



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Mr Stephen Maddox  
Chief Executive, Wirral Borough Council  
Town Hall  
Brighton Street  
Wallasey, CH44 8ED

10<sup>th</sup> March 2010

*New Stone*

Thank you for your letter dated 5<sup>th</sup> March 2010 which your office faxed to me yesterday.

It is incredible that you are prepared to accept the poor educational achievements of some schools in Birkenhead as “best outcomes”. You were economical with the truth in your press statement by including the results of one selective and one Academy school in Birkenhead, mistakenly attributing this to five, instead of six, schools in Birkenhead (according to Department for Children, Schools and Families data). You further obfuscate by referring in your letter to the schools’ “improvement rate” rather than their baseline results – the only results that matter.

The whole point of Academies is “to transform education where the status quo is simply not good enough”. Schools that the Council propose to replace with an Academy, by that nature, fall directly into that category. Wirral Council’s acceptance of an Academy programme undermines your argument entirely.

I am glad that you accept, at the very least, that the Academy programme has been delayed by two years.

It is deceitful to suggest however that these delays have nothing to do with Wirral Council and everything to do with other stakeholders. The reverse is true.

You disingenuously suggest that the change of status of Birkenhead High School for Girls, announced by the Department for Children, Schools and



Families, caused delay to the present project. If you had quickly checked the calendar you would have found that this announcement was made in October 2007, well before the present project was conceived. Similarly Wirral was given notice of the Building Schools for the Future programme well before I invited Lord Adonis (the then Schools Minister) to Birkenhead to set in train a reform programme.

The Gyte Report directly cites the National Challenge. It was not therefore something which Wirral had to respond to once the Academy programme had commenced. Furthermore the Schools Commissioner has consistently been supportive of an early Academy opening.

The date slipping had everything to do with your failure to deliver on time, four pieces of key information. Your inaction caused such disquiet in the Department that I was asked, not for the first time, to chase you to fulfil the minimum requirement of a Local Authority. As a result of your failure a whole year's reform was lost.

The difficulties over Ridgeway had nothing to do with the second delay. The Schools Minister became personally involved in setting a timetable so that the Academy could open in 2010. You again failed to meet the timetable that you agreed with the Department which would have seen the whole process to establish a new Academy be completed before governments are barred from taking immediate decision in the run up to an election.

You state that "development work by the LA and the Lead Sponsor for the next Academy is on target with no outstanding requirements". That may be the happy situation at this moment in time, but it is not the result of efficient, effective and effectual council management. Deadlines have been missed pushing the Academy timetable back, as you accept, by two years. This has failed too many of my younger constituents and their families.

The lack of leadership, poor attitude and the incompetence exhibited by you and Howard Cooper are unacceptable.



The Birkenhead Universities' Academy was delayed twice and for two clear reasons: both arising from the incompetence of the Director of Children's Services.

Firstly in December 2008 the Department for Children, Schools and Families requested basic information from Howard Cooper which was not delivered to deadline.

Secondly in February 2010 the closure notices for the two schools were not published to the timetable agreed with the Department for Children, Schools and Families to allow decisions to be made before purdah.

If you are so confident in your position might I ask that you refer this matter to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee for them to make their judgement?

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank Field'.

**FRANK FIELD**