

Press release: National primary offer day

- 90% per cent of pupils offered their first choice of primary school and 97.2% were offered a place at one of their top three last year
- Disadvantage gap index at Key Stage 2 down 10.5% since 2011
- 825,000 new school places created since 2010 – with 90,000 more over 2016-17 alone

Pupils across the country will find out today (Monday 16 April) which primary school they will be going to in September, amid rising education standards in England.

Figures show 97.2 per cent of pupils were offered one of their top three primary schools in 2017 and follows the creation of 825,000 new school places since 2010.

Families will receive their offers as standards continue to rise thanks to the government's reforms and the hard work of teachers, with 1.9 million more children in good or outstanding schools than in 2010 and nine out of ten schools awarded this rating at their last inspection.

School Standards Minister Nick Gibb said:

This morning, thousands of pupils and their parents will find out which primary school they will be going to this September. Thanks to our reforms and the hard work of teachers, academic standards in our primary schools are rising across the country. Our young readers are among the best in the world, the proportion of primary school pupils reaching the expected standards in reading, writing and maths standards went up 8 percentage points last year and the attainment gap between children from wealthier and poorer backgrounds has narrowed by 10.5% since 2011.

A good primary school education lays the foundations for success at secondary school and beyond, so it is right that we help make sure every child reaches their potential from the moment they start their education. That's why we're investing £5.8 billion to create even more good schools and good school places – building on the 825,000 we've created since 2010 – resulting in 9 out of 10 pupils securing one of their top three choices of schools.

Academic standards are rising following the introduction of a more rigorous primary school curriculum to match the best education systems in the world, with latest performance data showing:

- The gap between disadvantaged pupils and others in a combined measure of

English, reading and mathematics has decreased in each of the last six years, narrowing by 1.3% in the latest year and 10.5% since 2011;

- There are now 154,000 more six-year-olds on track to become fluent readers than in 2012, with England's recent rise up the international PIRLS rankings putting the success of the government's reforms on a global scale; and
- In 2017 72% met the expected standard in reading, 75% in maths and 77% in grammar, punctuation and spelling.

On top of this, the government has invested in programmes to help raise standards in these crucial early years of education, including a £26 million network of specialist English Hubs around the country to improve pupils' literacy and £41 million to follow the same approach to teaching maths as world leading countries through the Shanghai Mastery for Maths programme. □This is on top of wider changes to the primary assessment system which will reduce unnecessary workload for teachers so they can focus on what really matters in the classroom.

Speech: Airstrikes show we stand up for principle and civilised values: article by Boris Johnson

There is a very simple reason why it was right for the UK to join our closest allies in launching strikes against the Assad military machine.

This is about our collective future. It is about the kind of world we want our children to grow up in.

It is about – and exclusively about – whether the world should tolerate the repeated use of chemical weapons and the human suffering they cause.

The problem with such weapons is not just that their effect is hideous. Anyone looking at the pictures from Eastern Ghouta can see the kind of suffering involved: the foaming at the mouth, the floppy bodies of children, and the particular terror those weapons deliberately inspire.

Vile, sick, barbaric though it is to use such weapons – that is not the principal objection. These munitions are not just horrible. They are illegal.

It is now centuries since humanity first recoiled against the use of poison in warfare. The French and the Holy Roman Empire were so disgusted by the use

of poisoned bullets they signed a treaty to ban them in 1675.

It is now almost 100 years since the great post World War One treaty to prohibit use of chemical weapons – and in that period we have seen nation after nation sign up to the global consensus that this particular means of killing is evil and should be banned.

Indeed, the universal abhorrence of chemical weapons, and the destruction of declared stockpiles, must be considered one of the great achievements of the modern world.

The global community simply cannot afford to turn a blind eye to what is happening in Syria.

In 2013 the Syrian regime committed to destroy its chemical arsenal while Russia – the mentor of the Assad Regime – guaranteed to oversee the process.

Since then the Assad Regime and Russia has made a complete mockery of that pledge.

A significant body of information, including intelligence, suggests the Assad regime was behind the chemical attack at Douma on April 7 that killed about 75 people and resulted in hundreds of casualties.

Multiple accounts located a regime Mi 18 helicopter in the vicinity at the time. The opposition does not have helicopters and no other actor in the Syrian theatre is thought capable of launching a chemical strike of that scale.

The only reasonable conclusion is that the regime has become so hardened and cynical that it is willing to exploit the extra potential of these weapons for removing entrenched urban resistance – in complete defiance of global disapproval and the norms of civilised behaviour.

The Douma atrocity alone would be enough to demand a response. But it is not a one off.

The Douma massacre is now part of a pattern of use of chemical weapons by the Assad Regime. International investigators mandated by the UN Security Council have found the Assad regime responsible for using chemical weapons in four separate attacks since 2014.

The UK and our allies have done everything in our power to deter the barbaric use of these weapons. The EU has imposed sanctions on key figures linked to chemical weapons use in Syria.

We have tried countless resolutions at the UN. But Russia has repeatedly shielded the Assad Regime from investigation and censure, vetoing six separate UN Security Council resolutions, including torpedoing the UN mandated Investigative Mechanism set up to attribute responsibility for chemical weapons attacks in Syria.

Instead, Russia has repeated its lies and obfuscation that we have seen in

this country since the attempted murder of Sergei and Yulia Skripal, including the grotesque assertion that the UK is somehow behind the attack in Douma.

Last year we had a military response from the US, when about 20 Syrian planes were destroyed at the Shayrat airfield after the chemical massacre of civilians at Khan Sheikhoun.

Now the world is forced to act again – not only to protect those who would otherwise fall victim to Assad's monstrosities, but because unless we do so his regime will continue to weaken what has become an effective global taboo, with significant humanitarian consequences for many more.

If we do nothing there will be other people and other governments around the world who will look at the impunity of Assad and ask themselves: they got away with it – why shouldn't I?

Unless we act there is a risk of moral contamination, a coarsening and corruption of what we have until now thought to be acceptable.

Yes of course it was also right for the UK to stand shoulder to shoulder with America and France – close allies who were instrumental in helping to forge the 28 strong group of countries that expressed their palpable outrage at the Salisbury attack by expelling more than 150 Russian diplomats.

Yes of course there are diplomatic considerations – but this is about more than diplomacy. It is about principle.

And in its specific focus on the use of chemical weapons – and the consequences that must flow – this action is limited, and we must be both acutely aware of those limits and clear about them.

These carefully targeted and calibrated strikes are not designed to intervene in the Syrian civil war or effect regime change.

The action was carried out to alleviate further humanitarian suffering by degrading the Syrian Regime's Chemical Weapons capability and deterring their use.

At a time of understandable tension in our relations with Russia it has been important to stress that this action does not entail some attempt to frustrate Russian strategic objectives in Syria.

In short this does not represent any major escalation of UK or western involvement in Syria – and we should have the courage to be honest about that.

In degrading Assad's chemical weapons capabilities we intend to do what we can to protect his people from that specific form of cruelty.

We are standing up for principle and for civilised values.

We may not end the barbarism – but we are telling the world that there is one

type of barbarism that is banned and that deserves to be banned.

[Press release: PM calls with world leaders: 14 April 2018](#)

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

Following the successful strikes made against the Syrian Regime's chemical weapons sites earlier today by the UK, France and United States, Prime Minister Theresa May is speaking to a number of her fellow world leaders.

Those who she has spoken to so far are Mohammad Bin Salman Al Saud; King Abdullah of Jordan; Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia; President Erdogan of Turkey; President Anastasiades of Cyprus; Prime Minister Gentiloni of Italy; Chancellor Merkel of Germany; EU President Donald Tusk; Prime Minister Turnbull of Australia and Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada.

The PM explained that the action the UK has taken with our American and French allies was limited, carefully targeted and designed to alleviate humanitarian suffering, degrade the Syrian Regime's chemical weapons capability and deter their use in the future. The response was not just to the Douma attack but to a series of devastating assaults on the Syrian people by their government.

All of the leaders agreed with the Prime Minister on the importance of restoring the international norm that the use of chemical weapons is never acceptable.

NOTE: The PM is continuing to speak with her fellow leaders and updates will be issued in due course.

Press release: PM calls with President Macron and President Trump: 14 April 2018

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

In separate calls, the Prime Minister this afternoon spoke with President Macron and President Trump.

The three leaders agreed that the military strikes taken against the Syrian Regime's chemical weapons sites had been a success.

The Prime Minister welcomed the public support which had been given by fellow world leaders for the strong stand the UK, France and the United States had taken in degrading Syria's chemical weapons capability and deterring their use; defending global rules; and sending a clear message that the use of chemical weapons can never become normalised.

Speech: PM's press conference statement on Syria: 14 April 2018

Prime Minister Theresa May:

Last night British, French and American armed forces conducted co-ordinated and targeted strikes to degrade the Syrian Regime's chemical weapons capability and deter their use.

For the UK's part four RAF Tornado GR 4's launched storm shadow missiles at a military facility some 15 miles west of Homs, where the regime is assessed to keep chemical weapons in breach of Syria's obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

While the full assessment of the strike is ongoing, we are confident of its success.

Let me set out why we have taken this action.

Last Saturday up to 75 people, including young children, were killed in a despicable and barbaric attack in Douma, with as many as 500 further casualties.

We have worked with our allies to establish what happened. And all the indications are that this was a chemical weapons attack.

We have seen the harrowing images of men, women and children lying dead with foam in their mouths.

These were innocent families who, at the time this chemical weapon was unleashed, were seeking shelter underground, in basements.

First-hand accounts from NGOs and aid workers have detailed the most horrific suffering, including burns to the eyes, suffocation and skin discolouration, with a chlorine-like odour surrounding the victims.

And the World Health Organisation has received reports that hundreds of patients arrived at Syrian health facilities on Saturday night with "signs and symptoms consistent with exposure to toxic chemicals."

We are also clear about who was responsible for this atrocity.

A significant body of information including intelligence indicates the Syrian Regime is responsible for this latest attack.

I cannot tell you everything. But let me give an example of some of the evidence that leads us to this conclusion.

Open source accounts allege that a barrel bomb was used to deliver the chemicals.

Multiple open source reports claim that a Regime helicopter was observed above the city of Douma on the evening of 7th April.

The Opposition does not operate helicopters or use barrel bombs.

And reliable intelligence indicates that Syrian military officials co-ordinated what appears to be the use of chlorine in Douma on 7th April.

No other group could have carried out this attack. Indeed, Daesh for example does not even have a presence in Douma.

And the fact of this attack should surprise no-one.

We know that the Syrian regime has an utterly abhorrent record of using chemical weapons against its own people.

On 21st August 2013 over 800 people were killed and thousands more injured in a chemical attack also in Ghouta.

There were 14 further smaller scale chemical attacks prior to that summer.

At Khan Shaykhun on 4th April last year, the Syrian Regime used sarin against its people killing around 100 with a further 500 casualties.

And based on the Regime's persistent pattern of behaviour and the cumulative analysis of specific incidents we judge it highly likely both that the Syrian

regime has continued to use chemical weapons since then, and will continue to do so.

This must be stopped.

We have sought to do so using every possible diplomatic channel.

But our efforts have been repeatedly thwarted both on the ground and in the United Nations.

Following the sarin attack in Eastern Damascus back in August 2013, the Syrian Regime committed to dismantle its chemical weapon programme – and Russia promised to ensure that Syria did this, overseen by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

But these commitments have not been met.

A recent report from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has said that Syria's declaration of its former Chemical Weapons programme is incomplete.

This indicates that it continues to retain undeclared stocks of nerve agent or precursor chemicals – and is likely to be continuing with some chemical weapons production.

The OPCW inspectors have investigated previous attacks and on four occasions decided that the Regime was indeed responsible.

And on each occasion when we have seen every sign of chemical weapons being used, any attempt to hold the perpetrators to account has been blocked by Russia at the UN Security Council, with six such vetoes since the start of 2017.

Just this week, the Russians vetoed a draft Resolution that would have established an independent investigation into this latest attack – even making the grotesque and absurd claim that it was “staged” by Britain.

So we have no choice but to conclude that diplomatic action on its own will not be any more effective in the future than it has been in the past.

Over the last week the UK government has been working intensively with our international partners to build the evidence picture, and to consider what action we need to take to prevent and deter future humanitarian catastrophes caused by chemical weapons attacks.

When the Cabinet met on Thursday we considered the advice of the Attorney General, the National Security Adviser and the Chief of the Defence Staff – and we were updated on the latest assessment and intelligence picture.

And based on this advice we agreed that it was both right and legal to take military action, together with our closest allies, to alleviate further humanitarian suffering by degrading the Syrian Regime's Chemical Weapons capability and deterring their use.

This was not about interfering in a civil war.

And it was not about regime change.

As I discussed with President Trump and President Macron, it was a limited, targeted and effective strike with clear boundaries that expressly sought to avoid escalation and did everything possible to prevent civilian casualties.

Together we have hit a specific and limited set of targets. They were a chemical weapons storage and production facility, a key chemical weapons research centre and a military bunker involved in chemical weapons attacks.

Hitting these targets with the force that we have deployed will significantly degrade the Syrian Regime's ability to research, develop and deploy chemical weapons.

A year ago, after the atrocity at Khan Shaykhun, the US conducted a strike on the airfield from which the attack took place. But Assad and his regime hasn't stopped their use of chemical weapons.

So last night's strikes by the US, UK and France were significantly larger than the US action a year ago and specifically designed to have a greater impact on the regime's capability and willingness to use chemical weapons.

And this collective action sends a clear message that the international community will not stand by and tolerate the use of chemical weapons.

I also want to be clear that this military action to deter the use of chemical weapons does not stand alone.

We must remain committed to resolving the conflict at large.

The best hope for the Syrian people remains a political solution.

We need all partners – especially the Regime and its backers – to enable humanitarian access to those in desperate need.

And the UK will continue to strive for both.

But these strikes are about deterring the barbaric use of chemical weapons in Syria and beyond.

And so to achieve this there must also be a wider diplomatic effort – including the full range of political and economic levers – to strengthen the global norms prohibiting the use of chemical weapons which have stood for nearly a century.

Although of a much lower order of magnitude, the use of a nerve agent on the streets of the UK in recent weeks is part of a pattern of disregard for these norms.

So while this action is specifically about deterring the Syrian regime, it will also send a clear signal to anyone else who believes they can use

chemical weapons with impunity.

There is no graver decision for a Prime Minister than to commit our forces to combat – and this is the first time that I have had to do so.

As always, they have served our country with the greatest professionalism and bravery – and we owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

We would have preferred an alternative path.

But on this occasion there is none.

We cannot allow the use of chemical weapons to become normalised – either within Syria, on the streets of the UK or elsewhere.

We must reinstate the global consensus that chemical weapons cannot be used.

This action is absolutely in Britain's national interest.

The lesson of history is that when the global rules and standards that keep us safe come under threat – we must take a stand and defend them.

That is what our country has always done.

And that is what we will continue to do.