

to The Rt Hon Frank Field MP
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

date 5 March 2010

my ref SM0087.DOC/DLK/35.2.1
your ref
tel 0151-691 8589 please ask for Steve Maddox

Dear

Frank,

I refer to your letter of 4 March 2010.

On behalf of the Director of Children's Services and myself I strongly reject the contents of your letter, both in relation to the achievement of young people in Birkenhead and the Council's role in the developing Academy proposals.

In respect of educational achievements of young people in Birkenhead, the schools concerned, with support from the Director of Children's Services, continue to work tirelessly to achieve the best outcomes for their pupils – as is demonstrated by their improvement rate in GCSE results well above the national average over the last three years, and highly positive reporting on the schools by OFSTED using the national framework.

Nor is it correct that actions or inactions by the authority have delayed the Academy programme by two years. Your letter fails to mention the need to integrate the change of status of Birkenhead High School for Girls to an Academy into the revised Birkenhead secondary re-organisation – a proposal announced by Lord Adonis at a conference without prior notice or discussion with us, nor the need to link the Birkenhead secondary re-organisation to the national Building Schools for the Future programme.

Similarly, the Birkenhead secondary re-organisation has had to be adjusted to take account of other national initiatives, particularly National Challenge and the views and directions of the Office for the Schools Commissioner. Timescales were further extended by protracted discussions with the DCSF nominated sponsor for the proposed Boys Academy, where ultimately it was not possible to proceed, due to the unwillingness of Ridgeway High to be part of the proposals – a position they were secure in due to the nature of their Foundation status – again

a national not local factor and of course the DCSF nominated proposed sponsor's inability to secure support for his proposals from the local community, including the Shaftsbury Youth Club and other key prospective partners.

Your letter makes no reference to the extensive consultation which has taken place to date and which is on-going to secure the best outcomes for the future, nor the necessary statutory approval process through the Council's Cabinet and Council.

Good progress is being made on the development of new provision for secondary education in Birkenhead. The Council is leading on the Capital Investment Programme at Birkenhead Girls Academy, on time, fully compliant with national requirements and to the full satisfaction of the Girls Day School Trust. Similarly, development work by the LA with the Lead Sponsor for the next Academy is on target with no outstanding requirements, both in respect of the proposed closures or the process of opening the new Academy. The relevant Council officers have worked very closely to date with the DCSF Project Officer, who has been kept fully informed of the actions we have had to take. The decision to propose a September 2011 opening was a unanimous decision by the sponsors, and not simply by the Council. The DCSF and yourself were copied into the Expression of Interest, with this date set out clearly in December 09. No concerns were raised at that stage.

I share your aspirations for the young people of Birkenhead as do their parents, teachers, governing bodies and all those who work in the Council to support schools. I am happy to work positively with any interested body or persons to progress the current Birkenhead secondary agenda to the benefit of pupils. We are currently working with the DCSF, the Office of the Schools Commissioner, the schools concerned and the sponsors in what is a very complicated process to bring about changes in provision and I feel good progress is being made.

I am, of course, happy to share my position in greater detail should you require this.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. ...', written over a horizontal line.

Chief Executive