

to get elected for the Island

Andrew Turner MP
The Riverside centre
The Quay
Newport
Isle of Wight
PO30 2QR

23rd June 2014

Dear Andrew,

You will have seen the proposal by Councillor Whitehouse, published on the Conservative Home website and repeated in Onthewight, that 4 secondary schools on the Isle of Wight should be closed. I would be grateful for a reply from you, in relation to this, on two points:

1. Whether you agree with Councillor Whitehouse's views on secondary school closures.
2. That you will seek an assurance from Michael Gove that the Department for Education is not putting any pressure on Hampshire education officers to investigate or bring forward any plan for secondary school closures in their role in managing Island schools.

As you know the Island has recently been through a major and highly unpopular schools reorganisation. Any suggestion that new closures are being discussed is deeply unsettling for pupils, teachers and parents.

Yours sincerely,



Stewart Blackmore
Labour Party Parliamentary Candidate
For the Isle of Wight Constituency



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

S Blackmore Esq
4 Brentworth Terrace
Ventnor
Isle Of Wight
PO38 1NT

24 June 2014

Our ref: AJT/JH/BlackmoreS/02

Dear Mr Blackmore

Thank you for your letter about the article written by Councillor Chris Whitehouse on the Conservative Home website. I have read the piece carefully and I cannot see that at any point Cllr Whitehouse says that four of the Island's high schools should be closed. Cllr Whitehouse's aims of sustainable schools and high quality teaching are something all those involved in the delivery of education share and I know that consolidation has already been discussed by some of those at a senior level involved in delivering education on the Island.

I am afraid it appears you are simply seeking to score political points in trying to put words into Cllr. Whitehouse's mouth. That impression is reinforced by your letter-head and the covering e-mail saying you intend to release your letter to the Island's media. I trust you will also circulate a copy of this response with your letter. Education is recognised by all parties on the Council as far too important an issue to use as a political football (as reflected in their cross-party approach to working on these problems) so it is particularly disappointing to read your comments.

With regard to the second point in your letter, it is not the role of the Department for Education to instigate any plans for school closures or to put pressure on Hampshire officers on how they resolve the capacity problems at high school and post 16 provision, (which have been identified and acknowledged by the Hampshire officer team). Hampshire officers are working for the Isle of Wight Council to find solutions to the ongoing problems Isle of Wight education faces.

As an elected member of the Council and someone with wide experience in the field of education, it seems to me quite in order for Councillor Whitehouse to add to the debate. I would also suggest that the Hampshire education team would welcome input from all elected members.

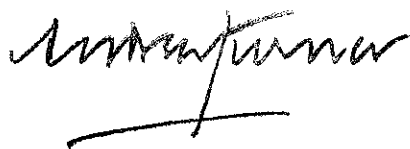
I will however write to John Coughlan, Hampshire's Director of Children's Services to enquire whether he feels his team are being put under any inappropriate pressure by Department of Education officials. If he feels that to be a problem I will certainly

Andrew Turner: Member of Parliament for the Isle of Wight

look into it; but it is not something either he or Cllr Priest has raised with me. I will of course let you know the response I receive.

I trust that this is helpful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Turner', with a horizontal line underneath.

Andrew Turner
Member of Parliament for the Isle of Wight

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The Riverside centre
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25th June 2014

Dear Andrew,

Thank you for your letter but I am afraid that I must make a number of points in reply:-

1. You have suggested that I am trying to make political capital out of the issue but Councillor Whitehouse made his proposal on a party political website. Now that this has happened it is important that his proposal is discussed in the public arena.
2. You have said that I am misrepresenting Councillor Whitehouse's views but in his article he says, ***"We are running nine sets of premises and senior leadership overhead costs when the number of pupils really only justifies about five"***. He is clearly saying that over capacity should lead to the closure of premises.
3. You say that the parties are working together with Hampshire officials to improve the quality of education on the Island. I agree with this approach and it is Councillor Whitehouse who is breaking the consensus by directly criticising the developing approach by Hampshire officials. He says in the article, ***"what Hampshire officers have been threatening is a tinkering around the edges by closing a few classrooms in each of the undersubscribed schools"*** and later criticises Hampshire officials for, ***"their undermining of Michael Gove's policies"***.
4. Thank you for following up the point I made about pressure from Michael Gove's Department but it is not fair to ask unelected officials to answer this question and it would be better to, as I suggested, obtain reassurance from Michael Gove. As you know, the Secretary of State does have powers in relation to schools is special measures.

Yours sincerely,



Stewart Blackmore

Labour Party Parliamentary Candidate
For the Isle of Wight Constituency