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Dear Sirs,

The staff of Scremerston First School would like to take this opportunity to put forward a supporting statement in relation to the Phase 2 consultation on the reorganisation of education within the Berwick Partnership.

We believe that a 2-tier model will provide the best learning outcomes for the children of Berwick, but we envisage Scremerston First School as an integral part of this future structure.

Please consider the following points:

Catchment schools - 60% of families choose the Scremerston offer over their catchment school - this choice should not be taken away from them; no other rural school is close enough for parents to be able to make this choice. Families send their children here because of smaller class sizes, nurturing ethos, reputation for supporting children with SEND (50% of children receiving additional support in school have come from out of catchment)

What would the expectation be for parents who still do not want to send their child to the catchment school for their address? Would there still be an opportunity for them to exercise choice in where they send their children to school? We have 8 children living in the village, 16 south of the village and 3 further afield (Horncliffe/Chirnside) meaning that if we were to close 27 children would have to travel further to school if we close (Prior/Spittal as suggested) and 27 children are closer to Prior/Spittal already, so it's a 50/50 split, thereby rendering the argument of environmental damage caused by parents bringing their children to Scremerston entirely void.

We have had 25 children who families have chosen to come out of their catchment to attend Scremerston 'mid-term' from other local schools since the academic year 2017/2018.

Church schools - under current arrangements Scremerston is the only rural school offering non-church school provision in the partnership, a choice several of our parents have made. Under the 2-tier proposal in the document the partnership would have 2x as many church primary schools as non-church, an imbalance which does not reflect the demographic of the town/nation (census 2021 reveals that only 46% of the population identify as Christian). Under 3-tier option the ratio is 7 church first schools to 4 non-church, again a predominance of church schools in a majority secular society.

Community - despite being close to the town of Berwick, Scremerston is a distinct rural community and would be very much diminished if deprived of its school, which is the hub of the community.

Without a school in Scremerston there would be little reason for families with young children to move here and so that age of the population would gradually increase with the additional demand on expensive health care/transport resources.

The school grounds are deliberately kept open out of school hours to enable the local community to access a safe play space and the school has invested in excellent play equipment to enhance the offer not only for the school children but also for the wider community, who do use the site regularly. Some of the ways the school has got involved with our community include:

Carpet bowls, outdoor gym, community park, community celebrations - Xmas/summer/easter fayres with local stall holders, PTFA organised events - bingo/quiz, clothing bank, links with local food banks - regular donations/visits, baby group, community room - local groups - knit and natter, CHOZES, school lunches provided to Armstrong Court residents (over the years, always willing to explore new ways to support community groups)

Early years provision - the Lucky Ducks nursery operates in a building administered by the school and would therefore have to close if the school did - reducing EY places within the partnership (currently 15 places per session) Following discussion with the current nursery manager, who is approaching retirement age, it is planned to take the nursery "in-house" creating a teacher-led early years unit, accommodating children aged 2-5 in what is now the nursery building - this has its own facilities, newly extended outdoor learning space and access to the whole school site; thus providing smooth transition from nursery into reception with continuity throughout the whole "early years" experience.

Reduction in spare places within the partnership - the closure of Scremerston school would not solve the issue of spare places; a more realistic PAN for each school would immediately reduce the number of spare places. Having looked at our school site and calculated the square meterage the early years unit could accommodate around 28 children and so a PAN of 10 would seem a realistic option for Scremerston - as, under to current proposals, St. Mary's PAN is to be reduced to 15 a PAN of 10 for Scremerston is in the same sort of range. The DfE states that there is a presumption against closing rural schools and that in order for these vital community resources to stay open a certain level of spare places is expected and accepted.

Transport - There would be additional cost to the school transport budget, with more children requiring transport to schools potentially further away than Scremerston. Children living in Scremerston could not be expected to walk to the next school as the road is very fast (60mph limit) and it is a significant distance with no safe crossing point, until the swimming pool, which is beyond the road to Tweedmouth Prior Park school. Parents are likely to drive their children to Prior Park, where there is no parking and would create added congestion around the school and increase the traffic heading in to Berwick, at an already busy time of day. Scremerston is positioned just off the A1 and is therefore in an ideal situation for parents travelling into Berwick from the south for work or to access the train station for commuting to

Newcastle or Edinburgh. It would also remain accessible in bad weather as the A1 is a priority road for snow clearance, where other schools in rural locations are on B roads.

SEND - the school offers a smaller setting which suits SEND pupils who would find a larger setting overwhelming. Experienced staff manage the needs of many pupils with low-level SEND within the current staffing budget without having to access additional funding. Our SEND support was praised in our most recent OFSTED report (July 2021).

Professionals providing additional support to our children, such as CYPS, HINT team members and the teacher of the Deaf have all recognised the massive contribution this school makes to the progress and SEMH of our SEND children.

Sarah C Smith

on behalf of the staff .