Northumberland County Council

Jacqui Pearson
<jacqui.pearson@northumberland.gov.uk>

Fwd: Proposed Closure of Bellingham Middle School

1 message

Lorraine Fife <lorraine.fife@northumberland.gov.uk> 27 April 2018 at 13:55
To: Jacqui Pearson <jacqui.pearson@northumberland.gov.uk>

HI Jacqui

Can you draft a response to below along same lines as the Lorraine Bell response.

Thanks

Lorraine

---------- Forwarded message ----------
From: **Andy Johnson GCSX** <andy.johnson@northumberland.gov.uk>
Date: 27 April 2018 at 12:32
Subject: Fwd: Proposed Closure of Bellingham Middle School
To: "Aviston, Sue" <Sue.Aviston@northumberland.gov.uk>, Lorraine Fife <Lorraine.Fife@northumberland.gov.uk>

Fyi

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: Karen & Carl Hamilton <curlewridsdale@yahoo.co.uk>
Date: Fri, 27 Apr 2018, 12:07
Subject: Proposed Closure of Bellingham Middle School
To: Peter.Jackson@northumberland.gov.uk <Peter.Jackson@northumberland.gov.uk>, Wayne.Daley@northumberland.gov.uk <Wayne.Daley@northumberland.gov.uk>, Nick.Oliver@northumberland.gov.uk <Nick.Oliver@northumberland.gov.uk>, Richard.Wearmouth@northumberland.gov.uk <Richard.Wearmouth@northumberland.gov.uk>, Glen.Sanderson@northumberland.gov.uk <Glen.Sanderson@northumberland.gov.uk>, John.Riddle@northumberland.gov.uk <John.Riddle@northumberland.gov.uk>, Cath.Homer@northumberland.gov.uk

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Cc: Scott.Dickinson@northumberland.gov.uk <Scott.Dickinson@northumberland.gov.uk>, andy.johnson@northumberland.gov.uk <andy.johnson@northumberland.gov.uk>, cath.mcevoy@northumberland.gov.uk <cath.mcevoy@northumberland.gov.uk>, guy.opperman.mp@parliament.uk <guy.opperman.mp@parliament.uk>, teamoppy@gmail.com <teamoppy@gmail.com>, rsc.north@education.gov.uk <rsc.north@education.gov.uk>, helen.samuels@bellinghampartnership.uk <helen.samuels@bellinghampartnership.uk>

Dear Northumberland County Council Cabinet Member,

For information this email has also been copied to the MP for Hexham, the Regional Schools Commissioner, the education spokesperson for the NCC Labour group, the NCC Director of Education, the NCC Executive Director of Children's Services, and the acting Head Teacher of Bellingham Middle School.

I write to express my great concern, dismay and objection to certain elements of the new proposal for education in the west of Northumberland.

I am very pleased that the proposal allows for the retention of small schools in the hearts of their local communities and I very much welcome that news.

The proposed closure of Bellingham Middle School however, is a disaster for those children, families and the wider communities living in North Tynedale and Redesdale.

The three-tier system of education is the only model which takes into account the rurality and remoteness of these areas and mitigates the impacts of long journeys to school for as long as possible. The closure of Bellingham Middle School will see children as young as eleven, subject to daily journeys of between two and three hours for the round trip to school in Haydon Bridge. This move will expose young children to needless extra risk in making long bus journeys, a risk which is increased significantly throughout

the winter months when travel is more dangerous due to icy roads, it will impact upon their education and indeed will lead to them missing school on occasions due to severe weather.

This time spent in travel on the bus could be much better spent in completing homework, by taking part in after school clubs and activities and in developing social capital by interaction with friends etc. It is bad enough that these journey times are necessary at age 13 to access high school education but it is completely unacceptable to impose these on children aged eleven and twelve when this does not need to happen. The new proposal appears to display a complete lack of understanding of these vitally important issues, issues which will have a direct and detrimental impact on young children's lives.

The impact of journey times can not be overstated. May I remind you that the negative impact of long daily travel times was thought to be so great that, until recently, it was felt necessary by NCC to provide boarding facilities at Haydon Bridge to mitigate the impact. Now however, a short time after the boarding facilities have closed, this proposal feels it acceptable to impose these daily journeys on eleven and twelve-year-old children. It is not.

This proposal could also have a severe impact on the sustainability of the remote communities in this area as families choose to move out to be closer to education or choose not to move here in the first place. This would see the scant local services we have eroded even further and the possible future closure of the small schools as the number of younger members of our rural populations with families dwindle and are not replenished.

The new proposal seeks to maintain the three-tier system in Hexham and whilst I applaud that NCC have listened to the wishes of that cohort of electors to maintain the present system there, I feel, for the reasons outlined above, that it is even more important that the three-tier system is maintained in the remote, rural areas of the west and that NCC have a moral duty to afford the people of North Tynedale and Redesdale the same courtesy and equal rights

by maintaining this system in this area, which needs it most, and keeping Bellingham Middle School open.

As a qualified teacher and a parent of a child currently in Year 5 at Bellingham Middle School (BMS), I cannot speak highly enough about the education and care provided by BMS. I appreciate that at the last OfSted inspection the school was rated as Requires Improvement, however, I feel that in the two terms my daughter has now been a pupil at BMS, the school has been excellent in meeting her needs educationally where she is both supported and challenged and pastorally where the systems in place have also been excellent. It has been a pleasure to watch her confidence grow and see her academic achievements develop and we are grateful for all that BMS have done. Bellingham Middle School is a very good school which, in my experience, cares a great deal, has the wellbeing of pupils at its core and has aspirations for the best possible educational outcomes for all.

The report on the outcomes of the consultation suggests that BMS has a Pupil Admission Number of sixty, however only 12 (from a possible cohort of how many I could not find in the report) have opted to attend in Year 5 from September 2018. I think that this unsurprising and is largely due to the uncertainty over BMS's future which the present situation has manufactured. I feel that the school would have a much higher Year 5 intake if it's future was not in doubt.

If the new proposal were to be adopted and BMS was to close in September 2019, I have great concern for the quality of education the children would receive in the intervening year. The schools impending closure will inevitably and understandably lead to staff seeking employment elsewhere and they can not be blamed for that, however, it will lead to much disruption for the children as staff begin to leave and a likely long list of ever changing supply teachers. This inevitable consequence, overlooked in the report, hardly ensures the best educational experience or outcomes for a whole cohort of children, in fact it does the opposite, thus further

penalising and disenfranchising them. These children, staff and communities deserve better and should not be made to suffer and become further victims of the attempted academisation of Haydon Bridge High School and the mess which education in this area has been allowed to get into.

Much has been made of the fact that people's views have been listened to and taken into account in the development of this new proposal, however, this is not entirely factual as it seems the views of many of the people in North Tynedale and Redesdale who have the same wishes as their Hexham counterparts, to see the maintenance of the three tier system, have been roundly ignored or disregarded.

I urge you please to also listen to the people of North Tynedale and Redesdale and afford them rights which are fair and equal to their Hexham counterparts by maintaining Bellingham Middle School and the three-tier system in this most rural and remote part of Northumberland, as the only system which truly puts the needs and well-being of the child first and doesn't expose them to lengthy journeys, unnecessary risk and disruption at ages eleven and twelve.

Many thanks in anticipation of your understanding and your time and attention to this matter.

Yours faithfully,

Carl Hamilton.

To: NCC Cabinet Members
Peter Jackson
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CC: MP
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CC: Regional Schools Commissioner (North)
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