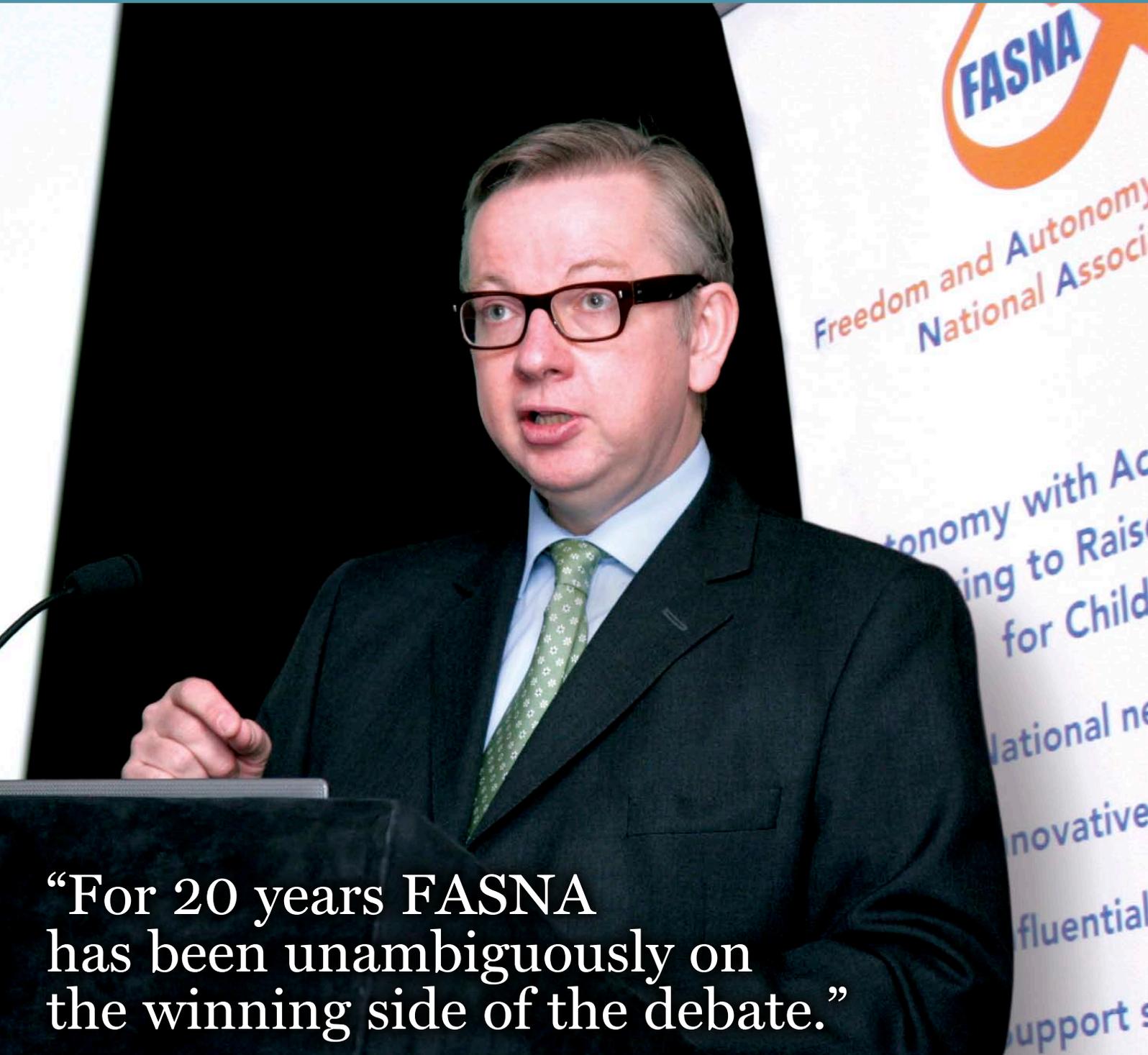


Volume 2 Number 1 Autumn 2012

Academy magazine



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Cover photograph: Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education. Story on page 40

Transforming schools at an affordable price



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DARTON COLLEGE

How a creative, cost-effective approach to remodelling could allow you to make better use of your existing school buildings

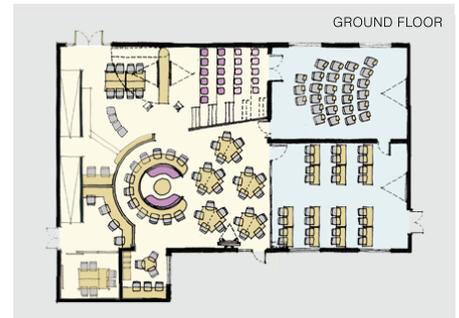
Current budget cuts have left many schools disheartened. You may want to make changes to improve your learning environment but you are concerned that either the funding isn't there, or that you cannot transform your school without totally new buildings that simply cost too much.

Lathams, the practice associated with FASNA, has a specialist education team working with schools to help release the potential of your existing or underused buildings, achieving a lot... for a lot less than you may have thought!

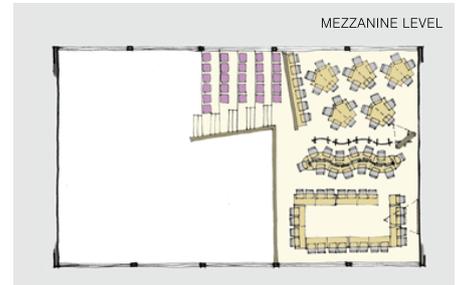
An example of how we can transform schools at an affordable price is our current work at Tudor Grange, where we are redeveloping the existing school gym to create a new sixth form centre. You can take a look for yourself at our plans for Tudor Grange and follow the work as it progresses at: lathamsschools.wordpress.com

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GROUND FLOOR



MEZZANINE LEVEL

TUDOR GRANGE

Redeveloping an existing school gym at Tudor Grange

Tudor Grange is located in the heart of Solihull; a mixed 11-16 academy with currently around 1250 pupils. The school has been successful with an application for a new Post-16 Centre which Lathams is now taking forward.

The Centre will be a redevelopment of the existing school gym (see above) and has involved incorporating areas to suit different learning spaces and styles, including careful space planning to accommodate furniture arrangement and semi-permanent structures.

Focusing on transformational learning

Lathams recent work at Darton College in Barnsley has focused on creating transformational learning environments; ensuring the most effective designs for today's teaching practices, that can be adapted to suit future changes in education.

At Darton, this has involved starting from scratch to create a brand new school that avoids monotonous circulation and underused areas, and encourages community use of facilities. But with funding for new build projects limited by the economic climate, we're now adapting our learning from this project and achieving similar results for other schools through refurbishment and remodelling of existing buildings.

“Lathams has been superb in translating our education vision into physical reality, bringing not only outstanding design skills, but also a deep understanding of the future of education, and an ability to listen and interpret.”

John Sanderson
Chair of Governors, Darton High School

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A move in the right direction

Although the changes to school funding from 2013-14 would appear to be moving towards a fairer system, the changes are minimized by the Minimum Funding Guarantee and are still open to local variation. Whilst these changes may be a move in the right direction, other aspects of the changes to school funding, such as the potential size of lump sums to individual schools (set at £200,000), are counter-productive. As it stands, it will take years to achieve equal funding for pupils with similar needs across the country, or even in the same Local Authorities.

The recently established Education Funding Agency (see Peter Lauener's article) is committed to moving towards a National Funding Formula and to transparency in school funding. Perhaps transparency will speed up the move to fairness – who knows. However, a watchful eye must be kept on the workings of School Forums as they begin to apply the restricted number of variations allowed. Mike Griffiths's article highlights some of the problems caused by LA control of School Forums and which the EFA may yet have to tackle. Of particular concern is the level of individual lump sums allocated by the Forum to each school. Will there be a temptation to set it towards the upper limit (£200,000)? We wait and see.

Capital funding remains a thorny issue. Too many outdated buildings; too little information on condition and suitability at the centre; too many LAs with opaque decision-making relying on personal contact or subjective factors rather than objective needs-led decisions which stand up to scrutiny. This is a huge issue for the EFA and the danger is we create another large, opaque and unwieldy bureaucracy at the centre.

The academies programme may be in danger of slowing down. Whilst more than 50% of secondary schools are now independent academies, primary schools are mostly under LA control. It remains to be seen what the DfE will do to kick start this programme. As things remain, we are in danger of having a largely independent secondary sector with an LA controlled primary sector. In that case the LA control of local variations, such as lump sums, and their control of School Forums becomes even more contentious.

I would be delighted to hear from primary schools about how they are taking advantage of new freedoms.

Clearly, the power and influence of LAs continue to diminish. This should be no surprise. Too often it has been the LA which has blocked autonomy, resisted fairness and failed to address poor quality. As the power of the LA wanes there are signs of a fight back with LA commissioned research - conducted by LAs themselves – which suggest that the system requires a middle tier to intervene if schools fail. What a surprise! The irony is that LAs have a poor track record in intervening over failing schools.

The recent debacle over GCSE exam results is in danger of undermining the structure of accountability. It would appear that exam boards changed the grade boundaries for GCSE English between January and May, meaning that a specific mark would earn a lower mark in the summer than grade awarded to the same mark in January. If this is the case it is patently unfair to students and also to schools. League tables and floor targets could be rendered meaningless, Ofsted judgements skewed and confidence in the qualification undermined. At the time of writing this is unresolved, but, it may be a significant issue for the whole system of accountability.

The planned curriculum review may lead to more schools taking advantage of the curriculum freedoms allowed to academies. This issue rightly devotes space to some exciting examples of work being carried out in our schools. I know there is much more happening and invite schools to contact me with examples of good and innovative practice.

Our articles on the sixth form are intended to help the debate on how Raising the Participation Age (RPA) will be implemented and what its impact will be. Changes to A levels, the UCAS system and RPA all happen at a time when funding for 16+ is being cut. Schools and colleges will have their work cut out to meet the challenge of change with less funding and maintain or improve quality.

We are looking for more interactivity with our readers and would welcome comments, letters or articles. Please send to the editor at editor@academymag.co.uk

Peter Beaven, editor of *Academy*, retired in August 2012 as Headteacher of Norton Hill and Somervale Schools in Midsomer Norton. He had been Headteacher at Norton Hill for 18 years but during the last three years was also Head of Somervale. He can be contacted at editor@academymag.co.uk

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New freedoms: are they being used?

Tom Clark, chairman of FASNA, asks whether your school is taking advantage of academy status

VA schools, foundation schools (with or without foundations), trust schools and of course independent schools have greater freedoms than community schools. Academies have distinctive freedoms – as the admissions authority, as the employer, as the owner of the buildings and estate, with the options to vary national pay and conditions and to vary the curriculum, and they can have distinctive, innovative structures of governance.

Academies have the same status as the Local Authority in respect of admissions, though both must observe the code of conduct. Employer status brings stake-holder engagement and the prospect of creative flexibility in the employment and deployment of staff. Being the owner of the estate has led schools to revelatory opportunities to achieve better value for money through contracts for buildings, maintenance, equipment, and services. Type 1 ‘sponsored’ academies have secure and established innovative practice in the variance of staff terms and conditions which is welcomed by the staff in those academies and seen to be ‘better’, contrary to the urban mythology put about by some Unions and others opposed to academies on principle. Changes to vocational diplomas, the emergence of an EBacc, the restructuring of the examination system and the assessment framework will lead to greater curriculum innovation. Self-confident academies need not confuse the accountability framework with the opportunity to provide a local curriculum responsive to and supported by parents. Top-down management of curriculum initiatives such as that for literacy and numeracy can be overlaid with common sense and expert judgement by teachers about what works.

Samworth Church Academy

The Samworth Church Academy in Mansfield, a type 1 sponsored academy, became oversubscribed and changed outdated admissions criteria to meet the needs of their local community in a clearer and simpler way. Criteria related to an historic and irrational catchment area became linked to feeder primary schools.

At Samworth, employment contracts for those people on teaching contracts and those people on other contracts were changed on an entirely voluntary basis. 90% of employees are employed on individual contracts. There is more flexibility to use traditional school holiday time for creative and innovative programmes ranging from traditional revision classes and coursework catch-ups to ‘study residentials’ that have combined adventure and outdoor activities with intensive study programmes. Contracts have no scales and no built-in cost of living rises. Following appointment, salary is reviewed annually on the basis of performance. Any subsequent salary rises are performance-related.

The concept of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 has been replaced with a two-year foundation stage and a three year qualification stage. Results have risen dramatically.

Sandy Hill Primary Academy

At Sandy Hill Primary Academy in Cornwall (a converter), additional funding led to re-organising teaching at Year 5 and Year 6 (36 pupils per class) and enabled streaming for 72 children in maths and English every morning which led to a marked improvement in writing and mathematics and reading.

More performance artists visit the school and more subsidised trips to events, shows, and historical sites have enriched the curriculum.

Resources have been invested in the joint moderation of work, (Early Years to Year 6) by three academies and two local schools and led to joint lesson observations in order to raise standards of teaching and to improve lesson observation skills of SLT.

As a result an improved percentage of good and outstanding lessons are being taught and a much greater understanding of the critical non-negotiable elements of a lesson without which they can only be at best judged satisfactory has become part of the culture.

Robinswood Primary Academy

It is the sensible use of autonomy, not the idea of being an academy, that has led to further improvements at Robinswood Primary Academy (another converter) in Gloucester.



Tom Clark speaks at the FASNA 20th Anniversary Conference

The school had first to be able to articulate what its beliefs were and then use greater freedoms and actions to underpin its values by: the use of more expertise in core subjects for very targeted teaching and the development of staff through coaching and mentoring; a greater emphasis upon outdoor learning to develop responsibility as well as team work; a determination to get the children to drive their own learning a little more, supported by ICT; the investment in Apple products to improve the approach to anytime/anywhere use of technology through iPod touches and iPads.

The school can evidence improvement in attitude, confidence and aspects of learning in core subjects.

Robinswood has a policy where if the school is supporting another school and staff from that school visit Robinswood, staff receive re-numeration for giving time explaining and helping.

The caretaker set up his own grounds maintenance company which Robinswood contracts itself and contracts to other local schools (this has saved money; the school gets a better service; and the caretaker is earning more). The school looks wherever possible to offer more rounded roles for staff and consequently gets much greater commitment from them.

When purchasing meat and vegetables for the kitchen, the school always looks to use local suppliers alongside considerations of cost and quality.

The school provides its own lunches at 40p less than the LA contract for hugely better quality. The service yields a profit as well as providing a number of local jobs. Considerable savings in relation to energy and teaching supply have also come from managing these services themselves rather than through LA contracts. It's about culture and self confidence.

Norton Hill Academy

At Norton Hill Academy (a converter) in Bath, an English teacher embarked on training to become an assessor for dyslexia and a specialist dyslexia support worker.

She kept her teacher's pay and pension, but had half her time on teachers' conditions (PPA and 1265 hours) and half her time on support staff conditions (37 hours a week with five weeks' holiday plus bank holidays). She provides one-to-one work during the school day and support during the holidays and after school.

The impact of this has been:

- Increases in reading and spelling ages which has impacted across the curriculum
 - Improved learner confidence
 - Faster progress by students than students of similar ability in previous years
 - Savings on the cost of external assessments and support
 - Speedier diagnosis and tailoring of support to individual requirements and in-house
 - Low-cost training and coaching for other staff
- Autonomy is about raising standards not structures

This article is taken from a piece written by Tom Clark which was commissioned by The National College as one of a series and available in full on their website and on the FASNA website.

Top-down management of curriculum initiatives such as that for literacy and numeracy can be overlaid with common sense and expert judgement by teachers about what works

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“We have come so far, so fast...”

Lord Hill, schools minister, reflects on the successes since the introduction of the 2010 Academies Bill



Between September 2002 and January 2010, 203 underperforming schools became sponsored academies. Many of these schools achieved remarkable things with the freedoms and opportunities that came with their new status.

In July 2010 we opened up those same freedoms to all maintained schools which perform well. In September 2010, the first 34 schools chose to convert to academies.

Move on a year, and another 947 schools had joined those first converters. By this September, another 12 months on, over 1800 schools will have opened as converter academies.

Over half of secondary schools across the country are now academies or well down the track to becoming one, with more than 1.7 million pupils. In at least 30 Local Authorities, 80% or more secondary schools are, or are in the process of becoming, an academy. The movement is also growing among primary schools, and over 1100 primary schools are now academies or on the way to becoming one. Almost 50 special schools have also gained academy status.

When we proposed extending the academy programme, there were those who said that no one would want to convert. They also said that if schools did convert, it would lead to an atomised system, with every school out for itself. They were wrong on both counts. Schools converting in chains and clusters, working closely together to share expertise, offer support and gain economies of scale. One third of converter academies are now working together in over 200 chains. And the fastest growing group of new academy sponsors are outstanding schools which have themselves converted in the last two years and now want to help other schools along the path of improvement.

Becoming a sponsor means that a school has the opportunity to share expertise and best practice, build on its reputation and develop and stretch its staff. The application process to become an academy sponsor is straightforward, and the Department for Education offers support throughout. We have also announced that extra funding is being made available to support new sponsors as they work to turn around schools. Schools that are interested in applying, or would like to discuss becoming a sponsor can email SponsorApplication.OSC@education.gsi.gov.uk.

One of the most rewarding and enjoyable aspects of my job is visiting academies and meeting their Head teachers and staff. In doing so, I always ask how they've found becoming an academy. We are all still learning lessons about how to make the conversion process as smooth as possible, but I have yet to meet a Head teacher who regrets the decision to convert. They tell me that they feel freer to do what they think is right, to take decisions for themselves and then stand by those decisions. Many are making changes to their curriculum, working more closely with their communities, introducing new initiatives and taking on more staff. They are all excited and full of enthusiasm about the opportunities that academy status has opened up for them.

My overriding objective is a system that gives as much control as possible to schools, free from political interference at a local and national level. The system is, of course, still changing. People are learning new ways of doing things. And we are continuing to look at what more we can do to give schools even more freedom. We want to simplify processes as far as we can and keep requests for information as light as possible, while still ensuring that schools are held properly accountable.

FASNA was established 20 years ago to bring together those who were convinced that greater freedom and autonomy for schools was the key to improving standards. International evidence, as well as that from the academies now established in England, has shown how far-sighted they were.

Now, just two years on from the first schools converting to academy status, a majority of the nation's secondary schools have become academies and gained that freedom. New partnerships and ways of doing things are taking shape and a lot of energy is being released. I didn't imagine when I introduced the Academies Bill in June 2010 that we would have come so far and so fast. That is the proof of the strength of the arguments that FASNA has always made.

Lord Hill of Oareford is the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools.

Building the system we all want

Chief executive Peter Lauener reports on the first three months of the Education Funding Agency

As I write, the Education Funding Agency (EFA) has just passed the three-month mark. In April 2012, the Young People's Learning Agency, Partnerships for Schools and part of the Department for Education all came together to create the EFA. The period since then, up to the end of the summer term, was marked by some significant milestones for us, and for our customers.

We have made almost £15 billion of payments to providers; we have published our plans for EFA business up to 2015; and we have worked on major announcements including the 261 schools which will be rebuilt or have their condition needs met through the Priority School Building Programme and the 773 projects in 571 academies which will receive Academies Capital Maintenance Funding this year.

Perhaps the most far-reaching of the announcements made before the summer break was the publication about school funding reform and the arrangements for 2013/14. This is the first step on the road to a new national funding formula that will make sure that similar pupils, no matter where in the country they go to school, attract similar levels of funding. It will also provide a more transparent, simple and rational funding process for academies, free schools, university technical schools and studio schools, and create a sustainable basis for budgets. The main changes include:

- a radical simplification of the local funding formula through which schools and academy allocations are calculated; a principle of maximum delegation, which will see a greater proportion of school funding going to maintained schools from Local Authorities;
- a move to use an October school census for the purposes of funding allocation, enabling a shorter lag between the data point for pupils and its use in calculating grant;
- the introduction of new regulations to improve the operation of Schools Forums, and a role for us in the Education Funding Agency (EFA) in overseeing the effective implementation of the reformed system.

In drawing up the new formula, Local Authorities will need to take account of the characteristics of every school in the area – including academies and free schools. It is in the interests



of all academies, but in particular for the longest-established academies and free schools, that the Local Authority has a clear picture of their features and needs. I would therefore urge all academies and free schools to cooperate with their Local Authority in providing information to help give full context for the development of the formula.

Academies and Schools Forums – how will it work?

One of the questions we are asked most frequently at the moment is about the EFA's role in relation to Schools Forums and what safeguards and support we will offer. The draft regulations give the EFA observer status at School Forum meetings with the right to participate in discussions. However, I would stress that these are local decision-making bodies and I see our role as ensuring that they are functioning effectively and that Local Authorities are compliant with School Forum regulations. We will provide scrutiny to guard against any potential unfairness in the system and investigate complaints that Local Authorities are not complying with regulations about the management of local forums or about their composition.

The academies' representative on the Schools Forum will need to be proactive, seeking and expressing the view of

academies, free schools, UTCs and studio schools in their area, so that local decision making takes into account the full range of education provision.

The new academic year will bring new ways of working and challenges for us all, but the EFA will be there to help academies and free schools understand the implications of the funding reform and what actions you need to take through a rolling programme of engagement and communications over the coming months.

Let me conclude with one final point which is wider than the funding reform which will be a major preoccupation this term. I have been very keen that we develop a real customer service ethos in the EFA. I know we have some way to go to deliver the standards that readers will want to see – and we have to be very clear about what we can and what we can't offer. At the end of the summer term we carried out our first customer survey. We will very soon be publishing the results in the e-bulletin and the next stages in improving our service.

I am committed to working closely with academies and with organisations such as FASNA, in building the new system we all want to see – and the EFA will only be able to meet our challenges if we co-create that new system.

Funding reforms and School Forums: is fair funding really any nearer?

Mike Griffiths sees small steps forward in the recent funding changes

Historians often tell us that in order to understand the present we must understand and learn from the past. I am now certainly a lot closer to the end of my career than the beginning and I cannot help but think about the words of the 1967 Jimmy Ruffin hit *I've passed this way before*. We are in a period of significant funding reform and I fear that if we don't understand and learn from the past, opportunities will be missed and unfairness will continue. However, the most important issue is that our state education system will remain more inefficient than it needs to be, impacting negatively in our country's most important investment: the education of our young people.

It is worth going back to 1988 and the Education Reform Act. This Act followed earlier legislation that began the process of opening up the market mechanism to state education.

Open enrolment was followed by the incorporation of FE Colleges, the introduction of LMS and the introduction of grant maintained schools. I remember very well the meetings and controversy as LMS was introduced. As formulae were debated they became increasingly complicated, but arguably and more importantly a strong torch light was shone on historical funding. The patronage and whims of Local Government management of state education became clear for many to see. This mismanagement was clear across the political spectrum with Labour and Conservative Councils all culpable. The result was the introduction of protection mechanisms as the prospect of 'winners and losers' became obvious. For many schools, particularly in the secondary sector, this unfairness was professionally unacceptable and became one of the main reasons why some schools sought grant maintained status.

As schools became grant maintained many Headteachers developed an awareness and expert knowledge of school funding. For example, George Phipson, the former president of FASNA, became nationally recognised as an expert on school funding. It quickly became clear that Local Authorities were retaining massive amounts centrally. Two issues emerged; the unfairness highlighted by local funding formula and the enormous inefficiencies of central hold back by Local Authorities. Under this pressure Local Authorities did begin to delegate more to schools but the toothpaste was well and truly out of the tube. Not only would it be very difficult to put it back in, there were many of us that didn't even want to start trying.

We then moved into the murky world of 'mandatory exceptions', 'discretionary exceptions', 'common funding formula' and the 'funding agency for schools (FAS)'. Today we are discussing what Local Authorities must spend money on, may spend money on, new funding formula, national funding formula, and the Education Funding Agency (EFA). I cannot help but think what goes around, comes around.

The 1997 January election brought a change in emphasis, if not a change in direction. As I said earlier, the toothpaste was out of the tube. The new Labour Government introduced fair funding and all schools benefited from the introduction of funding mechanisms that had been highly valued by the grant maintained sector. The two most obvious examples were devolved formula capital and special purpose grants for staff training. However, for grant maintained schools the return to Local Authority funding caused many difficulties after the clearer and more transparent funding regime of FAS and the common funding formula. In simple terms the Local Authorities were holding back funds and making spending decisions that many thought were better made at school level.

The introduction of academies and academy freedoms based on the 1980s model of the city technology colleges recharged the torch light batteries. The funding mechanisms that were introduced by Tony Blair and Andrew Adonis highlighted the issues of Local Authority expenditure and Local Funding Formula. Yes, the toothpaste was still out of the tube but the light was on again and it was there for everyone to see. Many of us argued fervently and strongly that what was good for academies should be good for any school that wanted it. Intellectually the argument was being won and there was no doubt that Tony Blair and Andrew Adonis wanted to see the rapid extension of more independent state schools. A change in Prime Minister and the arrival of a more centralist, regulatory

Secretary of State (Ed Balls) saw the brakes applied. However, the toothpaste was still out of the tube and the 2010 general election saw the coalition Government move quickly in the direction that Tony Blair and Andrew Adonis had planned. The number of academies through the converter process exploded. Another torch light was shone for very practical and simple reasons. Central funding based on Local Authority on LMS replication and scores of LACSAG calculations once again showed the funding system for what it was, historically and inherently unfair, as well as being complicated and bureaucratic.

To many of us it felt like the late 80s, early 90s all over again. It even looked for a while that a national funding formula may even happen. Many Headteachers, particularly FASNA members, have seen themselves as the crusaders for independence, autonomy and fairness. However, the forces of inertia are powerful and the prospect of a national funding formula has been slowed down for two main reasons.

The first reason is because of the political complexity of what is seen as 'winners and losers', and secondly around arguments to do with local flexibility and accountability. The first reason is morally and intellectually easy to deal with. It is simple, there are not 'winners and losers'. There is instead only a situation where some schools will continue to have extra funding that is unfair (the potential losers from NFF) and other schools who will continue to be unfairly denied resources (potential winners of NFF). The result has been a compromise of a simplified and more transparent funding mechanism that is currently being debated. I am involved in this locally and there will undoubtedly be changes in the right direction, but it is clearly still too little and continues to be too late. For more generations of children unfairness will continue. This is particularly true of schools located in the F40 Local Authorities, which are particularly poorly funded.

The second issue about local flexibility and accountability raises many interesting points. The last Labour Government introduced School Forums in an attempt to balance the local flexibility and accountability demands of Local Authorities, with a genuine concern that this is to remain unchecked would lead to more unfairness and greater inefficiency. I have had experience of two Local Authority Forums and I would like to share my experience of the reality of both local flexibility and local accountability. My experience of local flexibility is that what this means in reality is maintaining the status quo and funding failure. It is very difficult to get changes to funding formula because of the complexity of the issues. Funding failure

Central funding based on Local Authority on LMS replication and scores of LACSAG calculations once again showed the funding system for what it was, historically and inherently unfair, as well as being complicated and bureaucratic

is really a national scandal that is being replicated across the country. Millions of pounds have been top sliced out of school budgets as a result of failures at many levels. The following examples easily come to mind:

- The funding of horrendously expensive and poorly planned PFI/BSF projects (usually planned by outrageously expensive consultants engaged by Local Authorities).
- The paying off of massive budget deficits of individual schools. This has often been caused by the ignoring of fundamental weaknesses in school budgeting and inadequate monitoring and intervention by Local Authorities.
- The funding of single status agreements where the underpaid get back pay and the overpaid get protection.
- The regular and annual overspending of particular budget headings. The most common being “Special Needs” and “Behaviour Support”.

Very often at forum meetings these come under the nebulous heading of ‘budget pressures’, which usually means ‘we can’t carry on spending next year what we spent last year’. It is my experience that this usually leads to some sort of agreement (often reluctantly) of top slicing of local budgets. My point is that local flexibility is a polite myth, far too often it means funding poor planning, poor budgeting and poor leadership. I would also like to share my experience of local accountability through the local forum. Members mostly try to engage positively. These are not nasty or bad people; they are decent people trying to do a good job. However, most School Forums are too big and in my area there are well over 30 members. There is tenuous membership for some groups. The meetings are incredibly wasteful with people on high salaries meeting regularly for a long time and achieving relatively little. There is a lack of transparency at meetings and it is very difficult to establish who are members of the forum and who are not. They have often been characterised by bureaucracy and regulation. Many of us in FASNA cannot see the point of School Forums and have argued

for their abolition. However, as with the national formula, we have not yet won the argument but we have influenced it markedly which has led to recent regulations that require:

- Removing the minimum requirement of 15 members
- Significantly restricting Local Authority attendees
- Restricting voting arrangements
- Requiring Local Authorities to publish forum papers, minutes and decisions
- Requiring forums to be public meetings
- Giving observer status to the Education Funding Agency

The point I would make is that if Schools Forum requires such specific regulation it is clear they are not working. My own view is that these regulations will put sticking plasters on a wooden leg and the fundamental cultural and structural problems will remain. So yes, there are many changes to school funding but history tells us that there is, not really, as yet, anything new. It is important to remain positive and to make the best of new opportunities. In terms of funding, the toothpaste has been out of the tube for a long time and even with the new proposals it will remain so. A national funding formula is in the long term inevitable and in my view imperative, as is further independence and autonomy.

The strategic question is how do we create a fast-footed responsive education system that is world class? This should be the filter for all our decision. The question I leave you with is: do Local Funding Formula and local flexibility/accountability in their new manifestations help us to achieve this? I, for one, have fundamental doubts but remain positive enough, for now, to realise that recent changes are at least another small step forward.

Mike Griffiths is a Principal of The Samworth Church Academy in Nottinghamshire and a FASNA Executive Board member.

Great leaders make great schools

Heath Monk reflects on five years at Future Leaders Charitable Trust

Five years ago, I made the decision to leave the Department for Education to take up the leadership of a small charity, dedicated to closing the achievement gap through the development of outstanding leaders for challenging schools.

Five years has seen a lot of change. The DCSF has become the DfE, signalling a greater focus on what happens in the classroom – and less on the wider factors that may influence a child’s achievement. The march of phonics has continued in our primary schools; while secondaries have seen the end of the equivalencies and diplomas, and the introduction of the EBacc. Widespread ‘academisation’ and the demise of Local Authority school improvement services have irrevocably changed the school landscape.

I have learned a lot over the years, but the key insight that prompted me to join Future Leaders remains fully intact. Great leaders make great schools. Everything else is mostly noise.

This summer I will spend two weeks with another cohort of aspirant Headteachers starting their journey as Future Leaders. Like previous cohorts, they will have a range of views on the key policy issues of the day. Some will be vehemently opposed to, say, free schools, seeing them as, at best, a wasteful distraction and, at worst, a mechanism for the creation of exclusive schools for the middle classes. Others will point to the example of the charter school movement in the United States and get involved in high expectation free schools serving disadvantaged communities



such as the Kings’ Science Academy in Bradford, REACH Academy in Feltham or the Greenwich Free School.

What they will have in common – providing that we have got our selection process right – is a belief that every child can succeed and the drive and desire to dedicate the rest of their careers to proving that.

It won’t be easy for them. They will have to draw deep on their resilience and strive to stay true to their core values. They will have to persuade others – staff, children, parents – to share their vision. They will have to do whatever it takes, every day, to ensure that children from disadvantaged backgrounds make not just as much, but more progress than their peers.

For me, it has been a privilege to see a growing number appointed to key leadership positions. For example, David Millar became Principal of

Oasis Academy Coulsdon in Croydon in 2009, just three years after starting on the Future Leaders programme. At the age of 31, he was (at the time) our youngest Head. With the support of an experienced sponsor, he has worked with the leadership team to establish structures and protocols to ensure that the Academy has thrived under his leadership. His tough stance on ensuring good teaching, his commitment to engaging with the community and his empowering leadership style have had a dramatic effect on the outcomes for children. In 2011, 49% of students achieved 5 A*-C including English & maths (12% improvement from 2010) beating all previous school records. David’s outstanding work has been recognised by many including former Schools Minister, Lord Andrew Adonis who said: “Amazing things have happened here in the past four years”.

Peter Knight recently became our first primary Head, taking up a post at Bank Leaze Primary School in Bristol. Since joining the Future Leaders programme in 2008, his work in challenging schools has been exceptional. At Oasis Academy Mayfield in Southampton as Associate Headteacher, he was charged with improving the upper school and, through the development of a coaching programme, was able to improve teaching and learning dramatically. Last year 48% of students achieved 5 A*-C GCSEs (including English and maths), an improvement of 19% on the previous year.

Significant improvements you might say, but is it enough? Both David and

Peter would be the first to say that their work is only just beginning. There are still too many schools where the gap between the performance of affluent and poor children is too wide – indeed, the national attainment gap remains at 28%.

We're delighted with findings that indicate that schools that have had a Future Leader(s) for at least the last two years have, on average, significantly smaller attainment gaps and are improving GCSE grades at a faster rate than the national average. Encouragingly, this impact appears to be most substantial in those groups of schools where the Future Leaders input has been sustained over a significant period.

I'm interested to delve into these findings in more detail in the coming months to see what lessons we can draw from those schools that have made the biggest advances in closing the gap. I suspect that the common factor will be high-quality leadership, rather than a particular set of policies and pedagogical approaches.

I've been fortunate to be part of the advisory group for a new research project led by the Institute of Education into

the characteristics of young leaders in three global cities – London, New York and Toronto. The project will examine the new phenomenon of 'Generation X' leaders – a new breed of techno-savvy, globally-minded school leaders.

Are they more collaborative, pragmatic and interested in work-life balance than their predecessors? Are there different motivations for taking up leadership positions? And what does the future hold for secondary Heads like David who take up their first Headship in their late 20s/early 30s? It will be interesting to see how and to what extent the values and characteristics of the younger school leaders of tomorrow influence ways of leading schools and working with students.

My hope is that we can move away from the false dichotomies that plagued education for as long as I can remember: knowledge or skills; phonics or word recognition; student-centred learning or direct instruction and, perhaps the most challenging of all, competition or collaboration. We need synthesis, not antithesis.

In fact, one of the best things about working with Future Leaders is the

sheer amount of collaboration between our 350+ participants. We have created our own online personalised learning network where school leaders regularly share their own experiences and resources. There are numerous local training and networking events where Future Leaders meet up in person – it's no surprise that many form long-lasting friendships. As Peter Knight says: "Headship can be a very lonely vocation: being part of Future Leaders has provided that collegial network that doesn't always exist within a Local Authority."

Our aim is to bring more like-minded school leaders into this powerful network for change. We are fortunate to have been awarded a National College license to provide senior leadership (NPQSL) and Headship training (NPQH) from September. Through this training, we hope to engage many more teachers to join us in our mission to close the achievement gap.

Together, we can create an education system that is driven by moral purpose and the needs of children. We can make educational disadvantage a thing of the past, so that – to future generations – the idea that children from poor backgrounds perform less well at school seems as absurd as the idea that women shouldn't vote seems to us.

If we are to get there, it won't be as a result of a set of policies dreamed up in Sanctuary Buildings. It will be because a growing number of talented leaders and teachers got together and simply refused to accept the status quo.

We won't close the achievement gap overnight. But surely 100% must be our aspiration?

Heath Monk is chief executive of Future Leaders Charitable Trust, a charity aimed at transforming outstanding current or former teachers into inspirational leaders for challenging schools.
www.future-leaders.org.uk



Future Leader David Millar, Principal of Oasis Academy Coulsdon in Croydon

Headteacher recruitment: the greatest challenge

Stuart Warrener says that involving the outgoing Head in the recruitment process was a rewarding experience for Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership

It was in the third week of November at the conclusion of an update meeting with the Headteacher, when those words no chair of governors ever wants to hear, left the Head's lips: "I've thought about this carefully and have decided to retire".

Created by the federation of Norton Hill and Somervale Schools in 2009, the Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership committed itself to offering all local 11-18 year-olds the best possible education – a simple yet sincere objective.

In 2010 both schools were successful in the first wave of conversion to academies. Supported and encouraged throughout by the governing body, the Headteacher had been pivotal in driving these positive changes that were already bearing fruit. None of the changes, however, aimed to merge the schools: governors agreed it was their contrasts that gave youngsters and parents a real choice. This presented its own challenges when devising the specification for the Head's successor.

The rationale for retirement was sound – the "storming and forming" phase had been completed – and this was probably as good a time as any (aged a youthful 59) to hand the reins to another to drive the federation's future development. Good thinking perhaps, but the reality was sobering: replacing someone as talented and capable after 17 years in post was not going to be a stroll in the park. As academy governors we were acutely aware of the new freedoms we possessed. The flip side of this liberated status meant that, in contemplating the recruitment of the senior-most person in the federation, we were effectively on our own.

But hold on; we had a lot going for us.

First – governors had (sort of) anticipated this news and had been sufficiently far-sighted already to have in place a succession group, comprising five experienced governors as well as the chair and the Headteacher. An external consultant, retained to continue the work of the school improvement partner following academy conversion, also advised the group throughout. The group had met about three times before the announcement and

begun to acquaint itself with the process of recruiting a new Head. The full governing body quickly delegated responsibility to the succession group to undertake the recruitment process.

Second – governors were fully committed to undertaking the task they faced. Many tasks were delegated to sub groups: application pack, shortlisting, advertisement copy, sharpening and updating the information on both school websites and so on.



Stuart Warrener, chair of governors at the Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership

The interview process was an exercise in multi-tasking that probed and tested candidates' levels of stamina as well as capability. A conscious effort was made to allow all stakeholders the opportunity to spend face time with each candidate as they endured a combination of panel interviews, data analysis, presentations, moderating school council discussions and so on

Third – governors made a conscious decision to involve the Headteacher throughout the process and not 'go alone'. This decision created surprise, and in some cases, confusion for some candidates but was one governors felt strongly would add value to the process.

Fourth – governors developed and maintained a project timeline which gave sufficient time to run the process twice (and still appoint in time for a 1st September start), should this prove necessary.

The above could also be considered as top tips to others facing the recruitment challenge: anticipate and plan – don't just react. Select a sub group of governors to share the load – don't let the chair carry the burden alone. Decide if, how and when the current Head will participate and explain to candidates why governors have chosen to involve the Head, if that is the case.

Best practice literature talks of the seven stages of the effective Headteacher recruitment process and urges governors

not to rush to place an advertisement. In our case the Christmas break enabled governors to straddle the preparation work and ad placement either side of the holiday, in hindsight a very helpful division creating pauses in the right places during which we could revise and editorialise our work.

Our preparation involved the succession group considering a number of threshold issues the first of which was to define the role, paying close attention to the strategic objectives of the schools. Should we consider appointing an executive Head or a Headteacher with a more traditional teaching and learning background? We debated and decided on the latter but it's the debate that was important.

Arguably one of the most challenging tasks facing governors, and one where most time was devoted was in the development of the person specification. At a brainstorming meeting of the succession group each governor took two minutes to articulate what he/she was looking for in the successful candidate. This

was then summarised in a written first draft, linking it to the description of the role. Following two exhaustive re-draft meetings, the person specification breathed life.

Six weeks after announcing the Head's retirement, the job was advertised in the *TES*. Shortlisting followed school visit opportunities for those candidates wishing to observe directly the two schools in action. Three-day interviews followed two weeks later. It was in planning and shaping the interview sessions that the SIP's considerable experience was brought to bear. All exercises, tasks and question batches were devised and validated by reference to the job description and person specification. This had the effect of anchoring governors' attention to key issues, avoiding tangents and blind alleys. Top tips: when appropriate, get expert help and make use of it. When in doubt, refer to the person specification.

The interview process was an exercise in multi-tasking that probed and tested candidates' levels of stamina as well as capability. A conscious effort was made to allow all stakeholders the opportunity to spend face time with each candidate as they endured a combination of panel interviews, data analysis, presentations, moderating school council discussions and so on. Sadly, governors realised mid-way through the third morning that none of the candidates left standing was able to convince them that they should be appointed and the process was halted. A report was issued the same day to the full governing body advising that the mission had not been successful and outlining next steps. Top tip: Be brave if you don't identify the right candidate.

Following an immediate reflection and debrief (the afternoon of the third day), planning began for the second run of the process. The feeling generally was that the shortlisting process was sound and that an absence of strong applicants more than likely explained our failure to appoint. It is worth noting that as the ad went live there were 59 secondary Headteacher vacancies on the *TES* website. There was general consensus between governors that a more proactive approach was needed to identify and motivate potential candidates to apply.

It was shortly following this review that the initiative was taken to contact every secondary Headteacher and deputy Headteacher directly, explaining openly that our first attempt to appoint had failed and inviting them to consider making an application. This took the form of a written letter from the chair of governors and was followed up with a slightly modified *TES* advertisement.

A repeat timetable from round one this time was brought to life by prospective candidates responding to the letter, telephoning to discuss with the chair a range of issues such as

the role, the schools, the governors, the current Headteacher's reasons for leaving and so on. Clearly, they were checking out for themselves if an application was appropriate, taking soundings from me as to their likely chances of being shortlisted. In fielding calls the chair was struck by the marathon that is the application process alone for a Headteacher appointment. That's before the triple marathon of the interviews appears as a realistic prospect. But the process cuts both ways: the chair also derived considerable insight from those who did go on to make an application as we shortlisted and subsequently interviewed them. In short, by creating an earlier dialogue we progressed faster and with greater confidence during the later stages.

It is worth noting that the candidate who was ultimately appointed reported receiving the letter from the chair and connected it with the original advertisement and was motivated to apply the second time around. The lesson we can take away is: Do everything you can as early as you can to get to know all you can about prospective candidates and do everything you can to get them into the assessment process. We were right to conclude at the end of round one that there was nothing faulty about the shortlisting – it's about having the right applicants in the first place.

In summary, the second running of the selection process was superior in every way to the first and two very strong candidates emerged, one of whom was appointed and is already in the process of being inducted.

There have been some unanticipated yet noteworthy side benefits flowing from the recruitment of a new Headteacher. The process forces (a number of) governors to get up close and personal with the schools and with each other in a way that routine meetings do not permit. A different form of engagement emerged during the recruitment period as governors collaborated and managed each other's strengths and weaknesses. This was evident several weeks later at a general governor training session run by FASNA. No ice-breaker exercises were required to get it going – the governors themselves just got on with it, again. A most rewarding outcome.





Wanted: An inspirational bus driver...

Peter Berry offers some advice on how to advertise for a new Head

Imagine the journey to success as being a bus trip. Jim Collins, in *Good to Great*, did so and identified getting the right people in the key seats on the bus as essential to making that journey.

If there is one appointment that's going to determine how far you'll get, or even take the right road, it's your school bus driver. Recruiting a new one is likely to be the most important decision a school makes. Hopefully it won't be an annual event so it's crucial that you attract someone who is 'in sync' with your school's situation and ambitions. Someone who has the right attributes, attitude, and expertise to deliver success. From now I'll call this person "Headteacher".

For most schools the search begins with an advertisement. The point when you begin courting potential candidates. Making the school and job sound as attractive as possible whilst showing you aren't desperate (despite a difficult recruitment market for some schools). You specify what you're looking for, the "tall, dark, and handsome" of achievement, ideas, personality and character.

Recent analysis I did found what schools looked for in a new Headteacher, and what the priorities for the job are. It's encouraging but also slightly worrying that there's such consistency in advertising, and I'll come back to that. First, here's what I found in 238 national advertisements for Heads that appeared in February and March 2012

The identikit of a desirable Headteacher is one who is an inspirational and visionary leader, and with the ability to improve a school's standards.

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of advertisements identified leadership skills, slightly more than inspirational skills (60%). Just over half (51%) wanted Heads to focus on school improvement, and 46% said they were looking for someone with vision. (I'm reminded of Sir Michael Barber's comment that a few hundred years ago people who claimed to have visions could be burned at the stake, now it's a prerequisite for employment.)

This consistency in how schools describe their ideal candidate extends further. There's a widespread requirement for someone who will develop partnership and community links, and can be a motivational force in the school. Ranked alongside these, with around a third of adverts mentioning them, is emphasis on teaching and learning.

Other top twenty requirements include a focus on every child achieving their potential (26% overall), management skills (25%), communication skills (22%), being passionate (20%) and being ambitious/having high expectations (20%).

There are some differences between primary and secondary expectations. Overall, ads for secondary Heads ask for more, and there are different priorities for the two sectors. Improving school standards, for example, is specified by 64% of secondaries but only 43% of primaries. And strategic thinking is asked for in 25% of secondary recruitment, but in only 5% of primary.

One other difference is emphasis, or lack of it, on staff development. It's mentioned in 14% of secondary ads but in just 2% of primary. I can't believe it is less of a priority but perhaps greater numbers of secondary staff makes it more immediately an issue to mention.

It's encouraging that there is a consistency in understanding what the Headteacher role is about but lots of schools used the same words and phrases, rather like cut-and-paste. One option would be to be much clearer about the outcomes wanted, and leave it to candidates to describe the attributes and approaches they would use. More openness about where a school wants to be in one year or five years, for instance, and asking applicants to describe the route and what they would bring to navigate it. Less emphasis on the obvious – we know that Heads are leaders – and more on what you want them to deliver.

Advertising is expensive yet vital. Making yourself a little different, with the journey destination identified, could attract the driver who is sure of where you want to get to and can convince you they know how to get there. Share your ambition, and you'll have a better chance of getting someone who can realise it.

Peter Berry is a marketing consultant specialising in the education world. Previously director of marketing & communications for the National College for School Leadership, he has worked nationally and internationally with clients, from individual schools to government and business. He was recently appointed as a non-executive director of a new academy trust.

The 2012 Teachers' Standards: why they matter to every child in every school

Roy Blatchford, deputy chair of the Standards Review, on a “once-in-a-generation opportunity” to improve teacher quality

September 2012 sees the introduction of new Teachers' Standards, which replace the existing qualified teacher status (QTS) and core standards, and the GTCE's Code of Practice for Registered Teachers in England. The new standards set out the minimum requirements for teachers' professional practice and conduct. Teachers' performance is to be assessed against them as part of the new appraisal arrangements for schools.

In drawing up the standards during 2011, the review's remit was to develop new standards of competence, ethics and behaviour that reflect the trust and professionalism society should expect from its teachers. To that end, the new Standards begin with a preamble, a founding statement of expectations:

“Teachers make the education of their pupils their first concern, and are accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in work and conduct. Teachers act with honesty and integrity; have strong subject knowledge, keep their knowledge and skills as teachers up-to-date and are self-critical; forge positive professional relationships; and work with parents in the best interests of their pupils.”

What happens in classrooms?

On a personal note, I have had the great privilege since leaving Headship to observe over 8000 classrooms, from Mumbai to New York, Barcelona to Birmingham, Jeddah to Jarrow. At their best, these are the vibrant classrooms that teachers create because they are spending many of their waking hours within them. They are the places where young minds flourish. These sparkling classrooms are places and atmospheres that remain long in the minds and spirits of the learners.

In the academic year 2011-12 I observed over 700 lessons, as part of our Blink school improvement services. Special, primary, secondary, state and independent, home and abroad – schools have welcomed me with warm hospitality and in the spirit of championing what is great, recognising what is good, and suggesting a few even-better-ifs.

When I joined HMI, David Bell advised me to reflect on the wisdom of a previous chief inspector, Martin Roseveare: “You should remember that when you visit a school it is an everyday affair for you, but an unusual and important occasion for the school”. I remind myself of those words everyday I sign in to a school's visitors' book.

What did I learn during the past year in classrooms in the UK?

- That childhood is safe in the nation's primary schools
- That in socially challenging schools, the teachers have to run just for the pupils to stand still
- That great lessons are all about richness of task, rooted in teachers' excellent subject knowledge and passion to share that knowledge with students
- That pupils' prior knowledge of a subject is endlessly surprising
- That, in the best classrooms, IT is used like a pair of scissors, no more no less
- That skilled early years' practitioners have much to teach others about the power of timely digression and intervention
- That teachers spend hours marking, but too often pupils don't do justice to that marking
- That doing more of the same is not going to transform standards of attainment – doing differently can
- That teachers may cry when you tell them they have taught a great lesson
- That the best teachers are children at heart
- That sitting in the best lessons, you just don't want to leave

If all teachers meet these expectations we shall have a profession of which society can be rightly proud



In the best schools I visit there is a central paradox that runs through them like 'Brighton' through a stick of rock. It is this: the schools are at one and the same time very secure in their values and ways of doing, yet simultaneously restless to improve.

So too with the sparkling classroom practitioner, absolutely in the grip of well tried, tested and effective practices yet simultaneously questing to improve their teaching of a particular topic or skill. Show me the teacher who asks at the end of a day: what have I learned as a teacher today? What shall I do (a) the same and (b) differently next time?

What the 2012 Teachers' Standards say

The Review considered a wide range of international and national evidence, including evidence submitted by key users of standards before developing the Teachers' Standards. We felt the new standards had to provide a benchmark of the minimum requirements that should be expected of trainees and teachers.

In essence, the standards had to raise the bar and highlight the characteristics of good teaching. Above all, the standards needed to be clear, simple and assessable, and identify the key elements of teaching, and the expectations of professional conduct that underpin the practice of teachers at all career stages.

We were clear, however, that the standards should not define the award of QTS and the end of a teacher's induction period as two

separate career stages, principally because the induction period should be about consolidating ITT and demonstrating consistency of practice. Trainees and teachers should demonstrate that they meet all the standards, which define the level of practice at which all qualified teachers should be expected to perform.

The new standards do not prescribe in detail what good or outstanding teaching looks like; this should be determined by ITT providers, Headteachers and teachers, using their professional judgement as relevant to context, roles and responsibilities. The new standards should assist them in making such decisions by providing a clear framework within which such judgements can be made.

The Review also recommended that the Post-Threshold, Excellent Teacher and Advanced Skills Teacher standards should be discontinued, and advocated the introduction of a Master Teacher Standard. This Standard is made up of five core domains (modelled on international best practice) within which very good teachers can demonstrate their abilities:

1. Knowledge
2. Classroom performance
3. Pupil outcomes
4. Environment and Ethos
5. Professional Context

The Secretary of State is currently considering these recommendations and will respond in due course. In the meantime, the existing higher-level standards continue to apply.

It is the review group's view that the new Teachers' Standards, and the proposed new Master Teacher Standard will provide a new progressive career framework for teachers that will both raise the prestige of the profession, and improve teacher quality.

In my view, the 2012 Teachers' Standards are a once-in-a-generation opportunity for teachers across the country to unite behind a set of professional expectations that are focused unequivocally on the classroom. If all teachers meet these expectations we shall have a profession of which society can be rightly proud.

The new Teachers' Standards, effective from September 1st 2012, can be found on the DfE website. The Teachers' Standards Review reports can be found on the Review's webpage.

Roy Blatchford is Director of the National Education Trust and former HMI and Headteacher. He served as deputy chair/ chair of drafting group for the government's Review of the new Teachers' Standards.

He can be contacted via

www.nationaleducationtrust.net.

His book *Sparkling Classrooms* is available from this website, as are details of the Blink school improvement service. The National Education Trust is a multi-academy sponsor, working in the primary sector.

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Creating a school ‘PLC’

Chris Healy updates on the announcement of Teaching School status for Balcarras School

I am pleased to report that Balcarras is now a Teaching School. The National College email announcing this arrived a couple of days ahead of schedule in late March, to our considerable pleasure and satisfaction.

The induction took place at the National College on April 25th and was a suitably celebratory occasion. It was clear that achieving the status was a source of pride to all of the 80 schools recognised in this second round.

There are now 236 teaching schools of which 95 are led by secondary academies. Michael Gove made the journey to Nottingham to welcome the new cohort and to emphasise his commitment to the idea that teaching schools will be at the core of raising standards across their whole town, or section of city or rural area. Gove was impressive – a confident, persuasive advocate for his vision of a “permissive” system where teaching schools have the authority to lead the whole education provision and its improvement in collaboration with their partner schools. He is comfortable talking to Heads and prepared to answer their questions directly and openly. This confidence comes from knowing his stuff. You can see he is genuinely committed to education, even if you don’t always agree with his view.

Our aim as a teaching school has two main strands: to work very closely with one of our neighbouring secondary schools and also to create a collaborative professional development partnership of six secondary, one independent, seven primary and one special schools, which will be of real benefit to all of us. As well as these schools, the other organisations in our alliance are the National Centre for Excellence in Teaching Mathematics (NCETM), Gloucestershire Local Authority, Gloucestershire University and Cheltenham Festivals. Each of them has lots to offer, especially as our main two focuses are on maths and literacy.

We want to create a PLC, a Professional Learning Community, as pioneered by Michael Fullan in Ontario, where as Fullan says “teachers feel confident in one another’s staffrooms.” We are keen to get on with things and we saw the summer term as being the opportunity to get our community going. We have already organised lots of activities, including:

- Leadership for Young Teachers, led by one of our staff who is in her third year of teaching
- ICT – Where do we go from here? Led by our head of ICT and warmly welcomed by co-ordinators in both phases
- Literacy, Boys and Data – where two of our SLT reported

to other senior staff on what we have been doing in these areas and invited colleagues to comment and share ideas

- Maths – the first step in the creation of a dynamic maths community across the partnership was a heavily-attended gathering of teachers and co-ordinators from primaries and secondaries

The response has been great. There is already a real sense of sharing and working together which we hope to see spread and grow. The feedback has been enthusiastic and colleagues already feel that there is huge potential to develop from these small-scale beginnings.

We are now planning next term’s and next year’s activities, confident that the partnership has got legs and that colleagues across our alliance want to be involved. We have events planned like ‘Leading a department’ and ‘Becoming a consistently good teacher’ and there is a clear demand for them. We hope to see a senior leadership forum meeting termly where the leaders of all the schools in the partnership can get together to share ideas on issues like: how can you improve teaching across the school?; recruitment and retention; talent spotting; and effective performance management. We are looking forward to seeing how close we can move towards to becoming a PLC.

Meanwhile, in a separate but related development, we have become a School Direct teaching training provider. For those unfamiliar to it, this is an initiative to attract more high-flying graduates of shortage subjects into teaching, by placing them in outstanding schools that take the responsibility for their recruitment and training, alongside a training provider.

We have been allocated 12 places – three each in maths, physics, chemistry and languages. We were notified in April and the places are for September. This is a tall order, since these are shortage subjects and most of the potential teachers in them would already be set up for training slots from September. However, *nil desperandum*, we set up a recruitment page on our website, spread the word, contacted nearby universities and advertised in the local paper, and we have attracted a number of applicants. Not quite three in each subject, but one in maths, two in Chemistry, one in Physics and seven in MFL. And they have all got first or 2.1-class degrees. The interviews have now taken place and we have given places to four (one each in maths and chemistry and two linguists) two of whom are former pupils of our school. We will be underway from September.

Higher education still the key to long-term success

The job outlook for those going into higher education remains rosy, says Charlie Ball, deputy research director at the Higher Education Careers Services Unit

There is no escaping the regular stream of news about the gloomy job prospects for young people, particularly graduates, who have spent time and money going through our higher education system, only for some to find that they struggle to land a job at the end of it.

The graduate jobs market is not in the best of health right now, but there is every likelihood that the long term picture will be brighter – and don't forget, a degree is a qualification for the long term.

Short-term outlook

There is a lot of uncertainty around at the moment and until issues like the eurozone are resolved employers will remain cautious. At the start of the year, the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) produced its winter graduate recruitment survey that looks at how the jobs market is likely to look.

The survey covers 214 organisations that anticipated that they would be offering a total of 21,325 vacancies at some point in 2012. This is not the totality of the graduate employment market (or even the totality of all the 'good' jobs out there) and we shouldn't act as if it is.

However, it did give us a good indication about what is likely to happen this year. It told us that graduate recruitment is holding up, and even increasing in some sectors. Meanwhile, the Bank of England Agent's Summary of Business Conditions, which reports every month on the current state of business around the country, has been reporting a mixed view from across the economy.

For current graduates, their immediate job prospects depend a lot on the sector they want to get into. Broadly speaking,

engineering looks like it is finally about to be on the up, unless you're hoping to get a job in construction, which continues to suffer. And while the finance sector fails to recruit quite so strongly, jobs in the oil and gas industry are widespread.

Of this year's cohort who have been looking for work, I would expect to see only between eight and nine percent still unemployed by Christmas. While the jobs market is tough and unemployment is higher than it should be – we'd expect this figure to be nearer six or seven percent – by Christmas the majority will be employed.

The most frequent destination for graduates who don't go into employment is further study, but it's a common misconception that people who do so are simply looking to escape unemployment. I'd anticipate that around a fifth of this year's graduates will take this path, a slight uplift on what you'd expect to see in a buoyant market, but still a relatively small number will be entering in lieu of the jobs market. It's those that require a doctorate or masters to enter their chosen profession that constitutes the lion's share.

Public sector impact

The impact of the public sector cuts on graduate jobs has been gradual. The first and biggest to be hit were those in white-collar work in local government offices, which has traditionally been a good springboard for new graduates, as after starting in non-graduate roles, they quickly progress to graduate positions. Subsequently the cuts hit graduates working in those positions outside London particularly hard. However, we have started to see many of this group take up positions in retail as recompense.

There's a lot of assumption that 'everyone goes to university'. And if you're young and surrounded by people entering higher education this can be easy to believe. However, there has never been a situation where 50% of the school-leaving cohort went to university. In the UK, the largest proportion we have ever seen is just above 40%

Unfortunately the private sector isn't quite growing quickly enough to meet the fallout from the public sector. The good news is that most of the cutbacks have been made and therefore the main brunt on graduate jobs has already happened.

So, is a degree worth it?

Firstly, I'd like to dispel a few of the common myths about higher education, which frequently rear their head, particularly when the economy is struggling.

There's a lot of assumption that 'everyone goes to university'. And if you're young and surrounded by people entering higher education this can be easy to believe. However, there has never been a situation where 50% of the school-leaving cohort went to university. In the UK, the largest proportion we have ever seen is just above 40%.

The reality is that only around a third of the workforce has some kind of higher education qualification, and most people never will go to university. Subsequently, a degree does help you to stand out, make you more employable and increase your chance of getting a job.

It's also frequently reported that, 'there aren't any jobs for graduates'. But, the figures tell us that at least 150,000 of last year's graduates were in work six months after leaving university. Even during recession, studies show us that most graduates are working after six months. So, if it doesn't happen immediately there is evidence to show that if you go to university you are extremely likely, and more likely that those who don't have a degree, to get a good job.

'Graduates have to work unpaid to kick-start their career' is another falsehood. There is a lot of noise around about the

extent graduates are working unpaid, but the reality is that we don't know how widespread the problem is. As you would expect, unpaid internships are more common in some sectors than others; particularly prevalent in media and politics, and it is mainly London-centric.

So, if you are London-based and looking for an immediate role in TV the chances are you'll be more likely to get a spot of unpaid work experience than you are to land a full-time paid position. However, for most of us work experience is important to getting employment but not essential and you certainly don't have to work for free to get on.

Long-term prospects

So, what does this tell us? Most graduates will be in jobs after six months and the vast majority will have certainly found work within three years of leaving university. There's also no doubt that graduates are more employable than non-graduates. The unemployment rate for 18-24 year-olds at the time of writing is an alarming 21.%, but for graduates, after six months it was 8.5% in 2011. Graduates are also higher earners – with figures from 2011 showing a median salary for graduates of £29,900, compared with £17,800 for non-degree holders

We have a world-class higher education system and for those that go through it the chances are that in the long-term they will make a comfortable living, in something reasonably interesting – more so than their non-graduate counterparts. In the short-term, we must continue to educate people from an early age about the importance of career planning, building a profile, how and where to seek careers advice as well as the value of perseverance, a realistic outlook and adaptability.

Raising aspiration and improving destinations

Karen Ward writes about three initiatives that have helped Midsomer Norton Sixth Form widen the options available to their leavers

Midsomer Norton Sixth Form is located in Somerset just south of Bath and is a Federated Sixth Form taking students from Norton Hill and Somervale schools as well as other schools in the area. We have over 300 students and are exceptionally proud of the low number of NEET students leaving Year 13. This has been dramatically improved in recent years mainly due to three major initiatives.

The Harvard Club UK

Our first focus was to increase students' aspirations and to encourage more students to go onto higher education and to broaden their horizons. Of those applying to HE over 50% were applying to universities within 100 miles of the sixth form. In addition over 90% of students did not come from households where their parents had attended university – or in many cases post-compulsory education.

Whilst increased tuition fees were putting many off it also meant that the possibility of studying in the US was becoming a realistic option. The potentially large bursaries available from US Universities make them attractive and if the cost of studying in the US is broadly similar to the cost in the UK it may seem better value for money.

This led us to attend a conference run by the Fulbright Commission and the Harvard Club UK. Listening to alumni speaking and hearing Michael Colao from the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology detailing the distinction between 'need blind' and 'full need' in relation to financial aid at the US universities, we realised that many of our students could benefit from this.

We were pleased to be chosen by the Harvard Club UK to be one of their partner schools to help to promote the opportunities of studying in the US. The Harvard Club has for many years undertaken outreach work to encourage talented, high-performing students from UK state schools to apply to Harvard and other top universities, both in the US and the UK. The Outreach Group's aim is to promote knowledge about the strengths of, and differences between, the US and UK University systems.

This includes access to financial aid and providing information and support to schools, students and their parents about the application process for Harvard and other American universities.

The Midsomer Norton Sixth Form was the first to make this partnership and to offer an information evening for all students and parents in the region. This inspired several students to apply to US universities as well as those in the UK. Students apply separately to each US University and they can apply to as many



"We have found that the Cambridge Pre-U allows students to spend more time exploring topics that really interest them in class."

We are pleased with the success of the students in this first year. For example, one has received an offer from Florida Institute of Technology with a £10,000 bursary

as they wish. Our students applied to a range of universities and, after sitting SAT papers, were successful in achieving interviews. The interviews are carried out locally by alumni from the university and are often in quite relaxed surroundings. One of our students found herself completing a Harvard interview in a coffee shop in Bath!

The US universities are looking for students who are good all-rounders and this has helped raise the ambitions of the capable students who may not achieve A* grades but will achieve A grades in all subjects. We are pleased with the success of the students in this first year. For example, one has received an offer from Florida Institute of Technology with a £10,000 bursary. Florida Institute of Technology is a leader in engineering and applied science, aeronautics and aviation working closely with NASA. This kind of success is always going to encourage students to see HE as a wise investment. It has inspired many others to consider applying and also to consider travelling outside the local area.

The Cambridge Pre-U

Our next area of focus was to try and improve the students' readiness for university. Students often achieved interviews for Russell Group or Oxbridge but then did not have the depth of knowledge, analysis, or the analytical skills that their counterparts at private schools often possessed. We adopted the Cambridge Pre-U four years ago to address this.

The Cambridge Pre-U is a post-16 specific qualification that was developed in collaboration with universities. Ann Puntis, chief executive of University of Cambridge International Examinations acknowledges that:

“The focus of [this] curriculum is to develop key skills required for university such as problem solving, research, critical thinking, essay writing and communication skills. The linear structure of Cambridge Pre-U means that students take all exams in one session at the two years of study. This enables students to develop an in-depth holistic understanding of subjects and frees up hours in the classroom.”

We have found that it allows students to spend more time exploring topics that really interest them in class. It is recognised both by UK universities and, as we discovered, a growing number of US universities.

In addition to this we were attracted to the qualification as it gives students the ability to achieve above an A* grade. We wanted our students to be able to prove that they were truly exceptional. The course itself and the dynamic teaching it attracts have allowed them to do just that. In 2011, one student achieved numerous D1 grades (above A*) and another student achieved the highest mark in the country for Pre-U history. He is now studying history at UCL and openly says that Pre-U prepared him far more for university study than A levels, allowing him time to deepen his knowledge of the subject. A Year 12 student taking economics and global perspectives and research stated he preferred his Pre-U course to his A levels as



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The potentially large bursaries available from US Universities make them attractive

he “felt more actively engaged whilst having an opportunity to expand his knowledge”, as well as having an opportunity to focus on his studies without the pressure of exams in Year 12.

We are now expanding the Pre-U courses on offer as we have found that it allows students to achieve higher grades than expected. We were initially hesitant about the lack of retake options in Year 12; however this has not proved to be a problem. Students who take the Pre-U are less exam-saturated and we have found that universities seem to make slightly lower offers, having taken into account the linear nature of the course. We have also found that a growing number of universities are acknowledging the high academic requirements and skills required in global perspectives and research. It is definitely not general studies. Students have to be able to show clear critical thinking skills, an in depth understanding of philosophy, ethics and politics among other topics, and have to write a 5000-word dissertation in the topics of their choosing, amongst other aspects of the assessment. This has encouraged students to develop the passion for their chosen subjects and a level of articulation that they had previously lacked.

In the past three years the number of students successfully applying for Russell Group universities has grown, and furthermore the number applying for universities greater than 100 miles from the school has increased.

Direct to Work Programme

Finally, Midsomer Norton is a comprehensive sixth form and it is important that we also provide support for those students

whose ambition is to go straight into the workplace and to support them in achieving sustainable career progression. Tuition fees have meant that university is no longer a simple default option and apprenticeships at level three have become more sought after. We have therefore created a tailor-made ‘Direct into Work’ programme for these students. It has been run and devised by a member of the pastoral support team who has had a successful career in business. It involves mentoring and support classes in everything from the application to the interview. A business administration course has been devised to give students an opportunity to acquire skills that employers state they lack, such as using email for business, and which are never really assessed in the formal exam system. It is certified by the sixth form and gives the students a greater degree of confidence in their ability to achieve in the workplace. This year we are looking to expand this further and introduce the ASDAN Community Volunteering programme to allow students to gain confidence and to develop their people and team working skills in a real world environment.

With the increased focus on destinations for school leavers we have discovered that these three initiatives have given us a fantastic platform from which to build on our low NEET figures and to improve the life chances of our students.

Karen Ward is director of the Midsomer Norton Sixth Form, a joint sixth form between two Academies, Norton Hill and Somervale Schools.

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The role of mobile technology in the classroom

GCSEPod hosted a round-table debate to look at the role that mobile technology is playing in education

The role of mobile technology within schools, let alone inside the classroom has caused great debate amongst teachers, heads, educationalists and Ministers. For every advocate there is another who opposes its use.

Anthony Coxon, co-founder of GCSEPod, was joined by a guest panel of teachers from various academies - some who embrace mobile technology and others who are more cautious – to look at its role within education and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of use.

The panel comprised of: Graham Brown-Martin, founder of Learning Without Frontiers; Steve Margetts from Devonport High School for Boys; Tom Graham and Matt James from Kingsbridge Community College; Lynda Divers from Lincoln Castle Academy; Greg Williams from Aston Manor Academy; Chris Goodrich from The Mountbatten School; and Peter Burgess from GCSEPod.

Anthony (AC) began by asking the group whether academies should look to ban mobile phones and other mobile technology given the recent announcement by Sir Michael Wilshaw, chief inspector of Ofsted, that there will be a crackdown on schools which fail to monitor the misuse of phones in the classroom.

Steve Margetts (SM): Whilst I appreciate that there is scope for mobile phones to be misused, their use as a learning tool needs to be encouraged and academies need to take a sensible

approach to use and address negative issues and inappropriate behaviour in the same way in which they would tackle issues such as sex education.

Graham Brown Martin (GBM): It very much depends on how the technology is being used. If the technology is only being used to reinforce existing teaching methods then it will have little impact on the students' learning and on results and therefore the advantages may not outweigh the potential risks. If the technology however becomes an integrated part of the learning and teaching process the impact could be huge and any potential misuse could be monitored and counteracted.

Chris Goodrich (CG): As teachers we are very much focused on our students achieving success in their exams but at the same time good teachers will always help students to learn essential life-skills that will serve them way beyond their school years. Mobile technology is part of our students' life outside of the classroom and should therefore form part of our everyday teaching. Developing acceptable use policies in conjunction with the students themselves would help to control misuse of the devices.

Graham Brown-Martin (GBM): The very idea of an outright ban is like banning our children out of the 21st century. Teachers, parents, policy makers all use mobile devices to access knowledge so we cannot deny the same access to our students. The issue is

really around the current fact based curriculum, which continues to test children on what they know as opposed to what they can find out.

AC: But what must schools do to exploit the potential of mobile technology?

CG: The most important thing is to have the correct infrastructure in place to support the wide use of mobile technology. With 1400 students the need for a powerful wi-fi system is essential. Some people think that utilising mobile technology will result in huge, immediate huge savings as students will be encouraged to BYO (bring your own). The reality however is that budgets will still be required, simply redeployed to other expenditure.

SM: As this is uncharted territory for many members of the teaching staff, time and money is needed to train teachers to have confidence in and understanding of the technology, which requires time, budget and effort.

Greg Williams (GW): It was very much the same when computers were first introduced in to schools. Teachers don't need to be as familiar with the technology as their students, but they do need a reasonable level of understanding of what can be achieved with the technology to maximise its potential.

Lynda Divers (LD): It's about encouraging our children to become independent learners so that we can encourage them to find ways of accessing

information and what to do with the information as opposed to us having all the answers and showing them what to do.

CG: But we do need to ensure that the framework is in place so that it does not become another 'interactive white board' which, because of poor use are considered by most to be a waste of money.

GBM: But do you feel that the current assessment system which operates across our schools prevents innovation and our students growing in to independent learners?

SM: Our key responsibility under the current system is to help our students achieve the necessary exam grades that will allow them to make choices – be it to go on to study at A level, FE or HE or enter the world of work. The challenge really is to marry the two – how do we transform learning with the use of mobile

technology whilst ensuring success in examinations. My gut feeling tells me that mobile technology will play a huge role in the transformation of education as we know it, but it is such early days we lack hard facts and evidence.

GBM: But we are currently guilty of teaching to the test. Current legislation means that everything needs to be measured and measured again which unfortunately creates an environment where it is difficult to be innovative; schools will sharp begin to slip down the league tables if students are not passing the test which could have a hugely detrimental effect on budgets. I sometimes feel we are forcing some of our brilliant teachers to be factory workers, meeting quality control measures, as oppose to allowing them to practice the art of good teaching.

AC: Some critics of mobile technology say that it will lead to disruption and poor behaviour. Do you think there is a correlation between bad behaviour and mobile technology?

LD: Anecdotal feedback from some of our classroom teachers quotes the very opposite. Teachers claim that their 'cool factor' has risen since introducing iPads in to the classroom and as direct result behaviour has improved as the children are far more engaged and less distracted.

Interestingly, however a few members of staff feel that iPads would be better with students in KS3 as opposed to mobile phones, as given their age and maturity levels some could still be distracted with access to phones in class.

CG: Bad behaviour in the classroom is generally considered to be the result of a lack of engagement and mobile



With 1400 students the need for a powerful wi-fi system is essential

technology does seem to get student engaged. That said, it is like all things, we cannot afford to over-use the technology or simply use it to recreate existing learning or else students will soon tire of this too.

GBM: I couldn't agree more. Students remember and talk about great teachers, not great technology. The technophile is as dangerous as the technophobe.

SM: Punctuality has even improved in the classes where we use iPads. Granted this may well be the honeymoon period as use in the classroom is still new and exciting for our students, so it would be interesting to hear feedback from schools which are further down the line.

AC: Essa Academy is a great example. When they gave all their student iPods back in 2009, doom mongers warned them that the devices would be sold on eBay, children would be bullied and the iPods would be stolen on the way to and from school. In fact, not one device was lost or stolen and Essa openly state that the positive impact on behaviour across the school has been significant. Some say, children who feel trusted and valued generally respond extremely positively.

LD: One of the criticisms is the lack of equality and the problems this could lead to, as not all students will have access to the technology. Our school covers quite a large socially deprived area and lots of our students don't have access to home PCs and laptops, yet surprisingly the vast majority have their own smart phones. However, we do appreciate the need for inclusivity, if a one-to-one scheme is going to work, which is why we have been looking at the lease schemes through the E-Learning Foundation.

Some of the leasing schemes rely on a parental donation of around £15 per month, which ensure that the devices are completely up to date and are fully

insured against theft, loss or damage. We appreciate this is a significant cost but when compared to most mobile phone contracts it's quite favourable and it would be interesting to gauge parents' response.

SM: And there are cheaper ways to work the donation schemes. Schools can pay the money up front which is then reimbursed by parents' monthly contributions. Or in many cases, the schools use budgets that would previously have been used to furnish expensive ICT suites, pay technical support staff, buy printed text books *etc* to purchase the devices on behalf of the students.

GBM: And imagine what sort of buying power schools would have if there were a collective procurement system as exists in some other countries around the globe. How would education change if every child had both a mobile device and instant access to good connectivity?

AC: Do software issues need to be addressed to utilise mobile technology to its maximum potential?

CG: Accessing paid-for apps though Apple is problematic for the education sector and could prove a barrier to one to one iPad schemes across schools. Currently students have to download apps individually so schools are reliant upon them accessing/ purchasing the recommended material.

GW: The GCSEPod app works well for schools. As a subscribing school all our students can access the app free of charge without the need for any exchange in money. The education sector needs to work with Apple to look at ways of how schools can buy the apps on behalf of their students.

LD: Existing educational software that many schools have in their possession is not designed for use on mobile devices which given that some programmes are

well designed and effective learning tools needs to be addressed.

AC: We have discussed the uses, advantages and threats of mobile technology, but do you see any major limitations to utilising this technology?

Tom Graham: We need to ensure that our teachers are skilled enough to recognise the potential uses of the technology. We should accept that in many cases students will know far more than the teachers about the actual devices but a teacher who lacks confidence and understanding of the potential of mobile technology will limit its success.

CG: Keeping up with the ever changing devices could bring its own limitations as in most cases it is simply not possible to do so.

Pete Burgess: This is where it is so important to teach our students adaptability. We can't expect to change our devices every time a new piece of it is released but we can encourage students to be willing to accept change and adapt.

GBM: I read something the other day that said that the illiterate of the 21st century will be the person who is unable to learn, unlearn and relearn. This is why teaching and learning today is so different to past generations and why mobile technology has such a deserving place in our schools.

In summary I believe it is safe to agree that with the right approach and the right people pioneering the project, all academies can take advantage of one of the largest, most powerful and currently neglected resources available; the mobile devices in their student's pockets.

GCSEPod are award-winning providers of audio visual learning and revision material for GCSE students.

Preparing and Presenting the School's Case at Admission Appeals

Half day – Tuesday 2nd October 2012 10.30 - 1pm lunch, Central London

This seminar is particularly aimed at leaders in schools/academies who are new to the admissions role and who might have to present at admission appeals for places mid-year

Aims of the day - To give delegates:

- The confidence to present the school's case to admission appeal panels
- An overview of the appeals procedure
- Top tips on preparing and presenting the school's case
- An overview of appellant cases
- The opportunity to discuss and share good practice

Combine with an afternoon session on the new Exclusions Guidance

New Exclusions Guidance – update your procedures

Half day – Tuesday 2nd October 2012 1pm lunch - 15.30, Central London

This seminar is particularly important for Headteachers and Governor members of the Pupil Discipline Committee

Aims of the day - To give delegates:

- A good understanding of the legal framework and statutory responsibilities
- A good understanding of the roles and responsibilities of governors including members of the Pupil Discipline Committee
- Top tips on preparing the paperwork
- The opportunity to consider case studies
- Knowledge of the procedure of a review hearing

Combine with a morning session on Preparing and Presenting the School's Case at Admission Appeals

Build your Capacity in HR Management and Employment Law Preparing

Full day – Tuesday 23rd October 2012, Birmingham venue TBC

This seminar will prepare you for the HR opportunities and challenges in the new climate of greater school autonomy and responsibility

Aims of the day - To give delegates:

- Top tips for managing risk
- Guidance on managing absence and (in)capability
- Guidance on the use and abuse of Facebook and other e-media
- Updates on current issues
- The opportunity to consider case studies
- Depending on the needs of delegates there may be a choice of session:
- An understanding of the impact of TUPE regulations for those schools thinking of converting to academy status OR
- Guidance on changing staff terms and conditions for academies

Preparing to be your own Admission Authority

Full Day – Wednesday 24th October or Monday 5th November 2012, Central London

This seminar will enable you to undertake the role with confidence and prepare an Admission Policy appropriate for your school

Aims of the day - To give delegates:

- A good understanding of the admissions process including the legal requirements
- A good understanding of the role of governors in the process
- A good understanding of the co-ordinated process
- Top tips on writing an admission policy
- Top tips on managing objections to your policy
- Top tips on managing the mid-year admissions process
- Opportunities for discussion

Raising Standards through Effective Governance

Full Day – Tuesday 4th December 2012, Central London

How well prepared are you for the challenges of increased autonomy and greater accountability?
This seminar will help you to focus on the changing role for governors and will introduce the FASNA Practical Guidance Handbook

Aims of the day - To give delegates:

- Understanding of the changing role and responsibilities of governors in the current climate of greater autonomy
- Clarification on the key elements of effective governance with reference to the latest Ofsted framework and government initiatives and guidance on undertaking these key elements
- An understanding of the role of governors pre and post academy conversion
- Guidance on the role and responsibilities of the Chair of Governors
- Top tips on chairing meetings
- Opportunities to reflect on their current practice and governing body structure
- An opportunity to work with other delegates to identify best practice

Booking Information

Places can be booked on-line via the FASNA website - www.fasna.org.uk or by emailing the following information to admin@fasna.org.uk:

- Full name(s) of person(s) attending
- Role(s) within school
- Name and address of school
- Contact name and e-mail address for all attendees

By booking the venue we are committed to a certain level of costs and therefore have to implement a cancellation policy:

- cancellation of less than 14 days notice no refund
- between 14 and 28 days notice - 50% refund
- up to 28 days notice - full refund

Gove's 20th Anniversary governance challenge

Conor Ryan tells the tale of the FASNA 20th Anniversary Conference in London

Education Secretary Michael Gove laid down the gauntlet for good governance in a speech to FASNA's 20th anniversary conference that also pledged further moves towards a national funding formula.

FASNA has its origins in the Grant Maintained Schools Advisory Committee, set up in 1992 to represent the interests of heads of grant-maintained schools. Through mergers and expansion, it has since embraced leaders of voluntary aided, foundation and trust schools, and academies.

Mr Gove told some 200 delegates at London's Connaught Rooms that FASNA had championed "the liberating power of autonomy for great head teachers" from the start. "When

FASNA was set up, those principles needed friends," he said, paying tribute to the work of Helen Hyde, Tom Clark, Joan Binder and George Phipson in championing school freedom.

In response to a challenge by FASNA chairman Tom Clark to avoid putting fair funding and governance reform in the "too-difficult-to-do box" the Education Secretary made his most significant comments. Mr Clark said that this was the most exciting period in education since the late 1980s and that a paradigm shift might be happening but a national funding formula and the concept of governors as non-executive directors of public companies with a multi-school perspective were essential elements to complete that paradigm shift. He



Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education, answers questions from the floor

“Haven’t I seen you before somewhere?”
 Lord Hill,
 Tom Clark,
 Gerard Kelly,
 Les Walton,
 Stephen Twigg
 (Shadow Secretary of State),
 Howard Kennedy,
 Patricia Sowter



said that FASNA had been “a little disappointed” with the latest funding proposals and many Heads were extremely sceptical of the ability of School Forums to challenge Local Authorities.

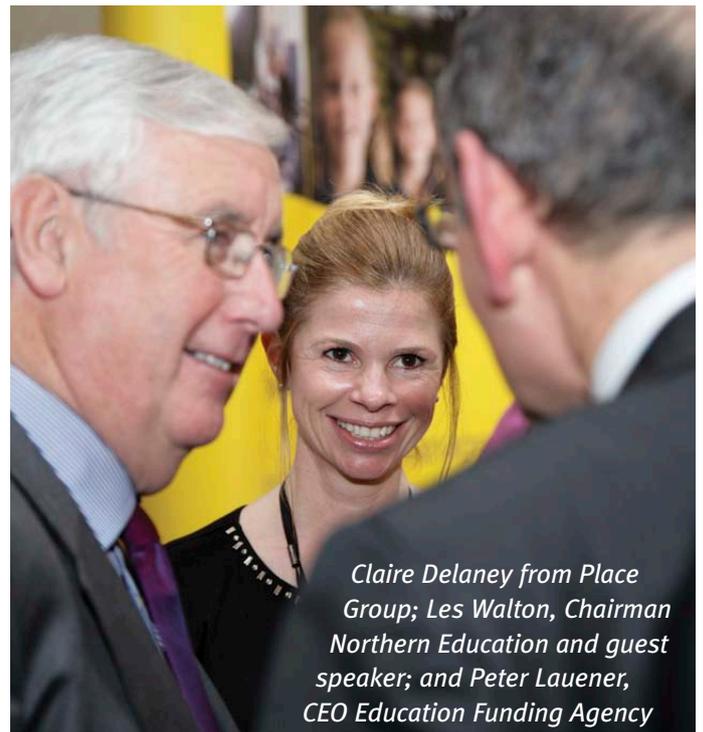
Mr Gove said: “We need to move to a full fair national funding formula where each school receives a set, transparent sum for each pupil – and the pupil premium on top for the poorest pupils – and Local Authorities only receive money for services that schools themselves decide that they need to buy.” That process had to be staged “to avoid causing unnecessary instability en route.” But, “the Government’s sense of direction is clear – and with your help, I hope we can get there as soon as possible.” He also promised that “the operation of the schools forum will be scrutinised from the centre to prevent individual good schools losing out.”

Mr Gove’s call for more professional governance was welcomed by many in the hall. “Good schools need good governors,” he said. “We all know what good governance looks like: smaller governing bodies, where people are there because they have a skill, not because they represent some political constituency.

“They concentrate on the essentials such as leadership, standards, teaching and behaviour. Their meetings are brief and focused; the papers they need to read are short, fact-packed and prepared in a timely way; they challenge the school leadership on results, and hold the leadership and themselves responsible for securing higher standards year-on-year – every year.”

But his description of poor governance proved more controversial, provoking debate in the *Times* and other

national newspapers. It involved “a sprawling committee and proliferating sub-committees; local worthies who see being a governor as a badge of status not a job of work; [and] discussions that ramble on about peripheral issues, influenced by fads and anecdote, not facts and analysis.” Mr Gove said that Ofsted would do more in its new inspection framework to hold governing bodies to account.



Claire Delaney from Place Group; Les Walton, Chairman Northern Education and guest speaker; and Peter Lauener, CEO Education Funding Agency

In questions, the education secretary pledged to look into delegates' concerns on issues such as special needs, lagged funding and Local Authority opposition to autonomy.

Lord Hill, the schools minister, joined delegates for lunch, where he thanked FASNA for its "tough love" approach in advising the DfE and its help in explaining the benefits of autonomy to Heads and governors.

Shadow Education Secretary, Stephen Twigg, joined in the congratulations, recalling how he had worked with FASNA as a schools minister in the last decade. "Many of the schools that are here today are some of the great pioneers of using autonomy to innovate," he said.

Mr Twigg said that collaboration was important alongside autonomy. "Those of us who are making policy have got to ensure that we create a framework in which you can innovate, where you don't have unnecessary burdens coming to you from central or local government, but also a framework in which you are able to be supportive of other schools, and promote best practice."

The editor of the *Times Educational Supplement*, Gerard Kelly, reflected on the *TES*'s first 100 years in a humorous presentation that showed how little – and, in some cases, how much – attitudes in education had changed over the years.

Attitudes to discipline and learning were not so different. In 1935, the *TES* had asked "are children wicked?" and in 1927 it had lamented "that there were schools where the boys read no authors, but only did examination papers." But attitudes to equality had certainly changed. In 1962, one Headmaster had complained to the *TES* that "our air terminals and ports in late July are thick with women teachers hurrying abroad to spend their equal pay."

Mike Butler, on behalf of the Independent Academies Association, praised FASNA and celebrated FASNA's 20th



Gerard Kelly, Editor of the TES, gives a historic perspective on the standards agenda

anniversary. He said that both FASNA and IAA provided networks that lead to greater professional growth and made a real difference to children and young people. Both had worked together recently on issues like funding reform.

Howard Kennedy, who recently conducted a strategic review of FASNA, said that FASNA saw autonomy as being about the interests of the child rather than an end in itself.



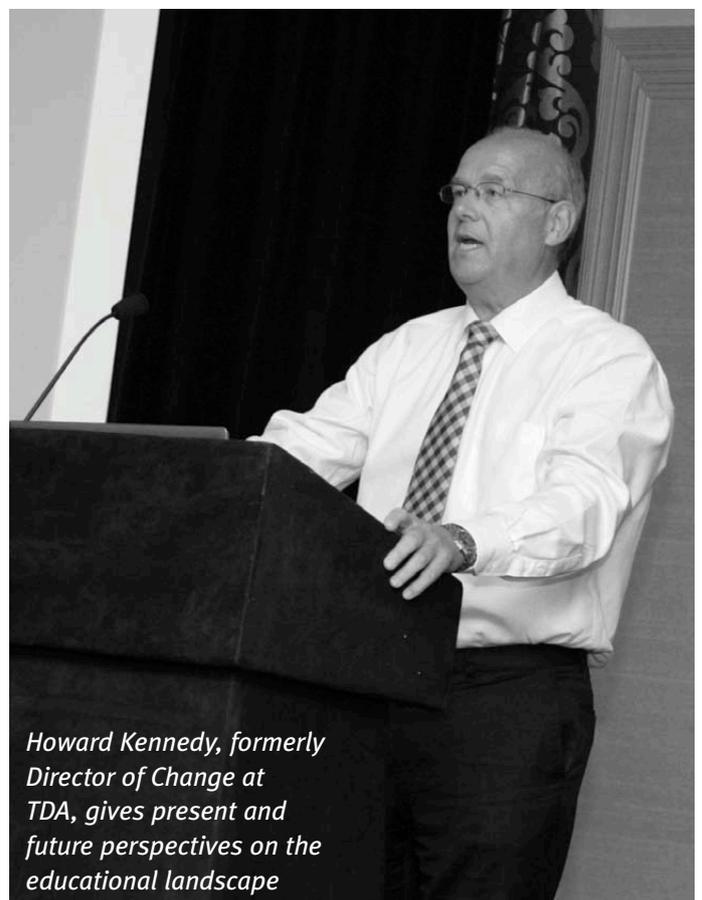


Lord Hill chats with delegates

“The challenge of the last 20 years – and the opportunity of the next 20 years – is to make sure that, as a profession, we are able to make that difference for all children, free of unnecessary constraint,” he said. As autonomy became the new orthodoxy, FASNA needed to watch for three potential pitfalls. First, FASNA needed to keep its eyes on the prize - autonomy was not a dogma, but a means to an end. Second, autonomy was not about isolation. This challenged autonomous leaders to develop educational improvement across the system, not just in pockets. And third, autonomous schools needed to know to whom they were accountable and for what they were accountable.

Events were rounded-off with an after-lunch speech by Les Walton, former chairman of the Young People’s Learning Agency and the EFA, and the founder of the Northern Education Trust. Reflecting on a career that spanned teaching, school leadership, local government and national roles, Mr Walton regaled diners with hilarious anecdotes from his distinguished career.

He said that had evolved four key beliefs from his time in education. The first is the value of standing on the side occasionally to gain a fresh perspective. Second is the benefit of being subversive and challenging orthodoxies. The third, which he had gained from his family, is the importance of being an independent thinker. And, finally, he said it was good to be optimistic. “I believe children are good,” he added. “I believe children are born to learn and have a natural desire to learn.”



Howard Kennedy, formerly Director of Change at TDA, gives present and future perspectives on the educational landscape

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Traded services: better value, better quality

Neville Coles, Principle at Priory Academy, explains how his school are helping others through a new trading arm

Tony Blair once said that ‘education, education, education’ was the priority of his new Government. We could give the same answer if asked about the main benefit to us of becoming an academy in August 2011. Education has been the one clear winner.

With good GCSE results and a successful Ofsted, people asked why we would want to become an academy. Alongside our excellent financial planning and management, being an academy has further allowed us to be creative in our entrepreneurial approach. There’s no doubt that the academy movement fitted with our mindset.

I have lost count of how many times our director of finance and business services said, “they do not do it like this in business”. So we did things differently. We set up an academy trust but we also committed to trade by setting up PCS Enterprises as our trading arm.

We had always managed our own school lettings, including sports provision, but we extended our provision by recruiting the Local Authority health and safety manager, and established a health and safety service to schools. We traded with 44 North Somerset Schools in 2011 and have extended this in 2012. We also now provide services to the Cabot Learning Federation and intend to expand into trading with businesses. We have already expanded and employed another professional to work within the H&S team and he has built up a dedicated website of resources. At the time of writing we are considering a move into human resources to see whether we can develop a trading arm in that area.

I had no particular desire to run a ‘business’ but a very strong desire to enhance our income to benefit children. I was particularly keen to see us add more quality staff, and we have. This year we have added 1.4 English teachers and have been able to employ an additional mathematics teacher all through the school year – all to benefit students. We will also employ an additional mathematics teacher in 2012/13. Now we can confidently say that the main secret to our success has been the ever-stronger ability to secure extra, exceptional staff to create smaller class sizes.

So, of the new academies, how many are now trading? It is still early days as yet but from our experience at PCSA the idea of seizing academy freedoms in terms of trading is well worth careful exploration. It has caused some friction with our LA but our view is that the deal for all concerned in North Somerset – students, parents, staff and the wider community – is now much better. Indeed, through our move into this area the LA has reduced health and safety prices to all maintained schools.

It is clear from our feedback from local schools that Headteachers benefit from our personal touch and hands-on approach. Many feel that LAs take them through a cursory ‘tick-box’ exercise, and are reactive and not proactive. They actually want friendly challenge and clear direction as to how to meet the many requirements.

We have lots of testimonies to back up our work. Take one such experience from Karen Sancto, Headteacher of Trinity Anglican Methodist Primary School in Portishead near Bristol.

She said: “We have been very pleased with our health and safety contract through PCS Enterprise. The audit procedures and expert advice delivered in a non-threatening and friendly manner have enabled us to further develop our procedures and enabled us to be secure that we are meeting statutory requirements. We have both felt challenged and supported and will continue with this contract for the foreseeable future.”

From our experience, schools that trade with us get an outstanding and immediate health and safety service. Any additional income we generate goes quickly back into ensuring that students at PCSA get reduced class sizes. Education wins!

Priory Community School is an Academy Trust school (PCSA) in Weston-super-Mare, Somerset. It has 1220 students who are aged 11-16 with 160 teaching and support staff. Its results have improved rapidly in recent years with mathematics moving from 34% 5 A*-C in 2006 to 72% in 2011. Last year’s English results stood at 84% and Science at 89%.

Myths, evidence and innovation

Briar Lipson at CfBT Education Trust encourages free schools to use their freedoms to break the mould

Free schools have an important role to play in driving up educational standards, by encouraging and testing innovations, creating a competitive market and providing more choice. But in order to be successful, free school proposers – whether they are already education leaders with expertise or not – need to think long and hard about what will ensure their school’s long-term success.

Our research and direct experience of working with parent groups in setting up their own schools has led to the creation of a new toolkit of advice, *Myths, evidence and innovation: a guide to making the most of Free School freedoms*. This signposts the relevant research to help the founders of new schools take an ‘evidence-based’ approach to decision-making and to see through some of the myths that surround schooling.

Buildings

Once school environments achieve minimum standards, the quantitative evidence of any benefit to pupil attainment from further investment is at best weak. Despite this, most qualitative research finds a perception of benefit from capital investment to pupil attainment, motivation and behaviour and to staff morale and motivation.

The success of any building is not only based on levels of investment, it is also contingent on good design. For example, what kinds of learning do you want to see take place in which classrooms? At Wellington College, where in 2010 93.2% of A levels awarded were graded B or above, staff have adopted the ‘Harkness method’ for teaching in International Baccalaureate and A level classes. This emphasises students taking responsibility for their own learning, and teachers acting as facilitators. According to the Wellington College website this changes the way that learning takes place. The method is underpinned by an entirely different classroom layout. Instead of sitting in rows or small groups, being lectured from the front and learning in a passive way, up to 14 students are seated together with their teacher around an oval table to enable interaction and active discussion, and whiteboards are set up on walls around the room to enable everyone to produce notes or drawings for the group. There is no ‘head of table’ or dominant position and it promotes a more tutorial style of learning.

Pay and conditions

Most schools will say they want to attract and retain the best possible teachers. But how can you make this meaningful? Local Authority schools must abide by statutory requirements for teachers’ pay and conditions, but free schools need not. While it may make sense to begin with a standard teacher contract of employment this should then be reviewed, line by line, in order to identify what could and should be altered in the light of your vision for the school.

Examples of innovations in working conditions that free schools could consider include:

- Alterations to the length and spread of the school calendar, or to the working week or day; for example the Norwich Free School’s school year comprises six terms, with a two-week holiday between each and a four-week holiday in August;
- Introduction of greater flexibility to be family-friendly, or to accommodate part-time working or sharing of staff with other schools;
- Facilitating secondments to other schools or to exchange programmes abroad to ensure staff have opportunities to learn from good practice elsewhere.

Innovations already happening within schools include ARK Academies, which offer their staff a generous bursary towards the cost of completing a part-time MA in education and international development opportunities. The Harris Federation of Academies offers private medical insurance, performance bonuses and a heavily-subsidised MA course. Some schools successfully employ staff on slightly lower wages in return for them teaching for fewer hours per week and therefore having more time to plan effective lessons and keep on top of marking during timetabled school hours. At CfBT free schools teachers will have 20% rather than 10% planning, preparation and assessment time.

School and class size

There is no right or wrong answer as to size but it is worth considering how you could adapt your model to mitigate the negatives and maximise the benefits of the class and school sizes you aim for. For example, the ‘schools-within-schools’ model establishes small schools within larger schools, to ensure they



Successful classrooms emphasise students taking responsibility for their own learning

benefit from big-school facilities while at the same time having small school communities, as illustrated below; and some charter schools in the US have established themselves within existing schools, taking over empty classrooms that sit directly alongside the original school's classrooms.

In our survey of the first wave of free schools to be approved, of the primary school respondents one was planning to open a school with two forms of entry, and the rest were all proposing schools with just one form of entry. Similarly across all respondents the most common average class size brackets were between 16 and 20, and between 21 and 26. So while the evidence may not always stack up, and the explanations may be diverse, smallness is clearly a factor that remains attractive to parents.

Leadership and monitoring

Part of the explanation for why many schools lack a clear underlying vision is that up until now most schools have been run by their Local Authority, which has broad and far-reaching objectives for pupils, laid down and altered regularly by politicians. By comparison, free schools have the opportunity to create and sustain a school with a more distinctive vision; one that is comfortable with the fact it might be attractive to some but not necessarily all.

One of the key areas of potential difference is assessment. Examples of existing attempts include the Knowledge is Power Programme (KIPP), a highly successful chain of charter schools where the development of character has been as important as

the teaching of rigorous academic skills; the New Philanthropy Capital "well-being measure" which allows schools to demonstrate their impact on the well-being of young people aged 11 to 16.

Curriculum

According to our survey, the opportunity to set the curriculum is the most important freedom afforded to those in the first wave of approved free school applicants. For example, curriculum innovations currently in use – though not necessarily ones that have been evaluated and proven successful – include the happiness and well-being course at Wellington College, focusing education on how their students might capitalise upon their human resources and make the best of their potential. The Royal Society of Art's Open Minds Curriculum promotes innovative and integrated ways of thinking about education and the curriculum. Teachers design and develop a curriculum for their own schools based round the development of five key competences: citizenship, learning, managing information, relating to people, and managing situations.

Briar Lipson is a senior development adviser at CfBT Education Trust. Her report, *Myths, evidence and innovation: a guide to making the most of Free School freedoms*, is available for download from www.cfbt.com

“ Over a two-year linear course, there’s the time and space to study the subject in depth ”

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The same but different

Joanne Cheadle of Cambridge Education says that free schools can learn valuable lessons from their cousins in the USA, charter schools

In the US – with its network of more than 5000 schools created under the charter system – the free school revolution has already happened.

As experts brought in by charter groups to work on school improvement, we've seen exactly how these schools run, how they succeed and how they fail and what the impact is on young people. The US situation is obviously different culturally, not least because of the large financial contributions from private donors, but there are important lessons to be learnt.

In essence, the US charter schools receive public money – and may also receive private donations – but can't charge tuition fees. In exchange for their freedom from some of the rules and regulations that apply to other public schools, charter schools have added accountability for producing results. Some charter schools are founded by teachers, parents or activists, by non-profit groups, universities, some government entities, and sometimes states allow private enterprises to open chains of for-profit charter schools. Charter schools are attended by choice and where enrollment in a charter school is oversubscribed, admissions are frequently allocated by a lottery. By 1995, 19 states had signed laws allowing for the creation of charter schools, and by 2003 that number increased to 40 states, becoming one of the fastest growing innovations in education policy, enjoying broad support from governors, state legislators, and past and present secretaries of education. By 2008, 59% of the schools reported that they had a waiting list, averaging 198 students. But the picture of effectiveness is mixed – and the rule of accountability has held firm. To date, 12.5% of the over 5000 charter schools founded in the United States have closed for reasons including academic, financial, and managerial problems, and occasionally consolidation or district interference.

I have seen some great charter schools running smoothly and effectively, making sound use of state and federal funds to achieve good standards for their students. I've also seen schools that take those same funds, increase them enormously through grants, patronage and sugar daddies, waste time, energy and money and fail the students. In states where authorizers take things seriously, such schools are soon exposed through the process of annual review. In many states, however, there is no process of annual review and charter schools limp from

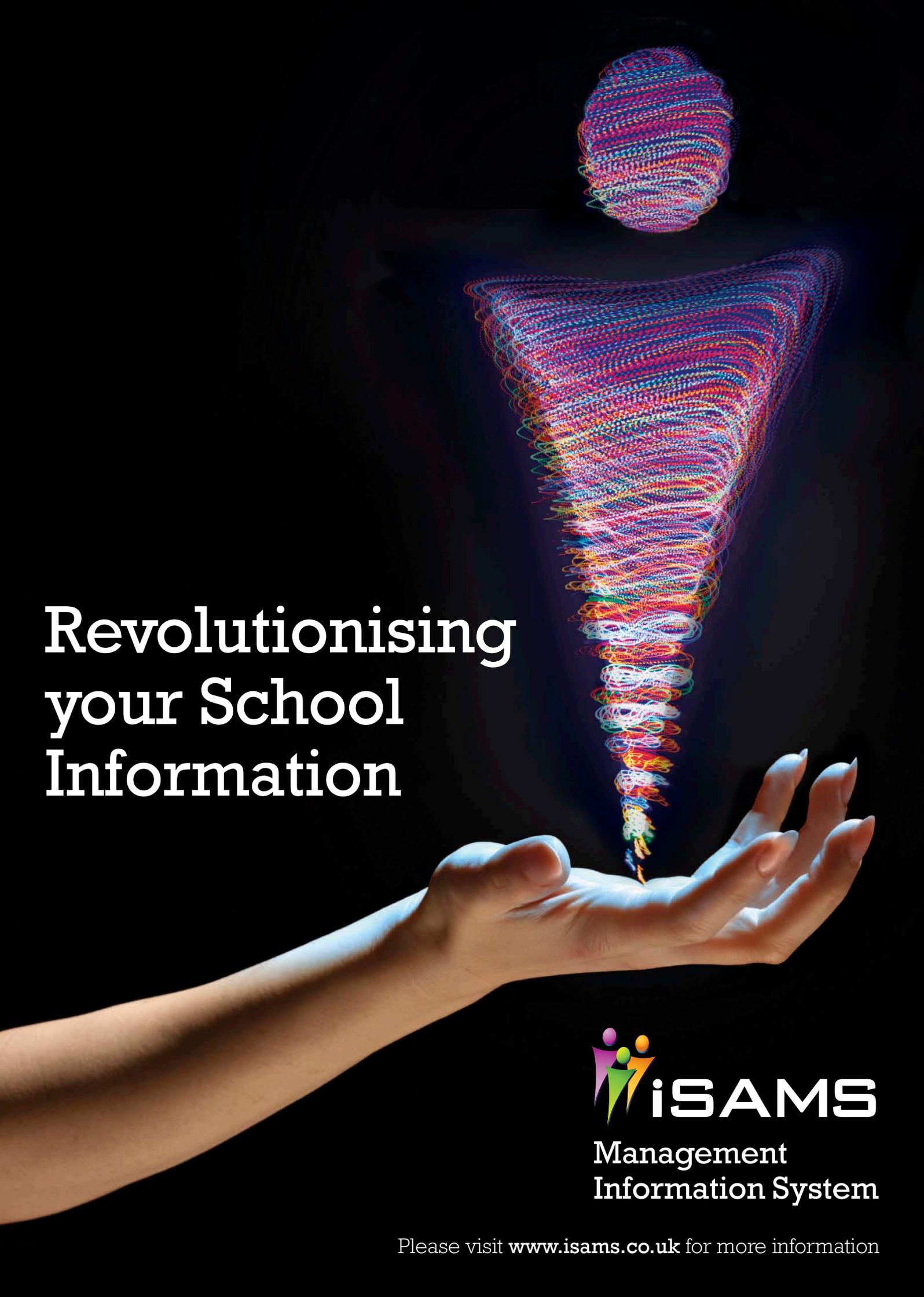
authorisation to renewal, scraping through the next five years of existence with shaky test results.

In the short term, however, these kinds of institution are the best way to show what can be done to promote continuously improving teaching and improve learning – particularly in schools and areas where higher levels of improvement are needed. Here are some of the reasons:

- charter schools can make choices – scheduling, programs, resources, teaching styles, student groupings *etc* are all decided by the school themselves;
- they can recruit, interview and hire people that best fit the school's vision and educational philosophy, never having to settle for second-best teachers who are surplus to needs in other schools. Where money allows, they can hire extra staff to support grades or subjects, or even employ teachers for short term assignments to improve student outcomes;
- they can ask people to leave when, despite support to be effective, they fail to meet the needs of students;
- they can think about the whole process of education, creating something new and exciting that challenges the system.

There have also been important lessons. Some charter schools have struggled by deciding to take a low-cost option and simply take over existing school buildings. By taking this route the organisers have found that the new school's reputation is bound up with that of the previous institution on the site. A fresh start is always better for the local community, even if that means making use of temporary buildings or taking on premises that aren't necessarily fit-for-purpose but can be adapted over time. A key issue that the UK needs to face is what happens if schools fail? As we've seen in the US, these kinds of educational innovations and experiments aren't following a closely worked-out plan, which is both their strength and their weakness. Ultimately, when charter schools fail to meet standards and funding is withdrawn, the real losers have been the children. Continuity and stability need to be preserved as far as possible and it is through systems of monitoring and support that will make this happen.

Joanne Cheadle, Cambridge Education,
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Rolling out the red carpet

A recent visit by Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg showed just how effective a strong, flexible team is in providing the necessary tools to rise to any occasion

As Principal of a successful school created out of two undersubscribed schools in inner London, I am convinced of the power of both teamwork and individual drive when it comes to raising standards and creating a positive environment in which both children and staff can learn and grow. The New North Academy is a highly inspirational, effective school, which puts pupils first. Having recently been asked to become an Advocacy School for the National Education Trust (NET), the criteria for which stipulates ‘someone’s doing something special here’, we were perhaps the obvious choice when the NET were looking for the right venue to invite the Deputy Prime Minister to

launch his recent key note speech on the Pupil Premium.

Over the last two years, I have been working strategically on raising the profile of the academy to share the excellent work done by our staff, and to demonstrate the positive effect of our beautiful, purpose built environment. Care is taken in every corner with every inch of the building used in some way by children, either on a one-to-one basis or in breakout groups, thus providing extra resources where they are most needed in order to enhance opportunity, experiences and attainment.

Many examples of how the Pupil Premium is used to best effect at New North made it into Mr Clegg’s speech.

These included lunchtime sports sessions to increase focus and attention during afternoon lessons, pupil counselling to help children to be in the right place, emotionally, to learn and one-to-one tuition for children who are learning English as an additional language, and it was examples of these initiatives in which Mr Clegg was most interested. This meant that it became a ‘whole school’ visit and no longer an event managed by the small core team used to dealing with external clients. Although we are set up for holding corporate events and therefore have no concern about the organisational, hospitality element to the day, we needed to ensure that the hard work and innovation delivered by our staff week in, week out could be properly represented in a short time.

And so the challenge began. The Cabinet Office were precise in their requirements, and we had to be ready for an official visit just as any other business would be. There were the ‘recce’ visits by security (just to ramp up the nerves), numerous emails, phone calls and a couple of late night conversations. All this leading to an immense sense of excitement among staff and pupils although, of course, no one knew exactly who the visitor was until one week before.

We knew what Mr Clegg wanted to see: his initiative in action. This meant every area of the work we do had to be displayed in the pre-designated route the Cabinet Office had planned and timed to the second. We decided to present our

We knew what Mr Clegg wanted to see: his initiative in action. This meant every area of the work we do had to be displayed in the pre-designated route the Cabinet Office had planned and timed to the second

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The visit prompted “an immense sense of excitement among staff and pupils”

work visually with as little explanation as possible, thus showing the work not only to visitors as they ‘passed by’ but also as a backdrop for the television cameras. This worked incredibly well both on stage and along the route – providing the Deputy Prime Minister, who was accompanied by the Children’s Minister, Sarah Teather, with numerous examples showing how this policy can be interpreted to best effect. Mr Clegg joined a Year 4/5 science lesson and participated in a breakout phonics session designed to help close the attainment gap for pupils.

As an academy, I feel we benefit greatly from our close working relationship with the NET, as we do with all our corporate clients, which is one of the main reasons I undertook

to develop this area of business a few years ago. Working to a three-year plan, we envisaged providing a service for local companies to offer them the chance of putting something back into their community. In reality, this has been more successful than even we imagined, and we have many national clients who enjoy fulfilling this aspect of their corporate social responsibility remit. We are incredibly lucky to have created a contemporary purpose-built building, and see this as a way to increase our outward approach to learning. This was especially true of this particular conference where we secured a developing partnership, gained substantial news coverage and made great contacts for the future.

At the end of the visit, we felt proud and valued. Our staff and children had all contributed to highlighting how extra finance can be used at pupil premium level with great results and Mr Clegg had delivered a keynote speech, which was broadcast on Sky, from our hall. The day proved a great opportunity to focus all our minds on how policy (and politicians) can be interpreted for learning day to day. Moreover, it was a valuable exercise in evaluation for both staff and children, helping to reinforce our core beliefs, aspirations and expectations.

Mary McStay is Principal of the New North Academy, Islington.

Promoting reading for pleasure

Mélanie McGilloway says schools must demystify the library to help build a reading culture



“Around the school, an attractive and well-stocked library is often an indicator of effective support for pupils’ wider reading and information retrieval skills. In secondary schools, an enthusiastic librarian often raises the profile of reading and provides good opportunities for pupils to share their views on books and widen the range of authors and genres they experience.” (Ofsted)

In a time where the Government is much concerned about the level of literacy of children and young adults in Britain today and Ofsted is making the development of reading for pleasure one of its priorities, the school library is vital in helping academies make the cut. Promoting and inspiring a love of reading

“Literacy is an essential skill which begins when pupils start reading for pleasure.”

Several reports in the last year have emphasised that reading for pleasure is a contributing factor not only to the development of literacy but also to students’ educational achievement as a whole. A study carried out by Oxford University goes as far as saying that reading books is the only out-of-school activity for 16-year-olds that is linked to professional and managerial careers in later life.

School libraries should first work at developing a reading culture within the school, as this ultimately will impact literacy across the curriculum.

In Moving English Forward, Ofsted recommends that schools should now take steps towards improving the provision of reading for pleasure and one recommendation is to appoint a reading advocate who can keep up with developments in children’s literature. This is exactly what school librarians should be doing. The constraints of the teaching profession make it impossible for many teachers to do so, whereas librarians will see this as a core part of their service.

Provide reading material that students want to read

In order to develop and promote reading for pleasure, a distinction must be made between prescribed reading (*ie* set texts in English) and what students choose to read as leisure reading, whether it is post-apocalyptic fiction or humorous factual books. It is the librarian’s duty to act on the latter and consequently all types of reading should be encouraged. Whether youngsters enjoy fiction, non-fiction, comics or magazines, this is reading and goes towards developing literacy. It would be counter-productive to disallow certain types of text because they are deemed unworthy. A school librarian will have the required knowledge to recommend titles to students and allow progression in their reading.

Reading for enjoyment lessons

In Churchill Academy, all Year 7 and 8 students spend one English lesson a fortnight in our purpose-built reading room. The layout of our reading room invites an informal atmosphere; there are few tables and most of our seating is comfy chairs, arranged in small clusters around low tables, a lot of displays and even fairy lights. Students are actively encouraged to relax and feel at ease, which is for us the first step to seeing reading time as non-threatening. The first sign of this is often students taking their shoes off!

We offer a variety of activities around reading and books, such as looking at picture books or a Guinness World Records Fact Finder Challenge. The impact is that students see that we value different types of reading material, and encourage choice. We also work hard at demystifying the library as ‘boring’ and ‘quiet’ with activities such ‘LRC Supermarket Sweep’ where students are given a list of subjects or titles like a shopping list and they must locate the books and put them in their shopping basket. This encourages investigation of our book stock as well as revising library skills. And most of all, the students have fun.

Author visits

Listening to an author speak, or watch an illustrator draw, can be hugely inspiring for students, and often for many students it will be their only opportunity to meet a 'real-life' author. This can work particularly well with reluctant readers, as meeting an inspiring author can make them feel more connected to books. It is also a contributing factor in promoting writing. In Churchill Academy, we have an author visit at the beginning of Year 7 to talk to the students. This coincides with our 'literacy across the curriculum' week. This year we will be welcoming Liz Pichon. We also hosted a big event with comic-creating duo The Etherington Brothers this year, who talked to Year 8 students about creating stories. This again was part of a week of a week of activities focusing on literacy across the school.

Author visits can be expensive but they are worth the investment, and often authors will be happy to talk to a whole year group. However, inspiring students can be done in other ways such as holding a Skype event with an author, as we did with teen thriller author Andrew Taylor, who is based in Australia. There is a lot of potential in Skyping with authors, particularly if the author is happy to be involved prior to the actual event, possibly looking at some creative writing from some of the students, or judging a competition. Another alternative to be considered could be for students to interview and interact with authors over Twitter.

Hosting clubs in the library

Offering opportunities for social interaction between students goes a long way at making the library a welcoming place. In turn these positive experiences can result in more willingness to embrace the library's ethos.

Most school libraries offer successful book groups. In Churchill Academy, our book group shadows the Carnegie Medal, vote in the Red House Children's Book Awards, and even organise hot chocolate and cake sales in the library in aid of book charities. Our shadowing of the Carnegie Medal has also allowed us to create links with another local secondary school, as we take turns to host a Carnegie party each year when our two book groups get together to discuss and play games around the books, prior to the announcement of the winner. We are also planning to use Skype this year to link up to discuss the Red House Children's Book Awards.

But school libraries do not only offer book groups. Scrabble, chess, manga, craft, Warhammer: all these groups happen in school libraries across the country and help offer positive experiences of the library, as well as often supporting academies' after-hours provision.

Embracing new technologies

In embracing new technologies, some schools have opted to get rid of libraries in favour of solely electronic information. However



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these decisions are often based on the wrong assumption that libraries are just about books. Libraries are the main information hub for the school; therefore it is fundamental that they keep up with developments in information technology. This is vital in research and information retrieval of course, but these new developments have a significant role to play in the promotion of reading as well. Some students will feel safer holding a Kindle or an iPad, than they will holding a book. Kindles, Nintendo DS, iPads and other tablet computers all are platforms which allow access to text. Our Kindle is used mainly during reading lessons, when students can borrow it to read. At the moment we download mainly free extracts from Amazon of books we have on our shelves. This works well as a promotion tool for our stock, but often students use it for a quick read or simply because they fancy the change of format. Using Book apps on iPads can be also particularly effective at making text more accessible and attractive to struggling readers.

Whether the technology facilitates leisure reading or research material, this will also go a long way at raising the profile of the library with students and accepting as a 'cool' place, and attenuating the stereotype of libraries, and therefore reading, being boring and old-fashioned. Developing collaborative work with cluster schools: Offering support, reinforcing links, easing transition.

School libraries have a vital role to play in the transition programme, though it is unfortunately often overlooked in the busy timetable of transition days. The promotion of reading is the perfect opportunity to strengthen those links between academy and cluster schools, with projects such as developing and housing a collection for those primary schools that do not

have appropriate libraries, as well as sharing a library team, with the academy librarian visiting cluster schools regularly to either help develop their libraries and/or work with the children. Creating such links will be crucial not only at easing students into secondary education but also at reinforcing the message that reading, and libraries, is an integral part of life in the academy. On 19th July, during a meeting organised by Booktrust, the National Literacy Trust and the Reading Agency on how schools can be supported to achieve Ofsted's new requirement for schools to develop strategies to promote reading for pleasure, Sam Lusardi from the Department of Education confirmed that the government would be fully supporting this development as well as the role of school libraries in achieving this. It is therefore imperative for academies to commit to the support and development of their libraries and library staff to allow them to fulfill their role in the development of the vital skill that is literacy.

Mélanie McGilloway is LRC Manager at Churchill Academy, in North Somerset. She also writes the children's book review blog Library Mice and is member of the executive committee of the national charity Federation of Children's Books, which won the Eleanor Farjeon Award this year, which recognises an outstanding contribution to the world of children's books. She was also part of the book selection panel this year for Booktrust's new bookgifting scheme aimed at year 7 students, Bookbuzz.



Listening to an author speak, or watch an illustrator draw, can be hugely inspiring for students



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Working towards outstanding

Christine Forsyth, Head Teacher at Woodham Community Technology College, tells how a concerted change in teacher behaviour has prompted a tangible improvement in results

The drive to achieve outstanding practice in teaching is all too evident in current education policy, but the route to achieving it is not so clear and possibly only half the story. When a teacher is in a classroom they have a twofold function: firstly they deliver a body of knowledge to students through interesting lessons designed to meet student's needs; and secondly they model the behaviour of an adult which stimulates social and emotional growth. Although the first function of the teacher, the delivery of content, has been the main focus of school improvement for decades there has been little effort, other than adding additional curriculum areas, to the social and emotional influence a teacher has in the classroom.

In 2005, John Corrigan of Group 8 Education, Sydney, Australia delivered a presentation to a group of Durham schools. The presentation detailed their research into 'The Ideal School' which had been ongoing for five years and although it set out to look at why teacher status had fallen in society it had moved on to look at why schools no longer met "pupil, teacher and parent needs" to stumbling on something outside conventional education wisdom but which adds such a fundamental systemic dimension to teaching that it provides an obvious route to creating outstanding teachers.

Research conducted by Group 8 Education shows that student engagement is largely triggered by the attitudes and behaviours of the teachers that students have rather than by any particular curriculum content or teaching method or by any particular internal motivation of the student. The research further shows that the average teacher in Australia holds attitudes and behaviours that are not conducive to achieving high levels of student engagement and that these unhelpful attitudes and behaviours are throwbacks to an earlier time when compliance rather than engagement was the desired state in which student learning was deemed to take place.

The appropriate teacher attitudes and behaviours – those that trigger engagement – have a second and equally

important effect. In addition to achieving high levels of student engagement, these attitudes and behaviours stimulate growth in students' emotional intelligence; the ability of a student to be self aware, to be aware of others, to modify their own behaviour and to handle stress successfully. Thus the outstanding teacher stimulates all round growth of each student as well as achieving superior learning outcomes in the traditional sense. It is this all round growth that our students need to become well-balanced adults and life-long learners and it is this growth in their children that our parents are seeking from their schools.





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“More than ever there is a sense that staff and students are working together”



Woodham Community Technology College is a secondary school in Newton Aycliffe, County Durham. There are around 800 students on roll, almost all white British. Attainment on entry is broadly average, 21% of students are eligible for free school meals and 26% have special educational needs. We have recently taken on academy status and would like to share the experience we have had in creating a school culture based on mutual respect.

In January 2006, Ofsted judged our school to be ‘satisfactory’. There was a clear need to improve. In September 2007, we began working with Group 8 Education. The aim was to change the culture of the school to create the conditions for sustained improvement. As a result of the High Performing Schools programme, now known as The Success Zone™ programme, our school has improved in a number of key areas.

To begin the process the school:

- Established a clear vision understood by all
- Aligned values across the school community, pupils, staff and parents.
- Established a distinctive culture based on unconditional mutual respect.
- Began a programme of teacher development based on cognitive coaching

Progress was not always smooth and sometimes things seemed to be more difficult than anticipated but, as time ticked by, improvements became tangible and statistics in a number of areas began to improve:

- Year-on-year improvement in results
- Five A*-C 80%, +26% from 2007; five A*-C including English and maths, 52%, +11% from 2007
- All groups of students make progress at least in line with expectations
- The gap between FSM and other students is closing rapidly
- Year-on-year improvement in attendance which is now high
- Steady decline in persistent absenteeism: 6.2% in 2007, 2.4% in 2011
- 54% drop in fixed term exclusions over last two years
- Reported behaviour incidents declined by 55% over the last two years
- Proportion of observed lessons judged as outstanding 18% in 2009/10; 48% in 2011/12

Since embarking on the programme the culture in my school has improved; more than ever there is a sense that staff and students are working together, which makes the environment a much more enjoyable one to be in.

Time to end the capital lottery

Barry Featherstone argues that capital funding should be allocated on a fair funding basis, like the annual grant



The annual capital bids lottery produces few winners and many losers. In December 2011, the Secretary of State announced a £276 million Academies Capital Maintenance Fund for the 2012-13 financial year. The main priority was to support academies with significant and urgent building condition needs and/or health and safety needs which cannot be met from routine maintenance. The other funding for capital was £44m for the demographic growth capital fund to address new learner places needed arising from increases in the local population of young people aged 16 to 19, including new places needed for local provision for learners with learning disabilities and/or difficulties.

In July 2010 the Government launched a comprehensive review of all capital investment funded by the Department for Education. The overall aim of the review was to ensure that future capital investment will provide good value for money and strongly support the Government's ambitions to reduce the deficit, raise standards, tackle disadvantage, address building condition and meet the requirement for school places resulting from an increase in the birth rate.

The report argues that there is a need for reform throughout the system. It demonstrates clearly that the current system is flawed and reveals how the public was let down by:

- complex allocation processes and multiple funding streams;
- a lack of good quality building condition data;

- unclear requirements around who should be maintaining buildings

In summary, the key Review recommendations were to:

- better target funding to where it is needed most, through use of robust data on where school places are needed for children and young people, and the condition of buildings;
- give local areas more flexibility on how funding is then used, in the context of clear over-arching national priorities. There should be local area decision-making processes on the priorities for capital, involving all the relevant local partners

The Government response was summarised as follows:

"We fully agree that any allocation model should be fair and transparent, aimed at addressing greatest need. We already collect pupil place data regularly and are developing this so that we can better target funding to areas where there is greatest basic need pressure.

"We do not currently collect condition data across the whole estate, which would allow us to allocate funding according to where buildings are in the worst condition. This is mainly because earlier Departmental programmes, notably BSF, made commitments that the schools estate would be rebuilt, removing the incentive for the department to monitor the condition of buildings. As we have seen, these commitments were deeply flawed and unaffordable. Allocation of funding for maintenance in recent years has therefore been mainly based on pupil numbers, which is not an adequate proxy.

There is not a full correlation between pupil numbers and condition needs and this methodology does not provide data on the impact of previous investment.

"We agree to immediately starting work on collecting data on the condition of buildings. However, there will be resource implications of introducing centralised data gathering based on 'condition'. With potentially around 27,000 educational buildings to survey, and the need to keep data continually refreshed, the costs would be significant, both in terms of local survey and central management. It would be important to understand what good quality and current condition data is already held locally, which could be utilised in a national collection without being duplicated.

"There is a clearly recognised need to review strategies and processes and ensure value for money. We applaud the ambition of allocating models and being fair and transparent but struggle to see what progress has been made when you consider this year's outcomes."

This year the Education Funding Agency received bids for 2465 projects, totalling £1.16 billion, from 1071 academies when they only had £250 million to distribute. The criteria were clear but still many academies put in bids. Judging such bids from behind an office desk with little data apart from that provided by the applicants themselves must have been a challenge. Honest judgements were no doubt made but fairness and transparency would be difficult to establish. Inevitably there were more losers than winners with funding

for 773 projects in 571 academies and over half the academies left disappointed.

The introduction of academies with their new-found responsibilities for running and managing their own estate encouraged sponsors and directors to adopt a more business-like approach. Continuing antiquated capital funding allocations that mean schools still have to go to the department effectively with begging bowls gives academies cause to abdicate their capital maintenance responsibilities. Alternatively they adopt business strategies to reduce expenditure and build up a capital pot.

Some governors quickly realise that, unlike industry, education has no profit margins and even with the efficient, best value, economy measures only small contingencies can be built up into a capital pot. Others push on to ensure 10% capital fund is maintained year on year. To achieve this financial decisions often take over at the expense of education. Take it too far and educational outcomes stabilise or even fall in order to create a fund for capital projects. Class sizes increase, leadership teams are cut and recruitment strategies take on the cheapest staff, all for the sake of economy without regard to educational impact. It is a narrow line between funding core business and creating a capital fund.

If we look at the funding of schools the annual grant is to provide the on-going education of the students in the school. The only capital element is the devolved capital formula, a pittance at £20,000 to £30,000 per year. Hereby lies the moral dilemma. If annual funding is for students in the school, how can you justify holding back up to half a million each year for a capital pot? It is time to review, as the Government have recognised in the James Report, but they have not gone far enough.

If schools are to be responsible for their estates then capital funding has to be

devolved. If the school is to be responsible for capital maintenance and development then there must be an identified source of funding allocated directly to them using a methodology that is transparent and fair. Bidding systems that are decided from an office are hit or miss and do not always meet school needs.

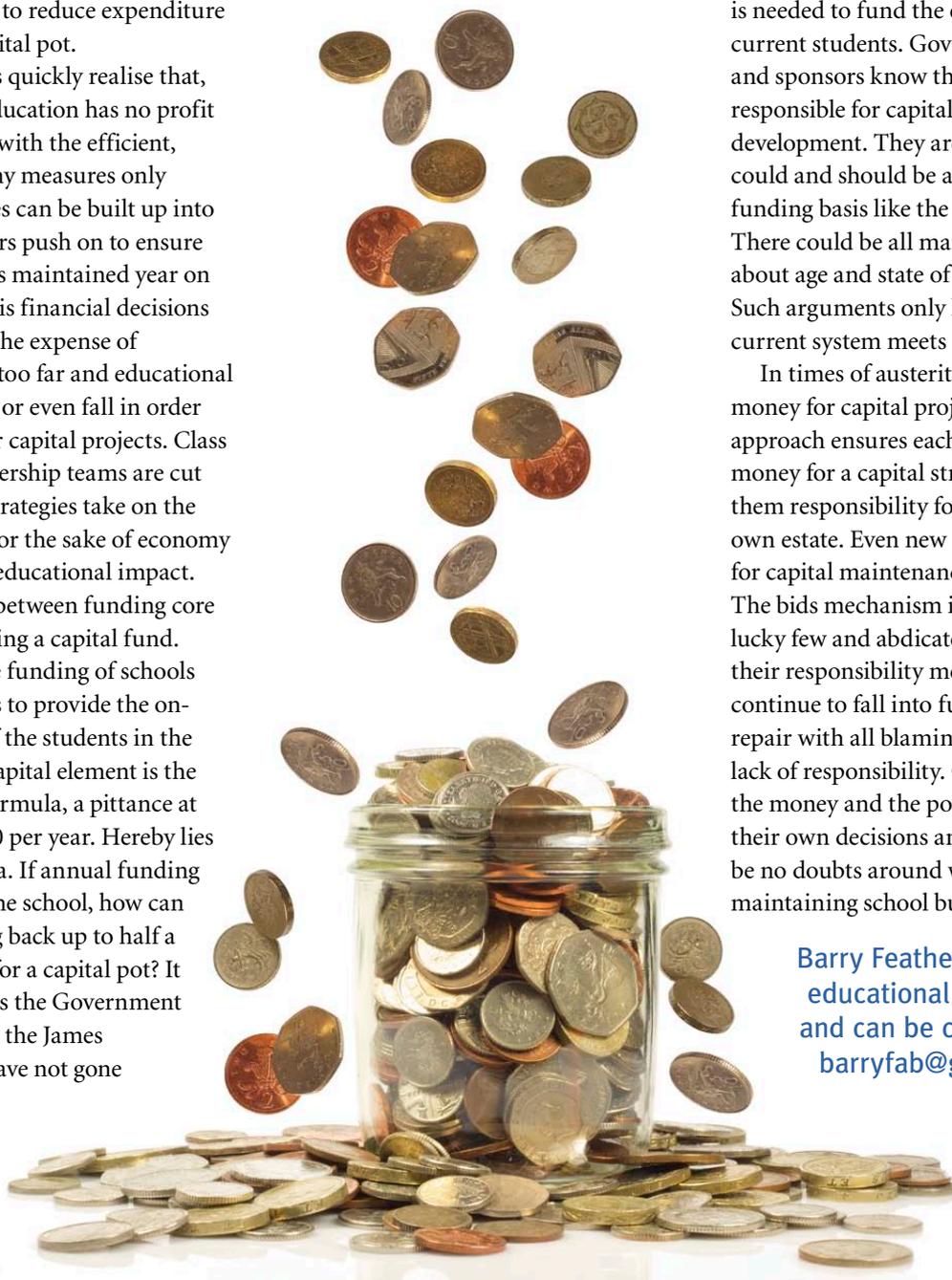
It is time to devolve the capital pot to local decision making by the schools themselves. A reserve can be retained by

the department to fund anything that is truly unexpected and critical. Under current thinking even that pot could be allocated as a loan with recipients still taking responsibility for their own responsibilities and repaying the loan from future annual devolved capital over a ten-year period.

Devolved formula capital with a meaningful annual grant would provide each school with a capital pot on which to base a capital strategy without impacting the annual grant that is needed to fund the education of the current students. Governors, directors and sponsors know then exactly who is responsible for capital maintenance and development. They are! Capital funding could and should be allocated on a fair funding basis like the annual grant. There could be all manner of arguments about age and state of current buildings. Such arguments only hold water if the current system meets current need.

In times of austerity there is little money for capital projects anyway. This approach ensures each school has some money for a capital strategy and gives them responsibility for managing their own estate. Even new schools have a need for capital maintenance and replacement. The bids mechanism impacts only a lucky few and abdicates others from their responsibility meaning buildings continue to fall into further state of poor repair with all blaming each other for lack of responsibility. Give the schools the money and the power to make their own decisions and then there will be no doubts around who should be maintaining school buildings.

Barry Featherstone is an educational consultant and can be contacted at barryfab@gmail.com



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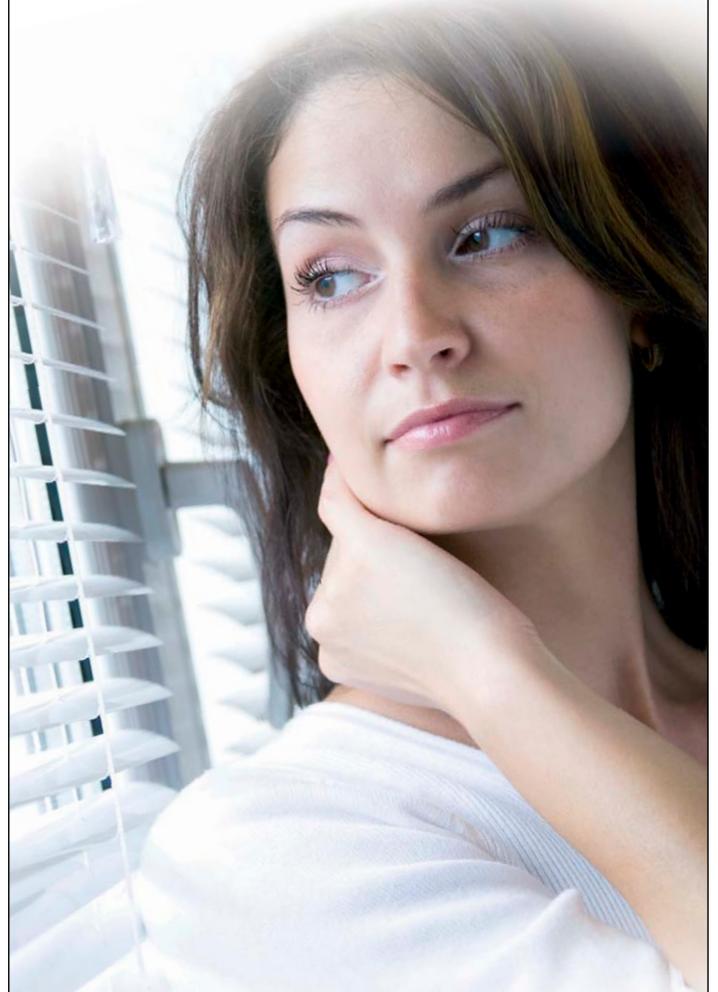
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Skills for life: the role of outdoor education

Pete Goldsmith says the outdoor pursuits programme at his school has life-changing benefits for the pupils

I have taught at the same school for over 30 years and have developed an enviable range of outdoor activities for students. When I first started teaching in 1980 I was thrown in at the deep end by being given a geography field trip to run. This experience led me to develop fieldwork and other outdoor activities and now we have a structured programme that starts with fieldwork in for all of Year 7, followed by:

- a residential outdoor activity for all Year 8
- a two-day introduction to the Duke of Edinburgh Award for all Year 9 encompassing the practical skills needed
- school camp as an option for Years 9-13 with over 100 going each year
- DoE Bronze Award taken by 160 students in Year 10 (60% of the cohort)
- Silver DoE taken by 80 students and Gold by 40
- Ten Tors training for 80+ students from Years 10-13 (and six teams actually taking part)
- Kielder Challenge with four Year 10 students working with students from a local special school

- hill walking and mapwork integrated into several KS4 courses (public services, geography, applied learning certificate)

Why is all of this so important?

As an ordinary comprehensive school in a semi-rural area, we believe that our students need to develop their social and interpersonal skills to for their future success as adults, citizens and workers. One way to achieve this is through outdoor pursuits that develop teamwork, leadership and communication skills as well as perseverance and an understanding of the need for hard work. This is important for all students as it develops self-confidence and improves employability skills. It may also give our students an edge to compete against the more polished and confident students from affluent city schools and independent schools.

As an early converter academy, it was significant that the governors quickly adopted a strategic vision that not only encompassed academic rigour and academic success but also the development of a range of personal and social qualities



that would be partly delivered through outdoor pursuits, also providing a degree of physical challenge. I will give details on two examples of this.

The Year 8 residential visit The trip to the Forest of Dean has had more impact, been more life changing and has inspired more pupils, trainee teachers and staff than anything else. A residential trip for the whole year group is an excellent way to start off an outdoor activity programme. Doing it at the right time is important and it needs to be built in to a programme of activities. We run it at the end of the autumn term in Year

8 when pupils are a little older and stronger and can cope with the physical aspects. We have built the curriculum around the trip so that pupils are learning about the impact of tourism in geography, compass bearings in maths or landscapes in art. The pupils go to the centre for three days and two nights. They do a mixture of problem solving, group

work, adventure activities and environmental awareness. They have a three-session day including night activities and they are accompanied by their tutors and house staff, trainee teachers and sixth formers, often those who are doing the Gold DoE Award. Pupils on free school meals go half price and by careful management, prices are kept down. It now takes place over two-and-a-half weeks as the five houses go separately.

The trip has had untold and immeasurable benefits to pupils:

- The boy, close to expulsion in school, who happily volunteered to clear all the tables after dinner and then organised board games in the common room in the evening.
- The girl suffering from dyspraxia who managed to get to the top of the 'Leap of Faith' and then jump off.
- Conversely, the bully and loud-mouth having to admit that he was scared in the woods at night and needing to be calmed down from hysteria by the very pupil he was bullying.
- The boy who joined Norton Hill after he had been removed from his father's drugs problem, could not talk to anyone and was unpopular with his peers and very badly behaved. He found he had a rapport with animals and particularly my dog. When we were trying to place him in a work placement, we remembered this and got him work at a kennels where he received a glowing report and a full time job when he left school.

In addition, it has given pastoral staff a valuable insight into their charges and increased pupils' respect for them.

The Duke of Edinburgh Award

We started the DoE Award in 2004. It soon grew to such an extent that it had become almost a full-time job and we had to use workforce reform and put a teaching assistant in charge of the Bronze Award. For the expedition phase, we travel to different areas for each level of the award with the Bronze going to the Mendips and the Quantocks, Silver going to the Brecon Beacons and Exmoor, and Gold to Snowdonia and overseas. The Gold expedition has gone to the Alps, Pyrenees, Corsica

or the Dolomites and is now one of the highlights of the sixth form. This two-week trip sees the students do a range of activities such as rock climbing, via ferrata, white water rafting and canyoning, as well as their expedition.

The school has also assisted the students in trying to achieve the other parts of the award. Learning new skills, volunteering in the local community and physical recreation are all important areas for young people and all this makes the DoE Award so valuable. Students who achieve the Gold Award will have a lot to talk about in their personal statements and job applications. Maybe one day soon the Award will be on a par with academic qualifications so that students do not need to take so many and use some of the time at KS4 and KS5 doing something equally worthwhile.

Staff development

Of course, all this activity requires a huge number of staff to support it. To encourage this training needs to be offered and the events need to become social activities as much as anything else. Many of our staff have NGB qualifications in hill walking, mountain leader and walking group leader qualifications. As a result of this and the financial support of the school, Norton Hill has a collection of qualified staff second to none. Running an outdoor trip requires a number of qualities. It is not a coincidence that many businesses use the outdoors as management training. Many of the staff involved in the outdoor

programme have gone on to more senior positions within the school. I do not think it is a coincidence that the Head will now appoint from within the staff for senior positions and it is not a coincidence that many of those staff have been involved some way in the outdoor programme. The future

When Norton Hill federated with a local school there was the issue of equality of opportunity across both schools. To remedy this, when the schools became academies, an appointment of an outdoor pursuits co-ordinator to work across both schools was made. He manages runs the staff team, drives the programme forward and oversees the health and safety aspects of this huge programme.

One thing Norton Hill has shown is that academic excellence can be enhanced by an extracurricular programme like this. What it has also shown is that the ideal of comprehensive education is achievable. It is possible for the academic, the pastoral and the extra-curricular to exist side by side with students of all abilities and backgrounds.

Pete Goldsmith now works as a freelance mountaineering instructor. He runs training and assessment courses for ML, WGL and SPA. He is also available for consultancy work. He can be contacted via 01761 232805 or 07890 938563; info@petegoldsmith.co.uk; www.petegoldsmith.co.uk



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“The scare stories about academies getting a second rate service simply aren’t true”

When Cardinal Hume Catholic School decided to seek academy status, Louise Levy, the school’s senior leader for business and finance, played a central role

After a successful 18-year career in banking and personal finance Louise Levy was on the lookout for a fresh challenge. She found it at Cardinal Hume Catholic School in Gateshead, where she took on the role of Cluster Co-ordinator in February 2009.

“It was a varied role, co-ordinating cluster collaboration and funding across ten local schools,” she said. “But I loved it. It was much more than a straightforward administration role and I found it very rewarding. I knew very quickly that education was a new career direction for me, not just a short term diversion.”

Determined to gain vital experience and know-how, she enrolled with the National College of School Leadership, where she gained a Diploma in School Business Management, and volunteered as a governor at her daughter’s school. “Along with a full time job and a family, that was a lot to juggle. But I felt then, and feel now, that it was worth it.” Aided by her commitment to learn, and her newly won qualifications, Louise was promoted at Cardinal Hume, taking on the role of business co-ordinator in January 2011.

But the biggest challenge was yet to come. The transition to academy status would draw on all her management, co-ordination and communication skills.

The big decision

Cardinal Hume Catholic School holds ‘outstanding’ status, and moved into a state-of-the-art new building five years ago. “Our success is not just about exam results,” Louise explained. “It is about building a really inclusive, happy environment that brings together an outstanding staff team, committed governors and parents in order to inspire students. Part of that is a willingness to innovate, responding to the needs of students quickly or being creative in delivering lessons to keep them fresh and interesting.”

That focus on innovation was one of the driving forces behind a decision to seek academy status, Louise said. “Along with many other factors, the governors felt that academy status would enable us to get on the front foot, making our own choices based on the needs of our students and acting on them quickly.”

But the decision was not taken lightly. Initial discussions went on for six months before a working party was established in June 2011. “The working party involved representatives from our governors, staff, parents and included speaking to staff from schools which had already converted. Each representative played an important role in really analysing the opportunity and, perhaps more importantly, keeping their peers informed throughout.

“Hearing about the experiences of schools which had already converted was particularly valuable, as they were able to give a practical view and dispel many of the myths and scare stories that tend to muddy the waters.”

In the end, the decision to convert to academy status was taken in July 2011. The benefits of converting to an academy were clear and Louise was tasked with managing the conversion administration in school.

Trusted support

“The working party gave me a real head start,” Louise said. “Everyone was on board and prepared to pull together to get the job done. Having those lines of communication open from the beginning made a huge difference.”

Along with the school’s internal stakeholders, Louise also needed to work closely with a project manager, solicitors and the local diocese— both to work with her after the transition and to provide expert support during the process.

“If I had one piece of advice for anyone setting out on the

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academy conversion process, it would be ‘choose your service suppliers carefully’. I had experience of running tenders and managing external partnership from a previous job, so I knew there was more to it than choosing the cheapest. It was more about looking at their ability to deliver once academy status was secured. I wanted suppliers to act as partners throughout the process.”

Louise’s choice of solicitor was a case in point. “The first thing I did was ask them to review the deadlines set out by the DfE, and pull together a detailed timetable for the entire process. I felt it was vital to have a set of realistic, common deadlines in advance that everyone involved could work towards and stick to.”

That ability to work collaboratively was a guiding principle for Louise throughout the process of appointing service providers, even informing her choice of insurance provider. “I choose to work with a company called Marsh. Not necessarily because of its scale and expertise in the education sector, but because the Marsh representative, Peter Moran, showed a real commitment to working with me in a very open way. I felt that he was someone I could trust to keep his word.”

Despite some inevitable tense moments, the school’s conversion to academy status went without a hitch. “You have to be organised and you have to have the right support. I was fortunate to be able to call on advice from people who had been through the process and get some reassurance at those occasional panic moments, whilst I am also privileged to work within a supportive and dedicated team.”

Taking the reins

With conversion successfully navigated, the day-to-day job of managing an academy school represented another fresh challenge for Louise and her team. “We had a whole raft of new service providers to manage, from banks and accountants, to solicitors, insurers and beyond. This was very much a new beginning, so it was crucial that we got all those suppliers working in tandem from the word go.”

Once again, close working relationships proved the key to success. “We had a head start because we’d worked closely with all our new service providers during conversion. We now have regular catch-ups with all our suppliers and continue that feeling of working together, rather than simply buying a service.”

The strength of those relationships was put to the test sooner than Louise might have hoped, when the school suffered flooding during this summer’s torrential downpours. “We had water up to our knees in parts of the school and were obviously worried about major disruption. But our insurance provider was excellent. We had dehumidifiers in and carpets lifted the very next day.”

Making sure the first payroll run after conversion went through without a hitch was a responsibility Louise felt particularly keenly. It was vital that our staff did not suffer any personal disruption due to the conversion to academy status. “That first payroll run was stressful. I actually went to the bank before work on the day it was due to check that my pay had arrived, and it had, so I could breathe a sigh of relief that it had gone through for everyone. “

“I have to say that the service we get from the Local Authority payroll team has been excellent. If anything, it is better than before, which just goes to show that the scare stories about academies getting a second rate service simply aren’t true.”

A varied role

Overall, Louise and her colleagues have been delighted with the effect that moving to academy status has had on the school. “There have been no downsides at all, no disruption to teaching, and the benefits in terms of being in charge of our own destiny and being able to make decisions, and act more quickly have been huge. My only regret is that we didn’t do it sooner.”

On a personal level, the reward for Louise has been to take on an even more varied and demanding role. “There is so much going on in my job these days, there is never a dull moment. We had a volunteer come in to work with us recently, and she expected the role to be all about figures and spreadsheets. She was astonished to find us involved in so much more.”

As well as overseeing business and finance management, Louise is clerk to the governors and company secretary, as well as co-ordinating educational visits and all kinds of cluster and strategic partnership activities. “Alongside that you have health and safety co-ordination, site inspections, risk assessments, managing the school website and working with local organisations to organise summer activities on the school grounds,” she said.

“It’s incredibly demanding, but the reward is playing a part in giving students the best possible learning environment. I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

The ability to work collaboratively was a guiding principle throughout the process of appointing service providers

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Off-site construction: safer, quieter and less disruptive

Simon Ambler, director of Yorkon, looks at the latest advances in off-site construction

Delivering new school buildings in these challenging economic times is no easy task. Construction cost, speed of delivery to meet the demand for school places, potential interruptions to teaching, and getting the right design to stand the test of time and promote the highest standards of education, are all key considerations.

The solution? Off-site construction is successfully challenging site-based building methods through innovation, and the value it can add to the procurement process for education providers has been proven.

Completion times can be halved, which will result in earlier occupation for the school – a key advantage when there is so much pressure on school places. Construction work is also safer, quieter and less disruptive – with a direct and positive impact on teaching.

With good design, highly efficient processes, and a robust and technically advanced building system, off-site construction is providing inspirational and stimulating learning environments, for permanent use and with complete long-term flexibility.

Flexibility for change

Schools have to adapt over time, and so do their facilities. The space in all new buildings should be designed to allow for different uses, to meet changing requirements, and the needs of the local community out-of-hours.

Modular buildings can be easily expanded, vertically or horizontally, without the need for decanting, and installation can be timed to take place during school holidays. Non load-bearing partitions and clear unrestricted internal spans of up to 12m facilitate space planning and the ability to meet a school's changing needs.

The addition of folding partitions instead of internal walls, for example, can create a variety of spaces in a single floor area, giving the academy the opportunity to evolve on a daily basis.

The latest advancements in off-site construction

With the latest technological advances and new innovations in off-site construction, there is no compromise on design, performance, or appearance:

- With thousands of configurations and permutations, some steel-framed modular building systems offer absolutely no compromise on design, aesthetics or layout and are sufficiently flexible to meet almost any building footprint or site requirement.
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- Module sizes, configurations and layouts can be designed to meet individual project requirements, with larger modules providing greater cost efficiency, fewer vehicle movements to site, less cranes and fewer construction joints.

How to expand an already constrained site

Modular buildings can be sited in completely enclosed courtyards, on raised platforms, and on the roofs of existing buildings. This means that areas of a school site can now be expanded or developed which may not have access to the plant, materials and equipment required for site-based building methods. This is a key benefit for schools or academies where space for expansion is severely restricted and yet the demand for places continues to rise.

Traditionally-constructed buildings can also be extended using an off-site approach, vertically or horizontally, giving schools even more flexibility to expand capacity requirements and optimise efficiency in the use of space.

Disruption to teaching can be a major concern during construction projects. However, by using an off-site solution, the manufacture and assembly of the building structure and envelope, and a high proportion of the fitting out are carried out off site, significantly reducing disruption. Construction work can be carried out without the need for decanting and the crane operations can be timed for weekends or holidays, keeping any disturbance to an absolute minimum.

How to select an off-site specialist

As the demand for off-site construction continues to increase, so has the number of specialist contractors. It is therefore critical in the selection of a modular partner, that schools compare manufacturers and systems that are like for like.

1. Assessing an off-site partner

If a project is a major scheme, does the manufacturer have the capacity required, when it is needed? Look at the financial stability, R&D resources, health and safety record, technical back-up, and management expertise. Does the contractor have a zero tolerance policy in place for defects?

2. Look at the manufacturer's track record

The off-site specialist should have relevant experience in the education sector, and be familiar with all the operational and technical issues. Talk to other schools and academies that have used the system and visit completed buildings. Always take up references.

3. How much of the manufacturer's business is from repeat customers?

This is a key indicator of a company's commitment to quality and service. Ask for statistics over the last five years.

4. What percentages of projects have been delivered on time and on budget?

Time and cost overruns are still a major concern across the building industry. However, the use of off-site construction

should significantly improve time and cost predictability. Ask for statistics that show what percentage of building projects have been delivered on time and on budget, ideally over the past five years. This will help you to make an invaluable comparison between off-site specialists and reduce risk.

5. Independent approvals. Look for independent endorsements and approvals, and ask to see the certificates for verification:

- ISO 9001 certification should be in place for the whole process, not just selected elements
- BBA (British Board of Agrément) accreditation
- Local Authority Building Control (LABC) approval
- LPCB certification for fire resistance
- OHSAS 18001 accreditation for occupational health and safety management
- Government Procurement Service framework approval.

6. What is the contractor's approach to sustainability?

The use of off-site construction can help you reduce your school's carbon footprint:

- Is the off-site specialist accredited to ISO 14001 – the international standard for reducing impact on the environment?
- Can the contractor demonstrate ongoing reductions in waste and carbon emissions?
- What energy saving targets are in place?
- What is the percentage of recycled material used in the building system?
- What 'green' design options are available?
- What in-house capability does the manufacturer have to value engineer the building design for maximum energy efficiency?
- How does the building system perform in areas such as air permeability and ventilation to meet or exceed building regulations? Look closely at the test results achieved for completed buildings.

7. What, if any, warranties apply to the modular system?

A comprehensive 30-year structural warranty for the load-bearing elements of the building and a five-year product warranty to cover the external fabric should come as standard for all modular buildings.

8. Look for best value

Ensure you are comparing cost estimates that are like for like and that you are looking for best value for your school – reduced risk, faster completion, lower running costs, lower maintenance and longevity.

9. How will the project be managed?

Does the contractor have adequate site supervision in place? Is the manufacturer willing to work with your team on design detailing?

10. Monitor and evaluate

Was the project delivered on time and to budget? If not, why not? Use this information and the lessons learnt for setting the specification for your next building project.

'Outstanding' Barnby Road chooses Corero for financial management

Nottinghamshire's Barnby Road Academy was one of the first UK primary schools to become an academy, achieved Ofsted 'outstanding' rating twice in the last six years - and uses Corero Resource for its financial management.

With the launch of the academy in September 2010, Finance and Business Director, Corinna Beckett needed a new financial management system. "Our existing system could not produce the level of reporting required for our senior management team or Companies House. All the financial information had to be transferred across to an Excel spreadsheet, which was simply not acceptable to our Trustees.

"I had no accountancy experience but our accountants were extremely helpful, steering us away from a nationally-recognised software package they believed wasn't education-sector friendly and recommending Corero Resource.

"I saw a demonstration and talked through our requirements with Corero. "We are a cheque-book school and the big advantage of Resource was that we could simply select the modules and options we wanted, rather than having to commit to the whole package. It was also very reassuring to know that it would be extremely easy to add new elements as we became familiar with the system or when we needed additional functionality.

"We chose Corero Resource for all our basic accounting functions, leaving staffing and payroll with Nottingham Council as we felt this was too much to take on at the time as we don't have a dedicated accounts team.

"I was so familiar with our previous system that I thought it might be difficult to move over to Resource but I was very quickly using it as easily as I do my own personal bank account.

"Corero trained me well and, if there is something I don't understand, the Corero support line is fantastic. I send a quick email description of my problem and every time I've been called back within five minutes and the problem resolved immediately.

"If we decide in the future it would make more sense to take Payroll in house, or if we want to increase our functionality, I know that I can just add the relevant Resource modules and I'll get full Corero support.

"Despite my concerns about being a Primary Academy, I am extremely happy with my decision to choose Corero Resource. It meets all of my day-to-day needs, all my reporting requirements and the support I receive is second to none. Accounts are clear, transparent and trails are easy to follow."

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At the start of this year, Education Secretary Michael Gove reported that 1529 schools in England acquired academy status. Six months later, at the start of July, that figure had risen to 1957. With more academies set to open in September, over half of all secondary schools are now either academies or in the process of converting.

At the heart of the academies programme is the determination to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy in education and enable school leaders to have the freedom to do what benefits their pupils the most.

This commitment is highlighted by Gove in the Academies Annual Report 2010/2011, published in June. “There is clear evidence,” he writes, “to show greater school autonomy leads to improved outcomes for pupils, and that quality sponsorship is tackling entrenched underperformance.”

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and those who receive alternative provision are also set to benefit from education more tailored to their circumstances, which academies offer. According to the Report, sponsored academies currently teach a higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs than the average across all state-funded schools.

The same benefits can also apply to Pupil Referral Units – a case argued passionately at The Academies Show London in May by Charlie Taylor, the Department for Education Expert Advisor on Behaviour and an accomplished Head.

However, whatever the context for a new academy, increased autonomy brings more responsibility, and demands

more preparation from school leadership teams. Successful academy Heads agree that ‘homework’ is key. Certainly there is more freedom to take steps to improve education provision, but how do professionals in the sector ensure they fully understand the possibilities open to them, as well as the potential pitfalls they should avoid?

These challenges are very familiar to Tom Clark, Chairman of the Board of FASNA. Earlier this year, Tom took to the stage at The Academies Show in London, speaking about the need for Heads to learn from each other’s experience, to forge worthwhile partnerships and create collaborations for the good of pupils and staff.

His comments resonated with many of the school leaders present, who felt that whilst the Department for Education Academies Delivery Group, led by director Dominic Herrington, offers comprehensive support to schools – pre,

during and post-conversion working with strategic partners like FASNA – there is also great value in sharing experience and working with peers.

Events like this and the upcoming Academies Show Birmingham on 28 November at the NEC – where Tom Clark will lead a discussion on Autonomy with Accountability: Taking Control, Being Accountable, Raising Standards alongside Dominic Herrington – offer a chance for forward-thinking heads to gather information and build connections to make the right choices. School staff can attend The Academies Show Birmingham on 28 November at the NEC Birmingham FREE – register online at www.academiesshowbirmingham.co.uk

Marcin Piechowski,
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Saving money on your behalf

The FASNA Buying Club has been working with a number of its members over the last academic year and one area that continues to deliver both surprises and savings is reprographics (photocopiers and printers).

Photocopier and printer contracts can be extremely complex, especially for secondary schools. They can also be incredibly diverse in terms of what is and isn't included in the price.

Whilst an operating lease is the only type of lease a school should enter in to, we have found many schools in all sorts of non-compliant contracts. Even when the correct type of operating lease has been used by a school, major advantages may still be gained by planning your new photocopier procurement strategy. Undertaking a full audit to establish how your school may benefit from new technology and its smarter use is certainly worth considering.

A recent FASNA member benefitted from significant savings from a FASNA Buying Club photocopier and printer audit, to the tune of £125,000. The school is now in receipt of a much-improved photocopier and printer estate, along with the major financial saving it has made from clever procurement. Money to spend where it matters – on teaching and learning.

Here's how we did it. Coopers Technology College asked us to review their reprographics contract as it was due to end within a few months. We first had to understand the school's current position through a contract analysis. This was followed by an audit of usage to establish volumes, colour coverage as well as assessing the physical locations of existing equipment. Following the audit and a subsequent floor-walk to produce e-plans of the machines, we presented our findings and recommendations to the school and governors. Delighted with our findings they directed us to manage a competitive tender for a new contract based upon the school's current and future needs.

Contract renegotiation

Coopers Technology College had previously entered into a five-year contract that, for various reasons, had been upgraded before the end date. As a result, a large settlement figure was rolled into a new five-year term. This meant that the College was paying a much higher quarterly repayment. They were paying interest on interest.

By helping the school to negotiate a new contract based on a compliant operating lease, we were able to save them £125,000, a cost reduction of around 70%, based on a like-for-like five-year period.

Enhanced processes

Previously there was very little clarity over the service agreement coupled with a minimum bill covering quarterly mono and colour pages. This could have led to inflated colour printing costs when the minimum print quota was not being reached. We were able to address this problem by introducing a transparent billing arrangement based on actual usage with no minimum usage.

Another key issue was the college's inaccurate copy audit system. Any staff member could use any departmental card. Furthermore, each member of staff also carried an ID card and a door access card yet neither of them were linked into the photocopying system, which meant that the contract wasn't being utilised to its full potential. By introducing ID printing cards based on a single card with a built-in intelligent Mifare reader, we were able to improve security and the school's audit process almost immediately as they were able to identify who was printing what, when and where, providing the necessary management information to control costs.

We also identified that the school had too many printers, of differing types, which made it far more difficult for the IT department to manage faults and to deal with logistics around toner inventory *etc.* We addressed this by recommending printers from a single manufacturer and by reducing the overall number of printers by 15%.

Improved account management

The management review process was a fairly reactive service. We therefore transformed the school's on-going support with the introduction of a managed service for printers and photocopiers, which included a transparent performance review process and proactive device monitoring.

School feedback

"I just wanted to express my thanks for the work carried out by the FASNA Buying Club and Place Group in the letting of a new photocopying contract for Coopers TC. When we met I explained that I had only been at Coopers since April 2011 and there were lots of priorities ... the letting of the new photocopying contract was firmly in my "too difficult" drawer and I welcomed the support from the FASNA Buying Club. At all times I have found staff to be knowledgeable, professional, flexible and supportive to the college."

If you have questions about the FASNA Buying Club or need additional information please email contact@fasnabuyingclub.org.uk or call us on 07540 802 133

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