

TWEEDMOUTH COMMUNITY MIDDLE SCHOOL

GOVERNING BODY



Governors' consensus responses to current consultation on 'Views on School Organisation' in Berwick to be submitted **by 12 August to the Council before they go on leave**

On Mon, 18 Jul 2022 at 14:27, Lorraine Fife <Lorraine.Fife@northumberland.gov.uk> wrote:

Dear Colleagues

While the current consultation on 'Views on School Organisation' in Berwick continues until 12 August, we are conscious that some of your governors may be disappearing on holiday in the next couple of weeks.

Therefore, this is just a reminder that if your Governing Body has not yet agreed how it will respond to the consultation, please can you ensure that your Chair of Governors and all Governors are reminded of the need to submit a consensus response **by 12 August to the Council** and therefore if any are going on holiday, they will need to have agreed the response **before they go on leave**.

Kind regards

Lorraine

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BERWICK PARTNERSHIP - YOUR VIEWS ON SCHOOL ORGANISATION
Berwick Survey - Have Your Say Northumberland - Citizen Space

Having read the consultation document, do you think schools in the Berwick Partnership will be better able to deliver improved outcomes and safeguard their viability for future generations if they are organised within the current 3-tier (first/middle/high) structure or if they are reorganised to the 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure?

✓ **Three-tier (current structure, phase change at end of Year 4)**

✗ **Two-tier (primary/secondary structure, phase change at end of Year 6)**

Please give the reasons for your answer.

3-tier or 2-tier?

[Having read the consultation document]

Tier	Advantages	Disadvantages
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3-tier system is suited to rural areas or catchment areas of smaller market towns - Middle Schools are uniquely placed for creative flexibility of organisation to meet the needs of pupils going through wide-ranging intellectual, physical and emotional development - By spanning parts of both KS2 and KS3, Middle Schools can use the outcomes of KS2 assessments to benefit the learning of pupils - The gradual introduction of specialist teaching maintains enthusiasm and widens interests - Joint curriculum planning across the phases of the 3-tier system is essential in order to deliver good outcomes in the shared Key Stages - Middle Schools offer a wide variety of extra-curricular activities in sport, music, art etc. - School climate nurtures support by being child-centered and small enough for children to be known personally - Curriculum is balanced between subject-centred and pupil-centred needs of the pupils and promotes self-esteem, self-knowledge and a foundation for lifelong learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher training is now focused on the primary/secondary model - Only one transfer in the 2-tier model so less disruptive in the pupils' educational pathway and simpler - The 3-tier system is a dysfunctional model for the most effective delivery of the National Curriculum. - The split of KS2 between first and Middle Schools and KS3 between middle and High Schools provides threats to the effective educational progress of children as it causes problems with the continuity of learning and teaching, support for pupils, the delivery of the curriculum, and the ability of schools to recruit Middle School specialist teachers
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attainment will improve faster through changing to 2-tier rather than through introducing initiatives within the 3-tier system - Pupils will have an additional 2 years of work in their secondary schools - Single transition points in 2-tier work effectively for pupils - One transition point for students, and one transfer of information between 2 schools - School age ranges would match the National Curriculum Key Stages - Recruitment and retention of teachers should improve - KS3 pupils would be taught in 11-18 secondary schools with a wider range of facilities, equipment and specialist teaching - First Schools and High Schools would increase in size and offer wider curriculum opportunities - Small First Schools in particular would improve their financial situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changes creates uncertainty and insecurity amongst children and staff - Schools are always under pressure re standards and organisation change will add to it - Small primary schools wouldn't have the specialist facilities of Middle Schools - Transfer of pupils from very small primary schools to large secondary schools could be daunting

Tier	Advantages	Disadvantages
3	8 citations - National Middle Schools' Forum	2 comments - Central Bedfordshire Council - website 2 comments - Alnwick Partnership consultation on proposals for reorganization
2	6 comments - Northumberland County Council <i>Putting the Learner First</i> (2005) 3 comments - Ponteland Partnership consultation on proposals for reorganization	4 comments - Northumberland County Council <i>Putting the Learner First</i> (2005)

We feel strongly that a link to the full National Middle Schools' Forum report (*Three Tiers For Success: a system designed to meet the needs of children as they grow and develop* by Nigel Wyatt, January 2019) should have been inserted where the National Middle Schools' Forum's advantages of the 3-tier system are mentioned on page 23 of the consultation document. Everyone should have been directed to this document to have full access to it. We wondered why this was not the case.

We were concerned that 'citations' from this well-researched and suitably statistically supported report – which clearly demonstrates the success of the 3-tier system over the 2-tier system – should be presented alongside 'comments' taken out of context, with no reference as to any research basis/bias, or statistical soundness, of their sources; and why this would be thought to convey an appropriate overview of the 2-tier/3-tier 'pros and cons' in any usefully instructive way which would help those reading the consultation document (pages 23-25) reach a well-informed, critically appraised, carefully considered, balanced conclusion.

3-tier or 2-tier?

Evidence Overlooked

It is imperative to look above and beyond what those within (pupils, parents, public, staff, heads, governors, County etc.) envisage would work best merely in terms of a majority consensus, or collective compromise, based on pooled perspectives which could potentially be broadened even more productively and positively.

For example, the assumption that two-tier (purely because it is so pervasive) is better than three-tier (just because so few LEAs follow it) is erroneous.

THE MOST SUCCESSFUL model (so much so that it has long been widely embraced across the whole world) is that of the independent sector (private/'public' schools) where there is indeed a 'Middle' (Preparatory Common Entrance [9-13 yr-olds: Y5-Y8]) and 'High' (Senior/'College' [I]GCSE and A Level/Bacc/Pre-U [13-18 yr-olds: Y9-Y13]) school system.

Here it has long been held that 11-13 yr-olds (i.e. Y7+Y8) do better in the top two years of a 'Middle School' setting than in the bottom two years of a 'High School' setting. Certainly 'outcomes' (in the widest sense of that word; certainly not just academic examination results) in the independent sector have long borne this out.

The independent sector 'Middle School' framework, then, is already there to be taken full advantage of: long established, well proven, and highly regarded. Why should our existing local state Middle Schools, already rated 'Good' by OFSTED, not continue to flourish, in a thriving 3-tier system, all the while aspiring to be 'Outstanding', by taking full advantage of everything available that's easily transferable from their independent educational counterparts?

In curricular terms, especially, there is so much freely available to adopt/adapt. Certainly, at TCMS, we have colleagues and contacts with significant independent sector 'Middle School' framework experience which means that we know we are already working well towards that goal: our focus on Oracy across the curriculum – and in wider contexts both in and out of school – is a key case in point!

And, again, the assumption that independent schools only do so well because they simply select the more able pupils is equally erroneous. Some do - more so in senior schools. But school settings for middle-years do, in fact, span the entire ability range; and that includes those whose SEND provision for a relatively high proportion of children on roll is excellent and exemplary.

Equally, it is often not appreciated that classroom curriculum delivery in such schools can be really quite spartanly resourced; with the bulk of school fees being funneled into other costly areas which simply aren't a feature of state sector school life. The assumption that 'more income = better outcomes' is, again, erroneous.

It is the educational ethos inculcated in children - the life-long-lasting love of learning and keenness to succeed instilled in them - by good teachers, led by a good Head, and filtering through to families, and the wider school community locally as a whole, which does most to drive up standards.

MIDDLE SCHOOLS DO THIS BRILLIANTLY.

Do you have an alternative option for school organisation in the Berwick Partnership that would address the issues outlined in this document that you would like us to consider?

We are wholeheartedly committed to supporting fully our strong vision for a successful school which sees TCMS continuing to thrive, as a Middle School, as part of a flourishing 3-tier system, in our aim to ensure it duly receives the recognition it deserves for becoming the Ofsted outstanding rated school we know it can be.

What we raise on the following few pages, then, is what we ask to be considered in light of the concerns we identify, and on the basis of what would optimally address – in terms of the best overall route-through-school experience for all our children and young people living locally within the Berwick Partnership area – what the consultations document identifies (pages 4-13) as ‘Issues Facing The Berwick Partnership’, i.e. what most would best improve the:

- **financially sustainable viability** of *those particular schools* in the Berwick partnership which are *not currently financially sustainably viable*
- **educational outcomes** of *those particular schools* in the Berwick Partnership which are held to be *currently below par*.

We are completely convinced that a move to the 2-tier primary-secondary system is not only wholly unnecessary but risks, in fact, exacerbating these issues.

We see so no merit in an alternative, substantially reorganized 3-tier, first-middle-high system; not when appropriately minimal tweaking, of things as they are, aimed only where they are necessary, at certain parts of the system, would suitably suffice; coupled with maximal initiative, input and investment targeted at key areas involving the one part of the system where all that is needed most.

Considering the Information in the Consultation Document

The consultation document groups ‘Issues Facing the Berwick Partnership’ under the headings ‘Ofsted’ (page 6); ‘Education Outcomes’ (page 6-9); and ‘Pupil Data and Information’ (pages 10-13).

‘Pupil Data and Information’	clearly reads as	‘Financially Sustainable Viability’
‘Education Outcomes’	clearly reads as	‘Academic Achievement’
‘Ofsted’	clearly reads as	‘Quality of Education’

Pupil Data and Information

Several factors are presented under ‘Pupil Data and Information’ (pages 9-13): decreasing birth rate (pages 9-10, table 5); falling pupil numbers (page 9, table 4); secondary age student exodus (pages 10-13, tables 6 & 8); and increasing surplus school places (pages 10-12, table 7). The specific issue of surplus places is linked, crucially, to the reduction in *per capita* pupil-numbers-based funding of schools, which therefore limits a school’s budget, forcing cutbacks, so

diminishing educational provision, and thus threatening a school's financially sustainable viability within the Berwick Partnership (pages 12 & 13):

...some schools can still have a healthy budget and carry a certain number of surplus places if they attract the right number of students that still allows them to provide the broad and balanced curriculum that the Department for Education requires. However, when schools need to cut back on their teaching and learning resources as a result of a reducing budget then the educational experience of pupils may be impacted. (page 12)

If the 183 High School age students who go out of the Berwick Partnership attended Berwick Academy, it would have an additional £915,000 in its budget each year. If the 94 Middle School age students who leave the area attended, those schools would have an additional £470,000 in their budgets. (page 13)

Though it is not stated in the consultation document, this clearly signals:

- i) schools will close
- ii) staff will lose their jobs
- iii) children will have to move to fill surplus places in those schools that do stay open

First Schools

The consolidation of existing First Schools' Reception-Y4 pupils into the most financially sustainably viable of their existing premises as possible (necessarily closing and selling off those remaining), extended to include as much 2-4 year-old pre-Reception provision as possible, would address the issue of surplus places in First Schools whilst retaining the current first-school phase (i.e. move from Y4 First School to Y5 Middle School) in the Berwick Partnership. This addresses the issue of the financially sustainable viability of First Schools in the Berwick Partnership.

Middle Schools

Both of the town's Middle Schools are fairly full in terms of pupil places, and financially well managed. Therefore there simply is no case for reorganizing them on the grounds of their financially sustainable viability. *They are financially sustainably viable.* Indeed, given the 94 Middle School age students (consultation document, page 13) who currently leave the area to attend schools elsewhere (even though that figure presumably includes students flowing on through from Belford Primary, Wooler First, and Glendale Middle Schools to Alnwick Partnership schools; and even if these three schools were to move permanently from the Berwick Partnership to the Alnwick Partnership), reorganization of Berwick Partnership schools would need, in fact, to *expand* numbers in the town's two Middle Schools if those among the 94 Middle School age students (and projected numbers for the future) who live in the Berwick Partnership area (and weren't to flow through Belford Primary, Wooler First and Glendale Middle Schools on into the Alnwick Partnership) were to be 'attracted back' or 'recaptured', post-reorganization, to the town's two Middle Schools in the Berwick Partnership. Whatever proportion of those 94 Middle School age students who leave the area would otherwise have attended the town's two Middle Schools, those two schools would have, in their budgets, the equivalent proportion of the additional £470,000 (consultation document, page 13) accounted for by those those 94 Middle School age students. This addresses the issue of the financially sustainable viability of the town's two Middle Schools in the Berwick Partnership. To reiterate – *the town's two Middle Schools are financially sustainably viable.*

High School

Berwick Academy is clearly not financially sustainably viable. At issue are the 183 High School age students who should be on roll there, were they not attending schools out of the Berwick Partnership. This would bring back into Berwick Academy's budget an additional £915,000 each year (consultation document, page 13).

There are, in addition, VIth form students, living in the Berwick Partnership area, who are also travelling to attend not only private, Scottish, or Alnwick schools, but also VIth form colleges in Newcastle, and perhaps elsewhere, too (?). The consultation document makes no mention of VIth form students living in the Berwick Partnership area who aren't actually studying in the VIth form at Berwick Academy. If they, too, were all attending the town's High School, that would add even more to the school's budget, and so further secure the financially sustainable viability of Berwick Academy.

If Belford Primary, Wooler First, and Glendale Middle Schools *were* to be moved to the Alnwick Partnership that *might* shift the balance in numbers on roll *somewhat*, such that *some* of those Berwick-based High School age students who currently travel to Alnwick would instead flow on through from their close-to-town Middle Schools to Berwick Academy. But parental choice *will* still operate. Some of those students will *still* secure places at the Duchess High School Alnwick. Private and Scottish school places will *still* remain available. Students will *still* travel to take up all those available places (consultation document, page 12, table 8). *There is no guarantee that enough of a shift in numbers will occur to ensure the financially sustainable viability of Berwick Academy as the town's High School.*

And so we do realize, then, that reorganizing the Berwick Partnership's schools to follow the 2-tier primary-secondary system would yoke flagging numbers of Y9-13 students at Berwick Academy (~520 students) to thriving numbers of Y7+8 pupils from the Middle Schools (~350) to bring the total combined number on roll (~870) at a new secondary school close to that of the capacity of the current Berwick Academy site (~930); thus obviating the need, in terms of financially sustainable viability, to 'attract back' or 'recapture' the numbers of secondary school age students currently travelling to attend private, Scottish, Alnwick, Newcastle, or other schools (or those, also, who may, indeed, be being home-educated; or receiving education other than at school [EOTAS]; or are out of education, for whatever reasons, altogether); or that 'attracting back' or 'recapturing', in addition, say, around just half or so (~60) of those secondary school age students currently travelling to Alnwick (133: consultation document, page 12, table 8), would see a new secondary school roll reach the capacity of the current Berwick Academy (~930) – assuming, that is, that such a new secondary school would involve a refurbishment/renovation/rebuild/redevelopment of the current Berwick Academy buildings/site to that same capacity.

We feel that this is an insufficiently unambitious way of attempting to deal with the financially unsustainable viability of Berwick Academy; and, moreover, does a great disservice to our young people locally. To seem to be 'solving the problem' of the financially unsustainable viability of the town's High School by accepting that: i) we have lost the majority of those who currently go elsewhere because Berwick simply can't (and won't ever be able to) provide what would persuade them to stay; ii) we might retain just a minority of these students but only by being able to manipulate the distribution of schools within the Berwick and Alnwick Partnerships; and iii) manipulating the distribution of year groups across school sites to shore up flagging numbers in one with thriving numbers from parts of others – that this is the only solution: this does not address the issue of retaining High School age students in Berwick for

the reasons that they should be staying, namely that:

Berwick should be seen to be providing provenly successful Education Outcomes for High School students – just as it already does, very well, for first and Middle School pupils – in all those areas in which our young people want, and need, and deserve to be succeeding, in order to flourish in life, and to secure their own futures.

We return to considering what could be done about this, after first considering the information in the consultation document on ‘Education Outcomes’, in order to take all that into account, too.

Education Outcomes

Despite saying, under ‘Education Outcomes’ (pages 6-9), that ‘Academic achievement is only one way of measuring the quality of a pupil's educational experience’ (page 6), the consultation document goes on to focus solely on academic achievement, in quite some detail, over quite a few of the following pages (pages 6-9).

Despite saying, under ‘Education Outcomes’ (pages 6-9), that ‘Parents and carers of pupils on roll in schools in the Berwick Partnership will know the many other ways in which their children are benefitting from their school’ (page 6), the consultation document goes on to say ‘However, *academic achievement is** important and therefore the following data is presented for information’. There then follows that sole focus on academic achievement, in quite some detail, over quite a few of the following pages (pages 6-9).

* In the context of the consultation document, at that point in the text, the words ‘education outcomes are’ (as they appear in the text at that point) are there in error; the context clearly means that those words should be read here as ‘academic achievement is’ since the document goes on to focus solely on academic achievement, in quite some detail, for quite a few of the following pages (pages 6-9).

Despite saying, under ‘Education Outcomes’ (pages 6-9), that ‘Academic achievement is only one way of measuring the quality of a pupil's educational experience’ (page 6), the consultation document does not mention any alternative gauge of Education Outcome which is in fact *measurable*.

Although the consultation document states that ‘Parents and carers...will know the many other ways in which their children are benefitting from their school’, there is then no indication as to what these ‘many other ways’ might be, other than that – implicit in the context – they have nothing to do with academic achievement; although they still are assumed – again, implied by the context, even though no single example is given – to count, like ‘academic achievement’, as ‘education outcomes’.

Indeed, might it not be that ‘the many other ways in which their children are benefitting from their school’ include precisely those benefits which parents value most as being currently community-school-specific such that the closure of, or change in, a school, because of any reorganization, would mean that those are the very same benefits, so appreciated by parents, which will be lost?

It seems somewhat disingenuous to suggest there is so much more that matters to parents than

mere 'academic achievement' only to then focus solely on 'academic achievement' without alluding to how reorganization of the Berwick Partnership might impact on 'the many other ways in which...children are benefitting from their school' as things currently stand.

A note on KS3 Y7 & Y8 curricular preparation for KS4 Y10 and Y11 GCSE courses

We would also highlight concerns about potentially persistently held erroneous assumptions about KS3 Y7 & Y8 education in Middle Schools stemming from the period, some ten years or so ago, around the time that Berwick Community High School became Berwick Academy, when, as we understand it, the LEA implemented independent County-administered assessment tests to identify that this was the case. That fueled, at this time, as we understand it, an unfortunate, and wholly mistaken impression that poor GCSE results at The High School stemmed from slippage in standards of Y7 & Y8 teaching and learning at Middle Schools. That entirely misguided belief needs, most emphatically, to be firmly scotched. It is not true.

To deploy the argument that the key to GCSE success lies in ensuring students begin secondary school in Y7 so that the school has a full five years to drill children to get the highest possible marks by the time, a full five years later, that they sit the actual exams – this is wholly wrong. It is also, moreover, entirely anti-educational. GCSE courses are specifically designed to be delivered solely over the course of two years in Ys 10 and 11. This is preceded, in the majority of schools, by a 'taster' year where the timetabled curriculum is purposely devised to include lessons in the full range of subjects the school offers, from which students choose the GCSE options they want to continue with for the two following years. Whilst these 'taster' lessons do facilitate, to some degree, 'getting ahead' with the GCSE specification, it is ludicrous to suggest that a school needs to begin that process from the very start of Y7.

There are plenty of schools, particularly in densely populated urban centres, with a high year-on-year turnover of students, as families move into and out of the catchment areas which these schools serve. Those schools cope admirably with implementing strategies to adapt curriculum delivery to ensure, say, that they get students arriving at the start of Y10 successfully through their GCSEs at the end of Y11. And it must be remembered that many subjects which students study for their GCSEs are entirely new to them when they first encounter them in Y9.

It is, rather, a broad base of diverse educational experiences; linked in with strong foundational knowledge and understanding to be built upon later; and, most certainly, strong study skills; as well as, most importantly, a love of learning instilled in children in their younger schools years; coupled with the necessary maturity they have developed to apply themselves to their schoolwork ready for GCSE, which makes all the difference to their success at that level when they get there.

This is what the Middle School educational experience delivers; and it can't be replicated in Ys 7+8 at a secondary school because those same children are, in that setting: the youngest; over-awed by all the older students; overwhelmed by the sheer numbers there that they are so unused to; having to endeavor, as best they can, to adjust, as quickly as possible, to everything that is very different and new to them; and trying to cope with all of that. That's a real setback for those children at that age.

As research clearly shows (see above: Wyatt, 2019) Middle Schools prepare Y7 and Y8 pupils for GCSE significantly better than secondary schools do; precisely because, perhaps, the pressure in the 2-tier system, to start drilling students towards GCSE too early, is so strong; and

this, sadly, stifles children’s natural curiosity and inquisitiveness, their enjoyment of learning, and their enthusiasm for study – all of which otherwise thrive in Middle School settings.
Ofsted

Though Tweedmouth Prior Park First School is the only Berwick Partnership school, other than Berwick Academy, with an Ofsted rating less than ‘Good’, pupils do go on from there to Middle Schools where any potential shortfall in Education Outcomes as Academic Achievement is no longer discernible given those Middle Schools’ Ofsted ‘Good’ ratings (page 6) and their >10% above both County and National expected standards for KS2.

Summary

Schools	Financially Sustainable Viability	Academic Achievement	Quality of Education
First	✘	✓	✓
Middle	✓	✓	✓
High	✘	✘	✘

(Pupil Data and Information)
(Education Outcomes)
(Ofsted)

Linking together Financially Sustainable Viability (‘Pupil Data and Information’), Academic Achievement (‘Education Outcomes’) and Quality of Education (‘Ofsted’)

In terms of Education Outcomes (pages 6-9) as Academic Achievement (KS1 [page 6]; KS2 [page 7]; KS4 [pages 7-8]; and KS5 [pages 8-9]), all that information presented in the consultation document (pages 6-9), coupled with schools’ Ofsted ratings (page 6), points to the only problem in Education Outcomes as Academic Achievement being those of Berwick Academy.

Addressing the financially sustainable viability of the town’s High School, therefore, we believe, requires that Berwick Academy must be seen to be able to deliver what will ‘attract back’ or ‘recapture’ those 183 High School age students (and projected numbers for future years) *and also* the additional number (??) of VIth formers who should be studying there as well. Simply accepting that the majority of these will always remain lost to the Berwick Partnership – and that a secondary school created within a reorganized 2-tier system will be financially bolstered by per-pupil funding generated from the number of Y7 and Y8 students incorporated from closed-down Middle Schools – is a reprehensible strategy which will by no means guarantee any improvement in ‘Education Outcomes’ as ‘Academic Achievement or otherwise.

We would be very concerned if it were indeed being assumed that, simply by reorganizing Berwick Partnership schools to follow the 2-tier primary-secondary system, all those who live in the Berwick Partnership area, but attend schools elsewhere, would be ‘attracted back’ or ‘recaptured’ purely by the allure of a shiny new-build campus.

In terms of the ‘pull-in’ power of an Ofsted rated ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ school, published public exam statistics remain the overriding deal-breaker in the majority of people’s eyes. And so there still remains, for Berwick Academy, the perceived problem of its GCSE results. It is most

unfortunate that public perceptions have – and not without some justification – deteriorated over the years to a point where they appear to have become intractably entrenched. Hence the continuing large numbers of pupils leaving local Middle Schools for schools other than Berwick Academy (consultation document, pages 10-13); pupils who, in the past, would automatically have gone on to become students at the Academy, far nearer to home than the schools which they are now prepared to travel to.

It is the case nationally, statistically, and stereotypically, that, on average, ‘middle class’, ‘professional’, ‘educated’ families have the wherewithal – financially and otherwise – to secure for their children their preferred choice of schools, and to cover the associated costs. It is equally the case – again: nationally, statistically, and stereotypically – that, on average, the children of ‘middle class’, ‘professional’, ‘educated’ families get more GCSEs, and at higher grades.

This means that, again on average, if all pupils leaving local Middle Schools did go straight on to become students at Berwick Academy, then GCSE results there would, in due course, automatically rise to a level which one would expect to reflect that of pupils’ prior KS2 results i.e. above expected in relation to both County and National averages; instead of, as is currently the case, well below (consultation document, pages 7-9).

Conversely, if, post-reorganization, all those pupils who would usually have left local Middle Schools to go to schools elsewhere do, in fact, continue to do so, and do *not* go on to an overhauled Berwick Academy – or to the new 2-tier secondary school which supersedes it – then GCSE results there will *not* improve; the problem of public perceptions will *still* remain; and ‘Education Outcomes’ will *still* be foremost among the ‘Issues Facing The Berwick Partnership’, potentially becoming *more*, not *less*, of an issue.

Whatever the arguments for Education Outcomes being about so much more than just Academic Achievement – and however much such arguments ring true – public opinion, especially locally, has long been overwhelmingly influenced by schools’ test and exam results; particularly Berwick Academy’s GCSEs. This will not change. It presents a considerable – perhaps even wholly insurmountable – challenge that must be conquered in order to win people over to whatever is proposed for reorganizing Berwick Partnership schools.

That aside, it has clearly long been the case that the Department for Education – and, more especially, the Secretary of State for Education – focuses very firmly, exclusively even, on test and exam results in judging schools – particularly schools which are (in danger of) failing; and certainly where a Local Authority County Council is to be held accountable for addressing such a case of a failing school within its remit.

Hence the recruitment, in 2018, of Northumberland County Council’s Executive Director of Children and Adult Services to Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the School System in the Department of Education Theodore Agnew’s (Lord Agnew; Baron Agnew of Oulton) group of education experts tasked with raising school standards in the North East; one of whose key targets was ‘unlocking the potential of key secondary schools in the region by encouraging collaboration with schools, high performing academy trusts and local authorities’.

Such collaboration, we feel, requires a radical rethink – a much more ambitious vision for KS4, KS5, alternative pre-and-post-16, SEND, special, and adult education. This needs to start, we would advocate, with an *accurate independent expert educationist consultancy assessment* of the educational needs of our teenagers and young adults living in the Berwick Partnership area;

and ensuring those needs are properly met by determinedly focusing on implementing thoroughly and carefully thought through, properly planned, and appropriately well matched educational provision, at Berwick Academy, which will rigorously and robustly target delivering those very educational opportunities which our teenagers and young adults do need, and deserve, to be able to access, in order for each of them to fulfill their individual potential; and so move on knowing that they are ready for the world of work, and to succeed in life – as fully capably prepared by their experiences of school as possible.

That means delivering provision for success in everything that will ‘attract back’ or ‘recapture’ those 183 ‘missing’ students, and additional VIth formers, to Berwick Academy: for the statistically likely majority of whom – coming from, on balance of probability, prospectively, stereotypically, ‘middle class’, ‘professional’, ‘educated’ families; and so aiming to get more GCSEs at higher grades – this does, in fact, mean provision for ‘Education Outcomes’ as ‘Academic Achievement’ i.e. provision for a good range of GCSE and A level subjects, delivered via high standards of teaching and learning, leading to ‘success’ as measured by exam results in terms of being able to get more of those GCSEs and A Levels, and at higher grades.

That said, it is just as important to ensure provision of alternatives to GCSEs (Applied GCSEs, Entry Level GCSEs, BTECs, NVQs etc.) for students better suited to, and likely to do better at, those instead; and to balance that with, ideally, for every student, at least a pass grade in GCSE Maths and English; and, if possible, a minimum of 5 GCSE passes – though there will always be some students for whom that will still be a struggle.

If Berwick Academy were able to show, now, that students’ grades for Maths and English GCSEs in recent years have been ‘on target’ with respect to what those pupils’ KS2 Maths and English SATs results predicted, then that is most definitely something worth working up in the public eye by way of demonstrating that young people are leaving at 16 having fulfilled their potential such that, post-reorganization, those who might otherwise have usually travelled to attend schools elsewhere would, instead, feel more reassured about staying within the Berwick Partnership to do GCSEs and A Levels at Berwick Academy. This would go some way to ‘attracting back’ or ‘recapturing’ those students.

As to how to provide such a broad ranging curriculum, staff it (recruitment and retention), resource it (finace!), accommodate it all appropriately within the premises on site (refurb/renovate/rebuild/redevelop), and ensure that everything is financially sustainably viable (student numbers, per-capita funding, additional sources of income), doubtless poses considerable challenges.

Nonetheless, a great deal *is* accomplished elsewhere, all of which needs to be scouted out, and tapped into, by looking outward, to models of exemplary practice in other schools, from which to glean the best of what could be implemented here; rather than the inward-looking, overly self-reliant, home-huddle-hub approach which is necessarily short-sighted and self-limiting.

We are aware of at least some suggestions prompted by colleagues and contacts with experience of how things have been done in other schools. We would be happy to share those and would urge that further such avenues should be purposefully explored and pursued.

That, we are convinced, would pay dividends. To concede otherwise, and simply accept that the students Berwick Academy loses just can’t be won back; that the only way forward is to go 2-tier just to boost numbers by combining, in a new secondary school, existing Y7 and Y8 Middle School pupils with Y9-13 High School students – that seems, to us, defeatist.

Besides which, we would echo the words of Cllr Fairless-Aitken at the FACS OSC meeting of 10am April 7th 2022:

'I don't know whether, if you stick clearly thriving Middle Schools, in this instance, onto a struggling - I know it's moved up a tier - academy, I don't know if that's going to fix the problem.'

We don't know if that's going fix the problem, either. We think it won't. And we're concerned it might well make matters worse.

Having read the consultation document, do you think Glendale Middle School and Wooler First should remain in the Berwick Partnership or move to the Alnwick Partnership?

? Remain in the Berwick Partnership

? Move to the Alnwick Partnership

Please give the reasons for your answer.

Having read the consultation document, do you think Belford Primary School should remain in the Berwick Partnership or move to the Alnwick Partnership?

? Remain in the Berwick Partnership

? Move to the Alnwick Partnership

Please give the reasons for your answer.

In the absence, as yet, of any real and useful information about precisely what the post-reorganization educational landscape might actually look like in north Northumberland, it is impossible to make any validly informed judgement; and so we offer, in what follows below, some important closely associated issues which we feel merit very careful consideration.

Moving Wooler First, Glendale Middle, and Belford Primary to the Alnwick Partnership

[Having read the consultation document]

Wooler First, Glendale Middle and Belford Primary Schools

Another issue arose as a result of the work undertaken with schools in the partnership linked to school organisation was the question of whether Belford Primary, Wooler First and Glendale Middle Schools should remain within the Berwick Partnership or whether it would be more appropriate for the schools to become part of the Alnwick Partnership. This idea came forward as a result of the historically significant numbers of pupils who leave these schools at the end of Year 6 to join The Duchess High School in Year 7. The key focus of this consultation is to seek your views on the organisation of schools, including which schools should remain within the Berwick Partnership.

There is very little to go on in the consultation document (page 19).

The views of the communities of those schools ought to matter most. However, the consultation document states 'this consultation is not a referendum and any decision about the structure of schools will be based on the quality of the educational rationale, not on the number of responses for one structure or another'. County, then, clearly, will be making that call.

A move to the Alnwick Partnership, which has recently been reorganized to conform to the 2-tier system (so far, seemingly, somewhat unsuccessfully, it should be noted), would presumably mean amalgamating all the children from Wooler First School with the Y5 and Y6 children from Glendale Middle School to form a Wooler/Glendale primary school (in whichever of those two premises was deemed most financially sustainably viable; the other being closed and sold off), with Alnwick's Duchess High School 'absorbing' Glendale Middle School's Y7 and Y8 children. Similarly, a move to the Alnwick Partnership would presumably mean all Y6 children leaving Belford Primary school would flow straight on through to Y7 at The Duchess High School in

Alnwick.

This, presumably, would displace, within a couple of years post-reorganization, many of the secondary-age Berwick-based children who currently travel to attend Alnwick schools instead of feeding on through to become students at Berwick Academy.

Points of Caution

We would caution that, should these schools indeed be moved from the Berwick to the Alnwick Partnership, public perceptions will need to be very carefully handled indeed. Public perceptions that this will have been orchestrated to 'trap' children within schools in Berwick in order to boost the number of pupils leaving the town's Middle Schools moving straight on through to become students at Berwick Academy (or the new 2-tier secondary school which supersedes it) must be expected.

We also note that the combined numbers of Berwick-based children attending Scottish and Private schools exceeds those currently travelling to Alnwick schools (consultation document, page 12, table 8). We would caution that, rather than recapturing Alnwick-bound Berwick-based children, if the situation is not handled very carefully indeed, those children will simply seek out, similarly, the Scottish and Private school alternatives instead; or, indeed, look further afield – including for opportunities elsewhere necessitating a move away from Berwick altogether.

Meanwhile, surplus places in any expanded new-build reorganization – created in anticipation of retaining Berwick-based children who, up until then, would have gone elsewhere – will remain – and, possibly, accrue – obviously without the expected *per capita* pupil-numbers-based funding to be financially sustainably viable. Thus the school will fail, and the Secretary of State for Education will have to step in. That must be avoided at all costs.

This deserves very serious consideration indeed. It may not be part of 'the vision' but it certainly must be factored in as a 'worst case scenario' and accordingly planned for in terms of ensuring mitigating remedial strategies, to rescue the situation in light of such an eventuality, are in place, and properly prioritised.

This is particularly so when, it must be remembered, whatever system the reorganization introduces, GCSE results will not improve immediately, the very year after the new system comes into being. Indeed, they may remain largely unchanged, or even dip, relative to the degree of disruption to our children's education which the reorganization process – how long it lasts in all that it involves – inflicts; and how all that continues to have an impact, year-on-year, following any such changes.

Whatever the arguments (as true as they are) for education being about so much more than just exam results, public perceptions have long become hardwired to respond reflexly to school comparator data based on percentage pass rate exam-based statistics. People will continue to send their children elsewhere if they do not feel that what is on offer closer to home is good enough for them.

Having read the consultation document, do you have any suggestions on how additional specialist provision could be delivered within the Berwick Partnership in order to meet the growing numbers of children and young people being assessed as having SEMH and ASD in this area and to enable them to receive their education within or as close to their home communities as possible?

We address SEMH and ASD separately in the course of further pages which follow. First, here, we comment briefly on SEND and Specialist provision more generally.

Whilst those with first-hand experience of the system as it currently operates locally will have invaluable insights to share, professional bodies and specialist agencies must also be consulted on this (see below). Obviously the more such provision the better. Certainly children should *not* have to travel far to access the support they need. They deserve to be able to access it locally. The anecdotal accounts we have heard (far too many of them) of everything that so many ASD children have to contend with, daily, what with taxis, buses, drivers, chaperones, long journeys, and difficult circumstances; and the frustration and anguish they and their families suffer as result – it really is wholly insupportable; and, we assume, incredibly inefficiently expensive. We're left with the distinct feeling that someone just needs to wade in, get a grip of the situation, and be resolutely relentless in their determination to sort it all out once and for all. Other than this, The Grove special school is consistently outstanding and is to be thoroughly commended on that. It needs, though, new, expanded premises, on a new site, with plenty of outdoor space, which would afford further 'fresh air' opportunities that would greatly enhance the educational experience of the children who go there.

That aside, we are aware of, and are currently working through, the following documentation, to gain as broadly informed a view as we can of SEND at every level:

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Documentation

Northumberland County Council

- Ofsted
<https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50166604>
Meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Thursday, 8 August 2019 at 10.00 a.m. Item 11. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES – SEND Written Statement (WSOA) Update
https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/Data/County%20Council/201911061500/Agenda/45348_M9500.pdf
National Autistic Society - Northumberland Information, Advice and Support Service
[Northumberland Information, Advice and Support \(autism.org.uk\)](http://Northumberland.Information,Advice.and.Support.autism.org.uk)
- Council's vision for its SEND services
Partnership working has been key as Northumberland County Council and Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) have launched an important strategy covering the next three years.
<https://www.northumberlandgazette.co.uk/health/councils-vision-for-its-send-services-3269592>
- SEND COMMISSIONING AND PLACE PLANNING OFFICER.4146
<https://www.northeastjobs.org.uk/job/-/227781>
- SEND and Inclusive Education Services Structure Chart
https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/679442/response/1625033/attach/4/SEND%20and%20Inclusive%20Education%20Services%20Structure%201%201.pdf?cookie_passthrough=1
- Northumberland Information, Advice and Support Service
Does your child Have SEND? Do you need any information, advice or support? We're here to help.
<https://northumberlandiass.org.uk/>
- Northumberland Family Services Directory and Local Offer
Northumberland SEND Information, Advice and Support Service
(Previously known as Northumberland Parent Partnership Service)
https://northumberland.fsd.org.uk/kb5/northumberland/fsdmobile/service.page?id=uJLQ_SSQj7E
- Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

(From 1 July 2022, responsibility for commissioning healthcare services for our area has transferred to the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board [ICB])

NB a 'SEND' search on the ICB website returns nothing!

<https://www.northumberlandccg.nhs.uk/your-health/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities-send/>

- Northumberland schools and what support can be offered for learners with Special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

[Education & Schools for SEND](#)

[Northumberland Schools](#)

[Special Educational Needs support in schools](#)

[Special Educational Needs guidance for professionals](#)

[Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment](#)

[Right to appeal and tribunal](#)

[Transition - Moving On](#)

[Elective home education](#)

[Adult Education](#)

[Education other than at school: EOTAS](#)

[School Exclusions](#)

[Contact the SEN Team](#)

<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Children/Northumberland-Local-Offer-SEND-0-to-25-years/Education-Schools.aspx>

Government

- SEND Review: Right support, right place, right time
Government consultation on the SEND and alternative provision system in England
Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Education by Command of Her Majesty, March 2022
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063620/SEND_review_right_support_right_place_right_time_accessible.pdf
- Schools, colleges and children's services: Special educational needs and disability (SEND) detailed information from:
[Department for Education,](#)
[Department of Health and Social Care,](#)
[Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities](#)
[Department for Work and Pensions](#)
- SEND code of practice
[SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#)
[SEND: managing the 2014 changes to the system](#)
[SEND: guide for parents and carers](#)
[SEND: guide for further education providers](#)
[SEND: guide for schools and alternative provision settings](#)
[SEND: guide for early years settings](#)
[SEND: guide for social care professionals](#)
[SEND: guide for health professionals](#)
[SEND: supporting local and national accountability](#)
- Teaching and learning
[Commissioning a SEND review](#)
[Education for children with health needs who cannot attend school](#)
[Providing supported internships for young people with an EHC plan](#)
- Special schools
[Residential special schools: national minimum standards](#)
[Visiting children in residential special schools and colleges](#)
[Residential special schools and colleges: support for children](#)
[Non-Maintained Special Schools Regulations 2015](#)
[Independent special schools and colleges](#)
- Disabled children
[Safeguarding disabled children](#)
[Short breaks for disabled children](#)
- Information for parents and carers
[Help if you have a disabled child](#)
[Children with special educational needs and disabilities \(SEND\)](#)
[Apply for school transport for a child with special educational needs and disabilities](#)
<https://www.gov.uk/topic/schools-colleges-childrens-services/special-educational-needs-disabilities>

National Autistic Society

- Schools Bill. What does the Bill mean for autistic people?
[Schools Bill \(autism.org.uk\)](#)

- Northumberland Information, Advice and Support Service
[Northumberland Information, Advice and Support \(autism.org.uk\)](http://autism.org.uk)

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

[Having read the consultation document]

Table 9 - Forecast for number of pupils with ASD as a primary need living in Berwick Partnership

Forecasts by year Group	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Sep-22	1	1	4	1	6	6	8	4	16	5	9	3
Sep-23	3	2	1	6	2	7	8	7	8	15	7	8
Sep-24	3	4	2	2	7	2	9	7	15	8	22	6
Sep-25	3	4	4	2	2	8	2	8	15	15	11	20
Sep-26	2	4	4	5	3	2	10	2	18	15	22	10
Sep-27	3	3	4	5	6	3	3	9	5	17	22	20
Sep-28	3	3	3	5	6	7	4	3	20	5	26	20
Sep-29	3	3	3	4	6	7	9	4	6	20	7	23

Note: Shaded figures show year on year increase within a particular year group.

We were puzzled, in discussing this data with teachers and teaching assistants from several local schools, as to why it should be that they know of classes for Sep-22 which each have in them more ASD children than Table 9 shows there to be in a whole year-group cohort across the entire Berwick Partnership. We'd be interested to know how these numbers were arrived at.

We'd also like to know the numbers of ASD children currently being home educated, educated other than at school (EOTAS); and if there are any more to be accounted for who don't fall into any category – perhaps are permanently unwell; otherwise unable to be educated anywhere for whatever reason; or, indeed, if there are any who have, as it were, 'fallen off the radar' altogether, and are currently actually unaccounted for?

We were also somewhat perplexed by Table 9 for the stand-out irregularities in the year-on-year increase in ASD within a particular year group which it shows.

Specifically - the number of those with ASD is forecast to suddenly more-than-double (red diagonal lines enclosed in black-bordered rectangles) in four future Y7 September year-group cohorts as each moves on into Y8 in the subsequent September: 2023-2024 (7-15), 2024-2025 (7-15), 2025-2026 (8-18), 2027-2028 (9-20). This pattern is very similarly repeated (this time it's about a 50% increase in ASD numbers) for four future Y9 September year-group cohorts moving on into Year 10 in the subsequent September: 2023-2024 (15-22), 2025-2026 (15-22), 2026-2027 (15-22), 2027-2028 (17-26).

Therefore, this sudden increase – over the course of a single academic year – is forecast to occur in *both* the 11-12 year-olds *and* the 13-14 year-olds, in all three of the immediately upcoming Sep-22 Y4, Y5 and Y6 year-group cohorts: *first* from the September start of their time in Y7; and *again* from the September start of their time in Y9.

We are wondering: i) why so many children are expected to be identified as ASD in the course of just a few consecutive years within these two particular year-group cohorts (Y7 and Y9) in

their schooling; ii) why it seems not to be *being* anticipated that they should be *being* identified earlier (such that the sudden increase in the course of these two particular years [Y7 and Y9] is, instead, seen as a more gradual increase in keeping with the overwhelming general trend for the other year-group cohorts [blue diagonal lines: the rate of increase in ASD numbers year-on-year encompassed by these blue diagonal lines is around just 1 ASD child per year-group cohort per school year], facilitated by earlier identification at a younger age – the earlier the better, surely, so that intervention/support can likewise be implemented earlier: is that not the aim? – to be targeting what is best for ASD children as early as possible?); and iii) what is being done to action earlier identification, intervention and support in order to mitigate this seeming oversight?

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

[Do you have any suggestions on how additional specialist provision could be delivered within the Berwick Partnership in order to meet the growing numbers of children and young people being assessed as having ASD in this area and to enable them to receive their education within or as close to their home communities as possible?]

This is a vast and complex area. We have, between us, some knowledge and/or experience, through friends, family, and neighbors, of more than a couple of dozen children with ASD: some who recently have been/are going through various Berwick Partnership schools; some living within the Berwick Partnership area who have recently been/are travelling to attend schools further away; and others – unconnected with Berwick – in schools elsewhere.

We also have professional colleagues and contacts – SENDCos, Teachers, Teaching Assistants (TAs), and Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs), Counsellors, Educational Psychologists, Child & Adolescent Psychiatrists, and SEND Advisors – not only through TCMS but across Berwick Partnership schools; as well as in schools outside the Berwick Partnership which children living in the Berwick Partnership area attend; and also in schools elsewhere.

In all honesty, attempting to coherently assimilate all that we have gleaned, from all these various inputs, simply defeats us. We find ourselves presented with a quite bewilderingly disparate picture. The overall impression is chaotic. It suggests a system struggling to cope; one that, for too many children, really isn't working very well, at all.

For now we would highlight three major points that stand out.

1. The importance of retaining the 3-tier system was, without doubt, *the* standout take-home message for what would most benefit ASD children. An array of really quite obvious reasons were given.

In contrast, the detrimental effects of so sudden a move, at eleven years old, for those ASD children used, for seven years or more, to so small a primary school, where they are, by then, extremely settled, as the oldest and 'biggest' children, and feel so safe in their school, to such a large, unfamiliar, and so sensorily overwhelming a secondary school, where they are then, in contrast, the youngest, 'little-est', and most vulnerable students, and feel anything but safe – the traumatic effects of all this were painted in very bleak terms.

2. There seems, for everyone we spoke to, to be such a frustrating obsession with inclusion. That brings with it tremendous pressures to see 'mainstream integration' as the ultimate

successful goal for ASD children to have to attain. But this is experienced by ASD children much more as a tremendous pressure to feel forced to conform to neurotypically stereotypical norms which burdens ASD children terribly with enormous self-imposed stresses and strains to mask their own neurodivergent individuality by mimicking expected norms.

This can lead to the buildup of intolerable inner turmoil which manifests in ways which are perceived as behaviorally unacceptable and merely serves to compound feelings of fault, flaw and failure. Much preferred, it certainly seems, from all those to whom we spoke, would be an entirely separate SEND school, on an entirely separate site, with links to local schools which would allow very carefully managed, and very gradually phased, assimilation into – and, indeed, withdrawal from – mainstream education on, where necessary, a permanently oscillating basis.

3. It was considered crucial by all those to whom we have spoken about this, that a complete and holistic overview of ASD provision in the whole of the Berwick Partnership area (not just in Berwick Partnership schools) needs to be very carefully and clearly conducted, most specifically '*from the bottom up*' i.e. to start, first off, by getting together, and talking with, all the TAs and HLTAs from every single school (including those, if at all possible, which children leaving the Berwick Partnership attend); hearing them out, for the invaluable perspective they have to offer; listening properly and productively to all that they have to say; taking all that on board; and then acting on it.

They are the ones who work closely, day in day out, one-to-one, with ASD children; all the while liaising very closely with their parents and teachers; and keeping the school's SENDCo, and key senior staff, informed and up-to-date. They are *the* key point of contact for everyone involved; pivotal to the process of ensuring their ASD charges make progress positively and productively; and, often, too, being a vital mainstay in the lives of those children and their families. They deserve to take center stage in the next phase of the consultation as County looks to them, first and foremost, to inform future planning for making even further progress in strategizing to deliver excellent SEND ASD provision in our schools.

Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)

[Having read the consultation document]

Table 10 - Forecast for number of pupils with SEMH as a primary need living in Berwick Partnership

Forecasts by year Group	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Sep-22	0	3	2	9	16	18	8	13	8	9	13	7
Sep-23	0	0	5	3	11	20	15	10	12	9	9	10
Sep-24	0	0	0	8	4	14	16	17	9	13	9	6
Sep-25	0	0	0	1	9	4	11	19	16	10	13	7
Sep-26	1	0	0	0	1	11	4	13	18	17	10	10
Sep-27	0	1	0	0	1	1	9	4	12	19	17	7
Sep-28	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	11	4	13	19	13
Sep-29	0	0	1	2	1	1	1	1	10	4	13	14

Note: Shaded figures show year on year increase within a particular year group

We were somewhat perplexed by Table 10 purporting to show a year-on-year increase in SEMH within a particular year group.

For instance, for the Sep-22 Y5 year-group cohort, SEMH numbers as that cohort moves up through Ys 5-11 (18, 15, 17, 16, 17, 17, 13), are forecast to fluctuate narrowly around a mean of 16, beginning with what is in fact the *highest* number of 18 in Sep-22 of their Y5, before then actually *falling* subsequently – not, in fact, increasing year-on-year, at all – to the *lowest* number of 13 by the time that cohort moves into Y11 in Sep-29. This does not show a year-on-year increase – quite the reverse.

Puzzling, too, is the very sharp difference between SEMH numbers for the Sep-22 Y1 cohort (forecast to rise by 2 or 3 for the next couple of years and then stabilize at about 10 for every subsequent year) and those for the Sep-22 Reception cohort, in the year group immediately below (forecast to start at zero and show no rise whatsoever for three years before levelling out at just 1 for every subsequent year; indeed that appears to be forecast as the case for every Reception year-group cohort for the rest of this decade [blue diagonal lines]). Then, for the Sep-22 Y2 cohort, in the year group immediately above, the mean SEMH number of just under 4 is forecast to remain very stable indeed over subsequent years with minimal fluctuation around the almost fixed mean value of just 4 (green diagonal line).

This would seem to flag up very unexpectedly odd predictive discrepancies between these three immediately chronologically adjacent year-group cohorts. One might expect them, precisely because they are so chronologically close, to have in common a very similar shared experience, at a similarly very young age – formatively crucial to their developmental progress, particularly socially – of, most especially, the adverse effects of having lived most of their very young lives, so far, in lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic. Wouldn't that lead one to anticipate the highest year-on-year increases for SEMH numbers in these youngest year-group cohorts since they would be expected to have been most affected by the pandemic?

In contrast, it is the Sep-22 Ys 3, 4, 5, 7 and 10 (red diagonal lines) who are forecast to have the

highest SEMH numbers (mean > 10) in the coming years (although, again, they do not show year-on-year increases, but fluctuate, over time, quite narrowly, each around their respective, fairly stable, mean SEMH number). The Sep-22 Ys 1, 6, 8, 9 and 11 have mean SEMH numbers of 5-10 (orange diagonal lines), again each fluctuating fairly closely, respectively, about a reasonably stable mean and, again, not showing a year-on-year increase.

We are wondering how these numbers have been forecast and if the analytical methodology has sufficiently factored in the effects on children (especially very young children) of lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic. How higher might SEMH numbers turn out – as only time will tell – to be? Has a ‘worst case scenario’ been scoped out? And are plans (and especially funding) in place for greater provision than these current forecast figures, for now, suggest? That would certainly prove prudent.

Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)

[Do you have any suggestions on how additional specialist provision could be delivered within the Berwick Partnership in order to meet the growing numbers of children and young people being assessed as having SEMH in this area and to enable them to receive their education within or as close to their home communities as possible?]

<p>Mental Health Counsellor C4G CIC Berwick-Upon-Tweed TD15 Full-time, Permanent</p>	<p>The successful candidate/s will be providing one to one therapeutic sessions either in a school setting or in the William Elder Building, therefore experience of working with children in a school environment is a necessity.</p>
<p>This post is grant funded to allow the continuation of the project and meet the current increased demand on services.</p>	<p>You will:</p>
<p>The role being offered is an exciting opportunity for Mental Health Counsellors/Practitioner to join Choices4Growth, C4G – CIC, a growing organisation celebrating its fifth anniversary in 2022. They provide mental health support for the whole of Northumberland and surrounding areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a recognised counselling or therapy qualification, preferably with post-qualifying experience • Be a member of BACP • Work ethically • Own an in-date enhanced DBS certificate • Work with pastoral teams, safeguarding teams, parents, carers, or guardians • Build relationships with colleagues in designated schools • Receive supervision from the Project Director • Work under the policies and procedures of C4G and that of the schools and William Elder Building • Demonstrate understanding of working with children and young people who require or would benefit from emotional and therapeutic support • Demonstrate understanding of a range of therapeutic models • Receive annual leave, contributory pension scheme and learning and development opportunities
<p>Choices4Growth is Berwick based and is the first organisation to offer assessment, counselling, signposting, and support to the whole of the community, covering all ages from 3 years – 18 years old, young persons and adults.</p>	
<p>Covering a range of issues in all age groups, including depression, anxiety, loss/bereavement, suicide ideation, relationships, domestic violence and currently working in three local schools and the William Elder Building Berwick.</p>	
<p>It is envisaged the new role will start in September 2022 to cover the additional schools seeking our support.</p>	

We are aware of the above recently advertised post. However, we understand that, to begin with, the grant-funded finance secured so far will only support an *ad hoc* allocation of hours, at various times of the day/weekends/evenings, as and when cases arise. This seems to us a somewhat haphazard approach to targeting SEMH as an identified SEND priority.

We would advocate, rather, the creation of a designated centrally-based, appropriately qualified, skilled, and experienced (suitably medically/psychologically/psychiatrically qualified with requisite Mental Health experience, skills and expertise) SEMH County

Coordinator accountable for overseeing SEND SEMH provision throughout all schools under the Local Authority's remit. This would promote a consistently clear, coherent, compatible, cooperative, collaborative, and cohesively coordinated approach that would engender efficient and effective management, provision and delivery of appropriately timely SEND SEMH identification, intervention and support – and, in doing so, duly demonstrate Ofsted SEND compliance – across all schools.

There then needs to be one SEMH Local Area Schools Coordinator for each of the geographically associated groups of schools within the region, to do an enhanced version of the job outlined above, on a full-time permanent basis, working within, and travelling between, all schools in their remit, and apportioning their time appropriately between them, in accordance with the SEMH needs of each one, in terms of: i) individual support for SEMH children there; ii) supporting/briefing/advising/guiding/training staff (school senior management, key SEND staff, teachers, (higher level) teaching assistants, and support staff etc.); and ongoing SENDCo liaison.

There then needs to be coordinated collaborative cooperation between the region's SEMH Local Area Schools Coordinators, overseen by the SEMH County Coordinator, to get staff from all schools together regularly for INSET, training, support sessions, and opportunities to share best practice etc.: work with pastoral teams, safeguarding teams, parents, carers, guardians etc. to build professionally supportive relationships between colleagues in linking schools together.

That aside, TCMS values the Thrive approach: <https://www.thriveapproach.com/about-thrive/about-us>

<p>THRIVE</p> <p><u>About Thrive</u></p> <p>Our mission is to help children and young people become more emotionally resilient and better placed to engage with life and learning.</p> <p>We do this through our whole-school approach to wellbeing - proven to improve attendance, behaviour and attainment.</p> <p>Thrive helps children and young people feel safe, supported and ready to learn. Thrive has been providing training, tools and insights to organisations and individuals for over 25 years.</p> <p>Initially conceived as a way of tackling the issue of school exclusions, Thrive now offers a whole-setting approach to supporting the right-time social and emotional development of all children and young people.</p> <p><u>The Thrive Approach consists of:</u></p> <p>1. Thrive-Online™ (TOL) - a web-based profiling, action-planning and progress monitoring tool enabling you to ensure the best outcome for each child or group.</p>	<p>2. Thrive training - focusing on the emotional needs of different age groups, informed by established neuroscience and attachment research, as well as child development studies and research into risk and resilience factors.</p> <p>With our HQ based in Devon, Thrive is a business that works with local authorities, multi-academy trusts (MATs), individual schools and other settings across Great Britain. To date, more than 50,000 staff have received Thrive training, ensuring that over 627,000 children and young people have access to the Thrive Approach, changing lives and increasing educational attainment levels.</p> <p><u>Benefits of Thrive</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Experience the personal and professional rewards of helping children and young people learn about their emotions and regulate their own behaviour. 2. Reduce exclusions and improve attendance and attainment by helping children and young people to engage with learning. 3. Strengthen links with parents and carers, ensuring a joined-up approach to supporting children and young people's emotional and social needs.
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Having read the consultation document, do you have any comments about the current level or availability of early years provision in the Berwick Partnership area?

Early Years Provision

[Having read the consultation document]

Early Years Provision

Some First Schools also have provision for children from age 2 or 3 which are run separately from the school, but based on the school site e.g. Tweedmouth Prior Park First and Spittal First School.

There are currently 20 Early Years provisions across the Berwick Partnership (including 9 schools). All provision is judged Good or above by Ofsted with the majority offering the free funded entitlement for eligible 2, 3 and 4 yr olds. Any specific proposals for Early Years provision linked to schools would be included in the next phase of consultation, but if you have any views or ideas relating to Early Years provision in the partnership at th is stage, then we welcome them.

There is very little to go on in the consultation document (pages 5, 15).

Early Years Provision

[Do you have any comments about the current level or availability of early years provision in the Berwick Partnership area?]

Clearly there is widely available good provision with no Ofsted-identified concerns (consultation document, page 15).

We are wondering: wouldn't consolidating all Early Years Provision within existing First Schools, especially if it were free-funded from the age of two: i) make the most valuable use of space available due to existing surplus places in some of those schools (indeed, if all pre-Reception 2-4 year-olds were included might that not go quite some way to obviating the need to close any First Schools at all?); and ii) greatly facilitate earliest identification, intervention and support for SEND (especially, of primary importance, in the priority areas of ASD and SEMH), safeguarding, and welfare issues; and subsequent monitoring, assessment and tracking on up through the same school not only of those individual children, but their siblings' situations, and family circumstances, too - particularly with ASD and SEMH (as targeted present priorities addressed earlier in this survey) in mind?

Having read the consultation document, do you have any suggestions on what Post-16 provision would be useful to assist young people in the Berwick Partnership area to support their academic or technical development?

Post-16 Provision

[Having read the consultation document]

Post-16 Educational Offer

As part of this consultation, we are also keen to hear about your views in relation to post- 16 provision for young people living in the Berwick Partnership area. We are seeking your ideas about how post-16 provision could be improved and where, and these will help to shape a more detailed proposal to be put forward in the next phase of consultation.

There is very little to go on in the consultation document (page 16).

Post-16 Provision

[Do you have any suggestions on what Post-16 provision would be useful to assist young people in the Berwick Partnership area to support their academic or technical development?]

All potential provision for Post-16 alternatives to GCSEs and A levels (and, indeed, Pre-16 provision for alternatives to GCSEs; as well as Post-16 provision for first-time-taken GCSEs, GCSE retakes, AS and A levels) should be scoped out thoroughly in terms of a rigorous assessment by an *independent expert educationist consultant* of 'numbers and needs' for our children, young people, and later-in-life learners, locally: entry level awards, applied GCSEs, certificates and diplomas; GNVQs, BTECS, and the new T-Levels; and, potentially, higher level qualifications offered in partnership with the geographically nearest Colleges and Universities, or those more distant online – all these should be considered. Every opportunity offered could make a real difference to someone. People here deserve that chance.

Do you have any general or additional comments that you would like the Council's Cabinet to consider in relation to any of the issues raised in this consultation document?

Please ensure, whatever is decided, that there is as little disruption as possible for children and their families as regards: i) the lead-up to re-organisation (building closures, interim relocations, renovation and new-build works etc.); ii) managing the transition itself very carefully, over an appropriate time-scale, so as not to rush things through before everything's properly ready to start shifting the children around; iii) having everything ready in place for after the transition (staff, facilities, resources, admin structures, policies, protocols and procedures etc.) so as to hit the ground running and not have to be scrabbling and scrambling to catch-up. Please be especially careful with Y5 and Y6 children coming up to their KS2 SATs at this time. And for staff: please, PLEASE ensure issues of recruitment, retention, and most especially redundancies and re-employment, are particularly carefully, sensitively and respectfully considered and dealt with equally appropriately so. Thank you.

That aside, we have raised, informally, at staff and public consultation events, and with our closest-to-town local County Councillors,* issues around how County conducts consultation and engagement, and overview and scrutiny, based on concerns in these areas regarding the previous survey (September and October 2021). We would hope, then, that such concerns do not again arise with regard to this current survey; and would note, in this respect, the opening of the *Executive Summary* (page 2, points 1.1-2) of the recent February-May 2022 *Northumberland County Council - Independent Governance Review* by Max Caller CBE, Gordon Mitchell and Jim Taylor on behalf of *Solace in Business*:

Local government is about people and place, managing, delivering, and integrating a range of disparate services to achieve a **consistent level of service delivery** and community leadership which **improves the lives of all of the area's residents**. Making this happen in the unitary council area covered by Northumberland poses **particular challenges** given the **size, population density, geography, and connectivity issues**. Doing this in a way that demonstrates **compliance and understanding with good local government practice and procedure** is a fundamental requirement, particularly when taking the hard decisions that this requires. Understanding **democratic accountability, scrutiny, openness, and documentation** needs to run right through every part of the organisation. A unitary council operation requires a real understanding of both **strategic overview and local delivery**. The evidence, very clearly, points to Northumberland County Council (NCC) having forgotten much of this and lost its way over a number of years...

We would also urge complete openness and transparency with the public on every single matter; and always at the earliest possible juncture. County must actually tell people, for instance, that they have already applied for 'test and learn' Local Authority led Multi Academy Trust status; and explain to people, now, exactly what they can expect that to mean – in the context of the new Schools Bill becoming Law; and the Government's target that all schools in England must academise and become members of Multi Academy Trusts by 2030 – in terms of how local schools will very soon be operating and how that will continue on into the future.

Otherwise, when changes are implemented, people may well rail against them, feeling – not without some justification – that they have hitherto been deliberately kept in the dark about them. Drip-feeding through tit-bits of information to people, on a 'need-to-know' basis, is a very poor approach to public consultation and engagement.

* Cllr Georgina Hill (in whose ward is TCMS; and many families whose children attend TCMS)

* Cllr Isabel Hunter (in whose ward live many families whose children attend TCMS; who lives very close to TCMS; whose family members have, over the years, attended TCMS)

* Cllr Catherine Seymour (in whose ward is Berwick Middle School; and some families whose children attend TCMS)