

Note: the contents of this letter differ from that which was delivered to the headmaster, in that a number of typographic mistakes have been corrected. As the signing ceremony is to be tomorrow (Thursday 7th December), we decided to deliver the letter to the headmaster yesterday, in order that it arrive before the signing of the agreement. This also precluded a full collection of signatures before the delivery of the letter. A copy of this letter, with all the signatories, will be delivered tomorrow.

This letter does not attack the idea of opening a school in the People's Republic of China. It does, however, raise a number of important questions as to the process and specific nature of the agreement.

The questions that we have asked the headmaster are on the last page of this letter. The pages before justify some of our concerns.

We shall update this letter as further typographic errors are noted and others indicate their wish to sign.

Room 4
Lower Corridor
Grant's

December 6, 2017

The Headmaster
17 Dean's Yard
Westminster
London SW1P 3PA

Dear Mr. Derham,

We regret that circumstance has compelled us to write this letter with such haste, and the consequent brevity of this letter; we should be most pleased were this letter to have been sent without reason, its concerns already having been addressed, and trust that this is the case.

The recent announcement of the imminent signing of an agreement to open six schools within the jurisdiction of the People's Republic of China and the imminence thereof concerns us sufficiently greatly that we must, with most profuse apologies, convey our concerns urgently in this letter, with respect to, variously—

1. the decision to open schools within the jurisdiction of the People's Republic of China,
2. the lack of apparent measures taken to guarantee intellectual freedom in the school, given the nature of the environment of the People's Republic of China,
3. the use of the Chinese curriculum within these schools,
4. the lack of apparent measures to promote intellectual freedom within the People's Republic of China,
5. the lack of apparent measures to insulate Westminster School in London from the influence, financial or otherwise, of the Government of the People's Republic of China, and
6. the process by which this decision came to be.

The brevity of the announcement is such as to assure us that the omission of these issues was precipitated by oversight or a desire for concision, and not out of a lack of consideration. We should be most grateful were we to be informed of the outcome of these deliberations, were they to have taken place, as we trust.

The decision to open schools within the jurisdiction of the People's Republic of China

We are most concerned by the lack of apparent concern for the distinction between the intellectual environments of the People's Republic of China and the United Kingdom.

Freedom House wrote in their Country Report on the People's Republic of China¹ that:

Citizens continued to be punished, often harshly, for publicizing critical views of the authorities online or to foreign media in 2016. Writer and activist Zhang Haitao was

¹China. (2017, March 20). <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/china>

sentenced in January to 19 years in prison on charges of “incitement to subvert state power” for criticizing the government’s record in Xinjiang in online articles and interviews with overseas media. Citizen journalists are routinely detained, harassed, and in some cases criminally charged. Wang Jing, a citizen reporter for the human rights website 64 Tianwang, was sentenced in April in Jilin Province to four years and 10 months in prison. The founder of 64 Tianwang, Huang Qi, was formally arrested in December on the charge of “illegally supplying state secrets overseas.” Also that month, a citizen journalist and founder of Civil Rights and Livelihood Watch, Liu Feiyue, was formally arrested for “incitement to subvert state power.” Lu Yuyu and Li Tingyu, who had documented tens of thousands of protests throughout China, were criminally detained in June and remained behind bars at year’s end. The Committee to Protect Journalists identified 38 journalists in prison in China, the second-largest figure worldwide after Turkey’s, as of December 2016.

We note that there has been no attempt to mitigate the potential risks of operation within China. Either these schools will operate within the intellectually closed bounds of that which is permitted by the Chinese authority, which would constitute an unbearable imposition upon staff members and pupils, or it would risk the security and rights of those who work with the school; this is made inevitable by the decision to operate within China.

We further note that the name “Westminster School”, especially when associated with the Abbey, carries a certain resonance; operation may appear to be endorsement, and the Chinese intellectual environment is one which in many respects should not be endorsed.

The lack of apparent measures taken to guarantee intellectual freedom in the school

The Chinese authorities restrict schools and other educational institutions in a number of ways which are contrary to the promotion of intellectual freedom in general and the unique ethos which Westminster School has in particular.

We should therefore expect at a minimum an acknowledgement of this risk, which was unfortunately, we presume by oversight or a desire for concision, not present in the letter.

The box within which the Chinese authorities permit schools and educational institutions to operate appears to be intolerably small. The *Financial Times* reported in December 2015² that:

Teachers and university professors in Beijing say they have been ordered to toe the party line on everything from history to geography, with special warnings given to those who dare to discuss “sensitive topics” such as democracy or human rights.

A number of measures, including a request for special dispensation from the relevant authorities within the People’s Republic of China, the maintenance of confidentiality within the school and other similar measures could potentially mitigate such problems, though possibly unsatisfactorily. It is odd, therefore, that no mention of such measures, essential as they are, was made.

The use of the Chinese curriculum

The Chinese National Curriculum appears to overly encourage obedience to the Chinese Communist Party. The state-run Xinhua News Agency reported³ that:

²“Beijing detains Chinese journalist working for German newspaper.” *Financial Times*, 14 Dec. 2015.

³Students “guided to firmly support the CPC leadership” in education reforms.’ *Xinhua*. 24 Sept. 2017

BEIJING, Sept. 24 (Xinhua) – China will incorporate more ethical education contents for students in its national curriculum, and seek to develop more innovative minds, according to a new education reform document.

...

Students must be "guided to firmly support the CPC leadership," said the document, which also highlighted social responsibility, rule of law, and Chinese traditional and socialist culture.

These aspects of the Chinese National Curriculum appear initially to be antithetical to the liberal ethos of the school, but would nevertheless likely be required.

The lack of apparent measures to promote intellectual freedom within the People's Republic of China

As has been documented earlier within this letter, the intellectual environment of the People's Republic of China is unacceptable. A possible justification for operation within it is that it could promote the liberal values which Westminster ought to support.

We are somewhat surprised, therefore, to note that there was no mention of any attempt to promote democracy or liberal values within the People's Republic of China.

The lack of apparent measures to insulate Westminster School in London from the influence, financial or otherwise, of the Government of the People's Republic of China

Should there be a significant financial connexion between Westminster School and the bodies to be established in the People's Republic of China, it would be likely that the authorities thereof would be in a position to significantly financially affect the school. We note that these authorities cannot be trusted to operate in good faith.

The Dean, in his letter, wrote that

The Governors have set up a company with separate staff to support and advise HK-METG in setting up and operating these schools.

Even if such a company were to be established, we are concerned that a financial dependence upon this company could create undue influence, or a perception thereof.

It would concern us greatly, therefore, were the authorities of the People's Republic of China to be granted such influence over the school.

The process by which this decision came to be

We recognise that there is nothing requiring a school to consult those who have an interest in it over every decision, and that Westminster School is not a democracy; we further understand that we sought admission to this school cognisant that there exist schools where there exists greater consultation, and that we should not expect to be consulted over every decision.

Nevertheless, this decision appears to differ in a number of ways which we have described. It is possible that the good name of Westminster School may be associated with the intellectual environment of the People's Republic of China; our academic success would therefore be used for the benefit of the authorities thereof. We regret further that the possibility that the school be influenced by the authorities of the People's Republic of China cannot be ruled out by the contents of this letter.

Inquiries

We should therefore be most grateful were the following information to be communicated to us.

1. What measures will be taken to—
 - (a) guarantee intellectual freedom in the schools to be opened in China?
 - (b) mitigate the effects of the use of the Chinese National Curriculum?
 - (c) promote intellectual freedom within the People's Republic of China?
 - (d) insulate Westminster School in London from the influence, financial or otherwise, of the Government of the People's Republic of China?
2. Whom has the Governing Body consulted in coming to this decision?
3. Will there be any pecuniary relationship between Westminster School and the new schools in the People's Republic of China? Should, due to regulatory or other issues, unforeseen issues occur such as to precipitate a budgetary shortfall, whose resolution were made contingent on the meeting of certain conditions as specified by the authorities in the People's Republic of China, on what basis would the school make a decision as to whether to meet such conditions?
4. Will the Governing Body condemn the human rights violations perpetrated by the Government of the People's Republic of China?
5. What is the ownership structure of HKMETG⁴? What previous experience have they had in the education sector?

Should our concerns not have been considered, an eventuality which we consider most unlikely, we should also be most grateful were the Governing Body to—

1. delay the signing of the contract, and
2. commence thereafter a process of consultation.

We remain, Sir, your humble and
obedient servants,

Joshua Loo,
Jonny Heywood, Esq.,
Ben Goodrick, and
A number of anonymous signatories,
being members of the Westminster
community, presently numbering more
than nine.

⁴We regret that we have been unable to contact the Companies Registry of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in order to find out this information, or locate HKMETG in the online portal of the Companies Register.