



The Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

2 February 2018

Dear Damian,

Fire Safety in Schools – Selsey Academy, West Sussex

We are writing to you on the issue of fire safety, and sprinklers in schools in particular, following correspondence with your predecessor in the summer of 2017 in the aftermath of the Grenfell fire.

We welcomed the Government's change of heart on Building Bulletin 100, which should mean that all new school buildings are fitted with sprinklers unless they are deemed to be one of '*a few low risk schools*'.

It was, in our view, grossly irresponsible for any Government to have brought forward proposals to weaken fire protections in the first place, but without the appalling Grenfell Tower tragedy, and our representations, we consider it highly likely that the weakened Building Bulletin would have become the Department's official advice, with potentially dire consequences.

It was announced on 23 January that Selsey Academy, a school in West Sussex operated by the Kemnal Academies Trust (TKAT) which was almost completely destroyed by fire in 2016 would be rebuilt without a sprinkler system fitted.

We find this decision incomprehensible. We are aware that the possibility of including a sprinkler system was tabled at a very early point in the design process for the new Selsey Academy. As the original building had no sprinkler system, however, the underwriter declined to include such a system on the claim. If all decisions were made on this basis sprinklers would never be fitted for re-builds, because no school fitted with a sprinkler system has ever burned down.

TKAT was then left in the unenviable position of having to decide if they could fund the inclusion of sprinklers within the project and cover the cost of the system, around £300,000, from their regular capital funding allocation, which in the current climate was not possible.

Your Department indicated that there would be no additional central funding for this provision.

Fire sprinkler systems have a number of advantages, preservation of life being the most important, but there are many other factors of relevance when making such decisions:

- **Rebuild costs are lower:** sprinkler systems reduce fire damage by around 80%. Therefore, the costs to schools for rebuilding are significantly lower.
- **Rebuild times are reduced:** when schools are destroyed by fires, they can remain closed for years, and some never reopen. However, sprinkler systems can contain the damage to a certain area, and schools can reopen as normal very shortly after a fire.
- **Less disruption to pupils and teachers:** fires can destroy coursework, resources and teaching notes. Moving to temporary accommodation can cause massive upheaval for pupils and teachers. By restricting fire damage, sprinkler systems also limit the disruption to the school community.
- **Safety of fire fighters:** the fitting of sprinklers helps ensure that firefighters are not put unnecessarily at risk

Although TKAT clearly considered the personal safety of building occupants in its risk assessment, other important aspects, as set out above, seem not to have been considered, no doubt because of awareness of funding constraints.

This is not an isolated case. The school at the base of Grenfell Tower (Kensington Aldridge Academy), built in 2014, does not have a sprinkler fitted. We would question how a large multi-storey secondary school in central London could possibly have been assessed as one of '*a few low risk schools*'. None of the new schools built recently in Croydon were fitted with sprinklers. Thirty-two new schools are due to be constructed in Northamptonshire, *without* sprinkler-systems fitted, despite the clear '*expectation*'. It is inconceivable that all these schools are '*low risk*'.

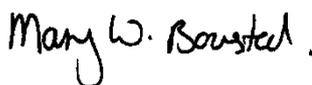
As you may be aware, new schools in Scotland and Wales, whether or not they are replacements for those burned down, are required to have sprinklers fitted. We call on you to ensure that staff, children, and fire fighters are offered the same protection, in terms of life and property, wherever they live in the UK.

We look forward to your response in relation to Selsey Academy, but also in relation to the wider issue of compliance with Building Bulletin 100.

Yours sincerely,



Kevin Courtney
Joint General Secretary
National Education Union



Dr Mary Boustead
Joint General Secretary
National Education Union



Matt Wrack
General Secretary
Fire Brigades Union