

Battle continues as third trust chosen

PARENTS, staff and local councillors have reacted with dismay after the Government named a new sponsor for Moulsecoomb Primary School in Brighton.

New Horizons Academy Trust is the third sponsor to have been considered for the school, which was ordered to become an academy in June after an 'inadequate' Ofsted rating.

A vibrant and popular campaign opposing the forced academisation has already seen off two other potential sponsors. Brighton and Hove Council has also strongly opposed the academisation of the school, and a ballot of parents organised by the council returned a 96 per cent vote against the plans. The council has also called for the school to be re-inspected by Ofsted.

The University of Brighton turned down an approach from

the Government to potentially sponsor the school while a second potential sponsor, the Step Trust, pulled out after its chief executive visited the school in September and was met by angry campaigners at the gates.

The National Education Union (NEU) has now raised concerns about New Horizons, which took over another school in nearby Worthing in September 2016. Half the staff, including the head, quit within a year.

By August last year, New Horizons had handed over running of the school to another trust, Durrington Multi Academy Trust (DMAT). The school, which was rated as good while under local authority control, is now judged as requiring improvement.

Members of both the NEU and GMB have voted unanimously to strike on 21 November over the academisation plans. ([Brighton and Hove News](#))

Blow for Waltham Holy Cross after sponsor imposed

DESPITE a powerful 18-month campaign from parents and staff and a last-minute intervention by the local Conservative MP, the Government has forced through its planned academisation of Waltham Holy Cross Primary in Essex, transferring the school to NET Academies Trust (NETAT).

A [statement by the Hands off Waltham Holy Cross campaign](#) said that parents were "disgusted that the Government forced through the academisation of Waltham Holy Cross Primary School on 1 November against the wishes of parents,

teachers the local community and our Member of Parliament".

The statement points to the fact that in October more than 1,000 people had signed a petition against the transfer.

Parents had also raised serious questions about the chain's record and were dissatisfied with an investigation into allegations of irregularities in the conduct of the school's key stage 1 SATs tests by NETAT. An external moderator from Essex county council raised concerns about the level of "scaffolding" by teachers who were using planning materials supplied by NETAT, raising concerns that pupils' 'independent'

work had in fact received too much support.

Dame Eleanor Laing, the Conservative MP for Epping Forest and deputy speaker of the House of Commons, attempted to step in at the last minute, referring the case to the Parliamentary ombudsman and writing to the schools minister, Lord Agnew, asking him to put the conversion on hold pending further investigation. However, Laing's request was rejected by Agnew and the school's transfer was completed on 1 November.

The school's head teacher and its foundation stage manager both left their posts when the school was transferred to NETAT. ([Guardian](#))

Free schools promoter to write Conservative manifesto

A FORMER advisor to Michael Gove who helped write the free schools policy and set up the New Schools Network, a Government-funded organisation that advises groups setting up new free schools, is writing the Conservative Party's election manifesto, according to the [Guardian](#).

The paper reports that Rachel Wolf

is also continuing in her role as partner for lobbying firm Public First, which she co-founded with her husband James Frayne, a former Department for Education (DfE) press officer appointed by Gove in 2011.

Public First's clients include fracking firm Cuadrilla and the Internet Association, the trade body for major

tech companies including Uber, Twitter, Facebook, Google, Airbnb, Microsoft and Amazon.

Wolf has previously worked in New York as Senior Vice President for the education technology company Amplify, which at the time was owned by Rupert Murdoch.

Businessmen in near-complete control of 200 academies

NEW analysis by education journalist Warwick Mansell has highlighted how power over almost 200 academies across England is concentrated in the hands of a wealthy elite.

Academy trusts have several levels of governance with trust "members" being the most powerful tier. These are similar to the owners or shareholders of a company and they have the right to set the trust's constitution and to appoint and dismiss trustees.

According to Mansell's analysis, 189 academies belong to ten trusts with constitutions which "see the controlling sponsors handed sweeping powers to appoint in many cases the vast majority of trustees, who in turn control the organisation through setting its strategy.

Parents, pupils and rank-and-file staff members, by contrast, have little or no influence over decision-making."

These ten trusts educated 113,906 pupils in 2017-18, according to Government data.

Conservative Party donors

The analysis also reveals that, "nine of the 10 trusts running these academies are controlled or heavily influenced by people – all of them men – who have donated or loaned money to political parties, including eight of them to the Conservative Party".

Among the chains analysed by Mansell is the Harris Federation, set up by the millionaire and Conservative Party donor Lord Toby Harris of Peckham. A clause in this trust's constitution in effect

ensures that members of Lord Harris' family can inherit the position of "principal sponsor" upon his death.

Responding to the findings, NEU joint general secretary Mary Bousted said: "The academies project has always been in the interests of the few, not the many. It has resulted in a fractured and confusing schools landscape, and a Wild West for those who wish to exploit it.

"There is a great deal at stake for education in this General Election.

Voters must look at this research and ask themselves in whose interests schools should be run.

"At a critical time in our history, this is an opportunity for us to change course as a country and vote for education."

([Education Uncovered](#))

Academy rebrokering stalls due to lack of sponsors

FIGURES obtained by Schools Week show just 181 of the 476 academies rated 'inadequate' in the past five years (38 per cent) have been rebrokered.

The figures suggest that there is a lack of available or willing sponsors to take over the schools and calls into question the Government's claim that the academy programme results in rapid intervention into those schools rated 'inadequate'.

The premise that changing school management wholesale by

bringing in a new sponsor is flawed, with such upheaval unlikely to help schools. However, the delays show that the academy system is failing on its own terms while also leaving schools in an uncertain position and without support.

Academy transfers are also costly. Figures published in July show the government has spent £31 million on grant funding to tempt new sponsors. The full cost of transfers is likely to be much higher, however, as this figure does not include a host of costs such as cash to wipe out deficits.

Academy chains

MAT accused of implementing 'off-rolling' plan

AN internal document seen by Tes reveals that an academy trust asked its staff to ignore "ethical considerations" when considering whether it could boost its league table scores by taking low-achieving students off school rolls.

The document from the Leeds-based multi-academy GORSE trust, which runs 11 schools in the city, discusses how taking low-achievers off school rolls could boost Progress 8 scores.

According to the document, the approach of staff looking at the issues was to: "Come at the problem with no preconceived ideas or ethical considerations; we simply want to test curriculum models to see which tend to generate the highest Progress 8 scores for the academy."

Deeply disturbing

GORSE chief executive Sir John Townsley later said the document seen by Tes was, "a theoretical discussion paper which sought to examine a range of acceptable

and totally unacceptable practices" which were at that time taking place across the country.

He added: "At no point did we implement any unacceptable practices."

However, Jonathan Pryor, Leeds City Council's executive member for schools, described the document as "deeply disturbing".

He also revealed that the council already had major concerns that GORSE was "off-rolling" pupils from its academies into its own alternative provision – the Stephen Longfellow Academy.

Academy chains

Only 12 trusts receive warning on high pay

DESPITE claims to be clamping down on high pay in academies, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) has written to just 12 MATs asking them to justify high levels of executive pay in their organisations since the latest academy accounts were published.

ESFA head Eileen Milner wrote to the trusts in October because their accounts for 2017-18 show they paid an individual more than £150,000 in 2017-18 or multiple people between £100,000 and £150,000.

However, education journalist [Warwick Mansell](#) notes that the latest annual report and accounts for the academies sector showed that a total of 146 trusts paid at least one person £150,000 or more in 2017-18 and asks why only these 12 trusts

have been written to this time.

Milner wrote to 212 trusts about the issue last year, later saying that only around 25 per cent of those warned reported reducing salaries.

Ten of the trusts written to this year had also received letters last year while for two – the Burnt Mill Academy Trust and Xavier Catholic Education Trust – it is the first time they have been warned on high pay.

[The letters are available](#) on the DfE's website. ([Schools Week](#))

Former RSC becomes academy trustee

JANET Renou, the former regional schools commissioner (RSC) for the north of England, has become a trustee at one of the country's largest academy chains a few months after leaving her Government post.

Renou left her position as RSC in

July, having held the post since the roles were created in 2014.

There is an emerging trend for RSCs – who are appointed by Government to oversee the academies sector, including make decisions on academy sponsorship and rebrokering – to join academy trusts.

In April, Martin Post announced he was stepping down as RSC for north west London and central England. Four months later he was appointed a regional chief executive for the Aspirations Academies Trust.

Lisa Mannall also left her position as commissioner for the south west to head the Cornwall Learning Education Trust this year.

Other RSCs to move to an academy job include Tim Coulson, Rebecca Clark, Pank Patel and Paul Smith. ([Schools Week](#))

Free schools

Free school trustees flown to Ibiza for meeting

A FREE school in Blackpool that flew trustees to Ibiza for a board meeting has been told it needs to take urgent financial action.

An ESFA review into Langdale Free School took place in January following an anonymous tip-off about financial mismanagement.

The report identified “a number of failings and weaknesses” at the primary school, including a deficit of £238,000 by the end of August 2018.

Before 2013 Langdale was a private

school named Langdale Preparatory School which was run by Montague Place. Since becoming a free school, Montague Place has continued to provide corporate services to the school and has two trustees on its board, including one that is a member.

The flights for the trustees meeting in Ibiza in 2018 were paid for by Montague Place, with no costs incurred or payable by the school. However, the report noted: “The costs incurred for the flights to Ibiza, for a board meeting, should have been reported in the audited accounts as a related party transaction.”

The ESFA report raised a number of further issues concerning the school's relationship to Montague Place, including the fact that, according to Langdale's funding agreement, Montague Place and its connected companies are allowed to charge the trust £50,250 a year for “corporate services”. The trust has paid a salary to three Montague Place employees within this limit.

Langdale has been told to “urgently seek a ruling” from the ESFA as to whether the management charge is in breach of its funding agreement. ([Schools Week](#))

Costs of doomed free school revealed

AN analysis of FOI disclosures by the journalist Warwick Mansell suggests that a doomed free school has cost the Government £1,500 per pupil per year in rent costs alone.

The International Academy of Greenwich (IAG) opened in temporary premises in 2016. However, the secondary school's closure was announced in November after Greenwich Council

rejected plans for the permanent home, which the Government had been hoping would be built on protected Metropolitan Open Land which is prone to flooding.

The Government has been paying annual rent and “service charges” of £395,000 to an evangelical Christian church in Lee near Blackheath in south London, so that the school can operate

in office space above the church.

The DfE also spent £400,000 in 2014 on a deposit to the land owner of the proposed permanent site, which cannot now be used, and £1.2 million on refurbishment work for the school's temporary home and to the site on which it had been hoped the school's permanent home would be built. ([Education Uncovered](#))

Free schools

Blacklisted free school founder still working in education

AN investigation by [Schools Week](#) has revealed that the head of two collapsed Manchester free schools is now running a supply teacher firm, despite being secretly blacklisted from involvement in schools by the Government.

Raja Miah was head and founder of the Manchester Creative Studio and Collective Spirit Free School which were shut in 2018 and 2017 respectively.

Both had large deficits and falling rolls. A Government investigation into the schools, which was published in May 2019, cast “significant doubts” on the legitimacy of money paid to a company connected to Miah by the schools.

But the Government said it was “unable to conclude on the allegations”

because of “substantial difficulties establishing any reasonable audit trail”.

Official correspondence in July from Lord Agnew said there had been “insufficient evidence” to formally ban Miah, the schools' former chair of directors Alun Morgan and former chair of governors Mohib Uddin, from future involvement in schools.

However, it added that the ESFA had “written directly to the three individuals, strongly discouraging their future involvement within schools”.

Agnew had also privately ordered regional schools commissioners (RSCs) to inform him if they found Miah, and two others linked to the trusts, “within schools in their region”.

Miah is now running a company called Supply School which was founded in June 2018 and recently advertised for an

employee to “focus on building relationships with our client schools”. In August, Supply School was ordered by an employment tribunal to pay an employee almost £2,500 in unauthorised deduction of wages.

£2m but no money for salaries

There are now calls for a further investigation into the finances of the two free schools after Schools Week found that they had paid more than £2 million to multiple companies linked to Miah, despite claims from a whistleblower that the schools struggled to pay for textbooks and staff salaries.

Angela Rayner, the Shadow Education Secretary, has called for a formal inquiry saying the case was a “national scandal that denied children a good education while a few made money”.

Damning report on UTCs by watchdog

A NEW report into the University Technical College (UTC) programme by the National Audit Office (NAO) lays bare the extent of the policy's failure.

The NAO's investigation found that £792 million had been spent on UTCs since the policy was launched in 2010 by Michael Gove. While a total of 58 UTCs have opened since then, 17 per cent (10) of these institutions no longer operate as technical colleges, while those that do were operating at 45 per cent of capacity on average as of January 2019, according to the NAO.

The financial performance of UTCs was also scrutinised by the NAO which found UTC's revenue deficits had grown

and now account for nearly 10 per cent of the total cumulative revenue deficits reported by all academy trusts in 2017/18.

The NAO also reported that as of July 2019, the ESFA had significant concerns about the finances of 13 UTCs. The DfE had formally intervened in eight, of which two subsequently closed.

As of August 2019, the report said, 52 per cent of UTCs were rated as ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’, compared with 76 per cent of all secondary schools.

There were 4,863 students attending UTCs that were considered to be inadequate or requiring improvement by inspectors. ([Guardian](#))

38 free schools still in temporary accommodation

FIGURES obtained by [Tes](#) via a Freedom of Information request to the DfE reveal that 38 free schools that opened between 2011-12 and 2016-17 are still in temporary accommodation.

A further two free schools that opened in a permanent home had since expanded into temporary buildings.

Tes has previously reported on how the Department for Education (DfE) could waste £75 million on temporary school sites for free schools – information that the DfE tried to suppress.