

Sponsored by the School Food Trust's Small Step Improvements programme, a series of half day workshops taking place in the North East where experts present low cost, tried and tested improvements that will make a real difference to your schools lunchtime.

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## Week 28 17 April 2012

### In this Issue

- A roundup of the latest in local and national education news
- School to school with Neil Richmond from Stobhillgate First school in Morpeth
- Details of a free alumni service from Future First
- Welcome to new Commercial Supporters [Aim Awards](#), [Wrigley's Solicitors](#) and [Film Club](#).

### Focus on...improving attendance in school

In 2010-11, the North East had the highest percentage of children regularly absent from school in the country, with more than 20,000 pupils missing at least a month of school, according to figures from the Department for Education. Middlesbrough and Newcastle both came in the bottom ten of local authorities ranked on their percentage of persistently absent pupils. Each had a rate of 8.8 per cent, compared to the national average of 6.1 per cent.

Yesterday the Government announced their plans to crackdown on school absences following the publication of a review by their Expert Advisor on Behaviour, Charlie Taylor. Taylor's independent review called 'Improving attendance at schools' makes a series of recommendations to tackle persistent absenteeism and to give greater emphasis on addressing truancy at primary level such as:

- Make data on attendance in reception classes available along with local and national averages – this fits with the government's policy of giving as much information as possible about school performance.
- Publish national statistics on attendance for the whole year, not just up until half term in the summer, as is currently the case. The exception to this would be for Year 11.
- Asks Ofsted to set specific, timed targets for improving attendance in schools where it is low.
- Encourage all primary schools to analyse their data on attendance so that they can quickly pick up on children who are developing a pattern of absence including in nursery and reception.

These recommendations have been accepted by the Government.

On the issue of term-time holidays, the review does not recommend the introduction of an outright ban, suggesting that Head Teacher discretion should remain but that the rules should be 'toughened up'. The Government has stated that it will amend the Pupil Registration Regulations to make clear that schools should only give permission where there are exceptional circumstances. However, it was the announcement that the Government plans to change to parental sanctions for school absence in response to the review that captured the media's interest.

Last year, 820 penalty notices were issued for unauthorised school absence by councils in the North-East and North Yorkshire. From September, Head Teachers will be able to impose an increased fine of £60 on parents whom they consider are allowing their child to miss too much school without a valid reason and if they fail to pay within 28 days it will double to £120, to be paid within 42 days.

The Government is also considering whether to implement the review's recommendation that once the fine has doubled, the money should be recovered automatically from child benefit. Parents who do not receive child benefit and fail to pay fines would have the money recovered through the county courts.

Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove said: "Successive governments have focussed overwhelmingly on tackling truancy amongst older children...Improving the attendance of younger children at primary school will reduce the number who develop truancy problems when they are older.... I agree that the current penalty notice scheme should be simplified. I will work with my colleagues in the Government to explore ways to make the payment of penalty notices swift and certain."

The need for a more streamlined system was supported by ASCL General Secretary, Brian Lightman, who said "Schools do not want to have to resort to fining parents, but sometimes it is the only option left. For these rare cases, the system needs streamlining so that fines are an effective deterrent rather than an idle threat. "

Christine Blower of the NUT, however, criticised the idea of deducting money from child benefit, arguing that this "will have huge financial repercussions for many families. Having less money for food and bills will simply create a whole new set of problems." Her view was echoed by a number of child poverty campaigners and family charities who highlighted the link between poverty and absenteeism and raised concerns over the pressure the moves could place on struggling families. Nationally, the statistics for the 2010-11 school year showed that children on free school meals, or those with special educational needs, were about three times more likely to be persistently absent.

Do you agree with the recommendations and do you think they will reduce persistent absenteeism? How has your school tackled this issue? What has been the most effective approach you have implemented to address truancy? Let us know by emailing [think@schools-northeast.com](mailto:think@schools-northeast.com)

#### Find out more:

- [Government adviser calls for crackdown on primary school absence](#) (DfE)
- [Truancy fines 'must be raised and deducted from benefits'](#) (Telegraph)
- [Dock truants' child benefit, ministers urge](#) (BBC News)
- [Region has highest level of truancy](#) (Northern Echo)

## Local news by area

### Darlington

- [Kids get on their bikes for cycling competition](#) (Northern Echo)

### Durham

- [Girl dies after choking on food](#) (Berwick Advertiser)
- [Funeral service to be held for Billingham schoolgirl](#) (Gazette Live)
- [Terry Deary calls to ban Horrible Histories from schools](#) (Gazette Live)

### Hartlepool

- [Students' baking is icing on cake](#) (Hartlepool Mail)

- [College chief to give talk](#) (Hartlepool Mail)
- [A sporting day out for youngsters](#) (Hartlepool Mail)
- [Arts student Beth set to follow stars](#) (Hartlepool Mail)
- [Public speakers are in fine voice](#) (Hartlepool Mail)
- [Technology is a breeze](#) (Hartlepool Mail)

#### Middlesbrough

- [Report shows Ravensworth Junior School is improving](#) (Gazette Live)

#### Newcastle

- [Celebrations after Walbottle Primary achieves 'outstanding' Ofsted](#) (Chronicle Live)
- [Teachers on Tyneside set for summer strike action](#) (Chronicle Live)
- [Sting and Dec's old school converts to an academy](#) (Chronicle Live)
- [North East artist now subject of A-level question](#) (Journal Live)
- [Church High pupil shares life on a farm with class](#) (Journal Live)

#### North Tyneside

- [Top rating for primary school](#) (News Guardian)
- [Pupil rows his way to national title – Video](#) (News Guardian)
- [Feet first challenge for pupils](#) (News Guardian)
- [Youngsters sign and sing to raise cash for charity](#) (Newspostleader)

#### Northumberland

- [Academy chiefs make offer to quit](#) (Berwick Advertiser)
- [Spittal pupils get a 'pizza' the action at Hirsell farm](#) (Berwick Advertiser)
- [School closure draws a step closer](#) (Berwick Advertiser)
- [NUT warns over summer holiday cut](#) (Berwick Advertiser)
- [School governors voice concern at coal yard plan](#) (Berwick Advertiser)
- [St Mary's First School marks 40th anniversary](#) (Berwick Advertiser)
- [Farm fences help Harvey hurdle his way to victory](#) (Berwick Advertiser)
- [Branton First School saved after local pressure](#) (Journal Live)
- [Music festival goes out on a high](#) (Morpeth Herald)
- [Lifeline for threatened first school](#) (Northumberland Gazette)
- [Pedals power pupils to cycling success](#) (Northumberland Gazette)
- [Sandy says goodbye to school life](#) (Northumberland Gazette)
- [Sally's route to retirement](#) (Northumberland Gazette)
- [Egg-cellent work wins Easter prizes](#) (Northumberland Gazette)
- [On a mission to inspire](#) (Northumberland Gazette)
- [School scoops lottery funding](#) (Northumberland Gazette)

#### Stockton

- [Thornaby school pupils have no lollipop lady](#) (Gazette Live)

#### South Tyneside

- [Pupils' cracking time in classroom](#) (Shields Gazette)
- [Show Racism's dream day out for young Toon fans](#) (Shields Gazette)
- [Students bid to get water flowing](#) (Shields Gazette)
- [Bishop joins school's Easter event](#) (Shields Gazette)
- [Young cyclists go bling-a-ding!](#) (Shields Gazette)

- [South Tyneside scores well on truancy](#) (Shields Gazette)
- [‘Outstanding’ Ofsted dedicated to ex-governor](#) (Shields Gazette)
- [Maths team is sum-thing else](#) (Shields Gazette)

#### Sunderland

- [Governor nominations](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Sunderland MP on a mission to improve special schools](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [School gets good report](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Pupils take on TV glee club challenge](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Pupils raise hundreds for heart charity](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [School serves traditional British roast to European visitors](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Children take on bucket challenge to help build wells in Africa](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Students get a lesson in drug production at science challenge](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Top voice for teachers](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Sunderland schoolchildren prepare for Easter](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Young entrepreneurs raise cash to help blind centre](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Sunderland pupils more likely to skip school](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Missing school tortoise comes crawling back after six months on the wander](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Pupils plant silver birches to mark their school’s 25th anniversary](#) (Sunderland Echo)

#### Regional

- [Back your school in North-east School Awards](#) (Gazette Live)
- [North East teachers threaten new school strike](#) (Journal Live)
- [Warning of North East children’s services crisis](#) (Journal Live)
- [New report reveals pupils’ attacks on teachers](#) (Sunderland Echo)

## Top national education news

### In Parliament this week

Yesterday, Education Secretary Michael Gove and colleagues from the DfE took to the dispatch box for another session of Education Questions in the House of Commons. Again, North East MPs and issues were well represented.

Alex Cunningham, MP for Stockton North, quizzed John Hayes, the Minister for Further Education and Skills, on the removal of the requirement for schools to provide work experience. He argued that this was a ‘regressive step’ when nearly 12% of young people in the Stockton Borough are not in education, employment or training and called on the Government to reverse the policy. The Minister responded by praising Stockton North on a 76% increase in apprenticeships in the area.

Newcastle Central MP, Chi Onwurah, took the opportunity to ask the Secretary of State about the legal costs of free schools, academies and forced academisations in Newcastle upon Tyne and accused Gove of imposing ‘chaos on our education system’.

In response Gove said “The council tax payers of Newcastle have already paid in the past for the failure of that local authority to raise standards in schools to a level seen in other local authorities, including Gateshead for example. It is critical that we raise standards in Newcastle and we will do so by welcoming new educational providers, including those who propose free schools.”

Sharon Hodgson, MP for Washington and Sunderland West, raised concerns about the impact of cuts to childcare tax credits on nurseries, warning that child care providers risked being ‘driven out of business.’

And Wansbeck MP Ian Lavery expressed his worries about the 75% of UK schools that contain asbestos and asked the Government to explain the measures it has taken to avoid future asbestos-related deaths in our schools.

To read the full responses to these questions and other questions covering the transparency of free school budget plans, careers guidance, teacher quality, sixth form funding, history and vocational education - [click here](#).

### **Universities to take charge in exam shake-up**

Over the Easter holiday it was announced that the Government would no longer play a part in the setting of A-level exams. For the first time in 30 years universities will be given powers to set A-levels because of fears that the gold standard qualification is failing to prepare teenagers for the demands of higher education.

The main exam boards will be expected to consult leading academics, with a particular emphasis on senior dons from Russell Group universities, before drawing up exam syllabuses and test questions. The new proposals are expected to be introduced in September 2014.

- [University dons take charge in exams shake-up](#) (Telegraph)

### **New rules to exclude disruptive children**

New rules published by the DfE will put an end to excluded pupils winning the right to come back to school against the Head Teacher's wishes. Under the new system, Head Teachers will have the power to exclude a child as long as the decision is legal, reasonable and fair. However, the Government's ultimate intention is to reduce the need for exclusion by supporting schools to manage behaviour and intervene earlier to address any underlying causes.

- [New rules restore headteachers' power to exclude disruptive children](#) (DfE)

### **England's schools' revolution: a progress report, two years on**

Last week the Guardian produced a useful report summarising all the changes since the coalition came to power nearly two years ago. Click below to find out more.

- [England's schools revolution: a progress report, two years on](#) (Guardian)

## 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.

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 invitation 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 [clegg@schoolsnortheast.com](mailto:clegg@schoolsnortheast.com) if this is not the case or to find out more.

Many thanks to [Gentoo Group](#) who kindly supported the 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](#) who without this event would not be possible.

### **Quick, easy steps to better school lunchtime experiences – 8 May, 14 June & 10 July**

This week's newsletter sponsor, The Schools Food Trust, is hosting a series of events throughout spring. By taking small low cost or no cost steps, The Schools Food Trust has seen schools enjoy increases of up to 8 per cent in take up of school meals. Through their Small Step Improvements programme you will work towards being able to deliver tried, tested, low cost improvements that will make a real difference to your schools lunchtime both for pupils and staff, changes that you can implement straight away.

The workshops will take place on the 8 May, 14 June and 10 July, 9am until 2pm at the Central Square Conference Room, Newcastle upon Tyne. For more information or to book a place [click here](#) or telephone 0114 2996901.

### **How to create a culture to enrich, extend and accelerate achievement for all - 15 June 2012**

Join Leading Learning on Friday 15 June 2012 at St James Park in Newcastle for their annual conference. Guest speakers include Professor Mick Waters, educationalist James Nottingham, paralympian Stephen Miller and Catherine McKinnell MP.

Aims of the conference include understanding how to engage modern learners, to extend, enrich and accelerate learning, understanding how to support your colleagues' development and how to create a culture of learning for students and staff. To book a place go to [www.outstandinglearnersoutstandingteaching.co.uk](http://www.outstandinglearnersoutstandingteaching.co.uk) SCHOOLS NorthEast Enhanced Members receive a 5% discount.

## **Resources and Opportunities**

### **Time limited offer of exclusive free Alumni Service for North East schools**

Social enterprise Future First has recently announced that they have been given £250,000 from the Cabinet Office and a part-matching grant from the foundation ZING to fund free piloting of a new Future First service in 500 schools across England. SCHOOLS NorthEast would like to offer you the opportunity to become a pilot school for this free alumni service.

Future First Networks is a new service designed to help schools build, manage and mobilise alumni communities. Future First has received funding so they can offer this service at no cost until July 2013 (with no obligation to continue beyond that) for the first 500 schools to sign-up.

SCHOOLS NorthEast is one of only a very small number of networks in the country that has been asked to distribute this offer so if you would like take part and receive this free service, be quick!

For more information and to take part please email [r.clegg@schoolsnortheast.com](mailto:r.clegg@schoolsnortheast.com).

### **50 things to do before you're 11¾s**

The National Trust has launched a new campaign to encourage sofa-bound children to take up outdoor activities. The Trust says that the campaign '50 things to do before you're 11¾', is a response to a report that it commissioned, which revealed that fewer than one in ten children regularly play in wild places.

To view the full list and to sign up visit <https://www.50things.org.uk/>

### **Invite to join a free online community**

One of our Marketplace partners Russell Prue has set up a free, invitation only, social networking site for 21<sup>st</sup> century Educators. This is a place where ICT savvy professionals can collaborate, share and exchange ideas about ICT in 21<sup>st</sup> century Learning and Teaching. This is an invitation to all SCHOOLS NorthEast members and joining is easy, just follow this link [www.WiredTeachers.org](http://www.WiredTeachers.org).

## Welcome to new Commercial Supporters

SCHOOLS NorthEast has a growing network of Commercial Supporters who help us to be able to continue to work on behalf of North East schools. The network offers opportunities for schools to interact with organisations that provide a range of products and services to education many of whom offer special discounts and unique provisions for SCHOOLS NorthEast member schools.

This week we are delighted to welcome [Aim Awards](#), [Wrigley's Solicitors](#) and [Film Club](#). Visit the SCHOOLS NorthEast Marketplace to find out what they can offer your school.

## School to School

In this feature, we ask a local Head give us a brief insight into their school. This week we spoke to Neil Richmond from Stobhillgate First School in Morpeth, Northumberland, which has about 180 pupils aged 3 to 9.

**Our school is** very diverse due to the catchment area, which makes it really exciting and our children learn social skills very early which is important for life.

**Our motto is** to enjoy school now and also prepare our children to be successful learners.

**Our school is good at being** very creative and always doing something different in order to give our pupils memorable experiences for life.

**We are working on** - guess what? The four new Ofsted areas! We think we do them all well but best to be prepared....

**The biggest challenges for our school are** current over-subscription in the Reception class for 2012. Oh yes, and finances of course - there's never enough money to even scrape by so every decision made ends up being financial. Shame. We are, however, lucky enough to be having our school made water-tight so that's a new roof. Hooray! Bet you couldn't get that under academy status!

**We think other schools would be interested in** our outdoor learning and what we've done with it from three consecutive years of fabulous Creative Partnership money. We're continuing to develop this anyway even without the money. You know the expression, 'Where there's a will...'

**What would you be interested in hearing from other schools about?** I love visiting any other schools. It's how we learn and take back any fantastic ideas which they all have. I was lucky enough to visit the opening of the Bishop Semantu High school newly opened in Hull. WOW! Make a bee-line if you can. It's how a school should be for this age group of children. The resources are stunning.

**Question from last week's school is: How can schools work more closely together without compromising their autonomy?** In Morpeth we have a lovely partnership which works very well together. It hasn't always been this way but virtually all seventeen of our schools learn from each other. We organised a teaching day for all our teachers (all 250+ of them!) which was inspirational and have scrutinised data across all tiers including Middle school to whom we feed and the High school. I wasn't looking forward to this but found it illuminating and have some excellent evidence for you know who!

Sorry if this doesn't answer the question but I couldn't work with a heavy-handed school suggesting this is how we should do it. Every school is totally unique and a part of its community. Just like every

child is an individual. I'm a Professional Partner and love to work with new Head Teachers. They are all doing a fantastic job in their schools. I learn more from them!

**Question for next week's school: 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?** I personally have always interviewed applicants for jobs in our school and elsewhere. I like to see the actual person or school. Online applications to me are only part of it.

## Over the holidays we learnt...

Click the links below to go straight to the story.

- [Pupils are being bullied on the sports field](#)
- [Half of free schools have no site](#)
- [Pointing to words helps children read in later years](#)
- [Figures show a sharp drop in staff teaching 'soft subjects'](#)
- [Half of state secondary schools turned into academies'](#)

## 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](mailto: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.