

# Hundreds protest in Sheffield, UK against enforced academisation of King Edward VII Secondary School

Our reporters  
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Over 500 parents, school students and teachers protested in Sheffield city centre on Saturday to oppose the forced “academisation” of King Edward VII Secondary School.

The oversubscribed popular school of over 1,600 pupils, with an intake from 35 different primary schools, has been targeted by the schools inspector Ofsted and the Conservative government as it is the last secondary school in Sheffield remaining under Local Authority control.

An Ofsted inspection in September 2022 found the school to be “Inadequate”, having previously been awarded a “Good” rating. The sole alleged failing was on leadership and management with reference to safeguarding, safety and assessment. A head of department reported that staff and students officially complained about the rudeness and conduct of the inspectors, quizzing students about bullying during a lesson.

Inspectors did not like the fact that students were allowed out of school at lunchtime at the upper school site. Following the report’s publication in January, King Edward were ordered by the Department for Education to join a multi-academy Trust. In England, once a school is judged to be inadequate by Ofsted, the Secretary of State for Education issues the school with a Directive Academy Order requiring it to convert to an academy by law.

On Tuesday, the Yorkshire and Humber Department of Education Regional Directors will discuss King Edward joining Brigantia Learning Trust, which itself has two schools that “requires improvement”.

The decision to force the academisation is political. With 80 percent of secondary schools now academies,

converting the remaining 20 percent (around 800 schools) has a completion target of 2030.

King Edward is renowned for its comprehensive nature both in intake, subjects, and for listening to its students. The Ofsted report even noted, “Pupils enjoy their lessons because they are taught by passionate, engaging and expert teachers... Pupils’ behaviour around the school is respectful and calm.”

Dave Clay, a parent who spoke at the rally said, “At the moment we have had no voice. We want choice in Sheffield. We don’t want some sort of factory education system, a one size fits all, straightjacketed by some weird business culture. And that is sadly what a lot of Multi-Academy Trusts are becoming. We don’t want state education to be privatised and that is what’s happened.”

Parent Emma Wilkinson explained, “We were given an inadequate rating based on one area, safeguarding and leadership. Yesterday, Ofsted announced that they would re-inspect schools quickly who found themselves in that position. Schools who were inadequate just on safeguarding and leadership but are doing well in all other areas. That’s us. That is exactly the position that King Edwards are in.”

Enormous pressures are now being put on staff working at a school deemed to be “inadequate”. The Ofsted ruling was appealed by the school and ignored.

**Ewan** explained that he has a son in Year 12 and two children who are former students at King Edwards. “I am here to protest against the forced academisation of King Edwards after a deeply flawed Ofsted report that doesn’t reflect the good quality school and education that my children have experienced. It’s a one-way trap door to becoming an academy.

“How does joining up to a new administration change standards? It’s the quality of teaching and learning that does that. I would like the school to remain under democratic local control and for the council to be responsible, which we elect to run the schools in the best interests of young people in Sheffield.

“There is no problem with safeguarding at school. The school allows children to go out at lunch times, which Ofsted had an issue with. School is about preparing you for the world of work. If you go out to lunch as an adult, then give young people a chance to do this and take responsibility for themselves is correct. If children are old enough to walk to school and back, they are old enough to go out and buy a sandwich!

“I am really angry, which is why I am here, to make my voice heard as there has been no consultation with families. Where is asking the parents in any of this?”

**Geoff** has two sons in year 7 and 9. He said, “My sons love the school and they treasure the school culture here. With the forced academy order from Ofsted this will ruin the culture and style of the school. We have come to defend the school and oppose the order by Ofsted.

“We want the inspection to be repeated rather than proceed with the corrupt inspection system that King Edward just got.”

**Jamie** is in Year 12. **Paula**, his mother, explained that she also had a daughter who left King Edward three years ago and is now studying at Oxford.

Jamie said, “I am here because I am very passionate about my school and to support my teachers who put in so much extra effort and really care about our school. We are the last school that is not an academy. This shows how hard our teachers fought for our education and blocked the academy drive by the government, so they obviously want to fight for their students.

“I don’t want to see the school become an academy as they will just take out its personal character. KES puts so much extra effort into having a balanced school life.

“Ofsted came into school with an obvious agenda. I was in a class when inspectors came into one of the lessons. They had a set of questions all about whether we felt safe and questioned us about working in mix year groups and whether we were anxious about this. It has never been an issue and works well for our school.”

Paula said, “I don’t want the school to be run as a business. I am really angry about that. This is not about

education but about profits. We need good quality education and support for teachers, not business models.

“Teachers and senior managers should make decisions based on their knowledge on what works and doesn’t work, and how they spend their money, rather than being run by some consortium.

“The inspection was rushed and didn’t take parent or teachers’ views into consideration. It seemed predetermined. Safeguarding is strong at this school. I know so many parents here and am on different parent chat groups and I do not know of any parents with safeguarding concerns.

“The government want to take a school that was an outlier and a sore point in their agenda and take it over. There is so much anger over the decision. There are many chat groups set up with parents upset and devastated by what is happening.”



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