Education and Skills Funding Agency
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

By email – cath.mcevoy@northumberland.gov.uk

16 March 2018

Dear Ms McEvoy

Spare capacity in the school estate

I am writing to arrange a meeting in relation to the levels of spare capacity in Northumberland. As you know, we work closely with all local authorities on pupil place planning. Much of that work has focused on creating sufficient high quality places; however, we are also working with local authorities to address high levels of spare places, particularly those in weaker schools. We all recognise that the effective management of the supply of school places has implications for school performance and financial health, and for maximising the efficiency of capital investment. This means ensuring both a sufficient number of places for all children that need one whilst avoiding an oversupply of places, in order that the local system is managed efficiently.

The department has looked at future levels of spare capacity across the country, drawing on the data local authorities supply through the School Capacity (SCAP) survey, as well as the current educational performance of all schools. This analysis suggests that Northumberland might have particular opportunities to manage down, or make better use of, spare places. We are aware that the LA currently has an informal consultation underway, which considers, among other issues, surplus places in the West of Northumberland.

As a result, we would like to arrange a meeting to discuss how spare capacity is being managed. Ideally, we would like to arrange a meeting during the week of the 30th April. During the meeting, we would like to discuss your approach to managing spare capacity and plans for the future. We would like to gain an understanding of the particular challenges that your local authority may be facing in managing the school estate effectively. We would also like to explore and consider actions that could be taken to reduce the spare capacity in Northumberland.

I have discussed the contents of this letter with the North RSC team and am copying to Janet Renou for her information. Representatives from her office will join me at the planned meeting along with Pupil Place Planning Advisers, and other DfE colleagues where relevant. Ahead of the meeting we will confirm who will be attending.

Prior to the meeting can you please provide a copy of any strategies or plans you may have in relation to how you are managing spare capacity within your local authority. Can you by the 9th April provide the relevant documentation or confirm that no such documentation exists.

Ahead of the face-to-face meeting if you would like to discuss spare capacity and the contents of this letter, I would be happy to arrange a telephone meeting with either myself or with the Head of Local Authority Engagement at ESFA, Rob Brophy.

To arrange a meeting or if have any queries in relation to this letter please email advisers.ppp@education.gov.uk.

Thank you in advance for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Peters
Head of School Place Planning
Education and Skills Funding Agency

cc: Janet Renou – North RSC
Katherine Cowell