

Eastern Daily Press

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Getting rid of debts should not be at the expense of education

Those involved in running our schools have issued some tough words today, and some bleak warnings.

Changes due to come in for the next academic year mean our schools must pay more in teacher pension costs and national insurance contributions – money that must come from other areas of their budgets. The consequence – they say – will be teacher redundancies, larger classes and some subjects simply being scrapped altogether.

There seems to be particular irritation that – as many teachers would have it – ministers have been able to reap the plaudits for saying they will not cut school budgets, while presiding over changes that means schools will have to make cuts anyway.

Now, the teaching profession and government have long had a volatile relationship, and skirmishes over education funding have become almost as commonplace as those over the curriculum.

Nevertheless, these warnings do seem troubling. Too many schools in our region have, for too long, been dogged by problems. The shortcomings of parts of our system will have become familiar to readers and there is no need to rehearse them here. But what is worth stressing is that many of the challenges facing our schools are now being met, and we have confidence in our army of dedicated teaching staff dedicated to delivering an excellent education for our children. As they strive to make the advances we all desire, it is essential to ensure nothing is done to undermine this progress.

The need to make reductions to this country's indebtedness is surely a wise policy. But we must ensure it is not at the expense of our children's education.

A region full of delights

Our fascinating story today, on the toings and froings of internal migration in and out of our region, raises just one question. Why would anyone want to leave?

Elsewhere in today's newspaper, we give just some of the flavour of what our corner of the country has to offer: from King's Lynn's blockbuster festival in the west, to Lowestoft's enchanting turtle trail in the east.

From Cromer's rambunctious soapbox derby, in the north, to Bungay's more cerebral antiques fair – part of a wider festival – in the south.

In between, we have the GoGoDragons! still delighting in Norwich, Dereham's continuing emergence as an unlikely centre for blues music, and Attleborough putting on a party too. Behind all of these events, which make this place such a wonderful one to live in, are an army of volunteers making them all possible. We thank every one of them.

The brilliance of bats

Bats suffer from an image problem. They are seldom seen and when they are, more often than not, they inspire horror rather than affection. Without the obvious beauty of birds, they lack the same fan club.

And yet, as the hundreds of volunteers involved in a pioneering monitoring project across Norfolk have discovered, they are spellbinding, wondrous creatures. Gradually, this brilliant project is unravelling the mysteries of these mesmerizing mammals.

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Be on your guard; stand firm in the
faith; be courageous; be strong.
1 Corinthians 16:13

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READER'S PICTURE OF THE DAY

iwitness24



■ Wild ponies on the heath at Cawston were caught on camera by Peter Dent. If you would like to submit a picture for possible publication in the EDP, visit www.iwitness24.co.uk

The letter that has seen a change in pronunciation

Peter
Trudgill



email: newsdesk@archant.co.uk

There are 26 letters in the alphabet we use for writing English. Some of these letters are redundant.

We could easily abolish C, and use K and S instead: cathedral city would work alright. X is a bit pointless too – we could write boks instead of box.

We could also, though, do with some extra letters, since we have no way of indicating the difference between the initial consonants of thy and thigh. And we have to write our single sh and ch sounds with two letters.

Mostly, the names we give our letters correspond to the speech sound the letter stands for: the name of the letter B begins with a b sound, and the name of the letter F has an f sound in it.

But there are exceptions. W does not have a w sound in its name, whereas the letter Y does! And in this part of the world, there is no “r” in the name of the letter R – we call it “ah” – even if Bristolians, Scots, Americans and Irish people do pronounce the r.

Another exception is the letter H, which



■ The letter H - but do you pronounce it 'aitch' or 'haitch'?

Picture: GETTY IMAGES

is called aitch – there is no aitch in aitch. Except that, now, there are quite a lot of people who do pronounce it “haitch”, as you have probably noticed.

Nearly all of them seem to be under 35. On the train from Norwich to London, you can tell how old the buffet car staff are from whether they inform the passengers over the intercom that you can get a coffee in coach aitch or coach haitch.

The only exception that I know to this age differentiation is that haitch has always been the normal form in the Irish Republic, and among people who went to Catholic schools in Northern Ireland. In

the bad old days, it was said that you could be stopped in the streets of Belfast by men carrying guns, and ordered to recite the alphabet.

Australian Catholics tend to say haitch as well.

But why have so many younger people here in England started saying “haitch”?

It seems like a mistake, doesn't it? But of course it also makes the name of this letter fit into the general pattern that we use with our other letters. And perhaps some schoolteachers use that name because they think it will help small children with learning to read and write.