
MEETING	MICKLEGATE WARD COMMITTEE
DATE	30 NOVEMBER 2023
PRESENT	COUNCILLORS J BURTON, CRAWSHAW AND KILBANE
APOLOGIES	COUNCILLORS

1. **TELL US ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE OF SOUTH BANK
MULTI ACADEMY TRUST**

Attendees: Councillors Kilbane, Burton, Crawshaw, Webb, MR Rachael Maskell, Michal Czekajlo CYC, Mora Scaife CYC

Attendance: 36 residents

Welcome Chaired by Cllr Kilbane who opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

Cllr Kilbane outlined that the volume of feedback received by the Ward Committee from parents and carers, existing and former school governors about experiences of the Southbank Multi Trust Academy (SMTA), changes to Teaching Assistants terms and conditions, attendance management, behavioural policies, changes in practice around working with school governors are the reasons behind calling tonight's meeting. The meeting is being held this evening to provide an opportunity to offer feedback in an open forum, without it being personal, and with a view to start a constructive dialogue with SMTA. SMTA have been invited to join the meeting, however did not take up the opportunity. York Press reporter is present and may take photographs to accompany the press article. Should you not wish a specific matter being mentioned in their article please let the reporter know. Many apologies have been received from parents/carers who cannot be at the meeting this evening due to other commitments.

The floor was opened for feedback and questions.

- A parent of a child with autism attending Y9 at Millthorpe School commented that when they were choosing the school for their daughter, they believed it was inclusive, however they feel that over time the school became an exam factory with a crowd control behavioural policy, with time in detention being often used as a punishment for misbehaviour. The parent felt

that they are in a situation without a route to see the situation changing for the better.

- A comment was made by a parent of a pupil attending Scarcroft Primary who feels that they are not able to be engaged with the school and are seen as a participant in victimisation campaign against SMAT staff, whereas the parent intention is to have a meaningful dialogue. When changes to the Teaching Assistant terms and conditions were being implemented a group of parents asked to meet with the SMAT CEO and Chair of Trustees, however that wasn't allowed. The parent feels that SMAT Trustees are not being visible and there is no scrutiny over the senior management actions.
- Y9 Millthorpe School student with PTSD spoke about his experience of the school. The school not acknowledging correspondence from health professional and insufficient communication with the Head of School resulted in overwhelming stress. Communication with Deputy Head does not seem to be bringing positive results. The experience of being shouted at, spending time in a small room given games to play as opposed to learning made the student stop attending school and reverting to home learning. The student asked for more learning materials from school to study at home, with science and history being promised some time ago, but still not received. This seems to be due to the amount of time it takes for SENCO to communicate with respective teachers. The student perception of SMAT is of a profit-making organisation and that needs to stop.
- A mother of Y9 student of Millthorpe School spoke about her frustration with the school reactive attendance policy. She used to teach languages at Millthorpe until 2010 and noticed changes to staffing over the past few years, with all specialist language staff not in employment anymore. The son is happy socially at school and teachers are positive, however systemic change to staffing because of academisation is concerning.

- A member of National Education Union spoke on behalf of teachers, who as he stated would be disciplined if they spoke out. Teachers are not happy with the situation. As an example, they are forced to rank up unsolicited calls to parents in relation to attendance issues. The speaker tried to raise the issue with SMAT and its Trustees, however, wasn't allowed to do that. The lack of accountability is disastrous with some academies in the country expelling students with SEND to improve their results.
- A resident, who introduced himself as a member of the block of governors resigning from their position with Scarcroft Primary spoke about his role and positive relationships with the Head of School. He decided to resign after only one year of service due to issue with the lack of constructive relationship and dialogue with SMAT. The resident feels that SMAT decisions, some of them good, some not, have been imposed on the governing body without the governors neither having any say on the matters nor any opportunity to criticise. Constructive criticism should have been allowed, whereas SMAT decided to accuse school governors of being aggressive. Changes to Teacher Assistants terms and conditions was only one of the factors behind governor resignations. Attempts have been made to communicate with SMAT with only one meeting with the CEO taking place in which governors didn't feel they were being listened to. As a result, the whole governing body of Scarcroft School decided to resign.
- Another ex-school governor at Scarcroft Primary added that minutes from their meeting with the CEO were supposed to be shared with SMAT Trustees, however when they were referred to at a later date Trustees weren't aware of the points made.
- A former Millthorpe School governor and a parent of Y11 student and primary school child spoke about their family experience of Millthorpe and Scarcroft schools during Covid-19 period, when children were left without online learning provision at the beginning of the pandemic. Son had started receiving deliberate negative marks in his book and didn't feel

he was being treated fairly. At the start of Y10 many teachers have left Millthorpe which was disruptive for students. Teachers are generally supportive; however, the attendance policy is problematic around inclusion with a blank approach for all pupils, not considering health conditions. Autistic daughter has tried to campaign to influence Scarcroft School, however the school response was that decisions are being made at the SMAT level. As a result, both children were moved to other schools, and the parent resigned from the governor role as they no longer had confidence in leadership and couldn't recommend Millthorpe as a good school.

- Another resident added at this point that they feel like they are being seen as negating towards Millthorpe School staff, but that is not what is intended and more than anything they want to support hard working teachers. The same person referred to experience her daughter had with the attendance, where an email was sent to them from school stating that daughter will be suspended if she misses school one more time. This was following on one instance when the daughter was late to a lesson and the fingerprint registration device malfunctioned. The parent feels that her daughter is under pressure for being disabled and is concerned about the whole SEN population within the Millthorpe School.
- At this point MP Raechel Maskell spoke about SEND update report that will be debated in the House of Commons either before, or just after Christmas. MP Maskell will reflect what is being said today during the debate and use her privilege to speak to see the matter to a solution.
- A resident mentioned her recent email correspondence seeking support from MP Julian Sturdy. She also raised a matter of female teachers over the age of 35 being bullied out from work because they are deemed to be too expensive.
- A residents spoke about the past good relationship between staff and governors and importance for SMAT to work with

school governors and seeing them as critical friends. The issue at hand is that there is no dialogue. Scarcroft School received good OFSTEAD report last time which was also thanks to a good relationship with school governors. Losing this relationship is not good for the school and the community, but how can that be resolved? The same person referred to funding for academies coming directly from the Department for Education (DfE) and the importance of finding a route back to DfE via Regional Director to raise the issues discussed today.

- Another person with children at Scarcroft and Millthorpe schools referred to the attendance slips being handed to pupils, strict rules and reminders about correct uniform i.e. wearing white socks being demoralizing for students. A more subtle and soft approach would work better in the speaker opinion. Constant focus on reprimands for bad behaviour as opposed to rewards for good work is not in the best interest of young people, who are being squashed by that approach. Another point raised by the same person was in relation to their communication with the DfE Regional Director and a promise of investigation that is not forthcoming.
- A former academy teacher spoke about her experience working at a school with dreadful atmosphere, where female staff were being belittled and bullied. She hopes that this will not happen to Scarcroft Primary and that SMAT will be up to the task to provide pupils with good teaching and staff with decent work conditions.
- A parent with two children at Scarcroft School spoke about their good experience of the school so far, however the senior management changes within SMAT since 2020 being of concern. A reference was made to the CEO response to the petition signed by 66 parents, as patronising and dismissive. Despite that parents and carers believe that as a large group they will be able to influence change. The academies system has flaws not only at a local, but also at a national level.

- A parent of a daughter at Millthorpe School spoke about their experience with the daughter being in tears when going to school because of the way she is treated. It feels awful for both the parent and the child, and something has to change urgently.
- At this point Cllr Robert Webb introduced himself as the City of York Council Executive Member for Children and Education, before thanking and reflecting on the community support for teachers working hard and with limited resources to educate young people in our city. As a portfolio holder Cllr Webb is responsible for safeguarding of all young people in the city. He has met with the SMAT CEO once before and asked to arrange another meeting with the CEO and DfE Regional Director to discuss issues raised this evening. When he last spoke with SMAT he invited them to participate in tonight's discussion, offered to field questions, however they did not take up the opportunity and prefer to hold meetings with parents/carers on a 1 to 1 basis. Cllr Webb advised parents and carers to take up this opportunity when offered by SMAT and see if it helps to alleviate issues. Cllr Webb encouraged everyone to raise any safeguarding issues with OFSTED. OFSTED brings safeguarding issues reported to them with the Local Authority and Local Authority has a duty to investigate. Cllr Webb will keep working to support residents to overcome issues around safeguarding matters.
- A residents suggested that prior to Cllr Webb's meeting with the DfE Regional Director a list of concerns raised by parents is formulated and share with him to take to the meeting. Also, an outline of the process how the case is investigated by the DfE Regional Director would be useful for parents and carers to be aware of.

Q - A question about the SMAT CEO selection process was raised.

A – This matter cannot be fairly discussed at tonight's meeting, as the SMAT are not present to respond to that. There is a process in place that must be followed when a CEO of an Academy is being appointed.

- A comment was made that Trustees are accountable on behalf of the Trust, and should there be a concern that they are not fulfilling their duties this could be brought up to the attention of Academy Members, who are accountable to the community. Perhaps Academy Members could be invited to the next meeting?
- A suggestion was made to log all individual safeguarding concerns and submit them to OFSTED for action.
- Another comment was made about some of the parents/carers already on the edge of exhaustion by the long process and not seeing a constructive way forward.

Q - A question was asked what constitutes a safeguarding concern and if having just one member on governing body at Scarcroft School constitutes one?

A – A governing body from one school is expected to cover duties at two schools. This could be looked at by the OFSTED inspector as a leadership issue.

At this point Cllr Kilbane summarised main concerns raised this evening, namely insufficient and patronising communication, relationship breakdown, hostile environment and in some cases children afraid to attend school.

The following are being proposed as the next steps: making a group representation to the DfE Regional Director and MP Raechel Maskell raising the matter in the House of Commons.

What else can be done to make our schools becoming places where teachers want to work, and kids want to attend to learn? We want teachers to know that the community supports them.

Another way to move forward could be a series of termly meetings with the SMAT CEO and Trustees, providing a forum where issues could be raised, discussed, and resolved.

A comment was made that not all SMAT schools are represented at tonight's meeting and that it would be

important to involve them with any future meetings and actions.

It was further added that a Southbank Forum could be established to discuss policies, organise meetings and make sure that parents and carers from other schools are being informed.

It was stated that the National Education Union could help with funding of the flyer.

Before closing the meeting Cllr Kilbane invited anyone interested in further participation in a Forum on the subject to leave their contact details which will be used to communicate about future meetings.

Meeting closed at 21:00.

, Chair

[The meeting started at Time Not Specified and finished at Time Not Specified].