



FYLDE ASSOCIATION

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For immediate release

Head Teachers prevented from speaking at Public Meeting over Cuts to Local School Budgets

Election ‘Purdah’ hits Meeting. We called an OPEN PUBLIC MEETING on Thursday 25th May 2017 at 6.30pm in Wesham Community Centre. It was to alert everyone to the extent of the cuts to school budgets hitting local schools, as well as elsewhere. The speakers were to include head teachers, who could explain the extent of the problem affecting their schools and answer any questions. However, they were prevented from speaking, one even on the day of the meeting, by election ‘purdah’ rules being imposed. So a room full of people at the Community Centre, including the Fylde Labour and Green candidates who were in the audience, were not able to hear from them.

Ken Cridland, President of Fylde NUT, said, “This purdah rule was originally designed to ensure that civil servants who are close to politicians remain neutral during election campaigns, but is now being used as a gagging order to stop those working in public services from telling us what is going. The word ‘purdah’ means drawing a veil. This election purdah is now being used to draw a veil over things which the powers that be would rather people don’t know about. People employed in public services are being told not to get involved in any sort of publicity or speak at meetings on the very issues people are really concerned about, in this case what is happening in the school down the road. This purdah is not being imposed to ensure neutrality. It is being imposed as a cover up.”

The teacher who called the meeting, Joanne Gould, Vice-President of Fylde NUT, who teaches at a state secondary school in Kirkham and Wesham said, “I am an angry woman. I am going to speak up! There are cuts continually going on now which are damaging the education we provide. We are losing teachers. Courses are being cut. Remaining staff are under more pressure. My own child is not able to do a music course which has now been cut”.

A governor at the same local secondary school, Linda Nulty, said, “I am Chair of Resources at that school, which is now an awful job”. We have had to reduce staffing by five teachers because of budget cuts. Fortunately, we were able to do that without compulsory redundancies, but we have lost good teachers. There has been no money to cover new costs imposed on us by Government, such as new national insurance payments.”

The meeting was informed of the good news that the Conservative, Labour, Lib Dem and Green Fylde election candidates had all signed the pledge on the national school cuts website. We think Fylde is the only constituency where this has happened so far. What they signed YES to is “I promise to oppose cutting per pupil funding in real terms for schools in Fylde compared to 2015/16.”

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Sam Ud-din, who is Secretary for the NUT at Lancashire level, explained that campaigns and meetings over education funding are going on around the whole country. He is from the Lancaster area and informed the meeting of the big march there on May 13th and how local head teachers had taken a lead in getting things underway before the purdah crack down.

Sam also used a projector to display the national school cuts website on-line. As people gave him a school name or postcode, he displayed the cuts one after the other which those schools faced in real terms.

Following some excellent points made from the audience and questions to the speakers, attention was drawn to a sheet on the chairs which showed how everyone could help in the campaign. This is what was decided we could urge people to do –

- 1) Log onto www.schoolcuts.org.uk, to see the cuts to your schools or schools around you.
- 2) Log onto www.schoolcuts.org.uk, click on 'Email your Candidates' near the top of the screen and fill in your, name, email, and postcode. Your Fylde candidates and their photos will appear, with the letter on funding levels that you can email to them. Click on 'send email'. The candidates have already responded to previous emails, but the more emails they get, the more seriously they will take this issue.
- 3) If canvassers come asking for your vote, tell them about your concerns. Ask them what their candidate is going to do about education funding.
- 4) Tell your friends, family and neighbours about how serious this problem is. Ask them to do the same.
- 5) Consider the information you have gleaned very carefully when you vote on June 8th.
- 6) We are likely to have to follow up our concerns after the election to make sure any promises are fully honoured.

Bundles of a sheet with the above advice on "How to help and why" were taken away by people, along with leaflets to hand to others, and to parents outside schools. It was decided to produce a Lytham St. Annes version of the very successful flyer used in Kirkham and Wesham with the cuts to each school on it, and get that out after the half-term.

Attached : Purdah letter, 'How to help and why' sheet, some photos from the meeting.

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