

Council-11th April 2016

A notice of motion has been received from Councillor S Coughlan: The Notice of Motion States:

Notice of Motion to Council – Academies

The Conservative Government's announcement that every school will be an Academy by 2020 heralds the final episode in the destruction of democratically accountable state education.

This flies in the face of any evidence about the validity of the Academy model as a vehicle for school improvement. This starts with the Education Select Committee who said that 'There is at present no convincing evidence of the impact of Academy status on attainment in primary schools'.

Even OFSTED boss Sir Michael Wilshaw now implicitly questions academisation. His recent report condemned several Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) for paying fat cat salaries, feckless support and failing the most disadvantaged children. Wilshaw compared them to the worst Local Authorities of yesteryear, but that's unfair. At least an LA could be held accountable at the ballot box.

At the recent Overview and Scrutiny, the Panel was informed that children's progress and attainment in Council controlled schools is better and improving more quickly than in Academies.

Therefore;

This Council condemns the government policy of forced academisation, and calls on the Leader of the council to write to the Chancellor stating that taking power away from local Government regarding schools, undermines the whole Devolution project of Combined Authorities and the Governments Locality policy.

Background

1. Within Walsall there are 121 schools and settings, 92 of which are maintained by the local authority. This includes 85 primary, three secondary, 7 special, 2 pupil referral units and 8 nursery schools. There are also 29 academies, comprising: 15 primary academies, of which 7 are sponsor- led and 7 are convertors; 16 secondary academies, of which 8 are sponsor led and 7 are convertors. Walsall currently works with 7 Academy Sponsors.
2. Walsall's school improvement strategy has clear strategic priorities and targets to 2018, which expect all schools and Academies to meet or exceed national averages for performance at all key states in primary and secondary schools. There is priority focus on rapidly improving the attainment and progress of pupils attending all schools and Academies in the Borough.

3. There is an improving trend of performance in key measures across all phases in Local Authority maintained schools. Currently the performance of Sponsored Academies is not improving at the same rate and this impacts on overall Borough wide results. There is robust data collection in place, analysis and use of data from schools and Academies by the Local Authority to challenge and support improvement across all settings. The Education Challenge Board set up by the Local Authority also holds schools and Academies to account.
4. The Local Authority invests resources and capacity to deliver challenge and support to all schools; Local Authority maintained schools and Academies. The Local Authority has not withdrawn from this when schools have become Academies because we have a responsibility to act on behalf of all Walsall's children, young people and their families irrespective of what type of institution they attend. As such the Local Authority holds regular challenge meetings with Academy sponsors and Principals to hold them to account and to monitor progress and outcomes. The Local Authority is represented on Academy Improvement Boards to challenge data, pupil progress and impact. This is not the case in all Local Authorities.
5. Regular meetings are held with the Regional Commissioner (who has responsibility for Academy performance on behalf of the DfE) to provide challenge and to discuss the roles and responsibilities of sponsors within Walsall Academies. As a result, some sponsors have been removed from underperforming Academies and DfE reviews have taken place.
6. The Local Authority monitors the performance and outcomes of all schools and Academies. There is an improving trend of Ofsted school inspection judgements with more positive outcomes (see Appendix 1). Seven schools have been removed from Special Measures, three have moved to good. Although there remains a 10% gap in schools judged to be good or better between Walsall and National since August 2014
7. The Local Authority promotes school-to-school support between all types of schools to share good practice and offer support to improve outcomes for all children. All schools and Academies engage in the school-to-school sector led approach with the Local Authority. This is a positive feature of Walsall's education system and must be maintained if more Local Authority maintained schools become Academies.
8. Where Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) are in place, engagement with the Council is less evident because many services are provided by the Trust's infrastructure, for example business management functions. This encourages them to become more self-sufficient and independent of the Local Authority. Potentially Multi-Academy Trusts will replace many of the roles and function of the Local Authority, particularly the larger Trusts with 20+ schools. This has implications for Council services that currently generate income by trading with schools
9. There are currently very strong and positive relationships between the Local Authority and Academies on which much of the work with them depends. The Local Authority's

statutory powers and role in Academies is minimal and that could result in our knowledge of Academy performance reducing with limited opportunity to monitor and challenge and no powers to intervene. This could put at risk achieving our strategic priorities to 2018.

10. As a result of more schools becoming Academies there will be a reduction of LACSEG (Local Authority Central Spend Equivalent Grant) as funding is transferred from Local Authorities directly to Academies. This will lead to significant reductions in resources to support services provided by the Council to schools and Academies. The impact on Children's Services is likely to be particularly severe because this resource delivers a well-established system of monitoring and challenging underperformance in schools by School Improvement Partners and other Local Authority officers.
11. The Local Authority will be discussing with Headteachers and Chairs of Governors future models of working together, via sector led improvement and school to school support within a system with more Academies. These discussions will include looking at the national and local changing educational landscape to achieve the ambition to improve educational outcomes for all Walsall children.
12. Where possible traded services will continue to be offered to schools and Academies by the Local Authority in order to maintain links and provide services as needed and required.
13. Walsall Council Children's Services has worked hard to encourage schools and Academies to work together in partnerships for the benefit of all children and young people, within a system where Local Authority schools already have more autonomy. This is having an impact on improving the quality of provision and outcomes for children and young people in Walsall. This positive partnership approach between schools, Academies and the Local Authority that enables effective challenge, monitoring and support must remain irrespective of how the balance of Local Authority maintained schools and academies changes.
14. The scope of the proposed West Midlands devolution deal does not include powers, funding or responsibilities related to schools.

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