

23 September 2008



Dear Vanessa Brown,

As a parent of a primary school child and a pre-schooler, who currently lives in the Falmer School catchment. I am writing to you, to express my opposition to the plans to close down the school and replace it with a city academy.

I have recently visited Falmer High School and was very impressed by how much the staff have managed to improve the school in the past few years; something that will no doubt continue if the school was left to carry on as usual. I strongly believe that the effective privatisation of the school will benefit neither the children or the local community. Personally I so strongly disagree with the academy programme I would refuse to send my children to such a school.

I am very concerned about the poor attempts at consultation by the council. Many parents in the area don't know about the proposal. It should be taken as given that those who are going to be the most affected by the proposed changes (i.e. the children and their families) should be the first to be consulted on what they think. This should include a consultation pack being sent to all families currently living in the Falmer catchment area.

Yours sincerely,

Paula Blackledge

Sent: 09 October 2008 20:08

To: Di Smith

Subject: Objection to notice to discontinue Falmer High School

Please find below my response to the notice to discontinue Falmer High School & my objection to its closure to enable the establishment of an Academy.

My husband & I supported our daughter's 1st preference of Falmer High School based on the excellent work done there by headteacher Stuart McLaughlin and his team of staff and their commitment of providing high quality learning opportunities for all. We specifically chose a state school because we want our daughter to experience a truly comprehensive education. We want our daughter to be educated in an institution under the control of the Local Authority, not within an academy directed by an unelected, unaccountable sponsor. The Academy proposals appear to offer no added benefits other than the promise of new modern buildings. Our daughter has excelled in a primary school building far older than the buildings at Falmer High. It is what goes on within the school not the bricks and mortar that make the difference. Your Summer 2008 No 1 Newsletter states that the Academy will offer improved results however reports show that nationally academies have not been a success with only 22% of academy pupils gaining 5 A*C passes whilst the national average was 44%. Recent figures released show that academies are excluding disproportionately high numbers of pupils, offloading difficult pupils to neighbouring schools. This will have a serious adverse effect on other schools in the city.

I do not believe with privatising our community schools by giving them academy status. Ed Balls recently announced 638 schools that must improve results and both Falmer High & Patcham are on this list. Along with 26 academies!!! We have already seen the steady rise of improved results at Falmer, give them the time and the money to continue doing so – they don't need academy status to achieve this. I believe that local residents have been misled into thinking that the only way Falmer will receive funding for new building is to accept the academy proposals, when BSF funding could be available within a couple of years & the school would remain under LA control. Schools should be under local authority control for the sake of the children and the staff. We know that current Falmer High staff will transfer with pay and conditions secure under TUPE regulations, but what happens when we then have a two-tier system when new staff are taken on? The lack of representation by parents, staff and the local authority is another major concern. **I therefore confirm that I am strongly against the proposal to close Falmer High School and replace it with an academy.**

Further to my previous email to Gil Sweetenham with my objection during the

informal consultation period, I have still not had any acknowledgement that my complaint within that email, has been noted. I therefore include a copy of that complaint, in 3 parts, & trust that I will receive acknowledgement that it has been noted.

1) Inadequate informal consultation.

I was fortunate to have received one of only 10, yes 10 copies of the consultation proposals leaflet that was sent to my daughter's primary school. (As confirmed within the document "Falmer Academy Project – Informal Consultation Distribution List). 10 leaflets for a school of 300+ children, a school within the Falmer High School catchment area, a school where over 50% of the current year 6 children will be moving to Falmer High School this coming September. When I questioned the Assistant Director of Schools, Gil Sweetenham at the public meeting on 10th June, he told me it was up to schools to inform parents. What, with 10 leaflets? Surely as a bare minimum the children due to start at Falmer High this September should have received direct information on the proposals and, as the Local Authority hold details of every child living in the catchment area **they** should have been responsible for getting this information to not only to these current year 6 children but every child living within the catchment area. They didn't. That may explain the poor turnout at the aforementioned meeting. I took 50 leaflets away from the meeting for parents of year 6 children at Coombe Road Primary and our headteacher later requested further copies for the rest of the school. In contrast, the Falmer newsletter (No1) was obviously distributed in greater numbers as these came home with the children – but not until the meeting had passed and close to the end of the consultation period. Considering the history of the SAR and the same complaint re lack of consultation I would have thought it would have been imperative for the local authority to get it right this time and save themselves further embarrassment.

2) I would like to register my disgust in the "Expression of Interest for an Academy" (EOI) document as found on the BHCC website. My husband & I, both educated, hardworking taxpayers are incredibly insulted at the presumption on page 8 of the document, **"...77 pupils from within the catchment area did not put Falmer School as a preference. It is reasonable to presume that the families of these pupils who chose schools outside the Falmer catchment area are the more motivated and aspirational families."** I am certain other parents that have chosen Falmer this year will be equally offended to read this. I request to be informed of who made this assumption please> Furthermore, why was this figure of 77 not broken down further to distinguish the amount of children following the sibling link to an out-of-catchment school? I therefore believe that this paragraph in the EOI to be misleading and inappropriate and would like this officially noted.

3) Finally, back to the EOI. There is reference on page 10 to the Falmer catchment area and "Projections for the next five years show the catchment area with at least 200 year 7 students and likely large building developments

at Preston Park Barracks (Lewes Road) and The Marina. Overall, the Y7 cohort living in this catchment area could rise from the present 200 to 250 from 2011 onwards."

As far as I am aware the Falmer catchment area is BN2 4 and part of BN1 9 postcodes. Throughout the SAR we heard how unfortunate the residents of The Marina are, living so far from their nearest school, yet now, somehow they appear to be included in projected numbers for a school a lot further away and totally out of catchment. Unless of course there are already plans afoot to amend the catchment areas? Something I am sure parents and residents citywide would be interested in hearing.

Jane Kistnasamy



Brighton & Hove

Subject: 2nd Falmer consultation submission

Dear Gil

I believe the 2nd consultation ends tomorrow (it's very hard to tell from the Council website, as details of the consultation are virtually invisible). Here is my submission.

In summary, you will not be surprised to hear that:

- I don't believe that Falmer School should close and then be redeveloped as an Academy.
- Alternative investment money is available from other sources.
- In the interests of democracy and real consultation, Falmer catchment parents should be allowed a vote on the proposal - just as Council tenants were, on a similar transfer of Council/community assets out of direct Council control.

Some of my reasons for this view are as follows:

1) I consider it profoundly undemocratic that any one individual (be it an Academy Sponsor or anyone else) should be allowed to wield so much power over the education of hundreds of (other peoples') children.

For example, Rod Aldridge acknowledged that he PERSONALLY had chosen the two specialisms, at the June consultation meeting at Falmer.

Why does the Sponsor have the right to decide what form my childrens' education is to take?!

This is even harder to swallow, when you consider that Aldridge will only be providing a MAXIMUM of 2 million pounds funding, which is spread over 5 years. (Experience from other Academies shows that Sponsors frequently do not supply even this much money.) Compare this to the 20-25 million pounds that will come from the taxpayer. Additionally, much of Aldridge's money will not even go directly to Falmer, but to its 'feeder' primaries instead.

2) There is a serious lack of transparency in the arrangements between the Sponsor and the DCSF, as the funding agreement between the two parties is (as I understand it) confidential.

3) I do not personally like the entrepreneurship specialism, and after hearing Aldridge speak, and reading the consultation documents, it seems to me that it will be little more than peddling an ideology, and indoctrinating my kids against my

wishes. (I very much doubt that this specialism will stretch to an objective assessment of the current banking crisis, for instance - and this is something that has major consequences for entrepreneurs!)

The specialism will not be a separate subject, but will permeate the entire curriculum (making it impossible to opt out of, if we so desire). Aldridge said that Maths can be taught in terms of analysing a balance sheet, and Geography in terms of comparing national economic performances.

Regardless of your political views, this is an EXTRAORDINARILY narrow approach to a subject. There will be many aspects of the curriculum that do not fit readily into the entrepreneurship theme, but despite asking, I have received no assurances that a TRULY balanced curriculum can be maintained.

As a result, I am seriously concerned about the quality of the education that will be available to my boys, and to all other pupils, at an Academy at Falmer.

4) I understand that Academies tend to show little or no improvement in results compared to mainstream schools, that they tend to offer the less challenging GNVQs rather than GCSEs, and that they are particularly poor at improving the performance of the weakest students. This is incredible given the resources that are channelled into them - they don't represent value for money!

I'm deeply afraid that much of the Academy pot of money will not actually be directly invested in Moulsecoomb and Bevendean, to improve our education, but will be creamed off by private companies and highly paid consultants.

5) While the LEA will retain some Governors, coming out of direct LEA control will mean that an Academy is less accountable to parents.

We won't know the terms of the Sponsor's agreement with government, and if a parent is in dispute with an Academy, their only recourse is to appeal to a distant and inaccessible Secretary of State - where they presumably join a huge national queue of grievances demanding attention. Local services MUST be as close to local people as possible, if they are to stand any chance of being effective and fair.

6) Although I am all in favour of strong discipline, Academies seem to have enormously high exclusion rates, with children often being excluded for arbitrary and petty reasons.

They are a flagship policy, with intense pressure for results. Academies have an incentive to eject any pupil who might - in their perception - be potentially awkward. They are then dumped back out into the LEA system - and it's not as if Brighton and Hove is overflowing with secondary places!

I don't want my (or others') children to suffer as a result of a target-chasing social experiment.

7) A Falmer Academy is unnecessary.

I cannot understand why (according to the Council's own documents) no money has been invested in Falmer for 15 years or more, with the result that its buildings are now not fit for purpose.

Leaving that aside, the Council also says that Building Schools for a Future money could become available as early as 2011. This could achieve the improvements in school infrastructure promised by the Academy, probably more cheaply, and without the Sponsor's strings attached.

8) As a gymnastics group pointed out at the June meeting, Falmer's buildings are already extremely well used by local people. Council representatives agreed with this, stating that the school is unusually well-endowed with halls and other meeting spaces.

However, if (e.g.) the South Building goes, there will be a net loss of such abundant community space. For instance, the consultation documents offer no assurances that there will still be room for the two nurseries. This is completely at odds with the rhetoric about the community being at the heart of the proposed Academy.

I hope that the Council will see sense, and abandon this dangerous plan.

At the very least, it must be put to a vote of catchment parents. I can see no genuine argument against such a vote.

Yours

Dominic Franklin

Brighton Schools Not For Sale



Falmer High School - Let there be a genuine debate.

If you wish there to be a genuine debate about the future of Falmer School please sign this letter and post it to:

Vanessa Brown, cabinet member for Children and Young People,
King's House, Grand Avenue, Hove
BN3 2LS.

Please take the time to do this. A City Academy means privatising Falmer High School and has severe long term implications for the school and the community. Parents at the very least deserve to know the facts.

Dear Vanessa Brown,

I am writing to express my concern at the plans to close Falmer High school and replace it with a City Academy leaving the school in the hands of an entrepreneur businessman with very little direct experience of education.

The city academy scheme has not proved to be a success through, out the country and can involve handing over control of education to unaccountable business and religious organisations. City academies have seen huge increases in exclusions and staff turnover when they have been introduced.

Despite this, and the fact that all teachers unions oppose the scheme the councils 'consultation' so far has only shown the pro-academy argument.

I am disappointed that parents of feeder primary schools have not been issued with individual letters asking them what they think. I also understand that the responses to the first stage of the consultation the majority of views expressed were against the City Academy and yet it seems it is going ahead regardless of this.

If a consultation is to be effective it needs to provide a balanced view of the pros and cons of proposed changes and so far this has not happened. With this in mind I request that you hold a ballot of the current and prospective parents in the school's catchment area so that all the issues surrounding the City Academy scheme can be debated openly and the views of parents taken into account. I understand Sheffield Council are holding a ballot over plan for an Academy in their city and see no reason why Brighton parents should not be given the same right.

I hope that councillors have enough confidence in their plans for the school to allow for this basic democratic right of parents to be observed.

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MRS J.R. BUNKER

APPENDIX 6



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