

INDEPENDENT

EDUCATION



ADVICE

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26 June 2018

Dr J Saxton, Chief Executive, Turner Schools

Dear Dr Saxton,

Thank you for your courteous and lengthy letter. I must apologise for my delay in replying, as I have been highly committed elsewhere both personally and professionally. However, I have spent considerable time preparing this reply and will attempt to respond to each of the points you raise.

As you acknowledge, I work very much from point of fact, and spend considerable time applying care, impartiality and accuracy, drawing on reputable sources which I try and quote where possible. This is because I completely agree here is no public interest in disseminating misinformation or inaccuracies. The public interest is best served when factual statements that are made are verified and underpinned by evidence, especially on controversial topics. I also, too often unusually in education structural matters, approach things from the point of view of families and children.

Indeed, these are some of the reasons my article demonstrates my concerns about statements made on behalf of Turner Schools. Clearly where we differ on matters of opinion, there may be no right or wrong and we have to disagree.

I also agree that *'If people are expressing views based on rumour and inaccuracy, then it helps no one'*. You write: *'Some of those who have contributed to your article are no longer employees or parents of Turner Schools, may have undergone capability, may have been reported to authorities, or be currently engaged in disputes with Turner Schools, so it is no surprise that former staff and former families have given a negative opinion'*. Whilst that looks a large cohort to be in conflict with, you clearly misunderstand the way I operate. In this case, as is my usual approach, the main trigger was factual information: for the primary schools, the KCC school allocation figures; for Folkestone Academy, the leaked document; and for the Turner Free School, the website. Indeed, if you look through my article itself, you will find almost nothing (if anything) that is based from information from the people you identify, although yes, I do have comments from an almost unprecedented number of such people, along with many from other points of view. These do confirm what I have written and who otherwise have contacted me, giving me even more confidence in my findings (second only to those responding to my Lilac Sky articles). You acknowledge

you don't apologise for creating such waves and I know from my own experience that tough decisions have to be made in such situations, but your style appears to be deliberately provocative, breaking staff vocations and careers and losing the confidence of parents.

You write: *'Turner Schools is a not for profit and none of its leaders have ever been in the service of for profit schools'*. I have never said this anywhere, and I presume from your comments in your U-Tube 'interview' you are alleging that I did. This is therefore a false allegation.

You may well have significant successes in all your schools as you claim. I have not denied this, especially in the primary schools. However, I have identified the difficulties you are having to face up to or have brought about.

A trivial matter, but the email address I responded to in your original posting was to enquires@turnerschools.com. You will find this in your comment posted 20th May, still on show. As I wrote in 28th May: *'You did promise to send me your personal email address on your website comment, but no, so I am sending it to the second one you quote. As you know the address you gave on your comment itself was faulty, and I suspect the one you have quoted in your second comment also looks wrong, so I am trying two versions'*. I am sorry you still do not understand what happened, although to me it appears clear.

Morehall Allocations May 2018: I was not commenting on the quality of education, which I was and am not qualified to judge, but on parental perceptions. As I wrote: *'Morehall was taken over by Turner Schools from the failed Lilac Sky Academy Trust in January 2017. One year on, pupil numbers have slumped from being full in 2017 with 30 places on offer, to having just 11 families choosing one of the school's 60 places for next September, the second lowest take up rate in the county, before another 9 Local Authority Allocated children were added in. Oddly, the school had increased its Planned Admission Number from 30 in previous years, presumably in anticipation of a growth in popularity because of its re-branding, as it had been full or nearly full in each of the previous seven years'*. This is all factually correct. I wrote little else, apart from an opinion so what is factually incorrect here? I do have the data for the high staff turnover, which I chose not to quote, as I did not have the reasons why they all left, although as you rightly surmise, subsequently I have been offered explanations for this and the other three schools which confirm my stated opinion. You may well have had subsequent enquiries for places, as nearly all other local primary schools are full and there is nowhere else to go. For the same reason, Morehall, like nearly all other town schools is receiving late applications. However, none of this is relevant to the key fact I have quoted.

For information, I do have census data for each year of the previous decade and, for example, in 2015, there were indeed four spaces in two year groups at Morehall, the other five being full or over PAN, making the roll one pupil under capacity. Whilst you are therefore technically correct to say: *'In addition, Morehall has had spaces throughout the past decade'*, in practice this is highly misleading, a verbal trick I am afraid the Trust appears to play too often. I would therefore prefer to wait for the October 2018 census to confirm the truth of your claims.

With regard to Martello, I am again explicitly quoting the 2018 allocation figures for Year R, the other matters relating to places you introduce are irrelevant. I am aware that you were head of Martello Academy at one stage and had difficulty in identifying the detail of the changes across the

two schools. Without names, I am not much clearer, although I have now happily changed the wording slightly to acknowledge this.

As you know, my only reference to Folkestone Primary is: *'The Primary section of Folkestone Academy carries an Outstanding Ofsted, and appears to be adopting none of the strong philosophies or models that operate in the other three Turner Schools, or the new brand of the secondary section'*, which you appear happy with.

You write with regard to FA: *'No teachers are being made redundant and there will not be 42 redundancies; this is about reform not finance'*. Perhaps you should not have referred to *'Like other schools, we are also operating in straitened times'* in your Consultation document if you wished to convince staff of this. The staffing appendix identifies 42 f.t.e. staff to be lost, and there is also a redundancy consultation underway to help this. I accept that up to 42 f.t.e. staff may have left because of natural wastage and the methods you outline above to remove them. However, you have now turned down my FOI to establish the facts on the grounds of: *Section 36 - Publication would prejudice or would be likely to prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs; and/or Section 43 - Publication would be or would be likely to prejudice commercial interests*. It is interesting to speculate what prejudice publication would cause to the effective conduct of public affairs and what commercial interests would be prejudiced. If the figures were low, this would have boosted much needed public confidence in the school. I can only draw my own conclusions!

I am fascinated with your statements about numbers in FA and TFS. What I did not quote, but will do, was the January 2017/8 census data for local Primary Schools in Year 6 that gives us:

	January 2017	January 2018
Folkestone & Hawkinge	661	647
The rest of Shepway	482	507
TOTAL	1143	1154

As you will know, FA expanded to a temporary PAN of 300 places for September 2017, as requested by KCC to cater for additional pupils arising from the closure of Pent Valley. This is described pejoratively in your consultation document as: *'the inflated 300 places per year that were assumed'*. In the event 303 places were offered, so the expansion was not inflated or wrongly assumed, although in the end just 267 arrived, some having taken up places at Dover schools rather than attend their local school; hardly the vote of confidence you promulgate with your quote about one boy returning!

With just 267 places taken up in 2017, and a fall in the number of Folkestone and Hawkinge pupils transferring to secondary school, it is difficult to see where the 270 FA offers in March 2018 plus your 120 at TFS have come from if one were to accept your astonishing assertion that NO pupil has been offered places at both schools (needless to say this is contrary to several parents who have contacted me about which *is the least worst* of the two schools they have been offered should they take up). Presumably the same number again who were not offered place will nearly all be refugees attempting to flee FA, as I can't see where else they would be coming from. I have omitted any reference to the local grammar schools as, presumably they will take the same number of children across both years.

You have introduced a new concept by referring to the '*Turner Free School holding page*'. The website <http://www.turnerfreeschool.org/> contains no indication it is anything but a full school website (clue, look at the address), complete with links to the school Prospectus, numerous news items, Admissions Policy, etc. BUT NO INDICATION IT IS A TEMPORARY HOLDING PAGE to persons seeking information about the school. This is ghly misleading if that is indeed the case, although the dedicated website address suggests otherwise.

'The article about 70 applications was on the Turner Schools website and it was published on 10th November 2017 (this was removed to avoid further confusion)'. At least you admit it was causing confusion, or to be precise was misleading, until after I alerted you to it in my article having seen it on the TFS website. As you are well aware, it was only removed after 22nd May (when I took a screenshot of it), so I can be excused for using the site as my source. When you informed me that it was out of date, I naturally updated my page – any inaccurate information provided was solely down to Turner Schools, nothing to do with me! Why on earth did you not remove it earlier, even after I had given you warning?

Your hang up with a comment by a reader about profit making in which you attempt to allege I have misled browsers does not of course hold water. I believe I have been careful about what I wrote. I was quite explicit in my response: *'I cannot find anywhere that I have said Turner Schools are making a profit'*. The allegation in your U-Tube 'Interview that someone has made this allegation is another example of flying false kites and then bringing them down (sorry about the slightly mixed metaphor, but I think this is a dishonourable trick). Why do you need to introduce: *'None of the senior management of Turner Schools have ever been involved with profit-making schools'* when no one to my knowledge has ever said they have?

I am aware of the improvements at Martello, following a dire start, in which children with SEN in particular suffered and have multiple claims they were encouraged to look elsewhere, as well as reported disparaging comments about the children themselves from senior staff. I have received further unverified allegations about leadership there previously, which I have not quoted for the very reason I do not have solid confirmation.

I am astonished that you have not troubled to read the comments on my website, before making the allegation instead relying on a second hand report that: *'but am advised that many of the comments posted on your site made defamatory statements about me and the Trust'*. I certainly have filtered out a number before publication that might have fallen into that category, but on re-reading those published I can see nothing that comes under that heading. Perhaps you could take the trouble to read them; it is worthwhile to get a first hand picture before making such allegations, and then refer to me any you think come into that category, and which are not reasonable opinion. Naturally, I would remove any that do come into that category that I have missed. I would certainly not like to think this is some sort of threat.

In summary, I can find just the one minor inaccuracy on my website that you have identified. This is about leadership of the two Turner Primary Schools, which I have indeed corrected as soon as it was drawn to my attention, sadly not important enough to feature in your earlier communications. I have also made several other corrections where I have spotted them, but you do not appear to have done so.

Thank you for the invitation, but no, I don't intend to visit. I can see at first hand your extensive PR operation at work without this. I am not an Inspector have no claim to the relevant skills and prefer to rely on the objective information I have quoted extensively.

I would however, ask if you could respond to the following questions to help me clarify several points:

a) You have describe Mr Boxall as having been '[Principal of a number of schools, including an Outstanding Academy in Kent](#)'. Can you please confirm which is the Outstanding Academy?

b) As you will be aware I have updated my article as further objective information has come in. The Section on FA now includes the following about staff vacancies: Four of these are Heads of Department, so will be unlikely to attract external applicants, as 31st May is the final day for submitting resignations for September. Three of these are for the major Departments of English, Maths and Geography. I happened to look at the first two. Oddly, they have a completely different structure, reflecting a school that has no clear strategy. Both have a very general introductory page, sent out for some reason from the Sixth Form Centre, but neither gives any indication of the radical change of approach set out in the reorganisation Consultation. The [English Head of Department](#) then turns via a Word download into a five page very generalised essay, although indicating that the successful applicants will be in charge of a single Key Stage, probably KS3. Amongst the specifics: the challenge of '*To establish strong cross-curricular links with other departments including helping to establish key numeracy skills*', and '*Evaluating the design and delivery of the curriculum for a Key Stage in Dance*'.

The [Mathematics Head of Department](#) details lead in to a Head of Faculty, although Faculties are to be scrapped according to the reorganisation document. This follows into a single website page, multi-coloured and shouting (their word not mine!) that makes no mention of mathematics from beginning to end, but is merely yet another collection of generalised slogans! Try: '*Courage - To exhibit positivity and determination in your sprint and marathon goals*'. There is no clue as to whether Courage is a requirement, a hope, or just a thought. There is no sign of planning or strategy here, just a sense of ad hoc decision making outside any sort of framework.

The appointment of Senior Staff is critical to any school. Would you not agree that these two job adverts show nothing better than sheer incompetence by those responsible for recruitment?

c) TFS now has four staff appointed for its 120 pupils in Year 7, a Principal and three highly qualified and experienced Assistant Principals (and therefore presumably highly paid). FA staff contracts have been changed to enable the Trust to order teachers to work elsewhere in the Trust including TFS. How many other teachers have been appointed to work primarily at TFS, and what will those highly experienced Assistant Principals be doing with their time?.

'Please, if you have an interest in informing our local community about education, then let us work together to get the essential facts straight on which people can then form their own opinions'. I am afraid there are two things wrong with this sentiment. Firstly, as I have demonstrated, it is Turner Schools that needs to get the essential facts straight. I hope I have already played my part here by pointing out some of the essential facts you need to

do this. Secondly, for me, my Turner Schools article represents just a small part of my education activity, and I have no spare capacity. Nor I am afraid would I wish to work for Turner Schools.

I hope that fully covers the issues you have raised.

With Best wishes,

Peter J Ready