



# Northumberland County Council

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **NOTIFICATION OF STATUTORY PROPOSALS FOR ATKINSON HOUSE SCHOOL**

Notice is hereby given in accordance with Section 19(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 that Northumberland County Council, County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 2EF intends to make the following prescribed alterations to the following school:

**Atkinson House School  
Pitt Lane  
Front Street  
Seghill  
Northumberland  
NE23 7EB**

Atkinson House School is a Community Special School for boys aged 11 to 16.

#### **CHANGE IN NUMBER OF PUPILS IN A SPECIAL SCHOOL**

- The current number of planned pupil places at Atkinson House School is 80. The proposed number of planned pupil places is 100 to take effect from 1 September 2022.

#### **CHANGE FROM SINGLE SEX SCHOOL TO CO-EDUCATIONAL**

- Atkinson House School currently has provision for boys aged 11 to 16. It is proposed that the school becomes co-educational i.e. admits boys and girls aged 11 to 16, the change to take effect from 1 September 2022.

#### **TRANSFER TO A NEW SITE**

In order to facilitate the above proposals, notice is hereby given in accordance with Section 19(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 that Northumberland County Council County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 2EF intends to transfer the site of Atkinson House School from its current site at Seghill, Northumberland to a new site at the following location, the transfer to take effect from 1 September 2022:

**The former Richard Coates CE Primary building  
Thornhill Road  
Ponteland  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE20 9QB**

#### **Copies of the full Statutory Proposal may be obtained from:**

The School Organisation and Resources Team  
Education and Skills  
Wellbeing and Community Health Services  
Northumberland County Council  
County Hall  
Morpeth  
Northumberland  
NE61 2EF

or from the Council's website at

<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Education/Schools/Consultations.aspx#schoolconsultations>

## Implementation.

- Atkinson House School is proposed to transfer site, increase its planned pupil numbers and become co-educational with effect from 1 September 2022.

## Objectives

The objectives of this proposal are to:

- **Change the number of planned pupils at Atkinson House School** - The current planned pupil number is 80 and the proposed planned pupil number is 100. The proposed increase in the planned pupil number is to take effect from 1 September 2022.
- **Change Atkinson House School from a single sex school for boys aged 11 to 16 to a co-educational school for boys and girls aged 11 to 16.** The proposed change in from single sex to co-educational is proposed to take effect from 1 September 2022.
- **Transfer the site of Atkinson House School** - the current site of Atkinson House School is located at Pitt Lane, Front Street, Seghill, Northumberland, NE23 7EB and the proposed site of Atkinson House School is the former Richard Coates CE Primary building, Thornhill Road, Ponteland, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE20 9QB to take effect from 1 September 2022.

## Reasons for proposal (evidence of demand):

The rationale for the proposal is centred on the premise that the number of children and young people who have been diagnosed as having Autism, Social Emotional and Mental Health needs in Northumberland has been increasing year on year for the past 10 years. This demand for special school places equates to an average increase over this period to date of 7% each year (actual variation from year to year has been between 2% and 12%). There continues to be an increasing demand from parents for their children to be educated within special school provision both in and out of the county.

Northumberland County Council has been successful in bidding for a special free school in Blyth (Gilbert Ward Academy) through the DfE's free school programme for secondary age young people who have autism and social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH), but this will not be completed until early 2023. Other special schools in the county have increased their provision recently and the next available school to expand to meet demand would be Atkinson House School. There is also a growing demand for SEMH provision for girls in Northumberland from Year 7 onwards, with no specific provision for them currently in the county.

Given the delay in the opening of the Gilbert Ward Academy and the increasing demand for additional SEMH places across the county, it is proposed that relocating Atkinson House to the vacant former Richard Coates CE Primary School building in Ponteland would provide additional capacity on an ongoing basis, rather than a temporary solution. The additional capacity at the proposed site for Atkinson House School would also enable the school to expand its provision by moving from a single sex provision to co-educational, thus supporting the growing demand from girls diagnosed with SEMH.

Furthermore, as additional young people with SEMH needs would be able to be educated within Northumberland, it is expected that one of the main benefits of this proposal would be the ability to educate a vulnerable group of young people within or closer to their home communities in appropriate provision.

### **Effect on other schools, academies and educational institutions in the area**

There would be no educational impact or impact on numbers attending on any of the schools in the Ponteland Schools Partnership as a result of the proposal as none currently have any specialist provision. Atkinson House School has provision for boys with an EHCP specifically for SEMH needs and would expand its provision only to meet the needs of girls with an EHCP specifically for SEMH needs. All students attending Atkinson House School even after it relocates would have an EHCP and would be eligible for free home to school transport.

A number of concerns were raised during the pre-publication (informal) consultation from the Pele Trust (specifically in relation to perceived potential impact on Richard Coates CE Primary) and Little Tinklers Nursery, both of which settings are adjacent to the former Richard Coates building on Thornhill Road, Ponteland. These concerns related on the whole to safeguarding concerns around the potential for younger children to come into contact with or overhear inappropriate language from secondary age students at Atkinson House School.

The Council is mindful of the concerns of the above settings, and also of the desire for Atkinson House School to ensure the safeguarding of its own vulnerable students. Therefore, should this statutory proposal be approved for implementation, Council officers would support the involvement of representatives from all the 3 settings adjacent to one another at Thornhill Road to work collaboratively in developing appropriate safeguarding arrangements for all children and young people attending the settings and for ongoing collaboration and information sharing in order to provide continuing assurance to parents, staff and pupils attending their schools and nursery.

### **Project Costs and Proposed Implementation**

Should this Statutory Proposal be approved for implementation, there would be a need to carry out building works to facilitate changes that would be required for students with SEMH needs. Draft building costs for such capital works at the former Richard Coates site are estimated to be in the region of c.£2.5m. Feasibility and design works approved to take place will provide confirmation of the building costs and these will be presented to the Council's Cabinet when they make a final decision on this proposal in March 2022.

The cost of the project would be funded from the circa £6.7 gross capital allocation for 2022/23 to support Special Educational Needs. As additional young people with SEMH needs would be able to be educated within Northumberland, it is expected that one of the main benefits of this proposal would be the ability to educate a vulnerable group of young people within or closer to their home communities in appropriate provision. However, it is envisaged that savings to the Council's special educational needs funding streams would also be made in the medium to long-term from reductions in the need for out of county placements and associated transport costs, which at the moment are estimated to cost £10,000 per place per annum more than an in-county place.

If approved, the prescribed alterations outlined in this Statutory Proposal would be implemented in one stage with effect from 1 September 2022. Staff of Atkinson House would begin preparing the current students on roll at the school for the relocation over the months leading up to the relocation of the school should the proposal be approved.

### **Pupil Numbers and Admissions**

#### Atkinson House School

Atkinson House School currently has provision for 80 students and there were 74 on roll as at Autumn 2021. Additional places are required at the school to manage the intake of students entering Year 7 in September 2022 in Northumberland who have SEMH needs.

The age range of the school is 11-16 and currently provides single-sex education to boys only. All students on roll at Atkinson House School have an Education and Health Care Plan.

## Impact on the Community

There were some concerns raised by consultees during the pre-publication (informal) consultation period around the impact of the relocation of Atkinson House School to the former Richard Coates site on the local community, including safeguarding with 3 education settings adjacent to one another, increase in traffic and congestion, anti-social behaviour and the actual need for additional provision for young people with SEMH needs.

Safeguarding and the need for additional provision for students with SEMH needs in Northumberland has been addressed earlier in this notice. With regard to impact on traffic congestion, all current students on roll at Atkinson House School are eligible for home to school transport and would be transported onto and off the school site in organised taxis. Furthermore, the Headteacher of Atkinson House School has already agreed that if the proposal is approved, he would instruct the taxi firms to transport students to enter and leave with students at the top entrance to the site which is not shared with either Richard Coates CE Primary or with Little Tinklers Nursery via the north end of Thornhill Road, thus avoiding the parental traffic arising from the latter settings. This arrangement would ensure that there would be little or no impact on traffic congestion as a result of the relocation of Atkinson House School and would also assist with ameliorating the safeguarding concerns of some consultees.

Given the home to school transport arrangements that would be in place for students attending Atkinson House School, any contact with the local community would be very limited compared to that of students attending other schools in the Ponteland area.

## Travel and Transport

- All students on roll at Atkinson House are eligible for Home to School Transport and this would continue to be the case should this proposal be approved for implementation and the school relocate to the proposed site of the former Richard Coates building.
- There would be some additional home to school transport vehicles (in the form of taxis) as a result of this proposal due to the proposed increase to planned pupil numbers. However, this is not anticipated to represent a significant increase in car use.

## Consultation

Although there is no statutory requirement to carry out a pre-publication (informal) consultation on the proposals set out within this statutory proposal, nonetheless a six week period of informal consultation (all during school term-time) was carried out by the Council from 13 October to and 1 December 2021 inclusive which was in line with the latest DfE Guidelines as set out in *'Making Significant Changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools – statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers October 2018'*.

### Process

A consultation document, including a questionnaire, was drawn up which set out the rationale, background information and implications of the proposal. This document was circulated directly to 2,016 interested parties as set out in a Consultation Register. The document was also published on the Council's website, on Twitter and Facebook and a notice highlighting the consultation displayed in the local library at Ponteland and was therefore available generally to the wider public. In addition an online 'padlet' was set up, which held supporting information including the consultation document and frequently asked questions arising from consultees during the actual consultation period and therefore was a useful substitute for a public-facing event.

In the interests of safety for staff and the wider public, meetings during the consultation period with the following interested parties were held virtually:

Ponteland Town Council  
Atkinson House Governing Body  
Atkinson House Staff  
Little Tinklers Nursery Manager

Operational meetings were also held with members of the Pele Trust, including members of the Richard Coates CE Primary school local Governing Body.

#### Outcomes

Notes of the virtual consultation meetings, and all views and responses received during the consultation period are summarised in the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services Report to Cabinet – Outcomes of consultation on proposals for Atkinson House Special School, 11 January 2022 available on the Northumberland County Council website at

<https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=140&Mid=1400>

#### **Submission of Objections and Comments on Proposals**

Within four weeks after the date of publication of the above proposals (**i.e. by midnight on Thursday 10 February 2022**), any person may submit comments, including support or objections to the proposals by sending their written representations to: **The Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services, County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 2EF, or by email to [educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk)**

Signature

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