



# Northumberland County Council

## Phase 2 Consultation – Education in the Berwick Partnership

### Notes of Meeting

---

<b>Meeting:</b>	St Cuthbert's Catholic First School – Governors' Meeting
<b>Location:</b>	St Cuthbert's Catholic First School, Prince Edward Road, Tweedmouth, Berwick, TD15 2EX

---

<b>Date &amp; Time:</b>	Thursday 2 <sup>nd</sup> February 2023 at 5.00 pm
-------------------------	---

---

<b>Present:</b>	Sue Aviston (SA) (Head of School Organisation and Resources)
<u>NCC</u>	Lorraine Fife (LF) (School Place Planning and Organisation Manager) ( <i>online</i> )
	Deborah Anderson (DA) (Project Support Officer)

  

<u>School</u>	Headteacher
	5 Members of the Governing Body

  

<u>Also Present</u>	Deborah Fox (Director of Education, Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle)
	Anita Bath (CEO, Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust)

<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. 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 St Cuthbert's Catholic First 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.</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.</li> <li>• Financial challenges facing schools due to falling rolls and surplus places. Schools' budgets are based on per pupil funding.</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>Proposals for this School</u></b>
	<p>Have included St Cuthbert's Catholic First School in the Council's proposals but it was noted that any decision would be the responsibility of the Trust Board and Regional Schools' Director.</p> <p>Proposals for St Cuthbert's Catholic First School are.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Under Model A (revised 3-tier structure)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ St Cuthbert's remains as a 0.5 form entry first school but clarifies its capacity as 75.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Under Model B (primary/secondary) structure</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ St Cuthbert's would be re-organised to become a 0.5 form entry primary school on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025 and remain on its current site. Capacity would be 105.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<p>As part of the consultation NCC request that St Cuthbert's First School's governing body, in conjunction with the Bewick Catholic Education Trust Board inform NCC of their preferred option.</p> <p>Any proposal to change from first to primary school would need to follow the guidance set out in the DfE's "Making Significant Changes to an Open Academy".</p>
<b>7.</b>	<b><u>Rationale for the Proposals</u></b>
	<p>The rationale for proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Driven by the number of pupils in the catchment area.</li> <li>• St Cuthbert's doesn't have a catchment area as it draws pupils from the wider catchment area therefore it has no school specific GP data. However, there has been a declining number of births in the Berwick partnership.</li> </ul>
<b>8.</b>	<b><u>Implications of the Proposals for Staff in the Berwick Partnership</u></b>
	<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>Special Educational Needs in Berwick Partnership</u></b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council investment presents opportunity to join up with SEND capacity needs in the area.</li> <li>• Held workshops with Berwick headteachers, the Parent Carer Forum, and the North Northumberland Branch of the Autistic Society.</li> <li>• The Grove is the only specialist provision in Berwick, but it is not designated for students with SEMH and ASD. Diagnosis of pupils with SEMH and ASD is increasing significantly.</li> <li>• 2021/22 data shows that 22 pupils living in Berwick needing specialist SEND provision have to travel outside of the partnership to access education on a daily basis.</li> <li>• Two proposed models for additional SEND provision have been suggested. Either model can be established under a two-tier or three-tier school structure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Model A</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Grove continues with its existing provision for PMLD and SLD pupils on its current site.</li> <li>○ Specialist SEMH and ASD provisions created at St Mary's CE First, Berwick Middle and Berwick Academy.</li> <li>○ Create opportunity for peripatetic provision which all schools in the partnership can access.</li> </ul> </li> <li><u>Model B</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Grove relocates to the site of Tweedmouth Middle (or another identified site), increases its planned pupil number and extends its designation to include SEMH and ASD pupils.</li> <li>○ Shared site with Berwick Academy would provide opportunities for some pupils to access mainstream lessons/qualifications.</li> <li>○ Primary support base at St Mary's First would continue.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• Welcome other ideas for increasing SEND provision in Berwick.</li> </ul>

<b>10.</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> <li>• These proposals will have no impact on faith transport.</li> <li>• There may be some impact for pupils living in Belford and Wooler under these proposals.</li> </ul>
<b>11.</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>12.</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>Q – <i>Does the number of students not attending Berwick Academy include sixth form students?</i></p> <p>No.</p> <p>Q – <i>Why would schools employ "at risk" staff as it could put a strain on their budgets due to high pay costs and protection?</i></p> <p>Any at risk staff would receive protection for three years but the receiving school wouldn't be expected to cover this protection.</p>

*Q – Has any work been done on setting up units in schools?*

Ran workshops with headteachers and these are the proposals that they came up with and three schools who were willing to set up specialist provision in their school came forward.

*Q – Are there sufficient alternative provision placements?*

NCC is currently tendering our alternative provision framework. However, it is sometimes a challenge identifying alternative provision placements particularly in registered provision.

*Q – What does it mean by “registered”?*

An unregistered provision is not inspected by Ofsted. However, it doesn't mean that as a local authority we don't undertake routine monitoring visits and they still need to apply to be on the framework.

*Q – If The Grove relocates what about the specific facilities currently offered at The Grove (eg. Pool)?*

Specialist facilities would be provided if they were required/needed.

*Q – What does a ‘Primary Support Base’ provide?*

If the relationship between the school and the pupil has broken down, it allows a period of respite and enable the pupil to be accessed. The aim is to re-introduce the pupil back into school.

*Q – Is the ‘Primary Support Base’ staffed by specialist special school staff?*

Not special school staff. It is staffed by the school where it is based.

*Q – If there are changes when would implementation be?*

The suggestion in the consultation is September 2025. However, you may have a different view, and this should be included in any response.

SA finished the meeting by thanking governors for attending and the meeting closed at 6.05 pm.