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To: Islington National Union of Teachers

Dear Islington NUT,

As you know, two organisations have registered an interest in establishing a free school on the old Ashmount school site. There has been a great deal of misleading information circulating locally and so I thought it would be helpful to set out the facts regarding whether Islington needs a new school and the appropriateness of the Ashmount site for this. Please feel free to circulate this letter as you see fit.

### **Does Islington need a new school?**

The evidence would suggest that Islington does not need a free school in order to ensure that every child in the borough has a school place.

Across Islington current long term projections show a steady increase in the demand for places through to 2017 with demand levelling off to 2019. The 2019 projected demand for places still shows a projected surplus of 304 primary school places across Islington as a whole. The table below shows the actual roll data from 2007 to 2011 and the projected roll data across Islington through to 2019. The vast majority of other London boroughs are not in such a strong position and require a significant number of new school places to ensure all their children can go to school.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Projected Roll Data</b>	<b>Projected Net Capacity</b>	<b>Surplus Capacity</b>	<b>Surplus (%)</b>
<i>*2007</i>	<i>12,432</i>	<i>14,054</i>	<i>1,622</i>	<i>11.5</i>
<i>*2008</i>	<i>12,283</i>	<i>14,054</i>	<i>1,771</i>	<i>12.6</i>
<i>*2009</i>	<i>12,186</i>	<i>14,054</i>	<i>1,868</i>	<i>13.3</i>
<i>*2010</i>	<i>12,257</i>	<i>14,069</i>	<i>1,812</i>	<i>12.9</i>
<i>*2011</i>	<i>12,388</i>	<i>13,922</i>	<i>1,534</i>	<i>11.0</i>
2012	12,260	13,948	1,688	12.1
2013	12,566	13,966	1,400	10.0
2014	12,850	13,966	1,116	8.0
2015	13,125	13,966	841	6.0
2016	13,378	13,966	588	4.2
2017	13,624	13,966	342	2.4
2018	13,626	13,966	340	2.4
2019	13,662	13,966	304	2.2

Being honest, school roll projections are not an exact science. Predicting primary school places for 2019 involves trying to plan school places for children who will not be born for another two or three years. If it transpires that we do need extra places in addition to those that we are predicting, there are significantly better value-for-money options available to the council than establishing a new school on the Ashmount site.

There is a real risk where there are surplus places that schools become undermined and vulnerable to a cycle of under-subscription, falling budgets and falling standards. Islington is committed to ensuring all schools succeed and pupils receive a first class education irrespective of the school they attend. Ensuring we reduce the number of surplus school places in the borough is an important element of this work.

The creation of further surplus capacity in primary schools could cause financial pressures on schools' budgets and would not be good value for money.

### **Is the Ashmount site suitable for a new school?**

The old Ashmount school is in very poor condition. I don't believe it is an appropriate building to educate children in, or expect staff to work in.

Put simply, if bringing the old Ashmount up to standard had been either practical or value-for-money the council would have done this already instead of moving the school. The council's survey makes clear that improving the old Ashmount building would cost many millions of pounds. Even with this vast expenditure our survey suggests the building cannot be brought up to the standard necessary to teach the modern curriculum. Planning permission for the new Ashmount school would not have been granted if it were possible to improve the old one to meet modern requirements.

**With the crisis in primary schools places in other parts of London, there is no rational argument for the Department for Education investing many millions of pounds in a new and unnecessary free school in Islington while children elsewhere in our city have no school to go to at all.**

You will be aware that the council plans, if granted permission by Mr Gove, to sell the old Ashmount site for a modestly-sized development of new homes, at least half of which will be for social rent. The plan to move Ashmount has always assumed the council would raise money from selling the old site. If the site is seized for a free school it would leave a significant hole in the council's finances that will lead to there being less money for other school refurbishments across the borough. Islington children and teachers in the other schools that need improvement will be the losers. At the same time, Islington has a housing crisis and the local families living in appalling overcrowding deserve a decent affordable home that could be built for them on this site.

Yours faithfully,



**Cllr Richard Watts**

