



HCSS EDUCATION

WEEKLY UPDATE

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Week 29- 24 April 2012

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Focus on... a middle tier

With over 50% of secondary schools in England now academies, the future role of local authorities and the need for a 'middle tier' between central Government and individual schools have been the focus of a number of reports and articles last week.

In [The Missing Link: the evolving role of the local authority in school improvement](#) commissioned by the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) consultant Jonathan Crossley-Holland describes Local Authorities as "shell-shocked" by the academies revolution. However, he argues that "It is in local authorities' hands whether or not they want to play a lead role in the improvement of all their schools". He writes "In some ways, both local authorities and schools are being given more room than they have been given for a number of years, albeit with far fewer resources, and are being given greater freedom to determine what they do."

Mr Crossley-Holland highlights the commitment in the government's 2010 schools White Paper to giving LAs a "strong strategic role" that includes developing "their own school improvement strategies to support local schools". However, he acknowledges that Ministers view them as "part of the problem".

A separate report, [Schools Causing Concern](#), also commissioned by the ADCS presents research on the characteristics of effective local authority school improvement work and explores the implications of the growth in academies and chains. Author Debbie Pritchard warns: "Local authorities do not have a divine right to work with schools", but notes that "the best authorities have not waited on central government to tell them what to do". She concludes that "the Department for Education cannot manage all schools centrally. A mediating layer is needed."

Support for the need for some form of middle tier is not confined to those organisations representing local authorities. Earlier this year, [Sir Michael Wilshaw, the chief inspector of schools, proposed a system of nationally funded local area commissioners](#) reporting directly to the Secretary of State stating “I speak as someone who believes in autonomy and who believes in independence and as a great supporter of the academy programme, but we know there will be some academies that won’t do well. It is no good just relying on Ofsted to give the judgment. By that time, it is too late. We need some sort of intermediary bodies which can detect when things aren’t going well, look at the data and have their ear very close to the ground to determine when there is a certain issue.”

And in [Progress, Rick Muir](#) called for local commissioners of schools, appointed by the local authority or elected mayor, to commission (but not run or manage) schools in their area including free schools and academies, and have a focus on school improvement.

These Commissioners “would act as a mediating layer for the majority of schools that are not part of academy chains, supporting them to improve through collaboration, promoting the professional development of teachers and ensuring schools respond effectively to national policy changes. They would be responsible for making sure that the needs of all children in their area are being met.”

The need for a planned system for supporting schools is stressed in a very [useful article by educationalist John Dunford](#), where he suggests that the Government’s policy amounts to ‘creative chaos’: “The system of school improvement in England has never been strategically planned and executed, with clear responsibilities set out for each of the four stages (identifying problems in the school; brokering solutions to the problem; commissioning people to support the school; and delivering the support). He says:

“In the increasingly mixed economy of schools there is a need for a middle tier to ensure the necessary strategic approach”, highlighting that McKinsey research has shown that all the highly successful school systems in the world have a middle tier between central government and the individual school. The article outlines six options for the middle tier:

- Local commissioners of schools
- Area HMIs
- Chains of schools and/ or teaching alliances
- Single local authorities
- Groups of local authorities
- A mixture of chains, teaching schools and national or local structures.

Dunford concludes “of the models above, the reinvention, in an up-to-date form, of district HMIs would be beneficial, not least because it would force Ofsted to play a stronger role in school improvement, as well as in accountability. Although such a development is necessary, it is not sufficient. A nationally funded network of local school commissioners is probably the only way in which universal coverage of the country can be achieved in an effective manner.”

What is your view? What do you see as the future role of the local authority in school improvement? Is there a need for a middle tier? What is the role for academy chains or school to school developments such as Teaching Schools? Do you think that Local Commissioners are the way forward and if so what should their role be? Email think@schoolsnortheast.com

Response to last week’s ‘Focus on...improving attendance in school’

A number of schools and local authorities in England use a pupil attitudinal survey called PASS (Pupil Attitudes to Self and School) to highlight children ‘at risk’ of truancy and disengaging from education. Where future attendance is concerned, PASS demonstrates a high correlation between students who have a low score in attitude to attendance and actual attendance.

PASS is published by SCHOOLS NorthEast Commercial Supporter GL Assessment and they will soon be organising a PASS seminar in the area, open to both Primary and Secondary schools. If you would like to register your interest, please email r.clegg@schoolsnortheast.com.

To find out more about the results of the survey [please click here](#) and to view 'Focus on...improving attendance in school' [click here](#).

In Parliament

Today, Education Secretary Michael Gove faced his regular grilling by the Education Select Committee. As always the session was jam-packed with questions and covered a wide range of subjects including assessment, EBacc, the curriculum review, school food, international comparisons, teachers' workloads, post 16, Ofsted's role in school improvement, and sex and relationship education.

The session kicked off with questions regarding Gove's view on the calls for an intermediary level as discussed in this week's 'Focus on'. Gove stated that he did not want to "recreate or generate a new bureaucratic system". He suggested that some people with vested interests were promoting "shop soiled solutions" rather than "fresh approaches". The Secretary State highlighted the importance of the role of NLEs and Teaching Schools in leading school improvement and stated he was "open minded" about a solution.

The Committee Chair, Alastair Stewart, challenged Gove as to whether Teaching Schools have the necessary resources available to deliver all that appears to be assigned to them. Gove responded that the Department was working with the National College to review whether the resource level was right.

In discussing the future role of Local Authorities in response to questions from Gateshead MP Ian Mearns, Gove stated that LAs were not "voiceless Eunuchs" and had the means of "ringing alarm bells". He described his aim for the system to be characterised by "schools collaborating together on their terms not anyone else's" and stated that schools should be discriminating consumers of LA services in the best interest of children. The Secretary of State condemned some LAs for "pursuing a vendetta if a school chooses not to buy their services". He also admitted that he has been criticised for "continually praising Gateshead at the expense of Newcastle".

Stockton North MP, Alex Cunningham, asked whether Gove could envisage a situation when an Academy might return to Local Authority control, to which the Secretary of State replied "yes, an underperforming academy could return to a strong LAfor example Gateshead LA might want to take over underperforming schools in Newcastle or County Durham". He confirmed that he was going to continue with his policy of "forcing primaries to become academies".

Cunningham returned to an issue he raised at the last session to challenge Gove as to why free schools were being approved in areas where there are surplus good secondary places. Gove responded that he was only approving free schools where there was "high parental demand".

To watch the Committee session visit <http://www.parliamentlive.tv/Main/Player.aspx?meetingId=10666&wfs=true>

Local news by area

Durham

- [Local pupils in Europe debate](#) (Durham County Council)

Hartlepool

- [Chipping in with new practice area](#) (Hartlepool Mail)
- [Police being called to schools 10 times a month](#) (Hartlepool Mail)

Middlesbrough

- [High-tech Stockton Riverside College wins top awards](#) (Gazette Live)

Newcastle

- [Michael Gove 'running scared' of North teachers](#) (Chronicle Live)
- [Walker primary school youngsters celebrate merger](#) (Chronicle Live)
- [Pupils get creative in past and the present](#) (News Guardian)
- [Michael Gove in war of words on Tyneside schools](#) (Chronicle Live)

North Tyneside

- [Parents protest over Monkseaton High GCSE plan](#) (Chronicle Live)

Northumberland

- [Pupils in picture for right royal artwork](#) (News Post Leader)
- [It's all yellow for pupils in fundraiser for Marie Curie](#) (News Post Leader)
- [Winning double for youth project at awards night](#) (News Post Leader)
- [Olympic torch visiting Tweedmouth store](#) (Berwick Advertiser)
- [Closure of Cornhill school takes next step](#) (Berwick Advertiser)
- [School has its own team of Wombles](#) (Northumberland Gazette)
- [Pupils get on their marks](#) (Northumberland Gazette)
- [People power helps save school](#) (Northumberland Gazette)
- [Face Britain VIDEO](#) (Northumberland Gazette)
- [Time to break our silence](#) (Northumberland Gazette)
- [Craig swings by to inspire pupils](#) (Northumberland Gazette)
- [School hopes to have formula for science prize](#) (Northumberland Gazette)
- [Blyth Community College failing pupils say watchdogs](#) (Journal Live)
- [Prudhoe school children praised for helping beat bullies](#) (Journal Live)
- [Blyth School Community College pupils using poetry skills](#) (Journal Live)
- [Girls Herald in a new trend!](#) (Morpeth Herald)
- [Students' experiences aired to a wider audience](#) (Morpeth Herald)
- [Pupils mind their language](#) (Morpeth Herald)
- [Peer pays a visit to sixth-formers](#) (Morpeth Herald)

Stockton

- [Police called to Thornaby Academy after student protest at teacher's suspension](#) (Northern Echo)
- [Schoolgirl tells of moment buses crashed in Yarm](#) (Gazette Live)
- [MP renews call for Ingleby Barwick school after pupils involved in Yarm bus crash](#) (Northern Echo)
- [School buses collide between Ingleby Barwick and Yarm](#) (Northern Echo)

South Tyneside

- [Honouring victims of Titanic and Concordia disasters – VIDEO](#) (Shields Gazette)

Sunderland

- [The Academy at Shotton Hall in Peterlee granted teaching school status](#) (Northern Echo)
- [Top tree expert talk](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Hollywood beckons for teenager](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Sunderland youngsters offer their voice in Washington DC debate](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Children learn to grow their own vegetables](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Students get a taste of Europe](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [School revamp complete](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Children turn to go-karts and bikes to raise funds for China trip](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Sunderland politicians welcome benefit penalties for truancy](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Pupil wins chocolate for her class](#) (Sunderland Echo)

Redcar

- [Overfields Primary organise 'switch-off fortnight'](#) (Gazette Live)

Regional

- [Thousands of children across the region to lose free school meals](#) (Northern Echo)
- [Centre for Life supports North East School Awards](#) (Journal Live)

Top national news

Work experience 'needs more than parent networking'

New research from the Education and Employers Taskforce and Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development has found that work experience makes a big difference to the career paths of young people. Work Experience - Impact and Delivery, Insights from the Evidence report argues for a better organised work experience system that relies on more than just parents' connections.

- [Work experience fair access call](#) (BBC News)

350,000 children will lose free school meals in welfare reform

The Children's Society has released a report warning that more than 350,000 children will lose their free school meals as a result of Government reforms to welfare entitlement to be introduced next year.

- [Free school meals changes 'could discourage work'](#) (BBC News)
- [350,000 children 'will lose free school meals in welfare reform' – charity](#) (Guardian)
- [Why simplifying free school meals is complex](#) (BBC News)

Events

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.

Many thanks to [Gentoo Group](#) who have kindly supported this event as our main sponsor. We would also like to thank our supporters [Aura Newcastle](#), [Avec Partnerships](#), [Dickinson Dees](#), [The Education Broker](#), [Muckle LLP](#), [Newcastle University](#), [UNW LLP](#) and [Ward Hadaway](#) for their support.

'Energy use and management' breakfast seminar – 9 May

Join Aura Newcastle at a breakfast event aimed at helping schools gain a greater knowledge and understanding of energy use and management.

A range of topics which affect energy management in the school estate will be explored including the “future” of energy costs and energy monitoring. This event will help schools make informed choices and include a demonstration on how to reduce energy wastage to make organisational savings. There will also be a brief discussion on how real life examples can be turned into educational tools.

The event will be held at East Durham College from 8.30am with an anticipated finish of 10.15 am. To book a place on this free event contact r.clegg@schoolsnortheast.com or call 0191 204 8866.

Community use agreements breakfast seminar - 17 May

Schools and academies are uniquely placed to provide access to opportunities and facilities which may help the local community. The benefits of such engagement are not only financial but can engender a greater commitment to the school or academy and to education generally. Regrettably, often the arrangements around community use are ad hoc and not fit for purpose.

This free breakfast seminar for schools addresses the dos and don'ts of community use and what a community use agreement should cover.

The event will take place on Thursday 17 May between 8.30 am and 10.30 am at Muckle LLP's offices in Newcastle Upon Tyne. [Click here](#) to register your place.

Becoming an outstanding school in challenging circumstances conference – 24 May

Whole Education is hosting a [Northern Conference](#) in Leeds on **Thursday 24 May 2012** exploring how schools an engaging education and raise pupil achievement against a backdrop of increased accountability and expectation. The event will bring together high profile educationalists, school leaders and over 20 innovative projects. SCHOOLS NorthEast members receive a fantastic 33% discount off the standard school rate of £175 if they book by the 8 May and quote the code: SNE33.

School improvement event from Northern Education - 1 June

Northern Education are hosting a free launch event for a new primary and special education offer which will support and enhance each school's capacity to have control over its own improvement.

The event will take place on Friday 1 June 10.00am to 12.00 noon at Cobalt Business Exchange, Silverlink, in Newcastle Upon Tyne.

To register please email christine.hopkins@northerneducation.com and request an application form and for more information visit www.northerneducation.com.

Resources and Opportunities

Code Clubs - programming project for primary schools

'Code Clubs' is a project to set up after-school clubs that teach young children how to programme computers. The sessions will aim to instil the basics of computer programming into children aged 10 to 11. The clubs will be built around practical hands-on tasks that will include children making games and eventually controlling robots. It aims to have 25 per cent of the UK's primary schools running a Code Club by 2014.

If you're interested in your school being part of the pilot programme [please click here](#).

Join the Climate Change Schools Project in 2012-2013

The Climate Change Schools Project (CCSP) puts climate change at the heart of the curriculum and makes schools 'beacons' of positive climate action in their local communities. To-date, hundreds of schools and thousands of young people have participated in over 50,000 hours of climate related activity through the CCSP.

To become a CCSP 'Climate Change Lead School' in 2012-2013 [click here to download a form](#) or contact krista.mckinzey@durham.ac.uk for further details.

Funding

National Scholarship Fund for Teachers: Round 2

The second round for applications for the National Scholarship Fund for Teachers will open on **Monday April 30 2012**. The fund aims to provide an opportunity for teachers to deepen their specialist or subject knowledge. For more information [please click here](#).

New SEN Support Scholarship: Round 1

A new national scholarship fund has been introduced by the Minister of State for Children and Families for support staff working with pupils with SEN and disability (SEN/D).

The primary aims of the scholarship are to foster high expectations of those working to support disabled pupils and pupils with SEN in the classroom, and to strengthen knowledge and understanding of SEN and disability, both in support staff and across the school.

Applications for the first round will open on **Monday 30 April 2012**. [Click here](#) to find out more and apply.

School to School

This week we spoke to Dr John Redman, Head Teacher at Cockton Hill Infant School in Durham.

Our school is...fun, exciting, vibrant, full of life, busy and happy, with young people learning and adults teaching and guiding in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. We have developed a creative curriculum that engages children and they like coming to school. We provide the basis for lifelong learning.

Our school motto is... "If you see someone without a smile, give them one of yours" and this works. We aim for all children to enjoy learning, be excited by it and to leave us with a wish to continue learning and exploring throughout their lives.

Our school is good at... including all children and providing them with equal educational opportunities whatever their prior experience or needs. Our inclusive approach caters for a wide range of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.

Our school is working on...developing children's language skills in speaking and listening, providing an exciting range of activities so children have lots to talk about and thus develop a wider vocabulary and then using this to improve reading and writing. We have a language rich school.

The biggest challenges for our school are...finding our way through the morass of paper work that is now required for everything. Where can we store registers, medical records and other paper work for the next 22 years? Whatever happened to the "paperless" society?

We think other schools would be interested in our...international links, international dimensions work and our three International School Awards.

We would be interested in hearing from other schools about... how much they are looking forward to the new phonics test for Year 1 children – all I can say is “blurst”, “jound”, “quemp”, “spron” and “fape” to all who read this!

Question from last week’s school is: *Do you agree that current applications from LLEs, NLEs and teaching schools, etc is representative enough or do you think those applicants or schools should be visited to see the REAL deal?*

My answer would be very simple – even in these data rich days, the best way to find out about a school and its leadership and management is to visit it.

Our question to next week’s school is: *“Although we start formal schooling earlier than other countries and we regularly test our children, why is it that when compared with other countries we are not at the top of the league tables?”*

In the last 7 days we learnt...

Click the links below to go straight to the story.

- [Children should stand up when adults walk in to a room](#)
- [Drinking water improves grades](#)
- [Children's favourite books removed from library shelves after parents complain they're 'offensive'](#)
- [Five-year-olds 'must have basic skills tested'](#)

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.