

CABINET

Date: 12 December 2017

Outcomes of Consultation on Proposals for Education in Belford

Report of Andrew Johnson, Interim Director of Children's Services

Cabinet Member: Councillor Wayne Daley, Children's Services

Report prepared by Andrew Johnson, Interim DCS

Purpose of report

This report sets out the results and analysis of the informal consultation process undertaken by the Council on the proposal to reorganise the system of education in Belford. This consultation was carried out at the request of the Governing Bodies of St Mary's CE Middle School, Belford and Belford First School. The report also includes a request to Cabinet to permit the publication of a Statutory Proposal.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Note the analysis of the consultation, which took place between 13 September and 1 November 2017. Cabinet should further note this has led Council officers to recommend an education model in Belford that supports the views of the Governing Bodies of St Mary's CE Middle School and Belford First School and of the majority of the respondees to the consultation.
2. Decide in the light of this report and recommendations from the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee whether to permit the publication of a statutory proposal setting out the intention of the County Council to implement the proposals as follows:
 - a. Close St Mary's CE Middle School with effect from 31 August 2018;
 - b. Extend the age range of Belford First School from an age 2 to 9 First School to an age 2 to 11 Primary School with effect from 1 September 2018.

3. Note the implications for Home to School Transport set out in this report.
4. Note that the outcomes of the consultation following publication of the Statutory Proposal would be brought back to Cabinet in February 2018 for a final decision.

Key issues

The Consultation Process

1. Cabinet approved commencement of a six week consultation on proposals for education in Belford on 12 September. Consultation began on 13 September and closed on 1 November 2017. Notification of the consultation was distributed to a range of consultees in line with Department of Education guidance, including parents, staff and Governors of the St Mary's CE Middle School and Belford First School. A Consultation Register detailing all parties consulted is provided at Appendix 1. The consultation document was also made available on the Council's website and electronic and hard-copy versions of the consultation feedback form could be accessed; the consultation document is provided at Appendix 2 of this report.
2. A meeting for the staff of St Mary's CE Middle School was held at the school on 3 October and a meeting for the staff of Belford First School was held on 9 October; staff representatives were also present at both meetings. A drop-in event was held at St Mary's on 11 October between 3.30 p.m. and 7.00 p.m. to which all interested parties were invited. Around 20 consultees attended over the course of the event, most of whom were parents and members of the Governing Bodies of St Mary's CE Middle School and Belford First School. The Director of the Newcastle Diocesan Education Board also attended the event.
3. An advertisement was placed in the Northumberland Gazette on 28 September 2017 detailing the consultation drop-in event and on the Council's website.

Consultation responses from the school's governing bodies;

4. Written responses from Governing Bodies of the community schools are set out below:

4.1 St Mary's CE Middle School, Belford

The Governing Body responded to the questions set out in the Consultation Document. Overall, they supported the proposals to close St Mary's and extend the age range of Belford First School for the following reasons:

Q1) Do you believe that St Mary's CE Middle School should close with effect from 31 August 2018 and that Belford First School should extend its age range to include Years 5 and 6 from 1 September 2018?

Answer: Yes - Due to already falling numbers in Y7 and Y8, because of the Duchess High School moving Two Tier, and a difficulty in providing a quality

curriculum to those remaining together with a decreasing budget share to enable sufficient funds to be allocated to deliver such.

Q2) Do you believe that St Mary's CE Middle School and Belford First School should continue as they are currently organised?

Answer: No - The children need to have a quality education provision which is not sustainable with pupil numbers decreasing to the levels we are presently at.

Q3) If you answered 'Yes' to Question 1, do you agree that the catchment area of St Mary's CE Middle School should be allocated to Berwick Middle School for Years 7 and 8?

Answer: No – The ideal scenario would be that the Duchess's High School would be allocated the catchment area to enable continuity of education into Y9 and onwards, which has been the majority choice for the past 15 years.

Q4) If you answered 'Yes' to Question 1 and you have any views or comments on what should happen to the St Mary's school building and playing field, should the school be approved for closure, then please write them below

Answer: The building could be reallocated to be a resource centre and a provision for specialist educational needs.

Q5) If you have any further comments on any of the issues within this document, please write them below:

Answer: none

Q6) If you have an alternative suggestion to any of the options set out in this document that would deal with the issues raised, please set it out below.

Answer: none [although refer to answer to Q3 above]

4.2 Belford First School Governing Body

The Governing Body responded to the questions set out in the Consultation Document. In common with the St Mary's Governing Body, they supported the proposals to close St Mary's and extend the age range of Belford First School for the following reasons:

"The governing body has previously responded on the issues facing the Belford schools. This response confirms those previous responses.

Q1) Do you believe that St Mary's Middle School should close with effect from 31 August 2017 and that Belford First School should extend its age range to include Years 5 and 6 from 1 September 2017?

Answer: Yes. Unfortunately, we regard the closure of St Mary's as an inevitable result of the falling roll and associated financial and educational difficulties it faces. Should closure be the outcome, we are willing and prepared to become a primary school by extending our age range as proposed.

We have sufficient and suitable accommodation to meet the needs of years 5 and 6. We have experience and expertise within our current staff to extend our age range and meet the additional children's needs.

We will need to enhance our staffing to an extent which depends on the number of children who attend in years 5 and 6. We are prepared to enter into an appropriate staffing protocol with St Mary's in order to assist with the redeployment of staff. However, we must stress that we are not likely to need, nor to be able to afford, more than one additional member of staff.

We have managed our financial resources effectively in the past, and see no reason why we should not be able to continue to do so. Whilst we would be a small primary school, with probably no more than 80 or 90 children, we are confident that we will be able to provide a very good education for all our children from age 3 to 11, and continue to operate within our budget.

We believe that it is of the utmost importance for the parents of Belford and of its surrounding communities, and for the wellbeing of the local community overall, that school education continues up to the end of year 6 within the village. Therefore, should it be decided that St Mary's will close, we feel that it is vital that we become a primary school as proposed.

Q2) Do you believe that St Mary's and Belford First School should continue as they are currently organised?

Answer: No. We understand the difficulties facing St Mary's governors in seeking to continue to run a middle school with a falling roll and less than 50 children, especially in years 7 and 8. We sympathise with their position.

We can see that under the proposal set out in the consultation document, parents will have a choice of school from Y7 onwards, with their children either progressing to a different middle school or to a secondary school, according to their preference and subject to the availability of places.

Q3) If you answered 'Yes' to Question 1, do you agree that the catchment area of St Mary's CE Middle School should be allocated to Berwick Middle School for Years 7 and 8?

We agree with this. We know that children from Lowick attend St Mary's and it seems logical that they, and those children from Belford whose parents wish them to attend a middle school, should have this option. In discussions with our parents, it became clear that they would not be happy for their children to travel to Wooler every day. This was simply due to the difficulties of that journey, especially in winter. It was not in a negative comment about the middle school.

Q4) If you answered 'Yes' to Question 1 and you have any views or comments on what should happen to the St Mary's school building and playing field, should the school be approved for closure, then please write them below

Answer: We have no specific views about what should happen to the building, which we understand belongs to the Diocese. We are keen to see that the

walkway through the St Mary's site to our school is preserved, as this will assist with access and help to alleviate parking problems at the start and end of the school day. We will also need to enter into further discussions with the Local Authority about the middle school playing fields, which would be too large for our school and expensive to maintain. Our current site and playing fields will be sufficient for our needs should we become a primary school.

Q5) If you have any further comments on any of the issues within this document, please write them below.

Answer: The majority of our parents wish their children to progress to The Duchess at the end of year 6. This pattern has indeed been the reality for most of our children for some time. As a result, our staff has liaised with schools in both the Berwick and Alnwick Partnerships. This will in all probability continue to be the case if we become a primary school.

Q6) If you have an alternative suggestion to any of the options set out in this document that would deal with the issues raised, please set it out below.

Answer: none

Response from the Newcastle Diocesan Education Board

5. i) *The Newcastle Diocesan Education Board ('NDEB') supported the governing body of St Mary's CE Middle School in their consultation process exploring options for the future of the school in early 2017. At the time of that consultation it was becoming increasingly difficult for the school to provide the best educational experience for children and pupil numbers were predicted to fall significantly in September 2017 resulting in the governing body deciding it needed to consider all options in the best interests of pupils at the school.*
- ii) *The primary responsibility of a governing body is to ensure that the school offers high-quality education, delivered through a broad and balanced curriculum in line with the National Curriculum. The NDEB acknowledges this and was concerned that all children attending the school should receive the same high standard of educational provision and the same educational opportunities as any other pupil in Northumberland.*
- iii) *At the same time, a governing body must ensure that the premises are maintained, while managing a balanced budget. Schools are funded according to the number of pupils they have on roll, rather than the size of the school building. As the number of pupils decreases, so does the funding – but the running costs of the premises (such as heating, lighting, cleaning and maintenance of the building) do not. The NDEB recognises that if a school's funding reduces as a consequence of having fewer pupils, it becomes increasingly difficult to meet all these responsibilities. There comes a point when the governing body can no longer fund the staff and provide the educational resources needed to offer the pupils a broad and balanced curriculum, while still funding the maintenance of the school building. In spring 2017 the governing body also received a letter from the Regional Schools Commissioner which stated that the school was a*

'coasting' school and in light of the school's funding challenges it was recognised it would be very difficult to make the improvements needed.

Consideration of alternative options

- iv) Following the consultation process in early 2017 the governing body considered all of the responses and one of the options put forwards by parents and the community was that Belford First School should extend its age range to become a primary school. In light of the responses to the consultation the governing body decided not to close the school but to look carefully at other options for education in the village including the possibility of working with Belford First School on possible alternative options so that any possible future closure could be linked with a change in age range at Belford First School.*
- v) Unfortunately as predicted St Mary's CE Middle School suffered a significant fall in pupil numbers in September 2017 and there are now only 41 pupils on role at the school. With such small numbers for a middle school it is even more difficult for governors to provide a broad and balanced curriculum at the school, particularly for those children in years 7 and 8. It is also recognised that it is very difficult to offer the children sufficient educational, social, emotional and cultural experiences to ensure they achieve their full academic potential. Sadly as a result of this the NDEB considers St Mary's CE Middle School should close as proposed, as the school will not be able to provide sufficiently good educational outcomes for the children in its care.*

Support for Option A

- V1) The NDEB have been involved in discussions with the governing body, the local authority and Belford First School following the previous consultation process. As a result of these discussions, and full consideration of all the options for the future of education in Belford, the NDEB supports Option A on the consultation paper, i.e. that St Mary's CE Middle School should close as previously proposed but not until August 2018 and that Belford First School should extend its age range to include years 5 and 6. As the two schools are working closely together the Newcastle Diocesan Education Board also supports the proposal that the current year 5 pupils at St Mary's should join the roll of Belford Primary School in September 2018 as it is agreed that would be the least disruptive option for the pupils in these circumstances.*
- vii) In summary the NDEB believes that Option A is in the best interests of education and the children in Belford and will work with the Local Authority, Belford First School and the governing body of St Mary's CE Middle School to support this process in the every way it can.*

Other Responses to the Consultation

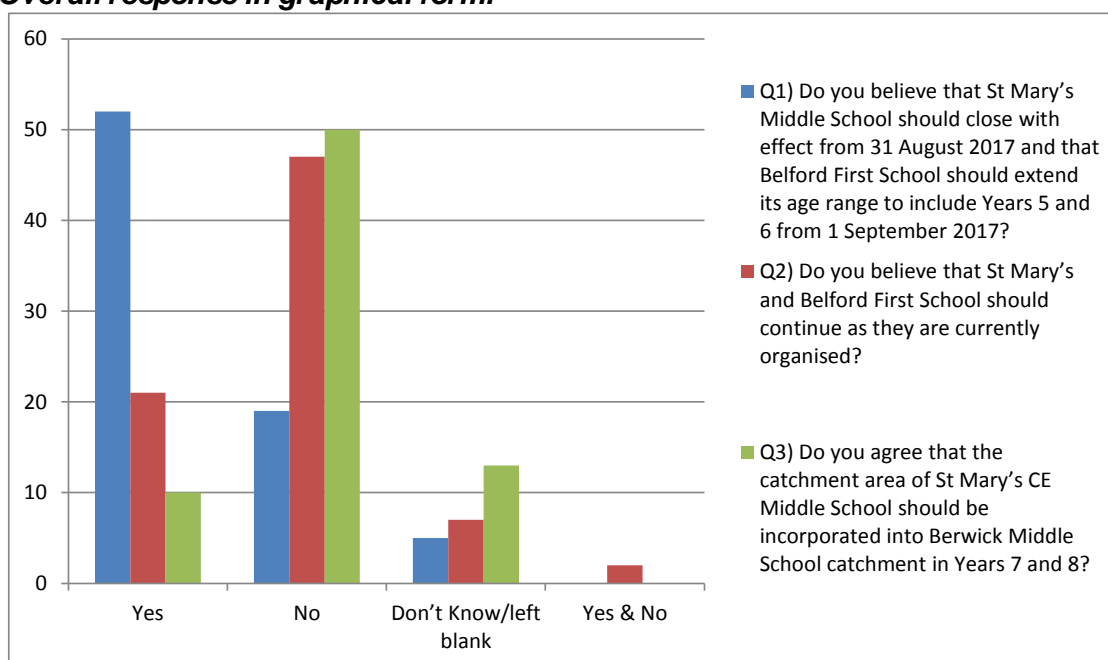
5. Seventy six responses were received in relation to consultation on the proposals, including those from St Mary's and Belford First Schools Governing Bodies and the Newcastle Diocesan Education Board.

The overall responses to Q1, Q2 and Q3 in the Consultation Document are shown below:

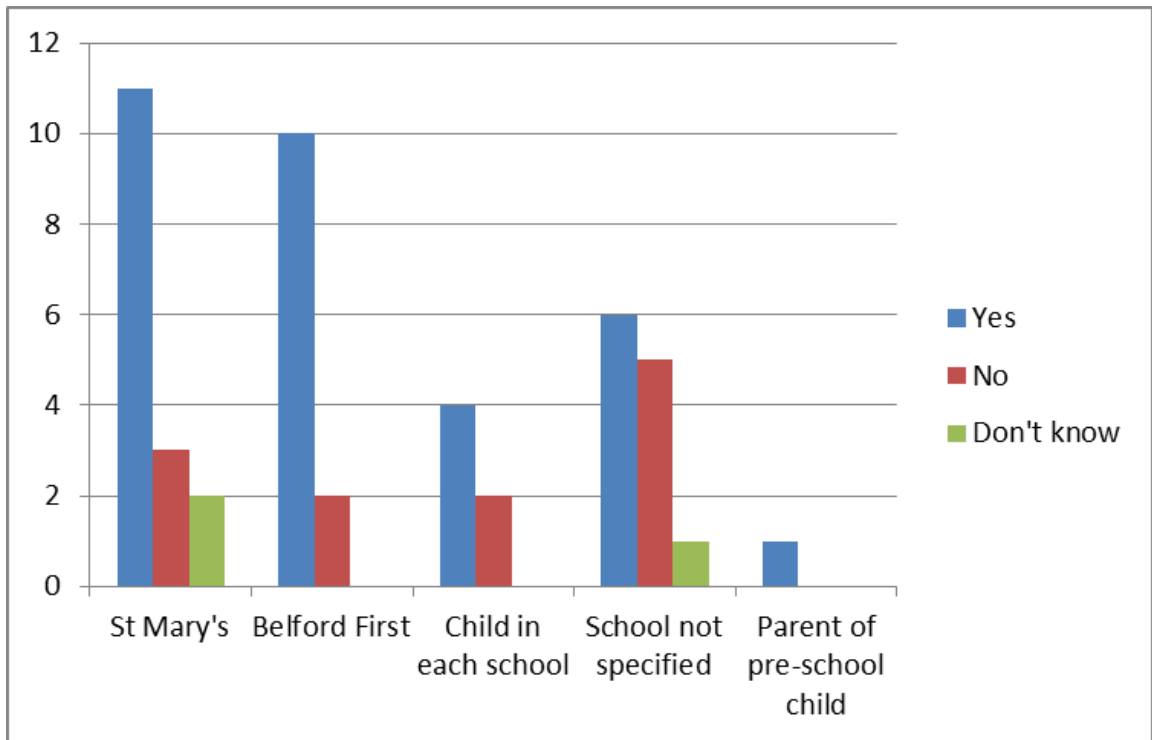
Overall responses:

	Q1) Do you believe that St Mary's Middle School should close with effect from 31 August 2017 and that Belford First School should extend its age range to include Years 5 and 6 from 1 September 2017?	Q2) Do you believe that St Mary's and Belford First School should continue as they are currently organised?	Q3) Do you agree that the catchment area of St Mary's CE Middle School should be incorporated into Berwick Middle School catchment in Years 7 and 8?
Yes	52	21	10
No	19	47	50
Don't Know/left blank	5	7	13
Yes & No	-	2	-

Overall response in graphical form:



The chart below shows the views of parents who responded to the consultation in relation to Q1 and the schools with which they associated.



6.1 Main responses in support of proposal in Q1 (closure of St Mary's and extension of age range of Belford First School):

- St Mary's is no longer viable; pupil numbers are too low
- It's vital to retain a viable school in the village to reduce travel times for younger pupils and to attract families
- Implementation of 2-tier system in Alnwick has had a negative impact on middle schools in Berwick partnership
- Negative impact on children in middle school if it continues; the children deserve better

6.2 Main responses against proposal in Q1

- St Mary's is a bigger and better equipped school; the primary should be created there
- More houses will be built in the village, therefore the village will need the middle school
- Berwick is 3-tier, so Belford needs a middle school

6.3 Main responses in support of proposal in Q2 (status quo):

- St Mary's should become the middle school; it has better facilities
- Support for 3-tier system; children need a change at the end of first school; middle school is warm and nurturing before high school.

6.4 Main responses against proposal in Q2 (status quo):

- St Mary's is not viable; it is not viable to run 2 schools in the village

- Pupils in the middle school will have an inadequate education if situation continues, in spite of efforts of staff
- Unrealistic to have a middle school in Belford when Alnwick is two tier and Year 7 and 8 pupils have gone to The Duchess High School
- This is the best proposal for Belford
-

6.5 Main responses in support of Q3 (St Mary's catchment to Berwick Middle)

- Berwick Middle is the closes middle school and Belford has always been in the Berwick Partnership
- Provides a choice of schools to parents and therefore can still join Berwick Academy at Year 9

6.6 Main responses against proposal in Q3

- If Belford First becomes a primary, then parents should be able to go to Alnwick and therefore Belford should become part of Alnwick catchment and transport should be provided
- After Year 8 in Berwick Middle, pupils will need to move again; disruptive
- Concerns with Berwick Academy
- 2-tier in Belford doesn't fit with 3-tier in rest of Berwick Partnership; all schools in Berwick should become -tier

7. Feedback received from St Mary's staff consultation meeting, 3 October 2017

The staff meeting was well attended by staff and staff representatives. The full minutes of the meeting are included in the Background Papers, and the main points raised by the staff and staff representatives were as follows:

- Staff voiced their concern through the Unison representative that they were disappointed with how they had been notified of the consultation by the Governing Body.
- Most parents will want to go to Alnwick after Year 6 and so the St Mary's catchment area should be go to the Alnwick Partnership if the school closes.
- Could Berwick Middle School be included in any staffing protocol?
- Issues and concerns around employment and redundancy process

8. Feedback received from Belford First staff consultation meeting, 9 October 2017

The staff meeting was well attended by staff, staff representatives. The full minutes of the meeting are included in the Background Papers, and the main points raised by the staff and staff representatives were as follows:

- If St Mary's closes, what would happen to the sports fields – would pupils still be able to access?
- Access to school needs to be reviewed e.g. new path?
- Would Belford First building be ready to receive additional year groups?
- Concerns that process could be delayed

9. Pupil responses to consultation – St Mary's CE Middle School

The full responses of the pupils at St Mary's are provided in the Background Papers. The main responses of pupils in St Mary's were:

- 35 pupils gave reasons why they thought St Mary's should stay open
- 3 Pupils thought the school should close as they were going to The Duchess's High School in Year 7 and there weren't a lot of children
- 1 Pupil wasn't sure as there were bad times and good times at the school

Year 5 children were also asked about what they would miss in the middle school.

- Lockers
- Snacks
- Wood carving
- Pencil cases
- The amount of art we do
- Using hammers and nails
- My friends

10. Pupil responses to consultation – Belford First School

The main responses of pupils in Belford First School were:

- Key Stage 1 Children were asked how they felt about Belford First School becoming a primary school.
 - My old school was a primary and there is no difference.
 - Good because there is lots of play equipment at this school
 - We have a climbing frame and they don't
 - I would like to try a different school.
 - I like this school. I like the work.
- Key Stage 2 children were asked how they felt about Belford First School becoming a primary school.
- I want everyone to stay so I have more friends to play with.
- I don't want to school a long way away.
- I want to stay here because we do good work.
- This school is better because the people are kinder.
- I want it to stay a primary so I don't have to go on a bus.
- It would be good to stay so we can make more memories.
- This is a good school.
- I want to stay with my friends.
- You only have to make friends once here.

11. **Feedback outside of scope of proposals**

Several comments from consultees concerned issues with the leadership and management of Belford First School. These comments are outside of the scope of the consultation and are being assessed as a separate matter and will be responded to accordingly.

12. **Alternative Models**

Six alternative models or variations were put forward by 17 consultees for consideration.

Alternative 1 – Do not make Berwick Middle School the catchment area for Belford at Years 7 and 8

Comment: Belford schools form part of the Berwick Partnership and therefore should the proposal to close St Mary's and extend the age range of Belford First be approved, the catchment area for Year 7 and 8 children residing in the St Mary's catchment would need to be incorporated into a Berwick Partnership middle school. As set out in the report to Cabinet of 12 September, Lowick CE VC First School part feeds to St Mary's and to Berwick Middle and therefore for continuity it would be most appropriate for the Belford catchment at Years 7 and 8 to feed to Berwick Middle. However, the principle of parental choice would remain open to parents and should they wish to apply for a place at an alternative school for their child, and a place was available, it would be offered to them. Furthermore, some pupils in Years 7 and 8 in the current St Mary's catchment could be eligible for free home to school transport to alternative schools as the policy provides for transport to catchment or closest school to residence.

Alternative 2 – Use the middle school instead of the first school site and ring fence jobs to first and middle school staff

Comment: The proposal to close St Mary's has been brought forward as a result of its falling pupil numbers and its reducing financial viability. There were only 40 students on roll at the school in October 2017, while the capacity of the school is 120. While Belford First was judged to require improvement by Ofsted at its last inspection in March 2016, since that time Ofsted have judged the school to taking effective action towards addressing the issues identified. The Belford First School building is in a good state of repair and will be able to accommodate the additional 2 year groups; the school is also in a stable financial position. Therefore, while it is unfortunate that St Mary's is in a vulnerable position, it would cause additional disruption to pupils and staff to place both staff groups in Belford at risk of redundancy.

Alternative 3 – Move Belford into the Alnwick Partnership

Comment: The comment set out under Alternative 1 above is also applicable here.

Overall, while it is understandable why the above alternative proposals have been put forward, none are viable enough to warrant an alteration to the current

proposals.

13. Conclusions and recommendations

The Governing Bodies of St Mary's CE Middle and Belford First Schools, the Newcastle Diocesan Education Board and the majority of respondees to the consultation, including parents, have all expressed support for Option A, which is to close St Mary's and extend the age range of Belford First School. The outcomes of this consultation are in line with the conclusions drawn at the end of the consultation carried out by the Governing Body of St Mary's in February-March this year, which were that the community were generally in favour of Belford First School becoming a primary school.

Therefore, it is concluded that Cabinet should agree that there are no viable alternatives to the proposals consulted upon and approve the recommendations set out at page 1 and 2 of this report, and move to the next stage in the process which is to approve the publication of a Statutory Proposal setting out a proposal to close St Mary's with effect from 31 August 2018 and extend the age range of Belford First School with effect from 1 September 2018.

Event	Date	Action
Statutory Consultation period	14 December 2017 to 11 January 2018	Consult on the statutory proposal for the closure of Belford Middle School and extend the age range of Belford First School
Family and Children Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee	6 February 2018	Consider the report on the outcome of the consultation and make recommendations on how to proceed.
Cabinet Committee	8 February 2018	Consider the report on the outcomes of the statutory consultation and make the final decision on whether to progress the final recommendations.

Report Author: Report Author: Andrew Johnson – Director of Education and Skills
Tel: (01670) 622767
Email: Andy.Johnson@northumberland.gcsx.gov.uk

Education in Belford

Background

14. The consultation on a proposal to close St Mary's and extend the age range of Belford First School was brought forward as a result of the request of the Governing Bodies of St Mary's CE Middle School and Belford First School and following a consultation undertaken by the Governing Body of St Mary's CE Middle School from 25 January to 15 March 2017 on a stand-alone proposal to close the school with effect from 31 August 2017. The Governing Body had reluctantly initiated the consultation at that time on the basis that the school budget would be impacted by the continuing low pupil numbers over recent years, and in particular by the projected fall in pupil numbers at the school in September 2017 due to the transfer of a significant number of pupils transferring at the end of Years 6 and 7 to Years 7 and 8 in The Duchess High School. The school has for many years had around 75% take up of places available at the school (see Table 1).

Table 1

Belford St Mary's CE Middle School	Pupils Attending (2017)	Pupils Attending (2016)	Pupils Attending (2015)	Pupils Attending (2014)	Pupils Attending (2013)	Pupils Attending (2012)	Pupils Attending (2011)	Pupils Attending (2010)	Pupils Attending (2009)	Pupils Attending (2008)
Y5	21	23	18	21	23	17	22	19	22	23
Y6	21	22	22	27	20	25	20	22	22	20
Y7	20	22	27	22	21	16	24	20	20	23
Y8	29	29	20	26	20	23	21	19	23	28
TOTAL	91	96	87	96	84	81	87	80	87	94

The Governing Body believed that the school would be placed beyond financial viability and would not be able to continue to offer a broad and balanced curriculum to students on this basis. Furthermore, the school had received a letter from the Regional Schools Commissioner stating explaining that St Mary's has been identified as a "coasting" school meaning that pupils' academic performance has not improved in the past 3 years.

In October 2017, there were only 40 pupils on roll at the school and only 13 pupils joined the school in Year 5. Furthermore, there were only 2 pupils in Year 7 and 4 pupils in Year 8 on roll at the October census. The capacity of the school is 120.

Pupil Transition and Admissions Arrangements

15. It would be proposed that pupils in Year 5 at St Mary's in August 2018 would transfer to the roll of Belford Primary School (as it would be). The other feeder first school to St Mary's is Lowick CE VC First School, which also feeds to Berwick Middle School, therefore for continuity it would be proposed that Years 6 and 7 at St Mary's in August 2018 would transfer to Berwick Middle School into Years 7 and 8 in September 2018. Year 8 in St Mary's in August 2018 would transfer as normal into Year 9 at a local high school in September 2018.

It would be proposed that pupils in Year 4 in Belford First School in August 2018 would remain on the roll of the school as they transfer into Year 5 in

September 2018. The headteachers at both schools have in any event agreed to work closely so that any transition between the two schools is as seamless as possible.

In any event, parents would be able to exercise parental preference in relation to alternative schools.

SEN Provision

16. There is no specialist SEN provision currently within either of the schools that form this proposal.

Early Years Provision

17. Belford First School has nursery classes for children aged 2 to 4 and this provision would continue should the school expand to include Years 5 and 6.

Catchment Areas

18. Should St Mary's be approved for closure, it would be proposed that the catchment area of the school would be incorporated into the catchment area of Berwick Middle School with respect to pupils in Years 7 and 8 only. The catchment area of Belford Primary (as it would be) mirrors the catchment of St Mary's and would therefore remain as it is currently, but would be shown to be the catchment school for pupils living in that area up to the end of Year 7.

While some feedback during consultation has expressed disagreement with this proposal (refer to para. 12 Alternative Proposals), changes to catchment areas would not preclude parents from exercising their parental preference to apply for a place for their child at any school should they wish to do so.

Implications for school buildings

19. It is proposed that should St Mary's CE Middle School be approved for closure, statutory education would cease to be provided from that building and primary education would be provided from the Belford First School site. The St Mary's school building is owned by Newcastle Diocesan Education Board, while the playing field is owned by the County Council.

The Belford First School building has the capacity to accommodate an additional two year groups and is in a good state of repair and in the ownership of the County Council. Therefore there aren't any capital implications of this proposal.

Any proposal to dispose of the school playing fields at any point in the future would be subject to the Government's 'Protection of school playing fields and public land' non-statutory guidance. Furthermore, Sport England is a statutory consultee on all planning applications for development affecting playing field land and it is its policy to oppose any plan that would involve the loss of playing fields unless it meets with one or more of the five exceptions within its "Policy on planning applications for development on playing fields".

Timeline for implementation

20. The timeline for implementation of the closure of St Mary's and the extension of the age range of Belford First would be as follows:

Proposed timeline

31 August 2018

- St Mary's CE Middle School would close.

1 September 2018

- Pupils in Year 8 in the middle school in August 2018 would transfer as Year 9 as usual to a local high school according to parental preference.
- Pupils in Year 6 and 7 in the middle school in August 2018 would transfer to join the Year 7 and 8 cohort at Berwick Middle School or to another school providing education in those year groups according to parental preference.
- Pupils in Year 5 in the middle school in August 2018 would join the roll of Belford Primary School (as it would be) as the new Year 6.
- Pupils in Year 4 in Belford First School in August 2018 would remain in the school as it becomes Belford Primary School as the new Year 5.

Implications for Staff

21. There would be implications for staff in St Mary's CE Middle School as a result of these proposals. Detailed discussions with the Governing Body the school and with the Trades Unions would be undertaken about how any adverse implications of the proposals for staff could be minimised, including the development of a staffing protocol between St Mary's, Belford First and Berwick Middle School.

Transport

22. Transport for pupils affected by the proposals, should they be approved, would be arranged in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy in relation to eligible pupils. Should the proposals be approved for implementation, some pupils in Years 7 and 8 may have longer journeys to school.

In any event, all applications for transport would be managed on an individual basis.

Sport and Recreation

23. Any potential impact on Sport and Recreation would be discussed as part of the consultation process.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report of the Interim Director of Children's Service to Cabinet, 12 September 2017
Responses to the Consultation from consultees
Minutes of Staff Meeting, St Mary's CE Middle School, 3 October 2017

IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

Policy:	This consultation has been consistent with the Council's policy to review changes to schools in accordance with local wishes and needs.
Finance and value for money	<p>For information purposes, the possible closure of St Mary's CE Middle School would result in a saving of £140k in a full year, based on the current formula. This saving would accrue to the Dedicated Schools Grant and be spent on the education of pupils across the whole county.</p> <p>Should St Mary's be approved for closure, it may close with a surplus or a deficit depending upon the costs, including redundancy costs which the County Council may need to incur during the period leading up to the proposed closure. Any surplus would accrue to the DSG whilst any deficit would have to be met from either the DSG or other Children's Service's budgets.</p>
Human Resources:	There would be a need to support staff displaced as a result of the proposed reorganisation with redeployment opportunities.
Property	The St Mary's school building is owned by Newcastle Diocesan Education Board, while the playing field is owned by the County Council.
Equalities	An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out concurrently with the consultation process and is included at Appendix 3.
Risk Assessment	A full risk assessment would be carried out on the project should consultation be approved.
Carbon Reduction	It is not envisaged that this proposal would have a significant positive or negative impact on carbon reduction.
Crime & Disorder	This report has considered Section 17 (CDA) and the duty it imposes and there are no implications arising from it.
Customer Considerations:	The proposal set out in this report is based upon the request of the Governing Bodies of St Mary's CE Middle and Belford First Schools on the basis that this proposal is in the best educational interests of

the pupils

Consultation

This report has been considered by the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and the Chief Legal Officer.

Wards

Bamburgh; Norham and Islandshires

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report sign off

Finance Officer	SD
Monitoring Officer/Legal	LH
Human Resources	n/a
Procurement	n/a
I.T.	n/a
Interim DCS	AJ
Portfolio Holder	WD

Report Author: Andrew Johnson – Director of Education and Skills
Tel: (01670) 622767
Email: Andy.Johnson@northumberland.gcsx.gov.uk

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Consultation Register
- Appendix 2 – Consultation Document
- Appendix 3 - Equalities Impact Assessment

Consultation Register - NCC
Proposals for Education in Belford – Consultation September – November 2017

Consultees

Schools directly affected by proposal:

St Mary's CE Middle School – Parents, staff, Governors
 Belford First School – Parents, Staff, Governors

Other schools potentially impacted:

Holy Island First School
 Holy Trinity CE First School
 Hugh Joicey First School
 Lowick First School
 Norham St Ceolwulf's First School
 Scremerston First school
 Spittal Community First school
 St Cuthbert's RCVA First School
 St Mary's CE First School
 Tweedmouth Prior Park First school
 Tweedmouth West First School
 Wooler First School
 Berwick Middle school
 Glendale Community Middle School
 Tweedmouth Middle School
 Berwick Academy

CE Diocese

RC Diocese

Local Early Years Care, Education Providers in Children's Centres, Child minders and parents of children in these settings

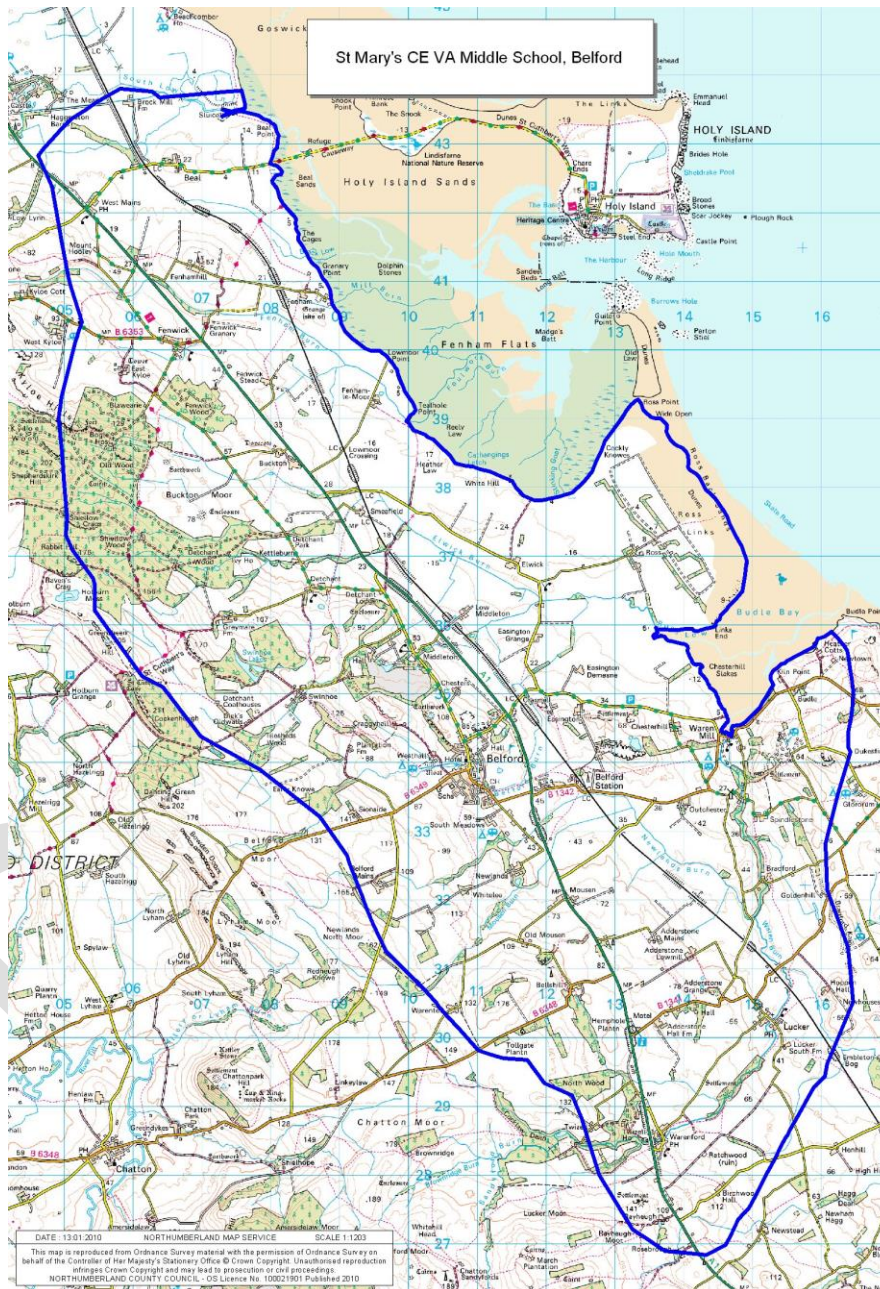
MP – Ann-Marie Trevelyan

Appropriate Parish Councils:

Adderstone with Lucker
 Bamburgh
 Wooler
 Beadnell

Unions

CONSULTATION ON EDUCATION IN BELFORD



13 September – 1 November 2017

CONSULTATION ON AUTUMN 2017

Northumberland County Council is consulting on proposals for the organisation of education in Belford. This follows on from consultation undertaken by the Governing Body of St Mary's CE Middle School in February/March 2017. At that point, a number of alternative proposals were put forward by parents and members of the community and the Governing Body agreed to postpone any decision at that point in order to fully consider the alternatives.

Having considered the options, the Governing Bodies of both St Mary's CE Middle School and Belford First School have asked the Council to consult on the following options for the organisation of education in Belford:

Option A –

- Close St Mary's CE Middle School with effect from 31 August 2018;
- Extend the age range of Belford First School to include Years 5 and 6 from 1 September 2018. The school would become a primary school and would educate children up to age 11;
- Alter the catchment area of Berwick Middle School to incorporate the St Mary's catchment for children for Years 7 and 8 only from September 2018 onwards.

Option B -

- Make no changes to the current arrangement of schools in Belford i.e. maintain the status quo.

The Council and the Governing Bodies of St Mary's CE Middle School and Belford First School would like to find out what you think about the options outlined in this document and also whether you have any alternative ideas.

The feedback from this consultation will then be taken to the Council's Cabinet for a decision on next steps.

WHY IS CONSULTATION ON CHANGING THE ORGANISATION OF SCHOOLS IN BELFORD TAKING PLACE?

Introduction

In February 2017, the Governing Body of St Mary's CE Middle School came to the conclusion that it was becoming increasingly difficult to continue to provide a high quality, broad and balanced curriculum to students due to the difficult financial position of the school. The Governing Body therefore reluctantly initiated a consultation on the proposed closure of the school. Following feedback from parents and other consultees, the Governing Body concluded that it would not be appropriate at that point to continue with the proposal to close the school, but instead decided that it would be in the best interests of the students to put aside the closure process in order to fully explore the other options put forward. In particular, this included an option to provide primary education in Belford.

The Governing Bodies of St Mary's and Belford First Schools have been in discussions about alternative education provision in the village and have asked the Council to carry out consultation on the options available to the schools, based on the feedback from the first consultation.

As a result, consultation is now being carried out on two options for educational provision in Belford.

Background

In the consultation carried out in February/March 2017, the Governing Body of St Mary's set out their reasons for proposing closure of the school, and these reasons remain.

St Mary's has had a significant fall in pupil numbers at the school in September 2017. There were 90 pupils on roll at the school in May 2017 and there are now 41 pupils on roll in September 2017; 14 pupils have joined the

school this September in Year 5; the school's Planned Admission Number (PAN) is 30 and it has the capacity for 120 pupils.

Schools receive a budget based on the number of pupils it has on roll, and not the size of the school. Therefore as pupil numbers fall, it becomes increasingly difficult for the Governing Body and staff to provide a broad and balanced curriculum due to the impact on staffing and teaching resources. As the staffing budget is the most significant cost to a school, it is generally this budget that has to be reduced as the budget fall.

Furthermore, middle schools in Northumberland are deemed to be secondary schools and with a reduction in staff, it becomes increasingly difficult to provide students in Years 7 and 8 in small middle schools with the secondary education equivalent to their peers. Sufficient educational, social, emotional and cultural experiences also become harder to provide to ensure that students achieve their full academic potential. However, the school must also continue to be heated, cleaned, lit and maintained to the same level, no matter how many students attend and therefore these costs never diminish.

In February/March, the Governing Body of St Mary's also highlighted that it had received a letter from the Regional Schools Commissioner at the Department for Education (DfE) which stated that the school had been identified as a "coasting" school. This means that the students' academic performance had not improved over 3 years. To address the issues identified, the school would need additional resources to improve; given the school's increasingly difficult financial position, it will be extremely difficult to make the improvements required as the school already struggles to recruit new, high quality and specialist staff.

Option A

Proposal:

- *Close St Mary's CE Middle School with effect from 31 August 2018;*

- *Extend the age range of all Belford First School to include Years 5 and 6 from 1 September 2018. The school would become a primary school and would educate children up to age 11;*
- *Alter the catchment area of Berwick Middle School to incorporate the St Mary's catchment for children for Years 7 and 8 only from September 2018 onwards.*

During the first consultation run by the Governing Body of St Mary's, a number of parents and community members put forward an alternative proposal that would see Belford First School extend its age range to become a primary school and provide education for children from age 4 to 11 in the village. This proposal has now been considered as an option by officers at the Council and the Governing Bodies of the two schools, and they are seeking your views on the proposal.

Under the proposal, St Mary's would close as previously proposed, but not until 31 August 2018. Belford First School would extend its age range to include Year 5 and 6, with the retention of Year 5 (current year 4) on 1 September 2018. It is also proposed that the current Year 5 pupils in St Mary's who have joined the school this September, would join the roll of Belford Primary School (as it would be) in September 2018; St Mary's and Belford First schools are already working very closely together and will continue to do so, therefore it's envisaged that this proposal for the Year 6 cohort in September 2018 would be the least disruptive for those pupils.

The catchment area of Berwick Middle School would be expanded to incorporate the catchment area of St Mary's for students in Years 7 and 8; and students who would have been in Year 7 and 8 in St Mary's in September 2018 would transfer to this school or to another school providing education in those year groups according to parental preference.

Option B

Proposal:

Make no changes to the current arrangement of schools or current system of school organisation within Belford i.e. maintain the status quo.

With regard to this proposal, it should be borne in mind that the Governing Body of St Mary's has already consulted earlier this year on the proposed closure of the school for the reasons set out earlier in this document. Since that time, the number of pupils on roll has fallen dramatically from 90 to 41 as predicted. Therefore, the long-term viability of this option at this point in time should be considered.

Structure of the schools under Option A and timeline for implementation

Proposed timeline

31 August 2018

- St Mary's CE Middle School would close.

1 September 2018

- Pupils in Year 8 in the middle school in August 2018 would transfer as Year 9 as usual to a local high school according to parental preference.
- Pupils in Year 6 and 7 in the middle school in August 2018 would transfer to join the Year 7 and 8 cohort at Berwick Middle School or to another school providing education in those year groups according to parental preference.
- Pupils in Year 5 in the middle school in August 2018 would join the roll of Belford Primary School (as it would be) as the new Year 6.
- Pupils in Year 4 in Belford First School in August 2018 would remain in the school as it becomes Belford Primary School as the new Year 5.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSAL

Staff

There would be implications for staff in St Mary's CE Middle School as a result of these proposals. Detailed discussions with the Governing Body the school and with the

Trades Unions would be undertaken about how any adverse implications of the proposals for staff could be minimised.

Admissions and pupil transition

It would be proposed that pupils in Year 5 at St Mary's in August 2018 would transfer to the roll of Belford Primary School (as it would be). The other feeder first school to St Mary's is Lowick CE VC First School, which also feeds to Berwick Middle School, therefore for continuity it is proposed that Years 6 and 7 at St Mary's in August 2018 would transfer to Berwick Middle School into Years 7 and 8 in September 2018. Year 8 in St Mary's in August 2018 would transfer as normal into Year 9 at a local high school in September 2018.

It is proposed that pupils in Year 4 in Belford First School in August 2018 would remain on the roll of the school as they transfer into Year 5 in September 2018. It is also proposed that the current Year 5 in St Mary's would join the roll of Belford Primary School (as it would be) in September 2018; the headteachers at both schools are already working closely and would ensure that any transition between the two schools would be as seamless as possible.

From September 2019, it would be expected that pupils leaving Belford Primary School at the end of Year 6 would join Berwick Middle School for Year 7 onwards. In any event, parents would continue to be able to exercise parental preference in relation to alternative schools for their children should the proposals be implemented.

Catchment Areas

Should St Mary's be approved for closure, it would be proposed that the catchment area of the school would be incorporated into the catchment area of Berwick Middle School with respect to pupils in Years 7 and 8 only. The catchment area of Belford Primary (as it would be) mirrors the catchment of St Mary's and would therefore remain as it is currently, but would be shown to be the catchment school for pupils living in that area up to the end of Year 6.

Again, changes to catchment areas would not preclude parents from exercising their

parental preference to apply for a place for their child at any school should they wish to do so.

Early Years

Belford First School has nursery classes for children aged 2 to 4 and this provision would continue should the school expand to include Years 5 and 6.

School Transport

Transport for pupils affected by the proposals, should they be approved, would be arranged in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy on an individual basis. In general, eligible pupils are transported to their catchment or nearest school by distance as calculated by the School Transport Team.

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

There is no specialist SEN provision currently within either St Mary's or Belford First School and therefore there would be no impact on this provision should Option A be implemented.

Implications for school buildings

If Option A is approved for implementation, St Mary's CE Middle School would close and statutory education would cease to be provided from that building. Primary education would be provided from the current Belford First School site. The St Mary's school building is owned by Newcastle Diocesan Education Board, while the playing field is owned by the County Council. As part of this consultation, we are seeking your views on any alternative proposals you may have for the use of the building and playing field.

Sport and Recreation

Under Option A, sport and recreation would continue to be provided as part of the primary curriculum. However, if you have any specific comments relating to the provision sport and recreation in school in Belford, then you can put forward your comments or views as part of the consultation process.

HOW CAN I MAKE MY VIEWS ABOUT THESE PROPOSALS KNOWN?

The Council and the Governing Bodies of St Mary's and Belford First School would like to hear your views on the options for the organisation of education in Belford set out in this document, including whether you have any alternative proposals that could address the issues raised. A response form is attached for your use at the back of this document. The form can either be sent by Freepost or attached electronically to an email – contact details are provided on the form. Alternatively, you can hand in your forms to a member of staff at either St Mary's or Belford First School.

Consultation is open until midnight on **1 November 2017**. In addition to completing the form, you may wish to attend the consultation event on the following date:

- **Wednesday, 11 October, 3.30 p.m. – 7.00 p.m.**

Venue - St Mary's CE Middle School, Belford

Council Officers and representatives from the schools will be on hand at the event to answer your questions and receive your feedback on the proposals.

In addition, the Governing Bodies will be holding separate meetings with the staff at their schools, which will also be attended by Council Officers and staff representatives. The dates of these meetings will be arranged separately with the schools.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE FEEDBACK FROM CONSULTATION?

Following the review of all feedback received from consultees, the Council's Cabinet will meet in December to decide whether or not to proceed to the next step in the process; if the decision is to proceed with Option A, then a statutory proposal would be published for four weeks and if the decision is for Option B, no change then the process would end at that point.

Electronic copies of the consultation document and an online consultation response form are available from the Council's website (address below). If you would prefer a paper copy of the consultation document, then please call **01670 623417**:

www.northumberland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

CONSULTATION RESPONSE FORM
VIEWS ON PROPOSED OPTIONS FOR EDUCATION IN BELFORD

PART 1- ABOUT YOU

Your name (Optional):

Your postcode:

Are you a Northumberland resident? YES NO

Are you responding mainly as a (tick one box only):

Parent/carer: Governor:

Staff Member: Pupil:

If you ticked any of the above, with which school or schools are you associated?

.....

If none of the above: please specify whether you are a:-

Local Resident: Town or village in which you live:

Parish Councillor: Parish/town council:

Other: Please clarify:

Please now continue to the questions overleaf.

PART 2 – YOUR VIEWS ON THE PROPOSED OPTIONS

- 1) **Do you believe that St Mary’s CE Middle School should close with effect from 31 August 2018 and that Belford First School should extend its age range to include Years 5 and 6 from 1 September 2018?**

Yes

No

Don’t know/
Not applicable

Your reasons for ticking the above (Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary).

- 2) **Do you believe that St Mary’s CE Middle School and Belford First School should continue as they are currently organised?**

Yes

No

Don’t know/
Not applicable

Your reasons for ticking the above (Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary).

3) If you answered 'Yes' to Question 1, do you agree that the catchment area of St Mary's CE Middle School should be allocated to Berwick Middle School for Years 7 and 8?

Yes

No

Don't know/
Not applicable

Your reasons for ticking the above (Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary).

4) If you answered 'Yes' to Question 1 and you have any views or comments on what should happen to the St Mary's school building and playing field, should the school be approved for closure, then please write them below

5) If you have any further comments on any of the issues within this document, please write them below:

PART 3 – ALTERNATIVE MODELS

- 6) **If you have an alternative suggestion to any of the options set out in this document that would deal with the issues raised, please set it out below.**
(please continue on a separate sheet if necessary).

**Now please return your Response Form to:
FAO Lorraine Fife, Children's Services, FREEPOST MP135, County Hall,
MORPETH, NE61 1BR**

**Or send your response electronically to:
email Lorraine.Fife@northumberland.gov.uk**

NORTHUMBERLAND

Northumberland County Council

Equality Impact Assessment

To be completed for all key changes, decisions and proposals. Cite specific data and consultation evidence wherever possible. Further guidance is available at: <http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=3281>

Duties which need to be considered:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

PART 1 – Overview of the change, decision or proposal

Title of the change, decision or proposal:

- Proposal presented under informal consultation 13 September to 1 November 2017: The closure of St Mary's CE First School with effect from 31 August 2018 and the extension of the age range of Belford First School with effect from 1 September 2018.
- This equalities impact assessment was carried out in relation to the above proposal.

Date of equality impact assessment:

Assessment following informal consultation process. This EIA will be refreshed and updated should approval for the publication of a Statutory Proposal be approved by Cabinet on 12 December 2017.

Brief description of the change, decision or proposal:

As provided in 1.

Name(s) and role(s) of officer(s) completing the assessment:

Lorraine Fife, School Organisation Manager

Overall, what are the outcomes of the change, decision or proposal expected to be? (E.g. will it reduce/terminate a low-priority service, maintain service outcomes at reduced cost, or change the balance of funding responsibility for a service which will remain the same?)

These proposals have been brought forward by the Council at the request of the Governing Bodies of St Mary's CE Middle School, Belford and Belford First School. The Governing Body of St Mary's have themselves consulted on the proposed closure of the school earlier in 2017 but decided to go no further with the process after feedback from consultation suggested that a proposal which included the extension of the age range of Belford First School should be consulted on. St Mary's has had falling pupil numbers for a number of years, but in September 2017, a significant number of pupils joined the Year 7 and 8 intake of The Duchess's High School in Alnwick and only 14 pupils joined the school in Year 5, in relation to a Planned Admission Number of 30. The fall in pupil numbers is forecast to continue. St Mary's also received a letter from Ofsted in the early part of 2017 identifying them as a coasting school. With the consequential fall in budget that will result from falling pupil numbers, the school will find it difficult to address the issues that have identified them as a coasting school.

It is envisaged that the implementation of the proposals would lead to improved outcomes for pupils in the Belford area.

If you judge that this proposal is not relevant to some protected characteristics, tick these below (and explain underneath how you have reached this judgement).

Disability

Sex - **X**

Race **X**

Religion **X**

Sexual Orientation **X**

People who have changed gender **X** Women who are pregnant or have babies

Employees who are married/in civil partnerships **X**

The characteristics checked above are not relevant because:

Should the proposal to close St Mary's Middle be approved, all pupils who would have remained on roll at the school on 1 September 2018 had it remained open would be affected equally by the proposal. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 at this time would be offered a place at Berwick Middle School or another school according to parental preference. Pupils in Year 6 at this time will be offered a place in Belford First School or another school according to parental preference.

Parents are also able to exercise their parental preference for another school subject to places being available in the selected alternative schools.

In the medium to long-term, there is no reason to believe that the proposed school closure would affect more positively or negatively than their peers any group of children, parents or staff defined by their gender, age, race, sexual orientation or gender-reassignment status. During the immediate process of transition, we would invite families to let us know if they are concerned about the impact that the change may have on the support networks for any individual children who may be at particular risk of harassment or discrimination.

Existing HR policies covering organisational change and redundancy would apply to staff employed at St Mary's. These are designed to ensure that the equalities duties of the Council and the schools are fully met.

PART 2 – Relevance to different Protected Characteristics

Answer these questions both in relation to people who use services and employees

Disability

Note: *“disabled people” includes people with physical, learning and sensory disabilities, people with a long-term illness, and people with mental health problems. You should consider potential impacts on all of these groups.*

What do you know about usage of the services affected by this change, decision or proposal by disabled people, about disabled people's experiences of it, and about any current barriers to access?

There is currently no evidence to suggest that any member of the community with a disability would be disproportionately impacted positively or negatively should the proposals set out in Part 1 be approved.

Any pupil, parent or member of staff in St Mary's who has a disability would not be affected by these proposals as any arrangements already in place to ameliorate such disability would be replicated at the alternative schools as required. No evidence has come to light during the consultation processes of any individual who would be categorised within this protected group, but appropriate arrangements would be made where this is necessary to avoid potential adverse impacts should the need arise.

Could disabled people be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal?

In the medium to long term, there is no reason to believe that the proposals in Part 1 would affect disabled children, staff or parents more positively or negatively than their peers. In particular, the support identified through the special educational needs system would continue to be provided to all pupils who need it.

During the immediate process of transition, we would consult families about any specific potential impacts on individuals; for instance, because of loss of support networks or the need to replicate reasonable adjustments made to accommodate disabled children, and we would ensure that appropriate individual arrangements are made where this is necessary to avoid potential adverse impacts.

Could the change, decision or proposal affect the ability of disabled people to participate in public life? (e.g. by affecting their ability to go to meetings, take up public appointments etc.)

The proposed changes would not affect any current arrangements for disabled people to participate in public life as adjustments would be made to enable access to alternative schools, should such access not already be in place.

Could the change, decision or proposal affect public attitudes towards disabled people? (e.g. by increasing or reducing their presence in the community)

There is no evidence to suggest that the proposals in Part 1 would affect public attitudes towards disabled people.

Could the change, decision or proposal make it more or less likely that disabled people will be at risk of harassment or victimisation?

There is currently no evidence to suggest that the proposed closure of the school would increase or decrease any risk of harassment or victimisation above that which may already exist to any pupil, member of staff or member of the community with a disability.

In line with current special educational needs systems, families would be consulted about any potential issues for individual children arising from the disruption of support networks during the process of transition.

If there are risks that disabled people could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal, are there reasonable steps or adjustments that could be taken to reduce these risks?

There is no evidence to suggest that there are any risks of disproportionately disadvantaging any pupils or members of staff at St Mary's or Belford First who have a disability.

Are there opportunities to create *positive* impacts for disabled people linked to this change, decision or proposal?

See para. 8 above.

Age

What do you know about usage of the services affected by this change, decision or proposal by people of different age groups, about their experiences of it, and about any current barriers to access?

St Mary's CE Middle School provides education to pupils between the age of 9 and 13. Belford First School currently provides education to pupils between the age of 2 to 9. Only pupils within these age ranges would be affected by the proposal.

Staff at St Mary's are employed equitably in accordance with the school's and council's employment policies. Should approval for closure of the school be given, suitable alternative employment for staff would be sought in accordance with the schools' and council's redeployment policies deal on an equitable basis, regardless of age.

Could people of different age groups be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal?

See para. 14. Above.

Could the change, decision or proposal affect the ability of people of different age groups to participate in public life? (e.g. by affecting their ability to go to meetings, take up public appointments etc.)

There is no evidence to suggest that the proposals would have any effect on the ability of different age groups to participate in public life more or less than already occurs. No evidence has arisen during consultation to would suggest that anyone within this protected group would be prevented from participating in public life.

Could the change, decision or proposal affect public attitudes towards people of different age groups? (e.g. by increasing or reducing their presence in the community)

There is no evidence to suggest that the proposal in Part 1 would affect public attitudes towards these pupils.

Could the change, decision or proposal make it more or less likely that people of different age groups will be at risk of harassment or victimisation?

There is no evidence to suggest that this would increase or reduce the risk of harassment or victimisation of this group of pupils when they transfer to alternative schools. The receiving schools will have anti-bullying policies in place to ensure that any harassment or victimisation of the new pupils is dealt with effectively.

If there are risks that people of different age groups could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal, are there reasonable steps or adjustments that could be taken to reduce these risks?

Refer to para. 14.

Are there opportunities to create *positive* impacts for people of different age groups linked to this change, decision or proposal?

It is believed that the learning experience of the pupils currently on roll at St Mary's would be improved by transferring them to alternative schools, as due to financial constraints caused by predicted continuing falling pupil numbers, the school would not be able to maintain its current teaching capacity in the future.

Pregnancy and Maternity

Note: the law covers pregnant women or those who have given birth within the last 26 weeks, and those who are breast feeding.

What do you know about usage of the services affected by this change, decision or proposal by pregnant women and those who have children under 26 weeks, about their experiences of it, and about any current barriers to access?

Staff at St Mary's are employed equitably in accordance with the school's and council's employment policies. Should approval for closure of the school be given under the proposals, suitable alternative employment for staff would be sought in accordance with the schools' and council's redeployment policies on an equitable basis, including for those staff who may currently be pregnant or on maternity leave.

There is no evidence to suggest that the proposals would create any barriers to pupils accessing any of the schools impacted by the proposals who have a parent who may be pregnant or who has other children under 26 weeks old. No evidence has arisen during consultation that anyone within this protected group would be impacted by this proposal. However, appropriate individual arrangements to the extent possible would be made where this is necessary to avoid potential adverse impacts.

Could pregnant women and those with children under 26 weeks be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal?

Pupils in Years 7 and 8 residing within the St Mary's catchment would be eligible for transport to the proposed catchment school for that age group (Berwick Middle School) and to the nearest and/or nearest CE school offering education in those years. It is expected that the proposal to extend the age range of Belford First School to include years 5 and 6 would be beneficial for parents as children will be retained longer in their own community and will remain longer with younger siblings where applicable.

No evidence has been provided that the proposals in Part 1 would cause disproportionate disadvantage to a member of this protected group. However, should evidence arise, the council would use its best endeavours to the extent possible in accordance with the Admissions Policy to seek a solution that would ameliorate such disadvantage.

Could the change, decision or proposal affect the ability of pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks participate in public life? (e.g. by affecting their ability to go to meetings, take up public appointments etc.)

There is no evidence to suggest that the proposals would affect the ability of this protected group to participate in public life under the proposals.

Could the change, decision or proposal affect public attitudes towards pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks? (e.g. by increasing or reducing their presence in the community)

There is no evidence to suggest that the proposals would have any effect on public attitudes to this protected group under the proposals.

Could the change, decision or proposal make it more or less likely that pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks will be at risk of harassment or victimisation?

There is no evidence to suggest that the proposal would make it more or less likely that this protected group would be at risk of harassment or victimisation under the proposals.

If there are risks that pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal, are there reasonable steps or adjustments that could be taken to reduce these risks?

There is no evidence to suggest that the protected group would be disproportionately disadvantaged by the proposals under the proposals.

Are there opportunities to create *positive* impacts for pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks linked to this change, decision or proposal?

See para. 22.

Human Rights

Could the change, decision or proposal impact on human rights? (e.g. the right to respect for private and family life, the right to a fair hearing and the right to education)

There is no evidence to suggest that the proposals would impact positively or negatively on the human rights of any of the protected groups identified within this EIA.

PART 3 – Course of Action

28. Based on a consideration of all the potential impacts, tick one of the following as a summary of the outcome of this assessment:

X	The equality analysis has not identified any potential for discrimination or adverse impact and all opportunities to promote equality have been taken.
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29. Explain how you have reached the judgement ticked above, and summarise any steps which will be taken to reduce negative or enhance positive impacts on equality.

From the initial analysis of the possible negative or positive impact of the proposal on groups with protected characteristics, there is no evidence to suggest that any of these groups would be disproportionately disadvantaged or advantaged by the proposal. Should a Statutory Proposal be approved for publication, the EIA would be reviewed to ensure that if any evidence arises that there could be possible negative impacts, those risks would be analysed to establish whether or not there were certain risks to any or all of those groups. Steps to reduce negative impacts or enhance positive impacts would then be defined.

PART 4 - Ongoing Monitoring

What are your plans to monitor the actual impact of the implementation of the change, decision or proposal on equality of opportunity? (include action points and timescales)

This EIA has produce following the informal consultation period. Should a Statutory Proposal be approved for publication by Cabinet, the EIA would be further updated following feedback from that formal consultation. Should the proposal subsequently be approved for implementation, appropriate action would be identified in the light of the consultation and where necessary, an action plan with timescales developed.

PART 5 - Authorisation

Name of Head of Service and Date Approved

Once completed, send your full EIA to: Irene.Fisher@northumberland.gov.uk. A summary will then be generated corporately and published to the Council's website.