



# Northumberland County Council

## Phase 2 Consultation – Education in the Berwick Partnership

### Notes of Meeting

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**Meeting:** The Grove School – Governors Meeting  
**Location:** The Grove School, Grove Gardens, Tweedmouth, Berwick upon Tweed, TD15 2EN

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**Date & Time:** Monday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2023 at 5.00 pm

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**Present:**  
NCC Sue Aviston (SA) (Head of School Organisation and Resources)  
Audrey Kingham (AK) (Joint Interim Director of Children’s Services/Director of Education and Skills)  
Lorraine Fife (LF) (School Place Planning and Organisation Manager) (*online*)  
Deborah Anderson (DA) (Project Support Officer)

School Headteacher  
6 Members of the Governing Body

<b>1.</b>	<b><u>Welcome and Purpose of Meeting</u></b>
	<p>SA welcomed everyone to the meeting and those in attendance were noted above. The purpose of the meeting was outlined as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explain the proposals for the Berwick Partnership and specifically for The Grove School.</li><li>• Provide the opportunity for governors ask any questions.</li><li>• Brief, but not verbatim, notes would be published as part of the report to the Council’s Cabinet Committee.</li></ul> <p>The presentation is the same one used for the meeting with staff.</p>
<b>2.</b>	<b><u>Context and Rationale for the Proposals</u></b>
	<p>SA set out the context and rationale for the proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Council has allocated investment for the partnership.</li><li>• Investment needs to be in a school system that will deliver improved outcomes, be viable and sustainable for future generations.</li><li>• The community in Berwick needs to support whichever school system is decided to ensure schools thrive.</li></ul>

<b>3.</b>	<b><u>Vision for Change</u></b>
	<p>During preliminary work Headteachers agreed a Vision for Change for the Berwick partnership and this was approved by governing bodies. The vision covered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving Educational Outcomes.</li> <li>• Sustainability of Education.</li> <li>• Improving and extending the SEND offer.</li> <li>• Engaging the Berwick Community.</li> <li>• Ensure schools work together.</li> <li>• Underpinning best value for NCC capital investment.</li> </ul>
<b>4.</b>	<b><u>Factors facing the Berwick Partnership</u></b>
	<p>Factors facing the Berwick Partnership include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Falling pupil numbers which impacts on the viability of schools.</li> <li>• The need to tackle surplus places. In January 2022 there were 1074 surplus places in the partnership. DfE holds local authorities to account over these surplus places.</li> <li>• The number of pupils attending schools outside the Berwick partnership. Currently 352 pupils attend schools outside of the partnership which equates to a loss of approximately £1.5 million from the partnership. This has an impact on curriculum and teachers.</li> <li>• Financial challenges facing schools due to falling rolls and surplus places. Schools' budgets are based on per pupil funding. Previously a premises factor helped those schools with surplus places but now budgets are set using a national funding formula.</li> <li>• By 2025/2026 over half of the local authority-maintained schools in Berwick will be in deficit. This doesn't take account of recent pay rises and the cost-of-living crisis.</li> <li>• The growing number of children and young people with special educational needs and the need to provide appropriate specialist provision close to home.</li> </ul>
<b>5.</b>	<b><u>Education Outcomes</u></b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Berwick is a strong partnership of schools in terms of performance. Fourteen out of 17 schools rated either 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted.</li> <li>• Two of the 'Requires Improvement' schools are taking effective action according to Ofsted. The other school has only recently been judged as 'Requires Improvement'.</li> <li>• The last validated data we have is from 2019. Data for 2022 will be available shortly and this will be included in the report to Cabinet. However, caveat by DfE is not to draw comparisons with previous years as schools were in a very different place and students' experiences were very different.</li> </ul>
<b>6.</b>	<b><u>SEND Data and Information</u></b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council's investment presents an opportunity to join up with SEND capacity needs in the area.</li> <li>• Shared information on the numbers, primary need and schools attended in relation to pupils with SEND living in the Berwick partnership.</li> <li>• Shared forecasted pupils' numbers for SEMH and ASD pupils up to September 2026. Predictions indicate steady increase of pupils diagnosed with SEMH/ASD.</li> <li>• Shared forecasted pupils' numbers for pupils with PMLD and SLD diagnosis up to September 2026. Current data does not indicate growth.</li> <li>• The Grove is the only specialist provision in the Berwick area but is not designated for pupils with SEMH as a primary need.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Grove has capacity for 48 students and according to 2021/22 data currently has 36 pupils attending The Grove reside in the Berwick area.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>According to 2021/22 data, 22 students with SEND have to travel daily to access suitable education.</li> </ul>
<b>7.</b>	<b><u>Proposals for the Special Educational Needs in Berwick partnerships</u></b>
	<p>Proposals for special education needs in the Berwick partnership are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Proposal for additional SEND provision under Model A</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Grove continues with its existing provision and specialism in Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) and Profound Learning Difficulties (PMLD) on its current site.</li> <li>Specialist SEMH and ASD provisions are created at First, Middle and High School phase (eg. St Mary's CE First, Berwick Middle and Berwick Academy).</li> <li>Option to identify and run peripatetic provision which all schools in the partnership can access.</li> </ul> </li> <li><u>Proposal for additional SEND provision under Model A</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Grove relocates to the Tweedmouth Middle School site, increases its planned admission number and extends its designation to include SEMH and ASD pupils.</li> <li>The shared site with Berwick Academy allows opportunities for students to access mainstream lessons/study where relevant.</li> <li>Primary Support Base at St Mary's CE First School would continue to operate as it is now.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Other potential ideas for increasing SEND capacity within the Berwick area is welcomed.</p>
<b>8.</b>	<b><u>Implications of the Proposals for Staff in the Berwick Partnership</u></b>
	<p><u>Staff at The Grove:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There would be no implications for staff under Model A.</li> <li>Under Model B additional staff would be required as the school expands its provision to include students with SEND and ASD.</li> </ul> <p><u>Staff in First, Middle and High Schools:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Under both models the staff working in schools proposed for closure or amalgamation would be at risk.</li> <li>The ambition is to retain as many staff as possible within the Berwick partnership of schools.</li> <li>Officers will work with schools and the academies to develop a Staffing Protocol. It is hoped that all governing bodies will sign up to protocol.</li> <li>The protocol looks at drawing a ring-fence around the partnership regarding any newly created posts through changes or posts created via resignations/retirements.</li> <li>Headteachers would be asked to consider those staff at risk in the first instance for any vacant posts.</li> </ul>
<b>9.</b>	<b><u>Other Implications</u></b>
	<p><u>School Buildings and Capital Allocation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council has allocated £39.9m towards investment in school buildings within the Berwick Partnership but the final figure could be less or more.</li> <li>Officers will be undertaking desk top exercises to establish what the potential budgets could be for carrying out any potential building works required under both models.</li> <li>Indicative costs for SEND proposals will also be developed.</li> <li>All indicative costs will be presented to Cabinet for consideration.</li> </ul>
	<p><u>Transport</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Council is not proposing any changes to the Council's Home to School Transport Policy.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There may be some impact for pupils living in Belford and Wooler under these proposals.</li> </ul>
<b>10.</b>	<b><u>Other Factors to consider</u></b>
	<p><u>Post-16/Post-18</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment presents an opportunity to extend and improve the Post-16/Post-18 offer for pupils and the wider community and are seeking views and ideas.</li> </ul> <p><u>Early Years</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback from previous consultation is sufficient early years provision in the partnership and that the provision was good.</li> <li>• There are concerns that with the falling birth rate that this provision remains viable.</li> </ul>
<b>11.</b>	<b><u>Next Steps</u></b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advised that the consultation runs until midnight on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2023.</li> <li>• Governors encouraged to submit a collective response but can also respond as an individual.</li> <li>• It is not a referendum. Decisions and recommendations will be made on the quality/rationale of the response, not in the number received. As educational professionals your views are held in high regard by Elected Members.</li> <li>• Outcomes and feedback would be considered by the Council's Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Committee in April/May 2023.</li> <li>• Cabinet Committee could decide either to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Stop the process and do nothing.</li> <li>○ Approve any recommendation(s) and move to formal statutory consultation. Statutory consultation would last four weeks.</li> <li>○ Approve further consultation if a sufficiently different proposal was put forward.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Final decision potentially made late summer/early autumn term 2023.</li> </ul>
<b>13.</b>	<b><u>Questions</u></b>
	<p><i>Q – Does the additional funding include special schools or only mainstream?</i></p> <p>There is £9m for special school, special provision and central services.</p> <p><i>Q – Do you have data on pupils who leave Berwick for university but who then come back to Berwick?</i></p> <p>Currently don't have that information.</p> <p><i>Q – Has work been done as to why parents opt out of Berwick Schools?</i></p> <p>Not specifically. There could be a number of reasons eg. lifestyle, transport, where parents work and parental choice.</p> <p><i>Q – Why parents make those choice (eg. private school, Scottish system or Alnwick) is important to address. It is key data that needs to be obtained.</i></p> <p>It is difficult to get this information as ultimately families make decisions on their individual child's needs and the needs of the family. We have conducted three rounds of consultation to try and get these views.</p>
	<p><i>Q – SEMH is not a diagnosis, it is a category and doesn't define needs. What is the cognitive ability?</i></p>

Northumberland's SEND Strategy is based on inclusion and the desire of approach is for all schools to be more open. If do nothing an additional 720 special school places will be needed.

*Governors stated that whatever is done needs to meet the needs of the child. The Grove is good at what it does, but it is not good for those pupils who fall within specific cognitive ability.*

*Q – Does the headteacher's data correlate with the local authority's data in relation to PMLD?*

The data is stating that in the south of the county there will be growth of PMLD but not in Berwick but happy to add in headteacher's local intelligence.

*Q – Doesn't instil confidence when local people have more information/intelligence than the local authority.*

There is a slight lag to the data.

*Governors stated that Model B is a none-starter and not happening. Can't put students in same school as the most vulnerable pupils. The Grove can't meet the needs of cognitive ability pupils. Governors were adamant that they will not tolerate having SEMH in the Grove. It is a safeguarding issue having SEMH and PMLD pupils together.*

From discussions with headteachers, two models in respect of SEND have been put out as a proposal. Now it is up to schools, staff and parents to give us their views and models for what they want. Unfortunately, we can't build a number of special schools, the funding is not available, so it's about trying to find the best solution to address the issue.

*Governors thought it was concerning that headteachers thought that Model B was suitable. St Mary's, Berwick Middle and Berwick Academy are happy to have those pupils. Let us keep the pupils we are good at dealing with (PMLD/SLD) and expand the school.*

*Q – Did finance come into the proposal?*

The proposal is about the site, not necessarily the buildings. However, building adaptations have provided good provision (eg. Ashdale). Local authorities can't open new schools, they would have to be an academy or free school. Therefore, the local authority is looking to The Grove's outstanding leadership and management to meet the needs of pupils in Berwick and prevent pupils having to leave Berwick to access their education. This is not a unique conversation, and we are having these conversations across Northumberland.

*Q – Have numbers been run to say what either model would cost?*

No, either model could cost more or less than the £39m available.

*Q - What is the timeframe for any change?*

Proposing that 2025 would be the first year of change. First schools would keep Year 4 to become Year 5 in 2025 and in 2026 middle schools would close. However, this might change in light of the consultation.

	<i>Governors requested that the proposal in relation to Model B is removed from the consultation.</i>
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SA finished the meeting by thanking governors for attending and the meeting closed at 7.00 pm.