

# Anti Academies Alliance



“A good local school for every child”

April 2014

Voluntary academies, forced academies and free schools...

# Keep fighting

Government figures show that 58 per cent of secondary schools are now academies. It is not clear if the other 42 per cent intend to convert or will be forced. Gove's original target was 100 per cent by 2015. He will miss that, but that is no cause for celebration. Secondary education in England is now a patch work of stand-alone academies, academy chains and free schools overlaying the already complex faith, voluntary and community school system. It is a recipe for social segregation and decline, at least if Sweden's experience is anything to go by.

As you will see below, the alarming failure rate in academies has left the credibility of the programme in tatters, yet it goes on like a zombie risen from the dead.

A very different picture emerges from the primary sector. (We have not seen the data on the Alternative Provision and SEN school conversions). Only one in eight primary schools have converted. Of these, around 500 are so-called 'failing schools', although only a handful of these have been forcibly converted, with most being 'bullied' into volunteering. Most primary academies are schools that were already outstanding so any claims that academy conversions are raising standards needs to be carefully examined. Likewise, anyone arguing for academy conversions needs to



have their motives closely scrutinised.

This briefing aims to support people who want to scrutinise and, hopefully, oppose academy conversions. But first it is important to be clear: The AAA is not against teachers, parents or students who work or learn in academies. On the contrary, we urge them to organise and fight for their rights – as teachers did early this year at the STEM 6 'free school' in Islington. In a South Tyneside Academy, teacher and

support staff unions are balloting over job cuts.

We are, as ever, strongly opposed to politicians and the coterie of 'system leaders' who are driving this policy forward, often for personal advantage. For over a decade, politicians – from all parties – have claimed that academies offered something better in school improvement. That claim is unsustainable. That's why we keep fighting.



## The war on primary schools

# New floor targets: recipe for disaster

The announcement in April 2014 that there will be new floor targets from 2016 – 85 per cent children must reach Level 4b – has nothing to do with raising standards. It is about accelerating the number of academy conversions and thus privatising state education.

There will be no new resources to help children reach these targets. On the contrary, austerity means schools' budgets are frozen. Teachers will not get any more time. They will continue to

drown in paperwork generated by anachronistic levels, league tables and performance-related pay.

Some estimates suggest that around 90 per cent of primary schools will become 'failing' schools and thus ripe for conversion to academy status. Add to this the suspicion that stand-alone academies are no longer allowed by the government, it is clear that Gove and DfE have cooked up a recipe for total privatisation. Our schools will be run by a series of giant chains. It is a nightmare scenario. We need to make a stand against this now.



## Check list for primary heads – please don't let politicians or brokers bully you into academy status

- There is no evidence that academy conversion improves a school. OFSTED argue it can be a distraction.
- OFSTED 'failure' is not reason for conversion – it is time for relentless focus on school improvement. Dips in performance are normal – for all types of school.
- Even academies are 'failing'. So don't be pressurised by brokers. They are not impartial. They are contractors with targets to fulfil.
- Some schools have successfully resisted conversion. The key is to stand your ground

and get support. It is exactly what you advise your children to do when faced with a bully in the playground.

- Demand the Local Authority help. It is their responsibility. Get an action plan. Ask other local schools to help and reach out to your staff and parents. It is their school and they deserve to be involved in the decision, not just consulted as part of *fait accompli*.

Academy conversion is a distraction from school improvement. Legal and structural changes don't improve teaching and learning.



## Opposing

It has never been easy to stop academy conversions. Gove and his cronies would have us believe that is because they are popular. They are not, at least with most people. But they are popular with a particular type of head teacher or governing body who are either too weak to see the alternatives or too greedy to spurn the opportunity for personal gain. In some cases they are popular with Local Authorities who are busy washing their hands of responsibility under the cover of the excuse that austerity means they can no longer support schools.

It does not have to be this way. This may sound harsh, but you need to be a particularly blinkered person to have missed the evidence on school improvement! The NFER findings makes it clear if you are not sure! Academies conversion is not about school improvement. It is about privatisation.

But these difficulties do not mean it is impossible to stop conversion – whether forced or voluntary. Perhaps the first thing to do is ask some questions. To whom does the school belong? Who should decide its future? The late Tony



# conversion

Benn, a former patron of AAA, often urged people to ask those in power certain questions (see box, right). When we approach the future of our school in this way, it is possible to see that governors, despite what the legislation says, should not make the decision alone.

## All sorts of victories are possible

- In 2013 parents at Snaresbrook Primary fought a high profile campaign. They had the support of the Local Authority, parents and staff. Eventually they 'put enough backbone' in the governing body to say no and the DfE backed off.
- Barking & Dagenham council launched a legal challenge against a forced academy conversion by arguing that they already had a better school improvement plan in operation and that a academy conversion would disrupt it.
- A parent, working almost alone, managed to expose the shambles of the conversion process at a CoFE school in Gloucester. The plan had to be dropped, at least for the time being.
- A school in Haringey, north London, was told it must convert. They went along with the DfE brokers and listened to a series of presentations by potential sponsors. They were careful enough to do 'due diligence' on each sponsor and found to their surprise that none were suitable. After a year or so, the DfE seemed to lose interest as the school was already improving.

## Tony Benn's questions

Ask the powerful five questions:

- What power have you got?
- Where did you get it from?
- In whose interests do you exercise it?
- To whom are you accountable?
- How can we get rid of you?

# What to do if you want to fight academy conversion?

1. Please contact us as soon as possible. Every school has a different set of circumstances. We can offer specific help and connections to other networks that may be able to help. Email or text for a copy of our briefing. We can also help with leaflets and meetings.
2. Let your head and Chair of Governors know that you are considering opposing academy conversion.
3. Speak to others – parents, staff, governors and the LA councillors.



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Amount: £..... In words.....

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# Anti Academies Alliance



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## The academies' hall of shame

It is reported that the DfE now has a special unit dedicated to 'market failures'. It must be very busy. There are too many scandals and failure to list here. The scale of problem is huge – fourteen academies chains have been barred from expansion, with EACT having 10 schools taken out of its control. No Local Authority ever failed so badly. The spectre of cronyism has raised its ugly head at the Kings Science Academy and the obscene waste is revealed in the £45 million spent on just one free school in Westminster run by Gove's favourite Tory party donor Lord Harris.

But the AAA is not about blaming individual schools for failure. Academies are schools like any other. Naming and shaming does nothing to improve them. Nevertheless we do want to see the politicians and 'system leaders' responsible for this chaos held to account.

### **This is our roll call in the Academies Hall of Shame:**

- *The generation of school leaders who embraced academy conversion whilst knowing the risks. They took the money and ran. Some, like Sir Bruce Liddington, of EACT, did a spell working in the DfE and then left to become a CEO. They built themselves a business and paid themselves a fat salary. Hurrah!*
- *The school governors who were too cowardly to stand up to brokers or too blinkered to consider alternatives. You could have said NO.*
- *The senior civil servants and ex local authority officials who have set up academy sponsor chains, such as CFBT, and then used their connections to lever their chain into schools.*
- *The Local Authorities, such as Bromley and Lincolnshire, who have tried to wash their hands of schools, abandoning their responsibilities to schools for ideological reasons.*

● *The policy wonks and media luvvies such as Toby Young, Peter Hyman and James O'Shaughnessy who have used their connections to build free schools for themselves.*

● *The politicians – Gove and Adonis – schooled in the dark arts of Blairism. These two have proselytised for the academy programme using all the powers invested in offices of the Secretary of State and Ministers of Education.*

These 'system leaders' need to be held to account. We need to remind people of their role. If you would like to add a name or organisation please email use at [office@antiacademies.org.uk](mailto:office@antiacademies.org.uk)

The AAA remains committed to fighting free schools and academies conversions. We believe we need a wider National Campaign for Education to set up a clear agenda for a system based on equality and high quality.