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Evidence to the Committee of Enquiry into Academy Schools, House of Commons, 12 June 2007

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I would like to stress at the outset that my opposition to academy schools is based on my commitment to a national system of state-funded comprehensive secondary schools, a commitment shared by all members of the *FORUM* Editorial Board.

I wish to concentrate on *three* main points, dealing with each in turn:

1. the harmful effects of academies on neighbouring schools;
2. the worrying implications of encouraging private investment in education; and
3. the potential for harmful distortion of the curriculum.

1. It seems to me that City Academies are a thinly-disguised New Labour version of the City Technology Colleges (CTCs) invented by the Conservatives in 1986, except that Kenneth Baker expected his private sponsors to pay 'all or most' of the capital and running costs, which turned out to be a big mistake!

When I was teaching at the University of Birmingham in the 1990s, I was on the governing body of a secondary school (Byng Kenrick School) in a relatively deprived area of the city; and I can well remember how morale in the area was affected by the setting up of the very first CTC nearby at Kingshurst in Solihull. The new school was seen as something very special, with lavish classrooms, modern computer equipment and a reception area like that of a posh hotel.

I know that the new School Admissions Code which came into force in February is intended to apply to new academies; but there seems to be some doubt as to whether it will apply to *existing* academies, and there is still the problem of children with 'special needs'. I cannot see the justification for

creating even more division in an already divided and segregated secondary system.

2. Back in July 2004, *The Independent* ran a front-page story with the bold headline 'Should these people be running state schools?' The individuals named in Richard Garner's story included: Peter Sutherland of the global investment bank Goldman Sachs; Sir Frank Lowe, the agent for many leading sports stars; Sir Peter Vardy, the millionaire car dealer; and Graham Able, the head teacher of Dulwich College in south London. It does seem to me that there is a very real problem of accountability here. I know that some sponsors have had their plans defeated by local activists. What I can't understand is how someone like fashion designer Jasper Conran should ever have imagined that he had the ability or experience to run or sponsor a school!

3. Because Sir Peter Vardy is a prominent evangelical Christian who believes in the theory of creationism, his academies are often quoted when we talk about 'manipulation' or 'distortion' of the curriculum. And there does seem to be cause for concern here. In July 2004, it was reported in *The Times* that Sir Peter had arranged for a document entitled 'Christianity and Curriculum' to be available on the website of Emmanuel College in Gateshead. This suggested, among other things, that Britain was 'saved' from an invasion by Adolf Hitler in 1940 by an act of God!

I think the question posed by *The Independent* in July 2004 deserves an answer; and that answer has to be 'no'.