

BLAKE STEPHENSON MP
Member of Parliament for Mid Bedfordshire



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt. Hon. Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education

19th December 2024

Dear Bridget,

Review of the Free School Project in Bedford

We write as Members of Parliament representing communities in Bedford Borough who are deeply concerned about the Government's review of the proposed free school project (known as "St. Neots Academy") in Bedford.

This project will meet a vital need for school places in Bedford. In the most recent statistics, just 84.4% of pupils in Bedford Borough received an offer from their first-choice secondary school and your Department has identified the Borough as an area with a great need for secondary school places.

Our school system is effectively full – and that is before you consider the assessment in the OBR report on the Budget which estimates that 6% of independent school pupils will leave the independent sector because of the Government's Education Tax. If that figure holds consistently, that could mean having to find an extra 276 places in Bedford's local state schools.

The school you have put under review will play a vital role in meeting all this need if it opens as planned in 2027. But even that school will be filled by anticipated future housing growth, showing the desperate need – and urgency – for new school places to be delivered for families in our constituencies.

We would be grateful if you could confirm the terms of the review.

Finally, we are deeply concerned that it has taken the Government nearly two months since it began its review to confirm to us as local Members of Parliament that the school is indeed one of those being considered as part of the review. We understand that the Department informed Mohammad Yasin, the Labour Member of Parliament for Bedford, in October.

We would like to understand why, given the Department's admission that there is no confirmed site yet, Ministers did not feel the need to inform all three of Bedford Borough's Members of Parliament when the review commenced.

Sincerely

Handwritten signature of Blake Stephenson in black ink.

Blake Stephenson MP
Mid Bedfordshire

Handwritten signature of Richard Fuller in black ink.

Richard Fuller MP
North Bedfordshire