



Newsletter

News and Views from CAmpaign for State Education – South East London

Welcome to the first edition of CASE – South East London. If you would like to share news or subscribe (unsubscribe) to the Newsletter, please e-mail: CASE-SEL@outlook.com. Information will be published anonymously, unless you give permission for your name to be used. For information about CASE and the author, please see the last page.

The State of Play in Education

It's not pretty. Constant changes to the curriculum, KS2 & KS4 exam structures, changes in attainment measures, means teachers are under pressure trying to keep up with new rules and requirements. Education funding is being cut and schools are also being forced to make bigger contributions to National Insurance and pension provisions. Something has to give – cut teachers' posts, cut INSET, cut resources, cut trips and support staff. That said, we have fantastic schools and fantastic teachers and support staff.

The Education White Paper - Educational Excellence Everywhere.

Whilst it is great that everyone is now talking about Education, unfortunately it is because of the Government's Education White Paper announced by the Chancellor on Budget Day. To the astonishment of Councillors and MPs from all parties, the Government announced its plans for all schools in England to become academies, standalone or as part of a multi-academy trust (MAT) by 2022. The question is why should good and outstanding schools be forced to convert into academies against the wishes of teachers and parents? The White Paper also proposes to remove the legal requirement for governing bodies

to have minimum 2 parent governors ie to have no parent governors.

I would urge caution on any school thinking of joining a MAT- jumping before being pushed – as it is not certain that the Government White Paper will result in a Bill owing to the amount of opposition amongst its own ranks. **If this appears in the Queens Speech on 18th May, then a Bill will be published.**

This is what the Conservative 2015 Manifesto said: "We will continue to allow all good schools to expand, whether they are maintained schools, academies, free schools or grammar schools."

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But **don't forget the Education & Adoption Act 2016** – this is now in force. Regional School Commissioners (RSC) gained powers on 18th April to issue Academy Orders to local authority (LA) maintained schools, if the schools are “Causing Concern” or if the school falls into the “Coasting” definition. The latter will not apply until performance data is published in Autumn, but the “Schools Causing Concern” criteria is here and now.

The definition of “Schools Causing Concern” is as fuzzy as previous government definitions. It doesn't just apply to schools rated category 4 (Inadequate) by Ofsted – it could also apply to schools rated 2 (good) or 3 (Requires Improvement) if there are concerns over performance or safeguarding.

The Regional School Commissioners who are advised by HeadTeacher Boards

(HTB) (made up of Academy Head Teachers only) will make this judgement. If our RSC Dominic Herrington, and his HTB make this determination, then the LA and governors must facilitate the conversion of the school into an academy – and they cannot drag their heels. Note that the requirement to consult parents has been removed – it was pretty woolly in the past as to what “consultation” meant, but now it is clear – no consultation. However, diocese and trusts of faith and foundation schools will be consulted.

The RSC will decide which Academy Sponsor or MAT to appoint to sponsor the school. Parents will simply be informed by the Academy Sponsor what their improvement plans are, yet Nicky Morgan MP, Secretary of State for Education states that parents are being given a bigger voice – it's difficult to see how.

Prior to the Education & Adoption Act 2016, the RSCs had oversight of academy schools only. There are 8 RSCs, and our schools falls into the South East & South London RSC. This extends from Southwark, west through Surrey & Hampshire, and south covering Kent, Sussex & Isle of Wight.

My Opinion: *As far as I can determine, this Government does not like parents – especially protesting parents. Nick Gibb MP, Conservative Schools Minister wrote to a Lewisham parent and stated “**protesting parents are an obstruction to be removed....**” and we can see this intention in both the Education & Adoption Act 2016 and in the White Paper. Interestingly, whilst I note that Conservative MPs are not all supporting the White Paper, an amendment to the Education & Adoption Bill to allow outstanding LA maintained schools to support failing schools was defeated in the Lords.*

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Government Plans / Interaction

The Education Select Committee is a parliamentary committee chaired by Neil Carmichael MP. It has a mix of MPs, but is majority Conservative, as you would expect. This Committee was critical of Regional School Commissions and their lack of transparency and accountability. They issued 23 recommendations to the Government to improve transparency and accountability. The Government issued its response to those recommendations in April, pretty much saying everything is fine, but this stuck out for me, as I had e-mailed Dominic Herrington (our RSC) in April to ask him whether he would change the constituency of his HTB to include excellent LA Head Teachers (he hasn't replied):

"The department does not agree that maintained school headteachers should

be eligible for HTB membership. The HTB role is focussed on academies, academy sponsors and schools becoming academies – either sponsored or converters. The only involvement they have with maintained schools is where these schools will become an academy, either through a converter or sponsored route."

Needless to say, this statement isn't accurate as the RSC and HTB will be dealing with "Coasting" LA Schools that may not have to convert into academies if they have good plans in place. Let's see how transparent Dominic Herrington will be.

On 26th April, the Local Government Association (LGA), representing local authorities, published a report confirming that LA maintained schools perform better than academies. It's not the first body or report to state this, but the Government ignores this data, instead only crediting academies with performing well. Hopefully, the Tory MPs that oppose forced academisation of good and outstanding schools will take note. Of the 1 million more children in schools rated as "Good" or better, 930,000 are in LA maintained schools, and of the top performing areas, the top 8 are local authorities, with ARK and Harris chains ranking 9th and 10th behind Hackney, Barnet, Waltham Forest (to name a few of the London boroughs in the top 8).

LGA press release states: *"Analysis of the grades achieved by all schools under only the current, more rigorous, Ofsted inspection framework - launched in September 2012 - shows that 81 per cent of council-maintained schools are rated as 'good' or 'outstanding', compared to 73 per cent of academies and 79 per cent of free schools. Ofsted figures also show that 'inadequate' council-maintained schools are more likely to improve if they stay with their local authority, rather than being forced to convert to an academy. 98% of council-maintained schools improved in their first Ofsted inspection after being rated 'inadequate' compared to 88% of academies."*

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Local Education News

In my opinion, the former Director of Children & Young People (**CYP**), Frankie Sulke has not left a great legacy for her successor (or for our children). Sara Williams is the new Director, CYP – parents asked for a meeting at the beginning of the year, and were told she was too busy.

It transpires that being too busy meant dealing with an OFSTED inspection of Lewisham Children & Young People directorate – that resulted in Lewisham Council losing its Outstanding rating and being rated Requires Improvement. It seems that the Director had identified the gaps in CYP services and the Council have plans in place, so avoided an “inadequate” rating.

In December 2015 the Mayor of Lewisham approved the appointment of an Education Commission, headed by Christine Gilbert, to provide the council with views on how to improve the performance of its schools. I learnt of this at a meeting with the Cabinet Councillor in February and arranged a meeting with the Education Commissioner in March with another parent.

We were able to present our views of our schools, and our views of secondary education. We expressed our frustration

at not being able to create a Parents communication channel with the Council. Twice, in 2015 and 2016 our requests were declined on grounds of budget constraints.

Sadly, I believe that the Council has reacted too late to protect our secondary schools; it should have been prepared for the Education & Adoption Bill / Act.

New Campaign Group

A new campaign group has been formed "Rescue our Schools – Families and communities standing up for state education" and one of their founders spoke at the Anti-Austerity March. They also had a parent speaker at the "Parents Defending Education" conference held in central London. One of their co-founders is a Lewisham parent! Visit www.rescueourschools.co.uk for more information. CASE-SEL and ROS plan to work together to create a big parent voice!

I also attended the conference and am interested in joining the steering committee – it was great to see so many angry parents from across the country in one room.

Parents are demanding a say!

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Our Schools

Well done to **Holbeach Primary School** leadership team for reassuring parents before Easter about the White Paper. Lewisham schools are waiting for Lewisham Education Commission Report and guidance from the Council to determine future strategy. Have other schools reassured worried parents?

At **Sedgehill School**, nervousness has turned to fear: the OFSTED report has been published rating the school Inadequate despite the increased 2015 GCSE results and improvements made. The school leadership have lodged a complaint about the process. The report has re-ignited strong feelings amongst parents – and unsurprisingly the blame game has started. The School will receive an Academy Order under the Education & Adoption Act 2016. Let's hope a sponsor is found that will support the value and ethos of the school and embrace the community. Not only do we face structural change, a new leadership team, but potentially expensive new uniforms too – We should fight to keep Sedgehill name & Sedgehill uniform.

Evidence that academies do not necessarily perform better than LA maintained schools can be seen at a few of the academies in Lewisham.

St Matthew Academy 2015 GCSE results dropped by 10% from 50%. All does not seem well.

In neighbouring **Greenwich**, the Council initially embraced academisation following publication of the White Paper telling its schools to convert into academies – they have since backtracked from this position.

The story below is of a parent campaign to protect their school.

John Roan School in Greenwich

Following a letter from Greenwich Council that schools should consider converting into academies, as a result of the White Paper, on 3/2/2016, the Governing Body of the John Roan school sent an email to parents announcing, 'The John Roan governors decided last night to form a working group to investigate the options available to us for becoming an academy.' After a negative response from the school community another email was issued from the 'working party' saying they were just exploring their options.

We knew how quickly a decision could be made for a school to become an academy and how little consultation would occur with stakeholders, so we formed a group to fight this academy idea before it had time to grow roots! This has become the John Roan Resists campaign.

Our campaign included leafleting outside the school gates, a parent led petition on change.org with 1459 signatures, a Facebook page plus a google e-mail group. We led a deputation at a Greenwich council meeting expressing opposition to academy status for the John Roan school and for other Greenwich schools, asking the council to oppose the government's plans to turn all

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schools into academies. The NUT staff at the school threatened strike action in March and then the head of John Roan agreed in writing to delay any decision on academisation until September. The school has still not agreed to a binding parental ballot as requested by parents, the NUT and supported by our MP, Matthew Pennycook.

However, another issue has arisen relating to an alleged budget deficit, which will result in cuts to courses, staff and pastoral care. We are challenging this and you can see more information on our Facebook page. We have asked repeatedly for a whole school community meeting where parents can meet staff and governors to discuss their concerns about this budget and restructuring plan but this has been refused. We hope for a positive resolution and wish for our school to return to the positive ethos and culture it had under the former Head Teacher.

Help! Does Anyone know how Lewisham PFI contracts are structured?

This seemed to be a stumbling block for Bonus Pastor Catholic College converting into an Academy – possibly because the Catholic Diocese would have to assume the liability? Whilst it is clear that when an LA maintained school converts into an Academy as a result of being a “School Causing Concern”, deficits will stay with the LA (and us tax payers), but I’m not clear on what happens to PFI debt and am struggling to find the answer.

Academy Watch

Harris Beckenham isn’t one of our schools, but it was interesting to read of a petition raised by the Student Body protesting at “Stupid Rules”, such as having to wear black coats), queuing up in the morning to access school, walking one-way down corridors. The petition has since closed with more than 200 signatures. I hope the pupils who raised the petition were not punished. <https://www.change.org/p/make-habe-great>

These **MATs** are not considered by the Ofsted Head, Sir Michael Wilshaw to be performing well enough. Between them they are responsible for educating thousands of children.

School Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA), E-ACT, AET, The Education Fellowship, Wakefield City Academies Trust, CfBT Multi-Academy Trust, Collaborative Academies Trust, Oasis Learning Multi-Academy Trust. We do want any of these MATs in Lewisham. The parliamentary Education Select Committee is also now investigating MATs.

What is CASE?

The Campaign for State Education has been a grass-roots, non-party political organisation since the 1960s. We believe that a good education is the right of all citizens and that this is best achieved through a comprehensive education system. We oppose segregation by '11-plus' or through covert means of selection.

What are we trying to achieve?

A properly funded, non-selective and locally democratically accountable school system that allows every child and young person to achieve their full potential. Visit the website: www.campaignforstateeducation.org.uk

About the Author

My name is Nicky Dixon, and I live in Lewisham with my family. My children attend Lewisham schools. I joined CASE NEC in September 2015 as I wanted to be part of a campaign group trying to protect our national education system.

I decided to create this Newsletter to share information with parents about government plans and news of our schools. My aim is to create monthly newsletters with sections on Government Developments / Local schools / Academy Watch. I welcome contributions.

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