



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

18 May 2018

Dear Damian,

The John Roan School, Royal Borough of Greenwich

I am writing to you regarding the future of the above maintained school in the wake of its inspection by Ofsted on 21 and 22 March this year and in anticipation of the forthcoming publication of that organisation's final inspection report. I understand that the report has not been finalised and published but there are reasonable grounds to suspect that Ofsted may rate the school as 'inadequate', albeit inadequate with serious weaknesses rather than special measures.

While we no doubt hold very different opinions as to the merits of such an approach, I appreciate that converting maintained schools to academies is at the heart of your Government's education policy, and that the issuing of directive academy orders to maintained schools that Ofsted has rated as inadequate remains your department's primary means of intervening to address underperformance.

However, in the case of The John Roan, I believe that there are strong grounds to suggest that the school could, with the continued support of the local authority and other partner organisations, turn the situation around and deliver rapid and sustained improvement in performance and educational standards if it were given the opportunity to do so.

Founded in 1677, The John Roan has a proud and distinguished history as one of the oldest state schools in England. It has served the children of Greenwich for over three centuries and remains a valued part of our local community. However, the past three years have been challenging ones for the school, particularly with regard to a series of changes in its senior leadership.

Following the retirement of a long-serving and well-respected Headteacher, Mr Des Malone, the substantive Headteacher who was recruited to replace him was not successful and left the school quite suddenly. An interim Headteacher from another local school was then asked to stand in for a temporary period to stabilise the situation. A second substantive Headteacher was subsequently appointed and she began to make improvements but, due to unforeseen family circumstances, she decided to leave. This rapid churn in senior leadership and the resulting uncertainty and lack of consistency, as well as changes to the leadership at a senior and middle level, had a detrimental impact on the school's performance.

Matthew Pennycook MP

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However, The John Roan is now in a much more positive position. A very experienced Headteacher, Ms Cath Smith (Executive Headteacher of the Bow School), was brought in on secondment to support the school in September 2017 and she has now been appointed to the permanent Headship. She currently leads the school four days a week and will do so full-time from September. The fact that the school has not had to wait until September for their new Headteacher to join them has ensured that the improvement journey has already begun, and it was unfortunate that Ofsted's inspection was undertaken just a month after Ms Smith was appointed to her new permanent position.

Under Ms Smith's leadership – the quality of which I have no doubt will be recognised by Ofsted in its final inspection report, whatever the rating ultimately awarded – I am convinced that rapid improvement can be delivered with continued support from partner organisations and a local authority with an excellent record of school improvement. Ms Smith is well liked by staff, pupils and their parents and has evidently already won their support and respect. She has a clear vision for what she wants to achieve and has high expectations that have been communicated clearly to the staff. As a result, the situation has already begun to improve.

If given the opportunity, I believe that further rapid progress can be achieved on the basis of a well-defined improvement plan. The local authority's Head of School Improvement already meets regularly with the new Headteacher to drive improvement. Additionally, the new Headteacher and Chair of Governors meet with the local authority's Director of Children's Services half-termly to be both supported and challenged regarding the pace of improvement. The school is already now receiving tailored support in English and Maths, Senior Leaders are being supported in their monitoring and training roles, the improvement of student behaviour is being supported, and the Governor support service is working alongside the Governing Body to model effective governance.

I fear that if a directive academy order is issued in the near future, it will prove to be an unnecessary distraction that will pull the senior leadership and Governing Body's attention away from an unswerving focus on outcomes for pupils and toward the finer details of academy models and governance structures. If the young people who currently attend The John Roan are to achieve their full potential, the sole focus must remain on delivering rapid and sustained improvement in performance and educational standards and what support the new Headteacher requires to achieve that end.

It is for that reason that I write to request that, should Ofsted rate the school as inadequate (with serious weaknesses rather than special measures), you give serious consideration to temporarily refraining from the issuing of a directive academy order in order to give the school a time-limited period in which to deliver further improvements under its new Headteacher with the support of the local authority and other partner organisations.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

Matthew Pennycook