

Anti Academies Alliance



“A good local school for every child”



Parents, communities, students and staff – fighting forced academisation.

Fight forced academisation

Forced academisation is a failing policy. It does not improve schools. It is costly and divisive. But it can be defeated. The victory at William Torbitt school in Redbridge, east London shows it can be overturned.

The DfE was forced to acknowledge this when it withdrew the academy order at William Torbitt, but the government seem unwilling to draw sensible conclusions from what has happened there. Figures from both Ofsted and the Local Government Association show that councils, rather than academy chains, are better at turning round schools that have been rated as

‘inadequate’ (not a term that we believe is helpful in any case).

Other schools continue to be forced to convert against the wishes of parents and staff. In some cases, such as the forced conversion of the Barclay School in Stevenage by Lord Nash’s Future Academies Trust, there has been a strong whiff of cronyism, if not corruption.

Acknowledge hostility

We need a concerted effort to bring an end to forced academisation and we can’t afford to wait until the next election. The Tories are not invulnerable – both the National Audit Office and Education Select Committee

have raised serious concerns about the risk that this policy poses to schools. A broad-based, coordinated campaign that brings local campaigns together within a national campaign can help shift government policy.

But this fight is only one aspect of the wider struggle against the privatisation of our schools. There has been a significant growth in campaigning against voluntary conversions too. It is important that this widespread hostility to academisation continues to be acknowledged and a clear road map is created to restore local democratic accountability to all our schools.

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Forced academisation: why we've fought it

We asked parent and community campaigners from a number of battles against forced academisation over the last period to explain why they decided to fight what was happening to their schools. Successful or not, these have all been inspiring campaigns and they have kept the issue of forced academisation in the spotlight. Some were supported by their local authority and MP, some weren't. What they all have in common is the belief that their schools should be under local democratic control. No one can't but be inspired by these campaigners. We can learn so much from all of them!



William Torbitt Primary, Redbridge

Our campaign was against the forced academisation of our school after Ofsted deemed it 'Inadequate'. Whilst there was no guarantee that we would win by campaigning against the academy order, we didn't give in, but fought back with full force. Our campaign was supported by parents, the community, staff, the local authority, local politicians and trade unions.

There were two main reasons we fought against the academy order. Firstly, to protect the education of our children and to ensure that they receive the best school experience possible. This of course is not guaranteed under an academy which can employ unqualified teachers. Secondly, to protect the wellbeing and working conditions of our staff who are a brilliant and amazing staff team. Because of our campaign and because of our staff members working so hard, we achieved a new Ofsted rating of 'Good' and as a result the academy order was revoked.

● William Torbitt anti-academisation campaign

John Roan, Greenwich



When we read the Ofsted report in June 2018 we were in shock. It described a school we didn't recognise. Yes, we had some difficulties (five Heads in four years) but it was damning. Inadequate is not a word we should use about people or schools.

Forced academisation is the most outrageous attack on democracy and accountability, where unelected civil servants (RSCs) along



South Shields

We decided to fight because of a 'leak' during the summer holidays of the school possibly closing. Parents, staff and students were opposed to the closure.

The academy order was the main 'excuse' for the closure, although the real reason is still ambiguous. Had the council fought alongside us, the academy order could have been revoked – the Ofsted inspection in May highlighted improvements so the academy order was not needed.

We have an incredible staff who are committed to our children's education. Parents believe in our school and staff and that was why we chose to fight against the academy order and against the decision to close that was made way before any consultation.

Forced academisations are not benefiting our schools – they are destroying them.

South Shields School has fallen victim to a terrible government policy.

Huge PFI debts and direct academy orders are creating enormous pressure on our schools at a time when school budgets are already being cut.

Schools should be given a chance to improve before major decisions like direct academy orders are placed on them. Get rid of academy orders.

● South Shields anti-academisation campaign

Budmouth College, Weymouth



Following an 'inadequate' Ofsted inspection, Budmouth College was placed under an academy order. The sponsor, Aspirations Academy Trust (AAT), was chosen by the RSC in January 2019.

Outstanding for many years, we believed that Budmouth had the potential to become good or outstanding again without academisation. This appeared to be supported by an interim Ofsted report. Catherine Shaw, chair of Budmouth's IEB, said 'the school had wanted the opportunity to come out

of special measures and stay as a local authority school but this had not been possible', *Dorset Echo*, 2019.

The lack of future accountability, transparency of the due diligence process, financial implications, behavioural strategies and SEN provision at Atlantic Academy on Portland (also under AAT's control) are all areas of concern. Some schools under AAT's umbrella have reported a decline in pupil numbers, including Atlantic, with a subsequent request to reduce PAN.

We fought and won the arguments, but Aspiration steamrollered in.

● Budmouth College anti-academisation campaign

Littlegreen Special, Chichester



The campaign against the forced academisation of Littlegreen Special School failed to stop Solent Academies from taking over the school in 2019.

Campaigners warned of the detrimental effect academisation would have on pupils, how the unnecessary disruption would unsettle them and undo the positive work that led Ofsted to judge the school as taking effective action. Parents' and campaigners' voices were not listened to.

Solent's lack of SEMH expertise and insistence on immediately changing routines and systems has brought chaos to the school. Many of the boys now feel anxious and

unsafe. Reports of what they are seeing have led some parents to have significant safeguarding concerns.

Privatisation of education is wrong. Schools should be LA controlled, stakeholders should be listened to and education should never be a business deal. There is no proof that converting schools to academy status offers better value for taxpayers' money.

We fought hard for the pupils and staff of Littlegreen. If you're currently fighting, fight harder. Don't let what happened to Littlegreen happen to your school.

● Littlegreen anti-academisation campaign



Mackie Hill Junior and Infant, Wakefield

The attempted forced academisation of Mackie Hill School is being driven by blatant political game-playing on the part of the DfE.

Mackie Hill School received an inadequate OFSTED rating in 2017. Changes were made, culminating in an extremely positive HMI Monitoring Visit in December 2018. The RSC (Vicky Beer) chose to ignore the substantive evidence of progress made and nominated the New Collaborative Learning Trust (Pontefract New College) as an 'appropriate' sponsor. PNC is a 16-plus provider with no track record of primary education.

It was clear that forced academisation was simply not needed given that the school was no longer failing and parents were united in their opposition to such a ridiculous choice of sponsor.

In a bizarre move, the HTB failed to make a decision on the approval of the nominated sponsor and, astonishingly, the decision was passed back to Lord Agnew, who ignored the evidence and approved PNC.

PNC has now withdrawn. It knew it wasn't wanted or needed!

Ofsted has just revisited and judged our wonderful school Good.

Politics has no place in the education of our children and we will now be redoubling our efforts to overturn this short-sighted and unnecessary forced academy order and to keep it as a local community school within the local family of schools.

● Mackie Hill anti-academisation campaign

Barclay, Stevenage



Our community campaign to resist the forced academisation by Future Academies Trust began following a public meeting called by a local Labour councillor in November 2018.

Barclay School was placed in Special Measures in October 2016, triggering an academy order, however 18 months later, efforts by the Barclay community turned things around; getting out of this OFSTED category in record timing. This demonstrated that our school was heading in the right direction; academisation was not the answer.

However, the order remained, and alongside pressure from the local Conservative MP, the original agreed sponsor was removed, and FAT imposed. This promised major changes to the curriculum and teaching

style; not only was this bad for children's education, it was also bad for staff.

With strikes, demonstrations, and petitioning, we united our community against the imposition – sadly, we did not manage to stop the Trust taking over. Despite this, our fight has dented the organisation's ability to impose sweeping changes at the school, helped build the growing confidence of other anti-academisation campaigns, and added to the mounting evidence that academisation is both unpopular and unnecessary.

● Barclay anti-academisation campaign

Springfield Primary, Birmingham



Teachers held a 22-day strike and we got over 12,000 signatures on our petitions.

However we were up against our LA, an IEB and the sponsor academy chain REAch2. The staffing restructure went ahead and eventually REAch2 took over last December. We now have a SMT of six non-teaching roles, and the majority of the remaining staff are NQTs. Ofsted re-inspected and have found our school still inadequate, nearly four years after their initial inadequate report and after a period where we were told that REAch2 was helping to turn the school around.

We wait with bated breath to see what lies ahead.

● Springfield anti-academisation campaign

Oldfield Primary, West Yorkshire



the school as having undergone rapid improvement. The federation upskilled the staff and the governors, everybody was feeling positive. Unfortunately our campaign and our efforts have not worked because an academy has been commissioned.

We fought the academy order because we know that the school has made significant improvement and taken rapid action. We just wanted a chance for Ofsted to return to see this evidence. Taking our school into an academy undermines our local democracy by ignoring parents' and governors' beliefs of what is best for our school. It increases parents' worries that the school will be deemed financially unviable in the future and be forced to close or be used for something different.

● Oldfield Primary School anti-academisation campaign

Oldfield Primary School is a tiny rural school with just 48 pupils. Unfortunately, we were rated 'inadequate' in June 2018 which meant that we were automatically issued with an academy order. Prior to the inspection, we joined a local federation of two very strong schools with excellent leadership.

Our campaign took us down to meet Lord Agnew at the DfE. A local authority inspection described



Academisation – the democratic deficit



by **WARWICK MANSELL**
Journalist and founder of Education Uncovered website

Anyone in any doubt about the problems with the government's academies policy should have attended public meetings about two forced academy controversies, which took place in 2018 and 2019.

I turned up for the events, put on by campaigns set up around the forced academisation of Waltham Holy Cross primary, in Essex, and Barclay, a comprehensive in Hertfordshire, and each time heard two hours of community members coming together.

During those packed, standing-room-only gatherings, I heard not a single voice, among the many parents, pupils, governors and staff with close knowledge of these schools, raised in support of the government's plans to academise both institutions, under new control and probably new leadership.

Extraordinary

Instead, there was passionate support for the schools' existing management teams, of a kind which any institutional leadership – and a saner government – would surely see as hugely valuable.

Yet, because of the way the academies policy has been set up, these views can and are being dismissed by policymakers. Barclay academised under the former academies minister and Conservative peer Lord Nash, while Waltham Holy Cross was eventually handed over to NETAT. No one in the room to discuss their schools' futures got any say in that.



With kind permission of Chris Riddell

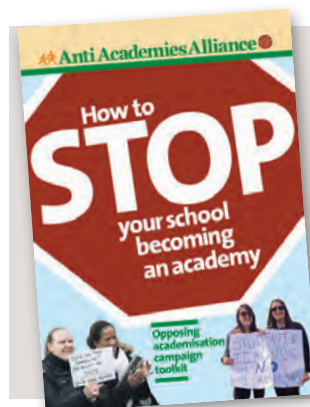
It is extraordinary that schools' futures, through the forced academies policy, are decided without any official input into the process from any local stakeholders.

Views taken into account

Parents, governors, staff and pupils have no official rights even to detailed information on the reasons why their school might be chosen to academise under a particular trust, let alone to have their views taken into account in the process.

Instead, the academies policy sees all decision-making as a closed-loop process between central government and academy trusts themselves, with no decision-maker even answerable at a local level to the people who depend on the decisions.

I have set up a (subscription) website, Education Uncovered, to try to track this and related policies. Sadly, the challenge with all of it is keeping up. But it is an important job: the views so powerfully articulated at those meetings should not be being ignored.



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