

LETTER TO NESTON PARENTS ON CONSIDERING ACADEMY STATUS

Dear Parents/Carers/Grandparents,

Considering academy status is not a simple proposition. An academy is funded directly by the state, but not involved with democratically elected local government, and removed from local control. School assets, land and buildings are transferred, leased to the academy for 125 years. There are only **two** elected parent governors - all other governors are **appointed**. There is **no** automatic place for staff, community, or local authority representatives - effectively, democratic accountability is out! The government wants all schools to become Academies or "Free Schools" and is open about wanting to bring the market and privatisation into education. This was not in the manifesto of **any** political party at the last election. There is a long list of companies (some very big companies), waiting to make money from "marketising" schools
(<http://www.atl.org.uk/Images/ATL%20Privateers%20Brochure.pdf>).

Academies are run by a private sponsor, or existing governors, who become the sponsors or owners of the school. They are outside of the local family of schools, unaccountable to the local community, allowed to set their own curriculum and terms and conditions of employment for staff. There will be no local authority to complain to; any complaints will have to go to London. This will break up the pattern of state schools across the country. Academies existed under the last government too, often linked to big school building programmes to sugar the pill; this no longer happens. The government wants to bring in **Free Schools**. This is little more than a huge transfer of public assets (land and buildings) to private interests; the largest since the eighteenth century enclosures. Officially, academy status would get Neston more money but....

"The new academies are being funded by top-slicing local authority budgets, handing disproportionately large sums of money to often already advantaged schools. Meanwhile, many local schools are struggling to deal with the impact of budget cuts from every quarter"

This is being challenged in the courts. Local Authority Central Spend Equivalent Grant (LACSEG) is the grant given to academies instead of to local authorities. This itself is subject to legal challenge this week from schools and councils who are aggrieved about losing money given to academies
(<http://www.localschoolsnetwork.org.uk/2011/06/is-the-government-about-to-claw-back-money-from-academies-to-stop-cuts-in-public-services/>). In 2012 **all** schools will have a new funding formula; so any advantages gained through academy status may well not last. In Cheshire West and Chester, the only schools to make staff redundant this year were academy schools, so presumably they had their own money problems... The money that is to be "top sliced" and given to academies pays for; **Special Educational Needs Provision** (existing teachers will be available to be "bought in" if the school can pay; but long term who will pay for teachers to take this long and onerous training; and who will do it if there is no job security?), **rebuild after damage from storm or fire; payroll and pensions, legal cover, behaviour support, governor support and data analysis, financial and budgeting support...** All of these services will still have to be bought in, so any saving will be somewhat limited anyway.

Does becoming an academy improve a schools achievement? No, as it turns out. The government initiated *Price Waterhouse Cooper Academies 5th Annual report* concludes; "there is insufficient evidence to make a definitive judgment about the Academies as a model for school improvement". Michael Gove (Secretary of State for Education) admitted to employing extra civil servants and giving half a million pounds to a "charity" set up to facilitate free schools. This government

believes in bringing money making into the education system. "Free Schools" (as in "fee" of state control, not free at the point of use) were pioneered in Sweden. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development reported (<http://pisa2009.acer.edu.au/multidim.php>), that Swedish students had dropped to 19th place out of 57 countries for literacy, to 24th in maths, and to 28th in science, compared with 9th, 17th and 16th in studies done in 2000, 2003 and 2006 respectively. "...and Swedes, used to coming near the top of just about every human development index, were appalled." (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/sep/10/sweden-free-schools-experiment>). SNS, a prominent business-funded think tank, reported that the entry of private operators into state-funded education had increased segregation and may not have improved educational standards at all. The pattern of local schools across the country to a recognised standard is important to any parent, especially those who might need to move for work. Breaking up the national education system is simply dangerous. Countries doing best in international measures of education tend to have a national network of good schools, not a broken up pattern of disparate schools.

Academy status has profound implications for children and young people, parents, staff and the local community. The decision to apply for academy status is made by the school's governing body which is required to consult with "appropriate persons" - as is taking place now. We believe the staff and governors at this school are dedicated people, committed to providing the best education for the pupils at the school, but the existing staff won't be here forever, and the existing parents cannot represent the needs and views of future generations of pupils and parents whose needs and aspirations must be safeguarded too. Furthermore, academy status may well open the school to competitive tendering for the services it provides, forcing it to compete with private, for profit, providers, including transnational corporate providers. There are **grave reservations** about academy status and there is **no evidence** to show that this school becoming an academy would raise educational standards.

All teaching and support staff trade unions oppose academies, on educational grounds and because of threats to conditions of service, so too do these education pressure groups; **Local Schools Network**, the **Campaign for State Education, Comprehensive Future**. The Local Authority has just made massive cuts to wages and conditions for staff, with redundancies and significant service reduction. One of the reasons suggested for becoming an Academy is to protect ourselves from this. Remember, a local authority can be changed at elections; democratic accountability can overturn terrible cuts, but once a school is an academy, there are no such safeguards. There are other, better ways to preserve education services without throwing away democratic accountability, losing education available to all for need not profit, and making the school and current and future pupil's education hostages to fortune. The decision to become an academy is irreversible - there is no going back.

We hope that having considered the information here, you will share our views that the high level of risk involved in academy status far outweighs the suggested advantages. Decisions affecting our children's education in such a fundamental way must be taken jointly by parents, staff, governing bodies and the local community. If you share our concerns, please contact members of the school's governing body immediately to make your voice heard.

Yours sincerely

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Thanks to

Anti Academies Alliance, NUT, West Cheshire Trades Council, Save Shorefields Dingle Sos