

Waltham Holy Cross wins reprieve as trust faces DfE investigation

THE forced academisation of Waltham Holy Cross school in Essex has been delayed pending a Department for Education (DfE) investigation after parents and staff raised concerns over potential cheating by the academy trust lined up to take over the school.

The school's forced academisation into NET Academies Trust (NETAT) was originally due to take place on 1 July 2019. The trust had also been brought into the school by the Interim Executive Board ahead of the transfer.

Parent and staff opposition – including three days of strike action by NEU members and a series of protests by parents – forced an initial delay to the takeover. NETAT later said a decision had been made to delay the transfer beyond the summer because of ongoing discussions about urgent building works, including asbestos management.

It has now emerged that the DfE has been forced into

carrying out an investigation into serious allegations of cheating by NETAT in KS1 writing SATs.

DfE officials were informed of the allegations twice, but no action was taken. When Shaunagh Roberts – a parent at the school – engaged a solicitor to write to the department, the Government responded at the end of July saying that officials were satisfied there was no charge to investigate having taken evidence from the head of NETAT.

But in September the Government conceded that it would conduct an urgent investigation after receiving further evidence collected by Roberts and her lawyer from staff at Waltham Holy Cross and other NETAT academies. There will be no transfer of the school to academy status until the investigation is concluded.

The DfE's decision to investigate the allegations is unprecedented and represents a huge victory for the staff and parents resisting the forced academisation of their school. ([Guardian](#))

Staff and parents in Brighton fight off academy trust

PARENTS and staff fighting the forced academisation of Moulsecoomb school have scored a major victory with news that the trust which had been lined up to take over the school has pulled out in the face of sustained pressure.

The identity of the trust has not been publicly announced. The school received an academy order in April, following an Ofsted inadequate rating.

Craig Arden, NEU regional officer, said: "We're pleased to hear that due to the campaigning of parents, an academy trust has realised it would be a mistake to step in and take over a school in the face of such strong community opposition.

"Staff and parents believe the Ofsted inspection in April harshly and inaccurately deemed the school to be inadequate, when they could see progress clearly being made.

More than 2,500 people had signed

a petition and joined public meetings and protest marches against the plans.

[Brighton and Hove Council has requested](#) that the Secretary of State revoke the order, citing the extensive support being given to the school by the local authority.

It has also instigated a parental ballot on the question of whether the school should be academised and requested that the Regional Schools Commissioner accept and act on the outcome. ([The Argus](#))

Parents forced to drop legal challenge

PARENTS have been forced to drop their legal action against a Catholic diocese over its plan to academise their children's primary school.

Families with children attending Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School in Wanstead, London, had applied to the High Court for a judicial review against Brentwood diocese which oversees the administration of all Catholic schools in the area.

The diocese wants to transfer the primary school, and all its other schools, into its own Catholic multi-academy trust (MAT). But parents now say they have effectively been "priced out" of any legal action against the diocese and that they cannot continue to fight the proposals.

A parent representative said: "No one ever wanted to take legal action, but when you are consistently met with silence and delay tactics to force through

academisation, what do you do? Parents deserve a voice and that voice to be heard.

"When you start at the school you hear a lot about the triangle of support that is home, school and church. But, sadly, this seems to have been forgotten.

"I hope both the school and diocese learn from this because it is our children's lives they are playing with. And they can't speak out for themselves." ([East London Guardian](#))

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Governing body that resisted academisation replaced

THE governing body of Peacehaven Heights School in Peacehaven, East Sussex, which rejected pressure to become an academy as part of the Kent-based Swale Academy Trust, has been replaced by an imposed and unelected Interim Executive Board (IEB).

Governors resigned en masse after hearing of East Sussex County Council's plans to replace them, [according to The Argus](#).

Phil Clarke, secretary of the Lewes, Eastbourne and Wealden branch of the

NEU, said the county council's move "defies belief".

"What we have here is the council exacting revenge on a governing body that dared to stand up to them," he said, adding: "A coalition of parents and staff beat them before at the Peacehaven primary schools and we shall do so again."

Another nearby school – Peacehaven Community School – is now run by Swale Academy Trust. In April, staff voted to strike against plans to hand over the school to Swale but a last-ditch legal bid to prevent the conversion failed in August

and the council confirmed the takeover was complete on 1 September.

Conservative-controlled East Sussex Council 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.

Since then it has been backing proposals for local schools to become academies.

Earlier in the year, parents and staff at six East Sussex schools successfully fought off council-supported plans for them to form a MAT with a local secondary.

Strike at Enfield academy sees reduction in workload

NEU members at Oasis Academy Hadley in Enfield, north London, took strike action over a proposed restructure that would mean members working across two schools several miles apart, impacting on staffing, workload, terms and conditions and staff wellbeing.

Alongside strike action, members also ran a campaign which included a public meeting and a march past Oasis head office, ending at the DfE. Following lengthy negotiations with the employer, a deal acceptable to members was agreed.

Significant concessions by Oasis should go some considerable way to addressing workload concerns.

These include reducing the number of formal reports to parents; a new marking policy that will significantly reduce staff workload; and a new, more supportive behaviour policy.

Oasis made some favourable changes to the proposed "clustering" of roles (where staff would be required to work across two schools) and have agreed to review the

workload impact of those roles.

Overall, these and other changes will make a significant difference to members at Oasis Hadley.

Campaigns force academy order U-turns

THE Government has revoked more than 33 academy orders, [according to a Schools Week investigation](#).

Of these, 27 were the result of a follow-up Ofsted inspection that resulted in a higher grade, five were issued because the school merged with another, and one because a school closed.

Three orders have been revoked so far this year. The latest was at William Torbitt Primary School in the London borough of Redbridge, which turned its inadequate rating into a good within seven months.

The school was supported by a strong parent and NEU campaign to resist forced academisation.

Separate NEU data shows that governing bodies at 11 schools have abandoned plans to voluntarily convert after members balloted for or took strike action.

Victory over working hours at Oasis Isle of Sheppey

NEU members at Oasis Academy Isle of Sheppey have won more than 51 hours of back-pay after mounting a successful campaign over excessive working hours.

Oasis Community Learning accepted that the academy's NEU teacher members had been directed to work over 51.17 hours above their 1265 contracted hours during the academic year 2018-2019.

Oasis agreed to pay members for the additional directed hours following an indicative ballot in which 98 per cent of members voted for strike action.

The academy also committed to ongoing, meaningful discussion on workload; to providing NEU reps with a directed time budget each year; and to meeting with NEU reps to discuss said budget to avoid future problems.

Liz Ruth, NEU rep, said: "I think it's true to say that staff now feel more unified and empowered as a result of the campaign."

"This win has made them realise they have the right to question and, if needs be, to fight for their rights."

Academies policy

Leaked Tory proposals suggest boost for academies & free schools

A LEAKED document seen by the Guardian in August appeared to set out proposals to increase the rate of academisation and the number of free schools.

According to the paper, which was under discussion between the Department for Education (DfE) and Number 10, the government plans to give more money to 'successful' academy

trusts to help them expand and would offer a £24,000 'incentive' to encourage them to take on challenging schools. It also hopes to build on what it describes as, "the existing success and momentum of the free school programme".

There have been no official announcements of new policy measures in these two areas since the leak. ([Guardian](#))

Academies policy

DfE refuses to release info on land sell-off pilot

THE Government has launched a pilot programme looking at the possibility of selling off academy land for housing, but has refused to release the names of academies participating.

The Surplus Land Pilot is being overseen by Government-owned property company LocatED, which describes it as "a small scale pilot to explore how to reconfigure a selection of school properties with surplus buildings or land" with the aim of unlocking "funds to support additional capital investment in school buildings and, in turn, release land for homes".

LocatED's website says the current pilot intake is now full. However, a freedom of information request to the DfE [from the website Education Uncovered](#), asking for the number and names of the schools taking part and which Regional Schools Commissioner regions they were located in, was denied.

The DfE's response explained that the reasons for the decision were "that the surplus land pilot remains in development. No decisions have yet been taken on the schools to form the pilot, and as such we are unable to provide a list at this stage."

This appears to contradict LocatED's

website and an official newsletter from the Schools and Academies Show at which LocatED and the DfE made a presentation about their plans in April 2019.

This stated: "LocatED and the DfE have created a list of 20 possible school sites to take part in a new pilot scheme which will aim to support schools and local authorities to identify surplus land in their estate which could be sold or redeveloped for housing."

Sue Corbett, development manager at LocatED, also told [Schools Week](#) in April that academies minister Lord Agnew was expected to decide in May which sites would form part of the pilot.

Education think tank's proposals amount to academisation by 'central government diktat'

A NEW report on reforming England's school system, Trust Issues, published by the education think tank EDSK, has been represented in some headlines as a call to "scrap" (TES) or "ditch" (Schools Week) academies.

In fact, its recommendations do nothing of the kind. If its proposals were implemented, all schools would become academies, albeit with their own governing bodies. Local authorities would largely be reduced to commissioning services for schools.

The report's central argument is that the existence of two different systems for state schools – academies and local authority schools – should be resolved. But the report comes down firmly on the side of academisation, without acknowledging this.

The report recommends that a State Schools Bill 2020 should introduce, "a new standardised funding agreement that will apply to every state school" whether in

"This is a clear attempt to breathe life into a dying programme."

the local authority, standalone academy, or MAT. This would mean all local authority schools would be converted into academies.

The report acknowledges some of the fundamental problems with the academies system, including lack of accountability for parents, fragmented admissions, and a lack of transparency.

By reinstating governing bodies for academies in MATs, the recommendations would in theory give schools the ability to choose to leave a trust – another significant problem in the current system.

However, the proposals refer only to school leadership initiating this, rather

than governing bodies. Likewise, if a school wanted to leave a trust, it would also still be up to the DfE to decide whether the application to move is approved.

Overall, the report's recommended actions would create a highly centralised system, with the Secretary of State and civil servants having the power to force schools into different arrangements with little or no consultation with parents, staff or communities.

Commenting on the report, Kevin Courtney, NEU joint general secretary, said: "This is a clear attempt to breathe life into a dying programme before this happens. What it would amount to in practice is the total academisation of the school system by central government diktat."

"It would also involve an expansion of the unelected and unaccountable Regional Schools Commissioner bureaucracy. It would actually reduce democratic accountability and make it harder for parents and staff to understand and navigate the system."

Academy bosses' pay continues to rise

THE DfE has revealed the identities of the 146 academy trusts that paid at least one person £150,000 or more in 2017-18. It represents a rise from the 125 trusts named the previous year. ([TES](#))

The website [Education Uncovered](#) has

examined academy pay to produce rankings of the top earners. Analysis of these figures reveals that, among those whose identities have been disclosed, the list is dominated by men. Nearly one in three people on the list of those paid £150,000 or more are not

named in their organisation's accounts.

This contrasts with the local authority sector, where all highly paid council officials must be named and have details about their salaries and pensions documented, to the pound, in annual accounts.

Academies policy

Councils warn of ‘looming’ school places crisis

LOCAL authorities have called on the Government to give them powers to open maintained schools to avoid an impending secondary school place shortage.

An analysis from the Local Government Association (LGA) has revealed that 15 councils will face a secondary school place shortfall in 2020/21 unless more secondary school places are created.

According to the LGA, this figure will rise to 27 in 2021/22, 49 in 2022/23 and 64 in 2023/24. By 2024/25, a total of 71 councils (48 per cent) face not being able to meet demand for 123,195 places.

The LGA has urged Whitehall to give councils the power to open new maintained schools and to direct free schools and academies to expand.

Cllr Antoinette Bramble, chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board,

said: “No family should face uncertainty over their child’s school place. But our secondary school places crisis is now just one year away and this will be the reality for thousands of families unless action is taken.

“Councils need to be allowed to open new maintained schools and direct academies to expand. It makes no sense for councils to be given the responsibility to plan for school places but then not be allowed to open schools themselves.” ([LocalGov](#))

Academy handbook beefs-up rules on pay, whistleblowing & trustees

THE [2019 Academies Financial Handbook](#) includes extra guidance on the role governing bodies should play to make sure the pay and other benefits of senior staff are reasonable and reflect their responsibilities.

The latest Government guidance also stresses the importance of having an agreed whistleblowing procedure and a structure that protects and supports staff so they can report concerns in confidence. ([Schools Week](#))

Academy chain news

Trust set up to take on orphan schools

NEW Education Secretary Gavin Williamson has announced plans to pilot a specialist academy trust to take on so-called “orphan schools” – institutions which have been forced into academy status but for which no sponsor can be found – in the north of England.

The new trust – the Falcon Education Academies Trust – will be chaired by David Earnshaw, chair of Outwood Grange Academy Trust (OGAT), who also sits

on the board of the Inspiration Trust, an academy chain set up by the academies minister Lord Agnew.

Earnshaw was appointed as a director of the new chain on 1 August. Other directors include Christopher Dalzell, who is also an OGAT trustee.

Earnshaw is also one of three controlling “members” of the new trust, along with Felicity Gillespie, a former adviser to the DfE and director of early years investment fund Aurora; and Thomas Attwood, a trustee of the T4 academy

trust and a former trustee of The Kemnal Academies Trust.

OGAT has been criticised for its use of suspensions and its “flattening the grass” assemblies. Inspiration has also faced criticism for the approach of some of its schools to managing behaviour and exclusions.

The DfE said that the new trust will be “expected” to take on the most challenging schools by “offering a route into a strong academy trust that allows school improvement to begin immediately”. ([Schools Week](#))

First Harris school rated below ‘good’

THE Harris Federation, one of the country’s biggest academy chains, has had a school rated less than good by Ofsted for the first time, with the report raising concerns about “inappropriate” mass entry into a qualification for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL).

Harris Academy Orpington was rated as requires improvement in a report published on 11 September.

Inspectors said that “virtually all” year 11 pupils were entered for an English

language qualification, “marketed clearly as a qualification for pupils or adults who speak English as an additional language”. This was despite the fact 95 per cent of the cohort was not EAL.

According to the report, “students who took the qualification last year said they did not know why they were entered” and “current leaders acknowledge that the mass-entry to this qualification, initiated by leaders who have since left the academy, was inappropriate”.

[Schools Week](#) revealed in April this year how the Harris Federation was entering hundreds of native English speakers in year 11 into a qualification intended for pupils with English as a second language.

Six of the 10 schools with the most entries into the qualification last year, compared with their number of EAL pupils at the end of key stage 4, belonged to Harris.

Harris said in April it was “categorically not gaming the system”. ([Schools Week](#))

Academy chain news

Ex-minister’s academy trust folds after financial woes

FLOREAT, the academy chain founded by Conservative peer and former Health Minister Lord James O’Shaughnessy, has folded following financial troubles.

Floreat was set up by O’Shaughnessy in 2014 but has faced financial difficulties after proposals for new schools fell through.

Until recently, the trust ran Floreat Wandsworth Primary School in south London and Floreat Montague Park Primary School in Wokingham. Both have now transferred to GLF schools. A third school, Floreat Brentford Primary School in west London, closed in August amid problems with temporary buildings and “critically low” funding levels

In October 2018 it was revealed that

“Floreat received £340,000 of taxpayer money for two free schools – but neither opened.”

Floreat received £340,000 of taxpayer money for two free school projects in London – Floreat Colindale and Floreat Southall – but neither opened.

The trust’s most recent accounts said “very low pupil numbers” meant that plans

for a new Floreat Silver Meadow School in Berkshire had to be scrapped.

They also show that the trust was seeking unpaid volunteers to fill the roles of finance assistant, office administrator and personal assistant to the chief executive.

O’Shaughnessy stood down as managing director of Floreat in 2016 but remained a director and senior adviser.

The Times reported on NEU research in 2016 that two firms linked to O’Shaughnessy received payments from Floreat totalling more than £125,000. Most of that went to Mayforth Consulting, a company he founded. Floreat has previously said the payment was a “fair and reasonable sum for the work carried out” and was “in line with governance and financial regulations”. ([Schools Week](#))

Free schools

Low pupil numbers in new free schools

FREE schools are opening with tiny numbers of pupils in their first year of operation, according to analysis of Government figures by the [website Education Uncovered](#).

In 2018, ten free schools opened with 25 pupils or fewer. These include a free school in St Neots, Cambridgeshire, which opened with only nine pupils in September 2018, despite having apparently been set up as a three-form-entry primary, capable of taking 90 children in its first year.

New free schools application round re-announced

PRIME Minister Boris Johnson has re-announced the latest free schools application round, calling on “parents, educational groups and community organisations” to bid to set up new free schools in

wave 14 of the programme.

Wave 14 was first launched in January by former Education Secretary Damian Hinds, and applications were supposed to open in the spring with a deadline of 30 September.

Detailed guidance for applicants was published in April but the application process never actually opened, and a deadline extension until 11 November was announced in July.

The Prime Minister’s reference to “parents, educational groups and community organisations” also rings hollow – all 22 of the previous wave’s successful bids were from established schools or trusts.

Almost a third (seven) of the trusts opening these new free schools have 10 or more schools already. Schools Week analysis of the successful trusts also found that many already have free schools in the pipeline. ([Schools Week](#))

Debts pile up for UTCs

UNIVERSITY Technical Colleges (UTCs) are facing mounting debts due to their unpopularity with parents and pupils.

Many UTCs have been forced to borrow money after educating fewer pupils than they received funding for through their general annual grant.

Research by the Price Bailey accountancy firm disclosed to the Guardian reveals that 31 out of 40 UTCs with published accounts owe money to the education and skills funding agency (ESFA), including 25 schools owing a total of £8.6m.

Ten UTCs have already closed with the most recent being [Wigan UTC](#) and [UTC@Harbourside](#), based in Newhaven in East Sussex.

Analysis by Schools Week found that £64m was spent on the eight UTCs that closed before them. ([Guardian](#))

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International

Shadow Secretary of State cites NEU reports

THE NEU's international campaigning work against the privatisation of education in the global south was recognised in Parliament in September.

Shadow Secretary of State Dan Carden referenced the NEU and Global Justice Now report [In Whose Interest?](#), as well as the [Unlocking Education report](#) which the NEU co-funded. Carden was [presenting the case for public and free education in the global south](#).

Responding to an update on Girls' Education from Secretary of State Alok Sharma MP, Carden said:

"In February this year, the Send My Friend to School coalition released a report calling for DFID to ensure that its aid spending goes towards supporting education that is provided universally and is available free at the point of use.

"In April, a report from the National Education Union and Global Justice Now claimed that UK aid is being used to push an ideological agenda to expand fee-paying private education around the world.

"Will the Secretary of State listen to the sector, to the unions and to teacher and campaign groups in the UK and the global south, who say that education is a universal right

guaranteed by the state and not a market to make profits from?"

Solidarity conference

ON 7 December 2019, the NEU will be hosting a [conference for international solidarity officers and activists](#), in partnership with the Equality Trust.

It will be an opportunity for attendees to network and learn more about how to promote international solidarity at school, district/branch level, in local communities and to help build the union.

The key theme will be "education, privatisation and inequality". The theme builds on the NEU's recent report [In Whose Interest?](#).