Dear Northumberland County Council Cabinet Member,

I am sending this letter to register my protest and that of my wife, at the atrocious proposal to close Bellingham Middle School (BMS).

Whilst we are relieved that other small rural schools would be retained, the closure of BMS we believe will do great damage to the local communities of North Tynedale and Redesdale. Worse still, it shall blight the education of many a child and bring anguish to their hard working parents, who only want the best for their children.

Our concerns, which we believe the local education committee appear to have paid scant regard to, are as follows:

- NCC have failed to demonstrate sufficiently that they have undertaken a thorough risk assessment of the proposed closure of BMS, both in terms of education needs and health and safety. Such an assessment should be made available to all parents effected by the proposal, in sufficient time to pass comment, prior to committee consideration.

- The present three-tier education system, by default, stimulates growing pupil independence and interaction commensurate with their age, whilst a two-tier system does not.

- NCC have not given sufficient consideration to the impact that transition from a rural Primary School of 20-25 children to a town Secondary School of 600-900 or more, shall have on a children of 11-13 years of age. Smaller rural schools, especially were classes are a mixture of year groups, cannot offer the same challenges that children of between the ages of 9-11 years need, like a middle school can for that next small step towards teenage development. Middle schools are perfect at offering that whilst recognising the need to provide a safe & watchful environment.

- The closure of BMS shall see children as young as eleven undertake daily 2-3hour round trips to school. Significantly increasing the risk of making road journeys during winter, with associated increased absence during bad weather. Journey times will impact on a child's education from increased tiredness, and time lost from evening study and homework. Children will miss out on after school clubs & activities.

- Currently BMS provides dedicated rooms for IT, Woodwork, Science, Maths, etc. Whilst the new proposed 'Primary' schools in rural communities could only provide limited, increased facilities at very great expense after disruptive refurbishment projects. Expense that would be better spent on maintaining BMS. Most small rural schools see children taught all subjects in the same classroom, which surely this puts them at a disadvantage in comparison to a middle school environment.

- If Hexham families are to be permitted to enjoy a three-tier education system, then NCC have a duty to provide the same opportunity to the families of the county's rural communities. Whilst Hexham parents have retained what they wanted, NCC have failed to provide a suitable alternative to parents in North Tynedale and Redesdale, who do want their children to go through a three-tier system. Currently local families do not have a choice - if parents want their child to attend a middle school in Hexham then they either have to fund transport themselves, potentially give up work or accept unsuitable working arrangements to transport their children

to & from school. If BMS closes there is no choice at all for parents.

- NCC have failed to provide detailed proposals of how they will ensure that BMS children's education shall not suffer, as teachers leave BMS for the sake of their own futures, during the intervening year until closure.

Quite simply, it comes down to one thing - our son enjoys so much being at BMS. Why jeapardise our child's future just so that NCC may cover over their own inadequacies in education management over the last 6-8 years? It feels as if we are all suffering as a direct consquence of the Goverments lamentable decision to back academies - academies such as Bright Tribe.

Our deepest regret, is that so many people and teachers we've spoken too, already believe that it is a 'done deal' and the closure of BMS is 'cast in stone'. We would be forever grateful for our son's education, if you sought not to make it so.

Yours faithfully,

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