

## In this issue

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- Details of an exclusive employment surgery with Muckle LLP for SCHOOLS NorthEast members
- Information on support grants for individual disadvantaged pupils
- Head to Head with Ruth Mayes, Head Teacher of Huntcliffe School in Saltburn by the Sea

## Focus on... *managing poor performance*

Commercial law firm Muckle LLP have a dedicated Education Team of leading lawyers who are experienced in working with schools, colleges and universities. We are delighted therefore to announce that they have teamed up with SCHOOLS NorthEast to hold an employment surgery providing practical advice on how to address the current issues affecting schools. The surgery will focus on:

### **How to negotiate the pitfalls of managing poor performance**

- Probationary periods
- Appraisals
- The need for rigorous procedures
- Key issues in defending age discrimination claims
- Disciplinary procedure

### **How to negotiate the pitfalls of managing sickness and absence**

- Management of persistent short term absence
- Management of long term absence
- Getting the balance right
- Legal solutions available

The event will take place from 8:30am to 11:00am on 25 February at the Muckle LLP offices in Newcastle upon Tyne. If you would like any further information or to reserve a free place at the surgery please contact Ruth Craig at Muckle LLP on 0191 211 7930 or email [rcraig@muckle-llp.com](mailto:rcraig@muckle-llp.com) stating your name, job title, organisation, address, telephone number and email address. If you would like any further information on the work Muckle LLP do, you can visit their website at [www.muckle-llp.com](http://www.muckle-llp.com).

## In the news

### **Regional news**

#### Darlington

- [School flies flag for technology](#) (Northern Echo)
- [Pupils go bananas to understand plight of poor](#) (Northern Echo)

#### Durham

- [Government backs academy plans](#) (Northern Echo)
- [Government backing for controversial academies](#) (Journal)
- [Minister backing plans for academies](#) (Sunderland Echo)

#### Gateshead

- [Pupils become environmental champions](#) (Evening Chronicle)

#### Tyneside

- [Janitor stole school's cash for cannabis farm](#) (Evening Chronicle)
- [Pupils raise cash for Haiti fund](#) (Shields Gazette)
- [Pupils put soles into aid campaign](#) (Shields Gazette)
- [Caretaker spent school's cash on drug farm](#) (Shields Gazette)

#### Northumberland

- [Ponteland High School delay bid for status](#) (Journal)
- [Minister says Alnwick's Duchess School must be rebuilt urgently](#) (Journal)
- [Alan Shearer presents new minibus to pupils](#) (Evening Chronicle)
- [New diplomas get an airing at open day](#) (Hexham Courant)
- [High school site selected for media centre](#) (Hexham Courant)
- [School chalks up traffic solution](#) (Morpeth Herald)

#### Sunderland

- [Schools get sensory room so pupils and teachers can chill out](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Shotton Hall School is outstanding](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Male teacher denies using money to buy conman's affection](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Cleadon pupils dream up ideal play area](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [School's delight at good report](#) (Sunderland Echo)

#### Teesside

- ['No' to Preston Park school plans](#) (Evening Gazette)
- [Celebrity chef Paul Rankin brings Ready Steady Cook to Teesside school](#) (Evening Gazette)
- [Preston Park web campaign is gathering support](#) (Evening Gazette)
- [Work gets underway at new Middlesbrough school](#) (Evening Gazette)
- [Roman adventure for schoolchildren](#) (Northern Echo)
- [Public urged to have say on Stockton NHS academy plans](#) (Evening Gazette)

#### Redcar and Cleveland

- [Youngsters to be shown the red card](#) (Northern Echo)

#### Region wide stories

- [Region's pupils are the worst for alcohol abuse](#) (Journal)

### National education news

#### Transition from primary to secondary

Researchers from Bristol University and the Quartet Community Foundation charity reported this week that pupils should be given extra time to adjust to the more intimidating atmosphere of large

schools, recommending that 11-year-olds should move to secondary school in June – rather than September – to overcome the negative effects of the transition.

- [Pupils 'should start secondary school in June'](#) (Daily Telegraph)
- ['June start' for secondary school](#) (BBC News)
- [Call to stop the trauma of transition](#) (Bristol University)

### **Rise in poorer pupils going on to Higher Education**

A study by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has revealed this week that teenagers from the poorest homes in the country are 50% more likely to go to university than they were 15 years ago. The Government-commissioned report shows that participation rates have soared in the past five years in particular, with disadvantaged 18 to 19-year-olds 30% more likely to enrol at university now than they were in the mid-2000s. But the figures also show that teenagers from the wealthiest backgrounds have benefitted most from the expansion of university places under Labour.

- [Study shows 50% rise in likelihood of Britain's poorest teenagers going to university since mid-90s](#) (Guardian)
- [More youngsters from poor homes go to university](#) (BBC News)
- [Rise in disadvantaged young people going to university](#) (CYP Now)
- [Gap between rich and poor students widens](#) (Daily Telegraph)

### **Facebook exam protest**

Over 10,000 A-Level pupils this week joined a campaign on Facebook against a Biology exam paper which they claim included unfair questions. They believe the paper, set by exam board AQA, failed to test what they learned as part of the syllabus. The protest prompted exam watchdog Ofqual to ask AQA to submit a formal report into the controversy.

- [Facebook campaign against A-level exam paper](#) (BBC News)
- [Thousands of A-level students launch protest over 'unfair' exam](#) (Guardian)
- [Thousands join Facebook protest over 'unfair' A-level Biology exam](#) (Daily Telegraph)
- [Board to 'take account' of Facebook exam protest](#) (Independent)
- [A-level Facebook protest widens](#) (BBC News)
- [Exam board steps in over Facebook protest](#) (Independent)

### **A-level grading concerns**

It was revealed this week that Head Teachers will be able to sit in on exam board grading meetings after raising concerns about the new style A-levels. Schools have complained about the wide variations in the grades awarded in the AS-levels taken last summer. The exam boards have said they welcome members of teachers' associations to their meetings, while Ofqual said it was working to ensure the A-levels were fair to all learners.

- [Grade fears prompt A-level exam board checks be heads](#) (BBC News)
- [New-style A-levels risk repeat of grading scandal](#) (TES)
- [Heads fear new A-level grading fiasco](#) (Daily Telegraph)

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.

### **Rocket Gardens**

Getting pupils outside and into the school garden is a fun and effective way of helping them to "experience the world beyond the classroom", as laid out in the Government's Learning Outside the Classroom manifesto. Rocket Gardens are aiming to help 1 million children to start growing their own food in 2010, and as an incentive to get involved they are offering a free Autumn Schools Garden worth £49 to the first five schools who place an order for a Spring Schools garden and quote SCHOOLS NorthEast.

For more information or to order a Rocket Garden visit [www.rocketgardens.co.uk](http://www.rocketgardens.co.uk). If you don't already have a school garden but are interested in creating one visit [www.growingschools.org.uk](http://www.growingschools.org.uk) where you can download 'Get Your Hands Dirty', an online resource providing support and ideas for teachers.

### **Entrepreneurs' Forum student writing panel**

The Entrepreneurs' Forum are aiming to build a network of young writers and reporters studying English, creative writing and media studies who will be offered the chance to interview community members delving into their backgrounds and uncovering insights that will provide valuable learning for those aspiring to follow in their footsteps.

This will help develop connections with local business, create a valuable resource and provide invaluable, real-life work experience, inspiring young writers and reporters to follow the many enterprise activities within their own schools. If you would like pupils from your school to be involved contact Will McLean from The Entrepreneurs' Forum on 0191 226 7488 or email [will@entrepreneursforum.net](mailto:will@entrepreneursforum.net).

### **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](mailto:IAG@brackenevents.co.uk).

### **Free energy display meters for schools**

In January Ed Balls launched an initiative to offer schools free energy display meters based on a recommendation from the DCSF Zero Carbon Task Force, aiming to enable schools to monitor and measure their electricity use. All publically funded schools can now apply for a free meter by completing an online application form.

Click [here](#) for further information and the application form, or click [here](#) to read the DCSF email about the scheme.

### **Sky Sports Living for Sport school visits**

You could get a free school visit from a sports star including Olympic gold medal winning athlete Darren Campbell, Olympic silver medal winning badminton player Gail Emms and Commonwealth Games bronze medal winning hockey player Alex Danson when you sign up to Sky Sports Living for Sports scheme.

If you would like more information on the scheme click [here](#) to watch a short video explaining how Living for Sport could benefit your school and how to get involved.

## Grants and funding

### Individual support grants for disadvantaged pupils

Funding is still available for Individual Support Grants from the e-Learning Foundation. These grants are aimed at individual students from low income families whose educational opportunities are being limited by their lack of home access and do not fall under any relevant home access programme. Schools are invited to identify individual students on whose behalf they would like to apply for a grant. While an individual family can receive up to 50% of the cost of provision, schools should not expect to receive more than 30% overall.

Click [here](#) for full information on how to apply. The deadline for applications is 28 February.

### 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](http://www.royalsociety.org/partnership). The closing date for applications is 5 March 2010.

## Resources and ideas

### National Strategies Disability Equality Scheme materials

All public bodies including schools, early years settings and Children's Centres are required to promote disability and reduce discrimination. The National Strategies has produced two sets of materials designed to help schools to produce a Disability Equality Scheme (DES) that meets legal requirements.

The first is a summary of the key areas that should be covered in a DES which can be accessed by clicking [here](#). The second is a self evaluation resource which enables schools to consider the evidence they may have for each area and plan actions for improvement, which can be accessed by clicking [here](#).

### Join the eLanguages community

eLanguages is a global online community of teachers sharing ideas and working together with their students on curriculum-relevant projects. You can create your own school profile, meet teachers from around the world and share a variety of resources to make your projects lively and interactive.

Membership is free, and if you are interested in signing up visit [www.elanguages.org](http://www.elanguages.org) for more information, or email [elanguages@britishcouncil.org](mailto:elanguages@britishcouncil.org).

### Bring learning to life with 'Fracteria'

Probiotic drink manufacturer Yakult has launched a new educational resource designed to help children better understand microorganisms, as a supplement to KS2 Science. The booklet explains

the way in which microorganisms feed, grow and reproduce, illustrating the ways they can be both beneficial and harmful.

The booklet is available free of charge. To download or order a copy visit [www.yakult.co.uk/publications](http://www.yakult.co.uk/publications) or call 0845 769 7069. To bulk order copies for use in the classroom email [info@yakult.co.uk](mailto:info@yakult.co.uk), heading emails 'Fracteria booklet' and providing the school address and the number of booklets required.

### **Sing Up resources**

How do you make any subject as exciting as a fire-breathing space monkey? With so much going on in your pupils' heads, it can be hard to make room for the basics. Sing Up offer lesson plans and teaching resources, as well as training workshops, to show you how to use singing across the curriculum to get your class engaged.

Visit [www.singup.org](http://www.singup.org) for more information.

## Head to Head

This week we spoke to Ruth Mayes, Head Teacher of Huntcliffe School in Saltburn by the Sea. She told us how pleased she is with her new school building, which you can see for yourself on their website by clicking [here](#).

**This week was** the week that was... (or am I the only one left who remembers that programme?!). As always this week was a crazy time when you hardly pause for breath, so it is no bad thing to have to reflect for this article!

**The two best things that happened at school last week were** firstly one blissful afternoon when all I focused on was teaching and learning - firstly by observing a year 9 English lesson which was without doubt outstanding in all areas. It was great to see the response from the students and to see how liberating it has been for the staff not to have to teach to the KS3 tests. The second was a one to one meeting with my fabulous lead teacher for G&T. We planned the official unveiling of the amazing timeline project led by Hannah and her sister Martha and had an in-depth discussion on planning for learning for G&T students.

**The biggest disappointment at school last week was** the number of issues still on the snagging list. Our new building is wonderful (see the website, I promise you will love it!) but why oh why can the contractors not finish the last few things?

**The funniest thing that happened at school last week was...** Sadly I am finding this is the hardest question to answer but perhaps that is because I am a natural optimist, laugh a lot and do my best to find the funny side of things.

**One thing that would have made my job easier last week was** if everyone could meet the deadlines for once. How much time is wasted with chasing so many people (students, staff and outside agencies) for things that are overdue and leave us pushed to meet a follow on deadline. And why do I still feel that I can't plead an extension when the delay is someone else's fault?

**Top of my to-do list for this week is** to prepare for the interviews for our new subject leader for MFL. We had a very pleasing response to the advert so it's a nice problem having to make time to read all the applications carefully and shortlist. I always enjoy interviewing even though it is a tense time with so much at stake. Looking forward to Monday!

**My hero of last week was** the Assistant Head who dealt with my villain of last week!

**My villain of last week was** the parent who does not seem to recognise how much work staff put in to support his child and persists in complaining. Luckily he is in the minority!

**Question from last week's Head Teacher: How do you balance the two agendas about community cohesion and parental involvement against the safeguarding agenda?** How much time have you got? Actually that is the heart of the problem. We have a good procedure for assessing the roles of volunteers and visitors, carrying out a risk assessment and determining whether they should be cleared but it is all added workload on an already stretched Business Manager.

**My question for next week's head is...** How do we balance being 'OFSTED ready' with not putting too much pressure on the staff? 'Short notice inspection' is a contradiction in terms when it could be anything from 3 to 5 years. We are now 3 years and 2 weeks on...

### Star pupil... *using technology in the classroom*

Cockerton C of E Primary School in Darlington is one of only three schools in Britain to be awarded ambassador school status for using computers to help pupils learn in all subjects. The school were recognised by Espresso, the provider of a digital library of resources for teachers and pupils. All schools in Darlington have access to the system, and as an ambassador school Cockerton will host demonstrations to help train teachers to get the most out of technology.

### Could try harder... *alcohol abuse*

Figures released this week by the NHS information centre revealed that children in the North east are more likely to drink alcohol and smoke than their peers in other regions of the UK. The statistics showed that young people from the region aged between 11 and 15 who do drink alcohol consume on average the equivalent of two bottles of wine or eight pints of lager a week. However the figures also show that they were the least likely in their age group to smoke cannabis. Click [here](#) to view the figures in their entirety.

### And finally...

A concert by relatively unknown 16-year-old American singer Taylor Bright has had to be cancelled at a Liverpool primary school because local newspaper The Liverpool Echo mistakenly reported it would be Grammy award winning country star Taylor Swift performing! St Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School has called off the concert amid safety fears after being inundated with enquiries about the event. The newspaper has since apologised and is making a contribution to the school.

Have a great week!