



2016/0027272POJN

**Lord Nash**

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools

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Councillor Mark Hawthorne MBE  
Leader of the Council  
Gloucestershire County Council  
Cabinet Office, Shire Hall  
Westgate Street  
Gloucester, GL1 2TG

Your ref: MH/mc

8 June 2016

Dear Councillor Hawthorne,

Thank you for your recent letter addressed to the Secretary of State, on behalf of Gloucestershire County Council, about academies. I am replying as the minister responsible for this policy area.

In our White Paper, 'Educational Excellence Everywhere', we set out our vision to continue the rise in educational standards in England over the rest of this parliament. A school system where every school can adopt the benefits of academy status will deliver this commitment, because it gives excellent leaders and teachers the freedom to run their schools and ensure that every child receives the education they deserve.

Since launching those proposals in the White Paper, we have listened to feedback from MPs, schools, teachers and parents. It is clear from those conversations that the impact academies have in transforming young people's life chances is widely accepted and that an increasing number of schools are keen to embrace academy status.

As a consequence of those conversations, we have decided, while reaffirming our continued determination to see all schools become academies in the next six years, that it is not now necessary to legislate to bring about blanket conversion of all schools to achieve this goal. We will, however, continue to require underperforming schools and schools that are coasting to convert to academy status, where they can benefit from the support of a strong sponsor. Since the new legislation contained in the Education and Adoption Act 2016 came into force, 104 directive academy orders have already been issued to underperforming schools.

We will also continue to support good schools to convert and to take the lead in supporting other schools as part of multi-academy trusts. The latest monthly figures show that 227 schools submitted applications to convert. This was the highest monthly figure since the programme began and we expect this rate to increase.

In under-performing local authorities we need to take more decisive action so that a new system led by outstanding schools can take their place. Similarly, where a critical mass of schools has already converted to become academies, it will become increasingly difficult for local authorities to be responsible for the remaining schools. We will, therefore, need to ensure that these schools are not left struggling in an unviable local authority.

To address this, we will include provisions to convert schools in under-performing and unviable local authorities to academy status. This may in some cases involve conversion of good and outstanding schools when they have not previously chosen to do so themselves, but in these circumstances the need for action is clear as the local authority will struggle to support these schools and their future success will be put at risk.

With regard to parent governors, we are not suggesting and never have, that parents should no longer sit on governing boards. I am clear that I want parents to be more involved in their child's education, not less as the White Paper made clear and we will be consulting with the sector on how to do this. To achieve this, for the first time, we will create a requirement that every academy puts in place arrangements for meaningful engagement with all parents and that they listen to their views and feedback. We will be creating a new parent portal to give parents the key information about their children's education and introducing regular published surveys of parental satisfaction.

With regard to small or rural schools. Hundreds of small rural schools that currently receive no top-up funding to address the unique pressures they face, will benefit from landmark changes made to school 'sparsity' funding. This means over 1200 small, rural schools will receive specific targeted support. For more than 700 of those schools, their local authority currently chooses not to provide the top up, but the new National Funding Formula will provide sparsity funding for every single one.

No small successful schools will be forced to join a national academy chain. Most small schools will choose to join a MAT made up of other local schools, though small sustainable schools will be able to convert alone if they wish. To support them there will be dedicated support from experts in the department to help primary schools through the process of conversion and a £10 million fund for small schools to secure expert support and advice.

I hope this reassures Gloucestershire County Council that we are committed to providing an excellent education for every child, regardless of their background or where they live.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John Nash', written in a cursive style.

JOHN NASH