

Testimony of a parent of a John Roan Y10 student at a United Learning School

The school is a **toxic environment** where **students are bullied on a daily basis**.

Every day they are instructed to **line up in silence for equipment checks in the playground and shouted at**. Our child has been put into **one-hour detentions for not opening their bag quickly enough and for missing a green pen or mini whiteboard**. Talking to a friend or a teacher leads to an **immediate one-hour detention**.

Children are made to wear **lanyards around their necks** with 'first impression' cards. If a teacher doesn't like your impression, such as a shirt tucked out, then a cross is put on the card. Three crosses and a one-hour detention is issued.

This week students have been told that **any single infringement will lead to a one-hour detention**. Apparently they will be focusing on skirt length. Girls who expose their knees will be punished too.

We are yet to receive accurate data on how many times our child has been in detention, but it averages once to twice a week.

In one instance, our child was **issued a one-hour detention for only completing 80% of the homework because they weren't taught the questions and struggled**. Is this an appropriate response to a child's need for support?

When our child has not attended a detention they have been placed in a **six-hour social isolation room** called the Disruption Free Learning Room (DFL).

A conservative estimate would be that **our child has missed around 30 to 40 hours of lesson time in their GCSE lessons**.

DFL is issued for **speaking out of turn, having your head down, not completing work to the required standard**.

Basic worksheets in maths and English are given with no support. Vital GCSE course material is not shared.

In our view, this is an abuse of power and is damaging to children's self-esteem.

And it doesn't work. Our child reports that **between 30 and 50 children are in detention every day**.

The disciplinary system is discriminatory. From talking to parents with **SEND children**, they are **targeted by imposing silent classrooms**. Some SEND children need to vocalise for help and to learn. In fact, all children do! How can you learn in silence?!

How many children are being isolated for hours and days on end, without support, help, or kindness? We would like to know.

Off-rolling is taking place. We know of families whose **children have SEND needs who have been encouraged to leave.** We don't know how many in total. Do their children not deserve access to high-quality education? Where is the accountability?

It is divisive school. The **constant use of ranking and league tables amongst students in the school and across the Trust leaves too many children feeling invisible and not valued.**

Our child reports that every Friday in an online assembly that is beamed into every classroom, the only information that is shared is attendance and rank.

We can only imagine a significant number of children whose names never appear, feeling left out and failures, who are **berated and shouted at in lineups and classrooms,** and **publicly humiliated.**

The 'jump to the front' card that **allows children with 100% attendance to eat first** is sinister. So children who may be ill and in need of nutrition have to queue at the back? Using food to manipulate children into attending school is unethical.

Our child reports that **most lessons are dull and repetitive with very little opportunities for creativity or genuine engagement from students.** Endless PowerPoints are read off in monotone. Students spend most of their time copying from the board and filling out prepared worksheets aimed at **rote learning and repetition** with the aim of extracting higher test scores for UL. There is **excessive testing.**

The 'state of the art' gym is rarely used for sports because it is mainly set up for endless internal exams.

The science department is in crisis from what we can see. There is very little learning taking place because of **high staff turnover and disorganisation.**

We worry our child will fail or underperform in their GCSEs. Some families may be able to afford personal tutors. Currently we are using YouTube videos and one of our child's elder siblings is teaching them biology. Any suggestions on how we can support their learning in chemistry and physics is much appreciated!

There are some oases in this barren desert. **Some teachers try, but this year the dynamic and engaging ones have left.** Why?

Covid hit us all hard, but we have been back for a year and a half and yet there have been **no school trips bar one music trip.** We are doing our best to see how we can compensate for this. The **obsession with tests and exam preparation and silent classrooms** means **no other way of learning is valued from our experience.**

Our eldest children started out in a lovely community school with a fantastic Head and kind teachers and support staff who could express their personalities and bring them out in our children.

Our children were encouraged to speak and express themselves. There were trips, both educational and purely for fun! Our children made memories and learnt about the value of community, developing confidence and autonomy and taking risks.

Now our child and his friends get punished for being children and adolescents!

Since UL took over the school has become **a soulless place**, with its **harsh, unforgiving culture and punishing attitude to exam success**.

Our child has developed migraines and unexplained sickness. That says it all.

John Roan now feels like a prison. We would have taken our child out like other families have done, but they want to stay to be with their friends.

There is no real choice in the education if you are surrounded by Multi Academy Trusts. It seems our children are commodities, mined for their productivity in the market of education that only values children for their exam results so they can climb up the league tables.

And if for whatever reason your child can't deliver, then they are discarded and made to feel unwelcome.

This is more than unfair. It's immoral.

Parents of a John Roan child.