

Education in brief: school objects to 'dictatorial' instruction to become an academy

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Parents launch campaign against the education department's move to turn their primary school into an academy after a single 'notice to improve' from Ofsted

Hostile takeover

Education Guardian has seen a transcript of a meeting for parents at a Croydon primary school in which attendees were given an insight into what critics see as the dictatorial nature of the process of forcing some institutions into academy status.

The school is Roke primary, in prosperous Kenley, Surrey, which, as the Guardian revealed two weeks ago, is at the centre of a new row over Michael Gove's move to turn more schools into sponsored academies. The previously "outstanding" school was identified for closure and re-opening as an academy under the Harris chain following weak test results in 2011 and a single "notice to improve" verdict from Ofsted the following May.

The governors' meeting for parents was told that the school's head, Caroline Phillips, and chair of governors, Malcolm Farquharson, were summoned to the Department for Education in September, where they were told of the Harris plan. Following better test results last summer and what it sees as a concerted improvement effort, the school reportedly asked the DfE to wait until a follow-up monitoring visit from the inspectorate, expected later in the autumn, had taken place.

The transcript records Farquharson as telling parents: "At the meeting [with the DfE], we said, 'Don't you think you should wait until the Ofsted monitoring visit takes place?' And they said, 'No, we want to move now ... and if you do not agree we will get the local authority to fire you, all of you, all the governors. If the local authority don't do it, we will. We will put in our own board of governors who will do what we say.' "

The DfE also reportedly told the school's head and chair of governors not to share with parents details of the DfE meeting. They did not do so until the DfE decision was reiterated in a letter received on the final day of last term. Ofsted inspectors did not arrive until this month.

A vociferous campaign against the plans was launched by parents.

The DfE said that no final decision had yet been made on the school, although academy sponsorship under Harris remained its preference. However, on Friday came news that Ofsted now deems the school to be making "satisfactory progress". Watch this space.