

Support Downhills



Haringey Anti Academies Alliance newspaper **SPECIAL** April 2012

“A good local school for every child”

SAVE OUR SCHOOLS

Downhills community still say ‘No Forced Academy’



Picture: @Brixtonite

Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove is in the process of forcing four schools in Haringey to become academies. Two schools have had their governing bodies swept away and two schools felt so bullied they ‘agreed’ to convert despite evidence of widespread opposition from parents and staff.

Gove claims it is all about improving schools. But there is no evidence that academies improve schools. There are many people in our school community – parents, staff, governors and head teachers and David Lammy the local MP – who are suspicious of Gove’s motives.

Gove believes in creating a market in education. He talks about a ‘supply side revolution’ with businesses coming in to take over schools. In short, this is about privatising education, in much the same way the NHS is being privatised.

The parents, staff and local community at Downhills have stood up to Gove. This newspaper tells their story. Last month the governing body was sacked and an IEB (Interim Executive Board) took over. It will decide whether the school becomes an academy as part of Tory sponsor Lord Harris’ academy federation.

That’s why parents are continuing to fight for their democratic rights. There is an important legal challenge (see back page), a vibrant community campaign and, as a last resort, moves to ballot staff for industrial action.

We have asked Gove to explain his plans. He hasn’t yet. But he said recently “I am marching towards the sound of gunfire”. He clearly believes he is in a war. As this paper shows, people in Haringey see things differently. We urgently need a proper debate. This newspaper and the Haringey Schools Conference on 21st April are designed to stimulate that debate.



Forced academies are undemocratic



by DAVID LAMMY MP

I will start by focusing on school standards. The Secretary of State has branded the parents, governors and teachers at these schools as “ideologues who are happy with failure” and “enemies of promise”.

However, not one of us is an apologist for poor results. That is why Downhills is under a notice to improve, and we support that. It is worth looking at the Downhills governing body—the very people who are supposed to be opposing this action for ideological reasons. It covers the whole range of the community. It has a solicitor, a former nurse, a senior civil servant and a hedge fund manager, all working for free to make the school better. Is that not what the big society is all about? Should not those people be praised rather than removed? How will getting rid of all of them and imposing a sponsor make the school and society better?

The governing body and I know that if a pupil leaves primary school without the basics, they will struggle at secondary school and potentially struggle throughout their life. We had riots this summer that reminded us of that fact. We are at the coal face, and we do not need to be lectured by those who, frankly, have limited experience of the inner-city context.

We believe in supporting a

school to improve, and that is exactly what we are doing at Downhills. Results from 2011 show that the school is above the Government’s floor target for English and maths. Some 6.4% of pupils achieved the national average level in both subjects, and among pupils who had been in the school for at least four years, 75% did so. More than 90% of parents are happy with the school.

We are not resting on our laurels with that 6.4% figure, because it still leaves too many pupils who do not succeed, but the argument that the enormous upheaval being foisted on the community is justified by the results just does not hold water. Downhills is above the national primary school average. Will its improvements continue if the school is forced through the process of becoming an academy over the next few months, against the wishes of the entire community?

The Government talk the language of localism and pluralism, but when it comes to the crunch, we see something quite different, which is driven solely by mandarins in Whitehall. That is fundamentally undemocratic. There is no collaboration whatever. Given that the Department’s Ministers are so well educated, it is a disgrace that not even the elected MP was worthy of a phone call or a letter.

● This is an extract from David Lammy’s speech in Parliament on 12th January 2012. www.davidlammy.co.uk/Debate_on_Forced_Academies_in_Haringey



Turkish parents made this banner. It says: “Save our School”.

The Downhills School community speaks out

Parent: Elsa

I have been following the campaign with increasing anger over the past few months. Before it all started I had no idea what Academies were, so I really had no pre-conception against or for Academies. Neither had I been involved in any political activity.

When I first learned that the DfE was threatening to force Downhills to become a Sponsored Academy, I couldn’t see the sense of it. Downhills was improving, according to OFSTED.

Results had gone steadily up for the past several years, thanks to an approach that puts children at the centre of their education. SATs results were above the floor target.

I am really angry now, and absolutely disgusted by it all. It seems completely clear to me that the Academy agenda has nothing to do with education. And it is ironic that with all their talk of “Big Society”, the government completely ignores the views of our whole community.



Picture: @Brixtonite

Parent: Karen

Downhills is a caring, nurturing, vibrant, creative, child-centred community school. As soon as you step inside it wins you over. I chose Downhills because it offered what I wanted for my children. It had a widely respected head teacher, an award-winning PTA and a great sense of community.

Ever since we found out that our school had been targeted to become a forced academy we have asked the DfE to come and tell us why an academy would improve our school. Not one letter was answered, not one meeting for parents, not any literature at all. Nothing!

To treat parents with such contempt is outrageous and arrogant. It is amazing how much energy you can find when you feel that your child’s emotional security and well-

being is being threatened. This is a primary school; it is not a place for an ideological battle.

This is our school. We feel a sense of ownership of it and we are not prepared to be disenfranchised.

Since last October our school has been bullied and threatened. It feels like our school has been handed over on a plate to Lord ‘Carpetright’ Harris as a thank you for making massive donations to the Tory Party.

This fight for our school and our community has brought us together. We are going to keep fighting for the sake of our children. Our school belongs to us and not some corporate interests.

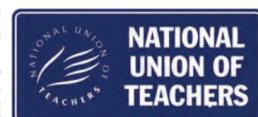
Downhills does not tolerate bullies – we will not be swept under the carpet!

These are the views of some of the people at the heart of the Downhills school community



Picture: @Brixtonite

Teacher



It is a fantastic job being a teacher. Anyone who works in a school will tell you how rewarding it can be to see children learn and grow as human beings.

That’s why I became a teacher and why I, and other teachers, work at Downhills. Just like at other schools, we want to do the best for our children. I have lived in Tottenham for 25 years. This is our school run by our community for our community in our community.

So we were shocked when the Secretary of State declared us a failure and publicly abused us before going on to push out our head teacher and to sack our Governing Body.

We want to see a school which is well funded and supported, which is inclusive and progressive. We want one which is accountable to the children, parents, staff and the community – not one which

is answerable to a few very well paid executives from a distant academy chain.

We also have concerns for our own well-being. We are concerned that our employer will be changed. They will be able to change our pay and conditions, our holidays and even lengthen the school days.

That is why – as a last resort – we have decided to ballot for industrial action. We do not do this lightly. We hope Mr Gove will see that Downhills does not want to be an academy and backs off. If not, we will organise action and protest with parents.



Albanian parents made this banner. It says: “Hands off our school”.

Governor: Roger

Six months ago I volunteered to become a local authority community governor at Downhills. Our governing body was dissolved without notice. We are not Trotskyites or political extremists – far from it. One of my colleagues is a hedge fund trader who spends every Wednesday evening on football training classes. And I am a lawyer who spent the last five years working at a UN war crimes tribunal.

I have nothing against the Harris Academy Trust, whose track record is by all accounts impressive. What I do not accept is the argument that academies are the only means of achieving a good education for our children. There are plenty of outstanding schools in local authority control. How a school is run is what’s important, not whether an academy or the local authority is in charge.

What persuaded me to join the Downhills campaign was the views of the other governors, parents, staff and the local community. They had legitimate concerns and felt the school could be turned round under local authority control. Many of their arguments I disagreed with but as the majority wanted the school to remain under a democratically-elected, accountable local authority I was persuaded they were right. At the very least I believed they were entitled to have some say on who should be in charge of the school when such dramatic changes were under consideration.

● This is an extract from an article Roger Sahota wrote for The Guardian newspaper.

Support staff



UNISON represents support staff in the school

This is an extract from a motion that was passed unanimously at Haringey UNISON’s AGM.

This Branch believes:

- That the Academies programme is an ideological attack on Community Schools designed to open up schools to the Government’s favoured businessmen such as Lord Harris of Peckham

- There is no evidence whatsoever that Academies improve outcomes for children

- If the government wants to improve educational outcomes for the children of Haringey it should (1) Reverse the cuts in funding for School Improvement Services (2) Provide us with the equivalent pupil funding to the Inner London Boroughs it seeks to compare us with

- There is no electoral mandate for the Forced Academies programme and that the Labour Council should unreservedly oppose it and provide support and resources of Officers to develop alternative proposals which retain the Schools within the Local Authority.

- That the Academy programme is both unproven and undemocratic in that it removes issues of school provision from locally elected politicians.

Ode to Michael Gove

There once was a fella named Gove
That only his mother could love
The Downhills GB
Said ‘NO ACADEMY’
And so he just gave ‘em the shove

By Alison Lloyd

But that’s not the end of the story
Be you Labour, Lib Dem or a Tory
Democracy’s dead
You have put it to bed
And the future is looking quite gory

Revolution is not the Brit way
At least that’s what most people say
But you’ve pushed us some more
You’ve caused a furore
And Govey, you might rue the day

In Tottenham we fight for our schools
We’re not ‘Trots’, but nor are we fools
We won’t let you butcher
Our dear children’s future
Just ‘cos we don’t play by your rules

Yes, it’s ‘carve ‘em up’ time for the state
The NHS and our schools on a plate
But is it improvement
Or big assets movement?
It’s the greed and the lies that we hate

‘Sponsor’ Harris sell carpets and mats
The rug trade has made them fat cats
But kids all find flooring
Incredibly boring
And we doubt it’ll help with their SATS

So here’s one last thought, Mr Gove
Since you seem to have something to prove
Take your ‘sponsor’
And stick it up yer bum, Sir
And then let us see how you move!

The Harris Federation

The Harris Federation is named after Lord Phillip Harris of Peckham, one of the richest men in Britain who has a personal fortune of £275 million and runs the Carpetright chain. Harris is a member of the Tory Party and has many large donations including to several leading figures.

The Federation currently runs 13 academies, only one of which is a primary school. Half of the Harris Academies are below the national average. Some have a significantly higher rate of exclusion than the national average.

The annual report for 2010 shows it has a turnover of £130 million. It employs 1,157

people. It runs two separate but connected business arms, the Harris Academies Project Management Limited and HCTC Enterprises Ltd. Both these companies are making profits.

The Guardian reported in November 2011 that one director of the Harris Federation “earned £243,027 – a rise of £26,411 on the year before.” This compares to the £142,500 for the Prime Minister.

In an interview in the Financial Times in 2009 Michael Skapinker reported a discussion with Lord Harris: “Can hospitals really be run like carpet shops? Aren’t they public services rather than businesses? Well, everything’s



about serving a customer, he says.” In 2010 Harris attempted to take over Kelsey Park School in Bromley, backed by Michael Gove. Both the Head teacher and Bromley Council were against the school becoming a Harris academy. The TES reported: “Kelsey Park head Brian Lloyd said he felt his school was the subject of a “hostile takeover bid” being improperly backed by the Government.”

Support Downhills



Haringey Anti Academies Alliance newspaper **Support Downhills** special ● April 2012

“A good local school for every child”

“We are not the ideologues. We just want our community school back”

by **Susan Moyse**

(parent of a child at Downhills Primary School)

Downhills has always been an inclusive, happy school and, importantly, results were improving rapidly. They were above national averages at key stage one and above the national floor target at key stage two. An Ofsted inspection in September said there was “a clear trend of improvement”. We were never on the list of the 200 poorest performing schools. We were nowhere near it.

An overwhelming 91% of parents voted against academy status, as did the former governing body and all of the staff. Our community backed us: in January over a thousand people took to the streets of Haringey to say “no” to forced academies. Now, because we don't have a governing body to represent us any more, a parent has to represent the views of our families, our staff and our community.

Our solicitor sent a letter of claim to the Secretary of State on 23 March. The letter asks the Secretary of State to withdraw the academy order on the grounds



Susan speaking at a press conference.

that parents cannot be expected to have confidence in a consultation carried out by an IEB with two members from the “preferred sponsor”. It says that the governing body was not given the opportunity to have Ofsted review its action plan or to carry out a consultation about Harris. The letter also questions whether an IEB is allowed to convert a school to an academy.

The Secretary of State has been given until 11 April to comply with the request to rein-

state the governing body. If he doesn't, a judge at a pre-hearing will then consider whether there is a case to answer, and, if so, a Judicial Review will be organised. There, the court will decide if the Secretary of State has acted lawfully or not.

We have been very lucky to secure the services of Hickman & Rose Solicitors on a conditional fee arrangement. However we need donations, however small, to show the judge that our community supports this action. Also, should we lose the case, we may have to pay the Secretary of State's legal costs. If you would like to make a donation please contact us at savedownhills@hotmail.co.uk

Haringey Schools Conference

Our community. Our schools

Saturday 21st April 2012

**2pm-5pm, Park View School,
Langham Road, London N15 3RB**

A local initiative organised in partnership with Haringey Governors Association, UNISON, National Union of Teachers, National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers, and GMB. To add your name to this list please email: haringeschoolsconference@gmail.com

Our schools have been under relentless attack from central government. They say our schools are failing but we know many great things are going on. Of course, things can improve and we are all committed to giving our best for the children and getting the best outcomes.

- How do we raise standards?

- How do we deal with the impact of diversity and poverty?
- What is the government's agenda?
- What does the data really show?
- What should governors and the local authority do to be effective?

Our conference is focusing firmly on making improvements and raising standards all round. We all come from the local community and have

invited a range of expert speakers to focus on the big issues facing education today, and Haringey in particular. Whatever your role in the school, this conference is for you. Please come and have your say in this open and frank debate within our family of schools about what we can do to work together for all our children.

For further information and to register: haringeschoolsconference@gmail.com or call 020 8489 5693

What you can do

Please send messages of support to the **Save Downhills School** campaign. Invite a speaker so you can hear our story. You can follow our campaign – on Twitter: [Save_Downhills](https://twitter.com/Save_Downhills) or Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/276114265773841/> or contact by email: savedownhills@hotmail.co.uk

More information about the **Haringey Campaign Against Academies** can be found at www.hcaa.org.uk

To find out more about legal issues visit the ‘A Can of Worms’ blog by **David Wolfe** – a leading education lawyer: <http://davidwolfe.org.uk/wordpress>

The **Anti Academies Alliance** is a national campaign composed of parents, teachers, unions, governors, councillors and MPs. The TUC, NASUWT, NUT, ATL, UCU, UNISON, UNITE, GMB, PCS, MU and FBU are all affiliated. Web www.antiacademies.org.uk Twitter [@antiacademies](https://twitter.com/antiacademies) Facebook [Anti Academies Alliance](https://www.facebook.com/antiacademies)