



Cabinet Member Education & Children's Services

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11th March 2022

Ref: MPE [REDACTED]

Mrs Joy Morrissey MP
Houses of Parliament
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Joy

MPE [REDACTED] - New Secondary School in Burnham (Case Ref: [REDACTED])

Thank you for forwarding your constituent's enquiry, please find attached the E-Act consultation document together with the LA's response.

We are not refuting our position at the time that closing the school was not our preferred option. We are simply explaining that the decision to close the school was taken by the DfE and that all avenues to reopen the school now lie with the DfE. The DfE would have weighed up the pros and cons of school closure when coming to their decision - striking a balance between (i) supporting parental preference and (ii) supporting community cohesion/reducing travel distances. DfE guidance on the Closure of an Academy by a Trust states:

The circumstances in which an academy trust might ask the Secretary of State to agree to the closure of an academy include:

- *Where an academy has low numbers of pupils on roll, and there is no reasonable prospect of attracting additional pupils because there are surplus places in schools elsewhere in the local area, and no predicted increase in the medium and long-term need for places.*
- *Where an academy in an area with a need for additional school places has been underperforming for some time and is under capacity and shows no realistic prospect of meeting the required standard. However, in these circumstances, as an alternative to proceeding to closure, the Secretary of State may agree to allow trustees to terminate their agreement early and seek an alternative sponsor or multi academy trust with the skills and capacity to improve standards.*

Factors considered by the Secretary of State will normally include:

- *Projections for future levels of basic need;*
- *The viability of the school under the current academy trust (including the effectiveness of any previous attempts to improve educational standards and financial performance);*

- *The availability of other academy trusts to take on the school and their capacity to drive the necessary improvements*
- *The impact on those likely to be affected by the closure;*
- *Cost effectiveness of closure (including availability of alternative provision and transport arrangements)*

While our preference was for the SoS to keep a local school open to serve the Burnham population and provide parents with greater choice, it would appear that the SoS considered on balance greater weight should be placed on (i) low numbers on roll at Burnham Park, (ii) historical underperformance and (iii) the availability of places within a reasonable distance of Burnham based on current trends in parental preference - noting that DfE best practice guidance on home to school transport recommends that a child of secondary school age might be expected to travel up to 75 minutes each way to school. It remains that the current numbers both in Bucks and neighbouring authorities are unlikely to justify the need for a school to reopen on the site.

Yours sincerely



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