

Anti Academies Alliance



Autumn 2011 www.antiacademies.org.uk

“A good
local school
for every
child”

It is privatisation, pure and simple...

STOP THE ACADEMIES PROGRAMME!



Protestors at Varndean school in Brighton who successfully resisted an Academy proposal last term.

The scale and pace of Academy conversions is reckless. No one has a clear idea about the costs or long term effects of this process. There is a growing sense of unease in town halls, governing bodies and staff rooms. In many areas, parents and students are in open revolt. The lack of consultation and democratic mandate threaten to divide school communities. It's clear that, coupled with the Free Schools programme, this is a narrow political agenda based on the ideology of privatisation, just like in the NHS.

Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove's obsession with creating a market of competing schools threatens

to divert resources away from teaching and learning. It will cause greater social segregation in an already deeply divided society. There will be winners and losers, mergers and acquisitions and fear and uncertainty as the grip of corporate raiders tightens on our schools.

It is time to call a halt to Academy conversions. We need a pause for reflection. Every Local Authority needs time to assess the impact. The Education Select Committee needs to gather evidence and scrutinise the policy. Ministers need to come clean on the real costs of the programme. But in the meantime, parents and teachers and all those who have a stake in education should continue to organise resistance.

INSIDE:

- Conversions driven by ideology
- Pay and conditions under attack
- Academies' financial scandal



Conversions driven by ideology not evidence

Michael Gove is driving a fundamental reform of our education system. He claims it will improve our schools, but there is no evidence to support this. Some claim that Academies are the way to help mend our 'broken society'. The summer riots exposed the inequality in society. Academies threaten to make this worse, not better.

Gove claims that Academies benefit from greater freedoms to innovate and raise standards. He argues that more choice for parents raises standards for all young people. But, behind all the rhetoric about choice, lies a more sinister commitment to promoting the interests of big business by privatising whole chunks of state education.

We are seeing big business use 'charitable' status and phoney philanthropy as an excuse to take control of an increasing number of schools. There is a web of business and political networks that are spinning the Academies, free schools and privatisation. It even includes Rupert Murdoch's NewsCorp who recently described the US schools system as a '\$500 billion dollar market'.

There appears to have been little or no assessment by government of either the short or long term consequences. Ministers appear unclear of the costs of the programme. The

Equalities Impact Assessment made at the time of the Academies Bill in 2010 envisaged only 200 conversions each year. There were over 600 in 2011.

The Academies programme is being foisted on school communities. Some head teachers are seduced by the promise of extra funds. In other cases they are being bullied.

Nearly 20 years ago Sweden introduced 'Free' Schools. Schools opened in empty office blocks, industrial estates or other cheap accommodation. The number of qualified teachers employed fell to around 60% compared to 84% in state run schools. Yet Sweden has 'flat-lined' in terms of standards. The Swedish government is now investigating the growth of social segregation and divisiveness that has been an unintended consequence of the policy.

Gove also makes much of American 'charter' schools. These are schools run by a variety of different organisations and are similar to Academies. The respected CREDO report on charter schools stated: "Despite promising results in a number of states and within certain subgroups, the overall findings of this report indicated disturbing – and far reaching – subset of poorly performing charter schools."

There is no evidence that Academies make better schools and plenty of evidence that the Academies programme is disrupting the whole education landscape. We must demand a pause for reflection and a moratorium on further conversions whilst a wide ranging, public inquiry is conducted.



What should Labour's education policy review do?



by Councillor SARAH DODDS

As a passionate anti-Academy campaigner and a Labour District Councillor, this is what I hope to see from the Labour policy review;

- 1) Clear and unequivocal opposition to the Government policy as it stands.
- 2) Restoration of entitlement to statutory teachers' pay and conditions.

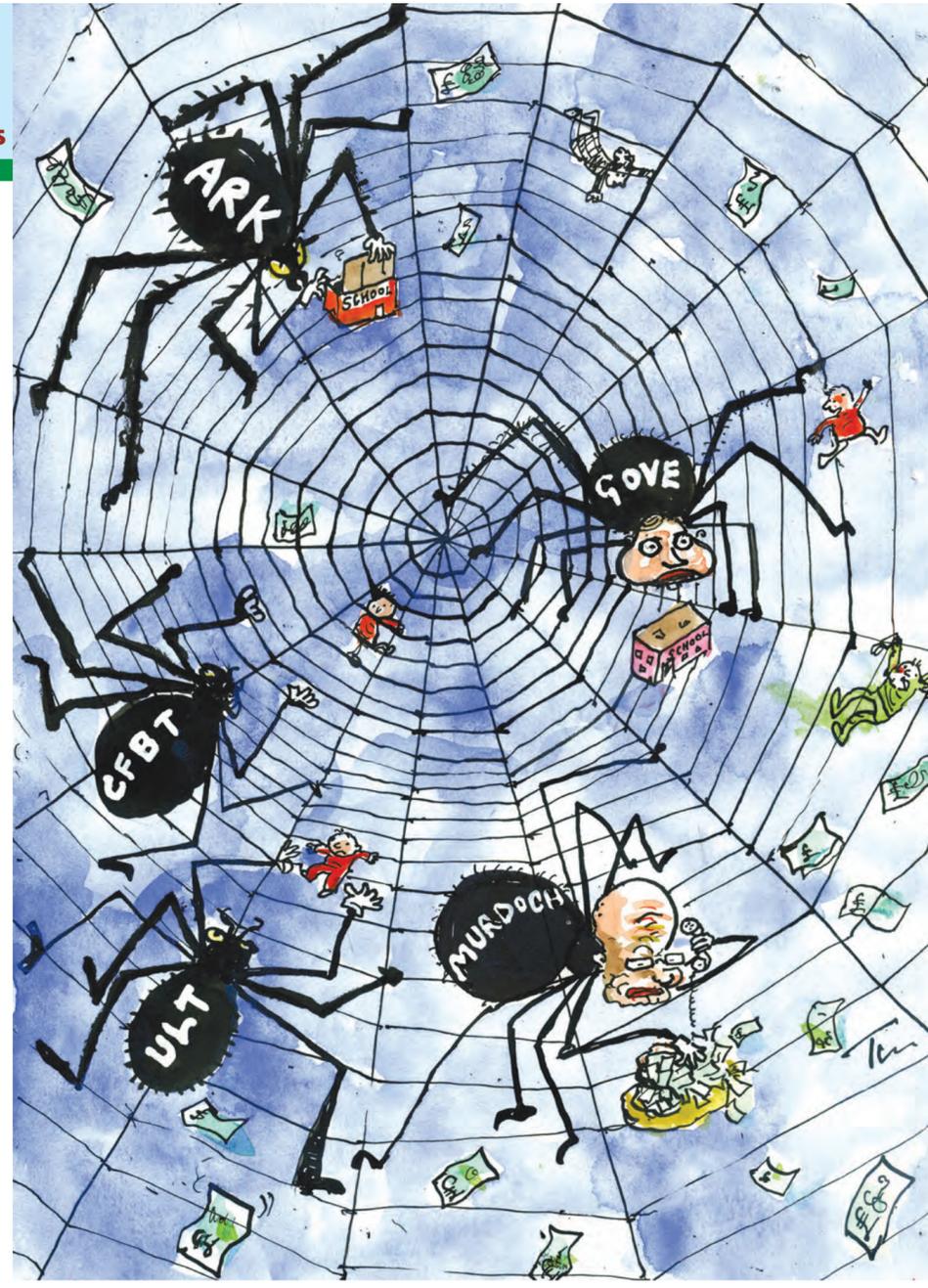
- 3) Scrapping of Academy governance model and restoration of elected stakeholder governance.
- 4) External, independent and locally run systems of accountability.
- 5) Restoring Local Authorities' responsibilities over planning and admissions, including scrapping any selection.
- 6) Allowing schools a way back.

One of the saddest conversations I have had is with a chair of governors who is looking at Academy status in his attempt to find a "least worst" option. His reasoning is that this will allow him to re-

turn to the local authority more easily when and if we have a policy reversal. If schools know there will be a way back, it will stop many going to start with. The seeming lack of political opposition is a crucial factor in the onward march to a market driven education system.

I am utterly convinced that the current Academy and Free Schools policy is opposed amongst the grass roots of the Labour Party membership. I hope that the policy review reflects this, and creates an education policy to be proud of again.

● Sarah Dodds is a parent and district councillor in Lincolnshire



Academies "threaten to create more social segregation"

The riots over the summer have brought into focus the issue of social segregation. Coalition ministers seem to believe that their Academies programme will help ease tensions and prevent further social segregation. They are probably the only people on the planet who believe this!

During the passage of the Academies Bill, Shabana Mahmood, MP for Birmingham Ladywood, warned that "rather than leading to greater social justice, it will deliver only social segregation". (Hansard, 19th July). Ed Balls made a similar point in the same

debate: "My fear is that we will see, as Sweden did, a rise in social segregation, with children in high-income areas doing better and children in lower-income areas doing worse. That would be deeply socially divisive, and that is not the only social division we may see as a result." (Hansard, 19th July)

In a report commissioned by the Sutton Trust in April 2011 on the impact of Academies, 59% of teachers agreed that pupils from more privileged backgrounds would be more likely to benefit as a result and 69% thought they would lead to greater social

segregation.' (Sutton Trust).

The *Financial Times* reported in June 2011 that "47% of children in Academies set up by Gove are from the richest 30%, whilst under Labour 47% were from the poorest 20%."

The New Labour Academies programme did attempt to target the poorest, but Gove, despite his weasel words, has ensured that his programme will entrench privilege. His vision of an education market place of competing schools will mean winners and losers. There is no prize for guessing who is most likely to lose.

Under attack: Pay and conditions in the Academies

The freedom to vary national pay and conditions is a crucial element of Academy conversion. Most heads and governors try to reassure their staff that nothing will change. This is not true.

The move to Academy status has a profound and permanent effect on pay and conditions. It removes staff from national agreements that are statutory and puts them into contractual arrangements with an Academy trust. These contractual arrangements can subsequently be changed by the employer. Although heads will try to persuade staff that TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings – Protection of Employment) Regulations will protect them, in practice this is worth little or nothing and the government plan to abolish it anyway.

Academies create a two-tier workforce with staff doing the same work but on different conditions. There is a tendency towards worsening conditions especially for support staff. We have re-

ceived many examples of pay & conditions being changed. The most extreme is illustrated below, but other Academies are increasing the working day and year significantly.

The following is an extract from a proposed teachers' contract from a school in the Midlands – we cannot reveal the school for legal reasons.

"HOLIDAYS

The Employee is entitled to 28 days' paid holiday per year to be taken during School holiday periods (unless otherwise required to work in accordance with clause 8.2). There is no separate entitlement to Bank or Public holidays. The School may require the Employee to take holiday on any Bank or Public holiday which occurs during term time, or on any day which occurs during a School holiday period. The Governing Body shall set out which periods are School holiday periods in the School Calendar".

Consultation: what should it look like?

The failure of the Academies Act to create a proper framework for consultation is threatening to divide school communities. Parents, staff and local communities' views must be heard. If heads and governors are so confident of the virtues of Academy status, they should be prepared to conduct an open and rigorous debate in which arguments for and against are tested, and preferably, a mandate for conversion is established by a democratic vote.

In far too many cases, Academy conversions are being herded through with one sided consultation. In some cases there is flawed consultation and an increasing number of these are subject to legal challenges.

So what should consultation look like? The National Governors Association has provided detailed advice on their website, but below we tell the story of a secondary school in west London.

"The school shut to pupils at

lunch time. All staff were invited to a meeting in the hall. The head explained his preference for Academy status, but acknowledged his commitment to an open and democratic resolution. Arguments for conversion were put by the Special Schools and Academies Trust. Arguments against were put by the Anti Academies Alliance followed by over an hour of detailed questioning.

"At the end, the head initiated a secret ballot. Numbered ballot papers were issued. Staff had to sign for them and return by lunch the following day. Of 148 ballot papers issued, 142 were returned with 138 voting against Academy status. Four voted in favour."

For politicians, like Gove and Cameron who carp on about the 'big society' and 'localism', it is revealing that they don't want detailed consultation or democratic process. But staff, parents and students should demand it and be prepared to fight for it.



what we think

#GetGove



by ALASDAIR SMITH
National Secretary of AAA

Peter Mortimore, former director of the University of London's prestigious Institute of Education, wrote in his final column for *The Guardian* newspaper in December 2010 that we must 'Fight Gove'.

Gove is dangerous. He is a neo-conservative, a flag bearer for the neo-liberal project and part of the Coalition inner circle who flirted with the Murdoch empire. He aims to privatise the state sector, to allow big business to muscle in and to let the 'market' decide the fate of our schools. Some of Gove's allies are keen to insist that his 'schools revolution' will only succeed when businesses are allowed to make a profit out of running schools.

This ideological obsession is threatening the stability and long term viability of our education system. These policies have no clear mandate. Nor are they popular with parents or staff.

Peter Mortimore was absolutely right. We need to get Gove. Labour has shown some willingness to fight – pointing to the difference between their Academies programme (which was supposed to target areas of social need) and Gove's, which is benefitting the better off.

But, as Labour District Councillor and parent campaigner Sarah Dodds argues, Labour needs to go much further. In particular it should target the absence of scrutiny and accountability. For example, the Education Select Committee has not

considered the issues. The only 'evidence' it has taken relates to Jamie Oliver's embarrassing TV 'Free school' circus.

There are many questions that remain unanswered. Peter Downes has exposed some of the financial issues. We don't know how Gove decides to approve an Academy conversion, or what criteria are used for Free School applications. Gove has already been found guilty of an 'abuse of public power' over the cancellation of BSF. As Andy Burnham pointed out, Gove found enough time to meet the Murdochs twenty-seven times, but never once visited an adult education college, sixth form college, or special school.

It is time Gove is held to account. We need a public inquiry and a national debate. There should be a 'pause for reflection' to consider the evidence, hear people's concerns and investigate the facts before any more Academy conversions or Free Schools are processed. There is also a wealth of knowledge about alternatives that needs to be heard.

Parents and the trade union movement have shown tremendous courage in taking up the fight. The AAA has supported groups all over the country. Our fight is part of a wider protest movement against all kinds of privatisation and cuts – in housing, the NHS, pensions and welfare.

Our task is to raise the level of debate and to challenge Gove's agenda in open and free discussions in every school, town and city across the country. We want to unite the resistance and fight for a good local school for every child.



Recommended reading

"Melissa Benn deserves – demands – to be read. This a passionate but well made argument for universal public education to promote every child's chances – not just for them, but for us." Will Hutton, author of *Them and Us: Changing Britain – Why We Need a Fair Society*

Anti Academies Alliance



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“A good local school for every child”

Essential first steps for campaigners

If your school has expressed an interest in becoming an Academy there are a number of immediate actions you can take:

- Contact the head teacher and Chair of Governors and ask them how the consultation process will work: Will there be a consultation document? Will there be an opportunity for both sides of the debate to be put in a meeting? Will there be a ballot?
- If you are not happy with the consultation process, initiate a petition/staff to circulate around parents calling for a proper consultation process. You could also organise a public meeting to discuss. If the process is doubtful, seek legal advice.
- If you are happy with the process, prepare your arguments against conversion.
- Contact the AAA office, local unions and community groups.
- Write letters to the press, local radio stations, MP and local councillors.
- Ask to address the Governors' meeting to explain your concerns.

Up and down the country parents, teachers, school staff, governors, head teachers and local councillors are standing up for our schools. Determined campaigning can stop your school becoming an Academy.



Parents and students at Perry Wood School, Worcester oppose academy conversion.

Primary heads speak out

In June, the government announced their intention to turn hundreds of 'underperforming' primary schools into Academies. We contacted schools directly in order to hear their views. These are some of the responses we received:

- *“I am absolutely 100% against Academies and will fight not to be one. I am an outstanding school.” Hampshire*
- *“Very concerned about poorly thought out reforms and children being used in a game of political ideology. There is so much conflict being created and pedagogy and high quality teacher collaboration and research is being compromised by market forces.” Leicestershire*
- *“I am a head teacher who is strongly against Academy conversion. I am also the head of a school serving an area of high social deprivation and will struggle to meet ever increasing floor targets to avoid forced Academy status. We have, thank goodness, met them this year! Given our context, at the moment, we are not able to convert on our own. We are therefore under pressure to consider Academy status models that would see us signing away varying degrees of our autonomy... another worry.” Kent*

The scandal of the cost of Gove's cash 'bribe'

Figures in a recent government consultation paper on the funding of Academies have revealed that Gove's policy of getting schools to convert to Academies is expected to cost nearly £600 million more than planned over the two year period 2011 – 2013.

Except in the DfE, it has been common knowledge for over a year that the policy of converting schools to Academies is costly and unsustainable, irrespective of its educational and social disadvantages.

A school leaving its Local Authority (LA) receives its normal funding and an extra grant called LACSEG (Local Authority Central Spend Equivalent Grant) to allow it to buy in the services it no longer gets from the LA. They also receive a £25,000 grant to help with the legal procedures involved in conversion and they get their insurance costs paid, often amounting to £90,000 depending on the size of the school.

As soon as the Bill became an



by Councillor **PETER DOWNES**

Act in July 2010, Heads and Governors of 'outstanding' schools did their sums and realised that the LACSEG gives them far more than they needed to replace the LA services. In arguing the case with governing bodies, many Heads specifically cited this financial advantage. This over-funding directly contradicts the government's statement that 'it is clear that there should be no financial advantage or disadvantage for a school converting to Academy status'.

The word spread quickly, hence the 'dash for cash' that has dominated the educational scene for the last year. Gove has trumpeted the 'success' of his policy, claiming that Heads are attracted by freedom and autonomy. In practice, Heads are going for the extra money, es-

pecially at a time when school funding is tight.

The true extent of the DfE's under-estimate of what it will be paying in LACSEG to Academies was revealed in figures published on 19th July. The figures showed that the expected LACSEG spend on Academies in existence and schools likely to convert within the next year will amount to £997 million (mid-range estimates).

This leaves a gap of £584 million. This is an astonishing figure in a time of national penury. Critics have pointed out that it is tantamount to a bribe to tempt schools to convert to Academies in order to justify Gove's flagship policy. In a time of national financial crisis, it is impossible to justify spending this amount of money on a minority of schools, predominantly the most favoured.

● *Peter Downes is a Cambridgeshire County Councillor, Vice-President of the Liberal Democrat Education Association and former Headteacher.*

Join the Anti Academies Alliance

Please find enclosed affiliation fee of £_____ and a donation of £_____

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Cheques payable to: Anti Academies Alliance
Return to: Anti Academies Alliance, PO Box 14412, Birmingham, B11 9DZ

Affiliation costs:
Trade Unions organisations: £250 national, £100 district and £40 local;
Parent and other organisations: £50 national, £25 district and £10 local;
Individual membership: £5

The Anti Academies Alliance is a campaign composed of parents, teachers, unions, governors, councillors and MPs.

The TUC, NASUWT, NUT, ATL, UCU, UNISON, UNITE, GMB, PCS, MU and FBU are affiliated to the Anti Academies Alliance.



This newspaper was produced with the assistance of Unite the Union

Design: www.smithplusbell.com Print: www.newstax.co.uk