

Eastern Daily Press

SERVING THE COMMUNITY
SINCE 1870

There's a need for transparency in our new schools system

The last five years have seen some of the biggest changes to the education landscape for generations. The government's drive for schools to become academies has been controversial, but the Conservatives' election victory removed any doubt that it was here to stay.

The expansion of the academy programme left ministers with a problem: how could civil servants in Whitehall hold all these thousands of schools to account? Their solution was to create a new system of regional schools commissioners who monitor these academies and take key decisions about them.

Tim Coulson is now starting his second year as the commissioner for our region. In his first year, he worked constructively with different parts of the local education system, whether academy chains, local councils or headteachers' organisations, and he plans to continue doing so. The position he holds is not without its critics, but Dr Coulson himself has won widespread respect.

In the coming years, regional schools commissioners will become even more powerful, with their role extending deeper into the non-academy sector. They will take more and more decisions with profound consequences for our communities and the education of our children.

However, the transparency of the process is not commensurate to the gravity of the decisions being made, and parents are given precious little information about why schools are opened, closed, changed or transferred from one sponsor to another.

Dr Coulson has signalled a move towards more openness, and this is to be welcomed, but only genuine transparency will give the public the confidence they need to have in such an important process.

Giving people a choice

The system of personal budgets has been around since 2008, and allows people eligible for council help to meet their social care needs to receive a direct payment they can use to personalise their care to their individual needs.

Some people who have taken up this offer have said it has transformed their lives, and believe it has prevented them being prisoners in their own homes.

Despite this, only 37pc of the people in Norfolk eligible for personal budgets have taken them.

Personal budgets may not be appropriate for everybody, but it is important that everyone has the information they need to decide what works best for them.

There are also concerns that those who have personal budgets, and used them to transform their lives, will see them cut. It is important that their voices are heard when changes are considered.

An event to be proud of

Pride certainly took over Norwich. What was evident was the sheer exuberance of the celebration, with its colour, music and flamboyant costumes. As one person summed it up: "It's an all-inclusive, great party for everyone."

It is another example of the vibrant community in which we live, and the organisers are to be congratulated on creating so memorable an occasion – one in which we can all take Pride.

READER'S PICTURE OF THE DAY

iwitness24



Richard Brunton took this photograph of a stoat hiding among the foliage on the edge of the saltmarshes at Blakeney - apparently keeping a wary eye on him. If you would like to submit a picture for possible publication in the EDP, visit www.iwitness24.co.uk

Dialect would be welcome if I was minister for education



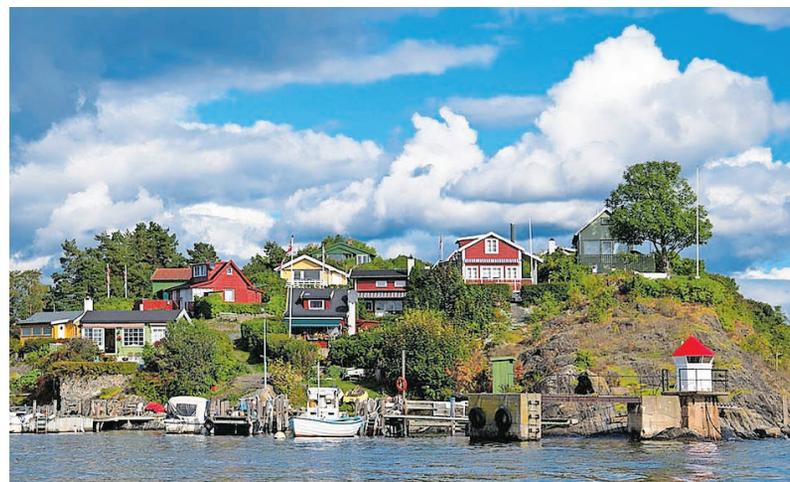
email: newsdesk@archant.co.uk

When I become minister for education, I am going to issue a circular to all the schools in our country which will read as follows:

"It is the duty of teachers to show great respect for children's spoken language, and they should ensure children feel and understand this. Teachers should help and encourage children to speak their local dialect and accent clearly, mellifluously and well. They should not attempt to have children abandon their native accent and dialect or have them speak the standard language in school. The school head must immediately intervene against any action of this type and instruct the individual concerned to adhere to this clear legal regulation."

What this means is that, under my ministry, teachers won't be allowed to tell Norfolk children that it's "wrong" to say "I'm now a-comen" and "He play very good".

On the contrary, children must be encouraged to say precisely those things if they are part of their local dialect. If Norfolk children pronounce hair and here, and pure and purr; the same, that will also be fine and to be encouraged. If they pronounce few as foo, teachers will be



Norway should not only be admired for its beauty, says our columnist, but also for its commonsense attitude towards language, dialect and accent.

Picture: PA

required to permit them to carry on doing so.

Do you think this is absurd? If so, you needn't worry because I'm not ever going to be minister for education. But this is not a ludicrous fantasy I'm having. This is not just a scenario I have imagined. The above words are not my own. This "edict" of mine is a direct translation of a circular which was issued by the Norwegian Ministry of Church and Education to all the schools in Norway on February 27, 1923.

Under my ministry, just like in Norway, writing would be different from speaking. Teachers would be required to explain to

pupils that in writing, the forms to use will be "I'm just coming" and "He plays very well". This is not because these forms are "right" as opposed to "wrong", but because they are part of Standard English, the dialect which is conventionally used in formal writing in the English-speaking world.

Norway is a country which is to be admired not just for its mountains and fjords, and for the role of its government as a mediator in international disputes. It is also to be admired for being a place where commonsense about language, dialect and accent are more prevalent than ignorance, prejudice and unreason.

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With perfect peace you will protect
those whose minds cannot be
changed, because they trust you.

Isaiah 26:3

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