

# Anti Academies Alliance



## Briefing

“A good  
local school  
for every  
child”

# WHY YOU SHOULD SAY NO TO ‘FREE’ SCHOOLS

The Conservative-led government wants private organisations to set up and run new state-funded schools. These so-called ‘free’ schools are academies, which means they are outside local authorities oversight, free from local accountability, free from national union pay and conditions agreements, with greater freedom over the curriculum and able to set their own admissions policies.

‘Free’ schools can be set up by groups of parents, community organisations, charities and businesses.

Many applications are from academy chains such as ARK, E-ACT and Harris, from groups of middle-class parents wanting grammar school-type education, from private schools seeking state funding, and from religious groups (over one-third of all applications).

This Briefing argues why you should say no to ‘free schools:

- Because they take pupils and money from existing schools.
- Because they increase social segregation.
- Because they aren’t the answer to raising standards.
- Because they will be run by business for profit.
- Because they threaten pay, working conditions and union rights.
- Because they are not democratically accountable.

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## 1. Because they take pupils and money from existing schools

'Free' schools damage existing schools in three ways. **BSF and IT programmes cancelled to subsidise 'Free' Schools**

Part of the capital and start-up costs comes from the scrapping of the Building Schools for the Future programme and part also comes from the Harnessing Technology Fund, intended for improving IT in schools.

**Running costs come from local authority budgets**

'Free' schools, like all academies, are given a share of the funding the local authority currently retains to spend on central services, reducing their capacity to support those schools and children most in need.

**'Free' Schools take pupils and money from neighbouring schools**

Because the money follows the child, neighbouring schools lose money, which has a negative effect on the quality of education they can offer, leads to job losses by teachers and other staff, and could even lead to schools being closed down.

## 2. Because they increase social segregation

Many 'free' schools will increase social segregation, either because they aim to attract 'academic' pupils at the expense of other local children or because they are run by religious organisations. For example, the 'free' schools being set up by Toby Young and Katharine Birbalsingh in London will both teach Latin, which is guaranteed to deter many working-class parents looking for an education for their children geared to today's needs.

Bolingbroke Academy is a 'free' school opening in Wandsworth, run by ARK and backed by leading City finance firms. Until a local campaign embarrassed ARK, pupils from a primary school with the highest level of deprivation in the borough were excluded from the catchment area, while four other primary schools in wealthier parts of the same area had been chosen as feeders, including one school which was further away. Labour MP Lisa Nandy said: "This is a shocking indictment of the Government's policy on 'free' schools, transferring money from the poor to the rich."

### Which are the 24 'free' schools which opened in 2011?

Of the 24 'free' schools, 11 have some religious association. Several of the schools are formerly private schools which have taken the opportunity to be funded by the taxpayer.

The West London 'free' school syllabus will include compulsory Latin.

The Maharishi school in Lancashire will include daily transcendental meditation.

Kings Science Academy, Bradford, will teach etiquette, fine dining, horse riding and archery.

Two are run by ARK, the academy sponsors who are made up of Hedge Fund managers, the people who pushed the economy into crisis.

London's first 'free' school – The Aldborough E-ACT primary school in Redbridge – has a 10 hour day and 4 week summer holiday. They boast "Aldborough will not adhere to national conditions of service for teachers".

### Most 'free' school applications fail

In the first wave there were 323 applications, of which only 40 were accepted for consideration and only 17 had their business case approved.



The Nishkam primary and secondary 'free' schools being set up in Handsworth, Birmingham, by the Guru Nanak Gurdwara, are Sikh schools. Bhagwant Singh, campaigning against them, says "They are likely to only attract Sikh children. I would say to a Sikh parent, choose an existing local school where children from different backgrounds are all mixed together. When they're separate, it's bad for the community. And if the 'free' schools take children from other schools it could result in them being closed."

'Free' schools in Sweden are a model for the Tories' policy. The evidence shows that they increase social segregation. According to the Swedish National Agency for Education "choice in the school system has led to a tendency to segregate in terms of pupils' sociocultural background, performance and ethnic background." Skolverket (the Swedish National Agency for Education) (2006) *Schools like any other? Independent schools as part of the system 1991-2004*. Stockholm: Skolverket. Page 51

## 3. Because they aren't the answer to raising standards

One of the main arguments used by leading advocates of 'free' schools is that they will reduce social inequality in the school system by providing better schools in poor areas. That was the aim of Labour's academies, but the evidence shows that they are no more successful than local authority schools with similar intakes, and those that have done better have done so by changing their intake to attract more pupils from middle-class backgrounds

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and by entering them for easier vocational exams instead of GCSEs. Evidence from the Tories' models – Swedish 'free' schools and US charter schools – also shows that they do no better than other schools, unless it is by selecting higher-achieving pupils.

The most recent large-scale study of US charter schools was published in 2009 by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University: *Multiple Choice: Charter school performance in 16 states*. It concluded that "17 percent provide superior education opportunities for their students. Nearly half of the charter schools nationwide have results that are no different from the local public school options and over a third, 37 percent, deliver learning results that are significantly worse than their students would have realized had they remained in traditional public schools." CREDO (Center for Research on Education Outcomes) (2009) *Multiple Choice: Charter school performance in 16 states*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University. Page 1.

In Sweden "The children from highly educated families gain mostly from education in independent schools, but the impact on families and immigrants who had received a low level of education is close to zero." Wiborg S (2011) *Learning Lessons from the Swedish Model. Forum 52(3)* page 283.

The Swedish Education Minister, Bertil Ostberg, said "The 'free' schools are generally attended by children of better educated and wealthy families making things even more difficult for children attending ordinary schools in poor areas." (*Daily Mirror*, 30 May 2010)

#### Swedish pupils slide in new global ranking

Sweden came in 19th overall out of 65 OECD countries and partners, far behind OECD partner Shanghai, China and OECD leaders Korea and Finland, the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) 2009 survey revealed.

Compared with PISA 2000, Sweden has lost 19 points and now has 497, compared with 556 for Shanghai, 539 for Korea and 536 for Finland. The OECD average is 493.

**Literacy:** the Swedish results have worsened, with the reading comprehension of 15-year-olds at the PISA average.

**Mathematics:** Since the 2003 survey, Swedish students have lost 15 points and currently perform at an average level.

**Science:** for the first time, Swedish students have fallen below the OECD average in science. Sweden

#### Pandering to social prejudices

Head teachers in Bristol have signed a letter raising concerns about the impact of the Bristol 'free' school on other schools in the area. Bristol 'free' school is the largest 'free' school to open so far.

Clare Bradford, headteacher of Henbury School in Bristol, says

"In the four schools local to the Bristol 'free' school there are more than 300 spare places just in Year 7, largely due to a big change in the demographic nature of the area."

"The 'free' school is being set up in an affluent area and will attract middle-class parents away from my school and they have aggressively marketed themselves to do so. The whole project is simply pandering to social prejudices. They haven't consulted with us either, and they have a legal obligation to do so, so we are now considering legal action."

"How can it be right to spend tax-payers' money on extra provision when all the schools have vastly rising results and value added scores?"

"Schools are not businesses. If they fail, it is the children who will suffer and the children whose schools will lose teachers and some of their option choices. They are playing a political game with it."

[www.bbc.co.uk/news/mobile/education-14747635](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/mobile/education-14747635)



is now six points below the OECD average and the survey projects a downward trend in this area.

#### 4. Because they will be run by business for profit

The myth is that 'free' schools will be run by parents. The truth is that they will be run by companies for profit. The government received so many incompetent applications that it had to tighten up the regulations. 'Free' school evangelist Toby Young complained that it would be "virtually impossible" for groups of parents to start their own schools – it's "much more about encouraging multi-academy sponsors setting up schools."

Numerous leading edu-businesses such as Gems, Pearson, Serco, Tribal, Nord Anglia, Cambridge Education, as well as US-based Edison Learning and two leading Swedish chains, are planning to make profits out of 'free' schools. Not only will they set them up on behalf of parents and others, they will take over the running. And don't think it's the parents who will make the key decisions; it's the company. For example, Appleyards offers to "Build a workforce that reflects your school vision; recruit and appoint senior leaders, including principals; determine the curriculum – what will your teachers teach and to whom?"

Zenna Atkins, last year's chair of Ofsted, is now CEO of a company called Wey Education, which plans to run a chain of academies and 'free' schools. She calls for companies to run schools for profit. (TES 20 May 2011). According to her website "Wey Education is developing a schools operating framework and education delivery model...The

# to 'Free' Schools

model ensures that a surplus can be generated annually based on state per pupil funding.”

At present, ‘free’ schools cannot be actually bid for and owned by these profit-hungry companies, unlike Swedish ‘free’ schools, but there is a powerful lobby demanding just that, ranging from the Adam Smith Institute to the Confederation of British Industry. Given the shortage of applicants which satisfy even the government’s criteria, and its commitment to privatising the public sector, it seems only the fear of a backlash of opposition is holding Gove back from agreeing.

## 5. Because they threaten pay, working conditions and union rights

‘Free’ schools, like other academies, do not have to pay national union rates for teachers and support staff, or abide by national working conditions. In fact, they do not even have to recognise trade unions, and most of them don’t. And, unlike other academies, they do not even have to employ qualified teachers. Existing staff who apply to work in a ‘free’ school will not be protected under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE) and will be required to accept the ‘free’ school’s contract. This is a recipe for cutting pay, worsening conditions, and destroying the ability of the education unions to defend their members, in order to boost private profit.

Much is made of the KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) school system in the USA. Under the KIPP model, schools operate for six days a week and there is a longer school day and school year. Teachers make home visits, work in the holidays and give pupils their mobile phone numbers.

## 6. Because they are not democratically accountable

### The New Schools Network – a Tory Trojan horse

The government set up the New Schools Network to advise about ‘free’ schools, giving it £500,000 without advertising the initial contract. But it is not an independent or neutral body. It is run by Rachel Wolf, an ex-adviser to Gove; its trustees represent the academy lobby; and its job is to promote ‘free’

### The very antithesis of social cohesion

Professor Gus John is very concerned about the proposed Michaela ‘free’ school being set up in Lambeth by Katherine Birbalsingh:

“We cannot address the issue of black underachievement in isolation from the other divisions in schooling and without regard to how such schools will impact upon funding for other children (including those hundreds of other black children who won’t gain access to Katharine’s school), each of whom has a right to a good school in their community. This is a recipe for greed, individualism, competitiveness and the very antithesis of social cohesion.”

“Katharine Birbalsingh seems to think that NO state run school could provide quality education or equip black children with sound values that make them fit for living in civil society. That is a gross insult to those thousands of teachers who do just that every single year, including in an increasing number of those virtually all black schools in the Borough of Lambeth.”

“Birbalsingh’s backward and uninformed position simply plays to neo-liberal ideology and to the legitimate anxieties of black parents. But, to get people agreeing with you about a given problem does not in itself justify your particular solution to that problem.”

<http://freeschools.sayingno.org>

schools. The NSN has since been given a further two years of financing of just over £1 million.

The NSN has been caught up in a scandal about how it is promoted by the government.

Dominic Cummings, a confidant of Gove who was freelancing for the charity at the time, told a senior civil servant: “NSN is not giving out to you, the media or anybody else any figure on ‘expressions of interest’ for PQs, FOIs or anything else. Further, NSN has not, is not, and will never answer a single FOI request made to us concerning anything at all.”

### Set up without consultation

‘Free’ schools can be set up on demand by as few as 50 parents. They don’t need to consult the local community, or neighbouring schools, or the local authority, before getting government approval. After that, any consultation is a sham because the school can just ignore opposition and go ahead.

### Undemocratic governing bodies

Local authority school governing bodies are one-third parents and have staff and local authority governors. ‘Free’ school governing bodies only need a minimum of two elected parents. The rest of the governors are appointed by the ‘free’ school owners, with no entitlement to staff or local authority representatives.

### Outside the local authority, unaccountable to the local community

‘Free’ schools, like other academies, are not part of the local authority system. They are accountable only to the secretary of state, not to the local community. They come under the control of the Young People’s Learning Agency, a quango which will soon be bigger and more remote than any local authority in the country.

Local Councils cannot block ‘free’ schools being set up and councillors have no role if problems arise for parents or neighbouring local authority schools. One major problem area is admissions and the provision of pupil places. This requires effective planning to ensure that the needs of the whole community are met and the expense of unnecessary surplus places is minimised. The spread of ‘free’ schools and other academies, all acting as their own admissions authorities, makes planning impossible. The Coalition Government claims to want to increase localism but in practice it is destroying the role of local authorities and replacing local democracy with a fragmented and chaotic market system.

## “Doubts grow over the success of Sweden’s ‘free’ schools experiment”

SNS, a prominent business-funded thinktank, issued a report in September that sharply reversed its normal pro-market stance. The entry of private operators into state-funded education, it argued, had increased segregation and may not have improved

educational standards at all.

“The empirical evidence showing that competition is good is not really credible, because they can’t distinguish between grade inflation and real gains,” Dr Jonas Vlachos, who wrote the report on education, told *The Observer*.

Vlachos, an associate professor of economics at Stockholm University, based his argument on his research which showed that students

who entered gymnasium [sixth form] from ‘free’ secondary schools on average went on to get lower grades over the next three years than those who had entered with the same grade from municipal secondary schools.

Vlachos suspects that, because schools rather than external examining boards mark students’ work, ‘free’ schools are more generous than municipal schools in

the grades they give. “There’s been tremendous grade inflation in Swedish schools” he said.

Jan Björklund, the minister of education, moved to tighten central control over schools and is soon to launch a parliamentary inquiry into competition and ‘free’ schools.

“Loopholes in the legislation have meant that ‘free’ schools can elect not to have a library, student

counselling and school nurses” he complained. “And as they get just as much money as the municipal schools, the owners have been able to withdraw the surplus.”

[www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/sep/10/sweden-free-schoolsexperiment](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/sep/10/sweden-free-schoolsexperiment)

The SNS report, only in Swedish, is here: [www.sns.se/forlag/20-ar-med-forandringar-iskolan-vad-har-hant-med-likvardigheten](http://www.sns.se/forlag/20-ar-med-forandringar-iskolan-vad-har-hant-med-likvardigheten)

## No consultation, no consideration

Michael Foley, headteacher of Great Cornard upper school in Suffolk, where two ‘free’ schools are set to open in the next two years, believes Gove’s policy will lead to segregation:

“Whatever you think of ‘free’ schools as a policy, we have argued for the intelligent application of that policy. But ‘free’ schools are being opened ad hoc on the basis that there happens to be a building spare.

“No consultation, no consideration of what the impact is of the school opening in that area and, when every school is making cuts, to hear that the local ‘free’ school is being given £4.5m for its buildings and has just 178 students but guaranteed funding for two years. You start to ask, where is the equality?”

“It is causing a lot of angst and upset in the system and it is so potentially divisive, channelling one group from one background off from those from another background. What we have is a bun fight for the middle-class aspirational children: we have lots of glossy prospectuses and PR in order to recruit the children that are most likely to do well.

“And I don’t buy this idea that admission is open to all. The minute you put Latin on the curriculum for the first few years or put pupils in stripey blazers, you will only recruit one kind of child, regardless of how many times you say your school is for everybody.”

[www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/jun/11/michael-gove-free-schools-middle-class](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/jun/11/michael-gove-free-schools-middle-class)

## Heads think ‘free’ schools are ill thought out

A recent report “London Councils – The Changing Education Environment in London” was conducted across London’s 33 local authorities and involved 347 school leaders.

Their attitude to ‘free’ schools was that “Headteachers and Chairs of Governors felt that the idea of ‘free’ schools was ill-thought out, and their reactions to the idea of ‘free’ schools were highly negative.” 29% thought that the diversity of their pupil intake would decrease; 36% thought that demand for places in their school would decrease; 34% thought that competition for staff would increase.

[www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/policy/lobbying/children/schools/schoolsreformresearchproject.htm](http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/policy/lobbying/children/schools/schoolsreformresearchproject.htm)

## Say No to ‘Free’ Schools – they can be stopped!

The ‘free’ schools policy does not have majority public support.

In 2010 an Ipsos Mori poll found that:

44% considered schools being run directly by private companies, religious groups, charities or groups of parents rather than being run by the local council as a bad idea, compared to 24% who supported it.

62% thought that local authorities are best placed to run schools.

In 2011 a YouGov survey of parents in 22 local authority areas where ‘free’ schools are being planned found that about half said local authorities should run schools and 43% said teachers, compared to 30% for charities, 25% for parents and 15% for private companies (people could specify as many options as they liked).

31% said they were against or “tended to be against” a new ‘free’ school, with most undecided.

Of course we all want the best education for our children. We recognise the equality gap in our schools and we share the concerns of those parents who feel that schools are not meeting the needs of their children.

But we say to them that the answer is not ‘free’ schools, the answer lies in parents and communities working with schools and local authorities to continue to improve our existing school system.

# What you can do

If you find out that there is a ‘free’ school application in your area, there are a number of things you can do:

- Since ‘free’ schools will impact on pupil numbers at other local schools contact the headteacher and governors at local schools and find out what they think. In Lambeth two local Headteachers spoke out about the impact of the Michaela ‘Free’ school.
- Find out if the ‘free’ school group is holding information meetings and organise local parents and teachers to attend. Some of the people at the meeting may have been influenced by the glossy leaflets and can be won round to opposing the ‘free’ school idea.

- Organise a public meeting to explain the case against the ‘free’ school. We can help arrange speakers.

- The DfE are required to consider the impact the ‘free’ school will have on the local schools and community. Encourage people to write protest letters outlining the impact the ‘free’ school will have on your area.

- Approach local councillors and MPs
- Write a petition

Across the country parents, school union members and concerned citizens are campaigning against ‘free’ schools being set up. Visit the Anti Academies Alliance website for news of local campaigns which you can support and join.



**This Briefing was produced by the Anti Academies Alliance. We are a campaign composed of parents, teachers, unions, governors, councillors and MPs.**

**The TUC, NUT, NASUWT, ATL, UCU, UNISON, UNITE, GMB, PCS, FBU and MU are affiliates.**



Newspapers

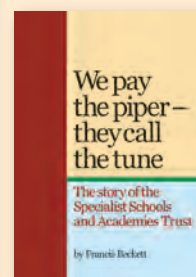


reports



factsheets

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pamphlets



and flyers

If you would like to get involved in campaigning against Academies and ‘Free’ schools, please contact us at: office@antiacademies.org.uk; 07528 201 697; PO Box 14412, Birmingham, B11 9DZ