

Wooler First School & Glendale Community Middle School Governing Body

Consultation on future structure within Berwick Partnership of Schools

Governing body preference: considering all aspects of the consultation and the situation of our two schools here in Wooler it is the preference of the governing body that we become a one form entry primary school with a new build school that is fit for purpose and affordable to operate.

Governors of Wooler First School/Glendale Middle School support the realignment of both schools to the Alnwick Partnership.

Rationale:

- 1. Over time most parents have opted to send their children to Alnwick High School**
- 2. Currently around a third of pupils leave Glendale Middle School at the end of Yr 6 to ensure a place at Alnwick High School.**
- 3. Survey of current parents/ carers indicate over 50% would make Alnwick their first choice, 18% expressed no preference, 27% indicated Berwick as their preferred option.**

Context: Wooler First School (WFS) Glendale Middle School (GMS)

We are deeply passionate about and also very proud of the pupils, staff and provision here in Wooler First School and Glendale Community Middle School.

Our schools sit outside the town of Berwick upon Tweed and serve a large geographic rural community.

WFS and GMS are two separate schools, not federated and operate as 2 schools on one site.

WFS and GMS have a federated governing body and Glendale Middle School has consistently transitioned pupils to Berwick Academy and Alnwick Duchess's High School at the end of Year 8.

Since the Alnwick partnership went to a two-tier system a number of pupils leave Glendale Middle School at the end of Year 6 to guarantee a place there in Year 9. This outward mobility fluctuates annually impacting on class sizes and staff deployment at Glendale. Year 8 pupils are unable to select DCHS as their next school through the LA transition processes adding further confusion, difficulty and anxiety to the process.

Pupil numbers at Glendale continue to fall and future numbers indicate further reduction over time.

This continues to impact on our capacity to sustain effective and high quality curriculum coverage at Key Stage 3.

Governors face an almost impossible task in making strategic decisions for the future of educational provision in our community.

Governors Position

- Governors took the decision pre-consultation to look towards reorganisation to become a one form entry Primary School. This in response to changes in demographics including falling roles, uncertain pupil mobility following the reorganisation of The Alnwick Partnership and further lower birth rates in future years which had already identified.
- Drift in pupil numbers at end of Year 6 as some parents/carers opt to send their child(ren) to Duchess's High School (around 30% per year).
- Difficult to know the numbers of pupils who will attend KS3 and this leads to difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff to ensure KS3 curriculum is covered.
- Further difficulties in next few years as the numbers in WFS continue to fall. WFS is now the only feeder first school to GMS. In the past there were 6 feeder first schools to GMS (2 schools are now Primary and feed Duchess's High School; 3 schools have closed).
- Less than 20 pupils in most year groups at WFS. The current two class structure in Year 5 and 6 would be unsustainable moving forwards.
- Falling pupil numbers has a considerable impact on funding. Governors face great difficulty in making strategic decisions with uncertainties in terms of funding, numbers, staffing and building resources.

- If we do nothing our budget would not sustain GMS to meet the needs of pupils at KS3 and would therefore disadvantage their future learning. Similarly, a fall in pupil numbers at WFS may necessitate a reduction in the number of classes and how these classes are organised.
- Our building was built as a secondary school in the 1950s and has many building issues commensurate with its age. Independent surveys suggest there are a number of issues that require a great deal of attention and finance.

Options to address this could be:

- new primary school building on our existing site of the correct size and configuration to be fit for purpose and affordable to operate and maintain in the long term (the preferred outcome of the governing body).
- significant changes and modifications to our existing facilities to make them fit for purpose and affordable as a primary school & Early Years setting.
- currently we have extensive grounds reflecting GMS historic status as an agricultural secondary school. This is a further financial drain on resources and would need to be addressed to ensure the educational model moving forward was affordable and sustainable.
- significant change and modifications to our existing facilities to enable effective education for our pupils while also sharing the site/facilities with other elements of Local Authority service delivery for the wider Glendale community (safeguarding/affordability to be addressed).
- The governing body give full support to the need to review and expand the SEND education offer in the north of the county. At present demand outstrips provision and many children are not able to access the provision they need and deserve close to home. This places our most vulnerable pupils in inappropriate provision locally or having to travel significant distances in and out of county to access suitable provision.

Way forward

As governors we understand the challenges facing our local schools in the Berwick partnership. We are committed to working with all stakeholders to ensure the best outcome for our children and young people in our community. We would love to be able to maintain the provision for children in the Wooler and Glendale area from 2 years old to 13 years of age that we have built. However, factors out of our control have led our governing body to the following conclusions:

1. Transition to a Primary model would safeguard our future viability and the viability of educational provision for our rural community.
2. The need to support all staff as we go through the process with:
 - clear guidance and timescales for change.
 - clear staff protocol that identifies how at risk staff will be supported through the process.
3. A designated new school build or comprehensive redesign and refurbishment of current facility.
4. Early Years provision: maintain existing provision with possibility to extend provision for the under two year olds. Pre-school provision is very limited in this part of the authority.
5. A possible development of SEND provision to meet needs within the wider area.
6. Possibility of maintaining current swimming provision on site including sharing this facility with local partners.

We are most anxious to move as quickly as we can to resolve the future viability and sustainability of educational provision in the Wooler and Glendale area.