

## Factsheet # 18

### KEEP SCHOOLS AS A LOCAL COMMUNITY SERVICE

- There are 203 old-style academies in England. They answer to central government which funds them directly and allows operational freedom. They are sponsored by a wide range of religious, commercial and public organisations.
- The first act of the Coalition government has been to rush an Academies Bill through Parliament and to invite schools to apply for academy status.
- The new government policy takes the academy programme, of which UNISON and many others were highly critical, to a new and different level.
- Rather than focusing on so-called failing schools, those judged as outstanding have been invited to a fast-track change of status. With 22,000 maintained schools in England, the current stock of academies could be viewed as a niche experiment of unproven worth. Thousands of schools breaking away from local authorities, with many freedoms and influences, will have a dramatic impact on education and society.

#### Reactions to the new academies programme:

- ❖ From the National Governors' Association on the absence of consultation: *"In its first piece of education legislation the government has effectively disenfranchised local communities."*
- ❖ From a parent, Melissa Benn, on academy freedom on admissions: *"Admissions remain at the very heart of fairness in our education system. Otherwise, social, ethnic and religious segregation, an already powerful element in our schools, will only intensify, harming poor children the most."*
- ❖ From headteacher, Mary Gibson, Islington, London: *"This school will become an academy over my dead body...I value the co-operation between schools and the involvement with the local education authority and I would hate not to have that."*
- ❖ Director of Children's Services, Hampshire: *"...whereas the local authority will remain true to its position of general neutrality on the question of the status of state schools, I personally struggle to see*

*what the genuine benefits are for a school in Hampshire to pursue this route, whereas I think the risks, as implied here, are significant.”*

- ❖ Christina McAnea, UNISON’s National Education Secretary:  
*“Academies can set their own pay and conditions for staff and their growth in numbers will increase chaos nationally and make the task of protecting vulnerable support staff that much harder. UNISON cannot see how the creation of a tier of schools, unfettered by local accountability and driven by central government, can benefit anyone but those resentful of local democracy or in it to make money.”*

### **How should we respond?**

UNISON has been working closely with other education unions, the TUC, the Anti-Academies Alliance and other concerned individuals and groups. The priority has been to ensure that amendments to the Academies Bill are laid, Parliamentary Questions asked and briefings circulated widely. Everyone in the community should have an interest in the fate of local schools and staff, governors and parents especially should:

- Find out if their school has expressed an interest in academy status. The public has the right to know and can use the Freedom of Information Act.
- If “Yes”, demand that full and proper consultation takes place, including public meetings.
- Know that staff are entitled to “meaningful consultation under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE) as their jobs will be affected.
- Be involved in the academies debate. This is a community issue and local MPs, councils, governing bodies and other community groups should be in discussion.
- Speak to the local press which can be a powerful ally in helping to keep schools a local, community service.

There are a suite of joint union campaigning materials available from our campaign website at <http://www.unison.org.uk/education/defendyourschool> and a link to the Anti-Academies Alliance website at [www.antiacademies.org.uk](http://www.antiacademies.org.uk)