



2024-0008813SoSPO

The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP
Secretary of State for Education

Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/contactus/dfe

Josh MacAlister

By email: hello@joshforwestcumbria.co.uk

7 May 2024

Dear Josh,

Thank you so much for your letter of 17 March about a proposal by Cumbria Education Trust for the construction of a sixth form across The Whitehaven Academy and Workington Academy. I apologise for the delay in responding.

The department's capital budget to support the education sector in 2023-24 is £6.8 billion. This forms part of the total commitment of around £19 billion over the 2021 Spending Review period. We remain committed to delivering our plans to support the education sector as agreed at that Spending Review.

The department received the business case from the Cumbria Education Trust concerning sixth form provision at The Whitehaven Academy and Workington Academy in January 2024. The Post-16 Capacity Fund delivers the government's £238 million Spending Review commitment to ensure that learners can gain the skills they need to progress and help the economy to grow, and that post-16 providers can accommodate the expected demographic increase in 16 to 19-year-olds in some parts of the country. The latest round opened in September 2022 and outcomes were announced in May 2023. Any further rounds are subject to future spending reviews.

You will know that the statutory duty to provide sufficient school places sits with local authorities. We provide capital funding through the Basic Need grant to support local authorities to provide school places in Reception to Year 11, based on their own pupil forecasts and school capacity data.

As you will be aware, the areas currently served by Cumberland Council were administered by Cumbria County Council until the end of March 2023. By this date we had announced that Cumbria County Council will receive just over £5.5 million to support the provision of new school places needed between May 2022 and September 2026, paid across the five financial years from 2021-22 to 2025-26. This took their total funding allocated between 2011 and 2026 to just over £28 million. Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council have agreed between themselves how Cumbria County Council's funding allocations for 2023-24 onwards should be split.

Local authorities forecast demand for school places based on planning areas. These are mutually exclusive groups of schools that represent admissions patterns and are reasonable alternatives to one another. Workington Academy is located in the Allerdale secondary planning area, and The Whitehaven Academy is located in the Copeland secondary planning area. Pupil forecast and school capacity data submitted by Cumbria in Summer 2022, upon which its 2025-26 Basic Need capital allocation was based, indicated that no additional places in Year 7 to Year 11 were needed in either area.

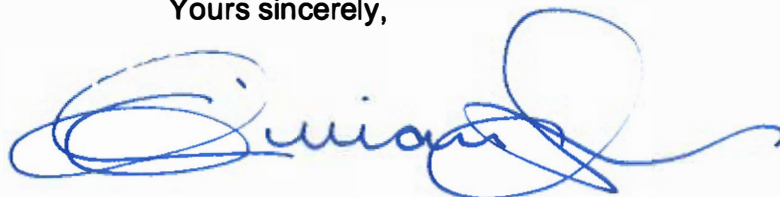
Department officials met local authority officers in March 2024 to discuss demand for places at The Whitehaven Academy and Workington Academy. Cumberland Council confirmed that both schools have become locally more popular due to Cumbria Education Trust's success in improving their outcomes but there are sufficient places for pupils in Years 7 to 11 in the area. The department continues to support the trust where possible, for example by approving a time-limited temporary expansion of Workington Academy to support the admission of pupils above their Published Admission Number.

We do not recognise the underspend figure you have referred to. The department actively manages its overall capital settlement to ensure investment is targeted to where there is most urgent need and so it achieves the best value for money for the taxpayer, including by utilising in-year underspends.

As you referred to Mark Jenkinson in your public letter to me, I am copying him into this reply.

Thank you again for writing. I hope that you will find the information useful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gillian Keegan', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP
Secretary of State for Education