

Berwick Academy Trustees

Dear members,

We write in response to the consultation of the future of education within the Berwick Partnership.

The Academy Trustees care passionately about the students, past, present and future and want them to be able to benefit from all of the opportunities that are available to those in other parts of the country. Furthermore we believe that providing a well-balanced and educated workforce is vital for the growth and development of the wider Berwick area. This is critical for an area which suffers from the challenges of being both a coastal and rural community.

For that reason the Trustees of Berwick Academy strongly support the proposed move to a 2 tier structure of education for the Berwick partnership. When considering the effects 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, that will enable the locality to be educationally sustainable and prosperous.

Specifically:

- Children should be taught the National Curriculum in complete Key Stages as they are in the majority of schools across the country.
- Children should move between schools less often, so that children, families and schools can build positive relationships and a clear understanding of expectations over time. Rather than these changing three times, sometimes in the middle of a Key Stage of the National Curriculum.
- Children and families benefit from developing a longer-term relationship (from year 7) with the school and familiarity with subjects, before choosing their GCSE options choices at year 9.
- The national picture is heavily in favour of two tier education, with only 102 three-tier middle schools out of 32,163 schools.
- Teachers are trained to teach either primary or secondary education. A two-tier model allows for specialist secondary teachers to teach their subject from year 7, improving outcomes for students.
- 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, (DFE/OfSTED vision). It also reduces the need for 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 a key stage. For instance, children would not have to go through unnecessary baseline assessments within Year 5, which are currently needed as a means to secure an element of 3 tier transition.

Other points to consider

SEND Provision

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

With the above in mind, Berwick Academy has worked with St Mary's to deliver a proposal which relates to providing a new provision to meet the needs of SEMH and other complex needs, within our locality. We hope you would also consider this within the context of any decision on education moving forward.

The Trustee board also recognises that the impact of Covid on children's mental health, resilience, emotional presentation/development, early years development is just emerging. This has also been recognised nationally. As such they believe this consultation and any proposed changes should be able to scale to provide the correct provision and resources for now and in the long-term.

There is the potential for this to include the need to further develop, within the locality, joint work in 'a family of schools' approach as currently being suggested between St Mary's and ourselves.

Wooler and Belford

As a Trustee Board we would like both schools to stay within the Berwick Partnership, as we believe they add strength in terms of the current and future potential of our joint educational offer. Additionally we would like their students to benefit from some of the partnership work with local employers. However, the decision is for their community to make.

Summary

In conclusion, the Trustee Board is unanimously behind the proposed change to 2-tier and passed a resolution to pursue this in January 2021. This is not only for all of the aforementioned reasons. We believe that with falling birth rates in the area, this is the only way to sustain a commercially viable, effective and scalable educational offering within the Berwick Partnership area.

We acknowledge that many people are wary of change, which can make it a difficult process to go through. However fear of change should not stop us from executing a strategy in Berwick which will offer the children of our area now, and in future generations, the best possible start to their lives. We have the people in place to make the change happen and the knowledge/expertise to help manage that change. We feel it is important to finally 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 education offer correct, then that will attract new families and opportunities to our wonderful part of Northumberland.

Many thanks

Berwick Academy