



Windsor Academy Trust

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Swift Parents letter (HMT/KS)

25th April 2018

Dear Parents/Guardians

As CEO of our family of schools I have been working in Blakenall since 2012. Goldsmith and Rivers were the first 2 schools to join Windsor Academy Trust (WAT) and they have made great progress in the last 6 years. I passionately believe that working together we can ensure that all the children in WAT have the best opportunities to succeed in life. The Free School and the new building at Rivers are key parts of improving opportunities for Blakenall children and the community.

Many of our staff at Goldsmith and Rivers Primary Academies have been receiving questions with regard to the progress of The Swift Academy Free School, and I felt it was important to write to you all to provide an update that might help explain the apparent delays. I also want to reassure you that the Trust is doing all it can to move the Swift Academy forward, but as yet we have been unable to secure the support of the local authority in regard to the creation of a new secondary school in the Blakenall area.

When we first considered the idea of a Free School in 2016 we met with local authority officers who confirmed in writing that there would be a significant shortfall of secondary school places in the Blakenall area by 2020 onwards. This same data was shared with the Department for Education and was accepted by them as part of the process in granting approval for the Swift Academy.

We have been working extremely hard for many months trying to get agreement for a site in the local area where the Swift Academy can be built. We have been supported throughout by the Department for Education and their team. We have also had support from the local MP Eddie Hughes. Despite full approval from Ministers, we have been unable to get any agreement from Walsall local authority that supports the building of the new school. The money to pay for the Swift Academy does not come from the Local Authority, but would be millions of pounds from central Government.

We have had many meetings with the officers of the local authority and they have stated that they see no need for a new school and therefore could not support the allocation of any land for its building. Since the project was first conceived and approved we have dealt mostly with the Assistant Director - Access and Achievement, Children's Services; who has taken the lead in the local authority position.

I have recently met with the new Director of Children's Services too, and during this meeting she re-affirmed that there was deemed to be no need for the Swift Academy in Blakenall. A number of people have asked who they should write to about Swift Academy. The Local Authority has suggested the Director of Children's Services; her contact details are:

Sally Rowe
Director of Children's Services
Walsall Council, Civic Centre,
Darwall Street, Walsall, WS1 1TP. Sally.Rowe@walsall.gov.uk

The Section 10 consultation has already demonstrated a huge support for the Swift Academy and I would like to thank everyone of you who submitted a response to this very important part of the process.

Goldsmith and Rivers children were amongst the first to join WAT, and since 2012 parents and Governors have been expressing the desire for a new secondary school. We will continue to work as hard as we can with the Department for Education and our community to make this happen.

New School Build at Rivers Primary Academy

I also want to explain to you the delays on the new building for Rivers Primary Academy. We were all very excited when this was announced by the then Secretary of State Nicky Morgan, and proud that our school and community would get a new building for its children. We had expected building to have begun by now, but the Department for Education and construction firms have not been able to move forward due to a number of issues raised at planning stage by the local officers. Although we are all disappointed by this, I want to reassure you that we are doing all we can to move this new building forward with the hope that it may be complete for the children in September 2019. Unfortunately this is becoming more of a challenge due to the delays.

There has been another meeting this week which has been very promising, and we are looking forward to a positive outcome from it. I hope to be able to share this with you very soon. In the meantime Mrs Cheadle will provide updates on a regular basis.

Yours faithfully

Mr Keith Sorrell
Chief Executive