

Victory after academy order withdrawn at Redbridge school

PARENTS, staff and pupils are celebrating after it was announced that the Education Secretary Damian Hinds has withdrawn the academy order in place at William Torbitt School in Redbridge, east London.

An academy order was initiated following an 'inadequate' Ofsted report released last summer which highlighted safeguarding concerns. However, a report following a subsequent inspection in January 2019 resulted in a 'good' grading.

The campaign to halt academisation saw more than 60 parents attend a meeting at the primary school with over

200 attending a protest outside. This was followed by another protest of around 50 at a full council meeting on 17 January. Staff at the school in the NEU and GMB were set to ballot together for strike action if the academy order remained".

National Education Secretary (NEU) joint general secretary Kevin Courtney had written to Mr Hinds three times pointing out the improvement made by the school with the support of the local authority and asking for the academy order to be withdrawn.

Mary Bousted, NEU joint general secretary, said this was the only logical decision and hailed it as a victory not only for common sense but also "for the parents and staff who campaigned and put pressure

on the Government to ensure that their school could continue to flourish with its current leadership and within the local family of schools."

She also said the case of William Torbitt "fundamentally calls into question" the policy of forced academisation, describing it as "wrong in principle" and "counterproductive".

"The Government now has to rethink its whole approach and stop forcing schools into academy status against the wishes of their local communities. Schools should be allowed to remain within their local authority where they can benefit from the local expertise and knowledge that will support genuine school improvement," she said.

Campaign saves six Lewes schools from academisation

THE Save Lewes Schools campaign has successfully seen off plans to convert six schools in Lewes, East Sussex, into a multi-academy trust (MAT).

Working with the NEU and GMB, parents formed Save Lewes Schools to oppose plans to form a MAT with a local secondary school.

The creation of the MAT was backed by Conservative-controlled East Sussex Council, which announced on 5 November 2018 that it would be reducing its core services to schools in an attempt to make £45 million of savings by 2021-22.

[A parental petition was set up](#) in

late November soon after the plans were announced and a public meeting was attended by 175 people.

Thanks to the huge support the campaign garnered, two of the six schools – Southover CE Primary and Western Road Community Primary – decided to withdraw from the MAT working group in mid-January. The plans were scrapped completely a few weeks later with the remaining four schools announcing they were withdrawing from talks as well.

Save Lewes Schools has inspired staff and parents of children at two schools in nearby Peacehaven - Telscombe Cliffs and

Peacehaven Heights primaries - to fight plans to academise their schools.

Governors wrote to parents on 9 January informing them that: "On the advice of the LA, to ensure continuous improvement and bring further capacity to the school in terms of leadership, we must now join an academy trust."

The campaign's Facebook page has received 400 likes and a petition calling on East Sussex County Council's director of children's services, Stuart Gallimore, to halt the plans has been signed by nearly 1,000 people.

■ [See the latest edition of Educate.](#)

Edmonton resists academy status

PARENTS and staff have called on the governing bodies of five schools in Edmonton to scrap plans to form a MAT from 1 April 2019.

The five schools are Galliard Primary School, Raynham Primary School,

Brettenham Primary School, Wilbury Primary School and Fleecefield Primary School.

NEU and GMB members at Galliard Primary School have taken seven days of strike action in opposition to the

proposal which has been widely criticised including by local councillors, the leader of the council and [Kate Osamor MP for Edmonton](#). The council debated an anti-academies motion on 27 February.

■ [See the latest edition of Educate.](#)

MPs back calls to axe Catholic academisation plan

EIGHT MPs have joined calls for the Catholic Diocese of Brentwood to scrap proposals to push all its schools to academise as part of Catholic Multi-Academies Trust (CMATs).

The letter, which was sent on 15 February to the right Rt Rev Alan Williams, Bishop of Brentwood, was signed by MPs representing Barking and Dagenham, Newham, Redbridge and Waltham Forest. They included seven

Labour MPs – Jon Cruddas, Dame Margaret Hodge, Stephen Timms, Lyn Brown, Wes Streeting, John Cryer and Stella Creasy – and one MP, Mike Gapes, who recently resigned the Labour whip.

The letter states: “We ask you to fully consider what would be lost by forming a Catholic MAT. There is ample evidence across the boroughs we represent of the positive influence and impact of local authority involvement – whether for

admissions, buildings, expansion, SEND/inclusion or school improvement support – working in partnership with the Diocese.

“We believe there to be [a] strong case for remaining part of the local family of schools within our boroughs.

“The evidence suggests neither financial nor school improvement benefits necessarily accrue from academisation.”

([Barking and Dagenham Post](#)).

■ [See the latest edition of Educate](#) for more.

Academy forced to join former minister’s chain

DESPITE huge opposition, including five days of strike action in December and January, the Future Academies Trust was given sponsorship of the Barclay School in Stevenage on 1 February.

The school was forced into an academisation process following an ‘inadequate’ Ofsted report in 2016, but was taken out of special measures in April 2018, raising the potential for the Secretary of State to rescind the order.

However, the Government controversially chose to push ahead with plans to give the school to Future, a chain founded and headed up by the former Academies Minister Lord John Nash and his wife Caroline Nash.

The Hands off Barclay campaign had mobilised huge numbers of parents: almost 3,000 names signed a petition, a 200-strong public meeting was held in early January, and a lively demonstration took place in the town centre.

Jill Borchers, the NEU rep at Barclay,

said the strike action had closed the school completely, and support for the community-led campaign was widespread.

Angela Rayner, Shadow Education Secretary, backed the protests and Ryder Cup golfer Ian Poulter – an ex-pupil – tweeted support for the campaign to his 2.3 million followers.

On the demonstration, Jill said: “We marched with our heads held high. We will continue to have our heads held high. The Barclay family will stick together.

“Uncertainty has been the biggest issue – lack of communication, questions asked and going unanswered.”

Jill told the NEU: “Throughout this difficult period, support from the NEU has been excellent. The number of NEU members at Barclay has more than tripled over the last year.

“We hope that our collective strength shown will ensure that our transition to a fully-fledged Future academy will be a process done with us rather than to us.”

([The Comet](#))

John Roan School continues to resist

CAMPAIGNERS fighting to save the John Roan School in Greenwich, south east London, from becoming an academy have scored a major victory with the news that the sponsor originally identified to take over the school has pulled out.

The University Schools Trust (UST) was named by the Department for Education (DfE) as sponsor in summer 2018 but has now said that it lacks the resources to take over the school.

NEU and GMB members have staged several strikes and a parent-led campaign group, John Roan Resists, has been set up to oppose academisation. Anni Harrison, a parent and spokesperson for John Roan Resists, said in response to the news: “What the community of parents and carers has achieved in resisting academisation is hugely significant.”

The Government has now named United Learning Trust, one of England’s largest academy chains, as the sponsor for the school. Campaigners have pledged to carry on their fight against academisation and are continuing to call on the Government to reverse the academy order.

acknowledgement of the fundamental flaws of PRP and of the potential benefits of moving away from it.

According to Moran, E-Act’s current pay and appraisal policies, which incorporate PRP, “can exacerbate silo working, undermine the power of the team and add to your workloads”.

The letter cites Organisation

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for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) research on the impact of PRP in teaching, which concluded that “the overall picture reveals no relationship between average student performance in a country and the use of performance-based pay schemes”.

Moran went on to say: “Fundamentally, the quality of teaching cannot be measured, quantified or ranked in the way PRP demands, which is why we have developed, with input from teachers, our own approach to teaching and learning.”

He also refers to teaching as “a professional skill and an art rather than an exact science” and says that “we should use a combination of approaches to gain a full picture of teacher effectiveness and should never assess teachers on a narrow set of data from a single year.”

Moran’s letter also signals an intention to introduce more consultation of staff on the management of the chain, with a commitment to include the issue of PRP within this.

E-Act, which runs 29 schools in London, would become the first academy chain to scrap PRP for teachers if the move goes ahead.

Children’s education damaged by academy failures and misuse of funds

A DAMNING Public Accounts Committee (PAC) report into academy accounts and performance has highlighted the lack of transparency and accountability to parents and local communities in the academy system.

The report said there have been “a succession of high-profile academy failures that have been costly to the taxpayer and damaging to children’s education”.

The committee found that parents did not know who to turn to when they wished to raise concerns about academy schools or trusts and called for a review of DfE complaints procedures. It said: “Parents and local people have to fight to obtain even basic information about their children’s schools and

academy trusts do not do enough to communicate and explain decisions that affect the schools they are responsible for and how they are spending public money.

The committee was highly critical of the department’s response to “serious failings” identified at academy trusts, saying that there has not been an “effective regime to sanction the academy trustees and leaders who were responsible”, calling on the Government “to strengthen the sanctions regime to deter, punish and prevent malpractice.” The PAC also said that the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is “not sufficiently transparent about the results of inquiries into concerns about the financial management and governance of academy trusts”.

[NEU joint general secretary Kevin Courtney](#) said: “We agree with the

PAC’s recommendation that, whilst academy trusts still exist they should be required to make available financial information at school level; that there should be sanctions with teeth to deter, punish and prevent malpractice among academy trustees; that all academy trusts must publish complaints procedures with named individuals to whom parents can escalate concerns; and that the Department and ESFA should publish reports into trust abuses in a timely and transparent manner.” ([Guardian](#))

NEU calls on Government to act on Harris Ofsted allegations

THE NEU is calling for the Government to step in, after Ofsted “failed to act” on allegations concerning the Harris Federation’s use of expert teachers during Ofsted inspections.

Anonymous allegations from former teachers, parents and governors that members of Harris’ consultancy team of 60 staff are brought into its primary schools on the eve of Ofsted inspections to paint a more favourable image of the schools, are reported in the [Huffington Post](#).

The Haringey branch of the NEU has written to Ofsted a number of times last summer to complain about

10 members of the central team being deployed to Harris Philip Lane for Ofsted and being “passed off” as regular staff of the school.

Martin Powell-Davies, NEU London regional secretary, said: “A system that can be played that way, and yet has such important consequences, is a system that needs to be looked at.”

He called for Ofsted to clarify whether all schools could bring in expert teachers during inspections to “level the playing field”, saying: “If that makes the whole system farcical then it shouldn’t be allowed in the first place.”

[The Huffington Post](#) said it spoke to multiple sources for its investigation, all former Harris teachers, staff or serving governors, but that all had requested anonymity for fear of negative repercussions for their careers if they were named.

Two thirds of academy trusts have below-average results for disadvantaged pupils

NEW research has found “significant variation” in outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals in sponsored academies, with a majority of chains analysed performing “below average”.

The Sutton Trust’s latest Chain Effects report has found that a large number of academy chains are achieving results “that are not improving and may be harming the prospects of their disadvantaged students”.

The analysis of 58 trusts by Becky Francis and Merryn Hutchings showed that in 2017, disadvantaged pupils at 12 attained above the national average, with three chains – the City of London Academies Trust, the Diocese of London and the Harris Federation – achieving “well above”.

However, 30 of the chains performed below average, and a further eight trusts recorded “well below average” attainment for that group.

Mary Bousted, NEU joint general secretary, said: “The foundational myth of the academies programme – that it would boost educational attainment among young people from disadvantaged backgrounds –

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must now be laid to rest as just that: a myth.” ([Schools Week](#))

‘Expert’ sponsor told it could lose ‘inadequate’ academy
STAR Academies, an academy trust which ministers consider an “expert schools sponsor,” has been warned that one of its schools could be rebrokered to another sponsor unless improvements are made.

Star, which was called the Tauheedul Education Trust until it rebranded last year, took over its first non-faith school, Highfield Leadership Academy, in Blackpool, in 2016. The school has since been [placed in special measures by Ofsted](#) with inspectors criticising pupil outcomes and behaviour.

Vicky Beer, the Regional Schools Commissioner for Lancashire and West Yorkshire, has issued a “minded to terminate” notice warning that Highfield will be rebrokered unless she can be “satisfied that this academy can achieve rapid and sustained improvement”.

“If I am not satisfied this can be achieved I will consider issuing a termination warning notice,” she said. ([Schools Week](#))

Academy trust criticised for taking on debt-ridden schools

AN academy trust which was urged to expand by the Government was also criticised for taking on debt-ridden schools, it has emerged, raising questions about whether the

academy system offers support to schools in difficulties.

Board minutes from September 2017 to September 2018 for the Nova Education Trust based in Nottinghamshire show that John Edwards, the Regional Schools Commissioner for East Midlands and the Humber, encouraged the trust to expand. However, the same minutes also show that Nova later faced criticism from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) for not being more discerning about the schools it took on.

Board minutes from December 2017 reveal that Nova directors were confused about why the ESFA and the DfE could not see that Nova was “actually taking problems away from them” by sponsoring “failing schools”.

Stephen Tierney, chair of the Headteachers Roundtable, told Schools Week that schools in financial difficulties were increasingly seen as “undesirable” and “cut off from school improvement”. “The system as a whole is looking increasingly broken,” he said.

“What will happen to these schools that aren’t taken on by trusts? How does the system help them? That’s the thing I don’t think people have an answer to.” ([Schools Week](#))

Questions raised about use of isolation rooms and behaviour policy

DATA on Outwood Grange Academies Trust’s (OGAT) use of

isolation rooms casts doubt on some of the chain’s claims about the practice of issuing what it terms “C5s orders” for pupils to go into isolation rooms.

The chain, which runs 31 schools, claims its strict behaviour policies are part of its “turnaround strategy” for the schools it takes over.

Data on 14 of the trust’s academies was obtained under the freedom of information act by Simpson Millar, the law firm which is pursuing a judicial review on behalf of an Outwood Grange pupil who it claims spent almost a third of his time in isolation rooms last year. It sent the data to Schools Week.

This reveals that some academies in the chain are still sending about a third of their pupils into isolation nine years after the trust took them over, casting doubts on this claim. It also shows half of pupils at two schools were put in isolation.

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSMs) are disproportionately more likely to be issued with a C5 at all except one of OGAT’s secondaries.

OGAT has also hit the headlines for adopting a controversial behavioural policy which trust executives call “flattening the grass”.

Former employees of Outwood Academy Danum in Doncaster have described to the TES how the trust applied the policy when it took over the school, seemingly to “terrify” children into compliance. ([Schools Week](#) and [Tes](#))

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Government threatens to reclaim £110k loan unless school joins a MAT

THE Government has threatened to force an academy to pay back a £110,000 loan unless it joins a MAT.

Hinckley Academy and John Cleveland Sixth Form Centre in Leicester received a financial notice to improve in January, its second since May 2016.

The warning orders the trust to “take all actions it can” to rebroker its sole academy. If it does not, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) will apply

a “qualifying floating charge” to claim back the deficit funding of £110,000 it loaned to the trust. The charge would mean that the agency is first in line to claw its cash back in the case of insolvency.

The document says the ESFA would only apply the charge in “exceptional circumstances” and with the agreement of the trust, but also says that the charge would be “a condition of providing the trust with funding”.

Richard Cahill, its head and accounting officer, said: “Since the original financial notice, everyone has worked hard to be the most efficient school we can be. It just doesn’t work anymore. There are no margins left to make any savings, there is nothing left to cut.”

An analysis by Schools Week shows that 60 per cent of all financial warnings handed out in the past year were to single-academy trusts – with the majority also told to join a MAT. ([Schools Week](#))

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Government failing to rein in academy CEO pay

GOVERNMENT efforts to bring the soaring salaries of academy bosses under control are proving ineffective. Over the last two years the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) has written to 213 trusts asking them to justify their bosses’ pay.

The Public Accounts Committee’s (PAC) recent report into academy accounts and performance criticised these efforts saying that the ESFA’s measures are “as yet

unproven and in isolation will not prevent abuse”. The ESFA told the PAC that, in light of its letters, only around a quarter of the trusts concerned had reduced their salaries.

The National Governance Association has also raised concerns about high pay and has floated the idea of adopting an NHS-style pay system where government approval is needed to award salaries in excess of £150,000.

Since the PAC report was published

it has emerged that 28 trusts have received a second letter from Lord Agnew, the Academies Minister. The trusts include Holland Park trust in North London, where the pay of head Colin Hall has doubled to £260,000 in seven years, making him one of the best-paid academy bosses in the country, despite being responsible for just one school.

This is understood to be the first time that any of the trusts previously warned over pay have received a second letter. ([Schools Week](#))

£27m paid out to struggling academies

FIGURES obtained by Schools Week reveal that the Government handed out £27 million in deficit funding to struggling academies in 2017-18. This included nearly £4.5 million paid out to academies run by the failed Schools Company Trust during the year it announced closure.

The £27 million was shared between 77 academies in total. Nearly £6 million of

this will not have to be paid back.

Funding totalling more than £3.25 million was paid to Plumberow Primary Academy, run by Academies Enterprise Trust (AET), of which £773,000 does not have to be paid back.

An AET spokesperson said the money was part of a wider ‘turnaround strategy’ agreed to support AET centrally. ([Schools Week](#))

Government lends academy chain more than £1m

ORMISTON Academy Trust – one of the country’s largest MATs – was loaned more than £1 million by the Government to help “cash flow management” last year, it has emerged.

Ormiston Academies Trust, which runs 37 schools across England, received an extra £1.1 million in the form of an interest free loan from the Education and Skills Funding Agency last year to take on two schools built

under private finance initiatives. The loan represents the second such settlement it has negotiated to takeover struggling schools with accounts showing the trust received a £320,000 loan to help with low numbers at the Endeavour Academy.

They also show that the pay of Nick Hudson, Ormiston’s chief executive, rose to £184,000, up from a £160,000-170,000 bracket in 2016-17. ([Schools Week](#))

Funding pressures will lead to more academy mergers

ACADEMIES are being forced to cut costs and merge into larger chains in an effort to manage “unsustainable” deficits, according to a survey of more than 1,000 trusts.

A report by the Kreston academies group found that half of the schools had an operating deficit last year. The group said that while the average deficits at academies fell in 2018 compared with 2017, further spending reductions would be much harder to achieve. Pam Tuckett, chair of the group, said: “We are seeing reductions in learning support assistants, and staff contact ratios will be increased to save costs.”

She predicted an increasing number of chain mergers and transfers of academies between trusts caused by financial pressures: “There have been several years of cost-cutting and the trusts that we work with are telling us that there are no more areas where they can save significant costs without impacting on the way in which education is provided.”

“The trend of mergers and rebrokerage is likely to continue until trusts have achieved a size that enables them to take advantage of the economies of scale of a larger organisation,” Tuckett said. ([Guardian](#))

NEU calls for investigation into six-figure legal settlement

THE NEU has called on the Government to investigate a possible waste of public money after an academy trust settled a legal claim from another chain with a six-figure payout.

Accounts for Nova Education Trust, which runs 15 schools based mostly in Nottinghamshire, show that another trust accused it of “breach of contract” and demanded Nova pays £623,000 in compensation. While the accounts state that Nova “was refuting the claim in its entirety”, the trust later settled for £150,000.

NEU joint general secretary Mary Bousted said the Education and Skills Funding Agency had a “responsibility to step in”.

“How can Nova simply refuse to answer questions about significant expenditure which has not been accounted for at a time when schools are desperately short of money?”

“That same sum could have paid for four experienced teachers.”

It is not clear what the alleged contract breach related to and the other trust is not named in the accounts.

Nova refused to comment to Schools Week which reported the news while the DfE declined to give further information. ([Schools Week](#))

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Accounts delayed as trust calls in forensic auditors

A RAPIDLY growing academy trust, which has recently taken on two schools from the failed Wakefield City Academies Trust, has missed the Government deadline for publishing its accounts and brought in “forensic” auditors after its expansion to take on struggling schools “raised some question marks”.

Astrea, which expanded this year to run a total of 20 schools, was set up by Reach2 – the largest chain of primary academies – to run schools in the north after it was awarded a slice of £5 million Government ‘northern hub’ funding to boost standards in “challenging and disadvantaged areas”.

A spokesperson for Astrea said the chain was “financially robust and sustainable,” but the “transactional complexities involved” in its expansion required it to “scrutinise our balance sheet and our accounts management in far more detail than the standard due diligence”. ([Schools Week](#))

Other news

Academy chain increases school charges for controversial curriculum team

THE Inspiration Trust chain of academies, founded by Academies Minister Lord Agnew, has nearly doubled the amount it top-slices from its secondary schools’ budgets in order to fund its new curriculum initiative.

Last year the trust appointed eight subject specialists to develop its own “knowledge-led” curriculum and also launched a specialist curriculum centre.

Its accounts for the 2017-18 academic year show Inspiration increased its top slice to 9.94% of its secondary schools’ income from 5.25% in the previous year.

The rise means that Inspiration now has one of the highest top-slices in the country. A report published last year found that just 2% of trusts top sliced more than 8.6%, while the average top-slice was nearly 5%.

Inspiration pools its schools’ general annual grant income first, before the trust board allocates a budget to schools. Last year’s

accounts also show that Lord Agnew donated £50,000 to Inspiration. ([Schools Week](#))

Government selects 11 academies for new curriculum fund trials

Eleven academies will split a £2.4 million grant to lead trials of the Government’s new curriculum fund programme, it has been announced.

Former Education Secretary Justine Greening, announced in January 2018 that a new curriculum fund, worth £7.7 million, would be used to pilot ways of delivering the 2014 national curriculum and tackling the burden of paperwork. It was subsequently revealed that [only schools with a knowledge-rich curriculum could apply](#).

The 11 academies, most of which are in London and the south east of England, include Pimlico Primary, run by former Academies Minister Lord Nash’s Future Academies trust and the West London Free School, which was founded by former New Schools Network boss Toby Young.

Each school will get a maximum

of £150,000 to pilot one programme, and up to £100,000 for each additional programme tested by the same school. ([Schools Week](#))

Another RSC leaves for academy job

LISA Mannall, the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) for the south west, will leave after less than two years in the job to take on a new role at an academy trust.

Mannall will join the Cornwall Education Learning Trust (CELT), which opens in September and is the result of a merger of the Newquay Education Trust and the Peninsula Learning Trust which was approved in June 2018 while she was RSC.

CELT will have three secondary schools and eight primary schools across Cornwall when it opens, with another free school, the Newquay Primary Academy, still in its pre-opening stage.

Mannall is the latest RSC to move from her post into a role within an academy chain that she oversaw, fuelling concerns about potential conflicts of interest. ([Schools Week](#))