

Dear County Councillor Tomlinson,

Please accept this letter as part of your consultation into the closure of Skerton Community High School. I would like to put on the record my strong objections to these proposals. I write on behalf of the many members of the community, parents, teachers and pupils who want to see this School remain open. I have not received one negative comment or email about the School at all since the intention to close the school was announced.

I note from the consultation document the reasons listed for closing the school are; educational standards, low pupil numbers and financial viability. I have been in discussions with the school governors and have been informed that Lancashire County Council have been threatening this school with closure for many years. This would explain the low pupil numbers as parents will not send their children to a school if they think that the school may close.

I have received a timeline of events over the last ten years since the school was put into special measures in 2004 and it seems that the County Council or other schools in the area have blocked every plan to improve the school for the future. This has stemmed from the Governors of Central Lancaster High School blocking an amalgamation in 2007, blocking the concept of a 3-16/19 'through school' in 2008 and blocking the introduction of a learning campus in 2009, to name a few examples.

I am also greatly worried that for some time now there has been a plan to close Skerton High School by Lancashire County Council. The Local Education Authority proposed that Hornby High School and Skerton Community High School join in a federation in April 2008. This was welcomed by both schools as they thought that it brought security for both schools but in September 2009 Hornby High School was closed. Most of the children from Hornby then moved to Skerton after their school had closed. It has not gone unnoticed that the Cabinet member at the time Councillor Patel gave the children and parents of Hornby reassurances that they would not have to move again in their school career. And now as the last of the children are leaving Skerton who went to Hornby, Skerton is facing closure. I do sincerely hope that this closure has not been planned all along by the County Council, and that investment for Skerton High School has not been held back.

I understand the second reason the County Council is using to justify closure is financial viability. Again if the school is in a troublesome position, constantly facing closure, then parents will not send their children to the school and therefore the school will receive less money as it does not house as many students. There is also it seems a problem with the pupil premium's Skerton High School receives. As it is a receiving school and takes more students throughout the year than at the beginning of the term, the school finds that the pupil premium money does not always follow the children from other schools when they start at Skerton. This obviously negatively impacts the financial position of the school.

Mr Snell the current Head teacher, who has been head since 2011, is the first permanent head the school has had since 2004, when the school was in special measures. Under Mr Snell there is now a focussed leadership at the school, and I think that this is reflected in the OFSTED report. I understand the school was rated inadequate, but more crucially it was not

put into special measures as it was previously in 2004. This shows that OFSTED can see a future for the school as they feel that the leadership know what needs to be done to improve the school.

From all of the correspondence I have had from parents it is clear that pastoral care is something that the school excels at. The vast majority of pupils at Skerton Community High School come from troubled circumstances at home, have faced bullying at other schools, or have special educational needs. They may not be students who will excel academically, although Skerton do have a few of these pupils, but at Skerton they are nurtured to achieve the best they are able to achieve. I would urge you to take seriously the numerous consultation responses from the children and take into consideration how this decision will affect them.

Skerton is a safe environment for many of these children. I recently attended a public meeting at the school and numerous pupils stood up and talked of how important the school is to them. 43 of the 151 students on the roll in Skerton have already been to at least one if not two local high schools already and have been bullied or had a bad experience in a large school. In the meeting some students talked of being so badly bullied at other High Schools in the district that they contemplated committing suicide. The nurturing environment at Skerton has brought them out of themselves and given them the confidence to stand up and talk in a public meeting.

The consultation lists other Schools that these pupils could go to should the school close. On that list is the Girls and Lancaster Royal Grammar Schools, which require academic criteria to be met before admission, these schools are not appropriate for the children at Skerton. There are two faith schools Ripley and Our Lady's and then three other non faith schools. If parents do not want their children to go to a faith school they are not left with many options. This is made even fewer given that many children have experienced bullying at other schools.

It also greatly concerns me that 52.9% of the students at Skerton have special educational needs, and I do not see how other schools in the area will cope with such a high influx of children with special needs and be able to adequately manage them. I think it would be appalling to see these children failed by the education system.

I urge the County Council to reconsider in the closure of this school and work with the Governors and Head Teacher of the school to create a centre of excellence at Skerton for children with special educational needs. It is obvious from the OFSTED report that OFSTED feel that the management of this school realise what needs to be done to improve the school and I hope that the County Council will facilitate these improvements.

Yours Sincerely

David Morris MP