6th June 2018

SENT EMAIL ONLY
The Executive Director of Children's Services
Northumberland County Council
County Hall
Morpeth
Northumberland
NE61 2EF

Dear County Council Cabinet Members,

Re: The proposed closure of Bellingham Middle School

We are writing to stress our objection, dismay and great concern over the proposed closure of Bellingham Middle School (BMS) and for Bellingham First School (BFS) to be made Primary.

We propose you listen to the parents in the Haydon Bridge Partnership, the same way you listened to the parents of the Hexham Partnership. This proposal will affect our children a great deal more than the Hexham Partnership children. Don't treat us any different.

We are parents of two young children. Our youngest aged 6, currently in Year 1 and our eldest, aged 8 currently in Year 4 at Bellingham First School. Our eldest child along with fellow class mates in BFS and other First Schools in the area, are the ones who will be mostly affected by this ridiculously outrageous proposal. To say she is worried and extremely anxious about the whole proposal is an understatement. She does not want to travel to HBHS from the age of 11, and we do not want her to!

The current three-tier system in place, takes into account the remote nature of the rural community in which the school is situated. It lets children grow and develop close to home for as long as possible. The children can walk or bike to school which takes them a maximum time of around 20 minutes for children living in Bellingham. The journey to BMS for children in the surrounding villages, for example Byrness, which is one of the villages furthest away, currently takes them an hour on a coach. They leave Byrness at 07:50am which gets them to BMS just in time. They arrive back home at 16:30pm. Already, a long enough day in our opinion for a child of such a young age. They currently do this from Year 5, age 9 to Year 8, age 12.

If the proposal to close BMS goes ahead and BFS is made primary, these Children from the age of 11 will be facing travel times of 2 hours or more <u>each way per day</u> to Haydon Bridge High School (HBHS). They would need to leave at the latest time of 06:45am and would return home at approximately 18:00pm. They'd be away from home for nearly 12 hours per day and be stuck on a coach for potentially a minimum of 20 hours per week! This is unacceptable! Not to mention the copious amount of homework they'd be expected to do. Please tell us when they would be expected to do this?
We can already picture the amount of anxious children already too tired to complete their homework and too tired to get out of bed in a morning to face the dreaded day ahead of them. Just thinking about it is mentally draining, never mind having to be the one experiencing it.

This leads us to our concerns over age differences. Can you guarantee a chaperone to be on this journey looking after our children of such a young age? As a former HBHS pupil who travelled to school via coach from Year 9, age 12, I remember feeling extremely intimidated by the older children on the coach. Bad language was shouted throughout the journey, bullies would use it as an opportunity to strike and the smokers didn't care who objected. The bus driver can only do so much and they certainly can't look after a coach full of noisy and disruptive children as well as drive them to school safely. There is a huge difference between a 9 and a 12 year old.
Keeping them in a three-tier school protects them from this and encourages them to grow up at a slow and steady pace without the need of peer-pressure getting in the way. They're slowly able to develop their own independence. In our opinion, they keep a hold of their youth for longer. They're able to spend more time at home with their

families. They're able to do homework in a reasonable timeframe and attend after school clubs if desired. Something they won't be able to do in a two-tier school!

The parents of the North Tyne Valley and The Haydon Bridge Partnership invite you, employees and Councillors of Northumberland County Council to travel, by coach, to Haydon Bridge High School from Byrness or Kielder; you choose; to experience first-hand what it would be like for these young children on a daily basis. Instead of pen pushing, really get out of the office and experience it.

A question which has passed many parents mouths – *Would you want your child to go through this on a daily basis, 5 days per week?* A genuine, honest answer to this question would really, really be appreciated.

A primary school does not provide specialist education to the children like a middle school does. BMS has a design technology room, a cookery room, an IT suit, a gym, a science lab. To teach in these areas alone, you need to be a specialist teacher and BMS have this. Why take it away?

Not only have each and every member of the dedicated and selfless staff of BMS made their love and dedication for all children clear on numerous occasions, they have never made this proposal about themselves. They have and are still putting the children first. Bearing in mind their livelihood and employment is at great threat. What greater role models could you ask for?

Lastly, I would like to mention the affect closing BMS would have on the economy of the local area. A fellow parent has already been directly informed by the estate agents, that the reason her 4 bedroom family home has not been sold yet is due to the uncertainty of BMS. Young families will simply not move to the area.

We beg you, don't close our Middle School. Keep the current three-tier system. The children and the community need it. You say the decision is down to what the parent's want, so prove this to us! Not one parent or community member I have spoken to thinks this is a good idea.

Yours faithfully,

Kathryn Scott & Andrew Archer

Sent email only to: educationconsultations@northumberland.gov.uk, jacqui.pearson@northumberland.gov.uk, wayne.daley@northumberland.gov.uk, john.riddle@northumberland.gov.uk