

Dear Mr Gove,

We are writing to you to request your assistance in a very emotive matter. Lincolnshire County Council proposes to close St Guthlac school in Crowland and to transfer the children to an Academy (yet to built) 20 miles away.

In our opinion this would be severely detrimental for both the children and the town itself. As a group of concerned residents, we feel that the demise of our local Secondary School would leave a massive hole in the local community. The Secondary School is at the heart of our town, and has instilled a strong sense of community to all that have passed through its doors, clearly demonstrated by the strong community support to keep St. Guthlac School open.

We have grave concerns about what will happen to our children and our community if the school should close.

We are particularly concerned about the impact it will have on the families and young people of our community. The shipping of an entire ward's 11-16 year-olds out of their community raises significant questions about how they will cope with being forced to travel 20 miles to a school where they and their families are not well known and will be lost in the hubbub of everyday school life.

The presence of a secondary school attracts families with children into the town and local area. With only a primary school Crowland will become a much less attractive place to live and work.

The flow of parents and children through the town at the start and end of the school day and for social events connected with the school provides an essential source of trade and income for local businesses. Should the school close these businesses will suffer severe losses.

We have here a school that has managed to improve and meet the needs of its students in the face of considerable challenges.

It could be a school that continues to improve, but only if it is given the support that it deserves and a commitment is made to maintaining stability in its continuation. Conversely, continually placing the school under threat of closure, denies it a platform for sustained improvement.

The Conservative party claim that they are in support of rural schools and against their closure. In your Rural Action campaign you state that you will "Give parents the power to stop rural schools closing and open new ones". In the Liberal Democrats policy document on Rural Living they state that they will "Support the unique position of rural schools through the promotion of shared teaching arrangements and IT and video-conferencing technologies." And "Provide fairer funding for rural school children through our Pupil Premium, which is based on the needs of the individual pupil not on their surroundings".

As the coalition government clearly support rural schools and regularly speak out against the closure of rural schools we are at a loss to understand why our local

county council seem to be on the verge of closing a much loved rural school in Crowland.

We would therefore be most grateful if you could intervene in this matter and help in the retention of St Guthlac School and look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours Sincerely,

Glyn Mayley (Chair)
Education4Crowland

Dear Mr Mayley

Thank you for your email dated 11 April, addressed to the Secretary of State, about the proposal to close St Guthlac School in Crowland and to transfer the children to an Academy. I am sure you will appreciate that the Minister receives a large volume of correspondence and it is not always possible for him to reply personally. On this occasion I have been asked to respond on his behalf. I am sorry for the delay with this reply.

The Government recognises the importance of rural schools, not only as places that provide education for our children, but also which, as you have identified, serve often as focal points that bring rural communities together both socially and to pursue and achieve common aims.

I acknowledge that proposals to close a school can be unsettling for those involved, particularly teachers and parents who are directly involved in the school. I am aware that Lincolnshire Council has consulted on the closure of St Guthlac Secondary School and that as a result of this consultation they have decided to proceed with the closure and have published a statutory proposal on 21 April to do so. Following the publication of the proposal there follows a six week representation period in which the public can submit their views. The representation period ends on 2 June 2011. All views submitted should then be taken into account before a final decision is reached. I encourage you to continue to make your case with the local authority so that your views are properly taken into account in any final decision reached.

While Ministers have no role in individual decisions, the law requires that those taking the decision must have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State for Education. The guidance requires that before taking a decision, consideration must be given to a range of factors, which include the impact on local standards and diversity, the length and nature of journeys to alternative provision and the views of interested parties. Even in areas where there is no significant demographic growth, the expectation is that local authorities focus on supplying enough good places rather than removing surplus places. There is also currently in place a presumption against the closure of rural schools. Although this presumption exists, it does not mean that no rural school will ever close, but it does ensure that the local authority must demonstrate that the case for closure must be strong and clearly identify that it is in the best interests of educational provision for the area.

I hope that my reply goes some way to reassuring you that the Government appreciates the issues faced by small rural schools, and the important role they play within their communities.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Dove
Public Communications Unit