



Victory against primary academisation in Sussex

PARENTS and teachers who campaigned against plans to academise two primary schools in East Sussex are celebrating after governors decided they would remain with the local authority.

A community celebration was held after school to mark the victory, which is the latest in a number of successful campaigns by parents.

Hundreds of parents, children and teachers marched on a day

of action in protest at proposals led by East Sussex County Council to hand over Telscombe Cliffs and Peacehaven Heights primary schools to the Kent-based Swale Academies Trust. In April strikes and protests closed the schools as well as Peacehaven Community School, a local secondary, also included in the plans.

Further strike action at Peacehaven Heights and Telscombe Cliffs has been called off but the future of the secondary school still remains in doubt. ([Guardian](#))

Momentum builds behind anti-academy campaigns

ANTI-ACADEMY campaigns hit the headlines again in the last two months.

On 28 April around 150 children and parents marched against the forced academisation of **Waltham Holy Cross primary school** in Waltham Abbey, Essex.

The DfE wants the school to be taken over by Net Academies, which run schools in Warwickshire, Reading and Essex. Two Net Academies schools elsewhere have been judged “inadequate” by Ofsted and a league table of academy performance published last summer by the Education Policy Institute ranked the trust as the sixth-worst primary group in England.

On Tuesday 14 May, following another strike day, parents, staff and students of **John Roan school** in Greenwich, south east London, boarded an open-top double-decker bus, heading to the DfE buildings in Westminster, where they held a lively demonstration against plans to force the school to become an academy.

After months of speculation the DfE has since finally announced that United Learning is the sponsor chosen by civil servants to take over the school.

In Kent a group of parents at **Paddock Wood and Horsmonden primary schools** have set up a petition demanding a binding

vote on plans to hand their schools over to the Leigh Academies Trust.

In Hertfordshire, parents at **Woodside primary school** in Goffs Oak have launched a legal challenge to plans to force the school into becoming an academy under the Ivy Learning Trust, amid concerns about the way the consultation was conducted.

Parents at **Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic primary school** in Redbridge, north-east London, are challenging plans for their school to become an academy and join a Catholic multi-academy trust. ([Guardian](#))

Staying with the local authority gets better results

NEW RESEARCH commissioned by the Local Government Association (LGA) suggests schools that remain within the local authority are more likely to retain a good or outstanding rating from Ofsted than those that become academies..

The report, produced by the education technology company Angel Solutions, analyses Ofsted inspection data of almost 17,000 schools between February 2014 and February 2019.

Of these, 12,814 schools had remained with their local authority, and 4,033 had converted to academies. The report found

that 90 per cent of the schools which stayed with their council (9,400) kept their ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ grade, compared with 81 per cent (2,275) which became academies.

It also found good schools that converted to academies were more likely to lose their strong Ofsted grade.

Only 59 per cent of schools (723) which were judged as ‘requires improvement’ or ‘inadequate’ in 2014 and which converted to academies were ‘good’ or better by this year, compared with 88 per cent of schools (2,048) with the same grades who remained with councils.

Government claims about MATs being a vehicle for school improvement have also been dealt a blow by [a report commissioned by the DfE](#) itself.

The report, written by Professor David Greatbatch and Sue Tate, “synthesises and critically evaluates recent evidence on the use of interschool collaboration as a vehicle for school improvement”.

However, it concluded: “Research on MATs and academy chains has not found a clear overall association between membership of MATs and improved pupil outcomes.”

Trust gets four Ofsted visits to improve school

THE David Ross Education Trust (DRET) has been informed that it has four Ofsted visits to ensure that one of its academies moves out of special measures.

The trust has been warned to improve the Lodge Park Academy in Corby, which was placed in special measures in January.

A pre-termination warning notice from interim national schools commissioner Dominic Herrington and regional schools commissioner Martin Post was sent to the trust on 5 April.

It states that they believe DRET “has the capacity to achieve the rapid and sustained improvement required” but says

that if “the school has not come out of category by the fourth Ofsted visit, I will consider termination of the academy’s supplemental funding agreement”.

Just two of ten previous ‘minded’ or ‘pre-termination warning’ notices sent to academies have included an explicit expectation over future Ofsted grades, but both trusts were offered much shorter timeframes for improvement.

REAch2 Academy Trust was told in March that Copperfield Academy must “move out of category” at its next section 5 Ofsted, while the Academies Enterprise Trust was informed in the same month

that its Offa’s Mead Academy must get a “satisfactory” section 8 report “indicating improvements are being demonstrated” – or face losing funding for the school.

The treatment of DRET by the national schools commissioner reveals a clear double standard given that under the law, once a maintained school is put in special measures by Ofsted, it must be forcibly converted to academy status as part of a MAT. While this does not always happen – often due to delays in finding a sponsor – there is no formal route for an RSC to exercise discretion in this regard. ([Schools Week](#))

New commissioners less likely to be school leaders

A NUMBER of new appointments have been made within the school commissioner system, appearing to show a move away from recruiting former school leaders to these roles.

The DfE has confirmed Dominic Herrington as the National Schools Commissioner after holding the position on an interim basis since September 2018.

Herrington was Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) for South London and South-East England for four years before becoming interim national commissioner.

He has previously held positions in universities and the DfE, has experience as a school governor and taught English as a foreign language in Spain, but has never taught in schools in England.

Herrington’s replacement as RSC for South London and South-East England is Claire Burton, a former chief executive of the Standards and Testing Agency.

Hannah Woodhouse, a deputy director in the office of the south west RSC Lisa Mannall will replace her boss on 1 September.

Meanwhile, an ex-Downing Street education adviser has been appointed as interim regional schools commissioner.

Katherine Cowell will take the post in the north of England in July, replacing Janet Renou. Cowell is a former education adviser to prime ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

The DfE announced in April that it will make “operational changes to the work of RSCs” to make their teams more “joined-up”. ([Schools Week](#))

Emerging monopolies in MAT transfer market

NEW figures reveal an increasing trend towards the consolidation of academy trusts into larger groupings.

Analysis of headteacher board meeting minutes show at least 190 trusts were given approval to merge in the 18 months from 31 August 2017 and more than one in five (43) were mergers of trusts with multiple schools.

In November 2017, the academies minister Lord Agnew said he wanted to see academy trusts teaming up and working together, with the “sweet spot” being between 12 and 20 schools.

There are also suggestions that the DfE is promoting a strategy of MAT consolidation to increase economies of scale.

In July 2018, the four-school

Heartwood Trust was approved to merge with the six-school Birmingham Diocesan Academies Trust.

Heartwood’s accounts said it did so because the DfE was “implementing a strategy to actively encourage single academies and small multi-academy trusts... to merge so they can benefit from economies of scale”. ([Schools Week](#))

Academy finances

Attempts to curb high pay largely unsuccessful

THE Government made a further attempt to curb “excessive pay” in academies by ordering almost 100 multi academy trusts to justify the six-figure salaries of head teachers or chief executives..

The DfE has written to 63 trusts for the first time after discovering they pay multiple members of staff more than £100,000.

It has also written again to another 31 academy trusts which “have failed to provide adequate justification” for paying high salaries despite previous requests for them to do so by Eileen Milner chief executive of the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

Overall, the ESFA has now written to 276 trusts over excessive pay but only 50 so far have agreed to reduce their salaries. ([TES](#))

Harris has more £100k positions than most councils

ACCORDING to education journalist Warwick Mansell, the Harris Federation, which runs 47 schools in London, has more employees on six-figure salaries than all but one of the councils across England.

A list of councils ranked by the number of people on £100,000-plus produced by the tax-reduction lobby group Taxpayers’ Alliance (TPA) shows

that just one council – Essex – had more people (55) paid six figures.

However, Essex is a far larger organisation than Harris, with 13,681 staff according to its 2017-18 accounts, compared to 3,464 at Harris.

Harris had more people on £100k-plus than did all the councils in Northern Ireland put together, according to the TPA data.

Harris also had 11 people paid £150,000 or more. This would have placed it third in the TPA's rankings of local authorities, behind Essex (13) and North Lanarkshire (12).

Harris's total of three people paid more than £250,000 in 2017-18 was more than 10 per cent of the entire total for councils across the UK (28) as cited in the TPA research. ([Education Uncovered](#))

Academy trust land sell off?

QUESTIONS have been asked by education journalist Warwick Mansell about whether Government officials might be supporting the sell-off of school land for housing development in order to fund school building.

According to Mansell, slides from a recent presentation by the DfE's property development company LocateED appear to suggest that schools run by academy trusts could be closed to make way for housing, with resulting cash used to regenerate other institutions run by the same organisation.

Senior officials from LocateED and the Department for Education itself made the presentation at the "Schools and Academies Show" in April. The talk updated attendees on

plans to investigate up to 20 projects which would see parts of school sites sold for housing.

The slides include an example in which a two primary school academy trust in financial difficulties in a rural county in the south of England would close one and redevelop the other. One site would be used for housing while it appears that the other, in a different village a few miles away, would benefit from new buildings.

According to Mansell, the presentation acknowledges that this would be controversial, but presents it in the context of underused school sites being needed to contribute to the nation's "urgent" need for new housing. ([Education Uncovered](#))

Secrecy around £16 million AET turnaround plan

THE DfE is refusing to disclose details of its £16 million turnaround plan for the Academies Enterprise Trust, one of the largest academy trusts in the country.

Earlier this year, schools minister Nick Gibb said that the ESFA would provide up to £16.1 million in recoverable and non-recoverable deficit funding, in order to support the turnaround plan for AET, between the academic years 2017-18 and 2020-21.

On 30 April, Lucy Powell MP, of the Commons Education Select Committee, asked Academies minister Lord Agnew: "Why can't we see that plan? If this was a local authority, this would be completely publicly available.

"Why isn't it publicly available? Or available to us as a select committee?"

Lord Agnew said: "Because the policy has always been that you get to carry out the recovery exercise before publishing anything."

Unions representing staff at AET have since launched a vote of no confidence in its leadership.

The move comes after AET failed to listen to staff concerns over proposed cutbacks and restructuring. The changes will put the wellbeing of children and workers at serious risk, say the unions.

Last ditch talks between the NEU, UNISON, GMB, Unite, ASCL, NAHT, NASUWT and AET to address concerns over a raft of cuts to services have been taking place at conciliation service ACAS.

However, the unions say AET broke an agreement to pause changes while a resolution was sought.

The unions also say the secretive nature of the turnaround deal calls into question what conditions AET has signed up to in return for millions of pounds of additional public funding.

"We want AET to engage in meaningful talks at ACAS and respect the 'status quo' provision in our recognition agreement. Instead, it confirmed the outsourcing of its ICT staff on Easter Sunday for the next working day.

"Teachers' pay progression is one of the lowest in the sector and staff workload is a severe problem. Meanwhile, AET chief executive Julian Drinkall is one of the highest paid MAT chief executives.

"Things can't go on as they are. We're asking members to show what they think of AET through a vote of no confidence in the board and chief executive." ([TES](#))

Boss paid £200k+ while schools struggle to afford basics

AN investigation by the Liverpool Echo has found that a former academy 'super-head' was paid in excess of £200,000, while teachers claimed they had to buy their own pens and textbooks for pupils.

The investigation found millions had been lost after a failure to budget at an academy trust responsible for schools in some of the most deprived areas in Britain.

The Heath Family North West Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), which runs schools in Litherland, Prescott, Runcorn and Cheshire, has since been propped up by emergency funding from the ESFA understood to be in excess of £1m.

Now-retired executive principal, Heather Mullaney, received salary increases of up to £60,000 between 2013 and 2017, according to company accounts, despite the huge problems in the trust's finances.

Mrs Mullaney retired in September but had received a salary of between £185,000 and £190,000, in addition to between £25,000 and £30,000 in pension contributions. Since the crisis came to light two further directors, Kris Billington and Timothy Cook, have resigned.

An independent audit of the trust by Howard Worth accountants said: "Given the financial position of the company

as disclosed in the trustee's report, we question whether the remuneration of the executive principal, now retired... is appropriate use of public funds."

According to a whistleblower who contacted the Echo to report on their experiences as a teacher: "The budget is non-existent and some departments have run out of the most basic supplies like exercise books and pens."

A report to the trustees in August last year stated that the financial position for the 2016/17 financial year was "unsustainable" after a loss of £1.38m in cash reserves. ([Liverpool Echo](#))

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Free schools

Free school chair broke law over payments

A GOVERNMENT investigation has found that the former chair of two free schools broke the law over payments of more than £500,000 to his own company.

An investigation by the ESFA has cast “significant doubts on the legitimacy” of money paid by Collective Spirit Free School and Manchester Creative Studio to the Collective Spirit Community Trust (CSCT), a company with links to a number of its trustees.

The ESFA concluded that the schools’ former chair of directors Alun Morgan breached the Companies Act 2006 when he failed to meet requirements to exercise

independent judgment and reasonable care, skill and diligence, failed to avoid a conflict of interest, and failed to declare interest in a “proposed transaction or arrangement”.

Morgan was a 50 per cent shareholder in CSCT, which also had “unclear” links to the schools’ former chief executive Raja Miah, the report found.

Miah had sent emails to the free schools chasing payments on the company’s behalf, according to the ESFA.

Collective Spirit, in Oldham, closed in the summer of 2017 after being placed in special measures. Manchester Creative Studio, which was also in special measures, closed last summer despite an emergency

government funding injection of over £400,000. Both free schools were founded by Miah.

The investigation report said the ESFA could not confirm if services had been provided “at cost”, in accordance with the rules around related-party transactions, because of the “lack of any robust financial control system, adequate financial oversight and relevant documentation to support contractual management and financial transactions” at the trusts.

The ESFA was also unable to confirm whether costs were “inappropriately inflated” or if invoices were submitted for services that were never delivered. ([Schools Week](#))

Report highlights chaos of opening a free school

FORMER trustees and staff of a now closed free school have released their own report into the process of opening the school.

The 14 to 19 Robert Owen Academy opened in Herefordshire in 2013 but in February last year, RSC Christine Quinn

said the school, which then had about 50 pupils, would close.

According to the report the school was granted its funding agreement on 19 August 2013 – just nine working days before it opened on 1 September.

A civil servant allegedly told the then

chair “welcome to the world of free schools”.

The report also claimed that school leaders were advised to “not share” their “detailed proposal” with the relevant local authorities, something which “was later to cause difficulties in relationships”.

([Schools Week](#))

International

How the UK promotes the privatisation of education around the world

THE NEU and Global Justice Now have published a report exposing the UK’s role in privatising education around the world.

[In Whose Interest? The UK’s role in privatising education around the world](#) lays out the UK Department for International Development’s (DFID) policies and programmes that are contributing to a privatisation agenda.

It highlights how Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) has been

supporting privatisation through grants to education businesses, support for pro-private research, and consultancy contracts with UK-based businesses, among other methods. The latter includes the Girls’ Education Challenge (II), which alone will see a £32.7 million consultancy fee paid to PWC.

In Whose Interest? also illustrates how privatisation is problematic in terms of equality, quality and accountability in education, and how it is undermining public education systems.

Fees, non-inclusive providers who don’t provide for children with additional needs, and unqualified teachers all contribute to a poorer and less equal learning experience for children relying on low-fee private schools.

Other systems, such as the proposed Education Outcomes Fund, could enable profit-making (through interest paid to investors) in education financing.

The report also makes parallels between DFID’s work internationally and the academisation programme in England.