Northumberland County Council

Education Consultations <educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk>

Proposed Closure of Bellingham Middle School

1 message

Sandy <sandybickerton@btinternet.com> 3 June 2018 at 16:19
To: Educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk

Hi,

Although my children are now both at high school, they previously attended Bellingham Middle School.

I am of the opinion that a middle school in this rural area is beneficial for the children, retaining close ties with their local area, and reducing the need for long periods of travel on unsupervised transport, and so would like to object to its proposed closure.

Additionally, I would like to point out, that it is not too many years since we all voted to retain three tier education in Northumberland, but somehow all over the county we seem to be losing this option.

Whilst I can see that this proposal is being put forward in an attempt to prevent the closure of a number of our local rural first schools, by enabling them to get extra funding for the extra 2 years of pupils they will have access to, I feel that it is a step too far, and removes the current choices about education that many parents in this area have access to. Parents who wish to find alternative middle or high school provision will no longer have easy access to a choice of schools, as the alternative schools in Hexham are remaining three tier, and access to them at the various ages will become problematic with a number of school changes perhaps forced on the pupils to enable them to have a choice. They will have to decide (and get a place) in Hexham at year 5 if they do not wish to transition, however temporarily, to Haydon Bridge.

Is this just a way of getting extra pupil numbers funding to Haydon Bridge? It's supposed to be about education, not politics or funding.

Currently Bellingham Middle School has good facilities for the "next step" of education, including science labs, workshop, library and cookery facilities. It would be quite expensive to replicate all of these facilities for years 5 and 6 in all of the feeder schools, and a backwards step for the children if they did not get access to these extended facilities until year 7. This also applies to the teaching, where currently there is a noticeable change in the level and style of children as children enter the Middle School, which would be lost of they stayed at a local primary – it is unlikely that these new primaries will be taking on extra higher age teachers, as they will be trying to balance their budget with the current staff and the odd extra children in years 5 and 6 that they keep on.

Out here, travel is a significant factor in a high school child's day. For Bellingham children this currently kicks in at year 9, and for outlying children at year 5. Whist the proposal would reduce travel for a couple of years for outlying children, it would be outweighed by many more miles being travelled from year 7. From Kielder this is well over 2 hours a day. Bellingham children would also have to start travelling from year 7 instead of year 9. Whilst children from year 9 onwards can generally be well behaved on school transport, this seems to be difficult for younger children, and I feel that the bullying / bad behaviour that can occur amongst younger children on unsupervised buses (the current schools 680 public service being a case in point) would prove problematic.

Both my children have experienced bullying at school, and in the village, and both chose to go to school in Hexham mainly to avoid travelling on buses with certain children to Haydon Bridge. I cannot imagine what our lives would have been like should they have been forced into doing this for years 7 and 8. We found that the middle school was very

helpful with steps to prevent bullying, which would have been more difficult to implement and follow up had the school not been “here”, and impossible to prevent on the bus.

Kids do grow up suddenly when they move up to high school, and the retention of three tier education helps to slow this down, at this time when we now see the benefit of children being children for longer. Also, the local links that a middle school can bring are good for the community as a whole. Children **gradually** extend their community by gaining new friends from the local villages in year 5. The transition from Kielder year 6 to Haydon Bridge year 7 along with the increased travel would be quite horrendous.

Middle school is a stepping stone for rural children, without which the overall leap may well prove too far.

I hope that you will take my comments into consideration, however I do not want them to subsequently be used to close our outlying first schools either, which are needed to retain children in their very local community too for a few years. Is there not a way that we can retain our first and middle schools locally, but share out the funding a bit between them **here** to ensure that they all remain viable here. Or accept that rural education needs extra funding in order that the children do not miss out. We don’t all have a choice about where we live.

Many thanks,

Sandy

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