



Northumberland
County Council

Proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools

Consultation

13 October-1 December 2021



<mailto:educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk>



Northumberland
County Council

www.northumberland.gov.uk

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Introduction

The Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation has asked Northumberland County Council to consult on a proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools on one site, together with Astley High School. We would like to hear your views on this proposal.

This consultation document sets out the reasons why the Governing Body believes this proposal would bring significant benefits to students. As a parent/carer, member of staff or a member of the community, you may feel you will want to understand what these proposals mean for young people, yourself and your community and therefore this consultation offers you the opportunity to have your say and to submit your views for consideration by the Council before any decisions on whether or not to make the changes are made.

Therefore, I hope that you will take this opportunity to respond to the consultation and I look forward to reading your comments.

Cath McEvoy-Carr

Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services
Northumberland County Council

What are the reasons for the proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle and Whytrig Middle Schools?

Seaton Sluice Middle School forms part of the Seaton Valley Federation of schools, together with Whytrig Middle School and Astley Community High School. The federation has one Executive Headteacher supported by a Head of School at each of the 3 schools, overseen by one Governing Body. Each school has its own budget and has to comply with government regulations, including having separate Ofsted inspections and other managements processes. As a federation, all 3 schools work closely together.

The proposal set out in this document is to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle School and Whytrig Middle School either on the current Whytrig Middle and Astley Community High School site or an alternative site in Seaton Delaval. This proposal has arisen in the light of the project to reprovide new buildings for Astley and Whytrig Middle School, these two schools already being co-located on the high school's site in Seaton Delaval. Although the initial project looked at reproviding new buildings for Astley and Whytrig only, during the course of working up the project the federated Governing Body identified a number of significant educational and financial benefits that could be gained by all students within the Seaton Valley Federation if they were located on one site in the new buildings.

The benefits identified by the federated Governing Body from the amalgamation of the two middle schools include:

- **Students on roll at Seaton Sluice Middle School would be able to benefit from a modern educational environment within new buildings together with their peers who are on roll at Whytrig Middle and Astley High Schools;**
- **Transitions from first to middle and middle to high would be improved by having one middle school for all pupils to feed into at Year 5; students would then move altogether as one cohort into the high school phase;**
- **The new Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP) at the current Whytrig Middle and Astley High Schools site would be able to be more easily accessed by students identified with special needs who are currently on roll at Seaton Sluice Middle School;**
- **Curriculum development would be consistent across the federation;**
- **One system of continuous professional development (CPD) for all staff across the federation would lead to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning;**
- **All students within the federation would benefit from the improved sports facilities at the shared site;**
- **Student support systems across the federation would work more consistently and effectively;**

- **Whilst not the most important reason, there would be financial benefits arising from economies of scale that would mean more funding would be directed towards teaching and learning.**

Overall, the Governing Body believes the benefits identified would ultimately lead to improved outcomes for all students on roll in schools in the Seaton Valley Federation.

At some point in the future, if the proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle and Whytrig Middle Schools is approved, Seaton Sluice Middle School would technically close as a separate entity and Whytrig Middle School would need to expand its size within the new planned buildings in order to accommodate the students who would previously have been educated in the Seaton Sluice Middle building. The Governing Body are keen that while technically the amalgamation of the two middle schools would not create a new school, as the Whytrig school number would need to be retained, there would be a 'new' school feel with a new name for the amalgamated schools, new emblem and new uniform (phased in) that reflects the history and character of both schools.

Therefore, the number of students admitted into Whytrig would also be increased from an annual intake of 90 students to 150 to accommodate students from the amalgamated catchment areas of the two middle schools.

What impact would amalgamating the two middle schools have on staff?

The Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation would need to develop a new staffing structure to bring the staff of both middle schools together and are keen to maximise the number of employment opportunities. Meetings will be held with the staff and their union representatives during the consultation period and the Governing Body will ensure that they comply with the legal requirements for staffing consultation.

Alongside this consultation, an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) is being carried out to assess what impact the proposed changes could have on identified groups; this will include the impact of the proposal on relevant students on roll in Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools, and Astley High School. Other groups may include staff, parents/carers and members of the local community in Seaton Valley. This EIA will also be provided to the Council's Cabinet along with the results of the consultation.

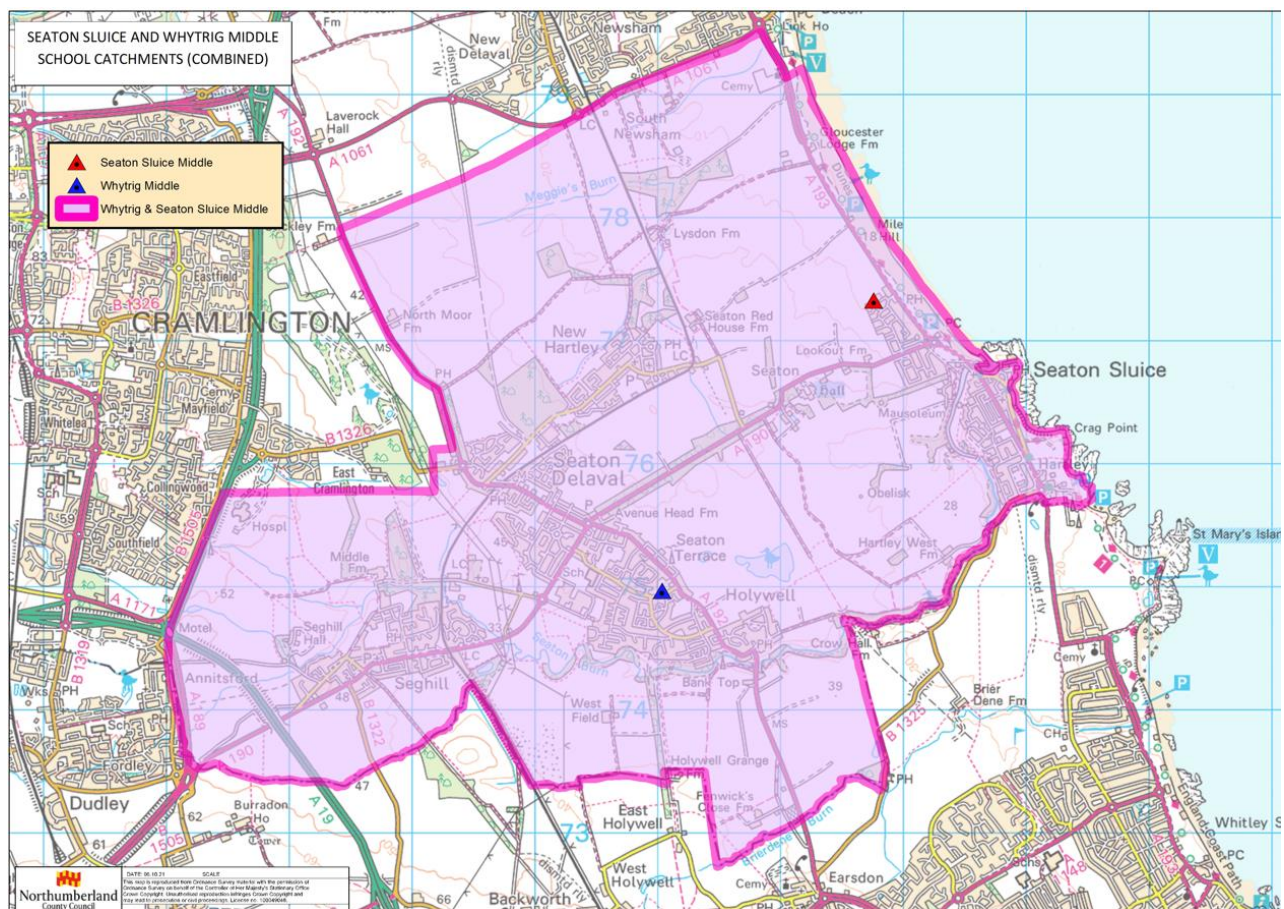
What would happen to Admissions and Catchment areas?

The amalgamation of the two middle schools is not proposed to happen until September 2024, but the decision on whether to approve the amalgamation will be made in March 2022. Therefore, should approval for the amalgamation be given, students would continue to join either Seaton Sluice Middle or Whytrig Middle in Year 5 on their current sites in September

2022 and September 2023, according to parental preference and the Council's admissions policy.

Students joining the Seaton Valley Federation in September 2024 would become the first Year 5 to join the amalgamated middle school. Students already on roll in Years 5, 6 and 7 in Seaton Sluice Middle in August 2024 would transfer to the roll of Whytrig (or as known by its new name) unless parents make a decision to enroll their child at another school.

With regard to catchment areas, should the two middles amalgamate, their catchment areas would be combined to form one large middle phase catchment area, which would mirror the current catchment area of Astley High School. The map below shows the proposed amalgamated catchment area.



What is the proposed timeline of the amalgamation?

If the proposed amalgamation of the two middle schools is approved, the timeline for implementation would be as follows;

31 August 2024

- Seaton Sluice Middle School would close technically.

1 September 2024

- Whytrig Middle School (or under its new name) would increase its Planned Admission number to 150 places and welcome the new Year 5;
- Students on roll in Seaton Sluice Middle in August 2024 in Years 5, 6 and 7 would transfer to the amalgamated school as Years 6,7 and 8;
- Students on roll in Year 8 in Seaton Sluice Middle and Whytrig Middle in August 2024 would transfer to Year 9 in Astley High School as usual.

What impact would there be on the plans for new buildings as a result of this proposal?

As previously stated, the Seaton Valley Federation identified that the benefits of the new buildings planned for Whytrig and Astley could also be shared with students of Seaton Sluice Middle if the two middle schools were amalgamated. If the proposal to amalgamate the two schools is approved, the additional space and facilities needed to accommodate students from Seaton Sluice middle would be reflected in the Outline Business Case (OBC) prepared as part of any project for new schools buildings. The OBC would also need to be approved by the Council.

However, should the Council not approve the amalgamation of the two middle schools, this would not affect the provision of new buildings and facilities for Whytrig and Astley, except the OBC would return to the original plan for reprovision of buildings for those two schools only.

How would Special Educational Needs provision be affected by this proposal?

An additionally resourced provision (ARP) for students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs was constructed at the Astley High / Whytrig Middle School site in 2020. This provision is intended for any students in the local area who can benefit from it, but any students with these additional needs moving from the Seaton Sluice site would of course have the resource on hand with no need to travel off-site.

What would be the implications for Transport and Travel of additional students to the shared site?

Transport for eligible pupils is always arranged on an individual basis in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy.

Should Seaton Sluice Middle amalgamate with Whytrig Middle, some students may become eligible for Home to School Transport as a result of a longer journey to school that meets the distance criteria or where there is no safe walking route. The Council's Home to School Transport Policy is available on its website at [Northumberland County Council Home to School Transport Policy](#). As a result, there may be some financial implications for the Council's Home to School Transport budget should the amalgamation be approved.

With regard to there being more students on one shared site, it is possible that there would be an increase in traffic to the site as a result of lifts to school from parents. The Senior Leadership team of the Seaton Valley Federation have experience in managing traffic to the current shared site in Seaton Delaval and a plan to manage traffic at drop-off and pick-up times would be developed in conjunction with Council officers prior to the opening of the new buildings. However, as a federation there will already be in place Home to school travel plans which encourage walking and cycling to school initiatives.

What would happen to the current Seaton Sluice Middle School building if students and staff relocate to the shared site?

The Seaton Sluice Middle buildings and playing fields are owned by the County Council and should the school amalgamate, in the first instance it would be assessed whether the site could be used by the Council for education purposes.

However, as part of this consultation we are seeking your views on what other possible use could be made of the site, particularly in relation to community use.

Alternative Proposals

The Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation believe that significant benefits could be gained for all students in the federation if the two middle schools amalgamate. However, you may have an alternative suggestion for gaining these benefits that you would like the Council to consider - you can set out your alternative suggestion in the questionnaire at the end of this document.

How can I find out more about this proposal?

Meetings for staff of the Seaton Valley Federation and the Governing Body have been arranged during the consultation period as follows:

Governors only meeting – Wednesday 10 November 2021 at 5:30 p.m.

An invitation to a virtual meeting will be sent to Governors directly ahead of the meeting.

Staff and staff representatives only meeting:

- **Seaton Sluice Middle School – Monday 08 November 2021 at 4:00 p.m.**
- **Whytrig Middle and Astley High Schools – Wednesday 10 November 2021 at 4:00 p.m.**

An invitation to the appropriate virtual meeting will be sent directly to staff ahead of the meeting.

It is the aim of the Council to hold an event during the consultation period where parents/carers and members of the public would have the opportunity to speak to Council officers and the Seaton Valley Federation about this proposal. This event would need to be managed in line with COVID safety measures. When organised, parents and other stakeholders will be contacted directly and the event will be advertised on the Council's website with instructions on how you may attend in COVID safe conditions.

How can I submit my views about this proposal?

A six-week consultation (school weeks) on the proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle and Whytrig Middle Schools began on **Wednesday 13 October and ends at midnight on 1 December 2021.**

The Council and the Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation are keen to hear your views on the proposal, and also to learn if you have any alternative proposals that could bring the same benefits that have been identified in this document.

A link to a questionnaire is attached to the end of this document; 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 proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle and Whytrig Middle Schools consultation (13.10.21 – 01.12.21).

To return your completed 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 before deciding on whether or not to move to the next step, which is statutory consultation.

Thank you for participating in this consultation

The Consultation Response Form

The consultation response form below is a duplicate of the Citizen Space survey so you can think about the questions and your response before you log on [to complete the survey online here](#).

Consultation on the proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools

Overview

The Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation has asked Northumberland County Council to consult on a proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools on one site, together with Astley High School. We would like to hear your views on this proposal.

This consultation document sets out the reasons why the Governing Body believes this proposal would bring significant benefits to students. As a parent/carer, member of staff or a member of the community, you may feel you will want to understand what these proposals mean for young people, yourself and your community and therefore this consultation offers you the opportunity to have your say and to submit your views for consideration by the Council before any decisions on whether or not to make the changes are made.

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Cath McEvoy-Carr

Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services

Northumberland County Council

Introduction

1 What is your name? (Optional)

2 What is your email address? (Optional)

If you enter your email address then you will automatically receive an acknowledgement email when you submit your response.

3 What is your role?

(Required)

Please select only one item

- ☐ Parent of a child at Seaton Sluice Middle School
- ☐ Parent of a child at Whytrig Middle School
- ☐ Governor of the Seaton Valley Federation of Schools
- ☐ Staff member in Seaton Sluice Middle School
- ☐ Staff member in Whytrig Middle School
- ☐ Resident / member of the community living in the area served by Seaton Sluice Middle School
- ☐ Resident / member of the community living in the area served by Whytrig Middle School
- ☐ Member of a Parish Council in the area served by Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools
- ☐ Other

4 If you answered 'other' to question 3 please provide details below

The consultation document referenced is this one.

5 Do you support the proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle and Whytrig Middle Schools on a shared site with Astley High School with effect from the target date of September 2024 in order to gain the benefits outlined by the Governing Body in the consultation document?

(Required)

Please select only one item

☐ Yes

☐ No

6 Please give the reasons for your answer

(Required)

7 If you have an alternative proposal to the amalgamation of the schools that you believe would achieve the same benefits, please outline it below providing as much detail as possible (or state none).

(Required)

8 Do you have any additional comments you wish the Council's Cabinet to consider, for instance do you have a proposal for the use of the current Seaton Sluice Middle building should the proposal to amalgamate the school be approved?

(Required)

Glossary

1. Roles, responsibilities and powers of the various organisations involved in school establishments.

The table below summarises roles/responsibilities and powers.

Organisation	Role / responsibility	Powers
Local Authority- Northumberland County Council.	Northumberland County Council must ensure that there are sufficient good school places for the parents and children who live in Northumberland. They must ensure sensible place planning. They must hold maintained schools to account for their educational and financial performance (but not academies).	The Local Authority can hold consultations. Elected members of the Council Cabinet are the decision-making body and can merge, close, or extend age ranges of maintained schools (but not academies). They cannot establish solely run academy trusts but can be stakeholders.
Regional Schools Commissioner / Department for Education	The RSC must broker the academy conversion of failing schools. They hold Academy trusts to account for both their financial and education performance.	The RSC has powers to instruct the Local Authority to close(discontinue)schools. The RSC is the decision-making body for any changes to Academies including closure or age range extensions.
Academy Trusts	Academy Trusts are accountable for the financial and educational performance of the academy schools within its trust.	Trusts can hold consultation on changes to age range, closure and growth and set up academies (with the permission of the RSC).
Diocese	The Diocese provides support and advice to its schools through consultation. They can hold consultations. They should be consulted and provide a strategic view on behalf of their schools. Hold its schools to account for their educational and financial performance.	The Diocese can provide capital investment for faith schools. They can support or oppose closures or changes. They can establish multi-academy trusts.

As Seaton Sluice Middle and Whytrig Middle Schools are **community schools**, the only involvement will be the Local Authority as no other organisation listed in the table above are involved in the school.

Ofsted Inspection

Seaton Sluice Middle School was inspected by Ofsted in January 2018 and was judged to be good. This was the first short inspection since the 2013 full inspection which judged the school as good too.

[A detailed list of the Ofsted reports can be viewed here.](#)

Whytrig Middle School was inspected by Ofsted in June 2018 and was judged to require improvement.

[A detailed list of the Ofsted reports can be viewed here.](#)