Northumberland County Council

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Proposed Closure Of Bellingham Middle School

1 message

Bellingham Parish Clerk <bellinghamparishclerk@outlook.com> 7 June 2018 at 23:35
To: "educationconsultations@northumberland.gov.uk" <educationconsultations@northumberland.gov.uk>, Jacqui Pearson <jacqui.pearson@northumberland.gov.uk>, "john.riddle@northumberland.gov.uk" <john.riddle@northumberland.gov.uk>, "wayne.daley@northumberland.gov.uk" <wayne.daley@northumberland.gov.uk>

Dear Sirs,

I am writing to put forward our parishes objections to the proposed closure of Bellingham Middle School. We appreciate that a solution for the situation that has regrettably developed with regard to Haydon Bridge High School is needed however the children and staff of Bellingham Middle School and our parishioners should not suffer because of this.

Three tier model
The Parish Council feels that the 3-tier system is the best model for education in the rural and remote communities of the North Tyne. The three tier system provides an essential stepping stone for children coming from tiny rural schools with at best a dozen in their year group (sometimes being the only child in a their year group) before going into huge high school year groups of 120 or 306. Parents have described the transition from first schools into Bellingham middle as 'flawless' due to the continuous sharing and joined up activities from reception through to yr5 and beyond. The catchment for Haydon Bridge Partnership is by far more rural than that of Hexham Partnership; one of the reasons cited in consultation was that the three tier model fitted with the rural nature of the Hexham catchment.
Keeping Bellingham Middle open will not mean the Haydon Bridge partnership 'reverting back to 3 tier' - Haltwhistle middle and its feeder first schools still feed into Haydon Bridge high, it is only the Allendale branch that are currently 2 tier after the closure of their middle school.

Travel Distances
It is noted that with the proposal to turn the first schools into primary children get to travel shorter distances to their village schools for 2 years more, However this is at the price of then having to travel a massive distance at the young age of 11. In the case of our parishioners an hour each way but their peers it could mean a commute of 3 hours daily as the boarding facilities have closed.
Young children should not have to travel long distances; families move into rural communities - send their children to local schools to develop roots within the community and maintaining those communities is a top priority, all the local schools including Bellingham middle are well supported by the wider community - Councillor John Riddle suggested that with regard to the travel, the routing of school buses needed to be revisited, however due to the rurality of the area, there are limited roads suitable for buses transporting children.

Economy
The impact on our rural communities has not been considered in the event of the school closure, the parish believes that the closure of any local rural schools would be make communities vulnerable due to impact on employment, housing etc. Without suitable education facilities young families will not move into the village (and some may move out) thus impacting the whole local area.
E.g. a parishioner has had direct feedback from prospective house buyer that they are now looking elsewhere due to the proposed closure of Bellingham Middle School, as the prospect of their children travelling long distances at a younger age.

Kind Regards
Bellingham Parish Council