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Focus on... Free Schools debate

As the number of academy conversions in the region snowball, Free Schools, the Government's other headline policy appear to have failed to make much impact. There are currently only three applications approved to pre-opening stage in the North East - Grindon Hall, Sunderland <http://www.grindonhall.com> (currently an Independent school), Cramlington Village Primary School, Northumberland <http://villageprimary.org> and BOSS2, a secondary school in Ingleby Barwick, Stockton <http://www.inglebybo2ss.co.uk/>. However despite the low take up, the policy has provoked much controversy in the local media and within local communities.

It was the proposed Free School in the Ingleby Barwick area of Stockton that prompted heated debate at the SCHOOLS NorthEast lunch with Stockton South MP, James Wharton last Friday. Mr Wharton, who has been a strong advocate of the new school, faced criticism from local Head Teachers concerned about the effect on the schools currently serving this area and the knock on implications for schools nearby. Heads questioned the wisdom of opening an additional school in an area where parents already had a choice of high performing schools, and at a time when there are surplus places in the system and a difficult economic situation. The Conservative Member of Parliament remained robust in his support of the proposals.

Despite the slow start there are signs that interest in Free Schools in the region is growing. The next round of approved applications will be announced in by the DfE in May and a number of groups in the region are waiting on news as to whether their bid has been successful.

In Newcastle, plans by Newcastle College's parent company, NCG, to open a free school in the city's West End (<http://ncgrp.co.uk/newsitem.aspx?newsid=458>) have been met with a backlash from local schools and Council leaders worried about the impact of the proposed additional places and upset about the wording of marketing materials sent to parents. Other applications awaiting approval include Jesmond Parish Church's plans for a 600 place all through school in the Jesmond area of Newcastle (<http://www.claytonacademy.org.uk>) and a bid for a secondary free school in Durham targeting the villages to the south and east of the City (<http://www.durhamfreeschool.org>).

The policy also divides opinion at a national level. This week, educationalist Sir Michael Barber took to Twitter to welcome Free Schools saying; “Free Schools are unlocking the creativity of school leaders and teachers...won't all be perfect but wish we'd done it years ago”. And former Labour Education Minister, Lord Adonis called on his party to support Free Schools arguing that they could be a 'powerful engine of equality and social mobility'. Although it would appear that his calls have fallen on deaf ears as Shadow Education Minister, Stephen Twigg yesterday challenged the Government's approach by stating that “they should tackle the growing crisis in primary school places rather than building more free schools”.

Whatever your views on Free Schools we want to hear them. Are Free Schools a catalyst for innovation or do they undermine existing provision? What should the criteria be for approving a Free School bid? Do you think Free Schools will become a significant feature of the North East's education landscape. Let us know of any bids you have heard about in your area email think@schoolsnortheast.com

[Fund Primary Places not Free Schools, Labour urges](#) (BBC News)

[Labour must back Free Schools, former minister warns](#) (The Guardian)

Local news story of the week

Teach First Week in the North East

Last week was 'Teach First' week and saw 30 successful figures from business, politics, journalism and entertainment enter the world of education. In the North East Hartlepool MP Iain Wright, inspired students at St Hild's School about public speaking and Shakespeare and Geraldine Brown, Head of Clinical Research at the National AstraZeneca Science Teaching Trust, was at Jarrow School to lead a lesson about how we breathe.

- [Scientist's breath of fresh air for school](#) (Shields Gazette)
- [MP goes back to the classroom](#) (Northern Echo)

Local news by area

Darlington

- [39 apprenticeships created by Darlington firms](#) (Northern Echo)

Durham

- [Students get to grips with climate change](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Dodgeball match sees pupils take on teachers in Durham](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Youngsters praised for clearing Spennymoor graffiti](#) (Northern Echo)
- [Work starts on £3.4m Spennymoor school project](#) (Northern Echo)
- [Merger should not affect studies](#) (Northern Echo)

Hartlepool

- [They're the wheel deal](#) (Hartlepool Mail)

Middlesbrough

- [Nunthorpe School aims to become an academy](#) (Gazette Live)
- [Marton schoolboy's cakes raise cash for MS Society](#) (Gazette Live)

- [Expulsion threat for forgetting pencil case](#) (Northern Echo)

Newcastle

- [Nick Forbes warns of school closures in Newcastle](#) (Chronicle Live)
- [Gosforth pupils keep pledge in wildlife garden](#) (Journal Live)
- [Newcastle nightclub Liquid and Envy gives children science lesson](#) (Journal Live)

North Tyneside

- [Longbenton school to celebrate music festival 30th anniversary](#) (Journal)
- [Students launch high school radio station – Video](#) (News Guardian)

Northumberland

- [Students help to promote healthy living](#) (News Post Leader)
- [Upright farm design a winner](#) (News Post Leader)
- [Pupils in character for reading day](#) (News Post Leader)
- [Fancy dress Teachers and pupils mark World Book Day](#) (Berwick Advertiser)
- [Peer visits Ponteland school](#) (Hexham Courant)
- [Youngsters take a pit stop](#) (Morpeth Herald)

Stockton

- [Yarm School pupil to play Royal Albert Hall](#) (Gazette Live)
- [Traffic calming plea after kids' lucky escape in Stockton street](#) (Gazette Live)
- [£5.5m school refurb is given approval](#) (Northern Echo)

South Tyneside

- [School opens a new chapter for pupils](#) (Shields Gazette)
- [Youngsters try their hand at reporting](#) (Shields Gazette)
- [Our literacy standards are 'among the best'](#) (Shields Gazette)
- [School's bike club is on the right road](#) (Shields Gazette)
- [Kids win over magistrates](#) (Shields Gazette)

Sunderland

- [Sunderland schoolgirls' lesson in climate change](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Alan Sugar-style student investment challenge raises thousands for children's hospice](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Pupils turn models for prom fair](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Boost to construction skills after college gets in bed with construction firm Weldi](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Fairtrade food on the school menu](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Principal moving to the south](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Piloting healthier young lives](#) (Sunderland Echo)

Redcar

- [Huntcliff School gets positive Ofsted inspection](#) (Gazette Live)

Regional

- [North East pupils get eco lessons during Climate Week](#) (Journal Live)

- [Time to reward hard work with 2012 North East School Awards](#) (Journal Live)

Top national education news

UK Head Teachers are top of the table

It was reported in the TES on Friday that the UK's Head Teachers are the best in the developed world. The findings come from an international research study by The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Published last week, the report, 'Preparing Teachers and Developing School Leaders for the 21st Century,' put UK Heads top of an index that showed they were more involved with the details of education and teaching than their counterparts in any other industrialised country. It praised Heads in the UK for "doing what school principals should be doing - spending time focused on learning, not administration".

- [Leaders of the pack: UK headteachers are top of the table](#) – TES

Schools 'illegally excluding pupils'

According to a major study by Dr Maggie Atkinson the Children's Commissioner, pupils are being excluded illegally by Head Teachers. The Commissioner examined the factors that influence school's decisions to exclude, the effectiveness of the appeals and the impact of legislation, Government Policy and regulation on practice regarding school exclusions. Dr Atkinson is urging the Government to investigate after she described the report's findings as only "the tip of the iceberg" and "a serious cause for concern".

For the first time, Head Teachers have openly confessed to researchers that they are illegally excluding pupils by sending them home for unrecorded "cooling-off" periods, coercing them into moving to different schools or refusing to allow them to return to school until their parents come in for a meeting. Pupils should no longer be expelled or suspended for "minor infringements" because it can damage their education and push them into a life of crime, said Dr Atkinson.

[Read the full report here](#)

- [Children's Commissioner warns over school exclusions](#) (Telegraph)
- [Schools break law to exclude difficult pupils](#) (Independent)
- [Schools 'illegally excluding pupils'](#) (BBC News)

Reform of 14-16 Performance Tables from 2014

The DfE have announced this week the final list of non GCSE qualifications which will be recognised in School and College Performance Tables for 14- to 16-year-olds. This follows Professor Alison Wolf's review of vocational qualifications.

This list updates the one published by the Department on 31 January and includes 15 additional qualifications that have been accredited by Ofqual and found to meet the requirements set out in the technical guidance published on 27 October.

[Click here to download the full list.](#)

Events

Helen Goodman MP: Creating the link between Education and Industry – 28 March

With youth unemployment levels rising and local businesses experiencing skills shortages, it is clear that action needs to be taken to address these issues. Meet with Helen Goodman, MP for Bishop

Auckland, to discuss the challenges involved in ensuring greater collaboration between education and industry.

The event will take place on 28 March at the South Durham Enterprise Agency between 1pm and 3pm.

If you would like any further information or would like to attend, please contact Andrew Hair on andrew.hair@parliament.uk.

Girls in STEM subjects - why and what they choose – 26 April 2012 (4.30pm – 6.30pm)

Jim Ridgeway discusses findings from an international project exploring factors influencing girls' course choices. Results from interviews and surveys with parents, teachers, 14 to 16 year old girls and university students in 6 EU countries will be presented, including comparisons between girls taking and not taking STEM subjects.

The event will be held at the Science Learning Centre North East and cost £15. To book a place please contact: Nicola Hall n.l.hall@durham.ac.uk 0191 3706200

SCHOOLS NorthEast Patrons Dinner – 1 May

Our third annual Patron's Dinner will be on the evening of Tuesday 1 May 2012 at the Centre for Life, Newcastle Upon Tyne starting at 6:30pm.

This is our annual Black Tie dinner bringing together Head Teachers and other leading figures from education, business and politics in our region. Attendees will have the opportunity to hear from a high profile guest speaker and enjoy a formal three course dinner whilst networking with colleagues and celebrating the many successes of North East schools.

The Dinner is free and invite only. All SCHOOL NorthEast Enhanced Members will be invited. If you are an Enhanced Member you should have already received your invite but please email r.clegg@schoolsnortheast.com if this is not the case or to find out more.

Resources and Opportunities

Olympic Games Competition for UK primary schools

Enter LCP's Olympic Games Competition and you could win an afternoon of fun Olympic Games themed activities organised by [Sporting Dreams](#) for your primary school plus a range of other prizes from [Eduk8 Worldwide](#) and [LCP](#). For more details visit www.LCP.co.uk/Olympic-Games

Free Sage@School teacher training - offer ends soon

SCHOOLS NorthEast Commercial Supporter, Sage@School, is currently offering to train two teachers for the price of one when you buy a Teacher & Student Package – a saving of £280. But hurry as the offer ends on 30 April. Become a Sage Certified teacher and help your students develop the practical business skills they need for a brighter future.

Don't miss out on free Sage@School teacher training. [Find out more here.](#)

Red Balloon North East – a new initiative to support bullied children

The charity Red Balloon is in the process of establishing a service in the North East. The service aims to offer bullied children a safe and supportive environment to continue their education, address the damage that the experience of bullying has caused and help them develop the resilience to return to

mainstream education. If you're interested in learning more about our service contact us at rb@northeast.rblc.org.uk.

New award to raise university aspirations of all pupils

Schools Minister Nick Gibb has announced a new national award scheme to recognise the top achievers in every secondary school in England and those showing great potential. The award, named 'DUX Awards,' is open to all maintained secondary schools and will see teachers selecting a Year 9 pupil as their Dux. They will be rewarded with a visit to one of the 20 current Russell Group universities.

Registration for places under the scheme will run from 16 to 27 April 2012. During this two week period, schools will be able to use this website to register one Dux Award winner, one 'first reserve' and one teacher for a university visit. [Click here for details on how to enter.](#)

[Newcastle University to take part in Dux scheme \(Journal Live\)](#)

Royal Academy of Engineering Resources

The Royal Academy of Engineering (RAEng) is Britain's National Academy for Engineering, it brings together the country's most eminent engineers from all disciplines to promote excellence in the science, art and practice of engineering. To view a wide range of resources from RAEng on the TES website please [click here](#).

School to School

In this feature, we ask a local Head give us a brief insight into their school. This week we spoke to Jen Howes from Newham Bridge Primary School in Middlesbrough. The school is a mixed community school of around 300 pupils aged 3 to 11 years old.

Our school is... an exciting and vibrant place to be. It is 42 years old but has been completely refurbished throughout. It is set in beautiful grounds with views of Roseberry Topping. The children are extremely proud of their environment including the allotments, flower and herb gardens.

Our school vision is... to provide a happy, caring school where each child is confident, safe, secure and eager to learn. We aim to ensure that a sound educational foundation will be laid upon which to build for the future.

Our school is good at...making people feel welcome. Many visitors comment on the calm, purposeful atmosphere in school.

Our school is working on... 'Bridgebook,' a secure social networking site to encourage safe use of the internet. This has been developed because we found that children as young as six years old had accounts on Facebook.

The biggest challenge for our school is change...as well as the usual imposed changes, the school will also be facing appointing a new Head Teacher. After having had the privilege of serving the school for eighteen years, it is time for me to hand over to a new leader.

We think other schools would be interested in...our ICT plans and our excellent early years provision.

We would be interested in hearing from other schools about...how academy status has impacted on a school?

Question from last week's school: Which statesman or politician (living or dead) would you invite into your school and why? I would like to invite Rab Butler into school. I would like to hear his thoughts about the changes in education since his 1944 Reform Act. I would like to know if his vision has been fulfilled.

Our question for next week's school is...can you describe innovative ways to engage parents?

In the last 7 days we learnt...

Click the links below to go straight to the story.

- [Babies which are fed on demand do better at school](#)
- [Half of children find science and maths too difficult or too boring](#)
- [Gove removed Downhills' governors](#)
- [More teenagers will take GCSEs in foreign languages](#)

Have a great week!

The SCHOOLS NorthEast Weekly Update goes out to every Head Teacher in the North East every Tuesday, but if anybody else in your school or LA would like to receive the Update, please send their name and email address to r.clegg@schoolsnortheast.com.

Plus if you have any issues you would like to see covered in the Update, or any other comments, I would love to hear from you at the above address.