



## **Governor response to consultation on the future of Berwick Schools**

Dear members,

The Governors of Norham St Ceolwulf's CE First School strongly support the proposed move to a 2-tier structure of education for the Berwick partnership. When considering the outcomes for the whole partnership and reviewing the proposal we believe a 2-tier structure will produce the necessary improvements in outcomes for all our young people from 0-25, which will enable the locality to be educationally sustainable and prosperous, thus supporting the future of the wider Berwick area.

At a locality level Norham First School acknowledges the difficulties posed as a small rural school. However, under the new leadership and operational structures currently being implemented, it now has the long-term capacity to become a primary school. The school will be federated with Berwick St Mary's CE First School, which will enable the school to continue to deliver high standards of education from Early Years through to the end of Key Stage 2, whilst being financially sustainable through the implementation of hub working with St Mary's. The plans for the school have been shared with both the Diocese and NCC officers, all of whom acknowledge the viability and impact of the school's federation within the 2-tier model.

Governors also support the proposal for Berwick St Mary's and Norham St Ceolwulf's CE First Schools to federate with Tweedmouth Prior Park Community First School, believing such joint working will enhance the educational offer of the school as well as the viability. In truth our proposals also reflect the central policy of the DfE, who are promoting good practice for education through the co-operative working via a 'family of schools' approach.

### **Rationale for 2-Tier**

Examining the proposal purely in terms of educational outcomes we would like to highlight the following key factors that have been instrumental in our final response:

1. A 2-tier model is designed to fully support the implementation of the National Curriculum and the teaching of key stages.
2. In comparison with a 3-tier approach, a 2-tier approach reduces transitions from 2 to 1, with the transition being at the end of key stages rather than part way through. This not only has positive impacts on student well-being (i.e. fewer transitions enabling stronger relationships and support networks to develop in a 2-tier model), it also means schools have full accountability for key stages,

therefore students will receive continuous provision through a defined key stage, rather than the part provision currently received, which no doubt has an impact on final outcomes at Key Stage 4 and beyond, (see point 3).

3. Outcomes in education are based on many factors but primarily it is the relationship between student/families and school that is a major determinant. We would like to highlight the following:
  - a. In a 3-tier model, time to develop purposeful and impactful relationships with students and school is as follows:
    - First school - Nursery to Year 4 = 6 years
    - Middle school - Year 5 -Year 8 = 4 years
    - High school - Year 9 Year 11 = 3 yearsIn a 2-tier model time to develop purposeful and impactful relationships with students and school is as follows:
    - Primary school - Nursery to Year 6 = 8 years
    - Secondary school - Year 7 -Year 11 = 5 years
  - b. Within a 3-tier model, the high school, which arguably is the most important phase in terms of recognised outcomes, (i.e. nationally recognised qualifications - you don't often see reception baseline and Key Stage 2 SATs results on CV's), offers the shortest period of time with the students.
  - c. Within the first term at high school the students need to make life choices around the educational/vocational pathways they wish to take, and the staff in the high school, who have in real terms just started a professional relationship with the children, must support that decision in the best way they can. This high pressure, time restricted approach can lead to errors, as staff will not know the true strengths and passions of any child so quickly, not least because these decisions are being made during a period of transition, when the true potential of a child is often hidden by a desire simply to survive in a new setting and to fit in. Furthermore, it is very important to note the age of the children at this time - they are teenagers, many of whom will be going through puberty which poses a whole new set of issues and challenges as they try to make the best choices for their future.
4. Staff within the partnership are trained in both Primary and Secondary disciplines so there is already the expertise within the partnership to manage and deliver this change of structure well for all children. There is also the capacity within the partnership to deliver effective CPD so enabling any staff who require it, additional support immediate and high-quality training. Several schools within the partnership work with teaching schools around the region, therefore a more strategic network is also available. At Norham and St Mary's all staff are all primary trained and we have staff with experience of teaching Years 5-6 to outstanding levels, a resource which I am sure is available within other partnership schools.
5. Schools taking responsibility and accountability for whole key stages enables the delivery of a truly cohesive and progressive curriculum - the aim currently seen as the main driver in excellence within education as envisioned by DFE and OfSTED. It also reduces the need for repeated testing and assessment within key stages, as teachers/schools have a more robust knowledge of the

child, their achievements, and their areas for development, simply because they have supported the child throughout their whole journey within any given key stage. For instance, children would not have to go through the baseline assessments during Year 5 which are currently needed to secure an element of 3 tier transition.

6. Transition within the current 3 tier model is not a strength of the partnership, with baselines in Year 5 reflecting that point. Within a 2-tier model, transitions can be more dynamic, as the children are starting a new key stage. Baselines as currently practised would not be required, as this element would be completed through the Key Stage 2 SAT's when delivered within the primary schools by staff who have robust understanding of the child throughout Key Stage 2.
7. In terms of recruitment and retention of educational staff, which is an essential resource in the delivery of all our aims for the Berwick partnership, we feel it is very important that the partnership moves to a 2-tier model. Nationally recruitment is in crisis, with fewer teachers joining the profession and many leaving - some taking early retirement, but others simply making life choices and walking away from what could be a job for life. Berwick faces even greater challenges in terms of recruitment and retention, being for the most part rural, isolated from major conurbations and operating a model that is not in line with either National Curriculum or National training programmes. Why would a new teacher join a first school if we cannot offer the full range of primary experiences and so limit their career progression? This impact is also seen in the high school who have even greater challenges recruiting specialist staff.
8. We would also point out that any staffing issues in a change to 2 tier should in the main be achieved through the support of displaced staff via targeted and bespoke CPD. Berwick has the capacity within its current staffing profile to meet the needs of the proposed changes of structure within limited loss of jobs. All that is needed is good management of the process and to have a commitment from all parties involved to achieve the aim of improving outcomes for children.
9. The 2-tier model provides the partnership with a more robust approach to the financial sustainability of the locality. It is clear that pupil numbers are declining, reflecting the changing demographics of Berwick. A planned structural change is therefore required to prevent an unmanaged and long-term structural decline of Berwick educational provision. An unmanaged approach would result in a drop in the standards of education achieved; more schools closing than currently proposed; and a negative effect on the appeal of the Berwick area to any new families coming into the area. Such an unplanned change will also impact on recruitment and retention, with the high possibility of good staff having to move away to further their careers in the future.
10. Although not proposed in this consultation, the importance of financial sustainability in the future will also need to be addressed, with models such as those proposed for Norham and St Mary's (hub models) being a means to ensure long term success and survival.

## **Rationale Norham Community**

In relation to the future of Norham School, we would like to highlight the following:

1. The important role the school plays in supporting the community, providing not only a school to educate in line with the National Curriculum, but also in the social context of a vibrant rural community, committed to ensuring the school is part of and represents our shared goals and aspirations.
2. The vast nature of our catchment area could mean closure of the school and lead to some of the youngest and most isolated members of our community travelling excessive distances to other schools within the partnership.
3. Without a school in Norham many children/families would move to schools in the Scottish Borders, a counter intuitive result from a restructure designed to attract families back into the area.
4. The new strategic structures implemented by the executive head and governing body since September will make the school strong in terms of educational outcomes and financially sustainable in a 2-tier model.

## **SEND Proposal**

Governors have considered the issues around SEND within our local community and the wider context. As a governing body we fully support the development of additional provision for the existing and emerging SEND needs. Whilst we are aware of the excellent work of the Grove and support their work continuing in the future, we also recognise the need to support an increasing number of children/ families dealing with issues related to SEMH.

The Governing Body are aware of the proposal from St Mary's and Berwick Academy to create a new provision to meet the needs of SEMH and other complex needs, within our locality, therefore would recommend fully the proposal for consideration under this consultation.

The Governing Body would like to highlight that the impact of Covid on children's mental health, resilience, emotional presentation/development, early years development is just emerging and, as such, they believe this consultation and any proposed changes should invest in the correct provision and resources for now and the long-term. This again may include the need to further develop, with the locality joint work, ' a family of schools' approach as currently being suggested between St Mary's and Berwick Academy. In addition, as part of a hard federation, we would like to support this work for our rural families when applicable and appropriate.

## **Wooler and Belford**

As a Governing body we would like both schools to stay within the Berwick Partnership, as we believe they add strength to the partnership in terms of the current and future potential of our joint educational offer. However, the decision is for their community to make.

## **Summary**

In conclusion, the Governing body is supportive of the proposed change to a 2-tier system, for all of the above-mentioned reasons. We appreciate change is often a difficult process to go through, however change is what is needed in Berwick to offer the children of our area, and future generations, the best possible start to their lives. We believe we have the people in place to make the change happen and the knowledge/expertise to help manage that change.

Finally, we feel it is important to acknowledge that although the proposals are all about the educational offer, in truth they also will impact on the prosperity of Berwick at a wider context, as if we get the educational offer correct, then that will attract new families and opportunities to our wonderful part of Northumberland.

Regards

Douglas Watkin  
Chair of Governors Norham St Ceolwulf's CE First School

Sent on behalf of the Governing body 05/02/2023