

From an Ex Academy teacher who has worked under both regimes. 23rd May 2018

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=0sKFIYdbtWc>

The recent you tube clip of the interview on Academy FM with Dr Saxton will no doubt raise much comment and anger, especially from the Folkestone Academy staff and parents. As an ex teacher at the school I am very surprised by this response and the content as it is clearly an element of the Turner propaganda machines efforts to fight off the negative attention that they are rightly getting now. Transparency and truth is now starting to emerge and about time too. I respond I imagine on behalf of many professionals who have had the wonderful experience of working with our children in what was a fantastic school serving Folkestone under both regimes.

Using a 'friendly' media outlet is a standard platform and I wonder if she would be as willing with other media outlets. I am astonished by her claims that the Academy is a happy place. As an ex member of the teaching staff who had to endure the poor leadership, poor decision making, bullying of staff and lack of realistic strategic direction, I am well placed to comment on the current staff's response to this. They will be very angry with this wholly inaccurate line. It appears that there is just a list of pre-prepared questions which she is allowed to respond to from her viewpoint. As a teacher the interviewer lets her off the hook and this is the line that shows through. There is no follow-up questioning or challenge to the responses, merely an agenda. BBC please give the opportunity for Hard Talk or the Today show!

The statements Dr Saxton makes just discredits her further with staff who are again witnessing what they will see as mistruth so publicly as has been the perception previously from other communications. So many of the staff are furious and dismayed but cannot speak for fear of reprisals. I am confident that when the August results come in, Dr Saxton and her 'team' will be on overdrive with similar subterfuge without any doubt; the results are going to be vastly different to what the school was achieving previously and this will need explaining away.

Turner Schools will blame the cause on the number of departing staff, the decline in teaching standards and the level of disengagement with the children. The work is already being done to 'tee' this up with rhetoric around poor teaching standards and the declining learning climate. Any member of staff who has enjoyed working under decent leadership and well-founded strategic direction are extremely well placed to compare then to now. Let us consider why these things have happened so quickly, especially as 'good' standards were judged in the last OFSTED report with some areas 'outstanding'? You could argue now that in many cases if OFSTED arrived at the door much would be seen as inadequate. How has this happened so quickly?

To get to a 'Good' standard and its recognition takes graft, commitment, sound educational judgement and vision; and of course the quality leaders and staff that

deliver this. This does not happen in one year either. The achievements that the Academy and its children have secured took over 10 years. Good teachers leave because they perceive the leadership and strategic vision of the current governance and leadership team as poor, and by comparison to previously when it was so strong and professional. Teachers find this hard to professionally comprehend. Quality staff will only work with quality leaders as their professional integrity demands. Good teachers will also understand that the result of the leadership change this year has led to what is being forecast as very poor examination results in August. Something that particularly angers the committed teachers is the fact that the current students perhaps have been sacrificed to allow the Turner agenda to be initiated. There is a 3 year OFSTED grace which perhaps takes the pressure out and this came into place when the 'Turner Trust' took the reins. We must ask the question that are outcomes of the children this year and next being sacrificed to allow a change in agenda? When the three year grace was presented to staff as part of one of the early opening staff meetings the tone was certainly that this was something that was advantageous. OFSTED rightly hold the school to account but not in this case for three years?

Any decent teacher will always leave to improve their career on a good set of results and of course any decent future employer looking to promote or recruit talent will look at this first along with the departing schools OFSTED report. This can be quoted confidently now as we have good results and a 'Good' OFSTED rating. The results are good when you consider the context compared to other schools last year. There is this rhetoric of under achievement coming through to justify some of the measures that Turner School are committed to, but to the knowledgeable, again this is not accurate or a fair reflection of the achievements of the staff and students last year. The validated outcome measure maintains the 'good' judgment and the school was also relieved of coasting status. Hardly a set of poor results as is being presented. Teachers are nervous about the future as if they leave it too late to depart for pastures new, they are gambling with the real fact that the results this year will nosedive. After September any decent future employer will be looking at a very different picture.

The quality of teaching again, similarly to the outcomes, has been developed expertly over a long time and has been acknowledged by OFSTED as 'good'. As an ex teacher who previously saw collaboration and coaching models that were well thought out, managed and consistently delivered, it made me accountable for developing my practice and also for the outcomes. I am well placed to reinforce again that poor leadership decisions and the accountability modelling nosedived almost immediately with the change of leadership at the academy. The leaders brought in had little expertise or knowhow to develop this further or even maintain what was already in place. The baby was thrown out with the bathwater preferring to ignore or disregard previous good practice. Robust systems that support a successful school disappeared almost immediately and inferior less informed practices were implemented or not at all. Life was rudderless.

Good teaching and outcomes are supported by a good learning climate. Strategic management has previously been well considered and the pastoral systems have been robust in ensuring that a very positive learning climate was conducive to good outcomes. This was a mighty challenge due to the levels of need contextually in the area that the school serves. Again, evidenced by OFSTED as 'good' with some elements as 'Outstanding' at the last inspection. I find myself considering what is going on currently with the decimation of the pastoral staff; this is real and is happening as evidenced in the leaked plan published recently. Again I am astonished that in the recent friendly interview on the radio station, Dr Saxton states that in fact the posts are increasing and the house system is staying? All staff at the Academy will see that as a blatant mistruth as the leaked plan does not show any house pastoral staff allocation, preferring of course a horizontal year group approach? These staff are experiencing the very opposite in the school with job cuts looming and restructuring that gives the perception that it is designed to engineer people out.

Finally, Dr Saxton makes the reference to change and how this is always difficult. Anybody that has experience or has studied change management will agree with this point wholeheartedly. Change is always hard for us to bear as we are all creatures of habit. What is difficult to comprehend here is the amazingly low level of change management skill that the current school leadership is employing. Staff are upset and leaving in droves, children are reacting badly, parents are unhappy, standards are crashing, fiscal management is poor etc. etc. Basic change management if done well ensures that the opposite of these symptoms are secured and are protected. Trust and positive relationships are critical in a change process and all stakeholders need to feel confidence in the decisions and strategic direction driving it. I ask Dr Saxton and her senior leaders to reflect and consider their process, communication strategy, professional understanding in this field and people skills. It is important that you get this right for the precious children that are the future of Folkestone and the loyal, professional and knowledgeable staff that care for them. They are the ones that should be at the centre of this and on evidence, perhaps this is not the case.