

Forced academisation of 'Inadequate' school condemned by protesters

Huge crowds gathered in Newbury Park to protest the forced academisation of a primary school after it was rated Inadequate by Ofsted.

Parents, pupils, politicians and campaigners assembled outside William Torbitt Primary School, in Eastern Avenue, on Wednesday, December 19.

They oppose an academisation order issued by the Department for Education (DfE) after the school was rated poorly by Ofsted in June 2018.

As an academy, the school would become independent of the local authority and receive its funding directly from the DfE.

"The turnout was amazing," said parent governor Turabi Ay, who co-ordinated the protest.

"It was the kids who drove the protest - their voices were much louder than ours."

Ben Morris, assistant secretary of Redbridge NEU, said: "My members are

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confident that the issues raised by Ofsted are being addressed."

The school awaits an overdue re-inspection which will evidence the rapid progress it has been making, he added.

He praised Redbridge Council's track record of supporting its schools and highlighted a report from charity Sutton Trust showing that two out of every three academy chains are failing their poorer students.

Among the attendees were also pupils and parents from Highlands Primary School, in Ilford - who managed to fight off academisation plans earlier this year - and Cllr Elaine Norman, cabinet member for children and young people.

Cllr Norman said: "It was obvious from the protest

yesterday that parents, staff and unions are united in their opposition to the forced academisation.

"The council is supporting them with that and I will be putting a motion to full council on January 17."

The campaigners are set to protest outside the Town Hall before the meeting.

Earlier this month, a DfE spokesman said: "When we see issues of underperformance we will not hesitate to take swift action."

"Whilst we are always keen to hear the views of parents and staff, our priority is, and always should be, the wellbeing, safeguarding and education of pupils."

He added that a public consultation about the plan to convert William Torbitt Primary School to an academy will be formally run once an academy sponsor has been confirmed.

The DfE has been contacted for further comment.