

Rt Hon Justine Greening MP  
 Secretary of State  
 Sanctuary Buildings  
 Great Smith Street  
 London  
 SW1P 3BT

12 December 2016

Dear Ms Greening,

**Re: Government consultation 'Schools that work for everyone'**

We are the headteachers of the Gloucestershire comprehensive schools listed at the end of this letter and we are writing jointly to express our opposition to the proposals contained in the government's Green Paper, particularly as regards the proliferation of selective school places in our educational system.

We exist in a county which already has 7 grammar schools, 5 of which have expanded in the last year or are in the process of doing so. We fundamentally reject the assumption in the Green Paper that grammar schools are, in general, better than comprehensive schools. The school with the best Progress 8 measure in 2016 is comprehensive and, of the 10 schools with the highest Progress 8 scores, four are selective while the other six are comprehensive.

**Gloucestershire Top 10 Schools Ranked by Progress 8**

Rank	Status	Progress 8 Score
1	Comprehensive	0.63
2	Grammar	0.53
3	Comprehensive	0.49
4	Grammar	0.45
5	Grammar	0.44
6	Comprehensive	0.40
7	Comprehensive	0.34
8	Grammar	0.33
9	Comprehensive	0.27
10	Comprehensive	0.26

12	Grammar	0.21
15	Grammar	0.16
20	Grammar	-0.01

Grammar schools have an in-built advantage over their comprehensive neighbours because they only take high achieving children, have very few children from disadvantaged or 'problem' families, have very few SEND or statemented children and do not have to worry about meeting a broad range of needs. They also benefit hugely from having a great majority of parents who are fully engaged in their children's

education. Comprehensive schools, by comparison, have to meet the full range of needs and have to cater for all of the children in their vicinity regardless of their background or prior educational achievement. There is little understanding in this consultation of the real issues facing comprehensive schools in terms of the provision of pastoral care to students of all abilities who come from deprived backgrounds.

We would like to remind the government that **all** children deserve a great education regardless of their ability or social circumstance. If you think that stripping out the brightest children from existing comprehensive schools won't affect the achievement, atmosphere and ethos of these schools then you are simply wrong. By diverting bright children into new grammar schools you will, in effect, turn existing comprehensive schools into secondary moderns. Secondary moderns were abolished in most counties during the 1960s because they were failing their children; aspirations were low and educational standards were lower still.

We are gravely concerned that the government simply does not understand the corrosive effect that grammar schools have on their neighbouring schools. Here in Gloucestershire, we are all too aware that some of our schools are badly affected by a grammar school drain. Comprehensive schools rely on having a broad mix of abilities so that intellectual capital can flow from one student to another. Creating a dynamic and aspirational culture is made much more difficult if a school simply does not have a critical mass of students who have high aspirations.

We would caution you against 'grammarising' other counties. What you will find is that the overall educational achievement will fall. Many bright children will leave existing comprehensive schools to attend new grammar schools which in the main will be created by the conversion of existing comprehensive schools. These new schools will be full of bright, well-motivated pupils who will no doubt go on to be very successful. The schools that are left behind will have to adjust to life without the top 25% of the ability range. The attainment of these schools will fall and it will certainly look like they are failing. Parents will be ever more desperate to get their children into a selective school because the alternative will be a secondary modern education.

In Gloucestershire, we can see the detrimental effect of grammar schools being allowed, even encouraged, to expand. In one community there are two grammar schools each of which has increased its PAN by 30, resulting in 60 additional grammar school places. The non-selective schools in the area are good schools which provide an excellent education for a wide range of students. However, the grammar school expansion means that their intake is falling and they are facing serious financial difficulties over the next few years – it is difficult to see how this promotes an agenda associated with the title 'Schools that work for everyone'.

There are further particular issues surrounding rural comprehensive schools. If such a school becomes selective, what will be the provision for the other 75% of students who live in the community that the school traditionally served? Presumably they will have to travel by bus to the nearest non-selective school. This means that the school will no longer be a focal point for the local community, non-selective students will spend significant parts of their day travelling to and from school by bus with the consequent environmental impact. On the other hand, if such a school attempts to remain comprehensive, will the expansion of grammar school places mean that more of the more able students with parents who can afford the travel costs will attend grammar schools so that the local comprehensive becomes the local secondary modern school? We fail to understand how either of these alternatives can possibly be a step forward.

We would like to declare very clearly that we are committed to comprehensive education and we have absolutely no interest in selecting students on ability because we believe it is divisive and counter to the ethos upon which our schools were built. We believe that all students deserve a first rate education and that to divide children at the age of 11 is simply wrong. As shown in the table above, many comprehensive schools out – perform selective schools, proving that the comprehensive model is perfectly viable.

Simplistic approaches to complex social issues rarely meet with success. The Green Paper might produce schools that appear to work better for a minority of bright children but it certainly will not produce 'schools that work for everyone'.

We urge you very strongly to drop these proposals now and instead focus on how we continue to develop a system led approach to improving **all** schools in the interests of **all** children.

We would welcome opportunities for dialogue with you or your colleagues to discuss your proposals.

The following Gloucestershire Headteachers have given their full support to this letter:

Dermot McNiffe	All Saints Academy, Cheltenham
Colin Belford	Archway School, Stroud
Dominic Burke	Balcarras School, Cheltenham
Sarah Tufnell	Barnwood Park Arts College, Gloucester
David Bishop	Beaufort School, Gloucester
Allan Foulds	Cheltenham Bournside School
John Sanderson	Chipping Campden School
Kirsten Harrison	Chosen Hill School, Gloucester
Chris Belli	Churchdown School, Gloucester
Chiquita Henson	Cirencester Deer Park School
Christine Oates	Cirencester Kingshill School
Alwyn Richards	Cleeve School, Cheltenham
Steve Brady	Dene Magna School, Mitcheldean
Matthew Evans	Farmor's School, Fairford
Ian Frost	Gloucester Academy
Andrew Harris	Katharine Lady Berkeley's School, Wotton-under-Edge
John Reilly	Lakers School, Coleford
Pam Wilson	Maidenhill School, Stonehouse, Stroud
Alan Johnson	Newent School
Richard Gilpin	Pittville School, Cheltenham
Dave Alexander	Rednock School, Dursley
Richard Johnson	Severn Vale School, Quedgeley, Gloucester
Jon Bell	Sir William Romney's School, Tetbury
Philip Rush	St Peter's R.C. High School, Gloucester
Gary Watson	Tewkesbury School
Will Morgan	The Cotswold School, Bourton-on-the Water
Tom Beveridge	The Dean Academy, Lydney
Julia Maunder	Thomas Keble School, Stroud
Neil Hall	Winchcombe School
Rob Ford	Wyedean School, Chepstow

cc: Neil Carmichael, MP for Stroud and Chair of the Education Select Committee  
Alex Chalk, MP for Cheltenham  
Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, MP for the Cotswolds  
Nick Gibb, Minister of State for School Standards and MP for Bognor Regis & Littlehampton  
Richard Graham, MP for Gloucester  
Mark Harper, MP for The Forest of Dean

Lord Nash, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the School System  
Angela Rayner, Shadow Secretary of State for Education and MP for Ashton-under-Lyne  
Laurence Robertson, MP for Tewkesbury