

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

22<sup>nd</sup> July 2010

Dear Michael,

**BSF Bid and St. Mary's Catholic College, Blackpool**

I am writing to you to add my comments in support of the above BSF project for St. Mary's Catholic College in Blackpool which is currently under review by you and your Department. I know the school well - from 1997 until May 2010 it was in my constituency (it is now in the constituency of my Parliamentary colleague Paul Maynard who I know is also approaching you in support of the bid) and a significant number of its students and their parents remain my constituents in Blackpool South.

You may recall that in my question to you in Education Department Question Time in the House of Commons on July 12, I referred to the cumulative impact of the BSF cuts in Blackpool on special schools in the town. This was because just as John Donne said 'no man is an island' many BSF bids have knock-on impacts and implications for the non-secondary sector in their area. This is particularly the case in Blackpool, not just in the case of special needs issues, but in the case of St. Mary's in terms of the nearby Christ the King Catholic Primary School.

I can do no better than to quote what the head of St Mary's, Stephen Tierney, said in the letter he wrote to you at the Department on 9<sup>th</sup> July. *'Following the formation of a hard federation with Christ the King Catholic Primary School in January 2009, the primary school will hopefully be rebuilt on St. Mary's grounds as part of the holistic redevelopment of the campus. Both schools serve disadvantaged communities with Christ the King having just under fifty percent of pupils on free school meals. Christ the King Parish Church will also be rebuilt on the St. Mary's site with the fund for this being provided by the Diocese. If the BSF programme is stopped at St. Mary's then the new school building for Christ the King, which is an integral part of the programme, will also be lost as well as the new parish church building. The impact of your department's decision could be devastating on two school communities and the local parish community who are all committed to working together.'*

Over the years I have visited St. Mary's on a number of occasions - not least in the last year where I was grilled on everything from national politics to design, environmental and regeneration issues by the senior students at the school. The level of engagement, enthusiasm and maturity that they showed was remarkable - perhaps a reflection of the fact that St. Mary's was recently appointed as the North West Region SSAT Leadership and Innovation Academy Hub with responsibility for developing and spreading leadership and innovation across the region. The school's head, governors and supporters firmly believe that the BSF project is critical not just to maintaining and expanding such excellence but also in terms of drawing in others from a cohort of children often coming from challenging backgrounds and areas of high deprivation.

I know from your visits to Blackpool and from the briefing your officials will have given you, that you will be well aware of the particular issues around transience, a historic low-skill base, pockets of deprivation which equal or outbid many inner-city ones, that have made the challenges of secondary improvement in Blackpool so sharp - but one that St. Mary's have made a significant contribution to.

The volume of representations I know you will be receiving over St. Mary's is testament to the esteem in which it is held and its achievements to date. I hope that the points I have made here (and those which my town colleague Paul Maynard will be adding) will weigh strongly with you in support of proceeding with St. Mary's BSF bid.

With best wishes,

Gordon Marsden MP