

Tweedmouth Prior Park First School

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Tweedmouth Prior Park Governing Body Response to Phase 2 Reorganisation Consultation

The Governors of Tweedmouth Prior Park First School support the move to establish a two-tier education within the Berwick Partnership. This will create a more sustainable education system for children across the area, as well as address the growing number of surplus school places, which are a financial drain on vital educational resources.

Our reasoning includes:

1. The Benefits of Two-tier Education

- It will retain more, sustainable, Primary Schools across the Partnership to keep more schools closer to home, for the first years of a young child's school career.
- The single change of school at age 11 comes at a natural point in the education cycle, at the end of Key Stage 2. Having fewer transitions would benefit all children especially the SEND children.
- The Secondary school has longer to develop the growing child to prepare them for the important GCSE and A-level exams and the direction of their future careers.
- The two-tier stage education is the backbone to the National Curriculum Framework regarding Curriculum, Testing and Teacher Training (teachers are currently trained to teach either Primary or Secondary). It will ensure there is greater accountability for educational outcomes at all levels, with schools becoming accountable for whole key stages. The two-tier structure matches the National Curriculum and is in line with the majority of schools nationally.
- Some Berwick Head Teachers and Governors have been heard to say that Berwick is unique and needs its own unique solution. However, all areas of the country have their own unique challenges and, in this respect, Berwick is no different. The only real difference is that Berwick now has too many schools for the falling number of children – Berwick children deserve equality of opportunity with the rest of the country, which is predominantly 2 tier.
- First schools are well placed to deliver the primary curriculum to the end of Key Stage 2 as primary specialists. Our school has primary teachers who are trained to teach the full primary age range and have the expertise to teach children to the end of Key Stage 2.
- The outcome of the previous consultation concluded that 60% of the Berwick Partnership schools were in favour of 2 -tier.

2. How we will adapt to Two-tier Education.

- We currently have spare classrooms which could easily accommodate Years 5 and 6.
- The teachers in our school are all qualified primary teachers, therefore they have the expertise to teach children of all abilities up to the end of Key Stage 2. Some of our teachers have already taught in and/or have been Headteacher of 3-11 Primary schools. We have governors who have had experience as Governors in Primary schools.
- We will work within the proposed LA Protocol to ensure the correct staffing structure is in place ahead of the school opening as a Primary school.
- We have already started to explore the possibility and benefits of a Federation with St Mary's and Norham First Schools. This will further increase our ability to provide educational improvements and a stronger financial sustainability as a family of Primary schools, working closely together.

3. If Berwick Retained Three-tier Education

- More First Schools will have to close to make those remaining large enough to be financially viable, giving more young children and parents longer journeys to school.
- The pupils will continue to have two school changes, both occurring part-way through important stages of their education.
- The falling birth rate in Berwick is already affecting First School sustainability which would make the Middle Schools, in any form, unviable within the next few years, which could lead to another reorganisation of education within the Berwick Partnership. Retaining the Middle Schools would mean retaining their overheads, i.e., administration costs, that could be better invested into the education provision for all children
- The falling roll that we are currently experiencing will, in due course, affect all schools in Berwick. Maintaining the 3- tier system is not a viable solution for the long term future of the Berwick Partnership.
- Berwick Academy has only one term to try to get to know the pupils well enough before guiding them to make the crucial choices of the most suitable GCSE courses which are required to allow children to access their next stage of learning/life. This is not helpful for many pupils.
- Berwick will remain out of step with the National Curriculum Framework and the changes to two-tier education being promoted by the LA in close parts of the county. This can present difficulties to families moving to or from the Berwick area.
- The two existing Academies in Berwick, St Cuthberts RC and Berwick Academy, could still decide to convert to two-tier and we would then have the mixed economy that these consultations have tried to avoid.
- During the initial phone call, the only reason given to our Head Teacher for the merger of our school with Tweedmouth West was our Ofsted grading. This is unfair as it does not reflect the hard work undertaken by our school and staff over the last 4 years. We would welcome visits from anyone involved in making the decision about the future of our school. We expect an informed decision to be made based on our current performance, rather than a quick decision based on a now-outdated Ofsted inspection.

4. Other Points we would like to make.

- We appreciate the challenges that the necessary reorganisation will present to the schools that have to close, but changes must be made to help to improve the education offered to pupils across the Partnership and to respond to the significant fall in pupil numbers. We believe that the 2 tier structure of primary/secondary schools is the most effective way of doing this.
- We believe that there needs to be an expansion in the provision of Special School places to minimise the need for pupils to be driven long distances to find suitable education. We do not think that this can be provided unless the Grove School moves to a larger site.
- We believe that it is important to invest in new Secondary School buildings in Berwick, to replace the out-of-date buildings. This would allow the school buildings to be fit for purpose to meet the standards expected in current and future education.
- We understand that some parents, staff in other schools and decision makers, including councillors, may favour three-tier because it is what they know best from their days at school, but it is important that this decision is based on knowledge of the wider national educational landscape. We should not believe, what some are saying, that Berwick education is somehow 'special' in a way that is different from education across the whole country.
- Decisions must be made as soon as possible, as the impact of falling pupil numbers are moving up the age range, increasing the challenges at more schools across the Partnership.

Concerns:

- We hope Northumberland County Council FACTS Overview & Scrutiny Committee will be unbiased and consider the end of consultation report and recommendations with an open mind, remembering our children like every other child deserve the best opportunity to access good quality education from 3 years to 16+ years. Every child matters. The members of the FACTS Committee who are not local Councillors appeared to favour the 3-tier option when they considered the report from the previous consultation on 6th October 2022.
- Many of our parents feel daunted by the consultation and, despite our best efforts, will not submit a response. Many feel it is not high on their list of priorities.
- There is a factual inaccuracy about our school on page 4 of the consultation document. It states that Tweedmouth Prior Park First School has provision for children aged 2 or 3 which is run separately from the school, but based on the school site. This is wrong – the school has an integral Nursery class which admits children from age 3.