



Northumberland
County Council

BERWICK PARTNERSHIP

YOUR VIEWS ON SCHOOL ORGANISATION



23 MAY – 12 AUGUST 2022



Northumberland
County Council

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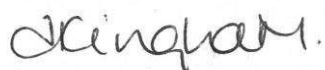
INTRODUCTION

Northumberland County Council has committed £39.9m towards the replacement and refurbishment of school buildings in the Berwick Partnership. However, before carrying out the works to school buildings, the Council needs to know that it is investing in a school structure that will deliver consistently good outcomes for all children and young people and that it is sustainable now and for the future generations to come.

Schools in the Berwick Partnership are facing some specific issues. In early 2021, Council officers began talking to Headteachers and school Chairs of Governors about how schools could be organised in order to overcome these issues and a number of 'models' of organisation were reviewed and assessed - a summary of these discussions and their outcomes is set out in this document. The key conclusion of these discussions was that before any detailed proposals for individual schools linked to the buildings funding could be brought forward, the views of parents, staff, governors, pupils, the wider public and anyone with an interest in education in the Berwick Partnership area needed to be gathered on the general principle of whether schools should be organised within the current 3-tier (first/middle/high) structure or within the 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure. Once this principle is established, more detailed proposals for individual schools can be brought forward.

This consultation document sets out those key issues faced by schools in the partnership, an overview of the current structure and the 2-tier structure at a Northumberland and national level, and data and information about pupil numbers and performance of schools. As a result, I'm afraid this is a long document. However, we believe it's really important that you are provided with the information that you need to be able to form your views before you respond to this consultation. You should also bear in mind that this consultation is not a referendum and any decision about the structure of schools will be based on the quality of the educational rationale, not on the number of responses for one structure or another. So, as well as asking for your thoughts about the 3-tier and 2-tier school structures, we are also asking if you have any alternative suggestions that you think could address the issues raised in this document that would secure a viable school system in the Berwick Partnership for the children and young people living in this area.

We are also running two public events in the coming Summer Term (details later in this document) where you will be able to ask further questions from schools and Council officers – hopefully you will be able to attend one of them. I really hope that you will take the time and opportunity to submit your views and I look forward to hopefully meeting you in July.



Audrey Kingham
Interim Executive Director of Children's Services
Northumberland County Council

CURRENT STRUCTURE OF SCHOOLS IN THE BERWICK PARTNERSHIP



The Berwick Partnership is currently organised mainly within the 3-tier (first/middle/high) school structure. There are 11 first schools, 1 first academy, 1 primary school, 3 middle schools, 1 age 13-18 academy and 1 special school:

The 18 schools within the partnership are:

- **Belford Primary School – age 2-11**
- **Berwick St Mary's CE First School – age 3-9**
- **Berwick Holy Trinity CE First School – age 3-9**
- **Holy Island CE First School - age 4-9**
- **Hugh Joicey CE First School – age 4-9**
- **Lowick CE First School – age 2-9**
- **Norham St Coelwulf's CE First School – age 3-9**
- **Scremerston First School – age 4-9**
- **Spittal First School – age 4-9**
- **St Cuthbert's Catholic First School – age 3-9**
- **Tweedmouth Prior Park First School – age 3-9**
- **Tweedmouth West First School – age 4-9**
- **Wooler First School – age 2-9**
- **Berwick Middle School – age 9-13**
- **Glendale Community Middle School – age 9-13**
- **Tweedmouth Community Middle School – age 9-13**
- **Berwick Academy –age 13-18**
- **The Grove Special School – age 2-19**

Some first schools also have provision for children from age 2 or 3 which are run separately from the school, but based on the school site e.g. Tweedmouth Prior Park First and Spittal First School.

In the 3-tier structure educational pathway, pupils in first schools leave at the end of Year 4 and transfer into Year 5 at middle school, where they remain until the end of Year 8. From middle school, pupils then transfer into Year 9 until the end of Year 11 or the end of Year 13 depending on their choices.

In 2017 the Governing Bodies of St Mary's CE Middle School in Belford and Belford First School requested consultation on the closure of the middle school and the reorganisation of the first school to a primary school. This proposal was approved and the first school became Belford Primary School in September 2018.

ISSUES FACING THE BERWICK PARTNERSHIP



OFSTED GRADES

Twelve of the 13 first and primary schools are graded Outstanding or Good, while Tweedmouth Prior Park First School is graded 'Requires Improvement', although it continues to be taking effective action. All 3 middle schools are currently graded 'Good' by Ofsted. Berwick Academy was inspected by Ofsted in November 2021 and was graded as 'Requires Improvement', having previously been judged to be Inadequate. The Grove Special School is rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted.

EDUCATION OUTCOMES

Academic achievement is only one way of measuring the quality of a pupil's educational experience. Parents and carers of pupils on roll in schools in the Berwick Partnership will know the many other ways in which their children are benefitting from their school. However, educational outcomes are important and therefore the following data is presented for information.

Key Stage 1:

Children in first schools and primary schools are assessed at the end of Key Stage 1 (KS1) assessments, which are taken by children at the end of Year 2 when they are aged 7 or almost 7. These assessments are not published as their purpose is mainly to assist schools with developing the next learning steps for individual children, although they are shared with parents.

Key Stage 2:

Children in primary schools and middle schools are assessed at the end of Year 6 when they are aged 11 or almost 11. Key Stage 2 (KS2) assessments did not take place in 2020 and 2021, therefore the last available data for Berwick Partnership is from 2019. Children are assessed against a number of measures, but one of the key measures is the percentage of children who meet the expected standard for Reading, Writing and Maths. The results for 2019 for children in Year 6 in schools in the Berwick Partnership are set out in Table 1, together with the Northumberland and England averages that year.

Table 1 - Percentage of students achieving KS2 expected standard in Berwick Partnership 2019

	% Children who met expected standard
Belford Primary School	88%
Berwick Middle School	72%
Glendale Middle School	63%
Tweedmouth Middle School	75%
Northumberland average	66%
England average	65%

From Table 1, you can see that the highest percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths was at Belford Primary School, with the two Berwick town middles also achieving above average scores, while Glendale Middle achieved just below the county and national average.

Key Stage 4 – GCSE Results

The last verified outcomes at GCSE (Key Stage 4) for Berwick Academy were in summer 2019, as set out in Table 2. The DfE has stated that due to the way in which GCSE results were assessed and awarded in the summer terms of 2020 and 2021, they cannot be meaningfully compared to previous years' results as a way of measuring pupil performance. However, the key measures of pupil performance at GCSE in 2019, 2020 and 2021 for Berwick Academy are included in Table 2 for information purposes. For the reasons explained it is not possible to produce a Northumberland or England average.

Table 2 – GCSE results, Berwick Academy

		GCSE 2019	GCSE 2020	GCSE 2021
Progress 8 (measures how much value a school has added to pupil progress compared to other schools. 0 = Expected Progress)	Berwick Academy	-0.55	-0.26	Not available, but expected to make progress on 2020 results
	Northumberland average	-0.12	N/A	N/A
	England average	-0.03	N/A	N/A
% Students Achieving Grade 4 or more in English and Maths (equivalent to low C pass in previous grading system)	Berwick Academy	47%	62%	63%
	Northumberland Average	65%	N/A	N/A
	England Average	65%	N/A	N/A
% Students Achieving Grade 5 or more in English and Maths (equivalent to high C pass in previous grading system)	Berwick Academy	21%	35%	36%
	Northumberland average	43%	N/A	N/A
	England average	43%	N/A	N/A
Attainment 8 (measures how well pupils perform against 8 qualifications - higher figure is best)	Berwick Academy	38.9	43.8	41.8
	Northumberland average	46.5	N/A	N/A
	England average	46.7	N/A	N/A

However, GCSE examinations are planned to go ahead as normal for 2022 and Berwick Academy expects to see the recent improvement in 2020 and 2021 outcomes being sustained into this year's results.

Key Stage 5 - 'A' Levels Results

As for GCSE results, 'A' level grades achieved by students in 2020 and 2021 cannot be directly compared to the last verified results in 2019, again as a result of the alternative grade awarding methods but results for Berwick Academy in the last 3 years are included in Table 3 for information.

Table 3 – ‘A’ level results, Berwick Academy

	2019	2020	2021
Average result - Berwick Academy	D+, 22.5 points	C-, 27 points	B-, 35 points
Average result - Northumberland	C+, 32.5 points	N/A	N/A
Average result - England	C+, 34.01	N/A	N/A
Progress Score (0 = expected standard)	-0.18 (Average for England)	N/A	N/A

Berwick Academy has reported that all university applicants in the 2020/21 year group gained a place at one of their chosen **universities, with 95% being placed at their first choice.** **Students seeking routes into employment and training were supported by staff throughout the lockdown period and most secured their next step.**

Pupil Data and Information

It is a fact that for a number of years, fewer children have been born in the Berwick Partnership area every year. Table 4 shows the average number of children per year group within each school phase (first/middle/high) living in the Berwick Partnership area at the moment (note this is not the average number of pupils actually on roll in Berwick schools). This demonstrates how pupil numbers have been falling over time and you can see that the average size year group is becoming smaller and smaller.

Table 4 - Average number of children per year group within each school phase (first/middle/high) living in the Berwick Partnership

Current Phase	Average year group size within each school phase
High School (Year 9 to 11)	221
Middle School (Year 5 to 8)	222
First School (Reception to Year 4)	200
Reception 2022 to Reception 2025	165

The result of these falling numbers is that schools will have many more unfilled (surplus) school places. Table 5 shows the steadily reducing number of children being born and registered with a GP in the Berwick Partnership over the last 9 years – there is a difference of 60 children between the size of the current Year 4 pupils born in Berwick and the group of children who will join a Reception class in September 2025 - this equates to 2 classes of 30 children.

Table 5 – Number of children registered with GPs in Berwick Partnership in the last 9 years

Reception Sept 2025	Reception Sept 2024	Reception Sept 2023	Reception Sept 2022	Current Reception	Current Year 1	Current Year 2	Current Year 3	Current Year 4
150	168	170	172	188	217	190	197	210

While there are around 500 houses planned to be built in the Berwick Partnership between 2021 and 2026, these would generate around an additional 148 children, which when spread across Reception to Year 11 equates to 12 children per year group. In short, these additional children will have little impact on the continuing fall in pupil numbers in the partnership in the coming years.

Added to the issue of falling pupil numbers is the number of pupils who live in the Berwick Partnership area, but who attend schools outside of the area. Table 6, Row 1 shows the number of pupils living in the Berwick Partnership of statutory school age (Column 1 - Reception to Year 11 **but not including children attending specialist provision**) against the number of children who actually attend a school in the partnership (Column 2). Rows 2, 3 and 4 break this data down by school phase.

Table 6 – Number of pupils living in Berwick Partnership area (excluding pupils attending special schools) and number who attend Berwick Partnership schools

	Column 1	Column 2 – Autumn 2021 data
Row 1	Total no. All Pupils living in Berwick Partnership catchment areas (Reception to Year 11)	Actual No. All Pupils living in Berwick area who attend Berwick Partnership schools (Reception to Year 11)
	2537	2094 (82% of Total)
Row 2	Total no. pupils who live in catchment areas of all first schools and Belford Primary	Actual No. pupils who live in catchment areas of all first schools and Belford Primary who also attend those schools
	1022	900 (88% Total)
Row 3	Total no. pupils who live in catchment areas of all middle schools (Year 5 to Year 8)	Actual No. Pupils who live in catchment areas of all middle schools and who also attend those schools (Year 5 to Year 8)
	884	774 (88% of Total)
Row 4	Total no. pupils who live in greater Berwick Catchment area (Year 9 to Year 11)	Actual No. pupils who live Berwick area and who also attend Berwick Academy (Year 9-Year 11)
	631	420 (67% Total)

As can be seen from Table 6, the first and middle schools appear to attract the majority of the children living in the catchment area of Berwick Partnership but this decreases at the high school phase. With falling pupil numbers, its therefore important for the viability of the whole partnership that it retains as many local pupils as possible throughout their educational pathway. The impact of children leaving the partnership is that it increases surplus places in schools even further – Table 7 below shows how surplus places (orange bars) have increased between January 2016 and January 2022.

Table 7 – Surplus Places in Berwick Partnership as at January 2022



Surplus places in themselves are not necessarily always a bad thing – some schools can still have a healthy budget and carry a certain number of surplus places if they attract the right number of students that still allows them to provide the broad and balanced curriculum that the Department for Education requires. However, when schools need to cut back on their teaching and learning resources as a result of a reducing budget then the educational experience of pupils may be impacted. Extensive surplus places across many schools also means that schools often compete for pupils.

Which schools do the pupils who don't attend Berwick Partnership schools go to?

Table 8 shows that the majority of pupils resident in the Berwick Partnership area who attend out of catchment schools go into the Alnwick Partnership, Scotland and the private sector (pupils attending special schools or elective home education are not included in Table 8).

Table 8 – Number of Berwick Partnership resident pupils attending out of catchment/private schools

Phase	*Attending Alnwick Schools	*Attending Scottish Schools	*Attending Private Schools	Total	As percentage of total students in phase
High (Yr9-11)	103	49	32	184	29%
Middle	30	33	35	98	11%
First	25	3	8	36	4%
Total	158	83	76	317	13%

**These are the 3 most common alternatives of pupils who are educated outside of Berwick Partnership*

The data in Table 8 shows that 29% of high school age students (Year 9 to Year 11) living in the Berwick area choose to attend other schools; 11% of middle school age students (Years 5 to 8) attend these schools; and 4% of first school age pupils attend these schools. If the 183 high school age students who go out of the Berwick Partnership attended Berwick Academy, it would have an additional £915,000 in its budget each year. If the 94 middle school age students who leave the area attended, those schools would have an additional £470,000 in their budgets.

There are always a variety of reasons why parents/carers choose to send their children to certain schools, for example distance from home, proximity to relatives, while there will always be a percentage of parents who will send their children to private schools. However, some feedback received during the informal meetings with schools and via the community survey undertaken last Autumn (see later in this document) indicates there is a level of dissatisfaction with the educational pathway in the Berwick Partnership. While reversing the falling birth rate in the area would be difficult, it is possible that changes could be made within the Berwick Partnership that could persuade more parents and carers to send their children to their local schools – we are interested to hear your views on this issue as part of this consultation.

Special Educational Needs

While many pupils with a special educational need (SEN) are able to remain in mainstream education, a significant number need more specialist help. The Grove School in Berwick provides specialist education to around 36 pupils who live in the Berwick Partnership area (although pupils also attend from outside the area as there are 48 on roll). However, there are a further 58 children living in the Berwick Partnership area with special educational needs on roll at 6 specialist provisions outside of the area, some of them travelling a considerable distance to and from school daily.

In particular, the Council's data indicates there is a growing need for additional specialist provision for children and young people with Autism (ASD) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) as a primary SEN need right across the county. This growing trend also applies to the Berwick Partnership, as can be seen from the forecasts for number of children in special schools with ASD and SEMH in Table 9 and Table 10.

Table 9- Forecast for number of pupils with ASD as a primary need living in Berwick Partnership

Forecasts by year Group	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Sep-22	1	1	4	1	6	6	8	4	16	5	9	3
Sep-23	3	2	1	6	2	7	8	7	8	15	7	8
Sep-24	3	4	2	2	7	2	9	7	15	8	22	6
Sep-25	3	4	4	2	2	8	2	8	15	15	11	20
Sep-26	2	4	4	5	3	2	10	2	18	15	22	10
Sep-27	3	3	4	5	6	3	3	9	5	17	22	20
Sep-28	3	3	3	5	6	7	4	3	20	5	26	20
Sep-29	3	3	3	4	6	7	9	4	6	20	7	23

Note: Shaded figures show year on year increase within a particular year group

Table 10 - Forecast for number of pupils with SEMH as a primary need living in Berwick Partnership

Forecasts by year Group	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Sep-22	0	3	2	9	16	18	8	13	8	9	13	7
Sep-23	0	0	5	3	11	20	15	10	12	9	9	10
Sep-24	0	0	0	8	4	14	16	17	9	13	9	6
Sep-25	0	0	0	1	9	4	11	19	16	10	13	7
Sep-26	1	0	0	0	1	11	4	13	18	17	10	10
Sep-27	0	1	0	0	1	1	9	4	12	19	17	7
Sep-28	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	11	4	13	19	13
Sep-29	0	0	1	2	1	1	1	1	10	4	13	14

Note: Shaded figures show year on year increase within a particular year group

A small but significant number of children in the Berwick Partnership are also diagnosed with Speech, Learning and Communication needs particularly in the primary years, which often leads to a diagnosis of ASD in the secondary years.

Discussions on the structure of schools in the Berwick Partnership have also presented the opportunity to have a 'joined-up' approach with mainstream education in the area.

While discussions with schools and relevant Council officers **will be taking place in the coming weeks on how the needs of this group of pupils could be addressed within the Berwick Partnership area that may lead to firm proposals being brought forward for SEND provision in the future, we welcome your views or ideas how this could be achieved as part of this consultation.**

Early Years Provision

There are currently 20 Early Years provisions across the Berwick Partnership (including 9 schools). All provision is judged Good or above by Ofsted with the majority offering the free funded entitlement for eligible 2, 3 and 4 yr olds. Any specific proposals for Early Years provision linked to schools would be included in the next phase of consultation, but if you have any views or ideas relating to Early Years provision in the partnership at this stage, then we welcome them.

Post-16 Educational Offer

As part of this consultation, we are also keen to hear about your views in relation to post-16 provision for young people living in the Berwick Partnership area. We are seeking your ideas about how post-16 provision could be improved and where, and these will help to shape a more detailed proposal to be put forward in the next phase of consultation.

VIEWS OF SCHOOLS IN THE BERWICK PARTNERSHIP



Between April 2021 to March 2022, Council officers worked with headteachers and Chairs of Governors (and occasionally attended by other organisations) to look at the issues facing the Berwick Partnership set out earlier in this document.

A detailed summary of this work and its outcomes can be found in the document “Report of the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children’s Services” which is available on the Northumberland County Council website at

<https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=140&MId=1404>

A key piece of work achieved by this process was agreement on a Vision for Change for the Berwick Partnership as follows:

- **Improving Education Outcomes** at each phase to ensure every child meets their potential.
- **Sustainability of Education** across the whole of the Berwick Partnership for the long term.
- **Improving and extending SEND offer** for children and young people in Berwick Partnership so that their needs are met locally and travel times are reduced significantly.
- **Engaging the Berwick Community** in the review process to build an understanding of all the issues and to grow support for any proposed

changes within schools in order that the community engages, supports and thrives.

- Ensure **schools work together** to further develop the partnership and create a sustainable model for the future.
- Underpinning the **best value for NCC capital Investment** as well as any wider investment opportunities which may arise.

In conjunction with the work undertaken by the Berwick Partnership, the Council initiated a high-level Community Survey between September and October 2021 to raise awareness of the main issues facing the Berwick Partnership and to gain an insight from the wider public in the area about their priorities for education. 436 responses were received to this survey, with almost half of respondents being parents. Table 11 sets the order in which key educational statements were prioritised by this group of stakeholders.

Table 11 - Education priorities ranked by survey respondents

Statement	Ranking
Improved outcomes for all children whatever their abilities	1
A system that attracts and retains the best teachers	2
School buildings that are appropriate for teaching and learning in the 21st Century	3
Improved and extended provision to meet the needs of children with SEND in the area covered by Berwick Partnership schools	4
Schools that have excellent facilities that are shared with the local community	5
All schools large enough to withstand fluctuations in pupil numbers	6

The outcome of the work carried out with the Headteachers and Governing Bodies and the results of the Community Survey suggested that there are just two remaining options for school organisation in the Berwick Partnership at this point, which are the continuation of the current 3-tier system or reorganisation to the 2-tier (primary/secondary) system. However, there was an understanding that under either system, there would need to be agreed changes to address falling pupil numbers and improve educational standards in order to establish a viable and sustainable school system before the programme of capital investment in buildings could be undertaken.

Wooler First, Glendale Middle and Belford Primary Schools

Another issue arose as a result of the work undertaken with schools in the partnership linked to school organisation was the question of whether Belford Primary, Wooler First and Glendale Middle Schools should remain within the Berwick Partnership or whether it would be more appropriate for the schools to become part of the Alnwick Partnership. This idea came forward as a result of the historically significant numbers of pupils who leave these schools at the end of Year 6 to join The Duchess High School in Year 7.

The key focus of this consultation is to seek your views on the organisation of schools, including which schools should remain within the Berwick Partnership.

THREE-TIER AND TWO-TIER SCHOOL STRUCTURES - BENEFITS AND DISADVANTAGES



The purpose of this section of the document is not to persuade you to support either the 3-tier system or the 2-tier system of school organisation, but to present to you some of the information and rationale linked to both systems for you to consider before responding to the consultation. It is a fact that there has been very little academic discussion comparing these two systems of education in recent times, as nationally the majority of schools are organised within the primary/secondary structure and it simply is no longer an issue of wider debate. Likewise, we do not present educational outcomes of middle schools versus primary schools or high schools versus secondary schools as we could produce both good and bad examples of all types of school across Northumberland and beyond. Instead, we encourage you to consider the following information, but also consider your own or your children's experience of the school system in your area in the context of the issues facing the Berwick Partnership that we have highlighted earlier in this document. If you can, talk to the educational professionals in your local schools in the Berwick Partnership as these are the people who know what is working and what is not in the current system. You will also have the opportunity to do this at the planned public events.

Background to School Systems in Northumberland

Prior to the publication of the Plowden Report in 1967, all schools in Northumberland were organised under the 2-tier (primary/secondary) or variations of it, with transfer from a primary or junior school to a secondary-type school at the age of 11. Northumberland introduced the 3-tier system of first, middle and high schools into the county in the 1970's

and it has therefore been in existence here for 50 years. Many other local authorities also introduced this system of school organisation at this time.

The rationale behind the 3-tier system was then somewhat undermined by the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1989, which was based on the primary/secondary system. Table 12 shows the age of children within a particular Year Group and Key stage of the National Curriculum when organised within a primary/secondary system of schools.

Table 12 – Key Stages and Phase changes based on the National Curriculum

Age	Year Group	Key Stage	Phase
3-4	Nursery/pre-school	Early Years	PRIMARY
4-5	Reception class	Early Years	
5-6	Year 1	KS1	
6-7	Year 2	KS1 (Assessment)	
7-8	Year 3	KS2	
8-9	Year 4	KS2	
9-10	Year 5	KS2	
10-11	Year 6	KS2 (Assessment)	
Phase Change to Secondary			
11-12	Year 7	KS3	SECONDARY
12-13	Year 8	KS3	
13-14	Year 9	KS3	
14-15	Year 10	KS4	
15-16	Year 11	KS4 (GCSE's taken)	
16-17	Year 12	KS5	SIXTH FORM
17-18	Year 13	KS5 ('A' levels taken)	

In the 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure, primary schools have responsibility for Early Years, KS1 and KS2, while secondary schools have responsibility for KS3, KS4 and KS5 (although in some areas local authorities have age 11-16 secondary schools and sixth form colleges).

Table 13 shows the age of children within a particular Year Group and Key stage of the National Curriculum as organised within the current 3-tier school structure in the Berwick Partnership

Table 13 – 3-tier structure within the National Curriculum

Age	Year Group	Key Stage	Phase
3-4	Nursery/pre-school	Early Years	PRIMARY
4-5	Reception class	Early Years	
5-6	Year 1	KS1	
6-7	Year 2	KS1 (Assessment)	
7-8	Year 3	KS2	
8-9	Year 4	KS2	
Phase Change to Middle School			
9-10	Year 5	KS2	PRIMARY
10-11	Year 6	KS2 (Assessment)	
11-12	Year 7	KS3	SECONDARY
12-13	Year 8	KS3	
Phase Change to High School			
13-14	Year 9	KS3	SECONDARY
14-15	Year 10	KS4	
15-16	Year 11	KS4 (GCSE's taken)	
16-17	Year 12	KS5	SIXTH FORM
17-18	Year 13	KS5 ('A' levels taken)	

As can be seen from Table 13, there is a phase change from first to middle schools halfway through Key Stage 2, therefore the first schools have responsibility for KS2 in Years 3 and 4, while middle schools have responsibility for teaching KS2 in Years 5 and 6, including assessment at the end of Year 6. Middle schools then have the responsibility for the first two years of KS3, when there is another phase change to high school which picks up responsibility for the last year of KS3 and then the whole of KS4 to KS5.

As a result of the introduction of the National Curriculum Key Stages, discussions around what is the best system for the organisation of schools in Northumberland have been taking place since the early 1990's. In 2005, a programme of reorganisation of all schools in the county to the 2-tier system was launched by the Council Administration at that time under the title 'Putting the Learner First'. Cramlington and then Blyth Partnerships were the first to change to the 2-tier system in 2007/2008 and these were followed by Hirst Partnership in 2009. A change of administration in 2009 and the economic crash at that time halted the Putting the Learner First programme. Since that time, reorganisation of school partnerships to the 2-tier system has occurred wholly or in part as a result of the need to react to a failing middle school (e.g. Bedlington and Haydon Bridge), or as a result of requests to the Council from school partnerships themselves to consult on change (e.g. Alnwick, Ponteland).

Of the 13 school partnerships in Northumberland, 7 are now organised within the 2-tier system; St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy and its feeder primary schools in the South

East of the county are also organised within the 2-tier system (although there are a number of RC first school academies in parts of the county). Therefore, 6 partnerships are organised within the 3-tier system (although consultation is currently under way on whether the Coquet Partnership should change to the 2-tier system). While the partnerships are split almost evenly in terms of organisation, in fact 26,013 of the 39,911 pupils on roll in schools in Reception to Year 13 (excluding special schools) are educated in within the 2-tier system of school structure i.e. 65%.

Advantages and disadvantages of the Three Tier System

In January 2018, the National Middle Schools' Forum reported that in 1982 there were 1,816 middle schools. They also reported that in 2019, there were 107 middle schools in England operating within 14 local authority areas, including Northumberland. Most remaining middle schools in the country are organised as 'middle deemed secondary', having year groups within both primary and secondary phases, while there are around 6 remaining 'middle deemed primary' middle schools in the south of the country.

Other authorities in the North East with middle schools are Newcastle and North Tyneside, which like Northumberland, have a mixture of both 3-tier and 2-tier systems across their authority areas.

The National Middle Schools Forum cites the following as advantages of the 3-tier system:

- 3-tier system is suited to rural areas or catchment areas of smaller market towns;
- Middle Schools are uniquely placed for creative flexibility of organisation to meet the needs of pupils going through wide-ranging intellectual, physical and emotional development;
- By spanning parts of both KS2 and KS3, middle schools can use the outcomes of KS2 assessments to benefit the learning of pupils;
- The gradual introduction of specialist teaching maintains enthusiasm and widens interests;
- Joint curriculum planning across the phases of the 3-tier system is essential in order to deliver good outcomes in the shared Key Stages.
- Middle schools offer a wide variety of extra-curricular activities in sport, music, art etc.;
- School climate nurtures support by being child-centred and small enough for children to be known personally.

- Curriculum is balanced between subject-centred and pupil-centred needs of the pupils and promotes self-esteem, self-knowledge and a foundation for lifelong learning.

As stated, there is little or no academic literature comparing the 3-tier and 2-tier systems in this country as it is a non-topic outside of the areas where middle schools exist.

Therefore, many of the disadvantages cited in relation to the 3-tier system are to be found in the reports of local authorities who have or are proposing changes to the school structure in their area. For example, Central Bedfordshire Council, which has a mixed organisation of schools like Northumberland, published on its website the following statements:

- Teacher training is now focused on the primary/secondary model;
- Only one transfer in the 2-tier model so less disruptive in the pupils' educational pathway and simpler.

Feedback in 2016 from statutory consultation on the proposals to reorganise Alnwick Partnership included these comments from educational professionals:

- The 3-tier system is a dysfunctional model for the most effective delivery of the National Curriculum;
- The split of KS2 between first and middle schools and KS3 between middle and high schools provides threats to the effective educational progress of children as it causes problems with the continuity of learning and teaching, support for pupils, the delivery of the curriculum and the ability of schools to recruit Middle school specialist teachers.

Advantages and disadvantages of the 2-tier system

Responses from education professionals arising from consultation on proposals for reorganisation of the Ponteland Partnership in favour of the 2-tier system included:

- Attainment will improve faster through changing to 2-tier rather than through introducing initiatives within the 3-tier system;
- Pupils will have an additional 2 years of work in their secondary schools
- Single transition points in 2-tier work effectively for pupils

Advantages of the 2-tier system cited by Northumberland County Council under the Putting the Learner First programme in 2005 remain worthy of consideration in relation to the organisation of schools today:

- One transition point for students, and one transfer of information between 2 schools;
- School age ranges would match the National Curriculum Key Stages;
- Recruitment and retention of teachers should improve;
- KS3 pupils would be taught in 11-18 secondary schools with a wider range of facilities, equipment and specialist teaching.
- First schools and high schools would increase in size and offer wider curriculum opportunities; small first schools in particular would improve their financial situation.

Likewise, the Council at that time cited some perceived disadvantages of reorganisation:

- Changes creates uncertainty and insecurity amongst children and staff
- Schools are always under pressure re standards and organisation change will add to it;
- Small primary schools wouldn't have the specialist facilities of middle schools.
- Transfer of pupils from very small primary schools to large secondary schools could be daunting.

Forming Your Views

Before you complete the questionnaire, it is important that you understand that in the light of the falling pupil population in the Berwick Partnership, there will need to be some changes made to schools and how they are organised whether the 3-tier system remains in place or whether schools are reorganised to a 2-tier or other model; these changes could include some school closures. Details of proposed changes would be brought forward in the next phase of consultation.

So, we would like you to consider what system will be better placed to ensure that as many as possible of the pupils who do live in the Berwick Partnership area choose to remain in their local schools throughout their educational journey in order to support a viable and sustainable school system and improve outcomes for all pupils, whatever their abilities.

Alternative Proposals

While this consultation has presented information relating to the 3-tier and 2-tier systems of school organisation, you may have an alternative suggestion for addressing the issues facing the Berwick Partnership set out in this document. If you have any alternative suggestion, please set this out in the questionnaire and response form that accompanies this document.

How can I find out more about this proposal?

Public drop-in events have been arranged during this consultation period for you to find out further information about any aspect of this proposal.

Public Drop-in events

Date: Wednesday 13 July, 5.30 p.m. to 7.00 p.m.

Venue: Bell View Resource Centre, 33 West Street, Belford, NE70 7QB

Date: Saturday 16 July, 10.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m.

Venue: Berwick Community Trust, The William Elder Building, 56-58 Castlegate, Berwick upon Tweed, TD15 1JT

All interested parties are welcome to drop-in at any time within the above hours.

There will also be a separate event for staff working in schools in the Berwick Partnership during the consultation period. Staff will be contacted directly with the date and time of the drop-in session.

An online Padlet dedicated to the consultation on school structure is also available by following this link <https://padlet.com/Northumberland/Berwick>.

Additional information is posted on the padlet, including Frequently Asked questions that may assist you in your response to the consultation.

How can I submit my views about this proposal?

A 12 week consultation on the proposals set out in this consultation document began on **Monday 23 May and will end at midnight on 12 August 2022.**

The Council is very keen to hear your views on the proposal set out in this consultation document and also to learn if you have any alternative proposals.

A link to a questionnaire is here: <https://haveyoursay.northumberland.gov.uk/education-skills/berwick-partnership-your-views-on-school-organisat> **(copy and paste link into browser)**
please complete the electronic questionnaire if you can. However, if you or someone you know would prefer to send a hard copy, please request a printed form by contacting educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk stating that you require a printed survey form for the Consultation on School Organisation in Berwick Partnership.

To return your completed hard copy form, please send to:

School Organisation and Resources Team
Children's Services,
County Hall
Morpeth
Northumberland
NE61 2EF

At the end of this consultation, all feedback received will be considered by the Council's Cabinet before deciding on whether or not to move to the next steps in the process.

Thank you for participating in this consultation