

Lightly redacted email from SAT to KCC 20 July 2018

I am writing to you regarding the position of Swale Academies Trust with respect to Holmesdale School.

As you are probably aware the RSC named SAT as the sponsor for Holmesdale School on June 7th 2018. We were delighted to be asked to take the school on and genuinely believed that, based upon our prior experience, we could make a difference to the school and lead it quickly out of Special Measures . Naively, with hindsight, I believed that we would be in the school on the following Monday working to help bring about the necessary change . This has been our experience of previous school improvement projects we have undertaken for Kent and to be fair the positive results speak for themselves.

The reality however turned out to be much different. From 8th June, SAT has made frequent requests to KCC to be allowed to visit the school. These requests went unanswered at best or at worst ignored. Eventually on June 27th I was able to meet with XXX. During this meeting I asked that SAT would like to see the school and begin to prepare for its work. XXX contacted the school. Myself and a colleague were allowed to visit the school on June 29th.

During our visit on June 29th we reviewed the quality of provision, coupled with the Ofsted Action Plan and the proposed school improvement specification which had been devised by KCC. After this meeting I spoke to KCC to say that we were concerned that the school was not making sufficient progress to pass its first HMI monitoring visit and that neither the Ofsted Action Plan and the proposed school improvement specification were fit for purpose. I offered the services of SAT to produce appropriate documentation which would meet HMI requirements. I wrote what I considered to be a more appropriate school improvement specification matched to the Ofsted schedule and submitted this to KCC on the basis that this contained the correctly weighted areas of focus. This revised specification was produced on the basis of myself and others' lengthy experience of being practicing HMIs or OIs. The offer to rewrite the Ofsted Action Plan went unanswered.

On July 13th Kent published on its procurement portal the tendering documentation for school improvement at Holmesdale with a deadline for return of July 27th. The revised specification which we had produced for Kent was ignored. The proposed contract does not offer the successful bidder the same level of professional autonomy that SAT has been used to working with in our other highly successful school improvement projects in Kent over the past 10 years. I spoke to XXX to express my concern over the late timing of this procurement process and how the specification does not properly address the issues that the school faces.

I was disappointed to hear that Holmesdale had an unsuccessful first monitoring visit this week. The root of my disappointment is essentially due to the fact that this was entirely avoidable. Holmesdale has been without any school improvement support for the past six weeks and there is absolutely no practical reason I can see why SAT could not have been in the school providing professional support since the end of June on an interim basis subject to a proper procurement process. Had SAT been in the school from the point

that the Academy Order I am certain that we would have been able to do enough to ensure that the school was deemed to be making reasonable progress in the removal of Special Measures.

Whilst I understand the need for due process in public bodies, in this instance the process has failed the school and made the task of exiting Special Measures harder. It is rare for a school not to pass its first HMI monitoring visit and the letter when it is eventually published will knock parental confidence in the school still further.

Yesterday I rang and briefly spoke to XXX regarding the implications of a failed Ofsted monitoring visit and offered free of charge for SAT to provide interim support for the school as of today to "steady the ship" after a second bruising Ofsted visit and in addition write for the school an appropriate Ofsted Action Plan that can be enacted immediately at the start of the Autumn term.

When I spoke to XXX yesterday he committed to ring me back at 11.00 to discuss the issues further. Unsurprisingly, XXX did not call back as agreed and ignored my calls to him later in the day. I did manage yesterday to speak with YYY, but rather than take our offer of free support to begin to get to grips with the school, I was met with outrage that I knew the outcome of the HMI visit. As I understand it SAT has a mandatory seat on the IEB for Holmesdale by virtue of our sponsor status and as such I believe we have a right to know the outcome of inspection findings in the same way as the rest of the IEB.

Over the past six weeks it has felt like the most important thing for XXX and colleagues has been to keep SAT away from Holmesdale at any cost and be content to see the school struggle as collateral damage in this endeavour. Whilst that on the surface might appear somewhat of a dramatic representation, the facts of the matter are that the school has failed its first monitoring visit and had zero support for the past six weeks despite repeated offers from SAT as the sponsor to begin active support. If this is in fact solely down to the process that Kent must follow for the commissioning of any services from a third party I offer the view that the process is not fit for purpose.

SAT will bid for the school improvement work for Holmesdale and meet the submission deadline of July 27th. I am, however, somewhat sceptical as to whether we will be successful in our bid and even were we to be the constraints with which we would be expected to work would preclude effective progress.

Whatever the politics of this are our sole motivation to use the Academy Order to help create in Holmesdale a successful school for the future. I am not sure whether Kent has the same ambition. Perhaps I am wrong in this, however were we to be both working in unison the school would not have been left without support over the past six weeks.

If Kent do not want us involved in Holmesdale, it would be much more straight forward if we were just told so directly and perhaps Kent can agree with the RSC a sponsor of its choice. We certainly have enough work to do elsewhere and to be fair this is becoming tiresome.

I would be grateful if you could look into matters here and either call me or drop me a quick response before term ends next week.

Regards