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Focus on... *Great North Schools*

Thank you to everybody who attended one of our Great North Schools engagement events over the last two weeks. The events were a huge success, with around 130 Head Teachers representing the primary, secondary, special and independent sectors. Our discussions provided us with some fantastic ideas which will go a long way towards shaping the proposal.

We now need to produce a thorough proposal, creating a convincing case for the funding of great north Schools by March 2010. The next stages of the process involve data analysis and creating an implementation plan. Effectively this means if Great North Schools gets the go ahead we need to be in a position to put the project into practice straight away.

Even if you couldn't make it to one of the engagement events, you can still help to shape the proposal at this crucial stage. If you would like us to come to your school to talk to you about the proposal or if you can think of anybody or any networks we should be talking to then please let us know.

If you have any further ideas or suggestions they would be greatly appreciated, and if you can offer any help with mapping the key areas of education on a local, regional or national level then don't hesitate to get in touch. We would encourage you to review the final proposal and give us any feedback before it is submitted to ministers.

And finally, if Great North Schools has caught your attention, then spread the word! We want to create as much enthusiasm for Great North Schools as possible around the region, and the best way to achieve that is by talking to your colleagues.

If you would like any further information on Great North Schools feel free to contact your SCHOOLS NorthEast board member, you can find out who this is by clicking [here](#).

In the news

Regional education news

Durham

- [Durham pupils take part in international school link scheme](#) (Journal)
- [Quiet corner for a good read](#) (Northern Echo)

Newcastle

- [Pupils save Wallsend shop from closure](#) (Evening Chronicle)
- [Schoolgirl swaps Haltwhistle for Buenos Aires slums](#) (Journal)

Tyneside

- [Lunchtime staff's healthy outlook](#) (Shields Gazette)

Northumberland

- [Pupils get bike store](#) (Hexham Courant)
- [Pupils learn how to be a good friend](#) (Hexham Courant)
- [School set to supply next generation of sport stars](#) (Journal)
- [This school show is just peachy](#) (Morpeth Herald)
- [Snow repairs set to cost school thousands](#) (Hexham Courant)

Sunderland

- [Keep the kids in school and save money](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [School chef of the year prize for Sunderland mum](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Shock for pupils as UFO lands at school](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Pupils get moving with Wii Fit lessons](#) (Sunderland Echo)

Teesside

- [Schoolchildren become environmentally aware](#) (Northern Echo)
- [Petitioners fight plans for school at Preston Park](#) (Evening Gazette)
- [Poet visits Middlesbrough to talk to pupils](#) (Evening Gazette)
- [Atkinson Road Primary celebrates centenary](#) (Evening Chronicle)
- [NHS to pump £1/2m into new Stockton academy](#) (Evening Gazette)
- [Schoolgirl to take on charity skydive](#) (Northern Echo)
- [UCA dinner lady's surprise birthday party](#) (Evening Gazette)
- [Tribunal success for bully-claim teacher](#) (Evening Gazette)

National education news

Sats boycott ballot

Teachers' unions in England have announced they will be balloting members on whether or not to boycott Sats for 11-year-old boys. The NUT and NAHT have called for the government to scrap the tests, saying they narrow learning, although the NASUWT want to keep the tests. Over 300,000 teachers will be asked to vote in the ballot, with the potential boycott falling at the same time as the forthcoming General Election is expected.

- [Sats boycott ballot for teachers in England](#) (BBC News)
- [Teachers unions will vote on boycott of primary school tests](#) (Times)
- [Teachers to vote on boycott of 'stressful' Sats](#) (Daily Mail)
- [Over 300,000 teachers will vote on boycott of Sats](#) (Guardian)

Harrow Head Teacher on 'worthless' qualifications

Barnaby Lenon, Head Teacher of independent Harrow school, has criticised state schools for hindering social mobility by allowing pupils from deprived backgrounds to take what he calls "worthless qualifications". Mr Lenon was addressing a gathering of 100 independent and state head Teachers at the 100 Group conference in London, and said that by choosing 'soft' subjects, able pupils from poor backgrounds are being denied access to the top universities.

- [Poor children being short-changed with soft subjects, slams Harrow head](#) (TES)
- ['Worthless qualifications' give false hope to state pupils, says Harrow head](#) (Guardian)

- [Harrow head attacks 'worthless qualifications'](#) (Independent)
- ['Stop deceiving children with worthless qualifications', says Harrow headteacher](#) (Times)

Issues in foreign languages in schools

The National Centre for Languages have claimed that the collapse in the number of pupils studying French, German and Spanish at state comprehensive schools means thousands of teenagers are automatically excluded from applying for top jobs. The study said that languages were increasingly becoming the preserve of independent and state grammar schools as comprehensives drop the subjects in favour of 'easier' subjects to climb official league tables.

- [Fewer schools hit language target](#) (BBC News)
- [Auf Weidersehen German, Hola Spanish](#) (Guardian)
- [Foreign languages 'the privilege of elite and wealthy children'](#) (Times)
- [Foreign languages are 'elitist' subjects](#) (Daily Telegraph)
- [Foreign exchanges 'axed over safety fears'](#) (Daily Telegraph)
- [Schools abandon foreign language targets](#) (Independent)
- [System blamed as fewer pupils than ever study languages at GCSE](#) (TES)

Ring-fencing of school funding

Steve Bundred, head of the Audit Commission, has labelled Labour's pledge to protect funding for hospitals, schools, police and foreign aid as 'insane' as he gave evidence to the House of commons public spending committee. He said that given that large cuts would likely be needed to reduce the £187 billion national deficit, it would be unfair to maintain some budgets at the expense of others.

- [Ring-fencing NHS and schools budgets 'insane', says Audit Commission head](#) (Daily Telegraph)
- [Promises to spare NHS and schools from cuts 'insane' says audit chief](#) (Guardian)

Click [here](#) for a full round-up of all of the past week's education news.

Events and opportunities

Building Schools for the Future Conference

Shadow Minister for Schools and Families Lord Bates has been confirmed as the keynote speaker at the BSF 'A Meeting of Minds' conference to be held in Newcastle on 26 February. The event will take place at Newcastle Civic Centre, and will offer delegates the opportunity to discuss the BSF process in a plenary session before lunch, and in the afternoon there will be a tour of Kenton School, a recently completed BSF project.

Click [here](#) for full information on the event and how to book.

IAG Spring conference

DCSF is hosting a one-day regional conference in Newcastle on 3 March to support the delivery of the IAG Strategy within the context of school and 14-19 reforms. The event will provide a summary of current policy and strategic direction around IAG at both national and regional level, and offers delegates the opportunity to discuss the strategy and its implications including inspection and assessment, quality marks, work based learning and raising of the participation age.

Click [here](#) to register to attend the conference, and if you have any queries contact the event organisers on 0115 947 5666 or email IAG@brackenevents.co.uk.

Science Educators and Teachers Conference

The North East Regional Museums Hub Learning team is holding its annual Science Conference on 4 March at the National Glass Centre in Sunderland. The conference will explore opportunities to teach and learn from science in museums and galleries. Practical workshops and discussions will generate ideas and promote the excellent work taking place both regionally and nationally.

The event is free, but booking is essential, while limited bursaries are available to teachers to cover expenses. To book a place or for more information contact the Hub Learning Team on 0191 2639860 or email hubblearning@twmuseums.org.uk.

Number 10 art competition

After the success of the last Downing Street art competition, Number 10 is once again looking for the best drawings, paintings or sketches under the theme of 'keeping healthy'. The winning pictures will be hung on the wall of the waiting room of 10 Downing Street, and the young artists will be invited to the house to see their work on display. Prizes will be awarded to three age groups: 5 to 7, 8 to 11 and 12 to 16 years. For full information and to download an application form visit www.number10.gov.uk/page21130.

TDA Open Schools Programme

The Training and Development Agency for Schools is looking for more secondaries in Newcastle to join the Open Schools Programme, which offers people considering teaching as a career the opportunity to visit a school for a day. If you would be interested in taking part click [here](#) to apply online, or if you would like more information call the school information line on 0845 6000 998.

BBC outstanding teachers

The BBC is still looking for an inspirational teacher whose story deserves to be told, and we would love the name of a teacher from the North East to be put forward. Perhaps they have brought new and innovative methods to the classroom with outstanding results, or thrown away the rule book only to prove their way actually does work. They may have transformed a school, a class, or perhaps simply touched individual lives. They are also interested in hearing the stories of classroom assistants, school supervisors and other educational professionals.

For an informal chat contact Gemma Collins on 02920 322572 or gemma.collins2@bbc.co.uk.

Grants and funding

Royal Society partnership grants

The Royal Society has announced that the next round of partnership grants is now open for applications. Grants of between £250 and £3,000 will be available to teachers to help develop science projects. Any UK primary or secondary school teacher can apply as long as the pupils taking part in their projects are between 5 and 18 years of age. For full information and to apply visit www.royalsociety.org/partnership. The closing date for applications is 5 March 2010.

Brian Sasakawa Foundation grants

Grants of up to £1,500 are available to schools who wish to develop links with Japan and Japanese schools, supporting the study of the Japanese language and culture. The next deadline for applications is 31 March 2010. For more information on the scheme and to apply visit www.gbsf.org.uk/general/index.html.

Bio Energy capital grants scheme

Grants of up to £500,000 are available for schools to help towards the cost of buying and installing biomass-fuelled heating and combined heat and power equipment in England. The scheme can pay for up to 40% of the difference in cost between a biomass boiler and its fossil fuel alternative. The scheme is open to new applications until 31 March 2010. For full information and to apply visit www.bioenergycapitalgrants.org.uk.

Resources and ideas

National Storytelling Week

Next week is National Storytelling Week, marking a decade in celebration of storytelling. The TES have created an assembly outline to increase pupil awareness of the art, practice and value of oral storytelling. The outline is suitable for KS2 (P4/P5/P6) and is available by clicking [here](#).

Scimorph

Schools Minister Vernon Coaker has launched a new interactive web-based resource designed to encourage pupils in years 6 and 7 to be inspired and excited by science. Scimorph uses the latest 'augmented reality' technology to present KS2 science topics in a fun and interactive way, supporting teaching and learning both at home and in the classroom.

Click [here](#) for full information and to get started with Scimorph.

Appetite for Action

Appetite for action is a free sustainable food programme from Sky and Global Action Plan for all primary school, offering pupils challenges to eat 'greener grub, reduce rubbish and 'get growing. The programme contains free teaching resources related to sustainable food and a competition to win £3,000 for your school and the chance to appear on the Sky Real Lives television show. To sign up visit www.appetiteforaction.org.uk.

Head to Head

This week we spoke to Alice Witherow, Head Teacher of Benton Park Primary School, who are returning to normal this week after an Ofsted inspection. She told us about the effect it had on her staff, and on her own morale!

This week was the week after our Ofsted inspection so it has a more relaxed energy about it and by the end of the week the inspection seemed to be a bit surreal, like maybe it hadn't really happened - but it did!

The two best things that happened at school this week were firstly getting to teach for two days due to staff absence following the inspection. It is so nice to spend time with children and remember why we do the job. Secondly, going out with the whole staff on Friday night for a celebration. All staff were represented; kitchen, middays, office, teachers, support staff and there was a real sense of teamwork. It was such a positive reflection of the journey the school has taken in the three years since we were last inspected.

The biggest disappointment at school this week was the number of ill staff following an inspection. It shouldn't be that difficult and cost so much to people's health!

The funniest thing that happened at school this week was the prank played by the Assistant Head who strolled in to a colleague's class with a clipboard and announced "I'll just do a quick observation". The teacher's face was a picture apparently! Something to do with the stress of the previous week.

The one thing that would have made my job easier this week was if we were not so focussed on data. Even post inspection I find the relentless focus on tracking data to be of limited benefit. Last week however was easier!

Top of my to do list this week is to read about the new primary curriculum as I had shelved it to prioritise SEF writing etc

My hero of last week was the TES columnist who said that if all the tracking data in his school was binned it would make little difference to outcomes “good teachers change schools”. I totally agree, if we spent more time working to improve teaching standards and engaging people not statistics schools could improve with greater sustainability.

My villain of last week: I was so relieved by having got the inspection out of the way I generally felt a sense of good will to all - unusual if you know me!

How do we sustain the momentum for change in the run up to an election when all major parties seem to differ so much in their view of education? Keep doing what you believe and ignore politicians – it will all change anyway and children should be the only driver so if it works for them that should be what drives the school forward not what political mileage can be gained.

My question for next week’s head is: How do you balance the two agendas about community cohesion and parental involvement against the safeguarding agenda?

Star pupil... *international relations*

Pupils at Witton Gilbert Primary School and Tanfield Lea Community Primary Schools are forging new relationships with schools across Europe after taking part in the Comenius programme, an international scheme linking schools from different countries. One of the main objectives of the scheme is for pupils to learn about the differences in how they follow healthy lifestyles – including swapping ideas for playground games. Do you think the German game of Plumpsack would take off in your school as it has in County Durham?

Could try harder... *child poverty*

According to new statistics released this week by Save the Children, there are an alarming 73,000 children living in poverty in the North East. The study, which is based on the Government’s annual Family Resources Survey, revealed that 14% of children in our region are classed as being in severe poverty – slightly higher than the national average of 13%. Click [here](#) for full information from Save the Children.

And finally...

An American report from the University of Virginia has revealed that teachers should let boys move around in lessons to aid their learning, and called for more competition in schools saying boys responded positively to it. The author of the report, Dr Abigail Norfleet James, presented her findings last week to the International Boys’ Schools Coalition conference in London, and said that boys and girls had distinct skills, with boys more likely to be less verbal, have less acute hearing and slower perceptual speed and to be less likely to control their impulses.

Have a great week!