TALKING TO teachers and pupils today, I have to admit that the thought of writing this piece has been clouding my mind. The...  

Dear sir,  
I write after reading your article about teachers topping the list of those working unpaid hours (Teachers do most unpaid hours, SecEd 205, March 5, 2009).  
My colleagues and I routinely work extra hours. This is partly because the job is never finished: there is always something more to be done. It is also because teachers do not have a clear idea of what their hours should be. We know our day isn’t just 9am to 3.30pm, but how early should we come in and how late should we stay? Teachers probably used someone (senior management?) to tell us how many hours to work per day.  
The trouble is, senior managers often seem to be the worst “culprits” for coming in early, staying late and taking work home.  

There is a culture in school of doing a lot, above and beyond the call of duty, and individuals are scared to appear lazy compared to “everyone else” who seem to be working so hard. It’s a form of self-perpetuating peer-pressure.  
Also, highly dedicated senior leaders (whose lives seem often to be devoted to school) think nothing of scheduling meetings, briefings, parent’s evenings, open evenings, and so on, while simultaneously requesting written reports, statistical analyses, progress data, schemes of work or lesson plans. A conscientious teacher needs to spend hours to properly meet all these demands. I would like to be told how many hours I “should” be working, and then I could “legitimately” rush a cut-off point without feeling so guilty.  

Rachel Pattisson, Northumberland

IT IS 200 years since the birth of Sir David Attenborough in 1926. It is no surprise to learn that in 2006 Sir David was the most familiar name in the world. 

Sir David believes the use of lively experiments could be the key to ensuring more students study the sciences in the fourth form and beyond. He told me: “All people have the potential, and the desire, to develop their minds. However, our brains are not just empty milk-bottles into which you can pour facts and information.”

“The key to retaining information, and to finding it interesting, is to carry out experiments – to find things out for yourself. The experiments available as part of the Survival Rivals packs really enable students to do this.”

In one of the national selection experiments – the imaginatively titled I’m a Worm, Get Me Out of Here! – pupils are encouraged to use different strands and colours of worm-sized spaghetti to find out which colour and size of worm is the most attractive to birds.

Support: Sir David Attenborough is hoping The Wellcome Trust’s Darwin resources will ignite students’ interest in science