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Proposed Closure of Bellingham Middle School

Dear Northumberland County

I am contacting you regarding the proposed closure of Bellingham Middle School. Last week I opened up my social media account to see the parents of Hexham schools congratulating themselves on successfully campaigning to keep their first schools open, however further down I read in disbelief that the proposal is to close Bellingham Middle School.

I and many other parents and staff did not see this coming. I have tried throughout this campaign to remain open minded and convinced myself that change is not always a bad thing; I had prepared myself for the small first schools closing and merging in to a larger first school. I did see this as a money saving move. I simply cannot see how changing the small first schools in to primaries is a viable option, except to facilitate HBHS.

I feel the children who will remain at these schools will be at a huge disadvantage compared to the likes of children who attend larger primary schools with onsite facilities such as Science labs, specialist language teachers, gymnasium and sporting facilities options to take part in team sports etc. Not only will their education be affected but also their social development too. Some of these small first schools only have single figure year groups. I know after talking to someone who attended Kielder First School she said she would have felt totally isolated staying on another two years. There was only two in her year and she said she was desperate to move on to middle school and meet new people. Yet the children are going to be expected to move out of their bubble in primary school to a high school which could potentially hold 720 pupils, this is why we should have middle schools, a natural transition for our country children. The closure of Bellingham Middle School could see children spend between 2 to 3 hours per day travelling to and from school. This time could be better spent in after school clubs, doing homework, spending time with their families and friends. This is time these children will miss out on, which will be a disadvantage to them compared to other children their age who are able to live closer to their schools. I can't see new families with children choosing to come and live up here.

My daughter is in year 7 at Bellingham Middle school, she is a quiet child who is more comfortable in smaller groups. When she arrived at Bellingham she would rather sit at the back of the class and let everyone else do the talking for her, the teachers noticed this and have spent time and worked closely with my daughter to encourage her confidence. I feel that my daughter has now reached a real milestone in her education, she now has the confidence to speak in front of her class, will answer questions without being prompted. This is all thanks to those teachers who recognised her capabilities and spent the time working with her. She is doing really well at school, and settled and most of all really happy. This is the time that teachers in larger schools simply do not have. If my

daughter was in a larger school with larger classes these teachers simply would not have the time to spend gaining her confidence. I think she would go through school simply getting by and not achieving what she is capable of.

I would like to point out that the admission to Bellingham Middle School for 2018 is in fact 24 children.

With the closure of Bellingham Middle school looming over us, it is a difficult time both as a parent and as a teacher at Bellingham. Next year may see many teachers leaving, as they also need security. Where will that leave the children who are at the school? Parents are uncertain of what the future holds for their children and it is a very unsettling time for all involved.

I and many other parents feel that NCC are letting the children of the North Tyne and Redesdale down, especially now I feel that NCC have allowed the Hexham partnership schools to remain three tier and expect the North Tyne and Redesdale area become two tier for no good reason as far as I can see. Yet again the most rural areas are being hit the hardest.

I hope you can understand why I feel that the two tier system simply is not a viable option in The North Tyne and Redesdale area.

Regards

Lorraine Bell and Ian Savage

3rd May 2018