

In this issue

- All the latest regional and national education news
- Information on free Oxford University summer school places for hard-working students
- Details of school funding opportunities from Tesco and RBS Group
- Head to Head with Michael Gardener, Head Teacher of Sunnybrow Primary School

Focus on...

Staff performance management

SCHOOLS NorthEast this week ran an employment surgery with Newcastle-based law firm Muckle LLP focusing on the subject of managing poor performance. Issues highlighted included the importance of conducting regular performance reviews with all staff, the rights of the staff and the school in disciplinary matters, and the need to maintain a strong level of documentation of any meetings held.

Later in the week, research commissioned jointly by the General Teaching Council for England (GTC) and the DCSF showed that Head Teachers in England are reluctant to report weak teachers in their school because they are worried about the effect it will have on their career and self-esteem. Since 2001, only 78 cases of incompetence have been brought to local authorities, compared to 664 cases of misconduct over the same period.

When a teacher is found to be severely incompetent the council, which registers teachers and conducts disciplinary and incompetency hearings, can prevent them from teaching again. This has happened in 13 of the 78 cases.

The full report can be read by clicking [here](#).

The future of school improvement

This week also saw Manchester University's Prof Mel Ainscow deliver a breakfast seminar looking at the lessons learned from the Greater Manchester Challenge. His presentation, 'Moving Knowledge Around', looked at the ways in which the Challenge aims to strengthen the capacity of the education system, ensuring that all children and young people have access to high quality education, high aspirations for their own learning and can achieve the highest possible standards of learning.

In light of the Great North Schools proposal, Prof Ainscow's presentation gave us a fresh insight into school improvement and the way that collaboration can help to raise standards. The full presentation is available from the SCHOOLS NorthEast website by clicking [here](#).

In the news

Regional news

Darlington

- [School volleyball team reaches national quarter finals](#) (Northern Echo)

- [Anger over venue for Darlington teacher training](#) (Northern Echo)

Durham

- [Singer to play school gig in memory of his mother](#) (Northern Echo)
- [No reason given after school governor removed from group](#) (Northern Echo)
- [Brown takes Number 10 on tour](#) (TES)

Gateshead

- [Pupils can count on new numeracy aid](#) (Journal)

Northumberland

- [Schools raise funds for victims](#) (Hexham Courant)
- [Pupils make a splash learning about salmon](#) (Hexham Courant)
- [Middle school goes green with gusto](#) (Hexham Courant)
- [Students take part in Big Brother style event](#) (News Post Leader)
- [KEVI is gunning for capital date](#) (Morpeth Herald)
- [School fundraising in style](#) (Morpeth Herald)
- [Bede in the lead](#) (TES)

Redcar and Cleveland

- [School closure row gets heated](#) (Northern Echo)
- [Strength of feeling is clear as scores turn out to fight planned school closure](#) (Northern Echo)

Sunderland

- [Schools ban Bomb Bags after tot is injured](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Pupils rescued after minibus skid](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [School turned into cinema](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Houghton pupils switch on school's first wind turbine](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [BNP teacher faces misconduct charge](#) (Shields Gazette)
- [Learning lessons on eco power](#) (Shields Gazette)

Teesside

- [The big Teesside school debate hots up](#) (Evening Chronicle)
- [All Saints pupils need £20k to save Africa trip](#) (Evening Gazette)
- [New principal sets about finding name for merged Acklam school](#) (Evening Gazette)
- [Meeting held on controversial school plans](#) (Evening Gazette)
- [Damning Ofsted report slams centre for excluded pupils](#) (Evening Gazette)
- [Standing together to fight for St peter's school](#) (Evening Gazette)
- [Overfields school caretaker set for Lionsraw African soccer adventure](#) (Evening Gazette)
- [Ofsted inspectors praise progress at Stokesley School](#) (Evening Gazette)
- [£160k could be spent to survey Stockton school sites](#) (Evening Gazette)

Tyneside

- [Tyneside school set for anti-bullying award](#) (Evening Chronicle)
- [Sporting pupils are on the ball](#) (Shields Gazette)
- [Teachers could boycott Sats tests](#) (Shields Gazette)
- [School's pledge to tackle truancy](#) (Shields Gazette)

- [School swap scheme is class act!](#) (Shields Gazette)
- [Teachers' fears over asbestos](#) (Shields Gazette)

Regionwide news

- [North East teachers boycott threat over Sats](#) (Journal)
- [Entry is open for this year's school awards](#) (Journal)

National education news

Allocation of secondary school places

It was reported this week that up to half of the pupils in some areas may have missed out on their first choice of secondary school amid fierce competition for places. Thousand of 10 and 11-year-olds had to accept their second or third choices, with Hartlepool Council one of six local authorities who said they suspected admissions fraud as parents vied for places at the best schools.

- [School admissions: half lose out in some areas](#) (Daily Telegraph)
- [Third of city pupils miss place](#) (BBC News)
- [Schools struggle to place pupils who used to go private](#) (Times)
- [Pupils in England told their secondary school places](#) (BBC News)
- [Twins Paula and Peter Imafidon, 9, prepare for secondary school](#) (Times)
- [Talented twins win secondary school places aged 9](#) (Independent)
- [Lawyers report 500 per cent rise in school admission appeals](#) (Independent)
- ['I would be prepared to appeal if we don't get into first-choice school'](#) (Times)
- [One in six parents will be denied their secondary school choice](#) (Times)
- [Parents who cheat on school places will escape court](#) (Daily Telegraph)
- [100,000 'will miss out on first-choice school'](#) (Independent)
- [More than 100,000 children to miss out on first-choice secondary school](#) (Guardian)

Ofsted criticism of National Strategies initiatives

Ofsted have said this week that National Strategies in England boosted learning, but suffered because of what it calls an 'initiative overload'. The information was published in a report called 'National Strategies: a review of impact', and said that school suffered because of "frequent introduction of initiatives, material and guidance" which led to "overload" and diminished the effectiveness of each individual initiative.

- [Ofsted criticises Three Rs 'initiative overload'](#) (BBC News)
- [Ofsted: labour school reforms 'not working'](#) (Daily Telegraph)
- [Labour's teaching strategies were a burden, say inspectors](#) (Guardian)

Rise of 'nursery NEETs'

A think tank report this week has revealed that one-in-10 five-year-olds are already at risk of disengaging from education by the time they start school. The study of 15,000 by Demos found that 11.5% began school without the behavioural skills they need to learn or build friendships. The report argues that intervention is needed at nursery stage, and that helping children at an early age can prevent them from later becoming unemployed or out of education.

- [Warning over rise of 'nursery NEETs'](#) (Daily Telegraph)
- [One in 10 five-year-olds are 'nursery Neets'](#) (BBC News)
- [Underclass of pre-school children emerging, says report](#) (Guardian)
- [One in ten children 'lack the social skills they need to benefit from education'](#) (Daily Mail)

- [One in ten nursery children lack skills to succeed](#) (CYP Now)

Ofqual alleged downgrading of GCSE science results

A freedom of information request has this week revealed that the Chief Executive of exam watchdog Ofqual wrote to exam board OCR requesting that they reduce the number of pupils expected to attain top grades after predictions of a large improvement in science results emerged. The Sunday Times reportedly saw an exchange that showed Isabel Nisbet asking that the grade boundaries be changed to manipulate the results.

- [Ofqual ordered boards to downgrade GCSE results](#) (Guardian)
- [Exams watchdog ordered secret downgrading of GCSE results](#) (Times)
- [Regulator slammed over GCSE marking](#) (Press Association)
- [Science results 'fiddled to avoid grade inflation row'](#) (Daily Mail)

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

Events and opportunities

Free Place Group consultations for North East schools

Place Group is offering a free consultation to schools in the North East who want to collaborate and save money, and a free copy of their publication which highlights the challenges of raising standards whilst securing efficiencies. For further details click [here](#) or email their School Partnerships Director Sarah Monk at sarah.monk@place-group.com

The offer ties in with the DCSF desire for schools to work in partnership to help save money. Further information and ideas can be found in the discussion document Securing our Future: Using our Resources Well, which is available by clicking [here](#).

Show Racism the Red Card - Educating for Equality

Show Racism the Red Card are hosting two free conferences for school leaders in the North East aimed at tackling discrimination and promoting equality.

- The first conference is on the subject of Islamophobia and will be held on 15 March at the National Glass Centre in Sunderland
- The second conference is on the subject of homophobia and will be held on 22 March at the same venue.

Places are running out fast, so if you would like any further information on these events or to book a free place click [here](#).

Change in date of BSF Meeting of Minds Conference

The Building Schools for the Future Meeting of Minds conference which was to be held last Friday has now been postponed until 26 March.

Shadow Minister for Schools and Families Lord Bates has been confirmed as the keynote speaker at the event which will be held at Newcastle Civic Centre. The conference will bring together stakeholders in the Building Schools for the Future programme, including Governors and Head Teachers. The morning will provide a forum for participants in the BSF programme to take stock of their experience, exchange good practice in the design and procurement of facilities and make recommendations to enhance the progress of the BSF scheme, while in the afternoon there will be an

opportunity to visit Kenton School in Newcastle, a recently completed BSF project incorporating a biomass boiler.

Places are £60 including refreshments, lunch and transport to Kenton School. To book your place or for more information please contact Amanda McManus on (0191) 261 7441 or email riba.northeast@inst.riba.org.

Sport Relief – The Training Ground

Sport Relief takes place between 19 and 21 March 2010, and gives your school the chance to get active while you raise money to change lives forever. Their website has a comprehensive section called 'The Training Ground' which offers loads of great free information, teaching resources and assembly plans to use in school.

There is also advice on fundraising activities you could hold in your school, and a teachers' shop where you can order free activity packs for primary, secondary and early years pupils. For all the information you need go to www.sportrelief.com/teachers.

New National College Regional Associate

The National College are recruiting for a new regional associate for the North East. There are two regional associates in each Government region holding the post for two years, two or three days a week, usually on a secondment basis. As Pete Davies will be completing his second year as regional leader in September a new North East representative will be required from later this year.

The post is open to Head Teachers of all phases, and recruitment will be live for one more week. If you would like to discuss the role in the North East please contact current North East Regional Leaders Pete Davies on 07769 936696 or Maureen Bates on 07971 329760, or alternatively contact Regional Facilitator Jeni Ling on 07973 313822.

Grants and funding

Tesco Community Awards

The Tesco Charity Trust Community Awards Scheme provides one-off donations of between £500 and £4,000 to go towards providing practical benefits, such as equipment and resources for projects that directly benefit children and children with disabilities, living in the local communities around Tesco stores in the UK.

Schools can bid for funding for projects including the installation of playground equipment, sensory gardens or rooms, outdoor classrooms, breakfast and after-school clubs and specialist equipment for people with disabilities. Click [here](#) for full information and to apply.

RBS Personal Finance Education Awards for School 2010

The Royal Bank of Scotland Group is looking for examples of excellence in personal finance education (PFE). Running for the third year, the awards recognise and reward the best efforts made by teachers, and this year, students, in PFE.

Prizes include up to £1,500 for winning schools, plus a laptop or iPod shuffle for individual teacher winners. The deadline for entries is 23 April and you can edit your entry any time up until the deadline date. Visit www.pfe-awards.co.uk to find out more, and email any questions to questions@pfe-awards.co.uk or call 0207 401 4070.

Reminder – Creative Partnerships funding application process now open

Don't forget the application process is now open for the next round of Creative Partnerships funding. This scheme offers your school the chance to explore, over the course of the year, how a creative approach can address a particular aspect of your school improvement plan or other need.

For further information about the programme go to www.creative-partnerships.com, where you can download guidance information and FAQ documents.

Resources and ideas

Free Oxford summer school courses for hard-working students

The UNIQ summer schools campaign aims to help hard-working pupils in maintained schools gain places at the top universities. Oxford University are offering completely free places at a summer school in July to pupils who have excelled in their GCSEs and are likely to excel in their A-levels or equivalent.

Applications are now open, but the deadline is 12 March so you will need to quick. For full information on eligibility or to apply for a place, click [here](#).

Free Survival Rivals experiment kits

Survival Rivals offer free hands-on experiment kits inspired by Charles Darwin to UK maintained secondary schools. There are three kits in the series, 'I'm a Worm Get Me Out of Here' is aimed at 11 to 14-year-olds and looks at natural selection, 'Brine Date' covers sexual selection for 14 to 16-year olds, and 'The X Bacteria' investigates antibiotic resistance in bacteria with 16 to 19-year-olds.

To order the kits for your school, or to access other free resources, visit www.survivalrivals.org.

National Science and Engineering Week

Organised by the British Science Association, National Science and Engineering week runs from 12 to 21 March, and the theme of this year's event is 'Earth' in support of the International Year of Biodiversity.

The BSA website has a dedicated schools and colleges section which offers free online resources including activity packs, a book list and science quizzes, which can be accessed by clicking [here](#).

Head to Head

This week we spoke to Michael Gardener, Head Teacher of Sunnybrow Primary School in Crook. He told us about how varied his week can be, the importance of school support staff and the intriguing new phenomenon of Moon Sand.

This week was, as usual, very interesting, and tested my "Head Teacher skills" to the limit. One minute developing strategy with the governors and talking to my SIP about the forthcoming termly meeting, and the next discussing the various merits of the materials used to manufacture toilet cubicles with a builder.

The two best things that happened at school last week were firstly our Foundation Stage Teaching Assistant coming back to school after a lengthy spell off due to sickness. She was a big miss, not only because of her sterling work in school but also because of her wicked sense of humour which sometimes keeps us all going. Secondly, we got two new starters - always very nice when you are a small school struggling with numbers.

The biggest disappointment at school last week was finding out that our toilet refurbishment is going to take longer than expected, which now means some pupil toilets will be unavailable for 4 days at the end of this term.

The funniest thing that happened at school last week (or strangest) was when the top request for an after school club was a Moon Sand club???? It turns out that Moon Sand is a modelling material sold in Toys R Us. I must make a mental note to keep abreast of new technologies.

One thing that would have made my job easier last week would have been knowing about the Moon Sand phenomena earlier and budgeting for it last year.

Top of my to-do list for this week is finalising a monitoring strategy for school governors.

My hero of last week was our Chair of Governors who brought in a large selection of cakes for our rather lengthy, but productive, after school meeting. Thanks Meshiel!

My villain of last week was the plumber who came back for the third time to fix the leaky pipe in the kitchen. It's still leaking! There's nothing more worrying than a school cook who's upset again and again and again. No wonder the plumber wants to come back and fix it after school hours next time!

Question from last week's Head Teacher: What is work life balance? I think everyone knows the answer to this one but unfortunately too few people in our profession seem to manage it. "All work and no play make Jack a dull boy" is my motto. Sometimes you just have to draw a line in the sand and say enough is enough.

My question for next week's head is: Do you think anyone ever feels that they've got this job totally cracked?

Star pupil... *King Edward VI School, Morpeth*

King Edward VI School in Morpeth have been invited to give a presentation at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium in London in recognition of their award winning Student Voice and Leadership programme. Leadership and Enrichment Coordinator Victoria Najafi will be joined student voice ambassadors Oliver Barnes and Rachel Johnson at the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) and National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) National Student Leadership and Innovation conference.

Could try harder... *maths and science exams*

A report published by the Government this week has warned of widespread concern over the content of GCSE and A-level maths and science exams. It argues that there is not enough chance for students to display their depth of knowledge of the subject – in particular in A-level physics and chemistry exams. 'Science and Mathematics for the 21st Century' said that Teachers should be allowed to teach some areas of the course in more depth rather than sticking to a tick-box approach which will get the right results, and that they should be able to build on their own interests and stretch their pupils.

And finally...

A new publication of Macbeth has been released to try to encourage multimedia-savvy pupils to take an interest in Shakespeare – an interactive graphic novel, complete with voiceovers from RSC stalwarts Derek Jacobi and Juliet Stephenson! Classical Comics had previously produced graphic novel versions of Jane Eyre, A Christmas Carol and Frankenstein, but this is the first time they have

brought a story to life with voices and animation. If the venture proves popular with schools, the company are hoping to release Romeo and Juliet, Julius Caesar and A Midsummer Night's Dream in the near future. Visit www.classicalcomics.com for more information.

Have a great week!