

**Beaufront First School, Sandhoe
Bellingham First School, Bellingham
Bellingham Middle School, Bellingham
Broomhaugh Church of England First School, Riding Mill
Chollerton Church of England First School, Barrasford
Corbridge Church of England First School, Corbridge
Corbridge Middle School, Corbridge
Greenhaugh First School, Greenhaugh
Hexham First School, Hexham
Humshaugh Church of England First School, Humshaugh
Wark Church of England First School, Wark
West Woodburn First School, West Woodburn
Whitley Chapel Church of England First School, Hexham
Whittonstall and Broomley First School Federation, Stocksfield and Whittonstall**

Councillors Peter Jackson and Wayne Daley
Northumberland County Council
County Hall
Morpeth
Northumberland
NE61 2EF

21 March 2018

Dear Councillors,

As the Head Teachers and Chairs of Governors of 15 schools in West Northumberland, we have the following common key aims:

- **To promote and maintain the excellent educational and pastoral standards presently enjoyed within our schools;**
- **To promote and maintain the valuable contributions made by our schools to the many local communities in which we are based; and**
- **To strive to extend those standards and contributions to all schools throughout Northumberland.**

This letter represents the views of all our Head Teachers and Chairs of Governors.

Educational outcomes in West Northumberland are, overall, excellent. The results produced by Queen Elizabeth High School (2nd in the North East according to the Sunday Times Schools Guide for 2018) and, despite all the challenges it has faced, Haydon Bridge High School (8th out of 14 in Northumberland for progress and 5th for A-levels), provide clear evidence that the system is working well. This educational journey has its foundation in our first and middle schools. Our priority is to maintain (and, ideally, exceed) the excellence of this entire educational journey and to extend that experience elsewhere.

We welcome the opportunity to have a collective discussion about the future of education in West Northumberland and we recognise that there are some challenges that need to be addressed.

However, we do not accept that the current consultation approach as set out and managed by Northumberland County Council is providing a fair, robust and appropriate opportunity for school leaders,

parents and the wider community to create a 'unique and innovative' vision for the future of education in our area.

We have expressed these concerns at every stage of the process so far, both in meetings and in dialogue with the Council. To date, we have seen little evidence that our views, based on our years of experience and actually working on the ground in the communities affected, are being taken into account. The more we talk to parents and our communities, the greater our concerns grow.

This is why we are now calling on the Council to:

- 1. Review and extend the timescale of the consultation. More time and engagement is required in order to consider properly the far-reaching implications of the proposed options, and any alternative options.**

- 2. The Council has requested feedback on which models are a 'good option for securing sustainable and viable education in the west of Northumberland'. We believe that school leaders, parents and the community require the following information to enable a properly informed and therefore meaningful response:**
 - a. The Council's vision for education in the West Northumberland area, beyond the financial and surplus places numbers. What are the key design principles of the proposed options?

 - b. A clear and logical analysis, supported by robust evidence, of the expected improvements in educational outcomes each model will deliver.

 - c. Detailed financial modelling for each option proposed in the consultation, based on hard National Funding Formula, to demonstrate the financial impact and enable respondents to judge the viability.

 - d. Impact analysis on surplus places and capacity allowed within the system for each model: (i) as matters stand; and (ii) based on future housing projections.

 - e. The data that demonstrates the impact of loss of income from out of catchment children under each model. Specifically, the loss of income from children who travel not just out of catchment but into Northumberland from other local authorities.

 - f. Rural impact studies to show the likely effect on each local community should each of the rural schools named in the consultation be closed.

 - g. The evidence used to support the Council's intent to seek to rebut the presumption against closure of rural schools set out in DfE Guidance.

- h. Details of all information the Council has received from Hadrian Learning Trust in order to ensure any multi-million pound investment of tax-payers money in an academy outside local authority control represents the best investment
- i. Details of any precedents the Council can show where a local authority has made an investment of this size in an academy
- j. An update on progress made to claim back the £1m paid to Bright Tribe at Haydon Bridge High School, as per comments made earlier in the year by Councillor Daley.

It is simply impossible to answer the Council's own questions in any meaningful way without a better understanding of why any of the models represents an appropriate solution to the issues set out in the consultation document. Without the information listed above, we have no confidence that the consultation provides a fair and genuine opportunity for the public to respond to the consultation in an informed and meaningful way. From what we have seen and heard to date in our schools and local communities, this is the majority view held within the communities of West Northumberland.

We are all keen to see the future of education set up for success. Where there are genuine challenges to be overcome we are committed to working in an open and collaborative way to develop the most appropriate solutions. We also recognise that there is a pressing need to provide direction for what happens at Haydon Bridge High School. However, we believe there are many more options open than are currently being considered. The right solution, not a quick solution, needs to be found. To make the scale of changes proposed, on a 'once in a generation basis', with such significant financial investment, requires more time and more depth of information.

We reiterate both our willingness and desire to work with all stakeholders and also our call on Northumberland County Council to review its current approach to the consultation.

Yours sincerely,



Eileen Daniel
Head Teacher



Elizabeth Giuliani
Chair of Governors

Beaufront First School



Jen Stephenson
Head Teacher



Dom Aldred
Chair of Governors

Broomhaugh CE First School

Hazel Davey
Head Teacher

Jennifer Ainsley
Head Teacher

Jane Kennedy
Head Teacher

Amanda Taylor
Head Teacher

Rebecca Jackson
Head Teacher

Jude Long
Head Teacher

Amanda Taylor
Head Teacher

Jenny Morgan
Head Teacher

Leanne Barker
Head Teacher

James Ellison
Chair of Governors

Andrew Neal
Chair of Governors

Jo Holmes
Chair of Governors

Jenni Holland
Chair of Governors

Fiona Armstrong
Chair of Governors

Steve Wilkinson
Chair of Governors

Kelly Ritchie
Chair of Governors

Andrew Patterson
Chair of Governors

Catherine Theobald
Acting Chair of Governors

Chollerton CE First School

Corbridge CE First School

Corbridge Middle School

Greenhaugh First School

Hexham First School

Humshaugh CE First School

Wark CE First School

Whitley Chapel CE First School

Whittonstall & Broomley First Schools

Wendy Goddard .

Wendy Goddard
Head Teacher

RJS

Rebecca Simpson
Head Teacher

VRutherford ..

Victoria Rutherford
Head Teacher

PP 
(VICE CHAIR)

ANNE WELSH
Chair of Governors

Bellingham First School


(VICE CHAIR)

PP ~~Trish Taylor~~ ANNE WELSH

Chair of Governors

Bellingham Middle School

A. Gibson

Tony Gibson

Chair of Governors

West Woodburn First School