Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP  
Chair of the Education Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA  
23 February 2018

Dear Robert,

During my appearance before the Education Select Committee on 5 December, we discussed Whitehaven Academy and the dates Janet Renou, the Regional Schools Commissioner for the North, and her team had visited the academy. I committed to share these dates with the committee and am glad also to be able to clarify this matter.

In the discussion, I mentioned that when RSCs, by which I mean the RSC in person or a member of the regional team on their behalf, intervene in schools that are underperforming, this involves a great deal of activity to support that school. In particular, the RSC works with and through members of their regional team within the Department for Education, members of the Headteacher Board and specialist education advisers. They also work closely with colleagues from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) where there are issues relating to financial management or capital expenditure.

In reference to Whitehaven Academy, during the hearing I said “I know for sure that she [the RSC] and her team visited certainly within two years and, I believe, in 2017.” I should clarify that I meant this in the terms described above – seeing the RSC and her team as one and the same. They have visited and engaged with the school frequently in recent years as they have sought to identify the right support and future for the school.

Janet Renou herself visited the academy on 27 November 2015. She also met with the headteacher of Whitehaven Academy in January 2016 and again with Bright Tribe Trust representatives in Cumbria in January 2017.

In addition, members of the RSC’s team have visited the school in the period between the RSC’s visit in 2015 and 5 December:
- An education adviser visited in March 2016;
- The region’s Deputy Director and an education adviser visited in October 2016;
- ESFA staff have also visited the site on two occasions in April and October 2016;
- Officials with responsibility for capital made four visits to the school in 2017.

The RSC was fully appraised of all the above visits. Alongside this, Janet Renou has met or spoken on the phone with both MPs serving Copeland during this period, Cumbria County Council, and Ofsted. She has also had a number of meetings and discussions with Bright Tribe Trust. I last met the trust on 19 February, the third meeting I have had with the Trust.

As I said at the select committee hearing, I am committed to securing a new sponsor for Whitehaven, good progress is being made and I hope to be able to say more on this matter in the near future. I hope this clarifies the position.

I am copying this letter to Trudy Harrison MP.

Yours sincerely,

Sir David Carter
National Schools Commissioner