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Friday 5th July, 2019

Dear Mr Herrington,

Opposition to the forced academisation of Moulsecoomb Primary School

I wish to draw your attention to the widespread opposition to the Academy Order issued by your department to Moulsecoomb Primary School, Brighton. Parents and carers, teaching staff, support staff and governors at the school all vehemently oppose moves to take control of the school away from the local authority and community. Further, we oppose the school being handed over to a board of trustees with no connection to the local neighbourhood or the school. Along with Brighton and Hove councillors, the two local MPs, Caroline Lucas and Lloyd Russell-Moyle also believe that academisation would be wrong for the school.

As opposition spokesperson for the Children, Young People and Skills Committee on Brighton and Hove City Council, I co-proposed a motion with the Labour committee chair Nick Childs. This notice of motion – which is a political instruction from the council - notes the efforts made by the council to improve the standards of the school and calls on you as Regional Schools Commissioner to revoke the academisation order. Councillors of all parties and every single councillor on the committee voted in favour of revoking the academy order, which shows the widespread trust and support for the local authority's ability to carry out the necessary improvements to the school.

The Green Party's stance on academies has been consistent: we have always opposed turning schools into academies. We successfully worked with parents in the city to fight off attempts to turn Hove Park Secondary School into an academy in 2014.

We certainly do not see academisation as the answer to Moulsecoomb Primary School's 'inadequate' Ofsted rating, particularly as 70% of the children at the school live in one of the top 10% most deprived wards in the country, and statistics show that academies are two thirds less likely to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged children.¹ We also have serious concerns about the commitment of private trusts to act in the best interests of the school, following media reports regarding financial irregularities at a number of academy trusts, and the ease with which money has been siphoned away from the education of

¹ <https://www.uklocalarea.com/index.php?lsoa=E01016915&q=Moulsecoomb+and+Bevendean&wc=00MLNL>

children and into the pockets of top executives.²

Moving away from the questionable record of academisation, Moulsecoomb School is well known for its role in the community for providing pastoral care, mental health support and guidance for children facing complex challenges. Furthermore, the Ofsted report shows that school is improving in many ways, particularly amongst younger cohorts.³ Alongside this, the local authority's detailed plan to support the school looks set to lead to an overall improvement in other aspects of the school's performance in the near future. Taking a school at the heart of our community out of the local authority's family of schools at this time will make it far less likely to improve its performance.

The local community is bitterly disappointed by the imposition of an academisation order and has been very active in its resistance to it. Parents and carers have set up a campaign group called 'Hands Off Moulsecoomb School' and created a petition against turning the school into an academy, which over 2,400 people have signed so far. At a packed public meeting at the school on Tuesday 18 June, organised by the group, parents and staff were among those who voiced their many concerns about the proposed changes. One governor stated: 'What they're trying to do here to our wonderful teachers and terrific head is disgusting.'

In an indicative ballot among teaching staff at the school, 100% voted against the school's academisation. Parents are being balloted in September and if their vociferous campaign so far is anything to go by, there are strong signs that academisation will have zero support among them too. If the Government really wants to help the children of the school, perhaps it could begin by reversing cuts and changing the funding formula, which has adversely affected the spending-per-child in the school to the tune of £595 per pupil since 2015.⁴

Imposing an academisation order on a community that does not want it will do nothing for the morale of parents and staff at the school. The community wants to feel listened to and has the support of the city council - but alas, the decision about the fate of our community school lies outside local hands.

I would be grateful if you could acknowledge the fact that the community opposes this academisation order - and would be devastated if Moulsecoomb Primary School were to leave local authority control. I very much hope that sometime in the near future the Government rethinks its unpopular and undemocratic academy conversion policy, particularly now that evidence has shown it not to be effective.

I'd like to end by reminding you that a number of forced academy orders have been revoked in the past as the result of a higher Ofsted grade being awarded to a school in a follow-up inspection. I urge you to give Moulsecoomb School time for the positive changes by the leadership team and staff, supported by the local authority, to take effect at the school.

If the school is then reinspected, there is a very strong chance that there will be enough evidence of positive change for the order to be revoked. If this is the case, I very much hope that this is the path that you will take.

² <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/jul/22/academy-schools-scandal-failing-trusts>

³ <https://files.api.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50079579>

⁴ <https://schoolcuts.org.uk/schools/?chosenSchool=8462002>

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Green Party Councillor for Hanover and Elm Grove ward

Ministers have now u-turned on 33 attempts to force schools to become academies in the last 2 years.⁵ Academies have been beaten because teachers, parents, children and local Councillors have worked together. We intend Moulsecoomb Primary to be the next.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Elaine Hills, Green Opposition Spokesperson for Children, Young People and Skills

Co-signed by the Green Group of Councillors, Brighton and Hove City Council

Councillor Hannah Clare
Councillor Steve Davis
Councillor Lizzie Deane
Councillor Tom Druitt
Councillor Marianna Ebel
Councillor David Gibson
Councillor Amy Heley
Councillor Siriol Hugh-Jones
Councillor Leo Littman
Councillor Jamie Lloyd
Councillor Phélim Mac Cafferty
Councillor Sarah Nield
Councillor Martin Osborne
Councillor Alex Phillips
Councillor Steph Powell
Councillor Clare Rainey
Councillor Sue Shanks
Councillor Pete West

⁵ <https://schoolswave.co.uk/ministers-have-u-turned-on-33-attempts-to-force-schools-to-become-academies/>

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