

## Case study: Appealing against forced academisation

A Church of England primary school in the High Peak received a letter from the Regional Director (RD) (formerly Regional Schools Commissioner) informing its leaders that, as it had received two consecutive Requires Improvement judgements from Ofsted, it was considered a 'coasting school' and that academisation was therefore considered necessary. At this point, fifteen months after the most recent inspection, the school had not even received the monitoring visit from Ofsted to which it had been told it was entitled after six months. To add to the pressure, the letter was received in late November, and the process allowed just three weeks in which to appeal if governors wished to do so.

The senior leadership team and governors all felt that, for a variety of reasons, to allow this process to take place would be inappropriate. Most important were the massive progress that had been made since the last inspection and the lack of follow-up from Ofsted since then, but other factors included that the school leaders did not feel that academisation was right for the school, and even if it became unavoidable, they would wish to choose a trust rather than have one forced upon them. An emergency meeting was therefore held to decide the next steps. A working group of four people, not including the Chair, was set up, each with a specific task.

A governor member of the SLT (not the head teacher) was delegated to collate all the evidence of monitoring and support that had been carried out by a wide range of agencies since the last inspection. This included support from the LA, training programmes, curriculum scrutiny and new programmes of work introduced. The *ex officio* Foundation governor was tasked with liaison with the Diocesan Board of Education and writing a letter explaining the DBE's position. Another governor was to liaise with the local authority, while a fourth, with legal skills, undertook to write a letter pulling together all the arguments and evidence.

Most of the work proceeded swiftly, although the LA initially declined to participate on the ground that it was not required and would be inappropriate. It transpired that this was the first school in Derbyshire to have received such a letter and the LA was therefore quite unprepared for how to proceed. However, as further letters to other schools began to trickle in, they realised that they were required to play a role and started to look into the process and the supporting evidence they would be able to provide. In the event, they concluded that the information collected by the senior leader was excellent and they could not improve on it.

All the material prepared was reviewed and signed by the Chair of Governors and sent to the RD in both soft and hard copy before the deadline. After about three months the school was contacted to inform them that in the light of the information that had been provided, the RD was satisfied that the school was making appropriate progress and compulsory academisation would not be pursued at this point, though the situation would continue to be monitored. No details were given to indicate how this monitoring would take or has been taking place, and a year on there has still been no contact from Ofsted.

In the meantime the school was contacted by the LA to ask if any governors would be willing to talk to another Derbyshire school which had received the 'coasting schools' letter. The Chair and Vice-chair held a very productive meeting with the Head of the second school, which was then able to justify not being compulsorily academised in a successful appeal to the RD. It has since joined an academy of its choice.