

Rt. Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

21st July 2010

Dear Michael,

BSF and Highfield Humanities College

I am writing to you about the above whose BSF bid is currently being reviewed by you and your Department, a bid which I wholeheartedly endorse and to which I am giving my strongest support.

I know of course that you will have many excellent schools that you are currently considering in your review. But you were good enough in response to the question I posed to you in Parliament on July 12 about the impact of the BSF cuts on special schools locally to say that you were 'very sensitive to the problems in Blackpool' and I know that you visited us and saw a range of schools in Blackpool last year in the run-up to the General Election.

Let me outline some of the particular merits and urgency of the BSF bid for Highfield. It is a secondary school I know extremely well, not least because it is over the road from my constituency office - and in fact quite close to Roseacre Primary School in my constituency which you visited last year. It is a school which has counted work with Special Educational Needs students as a key element of its mission - which has an existing SERF unit for physical disabilities and aims to apply for a second SERF for sensory impairment.

Highfield serves a wide residential area but nearly half of its students come from the bottom 30 per cent of the most deprived areas in England. You will know that Blackpool in common with many other seaside towns has significant challenges with public health, alcohol and substance abuse issues as well as a high rate of teenage pregnancy. High levels of transience across the town increase the educational challenges. At the same time however there is a strong tradition of community voluntary activity and charitable involvement. During my time as Blackpool South's MP since 1997 I have seen numerous examples of the strong commitment and involvement of staff, parents and students at Highfield in, for example, anti-bullying and knife-crime initiatives and it has been a pleasure to welcome several

of the college's students to Westminster where their achievements in these and related initiatives have been highlighted.

Highfield has chosen its route as a specialist Humanities College with History, geography and RE lead subjects. Naturally as an historian and former editor of History Today I am pleased to have that focus in one of my secondary colleges - but the humanities focus also has had a significant impact on raising standards and profile within the school and community.

The need for the major rebuild proposed, transforming the centre of the school's site and enabling Highfield to offer much broader sports and other facilities both to its students and the local community, could not be more pressing. The central core of the existing building dates back to before the Second World War and many other parts of the site desperately need renewal - not least the 1960s heating system which the College's Business Manager has said frequently breaks down.

I believe the proposals for the College's transformation are innovative and imaginative but important of all cumulative effect of the BSF proposals will be to raise the academic and other achievements of Highfield to a new level, building on their significant and sustained improvements in Key Stage 4 results in recent years.

If these proposals were knocked back or significantly scaled down, I am seriously concerned about the negative impact it could have on Highfield's ability to continue raising aspirations and achievement. To do this is vital in a catchment area which has historically been at the lower end of both stay-on rates and in education and the attainment of the skills now needed more than ever in 21st century Blackpool. It is also worth noting as a side benefit that the new build at the heart of the BSF bid for Highfield will bring a significant number of new skills and apprenticeships which again are much required for Blackpool in general and the South Shore area in particular.

I know that the range of other expressions of support you will be receiving on behalf of Highfield from Blackpool Council, the local community organisations and PACT organisations plus those from parents, students and others involved with the College will be testament to the affection and support this initiative has gathered. I hope the points I have added here as Highfield's Member of Parliament will be ones that underline and strengthen its case to you. It goes without saying that I am more than happy to talk further with you and your officials on any aspect of the bid.

With best wishes,

Gordon Marsden MP