



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

PERSONAL  
PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL

FROM THE RIGHT HONOURABLE SALLY OPPENHEIM, M.P.

Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP  
10 Downing St.,  
London SW1

11th March 1986

*My D Margaret*

Gloucester Education

I enclose a copy of my desperate appeal to Keith as there is shortly to be a Court action and a Judicial Review as a result of the delay in his decision to reject Gloucester County Council's proposals to destroy the Grammar Schools in my constituency.

I am sorry that it is such a long letter for you to have to read but I must keep fighting to the bitter end, as I feel that there is a real danger that a wrong and disasterous decision could be made and that we will go down in history as the Government that closed more Grammar schools than Labour Governments have.

I do hope that I can count on your support and realise the difficulties of your position. I know that you will agree with me that such principles must be fought for.

*Yours Ever  
Sally*

*Please Help!*





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FROM THE RIGHT HONOURABLE SALLY OPPENHEIM, M.P.

PERSONAL  
STRICTLY PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Rt Hon Sir Keith Joseph MP  
Secretary of State,  
Department of Education and Science,  
York Rd.,  
London SE1

11th March 1986

Dear Keith,

Gloucester Education

I am writing to you because of the recent development in which Gloucestershire County Council have threatend to take you to Court because of the delay in your decision regarding the County Council's proposal for secondary school reorganisation in Gloucester.

I must say that I am very concerned that it has taken as long as it has for you to reject their proposals.

N.B.\*  
I realise that you have been under a great deal of pressure from many quarters, no doubt within your own Department as well as from the Gloucester Local Education Authority, as well as the far more important representations from parents themselves, and from myself.

I feel it important to point out once more and to stress the fact that whereas you have received a petition containing many thousands of signatures from those wishing to retain a Grammar School presence in Gloucester, you have not received any similar representations from those wishing a totally comprehensive reorganisation. You have I understand, received "reports" to the effect that a survey had been carried out which appeared to show that a number of parents, favour secondary reorganisation along comprehensive lines. No such surveys have been carried out whatsoever on anything but the most minor basis and certainly there is no way that as many signatures could have been collected from parents in favour of comprehensive reorganisation, as have been sent to you from parents in favour of retaining a Grammar School presence in Gloucester.

I would ask you in particular to find out from officials the precise nature of the surveys which are supposed to have been taken showing that parents favour comprehensive reorganisation, how many people were questioned and how many responded and in what way. My information is that this consultation was derisory.

cont...





I am sure you will have been told by educational experts, that one reason for not rejecting the County Council's proposals is that the general standard of education in Gloucester at all levels is not as good as it should be. I do not dispute this but closing the best schools is hardly likely to improve the situation. Nobody questions the claim that fewer secondary places are needed and that fewer Grammar School places could be justified.

However an alternative scheme has been mooted which would take account of this, leaving three Grammar Schools, the existing comprehensive schools and retaining those secondary modern schools which are most popular with parents and not as proposed by the County Council, closing down one of the most popular secondary modern schools while retaining much less popular schools.

I realise that this is not a matter for you to decide but knowing that such an alternative exists which would cost little or nothing, this must surely be borne in mind, when weighing up the pros and cons of the proposal put before you. In other words rejection of these proposals would leave the County Council with a perfectly viable and inexpensive alternative to put before you if they have the will to do so.

Meanwhile if the status quo is to continue until the County Council come to their senses this will cost very little and will cause no hardship to anyone nor will it in any way undermine education in Gloucester at present - quite the reverse. Acceptance of their plan would be both very costly and entail the destruction of good and popular schools.

The only difficulty will be the remaining uncertainty which is a small price to pay for the preservation of fine schools which parents want to send their children to, as opposed to the destruction of those schools and proposals which would lead to even lower educational standards in Gloucester than those that exist already. I have no doubt you have studied carefully the results of the examinations of the Comprehensive schools compared with those of the Grammar schools.

Given the opportunity to put new and more sensible proposals to you, the County Council could also take the opportunity of widening the catchment area for the Grammar Schools to cover the whole of my constituency on an equal basis, thus helping to raise standards.

I urge you therefore not to delay your decision to reject the County Council's proposals and in the name of better education and the high principles to which our Party subscribes, to reject without further delay the County Council proposals.

Yours,