

# Opinion

David Clay

## Year on year more schools have been forced to join multi-academy trusts

I was outraged by the recent Ofsted report based on a short inspection of King Edward VII school, ruling that the school was 'inadequate' and therefore forcing it into academisation.

King Edwards (KES) is an excellent school. It is known for having very good pastoral care and for being child centred, as well as having an excellent track record of high academic achievement.

For many parents, who feel that their child would especially benefit from being at a school that recognises and supports individual needs, it is the school of choice.

KES is not part of an academy chain and so retains an independent identity and ethos. Pupils thrive at the school, they feel that they have a voice and are valued as individuals.

The school has a well deserved reputation of promoting well being and helping children to develop into well educated, well rounded, caring members of society. It is not in the interest of the pupils, present and future or of the city as a whole to force KES to become part of a multi-academy trust.

Some parents think that on becoming an academy, a school will somehow automatically become more academic. This is not the case.

Many parents are unaware of the following facts regarding academies:

Teaching staff in academies are not required to be qualified teachers.

Class teachers in academies are, on average paid around £1,500 pa less than in maintained schools. Academies do not have to follow the national curriculum... they can write their own. Academies are not required to have a board of governors. Academies are allowed different admissions policy from state maintained schools. That there is no evidence that academisation raises standards.

That many large multi-academy chains are businesses whose primary target is making money from state funded education. Year on



year more schools have been forced to join multi-academy trusts. These MATs are, essentially, businesses that run groups of schools using money from central government. The size of these MATs is increasing as they swallow up smaller academy groups and Local Authority maintained schools (such as King Edwards). The five biggest academy chains in the country now have 70 or more schools in their portfolio.

One of the ways that MATs can keep costs down is by selectively employing younger, less experienced (and often, unqualified) teachers.

Schools within a particular MAT tend to have the same ethos and promote their particular 'brand', some even market their own uniforms.

King Edward VII school is noted for focussing on the individual child and for encouraging young people to think and to express themselves. It is now the last remaining Lo-

cal Authority maintained secondary school in Sheffield.

The suggestion that a school with such a long proven track record, should be forced to become an academy based principally on a two day inspection seems ridiculous.

The school was rated as being good in the previous inspection and the recent performance by students in their GCSE's and A level examinations were very good. Throughout the pandemic the school gave a level of support to students that was massively appreciated by pupils and parents and the school attendance figures remained very high. I would hope that any inspection would be used to identify faults and failings within a school and would help facilitate the correction of any deficiencies. It would seem that in the interests of the students and staff, that the school should be given the opportunity to demonstrate that any failings have been

**This underrated 2014 drama about a troubled teenage maths prodigy whose life changes when he is chosen to represent Britain at the International Mathematic Olympiad was filmed in Sheffield and Taiwan. In Sheffield, King Edward VII School and High Storrs School both feature in the film, which starred Asa Butterfield, future Oscar winner Sally Hawkins and Rafe Spall**

put right by re-inspecting the school. The purpose of school inspections is supposed to be to help to maintain high standards in education, and not be used as a blunt instrument to force schools to become part of an academy chain. While I believe that inspection of schools is essential, I think that the current Ofsted process has become politicised, noting that the government desire that all schools should be part of a multi-academy trust by 2030. The Government promised choice in education. The ethos and excellence of King Edward VII gives many parents in Sheffield, the choice that they want. To force the school to become an academy would be a travesty and a great loss to the city of Sheffield.

There is, I think, a growing feeling of frustration by ordinary people that our voices are not heard and that we are not being properly represent-

ed by our elected representatives.

This judgement of 'inadequate' and a subsequent forced academisation of a highly acclaimed Sheffield school is unsound and not in our interest.

It is clear that the best course of action would be to allow the school to address any short-comings and then to re-inspect. It is not acceptable to be told that we are to lose a good school with such a proven track record based on the ruling of a one day Ofsted inspection. We need to preserve choice in our city. It is something that adds to Sheffield's greatness. It is time for some common sense and time for our elected representatives to step up to the mark and to act in the interests of our children and their education. I would urge Sheffielders to sign and share the online petition 'Stop the forced academisation of King Edward VII School'.