

Statement made by Ashley Gatecliffe to the 14th December meeting of the Skipton and Ripon ACC:

I'm here to formally request an independent investigation into the leadership of the Upper Nidderdale Federation.

Fountains Earth School is part of the Upper Nidderdale Federation. My son attended the school and we had planned for his brother to join in September. However, last summer we, along with other parents in the school, took the difficult decision to remove our children. The decision was difficult because we knew that closure of the school was inevitable, and we knew the consequence of this on the upper dale community.

I am not here today in the hope that the school remains open. I'm here because it is not clear how North Yorkshire County Council is effectively monitoring its school Governing Boards, and, in particular, the Governing Board and Leadership team for the Upper Nidderdale Federation.

I first wrote to the Council in Autumn 2022 with concerns after a string of events led me to raise a formal complaint. My concerns centred around the decision making of the Governors and Leadership team, including recruitment practices and accountability. Despite requesting one, I was NOT given an impartial hearing and my complaint was heard and dismissed by members of the very Board that my concerns were addressed towards.

Over the last year parents tried to work with the school for the best interests of our children, but the leadership was not engaged. Instead - it chose to silence or take an opaque stance to our questions and concerns.

Those children who have moved from Fountains Earth, including my own, have been deemed 'behind where they should be' and, despite requests, there has been NO documentation sent to their new schools. Our fears have been proven - the educational provision was not consistently good enough at Fountains Earth, and the school was made the 'poor relation' with a conscious intention to close it.

It is my belief that the Governing Board of the Upper Nidderdale Federation is not doing its job in holding the leadership team to account and from what I am aware of, there have been serious conflicts of interest in relation to recruitment of both governors and staff as well as questionable practices in relation to the process by which governors are appointed.

A petition requesting an independent investigation now has over 1000 signatures, 570 of which are from the local area and 3 of which are from current and former Federation governors.

What brings me here today is that since the petition has been circulating, a number of former federation staff have contacted me with information about their personal experiences that should raise serious questions and warrant a full investigation.

It is my sincere hope that you will now take these matters forward, act appropriately and see that a thorough investigation does take place.

CYPS Officer response to the above statement, read out at the 14th December Skipton and Ripon ACC:

With regard to an independent investigation:

The governing board hold strategic responsibility for the performance and quality of education in their schools and this includes holding leaders to account for performance. The Local Management of Schools (LMS) Scheme sets out the relationship between the Council and the maintained schools it funds, and this is approved by the North Yorkshire Schools Forum. Headteachers and Governors of locally maintained schools must determine – at school or federation level – how to achieve effective management of resources and value for money, to optimise the use of their resources, and to invest in teaching and learning. Under LMS, the costs of operating a school, or schools, are borne by the school from a delegated budget. This includes all staffing, premises and resources costs. Governors are responsible for recruitment within their schools.

The education system is complex. The Council retains many duties and responsibilities with regard to its maintained schools and for example, its role alongside all schools in relation to safeguarding of children. Diocesan bodies have a distinct role in church schools. There is overlap with all of these parties and the Department for Education's (DfE) Regional Directors who take key decisions delegated to them by the Secretary of State for education, and therefore it is unclear who would conduct an 'independent investigation' and what authority it would hold.

With regard to complaints raised about the school:

In accordance with [Section 29\(1\) of the Education Act 2002](#), all maintained schools must have and publish procedures to deal with all complaints relating to their school and to any community facilities or services that the school provides, for which there are no separate (statutory) procedures. The duty to establish procedures for dealing with complaints lies with the governing body and not the council. Only complaints outside of the scope of the school's policy would be considered elsewhere by either the DfE or Ofsted.

About one year ago North Yorkshire Children's Services did receive correspondence about the school and signposted the writer towards the school's complaints policy. The council also provided information at that time about how to escalate the concerns to other organisations if required.

If parents, staff or community members have new concerns about the school, officers would advise them to raise these using the appropriate schools complaints procedure. As stated, it is rare that a complaint involving a school falls upon the Council to investigate it.

With regard to the query about pupil information being passed from school to school:

Schools hold detailed information about pupil progress and schools involved in pupil transfers work together, with parents and other agencies as required, to pass required and relevant information on as part of the transfer process.

With regard to school performance:

Ofsted inspected the school in June 2022 and reported that the school continues to be a good school. The report provides more information about leadership, curriculum and safeguarding.

The Council is currently undertaking the required process regarding the proposal that Fountains Earth School should close. Unless advised otherwise by the writer, both today's public statement and the response of the council officers would be included in the consultation feedback which is scheduled to be reported to the Council's Executive on 23 January, following the end of the consultation period.