



Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State

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Sponsors of Academies

1st March 2011

Dear Colleague,

The Academy programme has already proved itself an exciting, powerful and dynamic force for higher standards in our schools.

The GCSE results published on 12 January reveal that Academies, as a group, continue to make impressive improvements, well above the national average in most cases.

Sponsorship has been key to transforming some of our most challenging schools bringing added drive, vision, resources and expertise, to create a culture of higher aspiration. I would like to thank you all for the hard work and commitment which has contributed to this success.

But while we can celebrate these successes, we also know there needs to be relentless, persistent and focussed action to deal with those schools where performance just isn't good enough.

As a parent, I know children only have one chance at education. As a minister, I cannot allow underperforming schools where children are not receiving the education they deserve to carry on, unreformed.

I want to be fair to every professional working hard to improve children's lives and offer them my fullest support to do even better. But my first concern is the future of our children. Every day they spend in classrooms where they are not learning properly is another day they are held back from achieving their full potential.

That is why I am determined that, together, we raise standards in our underperforming schools.

In the White Paper - The Importance of Teaching - we outlined our determination to address underperformance by setting out new tougher and fairer floor standards to judge how primary schools are performing for 11-year-olds and how secondary schools are serving 16-year-olds. Schools which fall below these standards will be eligible for intervention.

There has been no formal process of properly identifying underperforming primary schools before. And certainly no systematic programme of intervening to address weak performance.

Until now, it's been presumed that primary schools were below an acceptable standard if they failed to get at least 55% of their students to the basic level (Level 4) in reading, writing and maths at the end of primary school (Key Stage 2).

But no effective strategic action has been required to address underperforming primaries, making the floor standard a weak lever for improvement.

We want to take a tougher approach. We want the floor standard to be 60%.

It can't be right that a school, in ordinary circumstances, allows more than four pupils in ten to leave without reaching basic standards in literacy and numeracy.

That floor standard will also have to rise further over time. Other nations are rapidly improving their own education systems and we cannot allow our children to be left behind in the global race to the top.

I realise, of course, that some schools face very specific challenges. And I know there has been criticism of floor standards in the past for operating in too crude a fashion. Some of that criticism has come from those afraid to acknowledge underperformance. But I want to be as fair as possible in any judgements that are made.

So any primary school where the children make better than average progress between Key Stages 1 and 2 will be exempt from falling below the floor.

For secondary schools, floor standards will be made tougher by raising the floor by five percentage points.

A secondary school will be below the floor if fewer than 35% of pupils get 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C, including English and Mathematics. It is unacceptable to have secondary schools where around two-thirds of children are not secure in the basics by 16.

We will, of course, be raising the floor standards further over time. And we will also, as with primary schools, ensure these standards are more fairly applied. Any secondary school where the children are making better than average progress

between 11 and 16 (Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4) will be exempt from falling below the floor.

I am writing to Local Authorities to ask them how they plan to improve schools performing below the floor standards. In many cases, I expect an Academy solution will be the most appropriate route to securing improvement, and your support will be critical in that process. I would be grateful for your thoughts on the bigger role you might play in helping turn these schools round.

Where there are Academies below the floor standards, we need to work together to address barriers to improvement. I am therefore asking all sponsors of Academies below the floor standards to submit a plan outlining the action they will take to secure improvement. It's important we show how the momentum for improvement is accelerating across all schools.

I would be grateful if you would send your proposals for school improvement to academies@education.gsi.gov.uk by Friday 15 April at the latest. My officials will then be in touch to discuss your plans in more detail. Dr Elizabeth Sidwell, the new Schools Commissioner, will also have a central role in the approval process.

I look forward to continuing to work with you to raise the standards of education in schools throughout the country.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'M' followed by a wavy line that tapers to the right.

MICHAEL GOVE