



Clive Efford MP

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Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for Schools
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
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Our Ref: BH/ZA16556

23 March 2016

Dear Nick

Re: International Academy of Greenwich

I am writing to outline my deep concerns over the way that the Department for Education has agreed to fund an 875-place free school in my constituency – the International Academy of Greenwich. I know from having spoken at two very well-attended public meetings that my concerns are shared by the overwhelming majority of local residents.

The development of the IAG involves two sites in close proximity to one another in my constituency. The IAG intends to open in September 2016 in temporary accommodation large enough to house the school for the first two year groups. The temporary home is King's Church which is located close to the Bowring sportsground which is the site where they hope to build their school.

Many residents maintain that they were not consulted by the school as required under section 10 of the Academies Act 2010 and only found out what was being proposed by word of mouth. At the public meeting I attended, residents were told that it was not possible to consult them over the location of the school because of the commercial sensitivity of the negotiations over the sale of the site, which I understand is now agreed with the Education Funding Authority subject to planning permission being granted.

The IAG have claimed in local newspapers that they have “acquired a permanent site” – currently the Bowring Group Sports Centre – with a view to building the school's permanent home there. As yet there is no planning permission and the site is on Metropolitan Open Land, which is particularly sensitive when relating to potential development. The site is also located on a flood plain and the playing field is part of the flood prevention scheme for the Quaggy River and is frequently submerged in several feet of water. This means the school can only be built on the perimeter of the site outside of the flood defences which puts the school building extremely close to

the existing houses.

The IAG have not applied for planning permission to build the new school and I understand that the EFA has not yet completed its feasibility report to establish whether a school of this size is feasible given the constraints and requirements of the site. This includes consulting with the various external bodies who may have a view on the possible development including the Environment Agency. The EA will have to look very closely at the impact that any development could have on the flood plain on which the site is located and flood storage area adjacent to it.

Prior to its permanent location being established, the IAG is proposing to locate temporarily to the Kings Church Building in Meadowcourt Road. This is not an appropriate location for such a school. It has no playground and little provision for outside play.

The building also contains a number of self-contained flats which are part of the Jericho Road Project. This is an excellent charitable initiative which, according to its website, provides supported accommodation to “rough sleepers, the homeless, ex-offenders, those coming out of substance abuse rehab and those with mild mental health issues.” Along with the local residents I applaud the Kings Church for providing this much-needed support for some of the most vulnerable members of our society. However, I know that local residents question whether this is a suitable site to share with a school.

I am also concerned about the increased parking and traffic that the new school will generate. Meadowcourt Road is a no-through road, meaning any vehicles travelling to the site will have to turn around in the road and leave by the same route by which they entered. Both the temporary location and the proposed new location are situated in small residential streets adjacent to the A20 – a major arterial route into central London – and the busy B212.

At the public meetings I attended, the IAG told local residents that children will not travel to school by car. But when pressed by parents and me they could not give any indication as to how this will be achieved. They ruled out any process of penalising parents who drove their children to school. Given the experience of schools in other areas, I remain highly sceptical of these claims.

I am concerned that parents and pupils are being informed that this school is certain to go ahead by the IAG when there are so many things still to be determined. In May 2013 the IAG offered 100 pupils places at a new school and had to withdraw the offers - because the school could not secure a permanent site in time. Similar announcements had to be made in 2014 and 2015. I am concerned that this is about to happen again.

The School has previously claimed that they would only be at the Kings Church site for two years. However, they are clearly are not in a position to guarantee to parents

that they will be able to secure the Bowring site. Given this – and their record of three years of disappointing parents and pupils precisely because they have not managed to acquire a suitable location – I would like to know details of their alternative plans to avoid letting the pupils down in two years' time. IAG has not yet commenced refurbishment work on the Kings Church site so it is questionable whether they will be ready in time for September.

I am extremely dissatisfied with the consultation on this school proposal. Residents were given no opportunity to voice their opinions about the suitability of King's Church as a temporary location for the school or whether the Bowring site is an appropriate permanent one. I am alarmed that the EFA told the IAG not to inform local people, thereby denying residents the right to be properly consulted about this major change to their community.

I do not think that this is a suitable location for a school for all of the reasons set out above. I would ask you to investigate this matter and whether you would meet with me and a delegation of my constituents to discuss this matter.

Thank you for giving this matter your attention. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely

Clive Efford
Member of Parliament for Eltham