

18 September 2018

Dear Anne,

It is with a very heavy heart that I am writing to tender my resignation as Executive Head of Harrop Fold School with immediate effect. As you are aware, there is an investigation under way. This was first mentioned informally at the start of the year in January, discussed with the local authority in March, and formalised as an investigation in May. I and a number of other members of staff have been suspended, and subjected to detailed questioning.

Despite the alleged need for swift action to be taken earlier in the year, the investigation process itself has been allowed to drag on, causing damage to the reputation of the school and to me personally. Parents and pupils are unsettled, and the media are speculating as to what has gone on that is so serious to warrant my suspension and that of three other members of staff.

I am at a loss to understand the “heavy handed” approach adopted by the Council, which appears to have completely ignored the best interests of the students, staff and school.

To date, I have still not yet been presented with the full details of the allegations that are being made, but I understand that the investigation is apparently focused on administrative errors involving a very small number of pupils. I and the school cooperated fully with the initial investigation and once identified, immediate steps were taken to ensure such errors could not be repeated. We had thought that this was the end of the matter.

As I understand it, the administrative errors involve how attendance, exclusions and home schooling are recorded. The number of pupils involved is approximately five in 2018 (2/3 EHE, 2 attendance) and three in both 2017 and 2016. This represents approximately 0.5% of our total student population.

From our previous extensive discussions, you are fully aware of my position on each of the issues raised, but I include a short summary in annex overleaf.

As the leader of Harrop, I will always take full responsibility for what happens in school and for the work of the team. However, my overall feeling is that Salford City Council are determined to pursue me personally, with the end goal of removing me as Executive Head. They appear to have assumed guilt on my part from the outset, and have brought significant pressure on you and the governing body to accede to their demands, failing which an Interim Executive Board will be immediately instigated. Understandably, you have been keen to avoid this, if at all possible.

The protracted nature of the investigative process has created a level of uncertainty that was already having a detrimental impact at the end of the summer term, with the school even having to close one day because of the level of disruption. I cannot sit back whilst this continues, particularly given the progress we have made as a school and within the community. Rather than allow

further damage to be caused, with the ongoing uncertainty and delay, I have taken the decision to step down.

Since I arrived in 2005/6, I have been single-mindedly focused on improving education in Little Hulton. In my opinion, the biggest barrier to that has been the shocking level of debt that had been allowed to mount up whilst the school was under Salford City Council's direction (and before I took up my role). We have laboured under this debt for nine years, and have been ruthlessly focused on reducing it, so that the school can ensure that despite the often-difficult personal circumstances our pupils face, they have a decent chance of getting the best education possible.

It is fair to say when I joined Harrop, my understanding was that the debt was effectively a notional figure, and a debt that was recognised by everyone would not be capable of being repaid by the school. Indeed, when Salford City Council approached HCSS who are experts in educational finance to look into the school's financial affairs back in 2010, it advised the Council that the school was unable to repay the debt and recommended that it should be written off. They felt that to insist on its repayment would critically damage the school. This advice was ignored.

As a result, I have worked tirelessly to reduce the debt from where it originally stood at over £3m to the current level of £1.6m. I have done this through general fundraising, and also through additional paid work in the public and corporate sectors, involving leadership development training.

The most recent round of filming for Channel 4's *Educating Greater Manchester* will see an additional significant contribution to the school through advertising donations. I am delighted that through the Channel 4 programme, all the hard work that has gone on at Harrop is being acknowledged, and that the school is finally getting the recognition it deserves. I am personally committed to continuing to support Harrop and all of the proceeds from my book, *Educating Drew* - will go back to the school. Taken together, these activities are likely to bring in, in excess of a further £100,000.

In addition to this financial contribution, whilst I will no longer be Executive Head, I would like to formally offer my time on a completely pro-bono basis to support the school for one or two days a week over the coming school year, with a view to providing a stable hand during this time of transition, whilst you and the governors, put in place longer term leadership arrangements. I appreciate that this is a rather unorthodox offer, but I want to stress my ongoing commitment and willingness to support Harrop. Furthermore, despite my resignation, I will of course continue to provide my full co-operation in the ongoing investigation.

You will be aware that it has been suggested previously that I should resign and accept a financial settlement to "walk away". Any such settlement would inevitably require me to agree to various confidentiality undertakings - otherwise known as "gagging clauses". As you may also be aware, the use of such clauses by the NHS has recently been heavily criticised.

Given the money the Council is clearly prepared to offer me to walk away - not to mention the vast expense that is being incurred in dealing with the ongoing investigation and the additional staff brought in to provide cover at the school - I would urge you to ask the Council to look again at the position it has adopted. It is driving a process through, which I understand you and the governors are unhappy with, but feel you have no choice but to agree to. Surely a better, more effective way to spend this money would be to contribute to paying off the outstanding debt.

I appreciate that some people may think that I am resigning because there are serious concerns at Harrop. I maintain that whilst there may have been errors made, these are administrative errors, involving only a tiny percentage of our school cohort. These errors are, I have no doubt, being replicated in secondary schools up and down the country. I take full responsibility for these errors - this comes with the territory of being a head - but I do not believe they constitute grounds for me to be pursued in the way that I have been, with what appears to be a complete disregard for the damage caused to the school, its pupils, the local community and the Governing Body. This feels very much like a personal vendetta and I hope that by removing myself from the situation, that some semblance of normality will return to the school, for the benefit of all.

I appreciate this has been a very challenging time for all involved, and the road ahead is not going to be easy. I very much hope, therefore, that you and the wider Local Governing Body will consider my sincere offer of unpaid support to the school over the coming school year as you seek to stabilise the situation and move to new leadership arrangements.

Finally, I want to thank you and the Governing Body for your support throughout this very difficult time. I remain absolutely convinced of, and committed to, the education that we were offering through Harrop, and continue to believe in our students and our community. Their spirit will always shine through.

Yours sincerely

**Drew Povey**

## **ANNEX - Response to Accusations**

### **That we are deliberately “off-rolling” students and coding attendance incorrectly**

I am fundamentally opposed to off-rolling and condemn it as a practice.

It is true that there have been administrative errors involving 2 - 3 students. This came to light in January 2018. In error, these students were originally coded as being “off-roll” and when this was identified as being incorrect, they were immediately reinstated. It transpires that this had happened over each of the last three years. Whilst we accept an error was made by us, it is also perhaps worth noting that despite having a statutory duty to check this data in each of the three years, it would appear that Salford City Council had overlooked these errors as well.

To be clear, there has been no financial gain to the school as a result of these errors.

In terms of potential impact on examination results, this is negligible, particularly in light of our inclusive approach at Harrop: we don't exclude; we keep a high proportion of managed moves (that we retain); and we have a high proportion of students with considerable learning difficulties. These three groups alone account for around 15 - 20% of our cohort each year), and if we were in the business of “massaging results” we would surely be looking to this much larger group of students to boost our exam results.

Refusing to take “managed moves” - or having a different approach to excluding pupils - would for example, have a much more significant impact than the very small number of students that were coded incorrectly.

In terms of coding attendance, it has been put to me that there are discrepancies in how students who are educated off-site are being recorded. As a leader, I will always encourage attendance to be as high as possible, but that has never included asking colleagues to falsify evidence. If there have been discrepancies then I anticipate that these will be as a result of administrative error, and nothing more.

Finally, it is worth noting that amongst the students that have come off our school roll, there are some who are very talented and who are predicted to do very well in their GCSEs.

### **That we are deliberately encouraging parents to home school ‘difficult’ children:**

This is completely untrue and flies in the face of everything that I and the school, stand for and our championing of the local area.

Parents are made aware of all options and then decide what they feel is best for their children at that particular time.

### **That we are inappropriately coding students who are sent home early for poor behaviour.**

It is true that if a student is behaving particularly poorly, we talk to parents about how to deal with the situation. With their agreement, occasionally the student may go home an hour early, for example. We have found this approach to be highly effective - for the school, the pupil and their families - with a view to avoiding potential safeguarding issues.

We have not coded these as formal exclusions, as it is always done in agreement with the parents - unlike formal exclusions.

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Sept 2018