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Dear Mr Meredith,

Thank you for your letter dated 1st February 2018, which accompanied the internal audit report for Maplewell Hall School's residential provision. Whilst I fully understand the reason for the audit of residential costs, I cannot see how the school's after school care is relevant to any conversations regarding residence whatsoever. They are both very separate. For the convenience of consultation, the Local Authority seems to have merged them into one.

Whilst I appreciate that the Local Authority has significantly overspent on the High Needs Block, I find it saddening that a consistently outstanding provision that improves educational outcomes for young people is earmarked for closure. I have taken the liberty of attaching our latest residential Ofsted report, which was carried out under the new social care framework.

During the consultation, was it coincidence that Maplewell Hall School received a visit at 4 o'clock in the morning, in order to check fire safety? After this occurrence, I wrote to you asking why this was allowed to take place at such an inconvenient time. I also asked why the school had never received anything like this before. The disruption and worry caused to



staff and students was significant, especially around Halloween when there are a number of anti-social behaviours that take place across the county. Having spoken to colleagues across the county, this seems to be isolated to Maplewell Hall School. I was given assurances that names of people who were planned to visit would be forwarded to me if such practice was to be replicated. A more reasonable time was also discussed. I asked for the welfare of the children to be considered. Waking up children with special needs, including autism, in the early hours on a school night is simply unacceptable. Despite assurances, this happened again, at a similar time in the early hours. I consider such behaviour to be thoughtless at best. Some would consider it to be a form of harassment.

The party line has been that residence is not included on any child's EHCP. This is perfectly true and from a purely social care background could be used as a tool for the closure of residence. However, from an educational perspective, things are very different. I would suggest greater scrutiny of how monies have been spent across the board, including the historical and extensive use of privately run provision that has been commissioned by the Local Authority. Such provision continues to be utilised by the Local Authority such as Hardwick House, the Griffin School and Woodside Lodge to name but a few. Such places cost tens of thousands of pounds each, varying between £55k and £70k per place. There are many others too. As part of the High Needs overspend the use of such provision must surely be scrutinised by the Local Authority and elected members. I guarantee that none of these have such strong academic outcomes as Maplewell Hall School.

What is the real reason for the high needs overspend? This is a question that must surely be answered before deciding to close an outstanding residential provision. Members should have the full funding breakdown for the High Needs block, rather than considering Maplewell in isolation. This will help to them to make an informed decision rather than basing their decision on a solitary audit report, much of which is irrelevant and pointless.

Maplewell's specialist autism provision, in its second year, was established in order to provide a high quality alternative to private providers. As such, it is projected to save the Local Authority in excess of £2m over a 3 year period, compared to the average costs of privately run centres. Outcomes are also stronger for those students who attend Maplewell. This will go a long way to alleviating the pressure on the Local Authority's overspend. This demonstrates that solutions can be found if there is a genuine commitment to work together. It was myself that approached the Local Authority in the first instance.

I understand that there will further overspends in the High Needs Block in future. One such drain on resources is the funding of behaviour partnerships. I would implore the Local Authority and elected members to investigate the use of monies in this area, paying particular regard to outcomes. Surely we want value for money. An independent investigation should be sought in order to determine whether behaviour partnerships represent good value for money. Unlike Maplewell, such provision is not outstanding and does not represent good value for money. A similar argument could be made for Oakfield School, which has had a chequered past. Would it be prudent to commission an audit of the use of monies in this area too?



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The autism outreach service still exists within the local authority. Does their funding come from the High Needs Block? If so, one should question whether the service represents good value for money. There are a number of schools who commission autism experts but is the service cost neutral or is it again heavily subsidised by the Local Authority? Such figures should be shared as part of the review of the High Needs Block overspend.

I recently discovered that autism outreach was brokering deals with private providers in order that they can support with transition. In one such instance they were asking for a daily fee to be paid by a maintained school to a private provider. Why is such practice allowed to happen? This is a great drain on the resources of the Local Authority.

With reference to the audit report, (section 2.2), the school see residence and after-school activities as two very separate entities. Section 3.1 refers to 'meetings' held with myself and other staff. To clarify, I had one initial meeting with _____ who was at pains to point out that he could not understand why he had been asked to undertake such work. The way that the report is written is misleading and I would like amendments to be made, in addition to the removal of all staff names.

I have been employed at Maplewell for in excess of 11 years. The funding of residence has always been consistent and I understand that this was the case for many years before. During the discussions with _____ it was agreed that residential funding was historic and a fixed sum. The audit report refers to the school using excess residential funds being used to pay off the school's existing deficit. This is not and never has been the case. Such assumptions simply serve to feed conspiracy theories that Maplewell has somehow misled people. This is not the case. It could be seen as supporting evidence, commissioned by the Local Authority, for the closure of Maplewell's residential provision. I must protest most strongly regarding the biased writing of the report.

Staffing, catering, heating costs and various sundries for residence have been stripped out in the audit. However, _____ did acknowledge during the initial meeting that it was an impossible task to separate all costs. A line that he has subsequently stuck to. However, his report clearly contains contradictions. Despite this, Appendix A seems to indicate the 'true' costs of residence. This is in direct conflict with what _____ said in our initial meeting. It contradicts what he has written in the main body of the report.

The report does make reference that it is the Governors of Maplewell Hall School that have delegated responsibility for the management of the budget. There is no restriction on



money allocated for residence to be spent elsewhere. Yet the audit seems to indicate that such practice is unacceptable. This is common practice for all maintained schools, but is being used against Maplewell Hall School at this point. Such information is completely irrelevant to the proposed closure of residence and sets a dangerous precedent for all maintained schools.

The audit report is written in such a way that it implies that Maplewell Hall School has somehow mismanaged funds to get itself into deficit. This is not the case and I can categorically state that the school went into deficit previously due to the fraudulent activities of the former Business Manager. This was reported in the press, where she was found guilty and given a suspended sentence for the theft of in excess of £15000. This is money that was 100% proved that she had taken. Significantly more money had been taken, plunging the school into serious deficit, yet it was only the aforementioned figure that was proven. In her role as Business Manager, she had presented false accounts to myself, as Headteacher, and Governors. Such practice was missed by the Local Authority's Bursar Service at the time. Claire Turner was to blame for the school's deficit and her alone, as was proven in court. Her dismissal was further proof of her theft from employer. The audit report is totally wrong to imply that the school was at fault for such actions, whether directly or indirectly. Due to prudence and a restructure the school has been out of deficit since August 2017.

When we previously met, I mentioned that it was a short-sighted strategy from the Local Authority to close the residential provision. The skills that students learn are invaluable. The Local Authority seems to think that it is simply used as a respite provision. On the odd occasion this is true. Students have needed somewhere to sleep when they and their families are in crisis. This is when social care has been unable to respond quickly enough to their needs. This is when families have been at breaking point, refusing to have their children home, as their whole world is falling apart. Residence has provided those families with a lifeline, where other agencies could not. It is a fantastic pressure valve for families. This is crucial work that nobody else can provide.

Residence is more than simply respite. It provides children with a community, a group of friends, an opportunity for children with moderate learning difficulties and autism to experience what friendship is really like. Our students do not have opportunities to take part in such activities and interact with a group of their peers away from school. Their needs do not allow them to do so in their own communities. They become confined to their own homes with few opportunities to socialise, as mainstream children do.

Residence provides our students with the opportunity to learn life skills that are crucial for independent living. Learning how to look after oneself properly, making beds, shopping, cooking and cleaning are crucial for their future independence. Many of our students do go onto employment and live independently. Without residence they will simply not have the opportunity to learn such skills. This will lead to greater pressure on social care system further down the line, when they will need to learn these skills at a later stage and it will significantly reduce their chances of leading an independent life. Social care will be picking up the bill at a later stage. Closing residence is a false economy. A short-term 'fix'.



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I have been told by [redacted] that Maplewell Hall School having a residential facility is not fair on children who attend other special schools in Leicestershire. This argument simply does not stand up to scrutiny. If this is the case, will the Local Authority be closing sensory rooms and swimming pools in other special schools, as Maplewell does not have such facilities? As Headteacher, I accept that all schools have different types of provision, as do my fellow headteachers of special schools and the parents and carers of children who attend special schools across the county. Residence is at the heart of Maplewell Hall School. It is what makes the school truly unique, as evidenced in the numerous quality assurance reports over the years, from School Improvement Advisors, Ofsted and the Local Authority's very own school improvement team this academic year. It isn't a case of closing a provision. It is more like 'ripping the heart out' of the school. The overwhelming support from parents, professionals and staff should not be ignored. The petition of in excess of 11500 names and the support of Nicky Morgan, a former Minister for education, and Ed Agar, who both visited the school, should not be ignored.

I have had the great pleasure of working in Leicestershire for the past 28 years. During that time, I have worked in a variety of settings. I have always been proud to be associated with Leicestershire Local Authority. I have also performed the role of Executive Headteacher at Blaby PRU, which was acknowledged at the time by Gareth Williams and Frances Craven. I am an experienced practitioner, Headteacher at Maplewell for 6 years, senior leader for 12 years and Governor for 3 years. I also advise a number of schools on school improvement in another capacity for a national organisation. My passion for education in Leicestershire is unwavering and my purpose is to provide the very best education for all children. My experience is vast and my opinion should count. I have the educational expertise that nobody involved in the consultation seems to have. Maplewell should be held up as the jewel in the crown for the outstanding all-round education of young people with special needs. Instead, it is being stripped of its most prized asset.

Maplewell has children with special needs. They deserve more. They deserve a world class education and we currently provide it, going over and above at all times, making the difference to their lives. They achieve higher grades due to residence, as evidenced in the latest Ofsted report. They learn vitally important life skills thanks to residence. They learn how to socialise effectively thanks to residence and they build vital emotional resilience thanks to residence. It is a truly fantastic package that is offered to students at Maplewell.



Closed means closed. It is forever. This is a huge decision that will affect so many vulnerable peoples' lives, students and families. It will also cost the Local Authority in future social care costs.

Although it has been made clear that the Local Authority will not compromise whatsoever on the closure of residence, I do have a couple of proposals to put forward. One proposal would be to keep residence open and for the Local Authority to pay for the staffing costs of residence, which equates to £140k per annum. This would represent a saving of £147k per year, providing the Local Authority with a significant saving year on year, and allow residence to continue. Such a figure does not cover the full cost of residence but as a school we will find prioritise monies in order to keep residence open.

The second would be to fund the staffing costs for a one-year period whilst the school investigates the option of taking a community business approach, where income is generated by the school in order to sustain residence. More time in order to further develop this option would be a reasonable compromise. I recently met Emma Compton, Director of Resource Factor Limited. They specialise in transforming community ideas into action that matters. Initial talks have been encouraging. She briefly explained a deal of success that she has with community support and action in the education field. Specifically, she was able to share situations where a community (whether geographical or interest-based) worked together to support an educational establishment where public funds were not forthcoming. There were various ways in which this has worked, including "buying in" to a proposal, thus keeping the establishment going. Ms Compton thought that the residential situation here at Maplewell Hall School might well lend itself to this kind of action. I have attached Ms Compton's thoughts on the future of Maplewell Hall School.

In summary, I would like elected members to scrutinise the bigger picture regarding the proposed closure of residence. There are a host of factors that contribute to the High Needs Block overspend. I have outlined but a few. However, without an independent assessment of what represents value for money in these areas, it is nigh on impossible for elected members to make an informed decision. would will be able to provide much of the relevant detail for elected members. Please consider all areas before closing such a wonderful and life-changing provision. I have taken the liberty of sending this letter to all elected members in order that they fully understand my views and those of the Governing Body at Maplewell Hall School, something which Counsellor Ould had previously requested. I am eager to work with the Local Authority in order that an acceptable solution can be found, but cannot stand by whilst such a fantastic asset is stripped away from the Local Authority and the families and children that depend on it.

I am more than happy to discuss the contents of this letter with you or any elected members if further clarification is required.

Yours sincerely
Jason Brooks
Headteacher