

STATEMENT BY LEEDS SCHOOLS TOGETHER

Our deputation represents Leeds Schools Together which is a forum made up of **parents, school governors, staff and professional associations** against the **proposals** for South Leeds High and Intake High becoming academies.

We strongly believe that the consultation process did not genuinely take into **account** the views and concerns of the local communities. In the case of **South Leeds**, there were numerous petitions with over a thousand signatures and a **packed** public meeting with an overwhelming majority of people voting **against an academy** proposal. South Leeds experienced a very difficult merger process **bringing together** two communities that clearly opposed the new school. **There were** three serious riots in the first year and after four years since its opening **the school** is now a much calmer, safer, teaching and learning environment. **The school** is now making steady progress and a recent HMI inspection indicated that **the school** would very likely come out of special measures after the next **inspection** in the spring term.

An overwhelming majority of staff and parents at South Leeds are very **concerned** that all the good work achieved over the past few years in developing a **positive** ethos and identity for the school as part of the local community, **will be put at risk** by now closing and reopening the school as an academy. **What the school** now needs is time to consolidate its success rather than more **change and uncertainty**.

Intake High School is also making steady progress, having come out of **Special Measures** over two years ago. The school does need an improved building; **however**, it just doesn't make sense to change an improving school's ethos and **all the instability** that may arise with closing and reopening the school as an **academy just to get more money** for a new building.

Although GCSE results at South Leeds and Intake are currently low, the schools **cannot** simply be measured by national targets to be deemed failing schools. **In fact** as part of the government's national challenge for schools to be achieving **30% A to C's** including English and Maths, the schools are not even being given

until 2011 to achieve these targets - whilst other so-called failing schools are being given this period of time.

All the research so far regarding the success of academies shows that results are mixed. Despite the favourable presentation of improved GCSE results by the government there are plenty of reasons to be concerned. There is no independent evidence that academies are delivering significantly improved results at a faster rate than other maintained schools.

Of the 638 "national Challenge" schools announced by Ed Balls in June 2008 i.e. schools labeled as failing, **26 of these are academies. This was 31% of the existing academies**, a larger proportion than in the maintained sector. Clearly academies are no magic bullet. The hard work of school improvement depends, as it always has done, on improving a range of factors.

Research on academies from the London Institute of Education concluded that "rises in achievement" corresponded to falls in the proportion of pupils from deprived backgrounds" Price Waterhouse Cooper in its research concluded much the same.

This research clearly links in with evidence from the only academy in Leeds so far: the David Young Academy, which excluded more pupils last year than all the other high schools in Leeds put together.

Although Education Leeds and the proposed sponsors have tried to reassure staff and parents at Intake and South Leeds that there will be minimal educational disruption, the closing and reopening of the schools as academies will in fact affect continuity and stability within both schools. The proposed sponsor of South Leeds High (Sir Paul Edwards) told the staff there would actually be **a predicted dip in results for the first two years of a newly opened academy due to the changes the school will have to undergo**. Try explaining this to the parents of students who currently are in Year 10 and doing their GCSE's next year. Try explaining this to parents of students who will be commencing Year 7 next academic year and will have to experience all the uncertainties.

To help measure the views of staff at South Leeds and Intake regarding the proposals for academies, a joint union survey was undertaken by the NUT/NASUWT/ATL. The outcome provides a very clear indication that a significant % of staff from both schools would be looking for work in other local authority schools if the schools become academies. A significant % also indicated that they would be prepared to take strike action if pay and conditions of service related to transfer of employment were not clarified in writing by the proposed sponsors and Education Leeds as appropriate. Staff are very concerned with the example of the David Young academy, whereby a reorganization occurred shortly after becoming an academy, resulting in major changes to pay and conditions of service and a consequent high turnover of staff.

We are very concerned that local accountability will be lost if South Leeds and Intake become academies. There have been assurances from the proposed sponsors and Education Leeds, that there will be close collaboration, however, an academies' governing body is legally independent from the local authority and a sponsor can assert significant influence over decision making within the governing body. Of particular concern is the credibility of Edu Trust as the proposed sponsor of Intake. Edu Trust is currently under investigation by the Department for Children, Family and Schools, over issues to do with mismanagement of finances and a senior executive of the company was dismissed due to raising concerns over this. When the staff at Intake voiced their concerns over the proposed sponsor, their Principal Designate responded by telling them to trust the school's management and not worry about it as everything will be ok. Surely Leeds city council and Education Leeds has a duty and responsibility to the local community to ensure that the proposed sponsor is appropriate for the school.

We know that the government is putting pressure on local councils to create academies, however, there are viable options which the consultation process has ignored. An alternative for South Leeds could be an agreement to defer the deficit for an agreed period of time and to apply for specialist status once it comes out of special measures. This would bring in additional funding and resources for the school. It would allow the school time to consolidate its progress and stay accountable to the local community.

The option for Intake is that the school be allowed to continue to make steady progress and that the new build remains within the local authority and accountable to the local community.

In other cities, such as Derby and Oldham, parents and teachers have successfully persuaded their education departments that academies are not the way forward. We would like Leeds to stand up for its local communities, and do the same.