

## **Personal Testimony from a Teacher about United Learning**

Between 2017-18 I was employed as a **Lead Practitioner at John Smeaton Academy (JSA) in Leeds**, which at the time was overseen by United Learning. They had sub-contracted the running of the school to the Rodillian Multi-Academy Trust, a local organization with three existing schools. I was seconded to John Smeaton as an employee of Rodillian, but when United Learning took the school back in January 2017 my employment was moved over to them and I remained in my position.

United Learning had initiated the removal of Rodillian from the running of JSA, due to Rodillian being under financial notice to improve, and some concerns about the treatment of staff under the Headteacher, Alex Burnham. **The people at the very top of United Learning, including Dame Sally Coates and Derek Davies, made many promises to staff that they would be well looked after under United Learning, and that a ‘healing process’ would take place. However, within days they had installed Craig Dillon as Executive Headteacher and Claire Bailey as Headteacher, and under their leadership things became very much worse.**

It was evident that there was a clear intent to remove many staff from their posts, seemingly with a particular focus on the most experienced teachers and anyone who was a member of the Union. I was later told by a senior leader that Ms Bailey possessed a list of 14 staff she intended to remove by any means. **There are many examples of teachers who suffered intolerable bullying and, in almost all of these cases, the staff concerned have now left the school and teaching altogether. Two former teachers had complete breakdowns and both suffer from ongoing mental health issues.**

I had been a highly successful and experienced teacher of 12 years at that point. I believe it was due to my experience, my involvement with the Union and my unwillingness to comply with many unethical practices instigated by Ms Bailey and Mr Dillion that **a situation was constructed to force my removal from the school.** During a cover lesson, I made a small administrative error in taking a register – the kind of mistake teachers make, daily, with no consequence or repercussions – and I was threatened with disciplinary action. I was forced to attend disciplinary meetings, accused of not safeguarding children and threatened with the end of my career. Thanks to the support of my Union, I was able to fight this unfair action and it was eventually withdrawn, but the process left me **severely humiliated and distressed.** The incident followed months of working under the leadership of Ms Bailey and Mr Dillion and seeing **colleagues bullied and treated appallingly.** There was no regard whatsoever for staff or for children – where teachers left their posts, **children were left without qualified teachers**, and this was noted by Ofsted when the school was inspected around that time. Staff morale and wellbeing was at rock bottom. **Sally Coates and Derek Davies must have been aware of what was happening and did nothing to intervene, despite their previous promises.**

I am only one teacher whose career was destroyed by working for United Learning. During their ownership of JSA, it remained in Special Measures, and is still there to this day. Recently, another Trust has taken it over. I have not taught in a classroom since 2017, although recently I have returned to working in education. It has taken me years to recover from how I was treated, and while I have managed to regain some of my former confidence, I still have the occasional panic attack when triggered by the kinds of behaviours I was subjected to at JSA. I find it very difficult to trust people I work for now and choose my workplaces very carefully.

In my experience, **United Learning’s claim to bring out ‘the best in everyone’ could not be further from the truth. I would strongly advise the teachers and parents of your community to fight this takeover,** and I wish you every success.