

17/1/2011

Dear Janet/ Helen (teacher governors) / Richard Hinkley (Chair of Governors)

I am writing to express my opposition to Congleton High School becoming an Academy. I am against this move for a number of reasons.

It seems to me that the current proposal to make good and outstanding schools Academies is a fundamental attack on state education and teachers. The current proposals are undemocratic and will only result in more privilege for those in wealthier areas who have access to higher achieving schools. The political agenda behind this is a suspect one and one that, I believe, will create bigger divides in society with all the future social problems of crime and poverty that will result. There will be no public accountability despite the fact that education will continue to be funded by public money. As a foundation school we already have the option to opt in or out of LEA services and so there is no advantage to becoming an Academy.

Rather than giving power to head teachers and governors, the Academy system retains funding at central government level and places schools in a position where they can be subject to control by the Education Secretary. Do we really want Michael Gove to control decision making in our school? Head teachers will not be in control of decision making if their decisions are unacceptable to the Government. This removes one of the current arguments used in favour of attaining Academy Status.

I have been teaching for 18 years and there has been a distinct improvement in teachers' pay in that time but we are still well below many other professions that require similar levels of academic achievement. I did not go into teaching to make a lot of money but as a holder of a good degree from a good university, had many other career options open to me. This government is attacking teachers' pay and conditions and the use of threat and intimidation has already been proved by the letter to head teachers applying for Academy Status, who have pledged to retain teachers' pay and conditions terms; the letter clearly states that they will not be allowed to do this. This, I feel, is very worrying indeed as it proves that removal of teachers' existing pay and conditions is a policy of the current government. I have worked with both fantastic and appalling heads and do not trust that I will always be lucky enough to have a head teacher who is principled and will make the right decisions about hours and pay. There must be safeguards in place to ensure accountability to the public and local communities that schools serve.

Working with children makes teachers vulnerable and we need a framework outside the school to protect us and support us if necessary. This includes unions, occupational health, legal advice and some of the other services we currently can buy into either through the LEA or privately. I do not believe Academy status offers us any of these things.

The threat of redundancies has been used to argue in favour of Academies. Redundancies will happen anyway as numbers fall; we have to tailor our provision to the number of children in our school. Using this as a threat to gain staff approval for Academy status is, I believe, a non-starter.

I am fed up with Education being used as a political football. Over the past few years, senior managers have spent hours jumping through hoops to receive funding and, yet again, with the introduction of the English Baccalaureate, the goal posts are being changed. I do not see anything wrong with the return to an academic elite curriculum, for those it is suitable for, but many schools have followed the previous government's policies and marginalised languages and humanities. They feel betrayed because the goalposts have again been moved. We have a coalition government that may not last a full term. Do we really want to become an Academy and acquiesce to government pressure or is it time to actually put some integrity back into education and act on principle rather than follow the carrot of funding being dangled before us? Pure economics should sound warning bells as this funding may not be sustained and once we have moved there will be no going back.

I enjoy working at Congleton High School and have taken pride in contributing to its current success. Moves such as closer liaison with neighbouring schools are really positive and working together is, I believe, the way forward. We need to keep pushing to allow our students to achieve the qualifications and experiences that will bring them success but I do not feel that becoming an Academy is the way forward.

We have to ask ourselves what is behind this pressure to become an Academy. What is the political motivation? Why the rush? Working in schools, we are in the best position to know what a good educational experience is for our students and should be prepared to defend their education against the whims of various governments, whatever their political persuasion may be. Education means good and outstanding teachers in the classroom ensuring quality teaching and learning is happening. This means that teachers need to be treated and remunerated well. There is no evidence that Academy Status will improve education for our students; it will threaten pay and conditions and I urge you to abandon moves to become an Academy.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Dearnaley

Deputy Curriculum Coordinator for English



ACHIEVING SUCCESS TOGETHER

CONGLETON HIGH SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY
Box Lane, Congleton, Cheshire, CW12 4NS.

Mrs S Dearnaley

19th January 2011

Dear Sarah,

Thank you for your thoughtful response to the consultation process. Many of the points you have raised have been answered in responses to other staff that will be considered by the Governors.

Some of the points you raise relate to political issues and it is not for the school to take a political stance on these matters. As governors we need to consider carefully whatever initiatives and opportunities are available to benefit our school.

One of the points you make is that the threat of redundancies has been used in favour of academies. I don't think anyone is making a threat, but as Governors we have to take strategic decisions based on the best information we have available. You will be aware that our intake numbers have dropped over the last couple of years from our admissions number of 180. We have information from our feeder primaries and from this a reasonable estimate can be made of our probable intake over the next 5 years. We are now working on the basis that we will be admitting 5 forms of entry rather than 6 next September, and this position will continue until at least 2015. This means that we will have to face a funding reduction relating to around 30 students per year, and it is just a fact that staff reductions will be necessary during this period to meet this reduced budget.

In my working life I have been the subject of a 90 day notice of potential redundancy and have seen friends and colleagues made redundant – victims of economic forces beyond their control. As Governors and employers we have a duty of care to our staff and I cannot see how we can discharge this duty without taking advantage of an opportunity for extra funding that may minimise the degree of staff reduction that becomes necessary. It is also difficult to see how being able to retain a higher proportion of our staff can but improve the education provided to our students.

You raise some other matters which I can clarify.

You suggest that Academies will be subject to control by the Education Secretary. Should we decide to convert we have to sign a funding agreement which defines our responsibilities – such as operating a fair admissions policy, preventing Governors receiving any remuneration and so on. To quote one clause directly "The Governing Body shall have regard to (but for the avoidance of doubt shall not be bound by) any guidance as to the governance of academies that the Secretary of State shall

publish". This seems to say that our school would be less subject to central control than has been hitherto.

This feeds into another of your points concerning the English Baccalaureate. The degree to which our school focuses on it will be a decision for the school and will depend to a large degree on how it is viewed by universities, employers and parents rather than on central direction.

I am pleased you enjoy working at the school and it is certainly not in the Governors' or the Head's interests to damage that in any way. In particular Terms and Condition of staff would be protected as part of the TUPE. The formal federation we have with other schools in the locality – some of whom are already academies – is very valuable and we certainly seek to strengthen these relationships over time.

I have tried to answer those concerns which lie within my remit as a Governor and I can assure you that any decision to convert will not be taken on political grounds but on purely pragmatic ones regarding the future of our school.

Yours sincerely

Mr R Hinckley
Chair of Governors.

cc Janet Newton, Helen Vale

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