OUR SCHOOLS ARE BEING PRIVATISED

The threat of the NHS being privatised has led to such strong opposition that the government has been forced to backtrack and yet, through the development of "academies" and "free schools", our education system is being stealthily privatised, right under our noses, without so much as a word from politicians or journalists who claim to believe in social democracy. Why is this?

PRIVATISED SCHOOLS DO NOT RAISE STANDARDS

Since their introduction, academies have not raised overall standards within state education. Individual academies may have done well but the overall record shows that children who attend academies do no better than those who attend community schools, while those from ethnic minorities actually do worse. This is in line with experience in the USA, where "charter" schools – the model for academies – have been found to perform less well than ordinary American high schools. After 15 years, "free schools" in Sweden have also been found not to raise standards overall, so there is no reason to expect them to benefit education in the UK.

PRIVATISED SCHOOLS ARE NOT LOCALLY ACCOUNTABLE

Michael Gove makes much of the "autonomy" conferred by "freedom" from local control but there is no freedom from government interference and the promised autonomy does not include professional autonomy for teachers. Instead, the school itself will be free to select its intake, exclude difficult pupils and depart from national conditions of pay and service for staff. Parents and pupils with grievances and concerns will have no-one to go to except the Secretary of State. Many academies are already effectively owned by private companies, some of them based overseas, whose first loyalty is to their shareholders and certainly not to the local community. These companies are certain to expand their activities as new academies and "free schools" struggle with the problem of replacing Local Authority services.

PRIVATISED SCHOOLS ARE COSTLY FOR THE COMMUNITY

The autonomy conferred on academies and "free schools" enables them to control their intake, effectively selecting "desirable" pupils and rejecting "difficult" ones. Academies also have very high exclusion rates, compared with Local Authority schools, and parents of excluded children have very little recourse to due process. Excluded children become a charge upon the Local Authority, rather than upon the academy that has failed to cope with them. Funding that was previously used by the Local Authority to deal with the needs of less advantaged children now has to be handed over to the academy, resulting in further deprivation for community schools.

PRIVATISED SCHOOLS ARE SOCIALLY DIVISIVE

As UK schools are primarily judged on crude measures, such as examination results, schools which are free to control their intake will inevitably try to enrol as many children as possible from better off backgrounds. This is already happening within the existing system but privatisation will make it much worse. The virtual abolition of nursery provision due to government spending cuts will ensure that children from disadvantaged backgrounds will have even less access to transforming education and our schools will be divided by social class even more than they already are. This has already been found to have been a consequence of the Swedish "free schools" system.