

**Diocesan Board of Education
Consultation Response for the Berwick Partnership**

1. As an underlying principle, the Newcastle Diocesan Education Board (NDEB) will seek to ensure the continuance of a thriving Church of England school presence in the Berwick area, with parents/carers being entitled to express a preference for a Church of England school as a viable option for their children.
2. There are six C of E schools directly affected and in the initial pre-consultation all of them have indicated a preference for becoming primary. The Diocesan Director of Education (DDE) has attended a number of workshops with headteachers and stakeholders and members of the Diocesan Team have attended open consultation meetings in the partnership to listen to the views of parents and carers.
3. The NDEB recognises there has been a robust debate about the correct model for Berwick and fully appreciates the challenges of the number of 'tiny' and 'rural' schools as well as pressures on all schools of falling rolls and the detrimental impact of this on school budgets. With this in mind, in light of the existing shared leadership and working, the Board would welcome at the earliest opportunity consideration to hard federate Norham C of E First School with St Mary's C of E First School to support longer term viability of Norham and support options for shared CPD between the smaller schools.
4. The NDEB would wish to avoid the continuation of a "mixed economy" of both first and primary schools in nearby geographical areas which was partly exacerbated as a result of the closure of Belford Middle School several years ago. For the avoidance of doubt this closure was a decision that was supported at the time to ensure and sustain a rural village's access to education.
5. There is an ongoing wider debate about the value of two tier versa three tier and we remain neutral on this wider debate whilst recognising that local context and area is very important to this. After consultation with Officers in the Joint Education Team the NDEB are of the opinion that, in the Berwick context, increased continuity of the curriculum; reduced transitions for children; increased level of accountability at given key stages and the wider opportunities for CPD in a two-tier System would all benefit the school system in Berwick. We also note that in a number of our two-tier systems secondary schools are moving to a model of working on syllabus earlier in a child's pathway through schools to support with long term outcomes.

6. Should the outcome of this consultation be to move to two tier this would also mean the schools on the border of the partnership would be in line with those of the neighbouring partnership of Alnwick – this would be seen positively by the NDEB to ensure consistency and choice for parents and children living in the area
7. In light of these discussions the NDEB is of the opinion that a two-tier system would be the most beneficial way forwards for the children of the partnership.
8. The NDEB would like to suggest that that the local authority could look to make further investment into the area for a period of time, should a change to the school system occur, to ensure that children are given additional support and intervention to give parents reassurance that children impacted by any change would receive additional academic support.
9. Having considered the paper with regards to Glendale Middle and Wooler First school the NDEB would wish to support the views of the Governing Body of those schools. However, the NDEB has a concern that losing a number of children from the partnership may jeopardise the viability of KS3 and KS4 in Berwick depending on the number of children this would affect.
10. Considering the geographical location of Belford the NDEB would suggest that Belford Primary should remain within the partnership.
11. The NDEB are already aware of and support the offer put forwards from Berwick St Mary's C of E First School to support children with Special Needs and Disabilities within the partnership. As inclusive schools we welcome this potential opportunity provided the correct and sustained investment is made to the building and surrounding grounds to support this possibility.
12. With regards to EYFS Provision the NDEB is minded to note the capacity already available in the area – but would support any enhancements to this provision.
13. With regards to provision for 6th Form / post sixteen the NDEB would support a partnership approach of all stakeholders to ensure the needs of all children and students are met. It will be vital that all stakeholders share a vision of joint working to ensure this is a success for the children on the partnership.



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