

## Academies

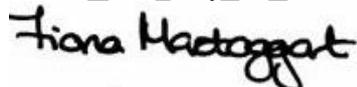
Many constituents have written to me about academies. A debate recently took place on the Schools White Paper, which you can read [here](#).

When academies were first introduced by a Labour Government, it was a specific programme to help struggling schools which were letting down pupils and it worked on the whole to improve standards of teaching and learning as well as staff morale. The Tories expanded the programme, justifying it by saying it increased choice for parents and now that they are forcing all schools to become academies even if they don't want to, there will be no such choice. Academies can overlook the needs of the communities close to the school, many don't but some do, and the lack of local accountability means that this risk cannot be managed.

In addition the decision to control education from the centre frustrates local planning, a local authority knows where new homes have been built and where there are sudden changes in the birth rate and can plan to meet the needs for schools which such changes create. As I understand the plans from the government, councils will still have a duty to supply schools places but as they have no control over what happens within a particular school there are real risks that there will be a mismatch between supply and demand. I cannot think that schools which are accountable to central government will have the insight to plan places appropriately at the local level, and this plan risks a crazy free-for-all where places like Slough, which has a very high birth rate, are likely to struggle to find sufficient places for children if there is no sense of local accountability.

I am especially concerned that in tandem with this change, the Government intend to abolish parent governors in schools. While I accept that parents should not dominate the governing body, they do bring direct experience of what is happening to pupils and this consumer insight should be cherished. I think that giving up all sense of local accountability will not only harm the quality of education in places like Slough, it will make planning chaotic. The Tory plans just won't solve the real crisis in schools which a shortage of well trained teachers, rising class sizes, a widening attainment gap, and a narrowing curriculum, problems that have been created or worsened by ministers. That's where they should be focussing their attention and I will continue to press for that.

Yours sincerely,



Fiona Mactaggart MP