

MARK RECKLESS

Member of Parliament for Rochester and Strood



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

Department of Education

Great Smith Street

London SW1P 3BT

15 July 2010

Dear Michael,

You will have received representations from Medway Council in respect of three current or planned Academies where building previously planned under the BSF programme is now "under discussion".

I am writing to you specifically with reference to the Strood Academy, which is located within my constituency, and to which particular considerations apply.

The Strood Academy, which opened in September 2009 is the first, and to date only, Academy to open in the Medway Towns. Cancellation of the new-build school, construction of which was the basis for agreement on opening our first Academy, would thus impact negatively on the currently very positive perceptions of the Academy programme in Medway.

The proposal to establish a Strood Academy initially attracted significant opposition. The proposal involved the closure of Temple, a boys' high school generally considered to be failing, and Chapter, a girls' high school which was held in high regard locally, and their replacement by a new-build mixed-sex Academy on the Chapter site.

Concerns which were expressed by Chapter parents, children and staff were dealt with during an exemplary consultation process. By the end of the process a strong consensus emerged in Strood, backed by all parties, to support revised plans for a single-sex new-build Academy on the Chapter site. Such an agreement could not have been reached, given entrenched problems at Temple, without the promise of a new-build school for the Academy.

The current situation, where all pupils are on the Chapter site but are partly accommodated in twelve portakabins, was intended as a temporary expedient pending completion of the new building. Design and planning of this has already been completed and reflects significant input from pupils and others in Strood. Were that building to be cancelled at this late stage, I fear that parents and pupils across Strood would feel that they had been treated in bad faith, not just by the last Government, but by Medway Council, which only threw its weight behind the establishment of our

first Academy after confirming that Academies would be a key priority for a Conservative-led Government.

I entirely understand that it is necessary to review school building projects which were planned under BSF, given the waste and inefficiency which the previous government let develop within the programme. However, I hope that you will recognise that very particular factors apply in respect of the Strood Academy and that promises which are perceived as having been made by all of us can be kept.

Yours as ever,

Mark Reckless MP