

Primary facing academisation receives 'good' Ofsted report

STAFF, parents and pupils at Crigglestone Mackie Hill junior and infant school in Wakefield are celebrating after Ofsted inspectors gave the school an emphatic 'good' rating in all categories following an inspection in November.

The Ofsted report is a huge boost to the school, which has faced the threat of forced academisation for more than two years after it was rated 'inadequate' and placed in special measures in 2017.

The Secretary of State has a duty to make an academy order in respect of any maintained school judged as inadequate by Ofsted, but also has the power to revoke an academy order at its own discretion "in exceptional circumstances" – according to Department for Education (DfE) guidance.

A number of maintained schools have had academy orders lifted following re-inspection and an improvement in Ofsted

grade. For example, William Torbitt Primary School in Ilford, east London, where forced academisation was met by a powerful, [successful staff and parent campaign](#) supported by the NEU.

"Unwavering positivity"

Mackie Hill first failed an inspection in December 2017. Shortly afterwards, however, nearby Kettlethorpe High School was brought in to provide support, with Kettlethorpe's headteacher now overseeing both schools as executive head and a new headteacher appointed.

In December 2018 an Ofsted monitoring inspection report praised the "unwavering positivity and determination" of this partnership to improve the school.

More than 1,500 people have signed a petition calling for Mackie Hill's partnership as a local authority school with Kettlethorpe to be allowed to continue.

Battle is back on in Newham

NEU members at two Catholic schools in Newham, east London, took co-ordinated strike action against academisation in December with a third school set to join the campaign in January.

Members took action at St Angela's secondary school and quickly scored a victory with an 11th hour agreement to suspend further strike action in January because the school board agreed to withdraw from all plans to academise or join a multi-academy trust (MAT) within the next five years.

Four successful campaigns so far

A strike also took place at St Michael's primary school in December and on 15 January, plus indicative support for strike action was held at St Bonaventure's Primary.

NEU members and parents have a track record of winning campaigns against academisation in Newham, successfully preventing the privatisation of a number of local authority schools in 2018.

Louise Cuffaro, who helped lead that winning campaign in 2018 to keep her



NEU members at St Michael's school in Newham striking against academisation

school, Avenue, in public hands, is now branch secretary of Newham NEU.

The three Catholic schools are run by the Brentwood Diocese, which

has its own MAT which took over Our Lady of Lourdes primary school in Redbridge, overriding vocal parent protests last year.

Brighton primary fights off another sponsor

CAMPAIGNERS against the forced academisation of Moulsecoomb Primary School in Brighton and Hove are “delighted” after another sponsor withdrew from the process.

Members of the NEU and GMB at the school took strike action on 21 November, receiving massive support from parents and the local community who joined staff on the picket line, along with councillors and local MP Lloyd Russell-Moyle. UNISON also returned a unanimous Yes vote for strike action.

The New Horizons Academy Trust (NHAT), which runs only one school, Seaside Primary in Lancing, had emerged as preferred sponsor after two others had withdrawn from the process, but questions were immediately asked about its viability.

When two senior members of NHAT visited Moulsecoomb two days before the strike, they were met by protesting parents at the school gates. NEU members at the school politely refused to engage with them.

Just over three weeks later, NHAT directors voted unanimously to withdraw from the process, citing a “toxic” atmosphere for the trust. Lee Murley, NHAT’s director of education, said: “Opposition for New Horizons’ sponsorship of Moulsecoomb from parents, staff and Brighton politicians has [...] been strong, with protests and even a mock funeral being staged. We cannot work with a teaching body which has no desire to work with us.”

Paul Shellard, secretary of Brighton and Hove district NEU, said: “We are delighted that NHAT has decided to withdraw as sponsor of Moulsecoomb. It is testament to



Parents, staff and the whole Moulsecoomb community resisting forced academisation. PHOTO: Dave Jones

the strength of the community campaign, which made it clear that Moulsecoomb is part of the Brighton and Hove family of schools. Parents, carers, staff, councillors and MPs have stood together and now we want the academy order to be revoked.

“NEU, GMB and UNISON will now call off the strike action scheduled for January. We urge other academy sponsors to stay away to avoid children’s education being further disrupted.”

A growing number of parents are pledging that they will withdraw their children from the school if it converts to an academy. Natasha Ide, a Moulsecoomb parent, said: “I fully supported the staff at Moulsecoomb in taking strike action to save our school. The whole community is united, and we will not stop fighting until our voices are heard.

“The last thing our children need is the

instability of a trust with a poor track record taking over our school, so it’s great news to hear that this sponsor has pulled out.”

Following the withdrawal by NHAT, Lloyd Russell-Moyle wrote to Gavin Williamson MP, Secretary of State for schools, on 23 December, calling for the “academisation order to be rescinded”, or, should that not be possible, for “Ofsted to conduct another rating”.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle said: “Everybody who is involved with Moulsecoomb knows that it is a good school and that the previous Ofsted judgement was a poor reflection of the incredible work the school does in its community. This Government talks about academy schools in terms of parental choice. Moulsecoomb parents have made their choice and 96 per cent voted against the school becoming an academy when the council balloted them last term.”

Academies

No new detail on post-election academies policy

THE new Conservative Government’s plans on education, specifically academies and free schools policy, are still unclear.

The Conservative manifesto for the December 2019 general election was notably light on detail. In relation to education policy it contained much on behaviour, discipline and the curriculum but there was little in terms of school structures.

Apart from an explicit commitment to “continue to build more free schools” there was not a single reference to academies in

the manifesto. There were broad pledges to create “more great schools”, expand alternative provision schools and “deliver more school places for children with complex special educational needs”.

The manifesto also said that a Conservative Government would “intervene in schools where there is entrenched underperformance”, but there was no detail on what that would mean in practice and whether it would entail converting more schools to academies.

A large majority of 80 gives the Conservative Government very considerable legislative power. There has

been speculation about the direction that the Government is likely to take, with [journalist Melissa Benn suggesting](#) that there “will be a concerted push to convert all schools to academies over the next five years, mostly by herding schools into larger multi-academy trusts”.

While this appears plausible, at the time of writing there have been no specific announcements on academies or free schools policy from the new Government.

[Gavin Williamson remains as Education Secretary](#) and Lord Theodore Agnew continues as Academies Minister.

Academies

Preston City Council to oppose further academisation

THE governing Labour group of councillors in Preston has said [it will submit a notice of motion to January’s Full Council](#) opposing further academisation in the city.

The announcement comes after [recent proposals to turn the City’s Ashton Community Science College into an](#)

[academy](#) with the Morecambe Bay Trust.

A spokesperson for Preston Labour Group said: “Academies haven’t improved educational standards for underachievers as they set out to do. Permanent exclusion rates are nearly double the rate in academies. It also removes local, democratic control away from communities.

“We fear it will be children from lower income families who disproportionately are at greater threat from exclusion and teaching staff’s terms and conditions may suffer detriment as a result of any transfer.

“In the long term this won’t deliver benefits needed for children and local communities.”

Revolving door between Ofsted and MATs

OFSTED’S deputy director – who was responsible for developing the current Ofsted framework with its heavy focus on curriculum – has joined the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET), one of the country’s biggest academy chains to oversee its curriculum work.

Matthew Purves will take up post at AET as director of education services in April, where he will oversee group strategy

for people and the leadership of the curriculum, including ensuring that AET academies “comply” with the Ofsted framework.

Two AET schools were given improvement warnings last year but the chain has said 2020 will bring a new period of prudent growth. AET was banned from taking over more schools in 2013 after it was deemed to have grown too quickly. ([Schools Week](#))

Signs of restraint in academy bosses’ pay?

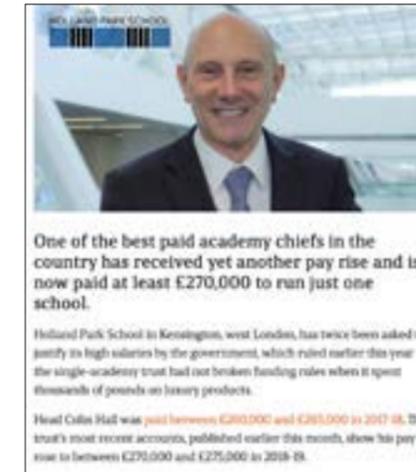
SCHOOLS Week analysis of the latest annual accounts for academy trusts shows that several MAT CEOs have had salary freezes or even pay cuts over the last few years.

Examples include the Nova Education Trust chief executive John Tomasevic’s pay dropping from between £260,000 and £265,000 in 2017-18 to between £215,000 and £220,000 last year. The remuneration of Keith Whittlestone, chief executive of the Joseph Leckie Academy Trust, fell from between £195,000 and £200,000 to between £185,000 and £190,000 in the same period.

The DfE has made a number of interventions urging restraint on academy boss pay. However, writing on Twitter, education journalist [Warwick Mansell said that the figures from annual accounts](#) he had seen did not bear out the claim that DfE scrutiny of salaries was leading to significant changes in the sector.

While accepting that there was “some levelling-off of CEO pay,” Mansell said that “the endlessly-hyped ‘crackdown’ seems to have had little effect on reducing the number of £100k/£150k leaders, which have been the target of the DfE’s efforts”.

And while some leaders have refused pay awards or accepted cuts – albeit to



(Above) Warwick Mansell’s comments on Twitter

(Left) The Schools Week article highlighting Colin Hall’s substantial pay rise

already large pay packages – the fact remains these individual decisions do not mean that huge pay rises for academy “leaders” are a thing of the past.

Far from it. [One of the best paid academy chiefs in the country](#) received yet another pay rise last year and is now paid at least £270,000 to run just one school.

Pay doubled in less than ten years

Holland Park School in Kensington, west London, has twice been asked to justify its high salaries by the Government, which ruled earlier this year that the single-academy trust had not broken funding rules

when it spent thousands of pounds on luxury products.

Head Colin Hall’s pay rose from between £260,000 and £265,000 in 2017-18 to between £270,000 and £275,000 in 2018-19. The Evening Standard reported he was paid £130,000 in 2010-11, which means his salary has more than doubled in under ten years. According to Schools Week, he was the fifth highest paid trust CEO in England in 2017-18, despite leading just one academy (see picture above).

These examples demonstrate a model which allows trusts to set their bosses’ pay – and indeed that of all their staff – based on the idea of leadership alone driving success is not an equitable one.

With no clear or consistent pay framework, this model cannot ensure that pay is fair across the sector. ([Schools Week](#))

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Academies

Closing MAT continued to breach funding rules

THE Birmingham-based academy trust Perry Beeches broke funding rules in its final year as a school sponsor before it was wound up, it has emerged.

In March 2016, a government investigation found the trust had funnelled £1.3 million to a private company without following proper procedures. The company then paid a “second salary” to “superhead” Liam Nolan.

Nolan stepped down from the trust –

where he had received £160,000 over two years on top of his £120,000 salary – in May 2016 and was then banned from teaching in November 2018.

The trust’s five schools were re-brokered in March 2018 but accounts for 2017-18 identify six breaches of the academy’s financial handbook during the year, including failing to submit its audited accounts by 31 December 2018.

Among the breaches identified in an assurance report from Perry Beeches’

independent reporting accountant was a failure to provide supporting evidence for six of the ten credit card transactions that were selected for testing. The report also warned the trust did not always follow its internal procurement process or ensure spending decisions “represent value for money”.

Other breaches included not maintaining a risk register, not appointing an internal audit service and its register of interests did not include “all relevant business and pecuniary interests”. ([Schools Week](#))

MAT doubles number of schools since its first academy failed an Ofsted

ANALYSIS by Education Uncovered has revealed that the Government has allowed a MAT to more than double its number of schools despite its founding academy having failed an Ofsted inspection.

Staffordshire University Academies Trust, based in Stone in the West Midlands, has expanded from eight schools to 19 since

2017 despite the fact that its title institution, Staffordshire University Academy, was placed in special measures in April of that year. Inspectors criticised the trust’s leadership in relation to that school and two-and-half years on it remains in this Ofsted category.

As pointed out by Warwick Mansell,

the situation “seems to add to claims from academisation critics of double standards: that the Government will take tough action in non-academy schools when they fail Ofsteds by enforcing a change of control, while a more flexible and lenient approach can be taken by officials in the academies sector”. ([Education Uncovered](#))

Free schools

NEU research: £300m spent on failed free schools

NEU research published in December shows that more than £300 million in one-off capital and revenue grants has been spent on failed free schools, University Technical Colleges (UTCs) and studio schools since 2010.

DfE data analysed by the NEU shows one in eight schools which opened under the free school banner – a flagship Conservative policy – went on to either close completely or transferred to another academy trust.

In total, the NEU identified £303 million spent on failed free schools, UTCs and studio schools since 2010. Of this, £295 million was spent on those schools that either closed completely or were transferred to new trusts while £8 million was spent on 65 approved schools that did not actually open.

The total spend on 45 schools that closed completely was £186 million while £108 million was spent on set up costs for the 31 schools that were rebrokered to other academy trusts after opening. A



“A shocking record of failure and waste... the hallmark of the free school programme.”

Kevin Courtney

school is rebrokered when its trust – in the case of free schools the one that was given permission to set up the school – is no longer deemed able to run the school.

The actual spend on unsuccessful free schools is likely to be much higher because the Government is yet to publish data for all free school projects.

Joint NEU general secretary Kevin Courtney said that the figures “reveal a shocking record of failure and waste that has been the hallmark of the free school programme”. He noted that the free school policy was one of the few specific education commitments made in the Conservative Party manifesto and called for the policy to be ended with the money freed up used “to help ensure that existing schools get the funds they need”.

He also highlighted the “massive upheaval, disruption and distress for the staff, pupils and parents” affected by the closure of schools and the fact that it is usually local authorities – which have suffered severe cuts to their own resources – that are left to pick up the pieces, such as finding new school places for the pupils.