

DOWNHILLS SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY FACTSHEET 5th January 2012

The Issues

The Secretary of State, Michael Gove wants to force our school to become an Academy against the wishes of the Governing body as well as many teachers, parents and others within the local community. On the 12th December 2012 the school received a letter from the Department of Education which said the Secretary of State's was 'minded to' make an Academy Order closing the school down and reconstituting it as an Academy. The DoE also threatened to dissolve the governing body and appoint an interim executive body (IEB) to replace it if the school did not pass a resolution to become an Academy, with a named sponsor agreed with the Department by the 27 January 2012. That deadline has now been extended to 3 February 2012. Downhills is one of the first primary schools in the country that may be forced to adopt Academy status.

Our School

Downhills Primary School is a Community School situated in South Tottenham that is over a century old. The school serves a diversely multicultural local community in one of London's most deprived boroughs. Just over 72% of pupils have English as a second language - over 40 languages are spoken by pupils of the school. 95% are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest groups of minority ethnic backgrounds are Turkish/Kurdish, Caribbean, Bangladeshi, African, Gypsy Roma and Eastern European. A significant number of children are refugees or asylum seekers. More than 45% of pupils are eligible for free school meals – a figure well above the national average. The number of our families living in deprivation is twice the national average. High proportions of children start and leave during the school year.

An Improving School Not a Failing School

The most recent Ofsted inspection took place in January 2011 and found that the overall effectiveness of the school was inadequate and issued a Notice to Improve. However Ofsted was satisfied with the capacity of the school for sustained improvement and in relation to the leadership and management of the school, Ofsted commented that *"Recent improvements in attendance, areas of accelerated progress and accurate self-evaluation indicate that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further."*

Since then dramatic changes have been introduced at the school including:

- A combined local authority and school action plan to address the areas identified in need of improvement;
- Decisive action taken to eradicate under performance within the staff and establishment, resulting in six new appointments of teaching staff from September 2011;
- Monthly monitoring of action plan progress in conjunction with the head of standards from the local authority who is a registered Ofsted inspector;

Ofsted Monitoring Visit - 15 September 2011

This had encouraging results. The HMI (Her Majesty's Inspector) was satisfied with the progress that the school was making to address the issues for improvement and raise pupil's attainment. In a letter dated 16 September 2011 the HMI wrote *"... there is a clear trend of improvement. School data and pupils' books indicate improvements in attainment, particularly in Key Stage 1. Progress has accelerated in some year groups since the previous inspection because after significant changes to staffing in the autumn term, the school has a core of experienced senior staff with high levels of expertise. They are providing effective help to colleagues which has enabled them to improve their practice. As a result satisfactory improvements have been made in moving the quality of provision on since the previous inspection."*

The improvement in the schools performance is indicated by unprecedented Key Stage 2 (KS2) results for 2011 that saw pupils attainment rise above the national floor standard of 60% to at least 61%. This is an improvement of 4% from 2010 results and 24% from 2009 results.

In addition there was 10% rise in attainment at Key Stage 1(KS1) in 2011 over the 2010 results and the school's 2011 Foundation Stage results were the most improved over three years for the whole of Haringey.

Where We Are Now

The school expects a follow up Ofsted Inspection that is due any time from 25 January 2012 until 25 May 2012. We have met with the Secretary of State who has been told of the governors strong desire that the school should be allowed to focus on improving its performance in preparation for the follow up Ofsted Inspection at the culmination of almost 12 months sustained progress under the School Improvement Plan. In addition the governing body notified the Secretary of State that there was strong opposition to the Academy proposal amongst the school community and that the governing body was obliged to conduct a proper consultation on conversion to an Academy.

Why We Object to the Academy Proposals

The school is improving and is addressing all the problems identified by Ofsted. Further examples include;

- At 94%+ the schools attendance record is the best for 3yrs and in line with national averages (despite the impact of cultural holidays such as EID).
- At Early Years Foundation Stage we are the most improved school in Haringey in the past 3yrs, and all our Ofsted ratings were 'Good' or 'Satisfactory' - despite huge challenges at that stage (with a high proportion of children from 1-room accommodation, or from homes where no English is spoken).
- At 48% our level of Disadvantaged pupils is well above the 19% national average. In this group nationally pupils score 58% in SATs. At Downhills they performed better than that at 59%.
- Rarely if ever do we have to exclude pupils.

As well as having an upward trajectory of improved results, Downhills is also good at things that are hard to measure like community involvement, art and music. For example every child takes part in instrumental music lessons. We host the Haringey orchestra, the Tottenham choir and have conducted art displays at the school in partnership with the National Gallery.

We are currently in receipt of (in Ofsted's words - Sept 2011) 'good support' and 'robust analysis' from our current 'sponsor' Haringey council (an elected and accountable body).

To remove the school from public control is disproportionate to the problems the school faces – we think it's a politically-motivated sledgehammer to crack a nut. More resources could help the school improve even faster - schools in Haringey receive up to £1,500 less per pupil than schools in inner London boroughs, because Haringey is funded as an outer London borough.

There is no evidence that academies improve standards in the primary phase. They are not a one size fits all solution. Haringey's Headteachers support our stance saying that this is an "untried and unproven way of delivering school improvement". Our children need consistency, not experiments.

We have committed teachers and a strong governing body of people with a wide range of skills (law, accountancy, finance, media, social work, psychology) and the support of the local community who want the school to remain in local authority control.

Our Legal Challenge – Judicial Review

We have instructed lawyers and sent a pre-action letter to the Treasury Solicitor who acts for the Secretary of State. We believe that if the DoFE continue with their plans they may be acting unlawfully because:

- the DoFE's proposals for an Academy and/or to appoint an IEB are premature when the school's further Ofsted review is due at any time between 25 January to 25 May 2012 given the significant improvement that the school can demonstrate since January 2011;
- the Secretary of State's timetable does not enable the governing body to consult on whether the school should convert to an academy. The time given for consultation is inadequate particularly as almost three quarters (72.8%) of our children come from homes where English is not a first language. Many of our families come from hard-to-reach communities.

The Treasury Solicitor has until the 19 January 2012 to reply to our claim.

Who We Are

This factsheet has been prepared by members of the Downhills Primary School Governing Body.

Forthcoming Events (organised by the Save Downhills Campaign)

David Lammy MP's Parliamentary Petition <http://www.hcaa.org.uk/2011/12/david-lammys-downhills-school-petition/>

9 January 2012 Public Meeting on Monday 9th at Downhills primary school, 7pm

11 January 2010 Recording of Save Our School song at Downhills primary school, 3.30pm

12 January 2012 Downhills to be raised in parliamentary debate at the House of Commons by David Lammy, 6pm

13 January 2012 'Hug Our Community School' event at Downhills, 3.30pm