

Glendale Middle School staff response to the Berwick area consultation

We as a staff body are aware that under the current proposals put forward in the consultation that Glendale Middle School is under serious threat of closure. We would like to express our unhappiness at this proposal and the decision by our Governing body, seeking to have a Primary school located on this site. Outlined below are our collective thoughts and possible solutions to the issue which has arisen.

At present Glendale is a good school (OFSTED rating) and the proposal is for us to close and send over 40% of the children who attend here to educational establishments which are not rated good; indeed both options require improvement. Surely if the education of the young people in our locality is our priority, then this is not a good move. In addition, we are increasing distance travelled by these pupils by more than 16 miles in most instances. Again, this is not a benefit to the child or the carbon footprint of the area, which is supposed to be a key factor within this consultation.

One of the consultation options is to send our pupils to be part of the Alnwick partnership and therefore our Key Stage 3 children will be educated at DCHS in Alnwick. As we currently stand this school requires improvement and according to its latest OFSTED report does so due to poor provision for Key Stage 3 children. Therefore, we are sending pupils to a setting, which is clearly not prepared for them and will not improve their outcomes. Again, another key factor to the consultation. Linked to this is the distance we expect these pupils to travel. For most pupils this will be in excess of 16 miles and severely hampers their ability to attend after school clubs and sports events. This will have an adverse effect on our pupils. The ability to attend clubs and sporting activities is a huge benefit to pupils of this age and making attendance more difficult is not good for the minds and social/mental health of these youngsters.

It is clear that we have a falling demographic in our locality but the position of the school has been further jeopardised by changing our school catchment area following the changes to school organisation in the Alnwick Partnership; this was something we were strongly opposed to at the time and the result has had a huge knock on effect for our school. Our catchment area has reduced in size and has also changed significantly and as a result performance data has changed. Therefore, we feel comparing our school to previous performance to be unfair. It also is unfair to use data for pupils educated outside our catchment as meaningful data: this situation has arisen due to the catchment changes and parents not wanting to send their children to Berwick Academy.

Can we also point out that the graphics on page 14 of the consultation document are skewed against Glendale Middle School? The figures are the same as the other two middle schools, however the thickness and height of the bar within the bar chart looks approx. twice the size, suggesting that we have more pupils being taught out of catchment when in fact the figures absolutely do not reflect this!

The destabilising effect of changing catchment and falling numbers has had a knock on effect of making staff recruitment and retention very difficult. We have a well-experienced and talented staff who know the children very well and provide a nurturing environment for pupils to flourish and be ready for their next educational stage at the age of 13. We have specialist facilities which children from the age of 9 are able to utilise. This includes a fully equipped science lab, tech room, cookery room, art room, swimming pool and access to forest school. As well as this we have fully equipped gym and sports facilities unrivalled in the north of the county.

We have excellent SEND provision here at Glendale, indeed pupils attend this school specifically to access this provision. We are a very nurturing school and currently have 27% SEND allocation, which is above the national average. Our SEND outcomes are excellent. We would like to suggest that this provision be expanded. Unfortunately, there is nowhere near enough SEND provision and range of provision in the North Northumberland area. We feel that with our experience, we are ideally positioned to offer provision for all SEND pupils but especially in some specialist areas, which go beyond the physical disability and difficult behaviours provision at the Grove and St Mary's in Berwick. For example, ASD provision and SEMH provision for girls and pupils who find it difficult to attend school due to their Autism and anxiety, but who do not present with challenging behaviour. There are many areas of SEND provision, which we feel, is under-provided for in this part of the county. There just isn't the choice for families. Being able to expand the range of this provision in our nurturing school would be a cost-effective asset to our area. This would also allow Wooler First School to stay on this current site as the building would be fully utilised and become affordable, something which is very unlikely if Glendale closes. In the long term, this would be far more cost effective.

In summary we feel Glendale offers a nurturing environment for a rural location. Our location is fairly unique and we feel should have an education system to fit the locality and in our opinion this is at a middle school. We have excellent staff, amazing facilities and the desire to make things better for all the pupils in our locality. This could be by remaining as a middle school or enhancing the excellent SEND provision we currently offer. Either way education up to until the age of 13 on this site is what is needed not only for our pupils but to secure the education and facilities for all pupils in this locality.