

Response to Consultation of Berwick Partnership Governing Bodies from Holy Trinity CE First School
Governing Body

In order to ensure that our response was a genuine summary of the opinions of our whole governing body, we held several discussions with our board and then asked each governor to submit their individual responses on the understanding that their comments would be private and only seen by the head and chair. We agreed, as a board, that the two middle school teachers on our governing body, should be allowed to take part as, arguably, several other members could be considered to have a conflict of interest. The final submission also includes the views of two teachers (one who teaches at a first school within the partnership and one who teaches outside the partnership). Rev Dennis Handley and Curate Thomas Sample took part in the discussions but declared an interest due to their pastoral responsibilities and didn't submit their views. They are not represented in this final response. We have a vacancy on our board due to a recent resignation for personal reasons. Total number of responses (11).

- 1) If the revised 3-tier system were the preferred model, Holy Trinity School would be largely unaffected so it would undoubtedly be the 'easier' option for this school – whereas other good schools would close or be amalgamated. We feel uneasy about school closures but recognise this does go some way to addressing the issue of surplus places. We also accept that a new build of Berwick Academy could improve educational outcomes at KS4 and above, where, it is clear from the consultation document, they are currently below national expectations.

However, within this model, a significant turnaround in outcomes will only come about as a result of better collaboration between schools and community support for the Academy which will require renewed effort from all parties to repair relationships further damaged by this consultation process. These were among the agreed intentions of heads and chairs laid out in the 'Vision for Change.'

Where rural schools are closed, appropriate transport must be provided for affected families.

Although three of our governors were resolutely in favour of three tier, we unanimously agreed that we could not support a model which did not include a rebuild for The Grove School.

- 2) We would prefer Wooler and Belford to remain in the Berwick Partnership to allow parents the option of returning to an improved Berwick Academy, which would have a positive impact on viability. However, the will of the parents and governing bodies of the communities within the Wooler and Belford catchments should be the deciding factor.
- 3) As above, we believe the communities and schools involved are better placed to decide whether the changes proposed are in the best interests of their children and young people. We have stated that we would like Belford to remain in the Berwick Partnership as we hope pupils will choose to continue their studies in Berwick but we respect the wishes of their governing body.
- 4) If the partnership were reorganised into a two tier structure, we acknowledge that middle schools and Scremerston First would close, and that seems unjustifiable to large sections of

the community who have made their support for the status quo known through recent 'Save Our Schools' campaigns. We also recognise that these schools are Ofsted rated 'Good' and the KS2 results are above average, as outlined in the consultation document. For those who are strongly three tier, significant changes to the school structure, are too risky if they are based on a 'hope' that outcomes will improve, without guarantee.

However, more of our governors expressed support for a two tier reorganisation either unequivocally (5) or tentatively (3). It was felt that only significant change to the current system would have the desired impact on outcomes at KS4 and above and deliver the required improvements in the SEND offer, in the long term. Reasons included the syncing of key stages with national, better staff recruitment and retention and the changing socio-economic background of Berwick (which some believed was having a negative impact on teacher pupil relationships at Y9 as these children tended to form attachments earlier.) There was a sense of inevitability that Berwick would succumb to pressure to go two tier and a feeling that it might as well be now, to take advantage of the money on the table and put an end to damaging uncertainty which has hung over this part of north Northumberland for years, if not decades.

Despite the cautious approval, a number of reservations were expressed, chiefly that, if a two tier model was chosen, careful management of the process was vital in order to minimise disruption to the education of the cohorts most affected, which have already suffered as a result of the pandemic. Doubts were also expressed about how much influence NCC would have and the council's capacity to ensure long lasting improvements in outcomes.

As we have said before, regardless of our individual opinions, this governing body is committed to collaborating with NCC and the wider Partnership to ensure the smooth implementation of whichever model is chosen by the community and this is key to minimising disruption and improving prospects for children and young people at all stages.

- 5) The revised campus model put forward recently by leaders of BMS and TMS represents a compromise for three tier supporters, but was not the preferred model for our three tier advocates. A fourth governor felt it could be explored further as an alternative to two tier. We all agreed that rebuilds for The Grove and Berwick Academy were a must and significant investment in the middles would be welcome, however our reservations about the previous incarnation of the campus model still apply, namely: congestion at the site; removal of provision from north of the river and potential impact on school roll at Holy Trinity and St Mary's. We were unsure whether there would be public support for a five form entry Middle School, sited alongside a high school, which would mean nine-year-olds making a significantly more challenging transition and negate the attraction of the current system which benefits from smaller schools for young children.
- 6) The Vision for Change included improving and extending the SEND offer for CYP in Berwick so that their needs are met locally and travel times reduced. We would welcome a high quality peripatetic service but there are many questions remaining about how this will operate within the three tier system. We think it is better for a child with SEND to be

supported in their home school rather than making multiple transitions to a specialist unit, which also limits parental choice and inclusion within the child's peer group.

- 7) In order to remain true to the agreed vision of heads and chairs, we believe a custom build for The Grove and a Berwick based SEMH hub providing a specialist run peripatetic service to local schools is non-negotiable. The Grove's PAN needs to increase so that more children can attend this setting. The siting of the SEMH hub is a matter for experts and, if the SLT of the Grove are reluctant to extend its provision, an alternative should be explored.
- 8) We strongly feel there is a need for better post 16 and post 18 provision in the Berwick area. The current offer was seen to be unsuitable and we feel our young people are disadvantaged, forced to travel long distances to gain qualifications and, ultimately, move away. We suggest: investment in community based education; close collaboration with Northumberland College (to complement and enhance the current choice of post-16/18 options); subsidised youth provision such as sports clubs, interests and hobbies to support wellbeing and raise aspirations; re-instatement of a community centre or venues for groups to use to hold events and classes.
- 9) EYFS is currently good, although more mainstream SEND support is required. We have concerns that the closure of Scremerston and Norham may limit access to nursery for parents in those catchments. We also caution against the loss of EYFS outdoor play areas due to a need to provide extra room at first schools, should the two tier option prevail.

Holy Trinity CE First School Governing Body

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