Secure Schools – Publication of the ‘How to Apply Guidance’ (HTAG)

I am writing to let you know that tomorrow we will be publishing our guidance on ‘How to Apply to Run a Secure School’ as we launch the provider selection process for the first Secure School. This follows our acceptance of, and commitment to deliver, Charlie Taylor’s Secure Schools proposal in December 2016 and the Secretary of State’s announcement on 2 October 2018 of the site for the first Secure School.

The School will be run by a not-for-profit academy trust rather than HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) with a focus on delivering an integrated service based on individual need and with education and healthcare at its heart. It will be imperative that the successful provider is driven to work with children in crisis.

We have therefore worked in partnership with the Departments for Education and Health and Social Care, as well as NHS England, to achieve a truly cross-governmental commitment and approach to reforming youth justice. We have also engaged wholeheartedly with a wide range of stakeholders, and this has enabled us to benefit from insightful feedback from experts across the youth justice and education sectors. This means we can confidently say that the Secure Schools model is shaped by best practice and what we know really works.

We know that children in custody display a wide range of complex needs, so it is crucial that we provide the right type of education, support and care to address those needs. By empowering Secure School providers to make key decisions, like being able to set and adapt the curriculum and timetable to provide meaningful activities, we can offer a bespoke service that best meets each child’s individual needs.

Giving providers the autonomy necessary to deliver services in an innovative way is a key part of the Secure Schools vision, but they will also be subject to a high level of accountability to ensure appropriate safeguards are in place. We are working closely with Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission to establish the inspection regime for Secure Schools, and this will be supplemented by monthly independent visitor reviews and independent oversight from organisations such as the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board.

Secure School Academy Trusts will be funded in line with the terms set out in a funding agreement. They must adhere to this agreement and to the Academies Financial Handbook. Academies are also subject to
Company law which requires that they have clear published frameworks for accountability as well as being subject to a greater level of financial oversight.

Delivering the first Secure School at Medway will provide a fresh start for youth custodial provision in the South East and ensure that provision remains in place in this crucial area of demand.

Medway has been providing much improved care for a very complex and vulnerable group of children and this decision is not a reflection on that work, which was recently recognised in an Ofsted report. The closure of Medway will enable us to set up the first school as quickly and cost effectively as possibly, and it is the first step towards our future vision for youth custody.

I hope you will join us in welcoming this major step forward in our key youth custody initiative and support us as we work towards delivering further Secure Schools and improving the youth custody estate.

EDWARD ARGAR MP