

# Eastern Daily Press

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## Our children must be in the classroom to learn properly

It has been an unhappy fact that over recent years, we have – on repeated occasions – had to report on the failings of our region's schools.

The challenges facing our education system have become wearily familiar, and the task of tackling them has been dragging on – with some successes, it must be said, but also with some setbacks.

We have, on some of those occasions, taken the authorities to task for a failure to address some of the shortcomings of our education system.

Today is not one of those occasions. As we report in these pages, those authorities are engaged in what can justifiably be called a “clampdown” on parents of children who are absent from school without permission. The number of those being fined in Norfolk and Suffolk has spiralled quite staggeringly in recent years. No doubt this will cause frustration and resentment in many, and it is certain to prompt debate.

Some of the rise is put down to more parents taking their children out of school to get cheaper holidays. Yes, the way holiday prices soar at the end of the term is galling. And, yes, overseas trips can be educational. But there is a bigger picture.

Of course, also, there will be some cases where parents are hard done by. But this initiative is an important step in improving our education system. Schools and their staff are making great strides. Children need to be in class to get the benefit. Absences are disruptive, not just for the pupil concerned, but for their classmates. This clampdown is aimed at raising standards in our schools and giving our children the education they deserve. It therefore has our support.

## In praise of machines

Weekends are a time for hobbies and pursuits. And this newspaper greatly enjoys celebrating the wide range of activities enjoyed by our readers – the more eccentric the better. One area we perhaps do not often highlight is that of motoring and, more generally, machine enthusiasm. Well, we have tried today. First we have the East Anglian Lotus Club, marking Jim Clark Lotus Day, an event to mark that adopted son of Norfolk's incredible 1965 season.

Then, just along the eccentricity scale, is the classic car rally featuring not just any old heritage vehicles, but a collection of motor cars originating from the former Eastern Bloc countries.

But trumping even that for eccentricity we have Peter Brueggemann, a Holt GP who, in his spare time, has been building a full size working replica of the Red Baron's aircraft. It is such ventures that give our region its colour and character.

## Canal is a great asset

Just days after the EDP reported on the exciting scheme aiming to open up a collection of “secret” Broads – linked to the main network but in private hands – we feature another story that continues that theme. The North Walsham and Dilham Canal, like those “hidden” Broads, remains off the radar for most. But both have the potential to become great assets and attractions to our region. Efforts to breathe new life into the canal are heartening.

## READER'S PICTURE OF THE DAY

# iwitness24



■ A cute little fox cub at Great Yarmouth was caught on camera by Mike Arreff. If you would like to submit a picture for possible publication in the EDP, send it to us via our website at [www.iwitness24.co.uk](http://www.iwitness24.co.uk)

## Logic can put eager learners on the wrong track

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I have written before about grammatical rules, and how we all speak according to a set of rules of grammar which we learnt, without being taught them, as small children. We were clever enough, as all human beings are, to analyse the language we heard spoken around us, work out what its rules were, and start using them ourselves – without any conscious awareness of what we were doing.

As far as English is concerned, these rules are nothing to do with the non-existent so-called rules that certain English language “experts” want to foist on us, such as: “You shouldn't end a sentence with a preposition”, and “The word ‘between’ can only be used of two entities, otherwise it should be ‘among’.”

The existence of the real rules I'm talking about can very clearly be seen by observing the way in which small children acquire them as they are learning their language or languages. Linguistic scientists who are experts on child-language acquisition point out that when small children are first learning to speak English, they employ irregular past-tense forms correctly: they say “Mummy went” and “Daddy fell down”.

Later on, they start getting things



■ Children learn the rules of grammar as they go along.

wrong. They begin to say things like “Mummy goed” and “Daddy falled down”. These are fascinating mistakes because they show that children have now worked out what the rule is for the formation of past-tense verbs.

The rule is not totally straightforward: you take the basic form of the verb and add to it one of three suffixes: -ed, as in wanted; -t as in walked (pronounced walkt); and -d as in filled (pronounced filld) – with the suffix being determined by what the final consonant of the basic word form is.

But, having learnt this rule, children then very reasonably start applying it to all verbs: if the present tense is hit, then

the past tense must be hitted. This is wrong of course, but it does show that they have learnt the rule entirely correctly.

It is only later that children then reach a third stage, where they realise that, although the rule for past-tense formation is as they have correctly analysed it, there are also exceptions: there are irregular verbs which you can only use correctly by learning and remembering them individually.

Chronological sequences in children's language development such as went > goed > went tell us a lot about how human infants acquire their mother tongue.

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The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right, and His ears are open to their prayers.

Jeremiah 1:5

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