



**Northumberland**  
County Council

# **WEST WOODBURN FIRST SCHOOL**

**INFORMAL CONSULTATION**

**DECEMBER 2019 - JANUARY 2020**



**THE COUNTY COUNCIL IS CARRYING OUT CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE OF WEST WOODBURN FIRST SCHOOL. THESE PROPOSALS INCLUDE WHETHER THE SCHOOL SHOULD CLOSE.**

**WE NEED TO FIND OUT WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT THESE PROPOSALS. WE WOULD ALSO LIKE TO KNOW IF YOU HAVE ANY ALTERNATIVE IDEAS ABOUT THE ISSUES FACING THE SCHOOL.**

## **BACKGROUND**

1. West Woodburn First School is a very small first school within the Haydon Bridge Partnership of schools. In 2013, some schools in the partnership reorganised from the 3-tier system to the primary/secondary system, including Haydon Bridge High School. In 2018, following extensive consultation in the west of the county, the Council approved the reorganisation of the remaining first schools in the North Tyne and Redesdale areas to the primary/secondary system, with the exception of West Woodburn. Following an appeal to the Schools Adjudicator, the Council's decision to close Bellingham Middle School in September 2019 was overturned. This meant that in September 2019, apart from Bellingham Middle and West Woodburn First Schools, the primary/secondary system is the prevalent school organisation system in the Haydon Bridge Partnership.
2. The decision not to reorganise West Woodburn First School at the same time as the other first schools became primaries in September 2019 had been made because at that time, issues with the capacity of the school's staffing body and its budget had arisen. To assist the West Woodburn Governing Body with the management of the school, the headteacher at Otterburn Primary School had been asked to work with West Woodburn to provide additional management capacity and to stabilise the school budget. This assistance had worked and therefore the Governing Bodies of West Woodburn First and Otterburn Primary Schools decided to carry out a consultation on making this arrangements permanent through the establishment of a federation. This proposal was approved by the two Governing Bodies and the River Rede Federation was established in Spring 2019.

3. Having achieved stability at the school and in order to bring it into line with the prevalent primary/secondary system in the partnership, the federated Governing Body asked the Council to consult on a proposal to extend the age range of West Woodburn First School from an age 4 to 9 first school to an age 4 to 11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2020. Cabinet approved formal consultation to take place in Autumn 2019; at that point, there were 8 pupils on the roll at West Woodburn.
4. The formal consultation on the proposal to extend West Woodburn's age range duly took place in September 2019, at which point the school's roll had fallen to 3 pupils. Feedback on the proposal had been received mainly from parents, staff and the federated Governing Body and from the parents of former pupils at the school, as well as a small number of community members.
5. The report to Cabinet indicated that the results of the feedback from the formal consultation have been inconclusive. While the feedback from existing parents and from the staff and federated Governing Body were positive, the views of the parents of former pupils have identified issues that now cause doubt about the continuing viability of a school that does not appear to have the support of the majority of its community. The report on the outcomes of this consultation can be found at

<http://committee.northumberland.gov.uk/Meeting.aspx?MeetID=10761>

## **WHAT ARE THE ISSUES FACING WEST WOODBURN FIRST SCHOOL?**

6. As noted previously, since consultation on extending the age range of West Woodburn First School was approved, the roll at the school has fallen to only 3 pupils. There were 8 pupils on roll at the school at the May 2019 census; while 3 of these pupils were in Year 4 and would have left the school at the end of the summer term in any event to join other schools for Year 5 for September 2019, with the addition of another child joining the school in Reception at the beginning of the new Autumn Term, it was expected that there would be 6

pupils on roll at the school in September 2019. However, parents of three of the children in Year 2 removed their children from the school at the end of the summer term and placed them into Year 3 other local schools in September. The table below shows the numbers of pupils who have been attending the school since September 2015.

<b>West Woodburn First School</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>
Y0	1	0	3	4	5
Y1	0	1	7	4	5
Y2	0	7	5	3	5
Y3	2	4	3	5	5
Y4	0	4	5	4	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>24</b>

7. So far, there have been no applications for a place in Reception class at West Woodburn in September 2020, although GP/birth data indicates under 5 children live in its catchment that would require a place at that time. The majority of parents with first-school age children living in the West Woodburn catchment area now send their children to other local schools. Feedback from some of these parents during the recent consultation indicated they had concerns about the ability of the school to provide a broad and balanced curriculum and the educational experience of their children at the school with such a small cohort.
  
8. However, the federated Governing Body and Executive Headteacher have worked hard to put in place an educational timetable that supports the offer of a broad and balanced curriculum to children on roll at West Woodburn. This includes transporting pupils from West Woodburn to Otterburn Primary School for lessons, activities and lunch for 3 days out of 5. While parents of West Woodburn have indicated they are happy with these arrangements, feedback from former parents and other interested parties indicates they do not feel this is in the best educational interests of children. This creates doubt and concern about the long-term viability of this arrangement.

9. With regard to the financial stability of West Woodburn, the school budget appears to be in a healthy position and indicates that it would remain positive over the course of the next four years as follows:

<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/2021</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23</b>
£51,621	£44,759	£40,321	£52,554
Actual No. on roll = 3	Projected No. on roll = 5 (max)	Projected No. on roll = 10 (max)	Projected No. on roll = 14 (max)

However, these budget projections have been made on the basis of the school becoming a primary and using the assumption that the children already on roll at the school will remain there, with all forecast preschool children living in the West Woodburn catchment area (indicated by GP/birth data) joining the school in future years (latest data indicates there are under 5 children that would require a place in Reception in September 2020 and and in September 2021). Given the feedback received from the parents of former pupils at West Woodburn during the recent consultation on the proposal for the school to become a primary, there is a significant concern about the number of pupils that would actually enrol in the future (as noted in para. 7) and therefore the viability of the school.

10. The establishment of The River Rede Federation has undoubtedly created stability both educationally and financially at West Woodburn at least in the short term, and there is an acknowledgement that small, rural schools can offer a different kind of educational experience to their pupils which parents rightly value. However, there is a point at which the school becomes so small that it impacts on the quality of the educational experience of its pupils as well as its viability.

## **OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF WEST WOODBURN FIRST SCHOOL**

11. The current possible options for the future of West Woodburn First School are:

- **Option A - it continues as a first school i.e. the status quo**
- **Option B - it extends its age range to become a primary school**
- **Option C - the school closes**

However, it should be noted that both Option B and C have already been consulted on in the last 22 months and were both unpopular.

12. Under Option A, should West Woodburn remain as a first school, parents would need to apply for another school for their child for Year 5 and Year 6 as currently. As West Woodburn is in federation with Otterburn Primary School and the prevailing primary/secondary organisation of schools in the Haydon Bridge Partnership, the catchment area of Otterburn Primary School would be extended to cover the current West Woodburn catchment area for Years 5 and 6. This means that pupils living in the West Woodburn catchment area would be eligible for transport to Otterburn in Years 5 and 6, but they would also be eligible for transport to their nearest school, which in most cases is likely to be Bellingham Middle School. In any event, parents would be able to express a preference for any school and if a place was available, it would be allocated. However, if the school is neither the catchment nor nearest school, or if it has been selected on the basis of a preference for a faith school, it is unlikely that eligibility for home to school transport would be met.
13. Option B (become a primary school) was consulted on recently on the basis of the creation of The River Rede Federation between West Woodburn First School and Otterburn Primary School (see reasons why this has necessitated a further consultation earlier in this document).
14. In relation to Option C (closure of West Woodburn) and including Otterburn and Bellingham Primary Schools, there are 4 primary schools between 4.5 and 10 miles from West Woodburn. While West Woodburn is in a federation with

Otterburn Primary School, the majority of parents of recent former pupils of the school have selected to send their children to Bellingham Primary School.

Should this option be approved, the catchment area of West Woodburn would need to be allocated to another school or schools - as part of this consultation we are seeking your views on this issue. Eligibility for Home to School Transport is assessed on an individual basis based on catchment, nearest or nearest faith school.

15. Under all options, Haydon Bridge High School would continue to be the catchment school for Year 7 onwards for pupils living in the West Woodburn catchment area.
16. As part of this consultation, we will be asking for the views of all interested parties on these options, including:
  - A. Parents of pupils enrolled at West Woodburn First and Otterburn Primary
  - B. Parents of pre-school children living in the West Woodburn catchment
  - C. Staff of West Woodburn and their representatives
  - D. Pupils of West Woodburn
  - E. Governors of The River Rede Federation
  - F. Schools in the Haydon Bridge Partnership
  - G. Local Parish Councils
  - H. Local early years care and education providers
17. We will also ask if anyone has any alternative options than those set out above.

## **HOW CAN I MAKE MY VIEWS ABOUT THIS PROPOSAL KNOWN?**

18. The Council would like to receive your views on the 3 options set out in this document for West Woodburn; additionally, we would like you to share with us any alternative suggestions that could resolve the issues facing the school if you have any. There is a questionnaire attached at the end of this document which you can either complete online, send in by email or send it in hard-copy through the post as follows:

**Online:**

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

**Email - [educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk)**

**Post: FAO School Organisation, Children's Services, FREEPOST MP135, County Hall, MORPETH, NE61 1BR**

19. Additionally, there will be separate meetings for staff, Governors and parents of current and potential future pupils of West Woodburn held at the school during the consultation period. Those relevant parents and staff will be notified of the date of those meetings in due course. An event for members of the community and any other interested parties to drop by the school for more information will be held on:

**9 January 2020 - 7.00 pm to 8.00 p.m.**

20. Depending on the outcomes of this consultation and the decision of the Council's Cabinet with regard to next steps, there may be a decision to consult formally on Option B or Option C, or an alternative arising from this consultation.

**The consultation is open until 15 January 2020.**



## CONSULTATION ON OPTIONS FOR WEST WOODBURN FIRST SCHOOL

Your name:

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Are you responding mainly as a (tick one box only):

Parent/carer of child on roll at West Woodburn First School:

Parent of preschool child living in West Woodburn catchment:

Parent/carer of child on roll at Otterburn Primary School:

Member of staff in The River Rede Federation:

Governor of The River Rede Federation:

Parent/carer of child on roll at a school in the Haydon Bridge Partnership:

Member of staff in another school in the Haydon Bridge Partnership:

Resident/ Member of the local community in the North Tyne/Redesdale area:

Local Parish Councillor:

Other:  If willing, please state your interest in this consultation:

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Please now complete the questions overleaf:

**Your views; (continue on a separate sheet where necessary)**

1) **Option A** - Do you believe that it would be in the best educational interests of current and future pupils living in the West Woodburn First School catchment area for the school to remain as a first school within the Haydon Bridge Partnership?

Yes, I agree

No, I do not agree

Please provide the main reasons for your answer:

2) **Option B** - Do you believe that it would be in the best educational interests of current and future pupils living in the West Woodburn First School catchment area for the school to become a primary school (i.e. extend its age range from 4 to 9 to 4 to 11) within the Haydon Bridge Partnership?

Yes, I agree

No, I do not agree

Please provide the main reasons for your answer:

3) **Option C** - Do you believe that it would be in the best educational interests of current and future pupils living in the West Woodburn catchment area for the school to close?

Yes, I agree

No, I do not agree

Please provide the main reasons for your answer:

- 4) If a proposal to close West Woodburn was published, please state below to which school or schools you think its catchment area should be allocated?

- 5) Do you have an alternative option for West Woodburn First School that you believe could resolve the issues raised in this document?

Please provide the main reasons for your answer:

### **SUBMITTING YOUR RESPONSE FORM:**

There are three ways that you can submit your response form;

- 1) You can use the electronic form on the Council's website at

**<http://northumberland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations>**

- 2) You can return this form attached to an email

**[educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk)**

- 3) You can return your Response Form in hard copy to:

**FAO School Organisation, Children's Services, FREEPOST MP135,  
County Hall, MORPETH, NE61 1BR**

**The consultation is open until 15 January 2020.**

**Thank you for responding to this consultation.**