
Haberdashers' Aske's: the campaign against academies in Lewisham

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ABSTRACT The National Union of Teachers' 2007 pamphlet *Academies – Looking Beyond the Spin: why the NUT calls for a different approach* lists six reasons why the NUT opposes Academies, schools run by private sponsors using public money. In this article, the Secretary of the Lewisham NUT presents evidence to show how the Academies operated by the Haberdashers' Company in Lewisham, South London, carry out each of these six threats to education.

1. Academies Put Schools in the Hands of Sponsors

The Haberdashers' Company, based in the City of London, has long run independent schools based in Hertfordshire and Monmouth, a selective grammar school in Shropshire, as well as the Haberdashers' Aske's Hatcham College (HAHC) in New Cross, Lewisham.

They took advantage of Conservative legislation to convert HAHC into an independent City Technology College. Under Tony Blair's Labour legislation, they then made the seamless transfer to Academy status. Aske's clearly saw that the two policies were essentially identical. Unfortunately, it was New Labour politicians who had made the Damascene conversion to Tory educational ideology.

Haberdashers' Aske's have seized their opportunity to expand their educational empire with the Government's financial backing. They were given control of Malory School in Downham, Lewisham, which became Haberdashers' Aske's Knights Academy (HAKA).

The National Audit Office's report into Academies described HAKA as 'the most expensive academy so far' with a staggering final capital cost of £40.4 million for which 'The Worshipful Company of Haberdashers' had, in

turn, to provide one of the smallest sponsors' contributions to date, at just £295,500.

The NAO also explain how, to avoid having to pay VAT, the Academy's project steering group decided to demolish the new sports hall that had been built for Malory School. 'It took the decision to save a VAT charge of £4.25 million by demolishing and rebuilding the sports hall at a cost of around £1 million'.

Dr.Sidwell, CEO of the Federation linking the two Lewisham-based Aske's schools, is proud of her connections with the backers of Academies in the DCSF and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT). In a recent school newsletter she delights in telling parents of her trips to give talks to the DfES, and how Aske's are giving consultancy advice to both a private school in Manchester seeking to become an Academy as well as for an academy project in Telford.

Haberdashers' were encouraged to take part in the first 'competition' required under the new legislation for a new school being opened in Haringey. However, the schools adjudicator was not so impressed with their claims and rejected their bid. Undaunted, Aske's have continued to seek to become sponsors of further Academies. They were one of the original parties expressing an interest in running Pimlico School in Westminster, and are also being considered by Bexley Council as the sponsor for a new Academy in Crayford. They are also being backed by Lewisham Council in a bid to acquire nearby Monson Primary School in order to turn HAHC into a 3-18 school.

Clearly, this City Livery Company is becoming a favoured player in the corridors of the DCSF as plans are made to break-up Local Authority schooling and put schools into the hands of unaccountable sponsors.

2. Academies Threaten Fair Admissions Procedures

Haberdashers' Aske's Hatcham College likes to describe itself as a 'very successful comprehensive'. But an analysis of their pupil intake shows that their pupil population is comprehensively different from that of other secondary schools in Lewisham.

The majority of secondary schools across Lewisham operate an 'area-banding' system where schools admit pupils living closest to the school, but limited to a maximum 20% within each of five ability bands. These bands are based on tests taken by all pupils at the end of Year 5 and, therefore, reflect the ability range of pupils across the whole borough.

For example, figures from the Lewisham Admissions Forum show the intake into Year 7 for September 2007 into the nearest secondary school to HAHC, the Voluntary Aided Addey and Stanhope, was closely in line with their allocated comprehensive banding:

Addeys	1A 'top'	1B	2A	2B	3 'bottom'	Total
Places available	24	24	24	24	24	120
Actual Intake	24	24	24	25	27	124

Historically, equivalent figures for HAHC have been hard to confirm. Neighbouring schools have, however, long complained that their admissions were being undermined by HAHC admitting a far greater proportion of the ablest 'Band 1A' pupils than 20%. This was certainly one factor behind the difficulties that faced Hatcham Wood School, once sited within a few hundred yards of the HAHC Pepys Road site. This was one of the testing grounds of the failed 'fresh start' policy that saw Hatcham Wood relaunched as Telegraph Hill School, before the rebranded school was also then swiftly closed down.

After a complaint was made by local parents, relating to the shortage of local secondary places following that closure, the LEA provided figures to the schools adjudicator for admission to HAHC by Lewisham pupils whose LEA banding was therefore known to them. The information reveals just how skewed in ability their pupil intake has been:

HAHC 2003	1A 'top'	1B	2A	2B	3 'bottom'	Total
Known Intake	72	25	9	2	1	109

More recent information, obtained by Councillors' questions and from the Admissions Forum, confirms, if no longer quite as starkly as before, that this skewed intake remains:

HAHC actual intake	1A	1B	2A	2B	3	'Not known'	Total
2005	44	38	25	22	9	68	206
2006	54	44	31	23	12	45	209
2007	49	46	33	23	16	43	210

The 'not known' figures will be largely pupils from outside the borough where banding scores were unknown to the Local Authority. Excluding these figures, an average taken over the last three years reveals the following comparison with a 'comprehensive' intake:

% intake	1A 'top'	1B	2A	2B	3 'bottom'	Total
Area banding	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%	100%
HAHC 2005-7	31%	27%	19%	15%	8%	100%

Clearly, some schools are more 'comprehensive' than others!

HAHC can only claim to be ‘comprehensive’ because it also operates a ‘banding’ system. Critically, however, it operates a separate and misnamed ‘fair-banding’ system based on separate tests sat by pupils applying to the academy. As the Lewisham secondary admissions booklet explains, in contrast to the area-banding arrangements, ‘places will be offered in each band in proportion to the number of children applying in that band’.

In other words, if a school can encourage able children to apply from across a wide radius while hoping its elitist reputation dissuades less academic, local working-class children to apply, ‘fair-banding’ will create an intake artificially skewed towards higher ability pupils. Far from being ‘comprehensive’ such a system is, in reality, clearly ‘selective’.

HAHC has long benefited from the use of fair-banding to give it a preferential intake. As one of the most highly oversubscribed schools in the country, HAHC sets its nine ‘fair-bands’ on the abilities of the approximately 2,400 children that apply to it from across South London every year. Its intake simply reflects the skewed range of its applicants.

Unfortunately, no data has ever been provided to accurately compare how the Lewisham bands compare to those operated by HAHC. Of course, the very fact that such information is not readily available is evidence in itself of the way that unaccountable Academies like HAHC are able to conceal essential data. However, as the ‘not known’ pupils are likely to be out-of-borough applicants applying from more distant middle-class homes, there is good reason to suspect that the inclusion of the ‘not known’ category would show that the HAHC intake was even more skewed than the table above suggests.

Another consequence of this policy is that HAHC is not, in reality, a ‘local’ school. Since they allocate so many places to high ability bands where many applicants will have applied from considerable distances from the school, figures given to councillors show that the majority of pupils admitted to HAHC live well over a mile from the school. (In comparison, the largest home-to-school distance for a pupil admitted to Addey and Stanhope School in 2007 was 1,414 metres for a 1A pupil, much less for other bands):

Home to school distance (metres)	2005 HAHC		2006 HAHC	
	Applicants	Admissions	Applicants	Admissions
0-599	66	36	103	43
600-1199	246	33	235	28
1200-1799	287	24	321	25
1800-2399	320	21	385	26
More than 2400	1497	92	1430	87
TOTAL	2416	206	2474	209

At present, HAHC operates a ‘partial lottery’ system. After allocating places for special needs, siblings and the 10% allocated for students with ‘aptitude in music’, 50% of the remaining places in each band are allocated by proximity to

the school. The other 50% are chosen by a lottery of all remaining applicants in that band living within the three mile maximum distance from the school.

HAHC were happy to receive publicity about the supposed 'fairness' of this lottery when areas like Brighton were discussing introducing a similar system. However, to counter opponents of their planned takeover of Monson School, they are proposing to drop their lottery system for pupils being chosen by 'distance-to-school'. However, it seems that they have no intention of dropping their separate banding system. Whether the lottery system is used or not, their (un-) 'fair' banding system will ensure that they will be neither a comprehensive, nor a local, school. This would require Aske's to agree to participate fully with the borough-wide 'area-banding' arrangements, as requested by the Lewisham Admissions Forum. But, as Academy sponsors, 'Haberdashers' can ignore those requests.

3. Academies Threaten Teachers' Pay and Working Conditions

With separate Academy contracts, Aske's Federation staff are not subject to local or national collective agreements. The existing pay and conditions for teachers are broadly similar to those in community schools although their 'Specified Hours' come to 1300 hours, not the 1265 set down for Directed Time in the Pay and Conditions Document.

A phrase that has long been included in Federation contracts explains the relationship they want with unions: 'Your right to belong to an appropriate Trade Union is recognised but this does not imply recognition of any Trade Union for negotiating purposes'.

4. Academies Do Not Offer Pupils a Better Education Than Other Local Schools

In the materials being distributed by Lewisham Council to convince parents to support the takeover of Monson School by HAHC, two main arguments have been made.

The first argument is that the dropping of the random allocation 'lottery' will mean that 'HAHC becomes a school of excellence focussing on local children'. As discussed above, the retention of its own banding system means it will be far from a local school.

The second main claim is that 'children at Monson Primary School [will] get much better educational opportunities than now'. But the Council's leaflet justifies this by saying that the difficulties at Monson are 'linked to the unsettling influence of high pupil mobility – children joining or leaving the school other than in Reception or Year 6 ... linking the primary school to HAHC, one of the highest achieving state schools in the country, will create more stable classes and lead to a rise in standards'.

Pupil mobility is indeed a major issue for Monson School. The school's 'mobility indicator', showing the percentage of pupils who stayed at the school for the whole of Key Stage 2, is just 65%. This is the kind of challenge facing a school serving an inner-city community with a rapidly changing population. 38% of Monson's children are eligible for free school meals and 38% also do not have English as their first language (compared to 21% FSM and 14% ESL for HAHC). Monson staff have considerable experience in supporting such a diverse primary school community. Will Aske's have that expertise?

The real intention behind these policies is poorly concealed. Instead of meeting the needs of Monson's existing pupil population, I believe that Aske's hope that the promise of a guaranteed place at HAHC will attract a different sort of family to place their children at Monson School. Small wonder that the *Evening Standard* reported back in April 2007 that 'estate agents in the area have said homeowners near Monson Primary could expect to see the value of their properties rise by £75,000 or more if the deal goes ahead'.

Gentrifying nearby streets and converting Monson into a stable feeder school for HAHC will improve its results. But the challenges of supporting newly arriving families won't have been addressed. Instead, other neighbouring primaries will be left with that task.

This will be one further example of the conclusions of educational research already summarised in the NUT's 'Beyond the Spin' pamphlet: 'that where Academies were raising their standards, they were doing so by improving their intake rather than doing better with the same pupils'.

What's more, given HAHC's skewed intake, is their 'high achievement' really such a surprise? Given that their September 2003 intake was taken overwhelmingly from the two top Lewisham ability bands, is the fact that their 2006 Key Stage 3 results were overwhelmingly at level 5 and above really such an achievement? Actually, according to the published 'Value-Added' scores for 2006 SATs, both HAHC and Monson School performed almost identically. But one is judged as a success and the other deemed ripe for takeover.

The Haberdashers' Company will undoubtedly point to Knight's Academy as evidence that their sponsorship of Academies makes a difference. It is true that their GCSE results have improved compared to the previous Malory School. Of course, the additional resources and increased status of a school now able to carry the Aske's 'brand label' has made a difference. But how much difference – and how was it achieved?

Sir Cyril Taylor, SSAT chairman, was quick to proclaim HAKA's first set of GCSE results, with 29% gaining 5 or more A* to C grades in 2006, as 'outstanding', with a headline in the *TES* hailing Haberdashers' 'magic formula'. Rather less publicity was given to their 14% score when English and Maths had to be included in the 5 A* to C GCSEs, way beneath the borough average of 52%.

As evidence from other Academies' results suggests, it seems HAKA had entered students for GNVQs to boost their A*-C scores but had only limited success when English and Maths were taken into account. The Academy

obviously made efforts to address this area and the provisional 2007 results published by the Local Authority show HAKA increasing its GCSE results to 37% with 5 A*-Cs, 27% with English and Maths.

The A*-C improvement undoubtedly helped some pupils, as well as the SSAT publicity machine, but the provisional results for A* – G results reveal some interesting statistics. HAKA's figure for pupils with 5 GCSEs at A*-G actually went down from 78% in 2006 to just 71% in 2007. If these results are confirmed, it seems that 38 of the 132 on roll, well over a quarter, failed to achieve this target. On this measurement, HAKA would be easily the worst-performing school in the borough, as they would be by comparing results for pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G GCSEs (apparently achieved by just 86% of pupils). These A*-G scores would also be worse than those achieved by Malory School in 2005.

While all exam statistics have to be treated with caution, a preliminary analysis would suggest that HAKA have been concentrating on students likely to achieve 5 A*-C grades at the expense of other school students. Haberdashers' are selling their takeover of Monson Primary as a way for the Academy to support underachieving pupils. But these results suggest there has to be doubt as to whether all students will be treated equally.

5. Academies Undermine the Independent Role of School Governors

Lewisham's Director for Children and Young People, Frankie Sulke, likes to describe the two Haberdashers' Aske's Academies as being part of the 'family of Lewisham schools'. Unfortunately, they behave like very distant relatives.

The Authority has now been able to place one governor on the Haberdashers' Aske's Federation governing body. Real powers lie with the Haberdashers' governors.

6. Academies have a Damaging Impact on Other Neighbouring Schools

The presence of HAHC, operating its own separate banding system, has long been seen as a factor undermining a genuinely comprehensive intake in other neighbouring schools. The closure of Hatcham Wood/Telegraph Hill Schools was evidence of its effect.

While HAHC, as a CTC and then as an Academy, has been a long-term factor skewing admissions in the north of the borough, it has been the creation of HAKA in the south of the borough that has confirmed the damaging impact that Academies can have on other neighbouring schools. In particular, another comprehensive, where I myself teach, has seen a disastrous imbalance develop in its intake since nearby Malory became HAKA.

The following figures, from Lewisham Admissions, reveal their contrasting fortunes:

Malory (2004) becoming HAKA (2005-7)

Actual intake	1A	1B	2A	2B	3	Not known
2004	3	12	23	42	67	0
2005	25	27	34	29	24	11
2006	26	37	27	29	28	10
2007	31	35	45	48	38	11

Neighbouring community school

Actual intake	1A	1B	2A	2B	3
2004	11	26	34	36	50
2005	11	13	15	33	29
2006	8	28	43	38	80
2007	3	17	38	33	71

The trends in the admissions data are clear. Knight's Academy has been able to use its new Academy status and the Aske's 'fair-banding' system to attract increasing numbers of applicants (909 in 2007) from which it is able to admit increasing numbers of higher ability banded pupils. While spread fairly evenly across Lewisham's five bands at present, the general trend is towards attracting pupils from higher ability bands. With its site on the Lewisham/Bromley borders and separate admissions scheme in place, HAKA is well-placed to attract increasing numbers of students from leafier parts of the suburbs.

At the same time, this nearby community school has seen a rapid change in its intake. It now suffers from a severe imbalance with over 40% of Year 7 pupils coming from the lowest ability band and just a few per cent from the highest band. Such a skewed pupil population puts huge pressures on any school. Inevitably, exam results have suffered.

A full analysis of the reasons behind these admissions trends would have to consider a range of contributory effects. However, staff at the community school have every reason to believe that the setting up of Knight's Academy is a major factor. After all, their school was deemed by Ofsted to be a 'good school' in 2006 and had been included in the list of the '100 most improved schools' in 2005. In other words, this was no 'failing school' unable to attract pupils – but one vulnerable to competition from the new HAKA.

I think it's hard not to conclude that, instead of securing a planned comprehensive intake across the borough, Aske's Academies' separate arrangements and perceived status have meant that improvements in pupil intake at Knight's have been made at the expense of other neighbouring

secondaries. Replacing Malory School with this most expensive of Academies may simply have ended up creating another 'sink' school to take its place.

But rather than learn these lessons, Lewisham Council are seeking to further 'reward' Haberdashers' Aske's by supporting their proposal to take charge of Monson School. The plan will set up the same divisions in primary education that are already damaging secondary education in Lewisham. Another school will be taken out of Local Authority control. Once again, other neighbouring community schools will be plunged into difficulties as they are left to teach the pupils that have not been admitted by Aske's.

Unfortunately, local Labour politicians seem unable, or unwilling, to understand how their support for the break-up of Local Authority schooling is helping to create a divided system where unaccountable sponsors are able to expand their educational empires at the expense of neighbouring school communities.

The National Union of Teachers, with the support of the 'Defend Education in Lewisham' campaign is determined to expose the reality behind the Haberdashers' Company's 'spin' and will continue to campaign for all schools to belong to a Local Authority and operate the same, democratically agreed, common admissions policies.

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