

Anti Academies Alliance



Birmingham Anti Academies Alliance newspaper ● May 2012

Campaigning
against school
privatisation

Save Birmingham's schools NO TO FORCED ACADEMIES

Our schools and our kids are too important to leave to chance. Yet that is exactly what Tory Education Secretary Michael Gove wants to do. He plans to seize around 30 Birmingham Primary schools and turn them into academies.

These schools are currently run by the Council. It means that the schools are democratically accountable to us and if the Councillors neglect our schools we can vote them out. Michael Gove wants to hand them over to unelected academy chains, many run by businessmen who run their schools as if they were businesses.

We need to defend our schools and prevent them being turned into academies. All of our schools should be run for the local community in the interests of local children, not run by a Chief Executive on a Fat Cat salary from some office in Surrey or London.

Many of the schools that Michael Gove wants to seize are in areas with high unemployment and poverty. Our children don't have the benefits that the millionaires in the government can give their children. But this doesn't



mean our schools are failing or underperforming.

We all want the best for our children and want them to get the best education they can. Of course some of our schools need improving. To do this they need investment. They need more teachers and teaching assistants. Their governors and headteachers need help in improving their

schools. Schools should be able to support each other without being forced to become Academies. But how does Michael Gove describing some of our schools, and kids, as failing and threatening to sack headteachers, governors and staff really help?

In London, parents, staff and Governors in Downhills

School are standing up to the bully boy tactics of Michael Gove (see back page). We can do the same.

In Birmingham, parents and staff at Bournville school successfully prevented their school from becoming an academy.

We need many more campaigns like those seen at Downhills and Bournville.

Now teachers in many of the schools that Gove is threatening are preparing to stand together to defend their schools. Parents and staff across Birmingham need to unite to save our local schools. Our schools and children are too important to leave in the hands of unelected, fat-cat privateers. Join the campaign to keep it that way! ■



‘Keep schools at the heart of our community’, say staff

by Birmingham UNISON members

Schools are at the heart of our community in Birmingham. That’s why UNISON, the trade union for school support staff, is opposing attempts to force

our community schools to become academies.

UNISON members work in a range of occupations including teaching assistants, administrators, technicians, cleaners, caretakers and school meals workers. We support local children in their

learning, including pupils who have special learning needs or who speak a language other than English. We also ensure the day-to-day running of schools and help to provide school meals. As a result, we know first-hand some of the challenges our

schools are facing – and we don’t believe that forcing them to become academies is the right answer.

Schools forced to become academies will lose their links to the community and the local council. And once a school has become an academy, there is

no way back. The best way to raise standards is not by forcing a school to become an academy but by supporting the local governors, heads, teachers and support staff in the existing school to improve



teaching and learning. We want a bright future for our children and a strong school system, so we are urging parents and the wider community to join us in saying ‘no’ to forced academies. ■

‘We are the guardians of our children’s education’

by a teacher

Ours is an inner city school where children are happy and enjoy learning. Like most schools, the teachers work hard and are committed to the children they teach.

Our Ofsted judgements were ‘good’; leadership and management were rated ‘outstanding’ but our results were below floor targets.

But from 2010 our results were well above the floor target and have remained there. Our projected results in 2012 are the same if not better. Yet we were informed that we were still under threat with the forced academy agenda.

Following a meeting with the DfE our head decided it would be

better to convert to an academy rather than waiting to be pushed. Teachers were shocked, confused and upset. So we got all members of staff to sign a petition to our staff Governors who supported our anti academy decision. Fortunately the rest of the Governing body supported the staff’s decision.

We take strength from knowing that we are part of a movement in Birmingham that is resisting Academies – forced or otherwise.

We are prepared to strike against the bullies in the DfE. But we will do this while making it clear that WE are the guardians of our children’s education, not the privateers taking us back to a divided education system.

Together we can win. ■



Teachers and staff unions are united in opposing academies.

Undemocratic – and it’s part of their privatisation agenda

Forced academies have nothing to do with raising standards of education. There is no evidence at all to support the notion that changing the status of a school will transform the educational attainment of its pupils. On the contrary there is a mountain of international evidence to show that the real route to school improvement lies in the quality of teaching and leadership in a school.

School improvement strategies that are most successful are carried through with the involvement and support of all stakeholders in the school – pupils, parents, teachers, senior leaders and governors – working with the support of those in the local community who understand the school and its context – other local schools and the local authority.

The forced academy programme has no such aims. Instead it seeks to impose a central govern-



by CHRISTINE BLOWER, General Secretary, National Union of Teachers

ment dictat on schools in a way that removes the involvement of school communities in any say over the school’s future. When a school is subject to forced academy conversion the Secretary of State for Education takes all the decisions about its future including when and how it will become an academy and who its sponsor will be.

The NUT believes that the Government’s academy programme will bring about the privatisation of education in England. Instead of schools being accountable to the local communities that they serve through democrat-

ic governance arrangements and elected local authorities, academies are answerable only to the Secretary of State for Education and either a ‘sponsor’ – often from the private sector – or a small unaccountable academy trust. The school’s land and buildings – built, maintained and paid for by the taxpayer – transfer on a 125 year lease to the sponsor or trust. The Government has said that it wants all schools in England to be academies or free schools. If it gets its way there could be no publicly managed and accountable education service left in this country in a few years time.

The National Union of Teachers sends its full support to school communities facing forced academy conversion and urges parents, governors and trade unionists throughout Birmingham to support the campaign against forced academies. ■

Despite every trick in the book, this shows Gove’s desperation

Forced academies are the most recent phase of the Coalition Government’s academisation project.

In reality, they are a sign of the Secretary of State’s desperation that he has only managed to secure just over 1,500 academies out of over 22,000 schools across the country, despite using every trick in the book to increase the number of academy schools.

A climate of fear pervades those schools which have been targeted which is completely counter-productive to the immense efforts those schools are making to ensure that children have the highest standard of education.

This is no way to run an education service. This is not the way to improve educational outcomes. There is no evidence that simply converting a school into an academy raises standards. There is evidence, however, that academisation can result in local commu-



by CHRIS KEATES, General Secretary, NASUWT

nities losing access to their local school; significant amounts of money being diverted from supporting pupils to fund the administration and high salaries of academy providers; and parents being disenfranchised.

From time to time, a small minority of schools need help and support to overcome challenges and to provide the best possible learning environment for their pupils. With the right support, guidance and leadership structures in place, sustainable improvements can be secured.

Evidence also confirms that the overwhelming majority of

schools in these circumstances have been able to address the challenges they have faced without being turned into academies.

Therefore, the steps required to build and sustain improved performance can only be secured through the dedication, effort and commitment of all members of the community, working together to tackle problems and to lay the foundations for future success. Wresting a school away from its local authority, forcing it to compete, rather than collaborate, with other local schools and undermining the ability of its staff, parents and other key stakeholders to have a say in how it is governed and managed, all work against the grain of proven approaches to improvement.

The NASUWT is committed to continue to campaign alongside parents, local communities and other trade unions to resist forced academisation. ■

Campaigning works!

by SARAH BARTON, parent

In October 2011 the Governing Body of Bournville School and Sixth Form Centre abandoned plans for Academy conversion following a vibrant community campaign.

The parent-led group ‘Hands Off Bournville School’ had been campaigning since June. Parents’ concerns had centred on a lack of democratic accountability, the lack of demonstrable educational benefits, loss of support from the local authority and unsatisfactory consultation. Things had looked bleak for the campaign when a Freedom Of Information request revealed the application to convert had been made despite consultation being ongoing. Parents were considering a legal challenge.

Teachers and staff were overwhelmingly opposed to Academy conversion and saw their opposition as an act of loyalty to the school. Strike action was averted at the last minute following an undertaking by Headteacher Barbara Easton to recommend that Governors postpone their consideration of Academy status until after September 2012. She said it was felt that the school is not yet ready for such a significant change.

Parents, teachers and the local community welcomed this as the right decision for Bournville and were over the moon that Governors chose to heed their concerns.

Bournville School continues to thrive as a large, successful and happy community school serving a diverse community in the southwest of Birmingham. ■

Schools in chains?

The government are trying to force Birmingham schools to join chains of sponsors. While local authorities are accountable to voters, academy chains are not.



ence of running primary schools.

Academies Enterprise Trust (AET)

AET are set to become the biggest academy chain. It is run by David Triggs who is a self styled ‘super head’ and set up a company to sell his services. In 2009 he was charging £850 per day.

AET employs the services of Synabor to run its recruitment services. This is a highly profitable company and Triggs is on the board.

There are questions about the extent of AET experience. Only seven of their schools entered pupils for GCSEs in 2011, and only four in 2010. They have very little experi-

ence of running primary schools.

ARK is run by hedge fund managers who make money gambling on the stock exchange.

ARK is close to the Tory Party, whose treasurer is Stanley Fink, a director of ARK. While ARK claim that their schools are improving, many have used GCSE ‘equivalents’ such as NVQs to boost their league table positions. St Albans Academy in Highgate claims 67% of their pupils got five good GCSE results, but when the ‘equivalents’ are removed it is just 22%. ■

Stopping the school bullies



by RICHARD BURDEN MP

“Bullying schools? Moi?” is what I expect the man from the DfE to say next. But that is what is happening with Michael Gove’s Forced Academies programme. Like a lot of other bullying in schools, the culprit often protests innocence and it’s difficult to prove because the victim is frightened to speak out. But you still know it’s happening.

Birmingham has a number of primary schools on Mr Gove’s ‘hit list’ for conversion into academies. It’s sometimes difficult to find out exactly which they are. The schools themselves are reticent to have such information published. You can understand their fear of being stigmatised as ‘failures’.

When they get to find out, they may be invited to a meeting or it may be a phone call from the ministry. Sometimes it may be a visit from an officer of the local Council wringing their hands and saying that academy status is the way the Government wants the school to go and there is not much they can do about it. “Isn’t there an alternative?” the head may ask. “You can always try to resist it.” comes the reply. “But this is the way things are going and the Government may close you down if you don’t do what they say. Or they could remove the Governors and impose an academy

anyway. Wouldn’t it be better to go for it now while you have some control of the process rather than have something foisted on you later?”

The head may say, “Aren’t the results figures you are using out of date? What about the change programme we introduced a couple of years ago and the improved results we got last year?”

They reply: “It’s the results reference period, I’m afraid. The improvements you are making will make you even more attractive to an academy sponsor. Don’t worry. We are here to help you every step of the way.” As long as you do what you are told.

It’s appalling to see this happening to schools in Birmingham. Worse than that, so very little of what is said to schools is ever put in writing.

In the meantime, dedicated heads and governors are left in an invidious position. Some will resist what is being foisted on them and rightly so. As a local MP, I have backed schools which have made that decision. In other schools, circumstances may be different. We should not condemn heads or governing bodies whose genuine judgement is that the interests of children will be best served right now by going down the academy road.

They should have the right to make those judgements, in consultation with the communities they serve. But it should be a local decision. Not one forced on them by covert Ministerial bullying. That’s why the Forced Academies programme is wrong. ■

Academies are no more successful than local authority schools – and we have the evidence

by RICHARD HATCHER

The government repeatedly claims that pupils achieve better results in academies. Their evidence is based on secondary academies, but they claim that the new forced

primary academies will do better too.

Academies do no better than local authority schools, if we compare like with like, and we have the evidence to prove it, based on the DfE’s own figures.

For example, the DfE figures show that academies have

boosted their scores by using vocational-type exams, which count for up to four GCSEs, much more than other schools have. In academies 82.6% of pupils get five or more GCSEs grades A*-C, compared to 81.2% in non-academy comprehensive schools. But if we strip out the

exams deemed “equivalent” it falls to 39.4% in academies compared to 54.9% in comprehensive schools.

Comparing academies with non-academies in similar circumstances you see similar results. If we take all schools

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Anti Academies Alliance



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We demand open and democratic consultation

We are parents campaigning for open and democratic consultation on school change in and around Birmingham. We have come together as a result of shared concerns at the rapid and undemocratic way in which schools across the city are being converted, voluntarily or forcibly, to academy status. Many of us have had personal experience of this happening in our own community schools, and accept a school community's right to choose academy

by PHILIP WONG,
'Ask Parents First'

status, we believe it should be a choice and not an imposition.

Decisions about the future of our community schools that will affect our children and generations of children to come are being made behind closed doors without parents having any say. This is just plain wrong.

We believe a decision of this



ASK PARENTS FIRST

magnitude must not be taken without the understanding and backing of a majority of parents. There are good reasons not to become an Academy that deserve to be heard. Parents and prospective parents should have the opportunity to make an informed choice about the future of their schools on consideration of all the facts as

part of an open and democratic consultation process. We believe this should involve a full and binding parental ballot before a school can convert to an academy.

Norwich City Council expects all schools to conduct open and democratic consultations with secret ballots before academy conversion. We believe Birmingham

ham families deserve no less and we call on Birmingham City Council to stand up to the DfE and follow the Norwich lead.

We call on all Birmingham MPs to challenge the coalition's undemocratic education policy in parliament.

● If you would like to get involved with the Ask Parents First campaign, email askparentsfirst@hotmail.co.uk or visit the website at www.askparentsfirst.wordpress.com

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We have the evidence

with 2010 results under 35% (the current floor target), we find that academies results grew from 29% in 2010 to 37% in 2011, an increase of 8%. But the comparison group of non-academies grew from 30% in 2010 to 38% in 2011, again a growth of 8%.

The government also claims that academies are more effective with socially disadvantaged pupils. Considering schools where more than 40% of students are on free-school meals, in academies 38% get 5 A-C GCSEs including English and Maths, compared to Community schools 44%, Foundation schools 41% and Voluntary aided schools 49%.

A briefing paper published recently by the House of Commons Library shows that there is no evidence of better performance for academies. It compares the achievement of similar groups of students and finds that academies underperform on virtually every single measure: out of 15 comparison figures academies are worse on 14 and only equal on one.

If academies do no better with secondary schools there is no reason to think they will do so with primary schools. We have the evidence – so say No to forced academies. ■

Sources:
Local Schools Network: www.localschoolsnetwork.org.uk/
<<http://localschoolsnetwork.org.uk/>

Give Gove another Downhills

by the SAVE DOWNHILLS
SCHOOL CAMPAIGN

Downhills school in Haringey, north London, has been told by Michael Gove that it will be forced to become an academy.

The parents have run a dynamic campaign to save their school, including a 600 strong public meeting and a 1,000 strong march through Haringey.

"Our school is a good school, our school is not a failing school. We have children from all kinds of backgrounds at our school. Some of our children have really difficult home lives; lots of children at our school live in temporary accommodation and keep being re-housed, consequently spending short periods of time at different schools. All children are welcome at our school. Our SATS results aren't bad and they keep on improving.

In November our school was attacked. Mr Gove started telling people that our school is failing and that our children are illiterate. Mr Gove is wrong. We were not even a school in 'special measures'.

Ofsted had said that we were an 'improving school with strong leadership and good teaching', then, because we didn't want to become an academy Mr. Gove wrote to Mr. Wilshaw and asked Ofsted to re-inspect the school immediately. They did, and with the same lead inspector, only 4 months later, they reported that our school was failing in every regard. We were totally stitched up, just because we did not and still do not want to become an academy.

Our much loved and respected Headteacher resigned. Mr Gove sacked our governing body, imple-

mented an Interim Executive Board (IEB) and made an Academy order with the Harris Federation as the sponsor.

The 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 of carpet stores. Harris is a member of the Tory Party and has many large donations including to several leading figures.

We do not think that he is telling the truth

We do not think that private business and profit have any place in our children's education. We love our community school. Over 90% of our parents voted NO to becoming an academy.

Our school has been under sustained attack now for nearly 6 months, but we will not give up. We are taking the Department of Education to Court because we believe that they have acted unlawfully. Not only is this a vicious assault on our school; it is also an outrageous attack on democracy. This is a cause worth fighting for.

Mr Gove was overheard saying "we don't want another Downhills", well we want lots more Downhills. Please join us in fighting this vicious and undemocratic assault. Fight for your children's school as well. Write to your Local Council, write to your MP, let your local paper know how appallingly you and your children have been treated.

Together we can stop Mr. Gove ignoring the wishes of teachers, governors, head teachers and parents."

● Contact the campaign at savedownhills@hotmail.co.uk



School students in Haringey, north London, opposing academies.

Picture: @Brixtonite

What you can do

Public Meeting:
Northfield Baptist Church, 789 Bristol Road South, Northfield
Thursday 10th May at 6pm

If you would like copies of this newspaper or want to help campaign against forced academies call 07528 201 697 or email office@antiacademies.org.uk

More information about the Alliance Against Birmingham Academies at <http://allianceagainstbirminghamacademies.wordpress.com/> or on facebook at Alliance Against Birmingham Academies

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 Facebook Anti Academies Alliance

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