Your Views

ABOUT YOU

Governing Body of: OTTERBURN FIRST SCHOOL

As a governing body our views on the changes needed in the west of the county are unanimous in relation to all aspects of the consultation being undertaken.

For several years the governing body has had a long term vision for Otterburn to become a primary school.

The situation at Bellingham Middle school has only strengthened these views as many of our parents are concerned about what they describe as 'poor quality education and opportunities'. More and more of our parents are expressing a wish to go to the Ponteland schools. We feel that this plays a key role in why a proportion of children in the Otterburn catchment attend Cambo and Belsay schools. Parents see this as securing a way in to the Ponteland partnership.

The governing body understanding that historically Otterburn's catchment fell under the Ponteland catchment and not Hayden Bridge and would like confirmation as to why this was changed and to discuss the pros and cons of reversing this as part of this consultation process.

YOUR VIEWS (continued)

1) How do you think surplus places can be reduced in schools in Haydon Bridge and Hexham Partnerships? *Please note your thoughts and ideas below (use a separate sheet if necessary).*

Due to the current situation with Hayden Bridge High School in terms of the vast drop in pupil numbers, the extensive deficit budget and the capital expenditure needed on the modernisation of the premises the governing body would support the closure of the school.

It is felt that the situation has developed beyond the point of a viable return. Surely if it was feasible to keep the school open and work towards achieving the standards that there should have been originally then the Department for Education would have found a suitable sponsor who was willing and able to invest. As parents themselves, the governing body find it difficult to imagine how a school with such a poor reputation could manage to engage the support of parents.

It is the view of the governing body that a new school under the two tier system should be put in place with the most obvious and sensible solution being with the Hadrian Learning Trust. Plans could therefore be put in place to make this a school which has a realistic sensible number of places, with buildings that are fit for purpose and provide our children and young adults the opportunities that they deserve. This would involve capital investment from NCC and in the governors opinion would be the best option. If a two tier system is to be implemented in the west then all schools who extend their age range should have equal opportunities to access capital finances.

Otterburn's governing body feel that there are a certain number of smaller schools which should close. These schools are in close proximity to other more viable schools. In the governor's opinion, from the evidence provided by NCC and their knowledge of the local area and schools, the closures should include West Woodburn and Greenhaugh.

West Woodburn is 5.8 miles from Otterburn. The West Woodburn school building is not entirely fit for purpose and does not appear to have grounds to expand. The pupil numbers here would be too small to make a primary school viable under the two tier system. The closure of this school would then help to build the pupil role at Otterburn and possibly Bellingham First. West Woodburn's budget can surely not be sustained as first school let alone a primary.

The governing body are also of the opinion that Bellingham Middle, which appears to also be significantly undersubscribed, should close to enable Bellingham First to become a Primary with the children from Greenhaugh and possibly Kielder forming part of the Bellingham catchment area. Although this means more transport costs it must surely be more financially viable in comparison to the cost of running these small schools. According to Guy Opperman who visited Otterburn recently this decision has already been made for the middle school to close yet this information seems not to have been shared during this process by any member of staff or governor from Bellingham.

Now that Hayden Bridge has no facility for pupils to board the actual travelling in time and distance from Otterburn First School is barely different. However, Ponteland is actually a shorter travelling distance and a quicker, safer route.

OFS to HBHS 27.4 miles 43 mins
OFS to HMS 27.1 miles 38mins
OFS to QEHS 29.4 miles 39 mins
OFS to Pont Middle 24.4 miles 33 mins

Otterburn would thrive as a primary school with a growing number on role to enable it to be financially viable. According to the Primary Commissioner 55 pupils are around the number on role necessary to

support this. From the data provided by NCC you can see that even without possible children from West Woodburn the school is predicted to achieve this with years 5 and 6.

Otterburn's predicted numbers are:

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Nursery	8	10	8	
Reception	5	8	10	8
Year 1	7	5	7	8
Year 2	9	7	5	7
Year 3	9	9	7	5
Year 4	7	9	9	7
Year 5		7	9	9
Year 6			7	9
TOTAL	37	45	54	53

Although Otterburn currently loses children to Cambo and Belsay the governors feel quite strongly that this would not be the case if:

1) the education system in the west was of a higher standard;
2) Hexham's results are more in line with Ponteland so therefore parents would be happier for their children to attend a Hexham school rather than Hayden Bridge in its current state;
3) Otterburn were able to provide an extended day. This would be a far more viable option as a primary school.

2) Will the current structure of schools in the west of the county remain financially and educationally viable for the next 25 years? *Please note your thoughts and ideas below (use a separate sheet if necessary).*

The current structure of schools in the west is not financially viable nor is it educationally viable.

Schools need to be filled closer to their PAN to ensure that budgets stay out of deficit. Schools need to restructure into the two tier system to reduce the surplus places.

Documentation shared by NCC as part of this process shows Otterburn as predicting a deficit budget of £64,000 by 2021. The governing body strongly dispute this. Even if Otterburn were to remain a first school that deficit is inaccurate and misleading. This information does not allow for schools to explain, nor is it necessarily appropriate to, for why the financial situation is currently not quite as positive as it could be. Senior leadership long term sickness can have a huge impact on the budget.

The governing body is very proactive in ensuring that the budget is managed efficiently and this includes looking at necessary staffing restructures. Whilst the governing body understanding that the new funding formula is heavily weighted towards pupil numbers it is believed that this may have a positive impact on the budget. If Otterburn were to move to the Ponteland catchment then pupils number are also likely to increase further or at least have a clearer option to attend the Ponteland schools if parents wished this. As they themselves are forming a MAT it is currently unknown to us if there admission policy will change or not.

The governing body totally understand that the local authority have a duty to ensure that there is sufficient space for every child to be educated in a good school but find it incredibly difficult to understand how it is beneficial for the local authority to allow any school get in such financial difficulty over such an extensive period of time. Whilst the situation with Bright Tribe has not helped surely they are not entirely responsible for such a vast deficit. Where is the accountability for deficit budgets? What is the point of deficit budgets if no action is taken to rectify this at a much earlier stage? We do not believe that having a blame culture will help the current situation but more that the local authority should be ensuring that this does not happen again.

3) Should schools in the west of the county receive additional capital investment and if so, how should this be invested? *Please note your thoughts and ideas below (use a separate sheet if necessary).*

We understand from the consultation process so far that there will be some funding to enable more sustainable structures are put in place. The governing body feel that those schools who are altering age ranges should be entitled to sufficient funding for this to happen effectively so that the education of pupils is enhanced and not hindered.

There needs to be transparency on how this money is spent. If funds are available to an academy, such as the Hadrian Trust, there should be assurances in relationship to the ownership of the buildings etc. With the constant pressures put on budgets governors and trusts need to ensure that a constructive maintenance plan is developed to ensure that the buildings are cared for and last the duration. No school should be allowed to get in to such disrepair that it is 'falling down'.

4)	Do colleagues see any merit in the establishment of a local authority Multi-academy trust and would your school want to join such an entity? *Please note your thoughts and ideas below (use a separate sheet if necessary).*

The governing body does feel that for some schools a MAT is a good option. If the local authority were able to facilitate this to the benefit of schools and in particularly secondary schools then surely this has to be a positive move forward.

However, it is a well-known fact that this is not the case for small schools. The Wise Academy informed the Hayden Bridge partnership of this as part of this consultation process. A small school has to be financially viable in its own right.

He governing body therefore feels that unless something changes to support small rural schools being part of this system it would not be of benefit to Otterburn.

5) If you have any other ideas or proposals that do not fit with the questions above please attach them as additions to this document.

PLEASE RETURN THIS REPONSE FORM AND ANY OTHER COMMENTS TO:
FAO Lorraine Fife
Children's Services
FREEPOST MP135
County Hall
Morpeth
NE61 1BR

Or send your response electronically to:
EMAIL: educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk