

Consultation Responses

Community Members Responses – Others AGAINST Proposal:

1. Sir/Madam

As a father and grandfather who has seen his daughters and grand daughter enjoy successful educations at Hexham Sele first school I am appalled at the intervention from Northumberland County council in relation to the PAN numbers who can attend the school I find the proposal ill advised and not thought through correctly.

It would appear to be a blatant attempt to remove funding from a highly successful and efficiently run school to allow less viable and smaller schools to stay open.

What the report cynically omits to include is the cost in terms of the workforce at the school. It is clear should pupil numbers be reduced this will necessarily mean less teaching staff, office staff, cleaning staff and kitchen staff.

The other consequence of a smaller budget would be the choices the school would have to make regarding maintaining the school buildings or maintaining staffing numbers and/or the educational needs of the school.

A further consequence apart from removing any parental choice over what school they wish their to be educated at would be an increase in pupil numbers per class.

It is clear that class sizes would increase from what they are at present and possibly have a detrimental effect on the schools ability to educate any SEND pupils at the school.

A further pertinent point would be our new governments housing policy and its mandate to increase the number of houses to be built in all areas.

Unless I am mistaken N.C.C have made mention of a 222% increase in housing numbers and complaints being made, is the effect this would have on school numbers.

With this in mind is this really the time to start changing the PAN numbers ? More housing means more families more children and more school places this policy would make this effect worse not better.

As a further point in the last few days N.C.C have announced a 200 home development on the old Hexham middle school site. Could Hexham first school be the main benefactor of the change in the PAN numbers really cope with the extra 30 pupils AND the extra children this new development could bring.

I am assuming the authors of this report have not been to Hexham first school at the start or end of the school day and seen the chaos it causes to people living in the area.

As someone who used to live close to the school I have and feel sure residents close to the school will not be looking forward to extra child going to and from the school and make no mistake most of these children are driven to school.

These proposals are, unless they are applied to EVERY school are neither fair or appropriate

2. I am writing to raise an objection to the proposal to reduce the Pupil Admission Number (PAN) at Sele First School, Hexham.

Basing this proposal solely on birth rate data does not reflect the school itself or the wider community as a whole.

Families choose to relocate to Hexham to join Sele First School. These families would not be seen in the birth rate data. To reduce the PAN would take away this parental choice for families, forcing them into a school in which they would not choose themselves and may not be best fit for their child. Reducing the PAN will also have a detrimental impact on other schools in the area. Schools with a smaller PAN will fill up quickly, again reducing parental choice.

Looking at the birth rate data alone is not a reliable indicator of how many families would send their child to Sele First School. Within my role at the school I am often responsible for welcoming families into school for a school viewing. Many of which have relocated or looking to do so in the hope to send their child to this school.

Environmental factors were also mentioned within the reasons to reduce the PAN. The council are wanting children to walk to school, however many families have to travel by car for work, meaning they would be driving into the area anyways. This travel would still happen after reducing the PAN as there are not enough jobs in the surrounding areas of Hexham where travel is not needed. Wraparound care is also available for families at the Sele which can be hard to access in other areas.

Hexham also has planned local developments, including new homes targeted at families, announced by NCC. Reducing the PAN would not make it possible to accommodate these children, therefore affecting the area of Hexham.

Reducing the PAN at Sele First School would also mean less money to run the school. Running costs of the school will not reduce in any case, therefore more of the budget will have to be used to subsidise this.

I am strongly against the reduction of PAN at Sele First School. I feel, as stated above, it would have a detrimental impact on not only the school itself but also the wider community. In my opinion this proposal shows a lack of understanding of the community and wider area.

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4. I would like to voice my concerns for your proposal to decrease pupil intake at the Sele First School Hexham. This is an excellent school which gives children the best start in life. It would be an absolute crime to take the choice away from parents who choose and what the best start in life for their child. To reduce the intake to 60 does not practically make sense. You have not looked at the greater picture. - There is no control over who moves into the area and whether they purchase a house in the East or West of Hexham. Therefore your idea immediately does not work. This is so because your decision would make the catchment school for the West End the Sele and the East End Hexham First School. To have two year group classes would not work at the Sele because people move to the area all the time and join the school later in the year, it needs to remain as it is to avoid huge class sizes. This proposal would cause huge class sizes which would be detrimental to every child's education in the class. Also this will cause staff loss at the school and increase the amount of people who are unemployed which is not a favourable move. I think you need to look at why parents chose the Sele School for their children and help it to strive as the great school it is, and for it to remain as it is. Do not damage it and take choice away from parents. A good starting point would be to look at all the other school choices in the area and look at why parents choose not to send their children there. Look at these schools and help them improve and become a better choice. Leave the Sele school alone it is perfectly fine as it is, and I'm sure at some point birth rates will go up and when they do your actions will cause a serious dilemma for children's education. Whoever thought of this has not looked at the greater picture and only looked at cost cutting which again is a crime against the children of this area.
5. I am writing to express my objection to the proposal to reduce the PAN at Sele First School. The school has excellent pupil outcomes and is the heart of the hexham community. It offers a fantastic feeder to HMS and QEH. If the local population numbers suggest that a school should reduce it's numbers you might want to think about closing one of the underperforming small schools in the area thus making a saving for the county and recognising that there are a number of small schools locally

who have 60-70 pupils in the entire school and who do not offer as good and consistent an education as Sele First. Having had my daughter in one of these smaller schools and taken her out due to the appalling standards I could not, in good conscience, withhold my objection to this proposal when there are other schools within a 4 mile radius of Sele First who deserve much more scrutiny. Sele was there for my daughter when she was let down at another Hexham school. Were this proposal being made based on performance that would be a different matter however based on population size suggests to me that there are more strategically appropriate routes to take to achieve the same (if not better) outcomes for the children in the area. I would be happy to elaborate on this position further in any consultation that takes place in the future.

6. I am writing to oppose against the suggested proposal by Northumberland County Council to reduce the number of pupils that can attend Sele First School in Hexham.

This proposal is quite honestly a ridiculous proposal which will have detrimental affects on many children across this rural area of Northumberland. I can appreciate that on paper there are other schools within the local area who's numbers may be in decline and that the intake numbers at Sele First School are on the rise, this in itself is a huge marker that the Council should be looking at as to the reasons why parents are choosing one particular school over other available schools which are potentially easier for parents to get their children to. This is where the work and effort should be going into not reducing numbers of children going to a particular school because it does not fit what the council sees fit.

I personally live in Haydon Bridge approximately 7 miles outside of Hexham and we have a primary and secondary school within the village we reside, however, both my children initially attended the school in the village, I moved both to The Sele First School due to the lack of resources and support I was getting from the village school with both my children having SEN. If the school in our local village was up to a standard the same as The Sele I would not have had to move them, and this would have been significantly easier for me and my children could have just walked to school at the age they are now. I feel that this will be similar for many other local parents that are choosing The Sele First School or are transferring their children from their current school to The Sele First School. This should be raising alarm bells and supporting schools that are not at the same level as The Sele, this should be the priority not punishing children and parents by forcing them to attend under achieving or underfunded schools. Parents have the right to choose where their children go to school and to make sure they get the best level of education and support possible; this is obvious that local parents feel that The Sele First School is the best school to offer these things and that should be acknowledged and learnt from instead of punishing the school and families.

Another reason parents are choosing The Sele First School is due to the ludicrous rules in relation to transitioning to Middle School. Currently The Sele First School is a feeder school to Hexham Middle School and parents are thinking ahead to this time and are choosing The Sele to make sure their children can get into their choice middle school. Again living in Haydon Bridge we also have a high school however their most recent Ofsted report gives insight into why parents do not wish for their children to attend there and therefore are having to send their children to first schools in Hexham so that they will be able to get a place in Hexham Middle School as they do not wish for their children to attend the high school in Haydon Bridge.

There are very public opinions about the other local schools in the area and a quick search on local Facebook pages would give you a great incite into what other parents in the are think of other local schools. My proposal to you is that instead of reducing numbers at a brilliant, supportive and well-loved school, is spend time and money on brining other local first and primary schools up to the same standards as The Sele First School.

I hope this is taken into consideration and some food for thought before a final decision is made on this subject. If you wish to discuss any of my comments or views further in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact myself on 07949869856, and I will be happy to support the council in making a better and more informed decision on the state of the local school system, instead of just forcing parents to have to take their children go to other schools which in turn will have a knock on affect on the future generations education and long term achievements. This first years in school are the most important in a child's life and shouldn't all these children be entitled to the best level of education not just the ones that can afford to live closet to the school in an area where only the upper class or high earners can afford to buy/rent in this area. It would be awful to think that our local council would be penalising children and their families of accessing an outstanding school due to their level of income or the family being forced to move closer to the school potentially putting them in a financial burden just so their child can go to the school of their choice.

I hope this is received with best intentions and is taken seriously into consideration.

I wait for the right decision to be made.

7. I am writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area. I do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves. My family and I moved to the area 6 years ago, and 2/3 of our girls have been through the Sele First School. Both had absolutely fantastic first school experiences with the Sele First and so we want to see it continue in the same direction. The Hexham school system, including the Sele First was a major influence in our decision to move to Hexham. The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands. We know many other families who have specifically moved to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data. Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future. Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families. Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic. During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly oversubscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes. Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case. It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children? A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge. The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider

area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

8. We are writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

We do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

We are the grandparents of one current and one former pupil of SFS and have been impressed by the quality of their education, the dedication of the staff and the variety of opportunities offered to the pupils.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school. This proposal undervalues that right and need for parents to find a school that is a good fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for such families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

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Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

We are of the view that the County's failure to promote the sharing of best practice among Hexham's first schools should not be an excuse for addressing a short-term problem in such an irreversible and counter-productive manner.

A reduced PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run the school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge. The location of the school is an essential component of Hexham centre and this will be significantly at risk under the proposed new arrangements

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

9. As a parent of 2 children who have attended the sele first school (one of which still does.) I am strongly against the proposal to reduce PAN of sele first school. Reducing the overall numbers of children will mean larger classes which will have a negative effect on how the children learn.

The sele is in perfect proportion to the amount of children who currently attend the school they will still have the same running costs as it does now even with less children.

The sele is a beautiful school just how it is. I feel sad at the thought of this dramatic change as it will have such a negative impact on many families. Many children will miss out on what really is a lovely school with excellent teachers and staff.

10. I am writing to formally put forward my objection to the current consultation surrounding the reduction of students in Sele First School.

11. I am writing to strongly object to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number based on the birth rate data for the area. Choice is paramount to meeting the needs of all children within Hexham and outside the catchment. It is unjust to reduce opportunities and support for future generations. Sele First provides a rich and diverse range of extracurricular activities facilitate by the great skill set across the current teacher numbers. This offer and other additional activities the school is able to support would be drastically and adversely impacted by the proposals as a consequence of reduced staff numbers and the financial burden of an underused listed building. On a personal note, the support from staff across the school has been absolutely vital for me and my family, supporting my children through SEND needs and initiating a pathway for mental health support. We live outside of Hexham having been unable to secure a place to live within Hexham which will be the case for many. Considering the birth rates of the area is therefore incredibly shortsighted and neglects to consider those moving to the area during their school life. Furthermore, with the current political landscape, it is likely that new houses will be developed thus facilitating an increased local population and subsequently birth rate. During the time my children have been at Sele First, I have seen families join from outside the local area from within the UK and beyond; places at the school have been a lifeline for many including those moving due to losing family or SEND needs. If these school places were not available; it could have a devastating impact on many families. Furthermore, larger, oversubscribed classes are not in the best interest of those children with places at the school should the proposal go ahead. Following the pandemic, the support at Sele First for children and families has been vital. These children have not started their experience of nursery and schooling during normal circumstances; the proposal would reduce resources at a crucial time for these children and families. Sele First is a place where children from all backgrounds thrive, communities are built and staff give their all. The proposal to reduce admission

numbers robs children and families of vital support, opportunities; the long term impact on our young people must not be overlooked and put in jeopardy. The proposals are short sighted and fail to consider the fundamentals of the local area and its people. I urge the appropriate authority to reject these proposals and safeguard the future of Sele First.

12. I am the grandfather of two boys who live in Hexham. The older attended Sele First and the younger is still there. I am also a retired primary school teacher who went into the profession shortly after the 1967 Plowden Report was published.

I feel that Sele First has too many strengths that would be compromised by a reduction in pupil numbers. There would inevitably be a reduction in staff numbers, and it is the wide range of experience, skills, talents, interests and enthusiasm of those members of staff that enables the school to give the children such wide-ranging and rich experience in their education. Any reduction in staff numbers would inevitably reduce the range of that experience.

I appreciate, having read the proposals, that there are many factors that have to be taken into consideration in making these decisions, but I can't help but feel that reducing the pupil experience to a lower common denominator is not the answer to the problem.

13. As a former parent of children educated at the Sele First School, I write to you to express my disappointment in learning of the pursuit to reduce the PAN at the Sele First School. I object to this for a number of important reasons which I strongly feel significantly outweighs the rationale communicated in the consultation document. Both my children attended and thrived at the Sele First School. Hexham should be celebrated for its diverse school choices and its capacity for parental choice. Other neighbouring councils, such as Gateshead, have oversubscribed schools resulting in parents being offered their second, third or even fourth choice of schooling for their child/ children. This was the case for my nephew. Fortunately for myself and my children, they are now middle school aged and are outside the scope of the proposal. Other parents (current and future) will not be so fortunate if these plans are given the go ahead. Reducing the PAN would result in the Sele First School becoming oversubscribed despite having the physical capacity to have more children and therefore will ultimately:

- Limit parental choice. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child/ children. This is surely more important than where in the local area you live. Parents, like myself, carefully consider which local school would cater best for their child or children's personality and needs. Schools in our area may have the same Ofsted rating as stated in the proposal, however a single word rating does not mean the service delivery, values and ethos are the same and will equally match a child's persona and needs. First school is where a child starts their education journey and shapes their attitude towards learning. A misfit of child to school can have a detrimental impact on a child's early education and one that is hard to rectify.
- Increase class sizes. Larger class sizes impact service delivery both in terms of space to move around and to access classroom resources, and spreads teaching staff more thinly. Children, schools and families have faced many challenges due to the Covid pandemic resulting still in a significant shift in the learning needs of children (cognitively, socially and emotionally). Larger class sizes will increase these challenges further for everyone concerned.
- Cause unnecessary stress on parents despite having empty classrooms that could be filled as the proposal increases the possibility of situations where parents do not get their first choice, siblings may not be admitted into the same school due to a change of address which makes the logistics difficult for parents, or could result in forcing parents to remove a settled child from their school to attend another just because their younger sibling did not 'qualify' for a place. I moved

addresses within Hexham from one Hexham street to another after my eldest child's first year at the Sele First School. Based on catchment area alone, my first child would have qualified for the Sele First School, my second would have not even though our move put us physically closer to the Sele First School.

- Prevent children from attending the best fit local school within walking distance of their house simply because they don't live in the right street. My children walked the 10 minutes from our house to school and back. We did not pass any other schools on route. Our address (with postcode NE46 1) puts us in the catchment area of Hexham First School; a school I would not have chosen for my children for a number of valid, important reasons. This proposal may have forced us and others to apply for schools further away that had capacity and better suited our children; thereby going against one of the principles the proposal hopes to address (environmental).
- Adversely impact the financial budget of the Sele First School and the funds available to be spent on education as the running costs of the building will remain the same; thereby adversely impacting the quality of the educational offering.
- Removing healthy competition between local schools. Parental choice makes schools more responsive to its community's needs in order to attract demand for places. Removing this healthy competition, could result in some schools not striving to be their very best for their community as they would get the footfall regardless.
- In regards to the birth rate rationale, even though birth rates are on a downward trend, this does not reflect that many families choose to relocate to Hexham, from near and far afield, after starting a family for the community and its schools; with me being one of these families. We specifically chose to relocate and seek new employment in the area prior to our first child becoming school aged so both could be educated in Hexham at a school of our choice. The Sele First School is more than just a school. It is a school that has a strong community presence; both physically, socially and emotionally. It is in the heart of Hexham which helps children feel the presence and learn the importance of a community which in turn supports a solid social and emotional connection to each other, the community and its surroundings. One that cannot be matched by others solely because of its proximity to the town centre and parks. I strongly feel that this proposal is not in the best interest of children, families and education.

I hope by sharing my thoughts and feelings on the proposed PAN reduction at the Sele First School that the importance and benefits of retaining their current capacity is given serious weight in your consideration of the proposal.

14. As a former parent of children educated at the Sele First School, I write to you to express my disappointment in learning of the pursuit to reduce the PAN at the Sele First School. I object to this for a number of important reasons which I strongly feel significantly outweighs the rationale communicated in the consultation document. Both my children attended and thrived at the Sele First School. Hexham should be celebrated for its diverse school choices and its capacity for parental choice. Other neighbouring councils, such as Gateshead, have oversubscribed schools resulting in parents being offered their second, third or even fourth choice of schooling for their child/ children. This was the case for my nephew. Fortunately for myself and my children, they are now middle school aged and are outside the scope of the proposal. Other parents (current and future) will not be so fortunate if these plans are given the go ahead. Reducing the PAN would result in the Sele First School becoming oversubscribed despite having the physical capacity to have more children and therefore will ultimately:
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- Cause unnecessary stress on parents despite having empty classrooms that could be filled as the proposal increases the possibility of situations where parents do not get their first choice, siblings may not be admitted into the same school due to a change of address which makes the logistics difficult for parents, or could result in forcing parents to remove a settled child from their school to attend another just because their younger sibling did not 'qualify' for a place. I moved addresses within Hexham from one Hexham street to another after my eldest child's first year at the Sele First School. Based on catchment area alone, my first child would have qualified for the Sele First School, my second would have not even though our move put us physically closer to the Sele First School.
- Prevent children from attending the best fit local school within walking distance of their house simply because they don't live in the right street. My children walked the 10 minutes from our house to school and back. We did not pass any other schools on route. Our address (with postcode NE46 1) puts us in the catchment area of Hexham First School; a school I would not have chosen for my children for a number of valid, important reasons. This proposal may have forced us and others to apply for schools further away that had capacity and better suited our children; thereby going against one of the principles the proposal hopes to address (environmental).
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In regards to the birth rate rationale, even though birth rates are on a downward trend, this does not reflect that many families choose to relocate to Hexham, from near and far afield, after starting a family for the community and its schools; with me being one of these families. We specifically chose to relocate and seek new employment in the area prior to our first child becoming school aged so both could be educated in Hexham at a school of our choice.

The Sele First School is more than just a school. It is a school that has a strong community presence; both physically, socially and emotionally. It is in the heart of Hexham which helps children feel the presence and learn the importance of a community which in turn supports a solid social and emotional connection to each other, the community and its surroundings. One that cannot be matched by others solely because of its proximity to the town centre and parks.

I strongly feel that this proposal is not in the best interest of children, families and education. I hope by sharing my thoughts and feelings on the proposed PAN reduction at the Sele First School that the importance and benefits of retaining their current capacity is given serious weight in your consideration of the proposal.

15. I am writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

I do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

I have two little girls that attend Sele First School. Grace is in Year 2 and has SEN needs. The school have been exceptional with support and putting strategies in place to help her achieve her potential and limit the SEN barriers she may face. My other daughter Evie, has just started Nursery at the Sele and she loves it. I withdrew her from her previous nursery as I am well aware of how good the educational programme and support is at the Sele. I wanted her to be familiar with the staff and build friendships before she started Reception.

The Sele is not our nearest first school to our address. However, as parents, my husband and I chose the Sele First School based on the quality of education, group sizes, support they give the children and the high reputation of the school.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

16. I am opposed to this. The school is very well managed and has an excellent track record for educating local children. Birth rates fluctuate and reducing school places is a very short sighted strategy. I believe the current 3 form entry should remain.
17. I am writing to express my concern about the proposal to reduce pupil numbers at Sele First School, Hexham. I understand that difficult decisions have to be made with funding, but I do not feel this proposal is the correct solution.

Reducing pupil numbers at the Sele would force some children outside the official catchment to attend small rural schools, removing parental choice. While I have no doubt that there are many benefits to these schools, the low pupil numbers do not suit all children and their experiences are disproportionately dependent on the small number of other pupils and teachers around them. I myself went to a small first school, and do not feel I thrived in the same way my own children have at the Sele. We live in a rural area and as such the population is used to the idea that they may need to travel a short distance to access services – indeed parents are fully aware that their child will need to travel to middle and high school, so also traveling to first school is not a significant barrier. I am aware of many parents who have made this decision, either choosing to start their child's education at the Sele rather than a small local school, or moving them to the Sele after difficulties at a smaller school. Removing this option and choice will be of detriment to those children and families for whom these small rural schools are less suited, and may even force parents to consider moving away from rural communities into Hexham, if financially viable, to allow their children to have the same opportunities. The lack of breakfast clubs and afterschool provision at smaller schools will also reduce the employment opportunities of those parents who are unable to send their child to school in Hexham. These consequences to the rural community cannot be the intention of the local council.

Reducing the pupil numbers will be of significant detriment to the pupils who attend this exceptional school. As a parent who has had 2 children attend the school I feel it is a key part of the community, and has been of generations. One of the benefits of the Sele is that the size allows for a larger number of teachers; with a wide range of expertise towards individual pupil needs, not to mention the range of activities and extra-curricular opportunities this staff group provides. Reducing pupil and staff numbers will impact on this and the level of pastoral care the children benefit from. Even more importantly reducing pupil numbers will force pupils into larger class groups, reducing the quality of education as the teacher is less able to spend time with each pupil. This seems a stark contrast to the small rural schools where very small class numbers are normal. It seems inconsistent that the council should support these classes with very low numbers while forcing the majority into some of the largest classes in the county.

I do appreciate that this is a difficult decision, however I feel the current suggestions will be of detriment to a very large number of pupils and families. The high quality of education, pastoral support and range of opportunities the Sele has to offer will be significantly impacted – which as one

of the biggest schools in the area will affect a large number of pupils. There is also obvious detriment to the pupils and families who will now inevitably be turned away from the Sele. I cannot understand how reducing pupil numbers to well below current demand makes sense. A positive experience in the early years of school is essential for future learning and life prospects, and surely must be prioritised.

Thank you for taking time to consider my appeal to reconsider the reduction of pupil numbers at this exceptional school.

18. I am writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

I do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community. The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands. Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data. Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future. Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families. Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic. During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes. Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case. It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children? A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge. The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

19. Sele school is and always has been a thriving community of happy children who go on to achieve wonderful things in our community and beyond. These plans I can only see as having a detrimental affect on the school and local area as a whole and i strongly disapprove of your admission number plans. You will put many young professionals at risk of losing their jobs and add extra pressure which is already apparent within education to many teachers. Cost cutting in this area just doesn't add up in my eyes. Northumberland as a county receives considerably less on average than other parts of the country as a whole. Can you tell me why? As a large school I can only imagine the overall running

cost are high but making these significant changes will only cause more impact with a detrimental affect. Losing approximately 120 pupils funding is HUGE. Why would you decide put such a wonderful institution under any more pressure. Birth rate fluctuates year by year it is not representative to make a decision based on one years birth rate to affect an entire schools future outlook. A very strange criteria to base such a big decision on. Since my son began Sele First School 5 years ago his class size has fluctuated year on year due to pupils needing to transfer for various reasons within the community but also because of more young families moving to the area. These plans will not allow this to happen in the future and it will be hugely detrimental to the school and area as a whole. In light of this your figures will no doubt be distorted. Increasing class sizes from approximately 24 to a maximum of 30 in my eyes can only have a negative effect on pupils ability to thrive. Surely as a county this is not worth the risk! I understand your thought process about hoping to improve numbers in our local rural schools however I also know a large number of friends and locals who choose rural and smaller schools out of their catchment area for persona/work reason or for their child's needs and wellbeing. Your plan does not take these student figures into consideration and I very much doubt you will make these families choose a closer oversubscribed school in order to adhere to your catchment allowances. Every family in our region deserves a choice of where to send their children. I teach my children that we should always have a choice in what we believe is the right thing for everyone. We should be proud of the education we offer in Northumberland.

20. I wish to formally object to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area. There are a number of reasons for my objection, which are detailed below:
- The birth rate data is one element of a vast array of variables, and making such a huge decision on just one factor, is not a representative reflection of the complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley, nor is it reflective of the community and its demands.
 - The birth rate data does not take into consideration number of families who move to the area with the purpose of applying to Sele First school.
 - Reducing the PAN removes parental choice from their decisions. The proposal undervalues the rights and needs for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child(ren). The Sele would likely be removed as an option for many parents in the future.
 - Reducing the PAN removes parental choice from their decisions. Many of these decisions are based on practical reasons, for example wrap around care. Many of the village schools referenced that are 'passed along the way' have no wrap around care facilities, meaning working parents cannot consider these schools.
 - Reducing the PAN removes parental choice from their decisions: With Hexham being the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys.
 - Demand for a place at Sele First remains strong. Thus reducing PAN is nonsensical as you are increasing demand for an already in-demand school.
 - I am particularly concerned that given the demand is already strong, the County Council seeks it appropriate to negatively impact on the children of Sele First. Reducing the PAN will result in the Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.
 - This decision is purely a cost cutting exercise and is not being done with the best interests of the Sele First School, the learning of its pupils, the staff, or the wider community, at heart.
 - Numerous appeals processes are costly, and likely would result in no saving by reducing PAN numbers.

- The cost of housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families having to live in outlying areas as a result. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.
- It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?
- A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of, and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

21. I am writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

I do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

My family moved to Hexham in 2014 from Newcastle when our daughter was one years old. Therefore, she would not have been counted within the birth rate data for the area. Having considered the options available, we decided to apply for a place at Sele First School because we were hugely impressed by the reputation and ethos of the school, the dynamic happy environment and the positivity and confidence of the teachers and pupils we met. We felt that the school would enable our daughter to flourish more than anywhere else.

In addition, we wanted our daughter to attend a larger first school which would prepare her for moving on to even larger schools in the future. We were aware of friends' children who attended small first schools, some with mixed year group classes, who felt overwhelmed when it came to moving on to middle school.

Our daughter attended Sele First School from Nursery through to the end of Year 4 and we could not have been any happier with the education she received, and her experience was a very happy one and prepared her well for middle school.

Whilst we were fortunate to be able to buy a property in the centre of Hexham and therefore fell well within the catchment area, I believe it is very unfair to remove the choice of parents who are not in the same position.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families, like ours, move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

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The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

22. I write to you to expressly object to the proposed reduction to the PAN of the Sele First School in Hexham from 84 to 60. This excellent school has been a fantastic, supportive environment thus far for both of my children, whom each have very different needs. To see that provision reduced to circa 71% of it's current capacity going forward would, frankly, be a travesty. The school is, without a doubt, one of the best (possibly the best) schools in the region, hence it's popularity, both with those in catchment, as well as those travelling from out of catchment who recognise their brilliance. I fear that by reducing the PAN, many families would in future miss out on access to this wonderful, nurturing, engaging facility, and I urge you to reconsider this proposal before a difficult mistake is made.
23. We were disappointed to hear that Northumberland County Council is considering lowering the number of children per year at Sele First School, Hexham. We would like further information with regard to the reasons for considering this. We understand that the birth rate is declining. However Northumberland County Council have just made an outline planning application to build 222 houses

on the old middle school site which suggests that the number of children in the Hexham catchment area will increase and therefore all local schools should benefit. Parental choice is essential when consideration is being given to a child's education. As parents of four children and three grandchildren at present. We, the children, their partners and our grandchildren have attended a variety of schools in the local and surrounding area and would wish the parental choice to remain available. We hope you will reconsider your suggestion to reduce the Sele School classes per year from three classes per year to two. No thriving School and excelling school should be penalised in this manner, nor should staffing and the funding required to main the aging School buildings, in an adequate manner, be reduced as a result. Your response is anticipated

24. I wish to strongly object to the proposal. My youngest grandson who lives in nearby Acomb wouldn't be able to go to the same school as his 2 elder sisters. He was born 20/3/23 and would be directly affected by this misguided proposal. Also his Mum attended that school successfully with my other son and daughter. Please reconsider.
25. I am writing to voice my extreme concern for the reduction in PAN for the Sele First School in Hexham. I have two grandchildren who attend this outstanding school led by Mrs McVittie with her team of dedicated teachers. They moved to Hexham in 2021 and were welcomed into this caring and exciting environment. My grandson has had some health issues and the school has gone out of their way to accommodate and support him in the school environment. Both children are happily reaching their potential and as grandparents we are regularly welcomed into the school to view their achievements. Whenever I speak to anyone about the school I always give it my highest praise and recommendation. I find it difficult to believe that the only consideration for reducing the PAN is the lower birth rate. At present the admissions include 35% of children from outside the catchment area whose parents choose to send them to this excellent school. With the introduction of VAT on private schools, it is quite likely that this number will increase in future years as these parents find the fees unaffordable. If funding is cut then the classes will be larger and there will be fewer staff to help support children with extra needs, which is one area where the school is doing such a wonderful job. An increase in the number of children in a class is a backward move and will have a negative affect on the learning environment with less space for the children to move around the room, apart from the teachers having less time for individual children. My own children attended the Sele First School in the late 1980s and 1990s. The listed building has had many improvements made since then, but the upkeep must be very costly. If the funding is cut with lower pupil numbers, these costs will take a larger proportion of the allocated money. This can only be detrimental to a school which is working so effectively for the present pupils. I feel very strongly about the proposed changes and hope that you will reconsider the PAN reduction for the Sele First School.
26. Sele first school Hexham has sent out an email detailing plans to reduce their Pupil Admission Number (PAN) from 84 to 60 children for the 2026 intake onwards. They have asked parents to voice objections to that proposal via email, if they feel that an objection is justified. From reading the information in the link pasted immediately below, I understand that the County Councils position to be as follows. Faced with a falling birthrate (less pupils) and limited resources, the County Council hopes to protect the existence of as many schools as possible by reducing the PAN at various schools. In 2026 it will be the turn of the Sele after reductions in other schools in earlier years (e.g. Seahouses and Longhoughton in 2025).

<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Documentstore/School%20admissions/NCC-Admissions-Policy-Primary-2026-27.pdf>

The PAN reduction appears to be being focused on the larger schools. They are perhaps judged to be more able to withstand the loss. In the specific case of the Sele, Reducing the PAN is attractive to the

County Council because many pupils could go to other schools in the Hexham area (2022 data), and the Hexham area appears to have far more places available than the local birthrate justifies. The link also seems to show a dislike of schools competing for pupils, and an interest in making it harder for parents to send their children to The Sele, when they could send their children to another, nearer school. Whilst I have sympathy for County Council's intention to protect schools in general, I am more sympathetic to the position of the school that the assessment criteria is too narrow. Our situation is that we have a child in the nursery but were only able to get hours for part of the week, meaning that she splits her time between The Sele nursery, another nursery and home. Although we are new to the area, all of the other parents that we know already have sent their children to The Sele or intend to do so. From what we can see, The Sele is a desirable school and does not have a problem filling its places. Ofsted rates the Sele as 'good' and the link appears to suggest that all local schools are. I have not checked this, but it apparently indicates there is no advantage to attending the Sele versus other local schools. Whilst I see the values in Ofsted school ratings, they're obviously a bit superficial. We have not checked the ratings and still want our kids to go there. Why would we bother when so many parents like the school and at nursery at least, it's full. I don't think that the County Council's position that kids should not pass other schools to go to the Sele is fair. This is not my personal circumstance, but it is not at all surprising to me that parents might choose to send their children to the Sele and drive past other 'good' schools to do so. The Sele is better than the isolated rural schools precisely because it is bigger. Better social outcomes. Better academic outcomes. And you must remember. There will be parents who take their kids to the Sele because they work in Hexham. If their secondary education will also be in Hexham why wouldn't they. It's the sort of decision that people make to keep themselves in work. This apparent dislike of schools competing for places feels a bit silly. What's wrong with competition. With a declining birthrate isn't this unavoidable anyway? Businesses generally don't succeed when they shrink. It's more normal for the to shrink because they aren't succeeding. Enforcing a PAN reduction irrespective of the merits of the staff and the success of the school is soul destroying for the staff and would surely effect the culture of the school. The school will still have the same number of buildings, the maintenance costs, the same heating and electricity bills. I wholly appreciate that in arguing that the PAN should not be reduced at the Sele (and others like it) endangers the long term viability of other schools and the jobs and communities that they support. I am sympathetic to the County Council finding themselves in a position of trying to maintain the viability of as many schools as possible. But I don't think that reducing pupil number according to a school's ability to sustain the loss makes sense. It would be better to remove pupil number from schools that cannot maintain their intake. Doing so would align better with the choices that parents are making, reward the effort of forward thinking of those schools that are most successful, and support better academic outcomes for the children themselves.

27. I have read with concern, the proposal to reduce pupil admission numbers at the Sele First School in Hexham. I believe this will have a detrimental impact on parental choice and ultimately, pupil's wellbeing.

Hexham has recently been voted one of the happiest places to live in the U.K. Factors such as low crime rate and excellent schools are very important to families. Whilst some movement due to work commitments will cause school applications to fluctuate, it is extremely short sighted to permanently reduce the school's ability to accept families moving here at short notice, because 2 classes have reached capacity.

Furthermore, as there are plans to build another large housing estate in the town, this proposal cannot co-exist alongside any increase in the local population.

As a local authority Foster Carer, some of my placements have been fortunate to have received the outstanding education offered at Sele First. As Looked After and Adopted children have priority

when applying for a place in a Northumberland school, this could further increase numbers and disadvantage pupils living with birth families. There is also the potential for this to increase class sizes beyond the legal limit of 30. Indeed, this very scenario happened last year when my previous placement was adopted. The school preferred by the adopters was at capacity, but they successfully appealed. This increased the class size beyond 30 pupils but worryingly, the appeals process took 7 weeks, meaning the child was out of education the entire time.

There will be repercussions to this proposal. Children will suffer whilst parents and schools will endure stressful and time consuming appeals.

As there is already a national shortage of qualified teaching staff, reduced funding will impact on the school's ability to employ support staff.

The rationale for this proposal appears to be cost cutting and not in the best interests of families in Hexham.

I urge you to reconsider. Thank you for reading.

28. I object to the proposal to reduce The Sele's PAN by 29%. My three children attended the school and for 12 years I was a governor then trustee of Hexham Middle School and Queen Elizabeth High School. During that time, I was closely involved in detailed modelling of student numbers for Hadrian Leaning Trust, as well as the 2018 consultations on 'Education in the West'. My objection is based on the following grounds:
1. The claim that the birth rate within the school's catchment area shows a steady fall is not accurate. While numbers are undoubtedly lower than in the early 2000s, the data since 2016-17 show a variation of up to 55% up and down from year to year.
 2. In any case, GP birth data alone is insufficient to forecast future demand for pupil places. NCC forecasts are based on a simple roll-forward model. They do not take into account the dynamics of flows between schools within the greater catchment area of the High School, nor demand from outside a school's catchment area. Numbers in nursery are also ignored. The inadequacy of the NCC model can be seen by comparing the numbers forecast in the School Organisation Plan 2021-25. For 2024-25, NCC forecast 156 pupils in Reception across all Hexham Partnership First schools. The actual number allocated according to NCC's Admissions Handbook is 193. The chart below demonstrates that a PAN of 60 would have been resulted in The Sele being oversubscribed in three out of the last five years.
 3. Reception admissions are only part of the story. Numbers on roll at The Sele grow consistently through in-year admissions, as parents move into the area or seek a different educational environment. A PAN of 60 would result in these parents being turned away.
- | Year | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 | 2024/25 |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Applications | 32 | 34 | 38 | 32 | 45 |
| Greater Catchment | 17 | 18 | 18 | 14 | 23 |
| GC Sibling Outside Greater Catchment | 9 | 12 | 7 | 4 | 4 |
| Total | 40 | 10 | 20 | 30 | 40 |
| Actual | 50 | 60 | 70 | 80 | 2020/21 |
4. The proposed reduction in PAN is clearly designed to frustrate the preferences of parents who live outside of The Sele's catchment area. This appears to be contrary to the Schools Admission Code 1.14 which states: "Catchment areas do not prevent parents who live outside of the catchment area of a particular school from expressing a preference for the school." Schools in the Hexham partnership have for decades attracted pupils from outside the area, often with a view to progressing through the middle schools to Queen Elizabeth High School.
5. The Sele is the largest First or Primary school in the west of Northumberland. Just as some parents seek out smaller schools as the most suitable for their children, others prefer the unique environment offered by The Sele. The community our schools serve is not confined to the technical construct of their catchment areas.
 7. The assertion that cross-catchment flows result in significant daily car journeys is not supported by any evidence. The Sele's catchment covers the west of Hexham; Hexham First covers the east of the town. Parents and their children have always moved in both directions by foot, buggy and scooter. As Hexham is also the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many of them, a place at The Sele is the only

convenient and practical school for their children. These also have no impact on car journeys. 8. NCC's rationale for this reduction in PAN is short on data and analysis. It is also confusing in freely moving from "Hexham Partnership" to "Hexham First Schools" to "the Hexham area". 9. The claim that without a reduction in "excessive surplus places" pupils will be spread more thinly, putting the viability of schools at risk, is not evidenced. In Phase 1 of the consultation on Education in the West, NCC provided data which showed that numbers joining The Sele from Haydon Bridge partnership catchments were in low single figures per individual school. If that remains the case, this would have no material impact. 10. A school's capacity is not a multiple of its admission number. The DfE is currently conducting a nationwide Net Capacity Assessment to "provide a single, robust and consistent method of assessing the capacity of schools." Reducing the PAN has no impact on the physical capacity of the school, unless buildings are decommissioned or schools closed. The proposed PAN reduction at The Sele would result in lower funding while the school's fixed costs remain the same. 11. NCC does not have a coherent strategic plan to tackle "significant over-capacity". The Schools Adjudicator noted in his judgement against NCC in the case of Bellingham Middle School (STP635), that the outcomes of its 2018 'Education in the West' proposals failed to address this in a significant way. The 2021-2024 School Organisation Plan also aspired to deal with "the high levels of parental choice at first school level". That plan has not been updated and to my knowledge this ad hoc proposal singling out one school is the only example of any action. This proposal should be rejected. If it goes ahead, it is highly likely to result in objections to the Schools Adjudicator and may precipitate The Sele becoming an academy and gaining control of its own admissions policy.

Community Members Responses – Others FOR Proposal:

1. Hello

I have been made aware of proposed changes to the number of pupils admitted to Sele 1st School. I am supportive of these proposals and welcome the reduction to the size of pupil numbers at the school and the likely reduction in out of catchment attendees. I believe this will be beneficial to a number of other schools in the area and will reduce unnecessary transport of pupils from outside the catchment. Although the proposal notes falling numbers of births within the catchment - birth rates can be cyclical and may therefore rise again. In my view, adequate capacity should be maintained in reserve i.e. a mothball approach rather than an irreversible reduction to capacity at the school.

Thank-you,

Future Prospective Parent Responses:

1. We are writing to object to the proposal of reducing the Pupil Admission Number at the Sele First School. We write as teachers and prospective parents at the Sele First School. There are many reasons why we believe reducing the P.A.N. would be detrimental to our school and community. We recently moved from West Mickley to Hexham; a key reason for this move was to gain a place for our child at The Sele First School. We know first hand the fantastic provision they provide. We know of many families who have made similar move to us or have similar intentions. Reducing the P.A.N. would discourage these families and in some cases prevent them from gaining places at the school and joining this wonderful community. We believe families should have the right to choose which school they send their children to. The Sele First School has a fantastic reputation with passionate teachers, incredible provision, a warm community and incredible opportunities. We have a history of welcoming children from outside our catchment for these reasons. Our son has gained a place in Nursery for the 2025-26 academic year. He is excited and ready for his school journey. A reduction in the P.A.N. would mean his reception place would be in jeopardy. If he is lucky and gets a place, his

future sibling would not necessarily gain a place. Not gaining a place would also result in having to travel to another school for one sibling. This could be a reality for more families than our own. The Sele First School is a large listed building, and has been the beating heart of Hexham for over 160 years. Each class has played a part in writing the history of the school. Reducing the P.A.N would result in empty classrooms inevitably falling into disrepair as a result of decreased budgets. The Sele First School nursery is currently full. We believe it is short sighted to make a judgement in the PAN with only recent birth rate data as a reference. We look forward to hearing how you deliberate the Pupil Admission Number at the Sele First School. Yours faithfully,

2. Dear School Admissions, I am writing to ask you to consider not reducing pupil numbers at the Sele school. I have four children, two of whom currently attend. My daughter is planning to attend next year and I have a baby son who will be due to attend in 2028. We do not live in the catchment area, we are just outside of it. For logistical reasons we really need our other children to attend the same school, we have no family locally so multiple pick-ups from more than one school wouldn't be possible for us. The effect on my son of attending a separate school from that which his three siblings have attended would be detrimental. There is a unique culture at the Sele and one that he wouldn't want to miss out on, having seen his older siblings thrive there. The Sele is also able to provide wraparound care, which is particularly important for professional and working parents. Our community needs families and parents like this to enrich it, and having a larger school with the ability to provide this will allow those families to stay in this area. I'd like to question your method of estimating future pupil numbers. You have used the birthrate as your predictor but I'd like to ask if you know how many people move to Hexham between first having a baby and that baby starting school. I suggest it might be higher than the average area. Hexham, and this catchment area is fairly affluent. There will be a lot of 'next home' type houses that families will move to after having had their baby in their first, smaller and usually cheaper, home elsewhere. Those children will fall into the catchment but won't have been counted in your predicted number. I am also curious about what the introduction of VAT on private school fees will do. There is potentially a higher than predicted influx of children who would have previously gone into private education soon to enter into state education after the increase in private school fees. I presume with class sizes getting larger, teacher numbers will reduce. This is bound to affect the lovely environment at the Sele. The teachers are engaged and provide a vibrant presence in the school. Reducing their numbers and increasing their workload is bound to jade this environment with knock-on effects for the children. The building will suffer. What will happen to the extra classrooms? If pupil numbers were reduced, funding for the school would be reduced, having an impact on the maintenance and upkeep of the building. Would extra funding be available elsewhere to allow the school to keep its building safe and comfortable? There are many questions surrounding the future of this school if pupil numbers are reduced. I'd like to state again that your predicted fall in pupil numbers is flawed and very likely incorrect. But aside from that, please consider saving one of our best schools. It is the heart of Hexham with happy pupils and families. Reducing pupil numbers won't only mean that some pupils miss out on that experience, it means that the pupils that do attend will have a lesser experience. Yours sincerely,
3. Hi, Please do not lower the number of children that can be admitted to the Sele School in Hexham. I have a daughter born earlier this year and we live within 5 minutes walk from the school gates. I attended the school myself and hope that I would be able to send my own children there. The proximity of the school would not be the only reason I would choose to send my children to the school however, but for its success which I fear will be diminished with less funding available to support the teaching and the maintenance of the school. Kind Regard
4. Hi,

We're getting in touch as extremely concerned parents of prospective students of the 2026/27 intake (and later 2028/29 intake) at the Sele School in Hexham. While currently resident in Corbridge, we are beginning the process of moving to Hexham now and are worried about our eldest daughter's prospective place at the Sele School owing to the reduction of the school's PAN number.

We'd like to voice our opposition to this move by the council in the strongest possible terms. As parents and contributors to the local community, we want the freedom of choice to send our daughters to the school we feel will most benefit them.

I'm lucky to have attended the school in the 1990s, later progressing through the entire Hexham school system before ending up with a masters degree in later life and understand the importance of the solid early years foundation that the school provided me with. As a family, we have chosen to move to Northumberland and now specifically to Hexham where I grew up as we know the excellent family environment the town provides. We feel that the school is potentially having its numbers arbitrarily reduced by the council without taking into account:

- Parental choice.
- The popularity of the town from former residents now returning to start families.
- The undoubted continued influx of new families the town will attract. This final point should be particularly obvious to the council given Hexham often receiving awards including 'Best Market Town' and in December 2024 being voted the 3rd happiest place to live in the UK by Rightmove.

We find this decision both disheartening and illogical.

We would also like to highlight the fact that community doesn't begin on the first day of school. Many of the local and community bonds existing around the school and wider local area are as a result of friendships between children and their parents stemming from baby and infant groups, none of which are defined by a catchment area.

Finally, to suggest that reducing the PAN number for the school is part of a drive to decrease longer car journeys is a weak allusion to environmental policy at best. We don't live in a city, we live in a rural county which requires private transport everywhere and perhaps if there is a will by this council to improve environmental outcomes, they would perhaps look at a more considered platform for change which won't affect parental choice regarding education and may provide actual measurable outcomes in the future.

As parents and tax payers, we strongly urge you to reconsider this decision. The school is a great community asset and one that we hope our daughters will be able to make use of.

I understand you'll be busy but would appreciate a response on this however brief just so we know our voices have counted in this most important matter.

5. Hi

I would like to express my view in opposition of reducing the PAN at Sele First.

Although we live out of catchment we would like to apply for our daughter to start reception in September 2026. She has a place there for 2 days a week from September 2025 and I would like her to continue on her educational journey with minimal disruption and uncertainty, particularly given that she has SEND needs.

We were impressed by the warm and caring atmosphere of the school, as well as the strong offers in sports and the arts. Our catchment school does not have such a broad an offer. I believe that a school with multiple classes per year is better for children as it teachers to have more flexibility in grouping children and it also means that when the children transition to the next stage of their education it is less overwhelming for them as they have already experienced being part of a larger year group.

Places could be reduced at other schools, the Sele does have a lot of out of catchment children but why should the school be punished for having a great curriculum offer and having done such a great job of recruitment? Our catchment school did not publicise its open days well and only held them during the working day, but the Sele held a well publicised Saturday event. We have been unable to view our catchment school which makes it feel unwelcoming unlike the Sele which has made every effort to reach out to prospective parents.

Our catchment school (Hexham East) uses the “commando Joe” development programme and I disagree with the use of a programme with a strong military connotation with young children. Should she be forced to attend the school due to the reduced PAN at the Sele I would not be happy with her taking part in that programme and would be raising the issue further.

One argument used to justify reducing the PAN is that out of catchment children are driven in. The Sele is on my route to work and would not require a detour, unlike our catchment school. I believe that the central location of the Sele is a key asset as it allows a drop off to be easily incorporated instead of generating extra road traffic and pollution.

My daughter is in the SEND register with “R” status so we will not have priority on application but the staff at the Sele seem well equipped to deal with her set of needs. In a larger school, provision can be more effectively mapped to the child.

When my daughter was born the midwife commented that the October 2021 cohort in Hexham was significantly larger than usual. I have been aware of many young families moving into the area recently and would be worried that the reduction in PAN would leave children in a school not of their parents choosing.

I would be disappointed should the reduction in PAN proceed as I feel that the Sele is an asset to the community and should remain a choice for parents who feel that the school best serves the needs of their child.

Many thanks

Governing Body Responses:

1. Consultation on Northumberland County Council’s Admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools 2026/27 – admissions to first and primary schools We the Governing Body of Sele First School OBJECT in the strongest possible terms to the proposal to reduce the Planned Admissions Number (PAN) for The Sele First School. This is on the basis that the proposal to reduce the number from the current 84 to 60 is neither in the best interests of our school, nor the community which the Sele First School serves. Nor does it address the aims of the Council regarding the management of surplus places in the Hexham Partnership. We urge the Council in the strongest possible terms to reconsider their proposals by listening to all the schools which might be impacted and their wider communities. In no way does a PAN of 84 exceed the needs of Sele First School’s community, and a PAN of 60 falls some way short of meeting the needs of that community.

Furthermore, reducing the PAN will have a significantly adverse impact on the functioning of our school and its ability to provide a positive learning environment for our children, our ability to manage a Grade II Listed Historic Building in the heart of historic Hexham's Conservation Area, and on the wider community which benefits from a thriving first school at the heart of the town. We also question why the Council feels the need to take such action now, and why not consult on wider proposals for managing school places in the Hexham Partnership based on a broader range of data and evidence in an inclusive and collaborative way. The document Northumberland County Council Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools - 2026-27 – Admission to First and Primary Schools (Reception), talks about the sustainability and viability of small rural schools, yet it does not explicitly state how reducing the PAN of Sele First will address this. The proposal assumes that the PAN for Sele First exceeds the needs of its community. We dispute this for several reasons:

1. Falling pupil numbers resulting from a declining birth rate The Council states that there were 23% surplus places in first schools in the Hexham Partnership despite pupils attending from other Northumberland partnership areas and from out of the County. The Council states that this is due to a continuing fall in the birth rate data in the area. Yet this ignores the fact that our nursery is currently oversubscribed and does not take full account of the number of in term admissions and the very specific circumstances why this is the case. The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands. Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data. The claim that the birth rate within the school's catchment area shows a steady decline is not correct, and although undoubtedly low, there is a variation of 55% up and down from year to year. Nor is the use of GP birth data alone sufficient to forecast future demand for school places. For 2023-24, the actual number of pupils in Reception across all Hexham Partnership schools was 193 according to the Council's Admissions Handbook, an increase of 37 on the Council's own forecast numbers.
2. Pupils attending from outside catchment and pupils making significant car journeys The Council claims that the number of actual places far exceeds the needs of local communities within the Hexham Partnership and that the removal of excessive surplus places is necessary to avoid pupils being spread thinly across schools which places the viability of some schools at greater risk. Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, and a significant source of employment for a much wider geographical area, with many parents commuting for work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case. The Council also claims that, of 35% of pupils living in other school catchments, "about half" of these undertake "significant daily car journeys" to attend The Sele, contrary to the Council's policy to reduce car journeys to schools and lessen the impact on the environment. Of the 35% of pupils which attend Sele First School, 68 (50% of the total number of children attending from outside of catchment) are within the catchment area of Hexham First, which is within the Government's statutory walking distance to school each day and complies with the Council's School Transport Policy.
3. Other reasons House building in Hexham. It was recently announced by the Council that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children? The importance of class sizes under 30. Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic. During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with

the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes. The weakness of the PAN for managing perceived 'surplus' places. The PAN itself is a poor measure for establishing the level of need within a school catchment. It does not allow for sufficient flexibility for those moving to Hexham or those who specifically choose Sele First School, at change phases or within the school year. The importance of parental choice: Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future. Financial considerations and the liabilities of heritage buildings. A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge. The proposals as they stand would have a significantly adverse impact on Sele First School and fail to address the critical issues of supporting small rural schools. We urge the Council to reconsider these proposals and to properly consult all schools in the Hexham Partnership to agree a mutually acceptable solution which would not involve false choices which benefit some schools at the expense of others, solutions based on meaningful data analysis which present a true and accurate state of education in west Northumberland, and which promises to properly resource all of the schools in the partnership. Yours sincerely,

2. Whilst I appreciate you will have received numerous emails outlining the collective view of the Selefirst Governing Body I felt it was paramount that I attach the full letter of objection into my email also. I wholeheartedly agree with the views outlined within the attached letter, articulated brilliantly by our Chair of Governors, Katie O'Brien. I strongly advise you to consider the points raised within the letter and to consider the potential long term impact on the community.

Additionally, I wish to further raise awareness of two potentially catastrophic implications to this shortsighted and short term decision. I will aim to do so as succinctly as possible (because believe me I could write a lot):

- Freedom of choice is integral to human motivation and happiness. This cannot be argued. Your decision to reduce PAN at Selefirst takes away choice for many. In doing so, Northumberland County Council WILL be making Hexham as a community less desirable to live and a less diverse society. Limiting choice WILL increase anxiety, uncertainty and unrest felt by many families. Limiting choice WILL exaggerate feelings of inequality and unfairness within communities. In every young child are feelings of hope and a future of endless possibility. Taking away choice immediately reduces hope and limits possibility. For who is to say that the most local school is best for the young person seeking education? Of course we all want every school to provide the highest quality education and I certainly hope that this is the primary objective of all key stakeholders involved in education regionally and nationally (I'd certainly be concerned if it wasn't). Ensuring the highest quality of education is available on the doorstep is essential and will fit the needs of many families, but of course this will never be the case for all. Family circumstances differ, family values differ from household to household, and as mentioned above every child is different. Whilst not commonplace, there will be many families countywide who even have children at different Primary Schools (indeed I know some that do) - a decision not made for convenience but for what is believed to be right and in the best interest of each specific child and their future prospects. I understand the role of Northumberland County Council is to support all schools across the county and all aspects of school governance must be considered. When tasked with the issue of falling school numbers may I suggest you "power up" the collaborative effort and collective learning between schools; to celebrate schools experiencing growth and progression; committing more time towards understanding shifts in numbers; and where necessary to increase time, energy, effort and investment (if required) in raising standards

across every school. Whilst I appreciate you will say that you do this I would argue in response that if you truly believed in the approach of raising standards you would not be proposing to reduce the numbers of a school with a recent trend of growth, improvement and pupil satisfaction. Let me provide a case study example of how education coupled with freedom of choice is proven, and when reading this please consider the family in question under the conditions of your proposal to reduce Selefirst PAN. Within the past 18 months a family from outside of the catchment area enquired about the possibility to enrol at Selefirst and to explore the option of FlexiSchooling whereby their child (and subsequently children) would attend school on a part-time basis for an initial period of time, whilst undertaking home schooling alongside. Upon joining the school and attending school in this unique way (because it was right for that individual) the child gradually fell in love with education, grew in confidence within a school setting, and built new friendships. For context the child in question had dropped out of education because of a poor experience that affected their mental health. This child has now successfully transitioned into middle school and continues to thrive, where there was genuine concern that this may never be the case. The family commit significant time and expense to getting their children (now with another in Nursery) from Wylam to Hexham (far out of catchment). They do this not because it is convenient or financially beneficial. They do it because that is what their children need and through choice they were able to make an informed and considered decision about this vitally important and potentially life changing choice. As a result of such freedoms my son and my daughter have new friends, a family is flourishing (please recognise the positive impact happy, thriving children will have on the parents) and 2 children have newfound hope where previously it was potentially lost.

- I acknowledge the counties desire for more children and families to walk to school. As someone who has worked in sport all my life I fully endorse any push towards more active communities. I would however encourage NCC to step away from 'catchy objectives' and instead think about what enables and inspires physical activity, and indeed an appreciation for the great outdoors. The location of Selefirst is unique and I am unaware of any other school within West Northumberland that lends itself to community based Play and Physical Activity so well. Granted the school has significantly limited and dated PE spaces due to the Grade II listed nature of the site, however by definition of it sitting within the heart of Hexham's main park (The Sele) children are surrounded by green spaces, nature, and enjoys restricted vehicle access to the school in and around school times. What this means is 100% of children experience a small form of physical activity (walking, running, cycling, scootering, skateboarding) every day even if that is from their adults parked car 500 metres away. Every child steps out of the school gate surrounded by an environment that affords daily Play, physical activity, and engagement with nature. The proximity of The Sele PlayPark, SkatePark, playing field and hill, along with wider grounds that The Sele, Hexham House and Cockshaw Burn provide promotes health and creates a sense of community and belonging beyond the school gates. The problem here is that this type of information is likely hidden from data sources, but this is the reality. So to offer a alternate view point, perhaps it could be said that by narrowing the field of choice, reducing opportunity and cornering families into catchment only school choices Northumberland County Council may actually contribute towards increased inactivity within Hexham. I say this with confidence, knowing from experience the role *environments* play in shaping behaviour, for "we can't adapt to an environment we don't inhabit.

I wish you well on the decision making process ahead, and regardless of outcome I would be very interested to receive a response as to whom you consulted and to see evidence of the overall view from within the community. For it is those people who will have to live with the long term consequences of this decision, and most importantly it is the future of their children that will be most impacted.

I will close with one final point. I am lucky to work in an industry that supports children and young people, as such I am fortunate to spend time with families from a diverse range of communities and backgrounds. Every day I am surrounded by determined parents who, regardless of post code or socio-economic background, all want the same. They want the absolute best for their children and a big part of what they demand are great educators that care for their kids. By providing choice we increase the chances that more families will identify the right education provider to connect with their child which in-turn leads to more children engaging in education for longer with more prosperous societal outcomes long term.

For context I am a parent of two children. I grew up in Hexham and attended Selefirst, HMS, and QEHS as a child. I have remained in Hexham all my life and I am proud of the town. Our youngest child (daughter aged 4) is happily enjoying her time in Reception and as a family we are excited for her future at Selefirst having seen our eldest son (now aged 9) flourish within the school and now happily engaging in schooling at Hexham Middle School. As a family we live within catchment. I am Parent Governor and have been now for a number of years. I am sharing my views and I wholeheartedly object and voice my concerns for good of others and future generations of families who will of course determine the future success of Hexham and surrounding local communities.

Best regards

3. I am writing on behalf of the Governing Body of Sele First School to express our strong objection to the proposed reduction in our Published Admission Number (PAN). Please find our detailed response attached for your review. We urge you to reconsider this proposal, as we firmly believe that reducing our PAN would not be in the best interests of our pupils and community. The attached document outlines our concerns and the reasons behind our objection. We hope that you will acknowledge the arguments presented and recognise the strong opposition within our community to these plans. Thank you for your attention to this matter. Kind regards,
4. Consultation on Northumberland County Council's Admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools 2026/27 – admissions to first and primary schools We the Governing Body of Sele First School OBJECT in the strongest possible terms to the proposal to reduce the Planned Admissions Number (PAN) for The Sele First School. This is on the basis that the proposal to reduce the number from the current 84 to 60 is neither in the best interests of our school, nor the community which the Sele First School serves. Nor does it address the aims of the Council regarding the management of surplus places in the Hexham Partnership. We urge the Council in the strongest possible terms to reconsider their proposals by listening to all the schools which might be impacted and their wider communities. In no way does a PAN of 84 exceed the needs of Sele First School's community, and a PAN of 60 falls some way short of meeting the needs of that community. Furthermore, reducing the PAN will have a significantly adverse impact on the functioning of our school and its ability to provide a positive learning environment for our children, our ability to manage a Grade II Listed Historic Building in the heart of historic Hexham's Conservation Area, and on the wider community which benefits from a thriving first school at the heart of the town. We also question why the Council feels the need to take such action now, and why not consult on wider proposals for managing school places in the Hexham Partnership based on a broader range of data and evidence in an inclusive and collaborative way. The document Northumberland County Council Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools - 2026-27 – Admission to First and Primary Schools (Reception), talks about the sustainability and viability of small rural schools, yet it does not explicitly state how reducing the PAN of Sele First will address this. The proposal assumes that the PAN for Sele First exceeds the needs of its community. We dispute this for several reasons: 1. Falling pupil numbers resulting from a declining birth rate The Council states that there were 23% surplus places in first schools in the Hexham Partnership despite pupils attending

from other Northumberland partnership areas and from out of the County. The Council states that this is due to a continuing fall in the birth rate data in the area. Yet this ignores the fact that our nursery is currently oversubscribed and does not take full account of the number of in term admissions and the very specific circumstances why this is the case. The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands. Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data. The claim that the birth rate within the school's catchment area shows a steady decline is not correct, and although undoubtedly low, there is a variation of 55% up and down from year to year. Nor is the use of GP birth data alone sufficient to forecast future demand for school places. For 2023-24, the actual number of pupils in Reception across all Hexham Partnership schools was 193 according to the Council's Admissions Handbook, an increase of 37 on the Council's own forecast numbers.

2. Pupils attending from outside catchment and pupils making significant car journeys The Council claims that the number of actual places far exceeds the needs of local communities within the Hexham Partnership and that the removal of excessive surplus places is necessary to avoid pupils being spread thinly across schools which places the viability of some schools at greater risk. Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, and a significant source of employment for a much wider geographical area, with many parents commuting for work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case. The Council also claims that, of 35% of pupils living in other school catchments, "about half" of these undertake "significant daily car journeys" to attend The Sele, contrary to the Council's policy to reduce car journeys to schools and lessen the impact on the environment. Of the 35% of pupils which attend Sele First School, 68 (50% of the total number of children attending from outside of catchment) are within the catchment area of Hexham First, which is within the Government's statutory walking distance to school each day and complies with the Council's School Transport Policy.

3. Other reasons House building in Hexham. It was recently announced by the Council that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children? The importance of class sizes under 30. Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic. During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes The weakness of the PAN for managing perceived 'surplus' places. The PAN itself is a poor measure for establishing the level of need within a school catchment. It does not allow for sufficient flexibility for those moving to Hexham or those who specifically choose Sele First School, at change phases or within the school year. The importance of parental choice: Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future. Financial considerations and the liabilities of heritage buildings. A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge. The proposals as they stand would have a significantly adverse impact on Sele First School and fail to address the critical issues of supporting small rural schools. We urge the Council to reconsider these proposals and to properly

consult all schools in the Hexham Partnership to agree a mutually acceptable solution which would not involve false choices which benefit some schools at the expense of others, solutions based on meaningful data analysis which present a true and accurate state of education in west Northumberland, and which promises to properly resource all of the schools in the partnership. Yours sincerely,

5. Consultation on Northumberland County Council's Admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools 2026/27 – admissions to first and primary schools We the Governing Body of Sele First School OBJECT in the strongest possible terms to the proposal to reduce the Planned Admissions Number (PAN) for The Sele First School. This is on the basis that the proposal to reduce the number from the current 84 to 60 is neither in the best interests of our school, nor the community which the Sele First School serves. Nor does it address the aims of the Council regarding the management of surplus places in the Hexham Partnership. We urge the Council in the strongest possible terms to reconsider their proposals by listening to all the schools which might be impacted and their wider communities. In no way does a PAN of 84 exceed the needs of Sele First School's community, and a PAN of 60 falls some way short of meeting the needs of that community. Furthermore, reducing the PAN will have a significantly adverse impact on the functioning of our school and its ability to provide a positive learning environment for our children, our ability to manage a Grade II Listed Historic Building in the heart of historic Hexham's Conservation Area, and on the wider community which benefits from a thriving first school at the heart of the town. We also question why the Council feels the need to take such action now, and why not consult on wider proposals for managing school places in the Hexham Partnership based on a broader range of data and evidence in an inclusive and collaborative way. The document Northumberland County Council Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools - 2026-27 – Admission to First and Primary Schools (Reception), talks about the sustainability and viability of small rural schools, yet it does not explicitly state how reducing the PAN of Sele First will address this. The proposal assumes that the PAN for Sele First exceeds the needs of its community. We dispute this for several reasons: 1. Falling pupil numbers resulting from a declining birth rate The Council states that there were 23% surplus places in first schools in the Hexham Partnership despite pupils attending from other Northumberland partnership areas and from out of the County. The Council states that this is due to a continuing fall in the birth rate data in the area. Yet this ignores the fact that our nursery is currently oversubscribed and does not take full account of the number of in term admissions and the very specific circumstances why this is the case. The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands. Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data. The claim that the birth rate within the school's catchment area shows a steady decline is not correct, and although undoubtedly low, there is a variation of 55% up and down from year to year. Nor is the use of GP birth data alone sufficient to forecast future demand for school places. For 2023-24, the actual number of pupils in Reception across all Hexham Partnership schools was 193 according to the Council's Admissions Handbook, an increase of 37 on the Council's own forecast numbers. 2. Pupils attending from outside catchment and pupils making significant car journeys The Council claims that the number of actual places far exceeds the needs of local communities within the Hexham Partnership and that the removal of excessive surplus places is necessary to avoid pupils being spread thinly across schools which places the viability of some schools at greater risk. Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, and a significant source of employment for a much wider geographical area, with many parents commuting for work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, whose families may not be

able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case. The Council also claims that, of 35% of pupils living in other school catchments, "about half" of these undertake "significant daily car journeys" to attend The Sele, contrary to the Council's policy to reduce car journeys to schools and lessen the impact on the environment. Of the 35% of pupils which attend Sele First School, 68 (50% of the total number of children attending from outside of catchment) are within the catchment area of Hexham First, which is within the Government's statutory walking distance to school each day and complies with the Council's School Transport Policy. 3. Other reasons House building in Hexham. It was recently announced by the Council that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children? The importance of class sizes under 30. Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic. During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes. The weakness of the PAN for managing perceived 'surplus' places. The PAN itself is a poor measure for establishing the level of need within a school catchment. It does not allow for sufficient flexibility for those moving to Hexham or those who specifically choose Sele First School, at change phases or within the school year. The importance of parental choice: Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future. Financial considerations and the liabilities of heritage buildings. A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge. The proposals as they stand would have a significantly adverse impact on Sele First School and fail to address the critical issues of supporting small rural schools. We urge the Council to reconsider these proposals and to properly consult all schools in the Hexham Partnership to agree a mutually acceptable solution which would not involve false choices which benefit some schools at the expense of others, solutions based on meaningful data analysis which present a true and accurate state of education in west Northumberland, and which promises to properly resource all of the schools in the partnership. Yours sincerely,

6. Dear team, I am writing on behalf of the Governing Body of Sele First School to express our strong objection to the proposed reduction in our Published Admission Number (PAN). Please find our detailed response attached for your review. We urge you to reconsider this proposal, as we firmly believe that reducing our PAN would not be in the best interests of our pupils and community. The attached document outlines our concerns and the reasons behind our objection. We hope that you will acknowledge the arguments presented and recognise the strong opposition within our community to these plans. Thank you for your attention to this matter. Kind regards,

Other Governing Body & School Responses:

1. Hadrian Learning Trust objects to the proposal to reduce the PAN into Sele First School from 84 to 60, a reduction of 29%, for the following reasons:
 - The proposed reduction is at odds with the spirit of the School Admissions Code which supports parental preference. Demand for places at Sele First grows through the year groups, thus justifying retention of the current PAN; a reduction of this would deny places to those parents who would otherwise seek them.

- The proposed reduction is at odds with the presumptions guiding the Schools Adjudicator, to whom schools such as Sele First can object if the PAN set for them is lower than they would wish; there is a strong presumption in favour of an increase to a PAN to which the Schools Adjudicator must have regard when considering any such objection.
 - Schools in the Hexham Partnership typically attract students from outside catchment and this should continue to be enabled given that such demand exists, not limited as is proposed, noting that the Admissions Code reads: Catchment areas do not prevent parents who live outside of the catchment area of a particular school from expressing a preference for the school.
 - The consultation paper fails to provide a holistic analysis of the situation in the west of the county or the implications of the proposed change on other schools beyond Sele First itself
2. Hadrian Learning Trust objects to the proposal to reduce the PAN into Sele First School from 84 to 60, a reduction of 29%, for the following reasons:
- The proposed reduction is at odds with the spirit of the School Admissions Code which supports parental preference. Demand for places at Sele First grows through the year groups, thus justifying retention of the current PAN; a reduction of this would deny places to those parents who would otherwise seek them.
 - The proposed reduction is at odds with the presumptions guiding the Schools Adjudicator, to whom schools such as Sele First can object if the PAN set for them is lower than they would wish; there is a strong presumption in favour of an increase to a PAN to which the Schools Adjudicator must have regard when considering any such objection.
 - Schools in the Hexham Partnership typically attract students from outside catchment and this should continue to be enabled given that such demand exists, not limited as is proposed, noting that the Admissions Code reads: Catchment areas do not prevent parents who live outside of the catchment area of a particular school from expressing a preference for the school.
 - The consultation paper fails to provide a holistic analysis of the situation in the west of the county or the implications of the proposed change on other schools beyond Sele First itself

Parent Responses – AGAINST Proposal:

1. To whom it may concern,

I am against the proposal to reduce the PAN of Sele First School two form entry as it would mean larger class sizes which I feel would be detrimental to the learning of all students especially those with additional needs or issues in larger groups and issues with extra noise and busyness. It would make it more difficult to fit a higher number of pupils into the small classrooms at the school and would also leave a lot of empty spaces that are unable to be adapted for other things due to the building being listed. It would also affect families with more than one child as it would be harder to get siblings into the same school such as myself who currently has two children attending the school and my youngest who will be due to start school in September 2026 this would cause great issues if he were to attend a different school as doing two separate school runs is impossible to do as a single parent, it also would mean there being less staff at the school as a result of having fewer classes making a large number of current teachers and teaching assistants redundant. Also reducing the number of admissions takes away the choice of parents who may live on the outskirts of Hexham resulting in them settling on less superior schools for their children.

Overall I believe the proposal will be severely detrimental to parents, children, school staff and people living in the Hexham community.

Kind regards

2. To whom it may concern,

Parents of Sele First School have received a letter about reduction in year group/classes in school.

I am a Public Health Nurse in the area, our son is in Reception of this school, I strongly object to this with a few reasons for rationale.

To begin with, the awareness of neurodiversity has increased in recent years which is excellent for children and receiving a diagnosis to reach their potential. Alongside neurodiversity, there are also mainstream pupils who struggle with different aspects of school whether this is academically or emotionally. I am a great believer in every child counts and deserves recognition by their teacher. By increasing class sizes to 30 pupils per class from average of 24 at present there is an increased risk that children who do struggle in education are going to go unnoticed and there's more risk of a pupil missing a diagnosis due to teachers having six or more pupils to divide their attention amongst. This could have a detrimental impact on pupils and take away their opportunity to reach their potential within education both in Sele First School and moving forwards. At present the teachers know the child individually, understand their needs immediately and are excellent with building that rapport and trust with the pupils, increasing the class size increases the risk of this being ruined.

Another aspect of this is that Sele First School has worked incredibly hard to establish their excellent reputation in the area. Personally, we moved back to Hexham from a local village to ensure our child could attend Sele as we knew how popular it was. However, I do not think parents should feel their child may not be able to attend one of the best schools in the area because they can't afford to live in Hexham itself.

Finally, I feel that instead of targeting Sele for their large intake smaller schools surrounding Sele should be looked at, what are they doing that differs to Sele and where could they improve their reputation in this area to increase their intakes? Sele pride themselves on community involvement and making every child matter, I noted in the letter the council have emphasised it is the same Ofsted rating as other schools however it is evident something about Sele must differ to the rest of the schools for their intake to be so large in comparison to others.

I really hope the council do reconsider as I personally along with many other parents wouldn't want my son in a class of 30 children at such a young age.

3. Hello,

Please take this email in to consideration opposing to the proposed change of Hexham Sele School to reduce their admission numbers.

I, myself live in Haydon Bridge and my children go to the Sele School. This is due to our childcare being in Hexham and myself and my husband work in Hexham. Unfortunately we are not in the financial position to buy a house in Hexham which is why we live in Haydon Bridge. My eldest daughter went to the Sele School and it has been an outstanding school, I would like my younger two children to have the opportunity to experience this. I believe that all parents should have the right to decide where their child is educated.

Please can you consider when making a decision about the school, that not all people who are out of catchment areas are so by choice. People who live out of catchment areas should be entitled to the freedom of choice when it comes to our children's education. Also consider that parents out of catchment areas work in Hexham and that their childcare is in Hexham. It is essential that I can

access my childcare in Hexham (grandparents) as they would not be able to get to Haydon Bridge for school times due to transport and their schedule. Wrap around care is too costly. This would have a huge impact on my job.

The Sele School is an excellent school and has the capacity to keep the numbers as they are. I urge you to reconsider this proposal and keep the school thriving as it is with pupils in and out of catchment areas.

Many thanks

4. Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to express my deep concern over proposals to reduce school admission numbers at the Sele First School from September 2026.

Reducing the number of pupil places per cohort and subsequently reducing the number of classes per cohort and increasing class sizes will have a detrimental affect on children's education and frankly, welfare. It will also put increased pressure on teachers and support staff, leading to difficulty in retaining teachers (already a National-scale issue). I want to point you in the direction of the below research, which highlights the many impacts of large class sizes.

<https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/rethinking-class-size-the-complex-story-of-impact-on-teaching-and-learning>

As a parent of a pupil at Sele First School, I have heard many views regarding this from other parents and the wider community. The vast majority share my concerns about the proposals for differing reasons. I encourage you to seriously consider all of the objections to this proposal as it is going to have such a negative impact on pupils, staff and the community of Hexham.

Yours faithfully,

5. Dear School Admissions

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School

We are writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

We do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

We moved to Hexham from Newcastle in 2020 when our son turned 3 years old due to limited availability of local school places. When we were looking for potential areas to move to, Hexham proved very attractive to us due to the excellent reputation and slightly smaller class sizes offered at Sele First School to support our son's learning. We firmly believe that a reduction in PAN would have a significant detrimental impact on the nurturing environment that is at the heart of the school's ethos and identity.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

Yours sincerely,

6. To whom it may concern

I have personal stakes in Sele first school not becoming two form entry.

As both a parent, Teaching Assistant at the Sele and a member of the Hexham community who attended the Sele myself. I also have friends and family whom the PAN reduction would directly affect.

I am against the proposal to reduce the PAN at Sele First school. Two form entry would mean larger class sizes, less space and less staff. All of which would be detrimental to the learning of all students, especially those with additional needs or sensory needs. Classrooms would be more cramped and would not be able to be arranged to accommodate the needs of the children.

It would also mean many classrooms would be left empty with no way to adapt or change them as the much of the school building is listed.

I have a daughter with additional needs who attends Sele first school. I transferred her from another school in Hexham who were not meeting her needs. I chose the Sele for her as I knew from my experience as a SEN TA that the Sele is like no other school in the area for support children and the families of SEN children are met currently met by the school. I fear if the class size was larger and less space was available then it would be increasingly difficult to meet the needs of the children the amazing way that the Sele do.

I would also fear that admissions reduction would affect my job security and may cause redundancy for myself or colleagues. I love working at the Sele. It is the best place I've worked with supportive leadership and amazing Teaching and support staff.

It would greatly affect the families with older siblings attending the school, as they would no longer be guaranteed a space. This could cause major difficulties for families if younger siblings needed to attend a different school.

It would also take away parental choice for families moving to the area or live on the outskirts of Hexham or just outside of it.

Sele first school is a brilliant, inclusive school which prides itself on being alot of families first choice. Reducing the PAN at the Sele would be extremely detrimental to children, parents, school staff and the Hexham community as a whole. We should not try to change something that works and work incredibly well.

Kind regards

7. Dear School Admissions,

I am writing to ask you to consider not reducing pupil numbers at the Sele school. Both my stepchildren currently attend, as hopefully will my daughter next year. I have a baby son who is 6monthsold and we hope he attends too, when the time comes. We do not live in catchment area, we are just outside of it. But my stepsons' mother does, which is why my two stepsons attend. For half of the week we pick them up and they stay with us so for logistical reasons we really need our other children to attend the same school.

Though that is our main driver for us, personally. wanting you to still accept pupils out of catchment, there are other affecting my family too. Socially my baby son will feel isolated if his three older siblings attend the same school but he can't. Sibling school photographs won't be possible. Extracurricular activities may clash. And things like handing down uniform from the older kids to him won't be possible.

I'd like you to consider the wider society too. Some people live out of catchment but work in Hexham so their child being in school there matters. And the provision of wrap around care in a bigger school, in a town rather than a village, is likely to be wider so allowing working parents more choice.

I'd like to question your method of estimating future pupil numbers. I don't believe that 20 spaces will be left for out-of-catchment children. You have used the birthrate as your predictor but I'd like to ask if you know how many people move to Hexham between having a baby and that baby starting school. I suggest it might be higher than the average area. Hexham, and this catchment area is fairly affluent. There will be a lot of 'second home' type houses that families will move to after having had their baby in their first, usually cheaper, home elsewhere. Those children will fall into catchment but won't have been counted in your predicted number.

I also a curious about what the introduction of VAT on private school fees will do. I doubt many families will remove children from private education and relocate them into state education but I do suspect parents considering right now where to send their pre-school aged child may reconsider now. This would affect the 2025 intake onwards and again, as a relatively affluent area, I suspect a higher than average proportion of children are privately educated. Meaning potential a higher than predicted influx of those children into state education after the increase in private school fees. I'd suggest this is an unknown and reducing pupil numbers at the Sele is premature until this, being a huge and upcoming change, at least, is known.

I'd also just like to comment on what a lovely school environment it is. Having slightly smaller class sizes seems to really benefit the pupils and teachers. The teachers seem content and keen to be involved in extra curricular provision. They go above and beyond and the schools ethos really benefits. I'd worry if their class sizes increased about what that would do to teacher stress and their ability to be involved in the wider school environment. I am also keen to know what the plan would be for teacher numbers. If there is one less class per year group does that mean that 5 teachers will loose their job as they know it? Five professional from our community having to relocate off the back of this?

Additionally, the Sele building itself is beautiful, full of culture and class and really sets the school apart. But it is not a young building and I'd imagine it has high maintenance needs. What will happen to the extra classrooms? If pupil numbers were reduced I know that the funding for the school would reduce, having an impact on maintenance and upkeep of the building. I foresee leaky and draughty classrooms that are miserable to be in, never mind learn in. What would be done to protect against this? Would extra funding be available elsewhere to allow the school to keep its building safe and comfortable?

There are many questions surrounding the future of this school if pupil numbers are reduced. I'd like to state again that your predicted fall in pupil numbers is flawed and very likely incorrect in my opinion. But aside from that, please consider saving one of our best schools. It is the heart of Hexham and produces a lot of Hexham residents, who have been benefited from this special and unique environment. Those residents' influence in the town make Hexham an exceptionally pleasant town. Indeed one of the happiest in the UK. Reducing pupil numbers won't only mean that some pupils miss out on that experience, it means that the pupils that do attend will have lesser quality, and perhaps even unpleasant experience.

Yours sincerely,

8. To whom it may concern,

I am writing to you regarding your proposal to reduce Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN) at my children's school, Sele First School.

Firstly, I would like to state that I am hugely against this proposal, and shocked that it is being considered as a viable option. This school provides outstanding care for both my children. My eldest is on their SEN register for Autism and she has crippling anxiety. As a teacher myself, I know that this school provides her with an environment where she can not only access school but also thrive. This would not be the case in any other school or if class numbers increase. Her class is slightly under full capacity, in a class of 30 she would have less space for movement breaks, it would be louder, adult support diluted, direct adult interaction reduced, and the member of staff would have less time to get to know her as an individual.

We are currently seeing more and more children suffering from mental health issues. The Children's Society published a report saying that five children in a classroom of thirty are likely to have mental health problems. At the Sele First School, due to the smaller class numbers, staff know the children incredibly well and are able to give personalised mental health support, identifying needs and implementing plans before needing more intervention. Children leave with good levels of mental health and positive school relationships.

The country is suffering from a teacher recruitment and retention crisis. Staff at Sele First School teach at this school because they want the best for the children and they always go the extra mile for their pupils. A lot of staff have been there for a number of years and in the teaching community it is regarded as a positive environment to work in. Increasing class numbers will hugely impact on staff, less time to support pupils, less time to know families and their children and of course increase workload, therefore we could see a higher turnover off staff which would be a detriment to the pupils.

With reduced numbers Sele First School will start to have a long waiting list and people may move just to get into the school. I am concerned that the intake will have less diversity as it becomes the school of choice. All children have the right to their unique outstanding provision, not just if you have the money to live within the catchment area.

Finally, I would like to point out the negative impact that a reduction in numbers will have on educational results. With less adult support, the impact on mental health, an increased workload for teachers affecting the quality provided, academic results will be lower.

I am aware of the concerns councils are facing around funding, however, I do not believe that this outweighs the devastating impact it will have on the school and its community. Children's and staff's mental health will be dramatically impacted, academic results will lower, and the school ethos will suffer. I urge you to consider these reasons before making your decision.

Yours faithfully

9. Dear School Admissions

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School

We are writing to you to raise a very strong objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

We do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

Our youngest child is in Year 2 at Sele First School, having attended there since nursery. His older sibling also attended Sele First School from the Nursery all the way through to year 4, and is now at Hexham Middle School. Neither my partner nor myself were born in Northumberland. We moved to Hexham as we both secured jobs in the North-East, and wanted to find an appealing town to live in, and a First school that had an excellent reputation for education. This is what led to our move to Hexham, rather than anywhere else in the Tyne Valley. We both commute to work outside of Hexham as we work in the public sector, and rely on Sele First school's wrap around care. We could not manage without this.

We are deeply concerned that the proposal to reduce pupil admission numbers is based solely on current birth rate data. With the local proposals for further house building on the old Hexham Middle school site and the surrounding area, and the current government's agenda for home building, we can only expect increased numbers of families to re-locate to Hexham in the near future, putting lots more pressure on services including schools. The birth rate will not capture this influx of numbers in to Hexham and the surrounding areas.

Furthermore, the current government's decision to apply tax on fees at private schools, is also likely to drive up the demand on places at local state schools.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

Yours sincerely,

10. Consultation on Northumberland County Council's Admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools 202/27 – admissions to first and primary schools. Proposal to reduce the Planned Admissions Number of the Sele First School

I OBJECT to the proposal to reduce the PAN of The Sele First School from 84 to 60, a 29% reduction in the school's capacity.

Both of my children attended the school and my youngest currently attends in year 4. I have also been a Governor at the school for the past seven years and I am currently vice-chair, Chair of the Premises Committee and SEND Link Governor.

Reducing the PAN will have a significantly adverse impact on the functioning of the school and its ability to provide a positive learning environment for our children. The proposals assume that a PAN of 84 exceeds the needs of the schools community, based on the catchment and declining birth rate data. There are several reasons why this is not the case, and that a PAN of 60 would leave the school heavily oversubscribed. The Council's justification for this is that the higher PAN exceeds the needs of the school's community. I firmly dispute this conclusion and the means at which it has been arrived at for the following reasons.

- The use birth rate data is a flawed metric in predicting future demand for school places.
- A substantial majority of pupils live within the statutory walking distance of the school.
- Future house building in Hexham will significantly increase the need for school places.
- Current pupil numbers enable class sizes conducive to high standards of achievement, pupil welfare, good standards of behaviour and staff wellbeing.
- The pressures of maintaining heritage buildings is significant and reduction in the school's budget will make it impossible to carry out repairs and maintenance to the school estate.

The use birth rate data is a flawed metric in predicting future demand for school places

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands. Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data. The claim that the birth rate within the school's catchment area shows a steady decline is not correct, and although undoubtedly low, there is a variation of 55% up and down from year to year. Nor is the use of GP birth data alone sufficient to forecast future demand for school places. For 2023-24, the actual number of pupils in Reception across all Hexham

Partnership schools was 193 according to the Council's Admissions Handbook, an increase of 37 on the Council's own forecast numbers in the School Organisation Plan 2021-25. A PAN of 60 would have resulted in The Sele being oversubscribed in three of the last five years.

11. A substantial majority of pupils live within the statutory walking distance of the school

The Council claims that the number of actual places far exceeds the needs of local communities within the Hexham Partnership and that the removal of excessive surplus places is necessary to avoid pupils being spread thinly across schools which places the viability of some schools at greater risk. Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop of pick up near their place of work.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham.

Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case and create school admissions into a postcode lottery.

Future house building in Hexham will significantly increase the need for school places

It was recently announced by the Council that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

Current pupil numbers enable class sizes conducive to high standards of achievement, pupil welfare, good standards of behaviour and staff wellbeing

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic. During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

The pressures of maintaining heritage buildings is significant and reduction in the school's budget will make it impossible to carry out repairs and maintenance to the school estate.

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge. Maintaining 175 year old buildings in a conservation area has significant financial implications, and are often harder to heat and to insulate.

The proposals as they stand do not fully recognise the complex educational landscape in Hexham and west Northumberland, would have a significantly adverse impact on Sele First School and in my view would fail to address the real critical issues of supporting small rural schools.

I urge the Council to reject the proposal.

Yours sincerely,

12. Dear School Admissions,

I am writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

I do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

We moved back up to Northumberland from Bristol in summer 2021 and missed the deadline for school applications for our son who was due to start reception that September. We were lucky that he could still be given a place at Sele First School as they were not oversubscribed. This is our closest school and under the new admission numbers he may not have been able to attend. In his first year at school, at least 3 other children joined his class throughout the year. This was either due to moving to the area or because they had chosen to move from another local school. Without this flexibility in class sizes, families will struggle to move into or within the Tyne Valley area and parents will not be able to place their child in the school they think best suits their needs.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

I hope you will reconsider this decision.

Yours sincerely,

13. Dear School Admissions

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School

We are writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

We do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

We chose to send our children to Sele First School based on the school's size and reputation. We relocated to Hexham from following the birth of our eldest daughter, currently a Y3 pupil, and just prior to the birth of our youngest daughter, who is currently in Y1.

When considering the educational setting we wanted for our children, it was important to us to move to an area that would be firmly within the catchment of Sele First School. As well as the school's reputation for outstanding educational performance, we wanted a first school setting large enough so that the transition into Hexham Middle School and QEHS would not be as marked. Additionally, a larger school setting naturally provides a more dynamic mix of students from different backgrounds, which is also important to us. We are members of the congregation at Hexham Abbey and the school's close links with the Abbey were an additional deciding factor for us as a family.

For us, having a 3 class entry at Sele First sets the school apart because the mix of teaching and support staff within the school community gives our children access to rich extracurricular activities that they would not necessarily get if the PAN was reduced and class entry reduced to 2 in each year group. The teachers and support staff at Sele First are first class. We have no doubt that the school attracts such high calibre professionals because of its size and therefore ability to accommodate staff interests into the curriculum so widely as can be seen from the range of extra clubs and activities they run for the children and which are extremely popular and oversubscribed. It would be a great shame for all stakeholders if this was lost.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data. We work in Newcastle upon Tyne and are aware of multiple families with children of First School age that are moving to Hexham specifically to join the school.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

Yours faithfully

14. Dear School Admissions

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School

We are writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

We do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

As a family with two young children, we moved to the Hexham area in the months prior to our eldest child starting school, with knowledge of the reputation of the primary education system in Hexham, more specifically at Sele First, a huge draw to the area for us. Neither of us are native to the north east but have since made this our home and consequently work professionally in NHS locally.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

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A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

Yours sincerely,

15. Dear School Admissions

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School

We are writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

We do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

We have two children, one which currently attends the Sele First School and one which left a couple of years ago. When choosing a school for them we visited and looked around the local first schools and it was clear that the Sele First School was the best by far. The Sele First School has provided our children with a fantastic education and experiences that I believe would not have been provided in other local schools. We do not live in the catchment area for The Sele First School. I believe that the plan to reduce the numbers will effectively remove the choice from parents in what school they wish to send their children to and force them to send their children to the nearest school even if they believe the school to not be suitable.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

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A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

Yours sincerely,

16. For whom this my concern.

We have been made aware of the proposed Pan for the Sele school. I am writing to say I would NOT be in favour of the class sizes becoming 30 and only being 2 class per year.

Both my daughters currently attend the school and their brother will be starting the nursery in 2026. As we live in Acomb this could make it less likely we would get a place and that would leave me with needing to drop two children off at two different schools. I myself also work in Hexham and chose the Sele school for this reason along with knowing what a brilliant school it is.

Please reconsider.

Kind regards,

17. Dear School Admissions,

My husband and I would like to object to your planned proposals to reduce the size of Sele First by reducing its PAN for the following reasons:

Looking at falling birth rates is the wrong metric to understand the desirability of a popular, family friendly market town.

Looking at birth rates is the wrong metric when looking at population for a market town like Hexham. To understand the full picture of Hexham, you also need to look at number of families that have recently moved to the area and the current pressure on estate agents to find family houses for families that want to move into the area.

Many parents (like my husband and I) had our children in a large city, and decided to move to Hexham when they were at nursery and in reception. This is typical of many parents we know – and particularly typical of many parent friends of ours and many families at Sele First.

I did a quick straw poll of my daughter's class (currently in year 4 at the Sele) and just over half of the children were born in the area. All the other families moved to Hexham after their child was born. It therefore doesn't make sense to look at birth rates to decide how many children will be accessing local schools in 5 years' time.

The reputation of the schools in Hexham was why we moved to Hexham

Our daughter started reception in a primary school in Bristol. When we went to open days in Bristol, none of the schools seemed particularly great and we felt like we picked the best from a bad bunch. We decided to relocate and were unsure whether this should be Gloucestershire or Northumberland. Due to the reputation of school system here, the decision to relocate to Hexham was an easy one to make.

By reducing the school size and therefore losing fantastic staff, you are putting at risk the positive reputation Hexham has for its top-notch schooling. This far reaching reputation is not to be underestimated.

New housing developments reinforce the need for more, not fewer, classes

Not only will estate agents happily tell you that family sized houses sell incredibly quickly due to the number of families that want to move here, but there are plans to expand Hexham's size. For example:

- The proposed redevelopment of the former Hexham Middle School site includes plans for up to 200 homes. This will encompass a mix of housing types, which include family residences. Where will these children go when the size of the Sele is reduced?
- What about the land that is for sale next to the golf course towards the West End of Hexham? It has recently been sold for development opposite the Park Well development. Where will these children go?
- The old police family houses have been earmarked for development and now changes in policy mean this is now likely to go ahead (the new Police and Crime Commissioner has promised to resolve previous issues with the development).

Hexham's size increase will only continue – Labour has relaxed building regulations and people need housing. Hexham is an incredibly desirable place for developers to build (again, due to the positive reputation of its fantastic schooling system).

It makes no sense to decrease the size of a thriving, popular school in the centre of the town before all of this is about to happen. Surely you need a local school that can cater for the size that Hexham will grow to become?

Schools as infrastructure for a growing Hexham

Investments in education are critical infrastructure for a growing community. Reducing the size of Sele First would be akin to scaling back key infrastructure, such as roads or healthcare facilities, at a time when the town is expanding. This misalignment could create long-term issues for Hexham's development trajectory.

Cultural impact on Hexham

I work at the Queen's Hall Arts Centre in Hexham and since the new Artistic Director took on the role in 2018, she has transformed the cultural scene in Hexham. Family programming has gone from virtually non-existent (aside from a once a year pantomime) to a thriving art form in its own right. We have regular sell out family performances, workshops, exhibitions and other events. In 2023/24 alone, we sold 11,919 tickets to family audiences for our family specific shows. This doesn't include our free and un-ticketed events. We have already beaten this number in 2024/25 for families, and we are yet to account for our Christmas run. We also put on free family events which get larger every year (such as our Lantern Parade).

But we don't plan on standing still with what we currently do – we are about to start a weekly Saturday Club for young people, we have recently secured funding to run an environmental project for young people, and have plans to do more of the same in 2025 and beyond.

While we are working hard and building the cultural scene for young people in Hexham, the short termism of reducing its most successful first school in the centre of the town will have a negative impact of work we are doing to boost Hexham's cultural currency.

We have had specific feedback from audiences via surveys and other feedback mechanisms which specifically outline that they have moved to Hexham because of its cultural offering. The Council should therefore consider the increased desirability of things such as Hexham's increased cultural offering and the increase of independent shops opening up in Hexham and realise that this too, will have a pull for young families moving to the area. Hexham therefore needs a school that can cope with increased family numbers.

Encourage partnerships with rural schools

Instead of redistributing students, establish formal collaborations between Sele First and smaller rural schools to share resources, training, and best practices. This would allow rural schools to benefit from Sele First's expertise while preserving the integrity of Hexham's educational ecosystem.

Conclusion

The proposal to reduce Sele First School's PAN is misaligned with Hexham's growth trajectory, family-friendly reputation, and the educational and cultural aspirations of the town. Instead of diminishing a thriving institution, the Council should focus on holistic solutions that support rural schools. The proposal the council is offering is not only baffling but is a clear example of knee-jerk short-termism.

As Hexham's reputation is increasing in popularity with young families, class sizes will remain buoyant both at Sele First but will also naturally increase at rural schools. All you have to do is look at the popularity of Hexham's cultural offerings and speak to local estate agents to understand how many families are moving to the area and, as mentioned earlier, looking at birth rates is the wrong metric.

Sele First is not only a fantastic school, but a success story Northumberland County Council should be proud of. The Council should encourage smaller local schools to learn from its fabulous reputation rather than dismantling its offer.

Please reconsider your proposal.

Yours sincerely,

18. Dear Northumberland County Council,

Consultation – Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools 2026-27/The Sele First School

I am a current parent and also a governor at The Sele First School, Hexham. I strongly object to the proposals set out in the consultation document and consider that the PAN of the Sele First School should remain unchanged from 2026.

The document refers to the Council's key objective of enabling as many students as possible to attend local schools within or close to their home communities. This objective is achieved by the current arrangements. In fact, the proposal frustrates this objective by taking choice away from Hexham area families.

The suggestion appears to be that The Sele's current PAN is potentially impacting the viability of other local schools. However, the document does not explain how. Whilst the document includes data

about the current PAN of local authority schools, it does not say what current pupil numbers are and/or what the anticipated impact of the change in birth rate is on those other schools. No changes to other schools' PAN or any other measures in respect of other schools appear to form part of the proposal. The document says that it has been identified that the viability and sustainability of all schools in the partnership would be supported by a reduction in the number of surplus places, but no detail is given of how this was identified and how it would actually work in practice. In light of this, how can the Council properly evaluate whether or not the proposed changes will have either the suggested or indeed any impact on the viability of other schools?

The document records that The Sele is located in the heart of Hexham town. However, the proposal does not reflect the vital role that the school plays in the heart of the community. This is both in terms of attracting families to come and live in the area in order to attend the school, and bringing families into town for drop off and pick up. This adds immeasurably to the vibrancy and viability of the town centre, with families using shops and cafes and other local amenities and community spaces such as the library. Families who relocate to Hexham at any time after the birth of their child are completely ignored in the proposal document, which focuses only on the birth rate (and in doing so specifically excludes such families from consideration). It cannot be the intention of the Council to discourage families from moving to the Hexham area, but this is the potential consequence that the proposed reduction to The Sele's PAN will have.

The document states that around half of the non-catchment pupils live in the catchments of very small, rural schools and undertake significant daily car journeys to attend The Sele, passing other schools along the way. This does not take into account the fact that many of these parents are working in Hexham and would be making these journeys anyway. The location of the school in the Sele Park means that a large number of parents coming from within Hexham town walk to school, even those who live outside the direct catchment area of The Sele. The school has significant, well-used provision for scooter and bike storage. Contrary to the assertion in the document, the current arrangements support the Council's policy to reduce car journeys to schools and lessen the impact on the environment.

The birth rate data the document relies upon simply cannot be considered in isolation. It ignores the fact that, even if there is an overall decline over time, from one year to the next it can go up and down, which is the school's experience over the last few years. Crucially, the birth rate data ignores families who move to the area after their children are born (often with schools being the main driver for their move).

The document also ignores local families who are included in the birth rate data but who, for whatever reason, want or need their child to go to a particular school, which is not their catchment school, or who want or need their children to move after starting school. A rural area is an entirely different proposition to a city where the choice is commonly between numerous large schools.

It goes without saying that a bigger school is not necessarily better, but it does provide a different experience. Elements of the experience provided at Sele arise out of its size, for example nursery provision and it being a teaching school. Families should not be deprived of their choice to prioritise what is important to them just because they live in this area. Again, this is different to a city where numerous large schools in a small area mean families are more likely to be able to access key services like onsite nursery provision and wrap around care.

In Hexham, we are also part of a three tier system, which is not referred to at all in the proposal document, but is certainly something that factors into families' decision-making in terms of choice of first school. Families consider the impact their choice of first school will have on their child's ability to secure a place at their preferred middle school (a move which of course happens in year 5, two years earlier than in a two tier system).

The proposal document states that the data indicates that a PAN of 84 at Sele is no longer appropriate to meet the needs of the community served by the school. It is proposed that a PAN of 60 (2 forms of entry) should be implemented at the school for the September 2026 Reception intake onwards; this would, the document says, enable the school to meet the needs of its catchment area pupils, as well as continuing to have in region of 20 places that could be offered to pupils outside of catchment. Of course, this can only be speculation. The birth rate is not conclusive as to how many children will be looking for a school place in Hexham in 2026, particularly when there are well publicised plans to build 200 new homes on the old Hexham Middle School site. The Chronicle quotes the Council as saying the development will create a "high quality residential community". The application will also seek to secure more affordable housing than is required by planning policy. Where does the Council envisage these children are going to go to school if they reduce the number of school places available in the town?

The proposal mentions that all the schools in the partnership are rated "Good" by Ofsted, which is something for the community to be proud of. However, different schools offer different opportunities. Teaching and promoting diversity and inclusion is incredibly important, as recognised by Ofsted. Rigidly applying catchment area lines and limiting family choice in a rural location does the opposite of encouraging diversity and inclusion, particularly when property prices in The Sele catchment area are some of the highest in the area.

The majority of local authority maintained schools in the list included in the document, which are local to Hexham, have relatively small PANs, for example Acomb, 15, and Beaufront, 15. It is not clear whether smaller schools will have the flexibility to cater for families moving to the area, and/or those who have been unable to secure a place at their catchment area school, because of over-subscription. The proposal leaves the whole area at risk of a significant shortage of places in the inevitable event that the birth rate data does not present the complete picture.

Further, the PAN of the local authority maintained schools only represents part of the picture. Other local schools, such as St Mary's in Hexham, Corbridge First School and Whitley Chapel are not included in the table in the proposal document. Failing to take into account available places at all of the local schools means that neither the Council nor the community can truly evaluate the impact that a possible reduction in the birth rate might have on school places at The Sele.

A coordinated approach to the issue of reducing the Sele's PAN necessarily involves looking at all local schools, not just local authority schools, and also looking at the impact of the potential proposals on the middle and high schools and their PANs. None of this appears to have been taken into account in the proposal document.

Furthermore, the proposal does not mention either early years' or wrap around provision. It is not clear whether the Council has considered what impact reducing the school's PAN would have on the The Sele nursery (currently oversubscribed) and wrap around provision (currently full in almost all sessions). These are both essential services for working parents and local provision is limited, particularly where key providers of both services have stopped trading in recent years (e.g. Di & Jim's).

There is also no mention in the document about the economic viability of the proposal. Reducing the PAN impacts on funding, whereas the school building (which is listed) will cost no less to run and maintain. The school is very well run on an incredibly tight budget, but how can the school be expected to balance the books if funding is reduced by almost a third, which is the effect the proposal would have?

There is notably no discussion in the document about the potential impact on SEND pupils. The Government announced additional funding last week according to Gov.UK "*to start to pave the way for the government's wide-ranging long-term plans for reform to help more pupils with SEND to have*

their needs met in mainstream schools”. It is not clear how a proposal to reduce the number of school places available in the local area can be consistent with a central plan to keep more SEND pupils in mainstream schools.

The document does not seem to consider the fact that reducing the PAN of the Sele will not automatically have the effect of reducing demand for places. Inevitably there will be more appeals, involving stress for families and significant time away from the classroom for teachers.

In recent times we have experienced a period of major upheaval and challenge for schools and pupils, coming out of the pandemic. A period of stability is required. As a governor I attended a number of the drop in sessions which the school arranged to discuss the proposal with families and the community. The Sele has an incredibly committed and passionate staff, leadership and governor team and emotions were high as we heard about the real impact this proposal would have on individual families. On a human level, it is clear that the proposal will be overwhelmingly negative for families and the community, but there are also myriad empirical and practical reasons why it should be rejected, as detailed above.

In summary, I consider that the Council Cabinet should reject the proposal to reduce the PAN of The Sele.

Yours faithfully,

19. Hi there, I hope you are well. I have received news of a consultation to reduce The Sele First School PAN numbers. As a parent of a child at The Sele, and another child who's due to join in the next two years, I would like to strongly object to the proposal as I see it negatively impacting the school for students, parents, and teachers. Thank you,
20. Re: Objection to the Proposal to Reduce the PAN of Sele First School, Hexham

I am writing to formally object to the proposal to reduce the Published Admission Number (PAN) of Sele First School, Hexham. I do so as a parent deeply committed to the wellbeing of the school, its pupils, and the wider Hexham community.

This proposal reflects a lack of understanding of Sele First School’s unique context, its outstanding reputation, and its vital role within the local community. Reducing the PAN would have far-reaching negative consequences for the school, families, and Hexham as a whole.

- Sele First’s Reputation and Community Impact

Sele First School has long been recognised as an outstanding educational institution, consistently rated “Good” or “Outstanding” by Ofsted. Families actively choose to move to Hexham for the opportunity to enroll their children at Sele, boosting the town’s demographic vitality.

A reduction in the PAN would deter families from relocating to Hexham, potentially stalling the recent growth in family-focused activities and harming local businesses such as the Queen’s Hall, which hosts events aimed at children and families.

The assumption that declining birth rates justify this proposal is flawed. Families often move into the area after their children are born, specifically to access Sele’s high-quality education. For example, I and several other families relocated to Hexham for this very reason, with our children not counted in local birth rate data.

- Adverse Effects on Families and Admissions

The reduction in PAN threatens to disrupt families' choices and undermine the inclusivity Sele currently offers. As a parent, I had planned to defer my summer-born son's school entry to give him the best chance for academic and developmental success. However, under the new PAN, he may lose his chance to attend Sele altogether, forcing us to choose between his readiness and securing a place.

- Economic and Logistical Implications

The proposal does not account for planned local developments, including 200 new homes in Hexham marketed toward families. A reduced PAN would make it impossible to accommodate these children, contradicting local development goals.

Moreover, Sele's listed Victorian building has high maintenance costs that rely on its current budget. A reduced PAN would result in funding cuts, jeopardising the building's upkeep and safety. The school's physical structure and classroom sizes are unsuitable for larger classes of 30 students, further compounding the issue.

- Staffing and Wellbeing Concerns

Reducing the PAN would force redundancies among the dedicated staff, many of whom have served Sele for over a decade. This would diminish the school's capacity to offer its broad range of enriching activities, including its Platinum Arts Mark and Sports Award programs. Increased class sizes and reduced staffing would particularly harm support for SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) pupils, an area where Sele excels.

- Contradicting Environmental Goals

While the council has cited environmental benefits as a justification for reducing the PAN, this proposal would likely increase car journeys. Many parents, including myself, walk or cycle to Sele, which offers wraparound care essential for working families. Other local schools lack this provision, meaning parents would need to drive to multiple schools, increasing traffic and emissions. Some parents work in Newcastle so driving via school to drop their child off is negligible.

- Disrupting Community Unity

The proposed catchment changes risk creating socioeconomic divides between families living in central Hexham and those on the outskirts. Sele First School currently fosters a unified and inclusive community, which would be threatened by such divisions. We run events for the community such as our Christmas trail, aimed at giving families an opportunity to experience things that cost much more in other parts of the county. This would narrow the viability of these experiences due to cost effectiveness and fundraising.

There is also a strong possibility of causing a class divide in Hexham. Currently any child in Hexham can choose Hexham First or Sele First. If the PAN is reduced then children in the east of Hexham will be out of catchment. The west of Hexham is more affluent, the east of Hexham is more deprived. The reduction in the PAN will exacerbate class divisions.

- Conclusion

Reducing Sele's PAN would have significant negative consequences: fewer opportunities for families, a decline in the town's attractiveness to families, and a diminished educational experience for the children who remain. Sele First School is thriving and well-integrated into the community—it should be supported, not hindered.

I urge the council to reconsider this proposal and prioritise Hexham's families, community cohesion, and educational excellence.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this objection. I would be happy to discuss these concerns further or provide additional information.

21. Dear School Admissions

We are writing to object to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the area's birth rate data.

We do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves. As a family outside of catchment, with children at the Sele, we would like to share our personal experience.

If the PAN reduction measures had been in place, we would have not been able to access the school, and as a result continued to home educate our son.

The values of the school and child-led approach, in particular the openness to flexischooling, sets the school apart from others and enabled our child to rebuild trust and return to mainstream education. It is our view that our child would not be able to return to school, if the current proposals had already come into force. Child and parental preference, and alignment of values were key in our choice - we would not have put our child into a local school that did not reflect these, and would have continued home educating. This proposal undervalues these considerations. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for families such as ours in the future.

Our son started at the Sele in year 4. Prior to this, he had been home educated for two years, following negative experiences in another institution. In order for him to transition back into mainstream education, we sought a school that would respond to his needs and allow him to attend on a part time basis. Without this, he was unwilling to return to school - and we were unwilling to risk it: the risk of reintegration going badly, and leading to re-traumatisation or further school refusal was high and it had taken a very long time for us to support our son to be interested in formal learning again. We needed a school that we could trust would truly take a child-centred approach, including allowing a flexible timetable. We were willing to travel for this, given that the alternative was continuing home education which involved travelling distances to groups and activities anyway.

While we did approach local schools, Sele First, despite being outside of our catchment area, was the only school we could find that met our criteria. The inclusive approach and understanding of diversity fit immediately with our needs and values and they had experience of offering a 'flexi school' option and making this work for pupils and staff alike.

If the PAN reduction measures were in place, the larger class sizes and limited resourcing would have put into question our sons success at re-integrating into school.

After two years out of school, with the support of the Sele staff our son was able to return to mainstream education. The transition from home education into part-time school was huge, but managed with great care and consideration by the staff team at the Sele, drawing on their values, expertise and experience. Smaller class sizes and higher staff to child ratios were key factors in supporting our son's reintegration, and avoided many of the challenges that had led to our son dropping out of education in the first place. Meanwhile as a larger institution than our local first school, they had expertise and resourcing for Special Educational Needs and were able to support us in ways other schools would not have been able to. In a larger class or less resourced school their would have been less capacity to support his needs. As a result, our son has begun to thrive in school and has had many unique opportunities to find his passions and shine.

If the PAN reduction measures were in place, we would push for an appeals process as our daughter would be separated from her brother at school in Hexham. We would consider home educating her, or both of them again.

As a result of our very positive experience of working with the school to navigate this potentially challenging transition, and their openness to flexi schooling, we also want our daughter to be part of the Sele school community. She started in Sele Nursery in September 2024 and we would like her to remain for the full duration of the school, in part so that flexi school is an option for her too. If she could not, we would consider home educating her. If the PAN reduction measures affected our daughter, we would be in a situation where our son would be settled in school in Hexham, but our daughter would not be admitted into the Sele. It is not apparent what the solution would be, but I'm sure the Council can understand that would be untenable to have to drop off and pick up two children in different areas (where there is no public transport to school), and we would appeal any decision to insist on this.

If the PAN reduction measures were in place, it would impact our ability to work.

Another key factor for us choosing to commute to bring our children to school in Hexham is that we regularly work in Hexham, and have two sets of grandparents who live in and around Hexham who can pick up children after school. This is practical- it enables us to maximise working hours, with the bonus that our children spend time their grandparents regularly. We would be unable to manage collecting our children at 3.15 from our local school as we would both still be working - so having the children in Hexham facilitates our family and work life. Paying for wrap around care is beyond our financial means, and outwith what our young children can manage. In addition, the Grandparents live in walking/ cycling distance so contrary to the councils concerns, this does not add to car travel.

Even if the PAN reduction measures were in place, we'd travel into Hexham for after-school activities regularly anyway, so it would not reduce car journeys.

As the largest town in the west of the County, we already have extra-curricular activities we attend in Hexham, which we had even when we home educated. So regardless of which school we attended, we would drive in to attend them. In fact, attending school near these means that the children can walk to them after-school. In addition, with the school being larger, a number of the activities are offered as in school activities or after-school clubs. The children then walk to grandparents houses. As mentioned, we travel to Hexham for work regularly anyway.

If the PAN measures were in place, we would seek to move house in order to attend Sele anyway, although house prices in Hexham make this a luxury we would struggle to afford.

If the measures were in place, rather than ensuring that we attended our local school, as mentioned we would likely have continued home educating. However given that they weren't and our positive experience at Sele, we are now keen for our children to attend school in Hexham. If the measures were to affect us now, we would seek to move into Hexham in order to ensure our daughter could attend Sele. So the Council's assumption that reducing the PAN would increase attendance at other rural schools is based on flawed assumptions. House prices in Hexham are much higher than where we currently live and competition is high. We are concerned that reducing the PAN at Sele First will reduce the socio-economic diversity of the school - and exclude those like ourselves who would struggle to afford a house in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income.

In all, we believe that the Council should be proud of and embrace Sele First School's fantastic success and contributions to the wider community in Hexham and beyond, and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

Yours sincerely,

22. To whom this may concern.

As a parent of a child who attends the Sele First School I'm writing with sadness, anger and disbelief that you are proposing to reduce the pupil intake drastically. Which for us as a family would have a huge impact and more importantly whole school and we strongly object to any changes.

My child is thriving at the Sele school currently in year 2 in a class of 22 children which is by far more than enough. His year has been split into 3 classes. The teacher has a fantastic relationship with all children in the class and truly knows my child in such a short space of time since September.

I strongly believe this would not be the case if you're proposing to up the class to 30 children! Are the classes even bigger enough to comfortably sit 30 children without it being overwhelming for them?

My child's education has had the best start since attending nursery there and I strongly believe this is down to how our school set out each class (into 3 classes if a bigger year group) carefully they select children for each class with so much thought and consideration in doing so they are creating a happy safe environment for each child to begin their education in the best possible way. All the staff at the Sele First are so passionate in their role it shines and stands out a mile.

I have an older child who is now out of education and I only wish they had the same standard of education and care as my current child is receiving as this was not the case in our local catchment school.

I believe this is down to the teachers in our school who work endlessly with such passion and care to our children. We should have the opportunity to be able to choose where our most important little people get to spend the majority of their year knowing they are happy and well cared for because this as a parent is so reassuring.

I have nothing but positive feedback from our child each day and looks forward to every day going to school and as a parent this is all I ask for for my children

I have a younger child who will be ready for reception in 2026 and you will take that choice which I firmly believe is our right to choose where our children get educated away from us. The Sele is not in our catchment and my older child will of just left the school so this gives me no tie to the school for a

benefit.

I worry what this will mean for my youngest!

This really angers, frightens and upsets me.

I chose the sele school over our local school for many reasons and these reasons will still be as strong when we come to wanting our youngest to attend the sele school.

- Parent relationships with other parents.
- Child's current friendship circle
- Location to our work place as it's on our doorstep if there ever was an emergency.
- High standards the school comply with teaching standards.

The list goes on and on....

I would like to be kept up to date with all information, meetings we can attend to put our objections across and all other key dates about the consultation and I really hope and pray no changes are made and you keep our thriving school alone!

23. Dear School Admissions

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School

I am writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

I do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

While my family and I are based in Hexham, we are not currently in the catchment area for Sele First, instead being closer to Hexham First School (catchment for Woodlands, Hexham, NE46 1HT). When enrolling our daughter, we took the time to look around and visit both schools and made the decision that Sele First would be the best choice for our daughter. This was for a number of reasons including the way that reception and nursery are taught together at Hexham First, and curriculum, facilities and class sizes at Sele First being a better environment for our daughter. I feel strongly that this is not a decision that should be taken out of our hands as parents. Parental choice should not be taken away for schools in the area. The proposal would also hugely impact Sele First, which I very strongly feel is a very good school that serves the community well. In particular, raised class sizes at Sele First would impact on the quality of education, and there would be inevitable over-subscription for places with families resorting to appeal which would place strain on the school. As a parent with a second child who is yet to start First School, I would be very concerned at these changes and at the risk of my second child not being able to attend school in the same place as his sister, and at the school which I consider offers him the best education and start. There are also wider concerns about the Sele School's ability to financially maintain the building and teach classes of 30 children, given the restrictions of the listed building if the proposals were given effect. This would certainly have an impact on the quality of schooling that is currently offered and highly praised by parents.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

Yours sincerely,

24. Dear School Admissions

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School

I am writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

I do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

I live in Hexham but technically have to pass 'St Marys First School' on my way to the Sele, however the Sele is the only choice for me in terms of its facilities and teaching. I strongly believe parents should have a choice in the school their child goes to, primarily around the provision it provides and what best suits their child's and their family's needs. Hexham serves a vast rural community with many travelling into the town for amenities and work, birth rate data does not account for the remote area we live in. I also feel very strongly that my child shouldn't have to attend a religious school if I

don't want them to, the Sele offers a non-religious option for the town and surrounding areas – for example, parents in Corbridge may choose to travel to Hexham as their only choice is to attend a Church of England school in their village. I believe the reduction in the pupil admission number will be at huge detriment to the surrounding areas to Hexham and the school itself. I note the school are already having to fundraise for basic facilities which the council should be covering the cost of, by reducing this number, presumably the level of funding would reduce this further too. This is not acceptable and I urge the council to rethink the decision for the surrounding communities the school serves and the best interests of the children attending. I would be keen to understand if anyone from the local area has approved of this decision or whether this has been made in the county council offices by teams who have no local knowledge of the area and the vast rural community it serves. As full time-working parents we need a school which is set up to adapt to modern working life, providing wrap around care and flexibilities for families it serves, the Sele provides this in-house, they do not have a separate service provider to facilitate this, again for people who need to travel for work, out of the area and may be passing through Hexham, this is a lifeline to enable them to provide for their families and still ensure their child is getting the care they deserve.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

Yours sincerely,

25. Dear School Admissions

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School

I am writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

I do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

Our own circumstances are that my daughter, enrolled in Sele First School, was born in the London Borough of Waltham Forest. We moved to Hexham and timed that deliberately so that we could enrol her at the start of Reception in Sele First. Our move to Northumberland was partially informed by the quality of Sele First school. Our personal story reinforces the messages relayed by the school in their template below about the potential nuances and pitfalls of using local birth statistics to inform school admission numbers as we are aware of many other families who made similar moves to ourselves and it is not uncommon, especially post-pandemic, for families to leave big cities such as Newcastle for smaller towns like Hexham as their children reach school age.

Furthermore, we would add that if the Council is concerned that there is low attendance at Hexham First School with families opting for the Sele, the Council should put its financial efforts into improving the quality of that school and making it more attractive for parents, rather than punishing Sele First for its success and potentially negatively impacting existing students. We also think the School needs additional ringfenced support for maintaining its historic building and its very important that the burden of its upkeep does not impact on pupil experience. The school is, after all, a heritage asset and its sound upkeep is of broader benefit to the local community.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work.

These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that (Sele First School's) success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

Yours sincerely,

26. Dear Sir / Madam

In response to Northumberland County Council's recent proposal to reduce the PAN number for Sele First School, Hexham, I would like to raise the following concerns.

Whilst it is clear from the statistics you present that birthrate in the Hexham area has fallen, and indeed this is generally true at a national level, birthrate figures alone fail to capture the true nature of the area and the local community. We ourselves moved with our young daughter to the Hexham area in 2021. Our daughter, now 4, was not born in Northumberland and so is a prime example of a child living within the school's catchment area who is not included in the birthrate statistics for that area.

For us, and I would expect a great many families, the quality of the schools in the Hexham area was a major influence on our decision to move. The Sele school, until recently with an outstanding ofsted rating, was chief among those schools. The school continues to be 'good' but is, more importantly, very highly respected and valued in the area. As the report notes, children thrive at the school.

It should be noted that Hexham is the largest and most central town in the Tyne valley. The council

attest that many children will take car journeys to get to the Sele and in so doing, bypass other schools. However, as the major town in the area many of those journeys would likely take place anyway, as parents travel to work, to reach public transport links, to access shops and services, or as children and their siblings feed into the middle and high schools located here.

Conversely, should the school become oversubscribed as a result of the council's changes, it is considerably more likely that an increased number of car journeys out of Hexham to surrounding towns and villages would become necessary. Public transport to and from many of those places is either limited or non-existent. Onward travel to Newcastle or Carlisle, for work or further education, is even more restricted. This outcome would be contrary to the council's stated environmental objectives.

As a larger first school the Sele is also able to offer a level of wrap around care and extra curricular activities that other schools in the area are not, or at least do not. For working parents this is vital. We have been on a waiting list for after hours care for our daughter who currently attends the Sele nursery. The proposal to reduce capacity at this school is not accompanied by any proposals to boost such care at either this or any other schools in the area, to the best of my knowledge. Therefore, one assumes these services will continue to be oversubscribed and/or difficult to access. This is clearly detrimental to economic activity and productivity in the area, as well as to children's development.

The council should be proud to have such good schools in one of its local areas, and proud that among those schools Sele first is able to offer an excellent level of education to children from a wide area. The council should celebrate the smaller class sizes on offer here that undoubtedly help to boost attainment in an area of the UK that is known for chronic underachievement and generally poor educational outcomes.

The council should also take a longer term view, noting that whilst birthrate may have fallen recently, such factors are cyclical and temporary. As above, they do not alone paint a full and true picture of the community to which they refer. The costs of having to make up for shortfalls in provision in future years are almost inevitably larger than simply adopting a sensible, prudent approach today, taking advantage of the available capacity to boost achievement and enable greater choice, whilst anticipating future uptake in demand.

For these reasons, I cannot support the council's proposed reduction in the PAN for the Sele First School.

I trust that my views will be considered when making a final decision and I will look forward to learning the outcome.

Best wishes

27. Good Morning

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposal by Northumberland County Council to reduce the Pupil Admission Number (PAN) at Sele First School from 84 to 60, effective September 2026. As a parent of a student at Sele First School, I firmly believe this reduction is not in the best interests of the school or the community it serves.

The proposed reduction, based solely on birth rate data, fails to capture the complexities and unique demands of our community. Many families, including mine, have moved to the area specifically to

benefit from the outstanding education and nurturing environment provided by Sele First School. These families may not be reflected in the birth rate data, yet they are an integral part of our community.

Sele First School's current structure, with three individual classes per year group, allows for smaller class sizes, averaging 24 students. This setup has been particularly beneficial in addressing the increasing needs of children, especially post-pandemic. A reduction in PAN would not only result in larger class sizes, potentially reaching 30 students, but also exacerbate the strain on resources, ultimately affecting the quality of education provided.

Moreover, the diversity and choice available to families in Hexham are paramount. Currently, 34% of families opt to send their children to Sele First School from outside the catchment area, a testament to the school's reputation and the high demand for its places. Reducing the PAN would eliminate this choice for many families in the future, forcing them to look elsewhere for their children's education.

The financial implications of reducing the PAN are also concerning. A smaller PAN would lead to a decrease in funding, yet the school's running costs would remain unchanged. As a listed building, Sele First School incurs significant maintenance expenses, and a reduced budget would make it increasingly challenging to balance these costs, thereby compromising the quality of education and support provided to our children.

Sele First School has a long-standing tradition of serving the community, and its ethos, culture, and identity are deeply rooted in its current structure. The proposed changes threaten to undermine this foundation, impacting not just the school, but the wider community it serves.

In conclusion, I urge Northumberland County Council to reconsider this proposal. The decision to reduce the PAN should take into account the broader context and unique needs of our community, rather than relying solely on birth rate data. I believe maintaining the current PAN is essential to ensuring the continued success and vibrancy of Sele First School.

Thank you for considering my views. I look forward to a favourable outcome that supports the best interests of our children and community.

Yours sincerely,

28. To Whom It May Concern

I would like to express my strong feelings towards the potential changes being made to reduce pupils at sele first school Hexham. I do not believe this would have a positive effect on the children or the staff.

- Raised class sizes will impact the high quality education our children are currently receiving.
- hugely significant detriment to children with SEND
- Taking away parental choice for schools in the area
- It is disregarding people who move to the area and wish to join the school
- Huge job losses for teachers and support staff
- School wouldn't be able to financially cope and maintain the listed building on a smaller income
- The school building isn't fit to teach classes of 30 children, it was built for schooling 200 years ago classrooms are small, small hall.

Because of the reasons stated above, I think Sele First School should continue to operate in the way it has done for years I strongly disagree with the suggestion of reducing pupil admissions to the school and believe this has no positive impact only a large negative one.

I would like to be kept up to date on the above matter

Regards

29. Hello, I have received news of a consultation to reduce The Sele First School PAN numbers. As a parent of a child at The Sele, and another child who's due to join in the next two years, I would like to strongly object to the proposal as I see it negatively impacting the school for students, parents, and teachers. Thank you,

30. Dear School Admissions

I am writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

I do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

We are a family of four (two adults and two children) who have moved to the area in the summer of last year. We have found our forever home here and our eldest son has joined Sele First. We intentionally moved to Hexham to join Sele First School due to its incredible reputation.

The reduction of numbers will have a huge effect on our family as our youngest son is yet to join Sele First in 2 years' time. We are now anxious that after such a big decision and move, our youngest son will not get the chance to join such a wonderful school.

We urge you to NOT reduce the pupil admission number for Sele First School. The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families like ourselves move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future, including our family.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and The Sele provides this for families.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First

become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

Yours sincerely,

31. Dear School Admissions

I am writing to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

I do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider Tyne Valley community it serves.

The school is one of the reasons we relocated to the area. One of my children was born in Guildford and one in Cramlington, so in this instance alone, the figures used on birth rates are incorrect as families migrate back to the area as families grow. This seems to have been completely ignored in the consultation process. The number of families returning to the North East is countless.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and

practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families. This point is fundamental for working parents!

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes. Children thrive at this school and one of the reasons I for this I believe is due to the class sizes, and something we should be proud of.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

- It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children? The Labour government are also pushing for more house building above and beyond these 200 homes.
- A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

I repeat, the proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted.

I wish for my objection to the proposal to be lodged.

Kind regards

32. Ref: Admission to First and Primary Schools Hexham Partnership

I am writing to you in response to the ongoing consultation about reviewing and reducing the PAN limit at schools in the Hexham Partnership, directing the impact of a nominal average surplus at the Sele First School only.

General Observations

After reading the consultation letters and the Northumberland School Organisation Plan (*SOP*), I am baffled by the proposals. The Sele First School provides a fantastic and flexible learning environment to all through a fantastic site and diverse and capable group of teachers and support functions. I do not understand from the letter why a single school is being identified for a reduction of PAN, but I can only conclude at this time of sub-agendas not published, such as re-using part of the school for the benefit of Northumberland County Council (*NCC*) or changing the schooling system to a two formed primary school (Reception to Year 6).

Secondly, when reading the SOP I note that the Hexham Partnership of Schools, noting primary or first schools only, has a relatively low level of surplus at 16%. As an example, Hayden Bridge 28%, Prudhoe ~19%, Ponteland 20%, Alnwick 31% and Berwick 26%. The review into the Hexham Partnership which only selects the Sele First School for a reduced PAN seems absurd, especially given NCC's track record of historic incompetence when proposing such measures (noting previous appeals¹) and blatant disregard for the staff and students in ongoing education reviews (see Berwick²). Singling out The Sele First School without publishing data relating to other schools is not transparent.

The fundamental part of NCC and the Education team, with delivery by schools, should be to provide choice for parents when selecting schools, and providing an enriched learning environment and journey for the children, and parents. PAN reduction at the Sele First School is one way of increasing barriers to achieving this. Fundamentally, the school is setup for a 3-form provision and when higher/lower-class numbers are received, funding is proportionally adjusted so that the school can, through its devolved capital, deliver to the needs of the pupils at the time.

I whole heartedly do not support the proposal which appears to be trying to pit schools against each other, which is nonsensical and may draw away from a school's primary existence to focus on learning, collaboration and celebration of successes. Whilst I cannot support this, I would support a call for additional funding to NCC, for which some of this funding should be directed to the schools themselves to continue to deliver excellent education throughout not only the Hexham Partnership, but all Northumberland schools.

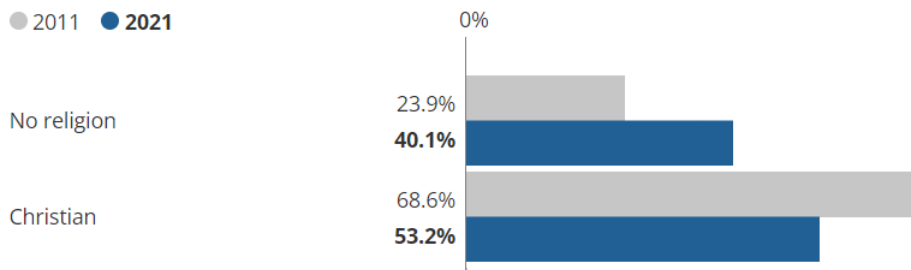
Local School Choices

Northumberland County Council (NCC) has a key objective to enable as many students as possible to attend schools within or as close to their home communities. Without changing anything i.e. leaving the current situation as is, this remains possible, even if there is a surplus of places which is described in the NCC School Organisation Plan 2021-2024 (SOP) as 'preferable'.

Looking at the location of all primary and first schools, in reducing the Pupil Acceptance Numbers (PAN) only at Sele First School, it may force residents of a non-faith background to send their child to a faith school. This is the opposite to the Northumberland religion trend which the last census identified a significant increase in non-faith persons in Northumberland. Whilst the education may be like that of the Sele First School in other faith schools in the area, I would be against sending my children to a faith education setting, to the point of moving away from Hexham.

In 2021, 40.1% of usual residents in Northumberland reported having "No religion"

Percentage of usual residents by religion, Northumberland ▾



Places of work may well play into the selection of school for those out of area. There is no Egger, Jewson or Specsavers in Whitley Chapel, but for those who work in Hexham with children in primary education settings, it makes total sense for their choice to be here. School location and parent workplace often have a significant interaction to one another, including the possibilities for wrap around care and after school clubs either based at the Sele First School (which are fantastic), or externally at dance clubs, The Wentworth and Tyne rowing for example. Having a smaller rural school still results in vehicle movements for work and extra-curricular activities.

Student Numbers

Looking at the reception intake within your letter 117 in September 2027, the source of such information has not been clearly identified. However, assuming the basic idea of using birth rates as published on the Office for National Statistics, this is a crude assessment. This idea does not consider variabilities such as the ageing population of Hexham passing/moving to retirement villages³ and new younger families moving to the area (see appendix A). Myself, wife and two children did this to attend the Sele First School. Furthermore, there are now more couples in Northumberland with children than at the last census, supporting the strong possibility of people moving to the area.⁴

“The percentage of households including a couple without children in Northumberland decreased by 2.0 percentage points”. Source ONS⁵

Greater than 98% of parents and pupils secured their first-place school choice. This is something to celebrate and

should be seen as success to having sufficient, but not excessive, flexibility within the school places provision in Northumberland as a whole. As part of this, the Sele remains a main stay for many people, not only for the reasons discussed already, but also the ability to support SEND pupils with their adaptable space. Reducing the PAN may adversely impact on their ability to effectively support pupils by providing breakout spaces, have potential for increased disruption with larger class sizes and so on.

Noting the NCC proposal of 2 form entry is better for schools, I would observe this is not the case. Providing schools with the flexibility on how they deliver the curriculum across all year groups, provide lunches, school trips and safeguarding, smaller class numbers over 3 classes makes more sense. Along with this, the Sele First School is in a historic building, and forcing 30 pupils into rooms may not be conducive to educating, and should alterations be required to support this, the CAPEX spend would be significant with structural, electrical and plumbing alterations.

Economics

Maintenance of buildings will be an ongoing theme over the next decade and having worked in construction for many years as a quantity surveyor and at local authority (inc. education projects new and old, and SEND specific etc.), I can objectively state that smaller schools cost disproportionately more to repair, maintain and upgrade than larger schools. Fundamentally this is driven through efficiencies in cost per meter squared e.g. a setup cost over a larger area is less when compared to a smaller area, more economically advantageous rates for greater quantities of materials and so on. Funding of these works are also pivotal, with smaller schools less able to set aside amounts for surprises or planned works and with the Sele First School, it is in a fantastic position in being able to obtain funding from bodies in relation to its listed status.

Funding of all schools is generally through the number of pupils in year. In having a high PAN at the Sele First School, it allows for needs of the children, school and community to be serviced on a flexible arrangement i.e. busier years can bring in funding for additional trips or visitors to the school, or setting aside savings for larger projects. In revising the PAN down indefinitely, this would result in a lower

maximum recovery, likely leading to job losses (*an assumption formed on basic math*), more decisions lead by money in lieu of learning benefit decisions and generally a more rigid school. This would not serve anyone well.

Sustainability

Journey CO2 assessment

If pupils had to make journeys from smaller schools which may be impacted by a closure or reduced PAN, opposed to reducing the PAN at the Sele First, the below table identifies the emissions impact on journeys per car, and vice versa if children travelled to rural schools. My conclusion draws out from this is that car journeys do have an impact on the environment, and impact families in time and cost. However, instead of reducing the PAN and forcing change, it makes sense to keep the PAN numbers as they are to provide the choice rather than forcing pupils away or have a more strategic and wider assessment approach when all schools can be assessed and have the PAN adjusted accordingly, based on the limited emissions and small journey times. This assessment does not consider 0 emission electric vehicles.

The average car journey from these schools to Hexham is ten minutes, which I disagree is “significant” as outlined in the consultation, especially given that most catchment travel times for rural schools is around ten minutes already. An alternative way to look at this data is closing/reducing other school / PANs and travelling to Hexham may result in less of an impact on the environment compared to running the schools and reducing the Sele First School PAN.

From	To	Journey Round Trip Twice Daily	Annual (assuming 40 weeks 5 journeys)
Slaley	Hexham	6.68 kg	1.34tn
Whitley Chapel	Hexham	5.90 kg	1.18tn
Beaufront	Hexham	1.68 kg	0.37 tn
Acomb	Hexham	2.02 kg	0.40 tn

*Note: Travel using an average grams/km of
168⁶*

Energy Performance & Maintenance of Buildings

Looking at what a school is using for heating and power, and from the online EPC register, the below table identifies that smaller schools are a larger impact on the environment per meter squared. As such, the below can be interpreted that it is more environmentally friendly to have medium to large primary or first schools to that of smaller village schools and that the Sele First School is in a better condition than other smaller schools.

School	Useable m ²	EPC rating	Main Fuel Source	Annual energy use Elec (kWh/m ² /year)	Annual energy use Other (kWh/m ² /year)	Total CO2 per Annum	Total CO2 per Annum / m ²
Sele First School	2,321	D [94]	Natural Gas	36.3	149.7	113	0.048
Whitley Chapel	405	F [139]	Electricity	134	0	30	0.075

Beaufront	443	E [117]	Oil	68	89	27	0.061
Slaley	398	E [106]	Natural Gas	63	108	22	0.074
Acomb	422	E [123]	Natural Gas	44	208	27	0.064
St Mary's	1,376	E [112]	Natural Gas	34.7	202.9	80	0.058

Notes: EPC rating A = Best, G = Worst; CO2/m2, lower the better.

Questions and Freedom of Information Request

Following my review of the proposals and publicly available information, I have the following questions for NCC to respond to as part of this letter. For absolute surety, this section should also be treated as a Freedom of Information Request:

- Within the letter you focussed on the Sele First School birth rates in the catchment areas, and the decline which may affect future intake pupil numbers. Please would you publish all birth year data for all Hexham Partnership schools?
- Why can boundaries of school catchments not be re-drawn to best suit new house building? i.e. out of Sele catchment may always be the case due to restrictive conservation area restrictions preventing house building in one part of town.
- Why must NCC fund transport provisions for pupils going to schools outside of their local school catchment? Would a means tested proposal / contribution fund be more in line with current day expectations? This may result in a saving to NCC.

Regards

33. Dear School Admissions

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School

I AM writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

I do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

We have been truly amazed by the quality of the teaching that is offered by the Sele First School team and are deeply worried by the prospect of larger class sizes. It seems clear that an increase in class size would negatively impact on the development of both our own children and others from the local area. I would therefore object, in the strongest possible terms, to this short sighted and ill-conceived interference into a well-run and successful school.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

Yours sincerely,

34. Dear School Admissions

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School

We are writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

We do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

We moved to Hexham seven years ago for work and were lucky enough to be in the catchment for The Sele First School. However, available housing in Hexham was and remains extremely limited, so we just as easily could be bought out of catchment.

We chose the school because it had a phenomenal reputation – everyone we spoke to recommended it. It was a ten-minute walk away from home, thus reducing the need for transport to school, and we hoped our sons would be able to make friends with children nearby.

Our eldest son has additional needs, which the Sele First School were the first to spot, and even without an EHCP, put in the necessary support he needed to thrive. When it came to applying for the plan, they really galvanized their support as they recognised it was in my son's best interests for his future educational career. Following the amazing start to his educational life provided by the school, he has since moved onto a mainstream middle school, something we didn't count on as a certainty. If resources were reduced, like in this proposed reduction to the PAN, I imagine his start in life could have been very different. We are forever grateful to The Sele and all the staff for their support of both our children.

Furthermore, the proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend

Yours sincerely,

35. Dear School Admissions

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School

We are writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

We do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

We realise that closing small village schools as an alternative in order to reduce costs would likewise be hugely unpopular for those communities. However, having been educated in small village primary schools ourselves, and witnessed the brilliant benefits our 2 children have had by being educated at the Sele in comparison, we fear that the values of having the option for larger first school provision in Hexham are in danger of being overlooked.

A larger school means that pupils have a larger peer group and more opportunities to make friendships. In a school with only other 3 other girls of my age I really struggled when one of those girls bullied me. Similarly, friends with a son who was one of only 2 boys his age in a village school nearby eventually chose to move him to another school.

Participating in sports events and curriculum appropriate outings is much easier with a larger year group of the same age.

In a larger school all the pupils across the school benefit from the varied specialist skills and knowledge of the teachers – so benefit from music/art/language/sports skills etc...even Maypole dancing! Teachers are more able to meet the specific needs of individual pupils in a larger school – for example my daughter's class has 2 Ukrainian boys, at least 2 boys with autism, and pupils with physical disabilities/mobility issues. These children wouldn't benefit from having similar peers if they were isolated in a smaller school.

In a small village school where the teachers are trying to meet the needs of multiple year groups within one class, the pupils at either end of the spectrum – who either need extra support or who are academically gifted, tend to get overlooked. Whereas a school such as the Sele is able to group pupils together to provide programmes such as Lexia, or different levels of phonics teaching/different spelling tests etc.

The school is able to provide specialist activities such as tennis coaching or music tuition from external providers because there are enough pupils who wish to participate.

The school is also able to provide teacher training in a way which might not be possible if teachers become overstretched with larger class sizes and fewer teachers.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

We strongly encourage the council to recognise the excellent teaching provided by Sele First and hope it won't make decisions which negatively impact on the school's and community's future.

Yours sincerely,

36. Dear School Admissions

I am writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland's County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First School's Pupil Admission Number (PAN).

Having reviewed the proposals I understand that there may be over provision within the county; however, reviewing the proposals I feel that whilst it looks an easy solution to cull one school it's not the best solution. This would result in a reduction of best outcomes of pupil education, poor parent choice, a more divided and less diverse population accessing the Sele school.

- Hexham is a wonderful town, however the housing is limited and both rental and purchase prices are out of many households reach. Reducing the number of places at Sele would mean that only the wealthier households can access this school. Yet the ofsted report from 2022 noted lack of diversity was an issue.
- Many parents work long hours and the Sele has both breakfast and after school club provision, not available at many of the smaller rural schools. Hence why some choose a town school rather than their village.
- The size of the Sele school means that they are able to offer support in a way that a smaller school with less staff can manage. This includes phonics groups based on ability. Benefiting not only the less able but supporting the gifted and talented. My son has benefited immensely from this a child who is shy he has built confidence at the end of year 1 when having just turned 6 years of age he had a reading age of nearly 11 years of age. Yet in the same class there are less able but no one feels different or less capable.

Our story is that we moved to the Tyne valley to be near family due to our circumstances where there would be better support. When doing so I had a job to go to in Corbridge and we rented a small flat in Hexham as my son had a nursery place in Hexham. This meant he moved from his nursery and friendship group where we lived previously. We wanted him to continue to school with his new peers and most were going to the Sele. We were unable to find or afford a house to purchase in Hexham but did so in Haydon bridge. We did not want to move our son to the school here due to friendships and after reviewing the schools themselves we felt the Sele would give our son the education and support he needs. In his year group I know of other parents who feel the same and have not sent their child to the school nearer to them. Additionally we needed the breakfast and after school club provision without which I could not do my job. If the PAN proposed changes had been in place we would not have had this choice.

So in conclusion please don't remove choice, reduce diversity, and lower academic standards. The Sele School is a fabulous school with an amazing team: less money, less staff, larger classes and less choice will erode all of this. Lowering standards.

Thankyou

Kind regards

37. Dear NCC School Admissions,

38.

We are responding to proposals for reducing Pupil Admission Numbers and budget at the Hexham Sele School presented in the report: “The NCC Admissions Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools – 2026-2027”. We object to the proposed cuts to the Sele School for the following reasons:

Having moved to the area our children have been happy at the Sele School and we think it is currently well run. The staff deserve praise for often going beyond the call of duty to support the pupils and foster a positive and encouraging environment. It is difficult to see how this can be sustained given the scale of the proposed cut in admissions and associated budget.

Falling demands for school places is an issue nationally and regionally and the above consultation report does adequately justify why the Sele School is faced with the burden of cuts to school places and budget. The consultation report refers to a key objective of the proposals being “enabling as many students as possible to attend local schools within or close to their home communities”(p.1). The report does not give any consideration of additional investment as a solution. Dramatic and selective cuts to the Sele School’s admission numbers and associated budget should not be considered an enabling mechanism to increase interest in other schools. If the relative quality of education available at the Sele School is influencing some parents to use the Sele in preference for other schools as the report suggests (p.2), attempting to drive down intake at the Sele via drastic budget cuts would be a perverse solution to this issue, which has potential to drive down educational attainment across the board in Northumberland.

There is a lack of transparency about the decision making process for the consultation proposals and budget implications for the Sele School which are a matter of public interest. Published figures suggest cuts to overall school budget linked to pupil admission numbers could be in excess of £0.5m+ per year; if this is the case, the impact to school budget and assessment of its implications should have been made clear as part of the consultation.

The above consultation report includes only brief reasoning for the proposed cuts to Sele School admissions and budget and no supporting assessments have been provided. It does not provide adequate explanation why the Sele is being singled out for a 29% cut in admissions from the 64 primary and first Schools listed in the policy, and what the implications of this will be for the school. Nor does it explain why admissions and budget cuts are the only proposed solution instead of additional investment in other schools which are not being selected by parents.

Have any quantified impact assessments been made of impacts to the Sele School and other schools affected and any alternatives to the proposals? We would welcome the opportunity to view any additional assessments which informed the proposals. Including:

- What assessment of admissions has been made to support claims of a negative impact on other schools through parents choosing to use the Sele School? Has any consideration of increasing investment in schools been part of this decision making process?
- What assessment has been made of impacts to the Sele School’s budget and facilities with the proposals, including per-pupil funding in light of fixed running costs?
- What assessment has been made to support claimed transport and carbon benefits (also considering the impacts of alternative patterns of use)?

- What other factors have been considered in addition to birth rate predictions, e.g. considering house building in Hexham within the report timescales? (Our children were not born locally)

We also note that the consultation has not been well advertised and others whose children will be affected in future years may not be aware of it. Thank you for your attention to this email and our questions. Yours faithfully,

39. Re: Objection to the Proposal to Reduce the PAN of Sele First School, Hexham

I am writing to formally object to the proposal to reduce the Published Admission Number (PAN) of Sele First School, Hexham. I do so as both a member of staff and a parent deeply committed to the wellbeing of the school, its pupils, and the wider Hexham community.

This proposal reflects a lack of understanding of Sele First School's unique context, its outstanding reputation, and its vital role within the local community. Reducing the PAN would have far-reaching negative consequences for the school, families, and Hexham as a whole.

- Sele First's Reputation and Community Impact

Sele First School has long been recognised as an outstanding educational institution, consistently rated "Good" or "Outstanding" by Ofsted. Families actively choose to move to Hexham for the opportunity to enroll their children at Sele, boosting the town's demographic vitality.

A reduction in the PAN would deter families from relocating to Hexham, potentially stalling the recent growth in family-focused activities and harming local businesses such as the Queen's Hall, which hosts events aimed at children and families.

The assumption that declining birth rates justify this proposal is flawed. Families often move into the area after their children are born, specifically to access Sele's high-quality education. For example, I and several other families relocated to Hexham for this very reason, with our children not counted in local birth rate data.

- Adverse Effects on Families and Admissions

The reduction in PAN threatens to disrupt families' choices and undermine the inclusivity Sele currently offers. As a parent, I had planned to defer my summer-born son's school entry to give him the best chance for academic and developmental success. However, under the new PAN, he may lose his chance to attend Sele altogether, forcing us to choose between his readiness and securing a place.

- Economic and Logistical Implications

The proposal does not account for planned local developments, including 200 new homes in Hexham marketed toward families. A reduced PAN would make it impossible to accommodate these children, contradicting local development goals.

Moreover, Sele's listed Victorian building has high maintenance costs that rely on its current budget. A reduced PAN would result in funding cuts, jeopardising the building's upkeep and safety. The school's physical structure and classroom sizes are unsuitable for larger classes of 30 students, further compounding the issue.

- Staffing and Wellbeing Concerns

Reducing the PAN would force redundancies among the dedicated staff, many of whom have served Sele for over a decade. This would diminish the school's capacity to offer its broad range of enriching activities, including its Platinum Arts Mark and Sports Award programs. Increased class sizes and

reduced staffing would particularly harm support for SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) pupils, an area where Sele excels.

- Contradicting Environmental Goals

While the council has cited environmental benefits as a justification for reducing the PAN, this proposal would likely increase car journeys. Many parents, including myself, walk or cycle to Sele, which offers wraparound care essential for working families. Other local schools lack this provision, meaning parents would need to drive to multiple schools, increasing traffic and emissions. drop their child off is negligible.

- Disrupting Community Unity

The proposed catchment changes risk creating socioeconomic divides between families living in central Hexham and those on the outskirts. Sele First School currently fosters a unified and inclusive community, which would be threatened by such divisions. We run events for the community such as our Christmas trail, aimed at giving families an opportunity to experience things that cost much more in other parts of the county. This would narrow the viability of these experiences due to cost effectiveness and fundraising.

- Conclusion

Reducing Sele's PAN would have significant negative consequences: fewer opportunities for families, a decline in the town's attractiveness to families, and a diminished educational experience for the children who remain. Sele First School is thriving and well-integrated into the community—it should be supported, not hindered.

I urge the council to reconsider this proposal and prioritise Hexham's families, community cohesion, and educational excellence.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this objection. I would be happy to discuss these concerns further or provide additional information.

Yours sincerely,

40. Dear School Admissions

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School

We are writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

We do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

The Sele is a fantastic first school and I'm extremely worried about the reduction in funding it would be getting because my child has complexities which are currently managed amazingly by the staff, but if class numbers are increased this would have a detrimental effect on my child's education. We also know lots of families who travel from the Tyne Valley area who work in Hexham and this decision would impact so many families.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

Yours sincerely,

41. Dear School Admissions

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School

I am writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

I do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

About Us

I have a daughter in Year 1 at Sele First School and another daughter who will join Sele First Nursery in 2025 and (hopefully) Reception in September 2026.

As a family we lived in Newcastle when both of my daughters were born, so neither of them appear on the birth rate data for Hexham/Northumberland. We moved to the area (Corbridge, then Hexham) in December 2022 with the hope of our eldest joining Sele First School in September 2023. Thankfully for us, the current PAN for Sele First meant we were able to get a place at Sele First despite being out of catchment.

We chose Sele First for a number of reasons, primarily:

- as a larger school we felt it could offer our children a wider experience in terms of the potential range of friends they could make, and the activities and experiences it can offer them
- we liked that they were able to support three classes per year, which keeps class sizes manageable
- location/proximity to where we wanted to live
- the strong role the school plays in the wider Hexham community
- recommendations from friends.

Why I Do Not Support NCC's Proposal

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families like ours move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

- See above – this is our experience.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

- Our catchment school is Hexham East. We viewed this school but determined it would not be the best fit for our eldest.
- It surprises me that a town the size of Hexham has specific catchment schools at all. Our daily commute to Sele First School is only a short walk or cycle further than Hexham East – and our daughter does cycle or walk everyday, so there is no additional car journey.
- It concerns me that our youngest daughter's Reception intake will be affected by the proposed PAN reduction to Sele First, and that she could be forced to attend a different school to her older sister. She attends Sele First nearly every day to drop off and pick up her sister, will be attending Sele Nursery next year and is totally comfortable with that setting.

She would be devastated if she couldn't follow in her big sister's footsteps by attending Sele because it was oversubscribed.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

- As we are technically 'out of catchment' and would not be guaranteed a place for our youngest if the PAN is reduced, it would be unworkable for our daily routine to have two separate school drop offs, and I am not aware of any after school provision at our catchment school, Hexham East.
- This will be the same concern for any of Sele First's many families who are out of catchment and have younger children still to join.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

- As above, I am concerned that my younger daughter will not get a place at Sele First like her older sister or that she will be in a much larger class than her sister.
- Sele has always had the option of splitting a two-form year into three and has done this in recent years in order to reduce class sizes and support children better. That has contributed to its success and popularity as a school. Reducing the PAN takes away that option and this will only be to the detriment of current and future pupils.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

- I feel very strongly about this point. Has NCC considered how reducing the Sele's PAN would affect the socio-economic balance of schools in the wider Hexham area?
- One thing I love about the Sele First community is its socio-economic diversity. My daughter doesn't just go to schools with "kids just like her" but she sees and hears the experiences of her friends who are from a wide range of backgrounds. Looking at the catchment map for Sele First, it is clearly in the area with the highest house prices in Hexham.
- If Sele First cannot welcome families from a wider catchment (like they do now), the school community will be much poorer for it.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

- The fact that so many families from out of catchment choose to come to Sele First is testament to its success as a school, and its importance to the wider community.
- Restricting its ability to welcome pupils from that wider Hexham area feels like NCC is ignoring all of the reasons why it has become a thriving school, and feels like a punishment for its own success.

Yours sincerely,

42. Dear School Admissions

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School

We are writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

We do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

As a family we did not start out at sele first, in fact we avoided it thinking a small school with small class sizes would mean teachers could better tailor education to the needs of our kids (one bright and old for his year group, the other very young for his year and therefore potentially 'behind' academically). In fact we moved our children to Sele First after a hugely disappointing introduction to education.

Sele First offers a wealth of opportunities our children were not afforded in a small school with small class sizes. The ability to offer such an array of extra curricular clubs means that my children with vastly different interests can choose the things they love- art/sport/music/chess/baking.... You name it, Sele First can offer it! There are so many opportunities they have had that they wouldn't have got in a smaller school- Sele First constantly strives to find and engage in things beyond the basic curriculum; art events, sporting opportunities, music and singing in the local community and nationally. This is possible not only due to the attitude of the teachers but because of the number of teachers with a wide range of interests, who are able to inspire pupils and pass on their passions.

And even when considering the National Curriculum, we moved from a small school that couldn't cater for our child who was too far from the middle of the bell curve academically. Whilst they tried hard at his previous school he was so far ahead with his reading and writing that he was having lessons on his own everyday- not the ideal way to make a child want to excel academically or socially at school. We realised first hand that small school works if you are happy to let those further ahead regress to the mean, and possibly those behind languish further. This previous school did not want to do this I admit, but, their efforts to give him the education he needed our son started to dislike school because he was singled out. Conversely, he slotted straight into Sele First from day one and his

academic progress has been supported incredibly well- we immediately realised that the larger numbers of children in a year group means there is always a cohort of kids at each academic level, and the way the classes are so fluid for phonics and reading to facilitate this is quite frankly amazing. Allowing children to mix with other classes in their year means not only are they able to be challenged with kids at a similar reading level but they also learn how to socialise with other children before entering the bigger middle and high schools. This makes the jump to 'big school' less daunting I am sure. It also allowed my children to find their friends – they had the ability to choose and found their kin because of this; in his previous school my son was there for one year and had no friends, the kids didn't have common likes and interests to him and as a result he was incredibly introverted. He now has a huge group of friends and is outgoing and happy.

In short, the system works- Sele First is a fantastic school. It can offer so much to its pupils purely because of the number of classes/children in each year, along with number of teachers with varied interests that give their all to Sele First to provide more than a small school could. And this is coming from a parent that was initially an advocate of the small school philosophy. I would be so sad to see a reduction in classes that made Sele First more like the school we left and less like the school it is currently. Additionally I cannot fathom where we would be as a family now if the Sele had only 2 classes that were full from the start of reception- we wouldn't have had the ability to choose to move our kids from a school that couldn't provide what they needed to a school that suited them academically and socially. I really think our kids wouldn't be the happy children they are today if we weren't afforded that opportunity. There has to be ability to move schools after starting reception- parents of preschoolers can't necessarily work out what school is right until they try it out.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First

should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

Yours sincerely,

43. Dear School Admissions

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School

I am writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

I do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

I am a parent of 3 young children, my eldest left Sele First in September 2024 to start year 5 at Hexham Middle School, having started at the Sele in Nursery aged just 3 years old and going all the way through the School successfully and joyfully (despite the global pandemic and teachers' strikes) to completing year 4. My middle child is currently enjoying his time in year 1 at Sele First, having also started in Nursery whilst my youngest child has secured his place for the Sele First Nursery to start in September 2025, with the aim of him starting in Reception at the Sele in September 2026. We are very much a proud Sele First family and our children are very happy Sele first pupils.

Whilst we do live in catchment, we chose Sele First for our eldest child as we are very conscious that we live in a rural area with a relatively limited outlook for our children. We wanted our children to experience the 'hustle and bustle' and the opportunities of a larger first school as a balance to the more sheltered, rural market town life that they experience at home. Sele First met these criteria and as a result it has put our eldest child in great position going into a large middle school environment last year.

Outside of being a busy parent, in my professional life I'm a qualified solicitor who works solely for a public sector consultancy supporting and advising Local Authorities and School to manage and negotiate their PFI Contracts to ensure that they are obtaining contractual compliance and value for money. Through my work I have gained an understanding about the importance of an appropriate PAN for a school and the issues that an incorrect PAN can have on the daily running and management of a school. It is for this reason that I object to the proposal currently tabled, and I'm concerned about the negative impact that, if successful, this will have on the school experience for both staff, pupils and families.

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge. Worst case scenario could see areas of the building fall into disrepair due to decisions being made about maintenance costs. There may be a need to 'mothball' areas of the building due to the disproportionate costs of repair and maintenance against the funding that the School receives. Heating may also be affected making it a worse environment for children to learn in. This would significantly impact on the pupils' education and the resources that the teaching staff have available. In the current educational climate where children's mental health issues are predominate, having the space to work with children who have extra needs is becoming a requirement and works so well at Sele First. If areas of the building are not fit for purpose due to poor maintenance, then this would have such a detrimental impact on pupils who need this support the most.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

We are fortunate to have a good schooling system in Hexham led by the successes at QEHS and the brand-new facilities at HMS. Many families move to the area in order for their children to access this system with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data. This option should not be taken away from families who want to do what is best for their children.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

Why change something that will detrimentally impact so many people, mainly the pupils within your care, when it is not in need of change?

Yours sincerely,

44. I am writing as both the mother of a child attending Sele First School and a proud member of its staff. The Sele First School has shown care and support not only to us but also to other Ukrainian children who were forced to leave their homes and seek refuge in the United Kingdom. Sele First School has opened its doors and hearts to these children, ensuring they feel welcomed, valued, and safe. This generosity and compassion have made a profound difference in our lives. I must strongly object to the proposed reduction in the Published Admission Number (PAN). This proposal fails to acknowledge Sele's unique context, its outstanding reputation, and its pivotal role within the Hexham community. The potential consequences of such a decision are severe and far-reaching.

- Impact on Pupils

As stated above, the change in PAN will affect the diversity of class makeup. Pupils will have fewer opportunities to form friendships and grow alongside a varied group of peers.

- Sele's Exceptional Role in the Community

Sele First School is widely recognised as a top-tier educational institution, consistently earning "Good" or "Outstanding" ratings from Ofsted.

I have chosen Sele First School for my daughter because of its support for Ukrainian children and its values, which have had a significant impact on my decision. Although I live near another school in Hexham that is just a 2-minute walk away.

The assumption that declining birth rates justify the proposal is flawed. Many families relocate to Hexham with young children, who are not reflected in local birth rate data.

- Impact on Families and Inclusivity

Reducing the PAN limits opportunities for families to make the best educational choices for their children.

- Future Developments and Economic Strain

The planned construction of 200 family-oriented homes in Hexham has not been adequately considered in this proposal. Reducing the PAN would make it impossible to accommodate the children moving into these new homes, undermining local development strategies.

Additionally, the financial strain on the school due to a reduced budget would jeopardise the upkeep of Sele's listed Victorian building. Maintaining this historic structure is costly and relies on the current level of funding, which would be severely impacted by a reduced PAN.

- Threat to Staffing and Program Quality

Sele's exceptional programs, such as those recognised by the Platinum Arts Mark and Sports Award, depend on its dedicated staff and stable funding. A reduced PAN would result in redundancies, affecting long-serving staff members and diminishing the school's ability to offer a broad, enriching curriculum.

Moreover, increased class sizes would hinder the school's ability to provide the personalised support that has been so critical for SEND students, an area where Sele has consistently excelled.

- Environmental and Practical Concerns

While environmental benefits are cited as a justification for reducing the PAN, this proposal would likely increase car journeys as families seek alternatives. Sele's wraparound care is vital for working parents, many of whom currently walk or cycle to school. Other schools lack this provision, forcing parents to drive longer distances, increasing traffic congestion and emissions.

- Conclusion

Reducing Sele First School's PAN would have a profoundly negative impact on the school, its pupils, and the Hexham community. It would reduce opportunities for families, deter potential newcomers, and diminish the quality of education for existing students.

I respectfully urge the council to reconsider this proposal and prioritise the needs of Hexham's families and community. I am more than willing to discuss these concerns further or provide additional information.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Yours sincerely,

45. Dear School Admissions

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School

We are writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

We do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

When our son was born we lived in a rural address which was within the catchment area of Sele First School, partly because we knew this was the school we wanted our child to attend and we did not want to live in a town. Our address was on the outer limits of the catchment area, on farmland, and we had to drive into school every day from this address as there was no public transport, no pavements, and it was too far for a 4-year old to walk. We were in the catchment area but we had no choice but to drive, because of the nature of rural communities. There is no way that some rural addresses within

school catchment areas can adhere to the Council's policy to reduce car journeys to school, so any data linking this to the PAN proposal for SeleFirst school is likely to be flawed.

Choosing SeleFirst School for us was due, in a very large part, to the size of the school and the resulting opportunities which our child would have in terms of academic, social and emotional development. These opportunities included more access to a wider range of extra-curricular activities, more focus on languages, culture and music (which we did not see when we visited nearby smaller, village schools), access to a larger friendship group, and belonging a large school community from a young age. Based on middle school and high school availability in and around Hexham, we believe that our child's transition from first to middle / high school would have been extremely challenging for him if he had attended a first school in a small village community. Now that he attends SeleFirst School, we have seen first-hand how strong the relationships are between SeleFirst and Hexham Middle School (and following that, QEHS) – and we know we made the right decision for our child.

After our child has finished first school we know that he will have had the best chance possible of cultivating and developing his own sense of self from the earliest possible stage, as he will have had opportunities to experience a wide variety of in-school and after-school clubs; he will have met many children of a similar age (which as an only child living in a rural setting in a village school, he would otherwise have struggled to do); he will have experienced play and learning at an appropriate stage of his development (rather than mixing age / year groups which we saw in the village schools we visited); and he will have been surrounded by many different adults who display and embody many different skill-sets and personality traits. Collectively, these differences all feed into his own social and emotional development; and enable him to meet and form positive relationships with many diverse people. A larger school can be a better option for many reasons, as long as adequate resources are in place for all pupils to be supported and safe. Reducing the PAN for SeleFirst would significantly impact upon these resources, and consequently upon the experiences for the children attending that school. Budgets are already tight at SeleFirst due to the fact that it is a listed building, and it is very evident that the school relies heavily on its PTA and local community to supplement its budget. The school community is strong, generous and extremely supportive of the school. Reducing PAN will also reduce the volume of families who come together to support the running of the school on a daily and weekly basis, whether this is through in-school Reading Buddy volunteers, parental support for school trips and STEM classroom visits, PTA fundraising activities, or even family members providing opportunities for the school and its pupils to be part of the local community (eg Community Garden and Park Run), and support local events (such as the Lantern Festival and the Christmas Lights switch-on).

From a data perspective, our family now forms part of the 'outside of catchment' statistics quoted in the consultation document, as we now live outside of the SeleFirst catchment area (to the west) and we drive a short distance into Hexham every day (for the record, we do not "pass any other first schools along the way"). This is simply because our rental agreement in Hexham expired and we had the opportunity to purchase a home in a nearby village, but our driving time and distance has changed very little. When we moved there was no good reason to uproot our son from his school after three settled years, when he is very likely to eventually end up travelling to Hexham for a middle school via public transport (not a school bus) when he is in Year 5 - as do the other children who live in our village. And for the reasons mentioned earlier in this letter, we did not want our child to attend a local village school nearer to where we now live, as we believed he would benefit from a larger school setting.

There is always a story behind a dataset, and this is ours.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

Yours sincerely,

46. To whom it may concern,

I write to you to expressly OBJECT to the proposed reduction to the PAN of the Sele First School in Hexham from 84 to 60.

SeleFirst is an excellent school and has been a fantastic, supportive environment for both of my children, whom each have very different needs. One of our children needs stretching as she is incredibly clever and the other needs extra support for his adhd/autism. The school have been incredible with both of our children.

To see that provision reduced to circa 71% of its current capacity going forward would, frankly, be a travesty. The school is, without a doubt, one of the best (possibly the best) schools in the region,

hence it's popularity, both with those in catchment, as well as those travelling from out of catchment who recognise their brilliance.

In recent years, a number of children have left other schools in Hexham and moved to the Sele, thus showing the shining reputation of the school and the education it provides.

Every member of staff at the sele is caring, nurturing, enthusiastic, knowledgeable and a credit to the school. To lose some of these staff in this reduction would be a huge detriment to the school and our children.

Additionally, as the school is a listed building, the reduction in numbers of children would significantly impact the education and opportunities that could be given to those children, as the cost of upkeep on such a building will be significant and the budget wouldn't be sufficient with so many fewer children to do this. The building costs would amount to a far bigger overall percentage of the school budget, meaning that the children would see a far smaller percentage actually spent on their education.

I fear that by reducing the PAN, many families would in future miss out on access to this wonderful, nurturing, engaging facility, and I urge you to reconsider this proposal before a massive mistake is made.

Kind regards,

47. Dear School Admissions,

I am writing with regards to the proposal of reducing pupil numbers at The Sele.

We are a military family and back in 2020 moved back from Turkey to the North East. We had to move with a moment's notice like many military families and could not find a property in Hexham. We had to move 15 minutes away but we were certain we wanted our children to go to a thriving community with an excellent school. This made The Sele First School our first choice. A small rural school with very small classes in very small villages would not have been the right choice for my children having come from overseas. They needed a thriving community where they could make lots of friends and benefit from all the other opportunities Hexham provides.

If this policy were to go ahead it will affect many children who were in our situation. To take choice away for families like ours when choice of living location is not always available seems unfair and not thought through for families who find themselves in different circumstances.

I hope my response will be given at least some consideration.

Yours sincerely

48. Dear School Admissions

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School

I am writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

I do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

About Us

I have a daughter in Year 1 at Sele First School and another daughter who will join Sele First Nursery in 2025 and (hopefully) Reception in September 2026.

As a family we lived in Newcastle when both of my daughters were born, so neither of them appear on the birth rate data for Hexham/Northumberland. We moved to the area in December 2022 with the hope of our eldest joining Sele First School in September 2023. Due to the competitive and expensive housing market in Hexham, initially we were unable to move straight to Hexham, and we rented in Corbridge until we were able to move on a more permanent basis to Hexham in August 2023. Thankfully for us, the current PAN for Sele First meant we were able to get a place at Sele First despite being out of catchment.

We chose Sele First for a number of reasons, primarily:

- as a larger school we felt it could offer our children a wider experience in terms of the potential range of friends they could make, and the activities and experiences it can offer them
- we liked that they were able to support three classes per year, which keeps class sizes manageable
- location/proximity to where we wanted to live
- the strong role the school plays in the wider Hexham community
- recommendations from friends.

Why I Do Not Support NCC's Proposal

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families like ours move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

- See above – this is our experience.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

- Our catchment school is Hexham East. We viewed this school but determined it would not be the best fit for our eldest.
- It surprises me that a town the size of Hexham has specific catchment schools at all. Our daily commute to Sele First School is only a short walk or cycle further than Hexham East – and our daughter does cycle or walk everyday, so there is no additional car journey.
- It concerns me that our youngest daughter's Reception intake will be affected by the proposed PAN reduction to Sele First, and that she could be forced to attend a different school to her older sister. She attends Sele First nearly every day to drop off and pick up her sister, will be attending Sele Nursery next year and is totally comfortable with that setting. She would be devastated if she couldn't follow in her big sister's footsteps by attending Sele because it was oversubscribed.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and

practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

- As we are technically 'out of catchment' and would not be guaranteed a place for our youngest if the PAN is reduced, it would be unworkable for our daily routine to have two separate school drop offs, and I am not aware of any after school provision at our catchment school, Hexham East.
- This will be the same concern for any of Sele First's many families who are out of catchment and have younger children still to join.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

- As above, I am concerned that my younger daughter will not get a place at Sele First like her older sister or that she will be in a much larger class than her sister.
- Sele has always had the option of splitting a two-form year into three and has done this in recent years in order to reduce class sizes and support children better. That has contributed to its success and popularity as a school. Reducing the PAN takes away that option and this will only be to the detriment of current and future pupils.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

- I feel very strongly about this point. Has NCC considered how reducing the Sele's PAN would affect the socio-economic balance of schools in the wider Hexham area?
- One thing I love about the Sele First community is its socio-economic diversity. My daughter doesn't just go to schools with "kids just like her" but she sees and hears the experiences of her friends who are from a wide range of backgrounds. Looking at the catchment map for Sele First, it is clearly in the area with the highest house prices in Hexham.
- If Sele First cannot welcome families from a wider catchment (like they do now), the school community will be much poorer for it.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

- The fact that so many families from out of catchment choose to come to Sele First is testament to its success as a school, and its importance to the wider community.
- Restricting its ability to welcome pupils from that wider Hexham area feels like NCC is ignoring all of the reasons why it has become a thriving school, and feels like a punishment for its own success.

Yours sincerely,

49. Dear School Admissions

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School

We are writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

We do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

From our perspective the narrow decision-making criteria of birth rate data is totally flawed.

While we have lived in the area as a couple for almost twenty-five years, when we decided to start a family eight years ago, we had some very important personal decisions to make. In particular where to have our child born!

As my wife is Scottish, as are the majority of my forebears, we felt it important to us that while we live in Northumberland, if we could, we should help give our child an identity that would enhance her connection to the rest of her family in a way that is truly special.

As a result, we decided to have our daughter born in Melrose, Scotland at the same hospital where her cousin was born only six months earlier!

For us the hospital in Melrose was just as accessible as the hospital in Cramlington was as we were told we couldn't have our daughter in Hexham as we did not fit within the restrictive midwife lead department criteria at Hexham Hospital. Those criteria would more than likely also unfairly impact on the validity of any birth rate data.

As it happens it was a great decision for our family and has been invaluable in giving our daughter a sense of identity shaping who she is while also connecting her in a special way with her cousin, aunts, uncles and grandparents alike!

While Tynedale and Hexham have always been our home and they are the integral to our daughter's sense of identity, so is being Scottish. As a result of our decision about where she was born, we question whether any birth rate data would have included her?

In addition to this, as a family, we live outside of the catchment area for the Sele and as a result we'd likely fall foul of the more stringent interpretation and implementation of the rules that are intended by the County Council.

In our specific situation the Sele is the only practical school option available to us without making it necessary for us to sell our home which we have owned for over sixteen years and moving to Hexham.

As a director of a business which is Tyneside focused my hours are often varied, long and often located away from our home. In addition, my wife who has worked for the same charitable organisation for over 24 years, is office based in Hexham only a 400m walk from the Sele.

Further to this and as mentioned previously the majority of our family are Scottish based and following the passing of my parents it means that we simply do not have extended family who live close that we can call upon to help with child pick-ups, drop-offs etc.

Unfortunately, while we do have a primary school within our village, its hours of operation simply do not align with our work lives, and should that particular school have been our only option as indicated by the possible change in policy implementation by NCC our only option again would have meant that we'd have had to move house unnecessarily disconnecting our daughter from the community that she has grown up in.

We feel that as my wife works 400m from the Sele and is required to commute into Hexham for work, the argument about additional car journeys put forward by NCC is far too simple and bordering on the spurious.

In addition, selecting the Sele first School for our daughter was simply the next logical step in her educational journey following on from nursery school. As with most areas nationwide there is a shortage of early years education options in Tynedale and especially within the area where we live.

For working couples who don't have extended families to lean on, nurseries provide an invaluable service and, in this area, the vast majority of nurseries are located in Hexham and fortunately they are not catchment led. As a working family our daughter regularly attended nursery in Hexham from around ten months old up until she transferred to the Sele First School.

While a good number of the children who attended her nursery lived in Hexham an awful lot did not. Given that our daughter had been with the same group of children for over three years when it came to selecting her next school it was extremely comforting for us to know that over 90% of her Nursery group were also transferring to the Sele First School.

The continuity this afforded to both us and our daughter was immeasurable. It made what can be a very unsettling and traumatic time for a four-year-old a lot less stressful as she already had friends that she knew in her class making everything significantly less scary. For us it also helped reduce the levels of worry that any parent has for their child when they are confronted with a challenging situation and experience.

Had we been not been able to send our daughter to the Sele First School due to restricted numbers or catchment area it would have definitely had a negative impact on her and the start of her school experience. As it happens the Sele First School provided superb care and guidance for our daughter at this critical juncture and has done ever since.

It must also be noted that even before we started our own family, we had always considered the Sele to be the school of choice where we'd wish any future children to attend. This connection for us originates with a niece and nephew who attended the school. While admittedly this was over twenty years ago their experience of the Sele was very positive and as a great school, this fact had always stayed with us!

Also, while it was over twenty years ago since our niece and nephew attended the Sele, I think it's important to mention that their mother sent her two children to the Sele after relocating from East Anglia to Hexham. Education for her children and the opportunity to enjoy the greater Tynedale environment were her principle reasons for relocating, with the Sele forming a major part of her decision making process.

Therefore for these reasons, we believe the proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

Yours sincerely,

50. Dear Northumberland County Council,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the proposal to reduce the Pupil Admission Number (PAN) at Sele First School from 84 to 60. As a parent with one child already attending Sele First and a second child due to start in September 2026, I strongly believe this proposal will have a detrimental impact on both the school and the wider community.

Our family moved to the area specifically because of the strong reputation of Sele First and the local schools. Like many others, we would not have been accounted for in the birth rate data used to justify this proposal, which fails to reflect the dynamic and growing population of the Tyne Valley. Families relocating to the area will face barriers to accessing the school, which could discourage others from moving here or even from expanding their families.

In addition, the planned housing development on the Middle School site will bring a significant number of new homes to the local area. This will inevitably lead to an increase in the number of families and children requiring school places in Hexham. Reducing Sele First's PAN at this time seems shortsighted, as it does not account for the longer-term impact of local population growth resulting from these developments.

While my younger child would still be in catchment, I am deeply concerned for families with younger siblings who may miss out on a place. I already know of several families in this situation, and I worry about the stress and difficulty this will cause, as well as the potential for fractured family logistics.

A reduction in PAN will also result in larger class sizes, which could have a serious impact on the quality of education provided. Sele First's current smaller class sizes allow teachers to meet the diverse and growing needs of pupils, particularly in the wake of the pandemic. Increasing class sizes to 30 will place additional pressure on teachers and reduce the personalised support children currently benefit from. This could damage the school's reputation, discouraging families from moving to the area or choosing Sele First as their preferred school.

I also share concerns about the financial implications of reducing the school's capacity. As a listed building, Sele First faces high fixed running costs that would remain unchanged despite a reduction in pupil numbers. This would mean a larger proportion of the budget being spent on essential maintenance, leaving less available to invest in teaching and resources – further affecting the quality of education.

Sele First is a vital part of our community, and its reputation has been built on its ability to provide high-quality, inclusive education for all. I urge you to reconsider this proposal, which I believe would negatively affect both the school and the wider community it serves.

Thank you for considering this response.

Yours faithfully,

51. Dear School Admissions

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School

I am writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

I do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

We moved to Hexham after both our children were born, and they both now attend Sele First and would have not have been counted in the birth rate. We also would not have moved to Hexham if it wasn't for the Sele, as they have a very strong reputation of being an excellent school. We are one of many families who relocated here after having children to be in the countryside and often nearer to family.

We would not have relocated to Hexham if we couldn't have transferred my daughter into the Sele, as the other schools are not up the same high standard. Sele first have such a strong relationship with the town, working with the abbey, the local theatre, Junior park run, the local library - and each of these experiences are foundational for our kids to feel embedded and embraced in their local community.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion, and we directly demonstrate that it is not reflective of the reality as many people move, especially when settling down with kids. My son is currently in the nursery (which we couldn't get him into until September as it is over subscribed as it is so good!), highlighting how already 53 kids are in the wings ready to go to reception next year. Many families, like us, move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic. My daughters previous school was over 30 per class and the teachers were exhausted, and the experience for her was awful - we thought school would always be a challenge but it after a month at SeleFirst she was a different kid, she loved to learn and has thrived - having 24 in her class gives both her and the teacher space to do well and succeed.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at SeleFirst will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that (Sele First School's) success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

Don't punish Sele first for doing well. You should use them as an example of how schooling should be done - and I urge you to rethink, and strive to give other kids in Northumberland the education Sele First give us. Don't take that away. Yours sincerely,

52. I am writing to you to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area.

I do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community it serves.

I have chosen to place my son Teddy in The Sele, driving him from Langley on Tyne 15 minutes away each day, because I believe this is the best educational fit for him. He had been at a small village school more local to us and was struggling there as there were too few children in the class for him to do things like play football with his contemporaries - critical physical activity for a child with ADHD traits. Since starting at The Sele he has been thriving: he enjoys the atmosphere and the opportunities that a larger school provides, and with the school's support has had the space he needs to catch up in key subjects. We have seen a marked increase in focus and attention both in class and at home. Additionally, due to the inclusion of Ukrainian families at The Sele, Teddy has been able to speak in his second language, Russian, daily while in the classroom, a priceless educational experience that could not be replicated through years of secondary education. Not only does this benefit him personally, and us as a family (it enables him to talk to his otherwise linguistically isolated grandmother at a critical time for the Russian speaking population in the Baltic states), but it promotes bilingualism within the school and a greater multicultural understanding in the local area. These opportunities for cultural co-mingling are obviously more likely in a larger school.

While a larger town school isn't the right solution for all children, and isn't the choice we have made for the moment for my daughter, I think The Sele's popularity should speak for itself - the children that select to come here thrive here. The school is getting a lot right, which is well understood locally. Successful schools like this should have a voice when determining their future- only the school and its community, and most importantly its leadership, fully understand the environment and the imperatives at work there; to impose top down, externally generated restrictions is all too often misguided and destructive to the great good that can otherwise be created by a strong leadership team given the resources they need. The Sele has been on an inspiring upward trajectory, creating educational wealth for its community, and should be given greater support to enable this to continue. The progressive leadership and inclusivity it demonstrates is a beacon in the area. I believe parents like me should have the choice to place their children there if they recognise it to be in their best educational interest, as that's finally in the best interest of our society.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands.

Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that Sele First School's success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

Yours sincerely,

53. To whom it may concern

I write with regard to the ongoing consultation to reduce the pupil admission number (PAN) at Sele First School, Hexham and wish to express my disappointment with and objection to the Council's position and its proposals.

Between 1991 and 1996, I spent five very happy years as a pupil at Sele First School. I am delighted that my son (my eldest child) has recently started reception at the school and if he has similarly fond memories to me in thirty years' time, I will consider myself (and him) to be very lucky. It is my hope that his two younger sisters will also get to have that same experience when they start school in 2026 and 2028, respectively. All three of my children would be impacted if the Council's current proposals were to be implemented.

Hexham is a desirable place to live and Sele First plays a hugely important role in that. My husband and I lived in Newcastle when our son was born. Our desire for him to attend school at Sele First was one of the reasons we elected to leave Newcastle (which is arguably more convenient for both our jobs) and move to Hexham. We were so certain that Sele First school was the right school for our son / family that it was the only choice that we made on our son's application for a reception place. I am quite certain that we are not alone in taking either of these decisions – indeed, I know of several families that have returned to the catchment area for Sele First upon starting a family.

The school's reputation is impressive. In the short amount of time we have been part of the school community, it has exceeded our expectations and our son is thriving. It is no surprise to me that parents from surrounding villages elect to send their children to the school and it is the attendance of these children that appears to be the crux of the Council's poorly thought-out proposals on pupil attendance numbers.

I have set out below my concerns with the Council's proposals in the hope that these (along with the concerns raised by others within the community) may persuade the Council to reconsider its position:

- Having read the Council's proposed arrangements for admissions in 2026-2027, no reference is made to what is in the best interests of the children currently attending Sele First School or the families that would like their children to attend the school in the future. That is absolutely unacceptable. I believe that the Council's proposals – if implemented - would result in:
 - Larger class sizes. Given the school's nursery provision is currently full and there are only a handful of reception places available, any reduction to the PAN would result in the school becoming severely oversubscribed. In order to respond to that demand and also ensure that it could meet its ongoing building overheads etc., the school would likely have no option that class sizes currently average 24. During such an important part of a child's education, that slight reduction in numbers enables the school to really tailor its offering to the children, ensuring that they are well supported and thriving in their environment (something which I believe the school excels in). The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children (and staff) of Sele First.
 - Reduced choice. Sele First is currently able to accommodate children living outside of the catchment area. Within a short distance of Hexham (but outside of the catchment area), there are a number of small villages and hamlets. The children living in those areas will ultimately travel to Hexham from the age of 9 to attend Hexham Middle School and, in turn, Queen Elizabeth High School. Whilst there may be schools located in those villages, I firmly believe that all families should be given the opportunity to choose where their children attend school. That benefits each specific child (small village schools will not be in the best interests of all children) and it results in a vibrant mix of children attending the school. Reducing the PAN at Sele First would remove that choice for many families, which will negatively impact those living in and out of the catchment area.
 - Reduction in the funds available to the school. Quite clearly, fewer pupils will result in less money being given to the school. The running costs of the school, however, will remain largely the same. Sele First is located in a listed building. The costs of maintaining that building – and the wider site – will not change if fewer pupils are on the roll. Instead, any reduced income will need to be stretched to meet existing costs, something that will clearly

impact on the school's ability to provide for its pupils. Whilst I am confident that the school would strive to maintain its current standards and the opportunities available to its children, there is only so much that it can do and there is a real risk that the children would be adversely impacted – with the potential for fewer resources being available or for the beautiful classrooms they currently work in to become inferior. The Council's proposals make no reference to how it will continue to support the school in this respect and ensure that there is no impact on the children.

- Increased bureaucracy. It is highly likely that a reduction in the PAN for the Sele First will result in the school becoming oversubscribed. The appeals processes that would be associated with that will obviously take up a significant amount of time for the senior management at the school, time that could otherwise be better spent. Mrs McVittie, the school's headteacher, currently has a very visible and personal presence at the school, something that absolutely benefits the children and their families. I worry that this would be lost – or at least significantly reduced - if the Council's proposed change to the PAN was introduced. In such circumstances, it would again be the children that would be adversely affected.
- The Council's proposals give the impression that it has given no thought to the impact on the children of Hexham and the surrounding areas – both those that currently attend the school and that may wish to attend the school in the future. Its proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. In particular:
 - Reliance is placed on the number of children being born within the catchment area. This fails to take into account the fact that many people move into the local area in order that their children can attend the school (as my family has done). Those children will not be included in the data. To the extent the Council proceeds with its proposals, I think it likely that families currently living just outside the catchment area may seek to relocate to Hexham to ensure their children can attend Sele First. Again, those children will not be included in the Council's current data.
 - Housing in Hexham is currently in short supply and is subject to high demand. It is also expensive when compared to a number of the outlying areas. If the Council proceeds with its proposals, it will effectively make a place at Sele First conditional upon living in Hexham. That will adversely impact those children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham at the current time. Attendance at Sele First – and the benefit of everything it has to offer – should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.
 - The Council also states that children are driving past their local schools to attend Sele First. I would invite the Council to consider employment within this area. It is highly likely that those children are from families already working in Hexham (or beyond) who would be making the trip to Hexham in any event or for whom the school's location in Hexham is more convenient for pick-ups and drop-offs. Hexham also serves as the local commercial centre. In the absence of data to show that those families are only making their trips to Hexham for the purposes of taking their children to and from school (which I do not believe will exist), I do not consider it appropriate for the Council to place reliance on this point.
- Only five days after receiving details from Sele First of the Council's proposals for a change to the PAN, I received notification – also from the Council – of an application for outline

planning permission for the construction of c. 200 dwellings on the old Middle School site at Wanless Lane, Hexham. I am supportive of the need for additional housing in Hexham and for this particular site to be used, however, the apparent disconnect between the various arms of the Council is astounding and very concerning. This development would result in a significant increase to the available housing in Hexham and would likely attract new families to the area. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

It is apparent from the Council's proposals that the only school in the county to be subject to a proposed reduction to its PAN is Sele First. It feels very much like the school is being punished for its success. The Council should be proud of and embrace that success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend. To the extent the Council were to implement its current proposals, it would be doing a disservice to the children of Hexham and the wider Tyne Valley. The Council alone would be responsible for any resulting detrimental impact.

In light of the above, I would urge the Council to reconsider its position. I will be forwarding a copy of this correspondence to my county councillor (Suzanne Fairless-Aitken – Hexham East) and my MP (Joe Morris).

Yours sincerely

Parent Responses – FOR Proposal:

1. I am a current parent of Sele First School and support the proposal to reduce pupil admission numbers. I live 5 minutes' walk from the school and find the number of cars parked on our street and the surrounding roads at pick up and drop off times very concerning. It often makes the walk to school feel stressful and unsafe. As well as cars, I also find the number of children, parents and dogs around the school and in the park after school very overwhelming and I feel it puts unnecessary pressure on local facilities such as the play park and toilets (which are in a terrible state of disrepair). Being a member of such a huge school community is very impersonal and I don't think it leads to the best outcomes for children, who benefit from nurturing environments where they can build relationships. Having previously lived in a small rural community, I understand the importance of supporting our small schools. I believe that reducing pupil admission numbers at Sele First would provide positive benefits to the children attending the school, the wider local community and in relation to reducing carbon emissions.

Parent Responses – Other than The Sele:

1. To whom it may concern I am writing to object to the proposal to lower the intake at the sele first school in Hexham. This is a good school which is well used and well needed. It is suitable for the numbers of children who attend and lowering the intake would not lower the size of the school or the cost of maintaining the building. As a parent of children in other smaller schools in northumberland I have no issue, and am all for, parents having a wide choice of where to send their children. The amount of houses being built and the popularity of the area (Hexham) has shown that even though birth rates have lowered recently (but we know this can change quickly) families choose the area for living and education. It makes no sense to me to limit the availability of school places in the vicinity. The impact on staff, families and the town will be detrimental. I understand the reasoning but I firmly disagree, put your energy into making the small rural schools amazing, inviting and exciting places to go to school rather than attempt to force families to choose them by limiting choice elsewhere. I will continue to oppose this decision should you go further with your plans. Thankyou

2. To whom it may concern, I am writing in support of the proposed changes to the PAN numbers at the Sele School, Hexham being reduced. I fully support this proposal and believe it will be beneficial for the whole of the Tyne Valley. In West Northumberland we are very fortunate to have a number of small schools in many of our villages. As recognised in the proposal birth rates are decreasing and therefore there are less children attending school each year. It is important that all of the schools in the Tyne Valley remain open and serving their local communities. If the Sele's PAN is not decreased then potentially over the next few years a number of schools could shut. This would have a far greater impact on families than a simple reduction in numbers resulting in all school staying open and serving their communities. I have seen that the Sele is arguing that this will take away parents choice however, many parents that I have spoken to who have chosen to educate their child at the school never viewed or considered any other schools. I believe parents will view all of the schools in their local area and will be very happy with the choices on offer. We are very lucky in West Northumberland to have a number of amazing schools. Yours sincerely.

The Sele Staff Responses – AGAINST Proposal:

1. I am writing to express my shock and upset at the proposal to change the PAN of Sele First School.

I am strongly AGAINST this proposal for a number of reasons.

I have worked at Sele First for 25 years. I feel I am well placed to explain why this would be the wrong decision for the pupils, families and parents of the school as well as the wider Hexham community.

- Looking at birth rate data alone is unreliable

Looking at birth rate alone is not an accurate indicator of how many families will apply for a place. Of the 25 years I have worked at Sele First only twice have we needed to have two classes within a year group. These were not consecutive years and were changed to three classes by the time the children got to year 3 due to a significant increase in numbers. In my role I am often responsible for showing families around school when they are looking for a place. It is a common occurrence for families to visit school who have or are hoping to relocate to Hexham. All of our classes in school have pupils in them from families who have relocated to Hexham including many from Newcastle. Our current Reception classes are close to the PAN of 84 and our current nursery is full with a waiting list. Many families who are intending to move to Hexham have visited school during our recent open days.

- Diversity

The school recently received feedback as part of an Ofsted inspection stating it needed to offer increased opportunities to pupils to help them understand diversity. Over the last couple of years, the school has become more diverse taking children from many areas and from a range of socio-economic groups. If pupils were only to come to Sele First based on the catchment area then Hexham is going to be split in two. I believe this would be extremely detrimental in reinforcing stereotypes and splitting the town into two groups. I ask those making this decision to think about the impact this will have on the wider life chances of pupils.

- Impact on pupils

As stated above the change in PAN will have an impact on the diversity of class makeup. Pupils will be restricted with whom they grow up and form friendships with. Pupils will end up in very large

classes which I don't believe will stop at 30. I am in a privileged position of visiting schools across the region and have seen first-hand the challenges of educating classes of 30 plus. Not to mention the impact this has on staff morale and resilience. I wonder to what extent the local authority expects its schools to remain good schools when faced with these challenges particularly given the increase in the number of pupils with SEND.

- Impact on families

As part of this consultation we have given parents and possible future parents the opportunity to meet with staff and governors. It has been upsetting to see parents in tears at the prospect of the PAN changing. These are both current parents with younger siblings and those who have very young children whom they intend to send to Sele First. Many families have moved to Northumberland and settled in a particular area for work/family

support and live just out of the proposed catchment. They are devastated at the thought of having this choice taken from them and being forced to go to a small school they don't feel fits their child's needs. Families with the biggest pockets will be most likely to get a place at Sele being able to afford a home in the catchment. Is this the culture we want to promote? I hope not.

- Impact on the wider community

Given the schools proximity and position in Hexham families visit the town centre on a daily basis. Reducing the footfall in numbers coming to school can only have a detrimental impact on this and hence an impact on the economy of Hexham.

- Impact on other schools

We have always worked very closely with partnership schools and have a good relationship with all. Northumberland is unique and has schools of all sizes. I believe this is a good thing so that families have variation in choice and can choose a school that best fits the needs of their child. Reducing the Sele PAN will make other schools with a smaller a PAN e.g. 15 full very quickly and restrict the choice of parents. A school local to Sele has recently restructured and is not ready for the demands of an increase in numbers. In addition, Sele has a vibrant and extremely well attended before and after school club that we have invested time in developing. Many local schools tell us they are not financially able to offer this. Forcing pupils to go to their nearest school may mean they are not able to attend wrap around care and parents will struggle to find childcare. It is well known that Hexham is suffering from lack of child care out of school hours.

- Environment

One of the factors mentioned to us as we were informed of this consultation was that of wanting all children to walk to school. Many of our parents work in Hexham which means they would be travelling to Hexham anyway. This therefore has no additional impact on the environment. Many parents work in Newcastle and are able to access the out of hours setting before travelling to work, again this has no additional impact on travel. I believe this to be a very weak argument put forward weighed up against all the other factors FOR keeping the PAN at 84.

- Impact on a listed building

Sele school is a beautiful listed building which like any other building has seen utility costs increase hugely. Reducing the income into school whilst still expecting it to function as a school would have a

detrimental impact on the budget. The school was built over 150 years ago and classrooms are not set up for use by 30 plus pupils. We have worked very hard at maintaining the building and bring in our own income from initial teacher training to boost the budget and help keep the building well cared for.

- Impact on a 'Good' school overall

I would like to think that NCC would want its local schools to perform well. Putting such stress on staff and increasing class sizes is already having a huge impact on our stable, committed and talented staff. Parents have told us if class sizes changed to 30 they may send them elsewhere. Staff may choose to go elsewhere. All this will have huge impact on the climate and morale in school. Not exactly productive to a committed and happy workforce. In all my 25 years at Sele First we have been graded either Outstanding or Good.

We have a creative and talented staff. Changing our structure would impact the quality of this and pose unnecessary challenges to the school. We know that more than 60 families will apply each year and the leadership team will end up spending valuable time taking part in appeals.

- Impact on Northumberland

As I have mentioned previously many of our families move into Hexham particularly around the time their children are of year 2 age. If classes were full with a change to a PAN of 60 this would not be possible. Families would choose to move elsewhere or stay in Newcastle. This will have an impact on the economy with Northumberland. It may seem like a small change to reduce the schools PAN however the knock-on impact is huge.

I really do hope the appropriate time and commitment will be given to acknowledging the content within this response. I am as previously stated against this proposal. It is my belief that this change will have a detrimental impact on many.

Thanks for considering my response.

2. Dear School Admissions,

Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School.

I am writing to you, as a member of staff at Sele First, to raise an objection to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Number (PAN) based on the birth rate data for the area. I do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School or the wider community.

I live in Hexham after moving here with my parents and sister whilst in first school. I was not born in Hexham and nor was my sister. I have made many friends in Hexham and a large portion were not born here either. With an increasing population in the Hexham postcodes I believe many families share the same experience as myself and I feel relying on birth rates is an unfair assessment of how the population will grow.

Hexham is regenerating and experiencing growth. There is affordable housing being planned for the old middle school site and this in its self will bring families from other areas. There are housing developments planned in the outer villages which will also affect school places.

The geography of Hexham is such that the majority of the population do not live in the town centre or the planned catchment area. Limiting places at the Sele will in future leave families and children with only the option of small village schools which may not have the capacity to meet their needs. I know from experience that for some children living in a village, it is important for them to form friendships further wide. Some children do not thrive in a village environment but families have been forced further and further out of Hexham centre to live due to rising housing costs and unavailability of housing. To force those families into village schools in addition could have a long term effect on the villages attracting families to live there.

Many smaller schools cannot provide the provision that we do at Sele including wrap around care and a fantastic provision for SEN children. Parents choose our school because of its location in being able to commute to work, to make use of breakfast and after school clubs and because we have always maintained excellent reports with Ofsted.

To reduce capacity now and over fill the classes makes no sense in the long term. It will eventually limit Hexham to elderly residents when parents struggle to obtain school places and this will have an affect on the local economy.

Under the current proposals my own son will be unable to attend Sele school which will cause me issues in being able to get to work. I chose my employment and my home based on our intention for him to attend Sele school. I am a recent graduate in teaching and at present I am a teaching assistant as there were currently no vacancies for teaching staff. Reducing classroom sizes will affect employment making it less attractive for scholars to choose to attend university for a career in teaching from the local area. It is imperative that we retain teachers with local knowledge and experience of the area as that benefits the children that we teach who thrive on familiarity.

The proposal being based solely on birth rate data is too narrow a criterion within the more complex and dynamic school landscape in the Tyne Valley. It is not reflective of the community and its demands. Many families move to the area with the intention of joining Sele First School and would therefore not be seen in the birth rate data.

Parental preference is hugely important when choosing a school for your child. This proposal undervalues the right and need for parents to find a school that is a strong fit for their child. Reducing the PAN would remove Sele First as an option for these families in the future.

Hexham is the largest town in the west of the County, many parents commute here to work. For many, rather than driving past their nearest school, a place at The Sele is the only convenient and practical school for their children, for proximity of drop off and pick up near their place of work. These reasons have no impact on car journeys. Wraparound care can be difficult to access and the Sele provides this for families.

Demand for places at Sele First school is strong, their current class size average at 24, this has allowed the school to support the increasing needs of children, especially following the pandemic.

During such an important part of a child's education, a slight reduction in numbers enables the school to tailor its offering to children, ensuring that they are well supported and thrive. The Council's proposals would negatively impact on the children of Sele First. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly oversubscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic

backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

It was recently announced by NCC that planning permission has been granted for 200 new homes to be built in the centre of Hexham. How does the Council plan to accommodate any such families and their children?

A smaller PAN means Sele First would receive less money to run their school. Reducing capacity will not reduce 'running costs' as a listed building, meaning a bigger proportion of the budget will be spent on essential costs. This will make balancing an already tight budget an increasing challenge.

The proposals show a fundamental lack of understanding of the community and the wider area and are undoubtedly short-sighted. The Council should be proud of and embrace that (Sele First School's) success and continue to offer as many children as possible the opportunity to attend.

Yours sincerely,

3. I am writing to express my shock and frustration at the proposal to change the PAN of Sele First School.

I am strongly AGAINST this proposal for a number of reasons.

I have worked at Sele First for 10 years as a class teacher and began my teaching journey here as a trainee teacher. I feel I am well placed to explain why this would be the wrong decision for the pupils, families and parents of the school as well as the wider Hexham community.

Birth rate data

Looking at birth rate alone is not an accurate indicator of how many families will apply for a place. In the 10 years I have worked at Sele First only twice have we needed to have two classes within a year group. One of these was changed to three classes by the time the children got to year 2 due to a significant increase in numbers. It is a common occurrence for families to visit the school who have or are hoping to relocate to Hexham, I have experienced this many times and have always welcome new admits, creating a safe and comforting environment for them. All of the classes in school have pupils in them from families who have relocated to Hexham including many from Newcastle. Our current Reception classes are close to the PAN of 84 and our current nursery is full with a waiting list. Many families who are intending to move to Hexham have visited our recent open days.

Diversity

During our recent Ofsted inspection, we received feedback stating we need to offer increased opportunities to pupils to help them understand diversity. Over the last couple of years, the school has become more diverse taking children from many areas and from a range of socio-economic groups. The proposed catchment changes risk creating socio-economic divides between families living in central Hexham and those on the outskirts. I ask those making this decision to think about the impact this will have on wider life chances.

Impact on pupils and staff

As stated above the change in PAN will have an impact on the diversity of class makeup. Pupils will be restricted with whom they grow up and form friendships with. Pupils will end up in very large classes which I don't believe will stop at 30. This will only increase teaching workload and the pressures that teaching brings. Teaching is already struggling and within the 10 years I have taught I have seen and heard many teachers who I trained with leave the profession due to the workload and

the pressures. Out of the 50 qualified teachers who I trained with, less than 10 remain in the profession. If classes were reduced you would only add pressure to the staff in Sele. I wonder to what extent the local authority expects its schools to remain good schools when faced with these challenges particularly given the increase in the number of pupils with SEND. This surely would only be detrimental to the pupils.

Impact on families

As part of this consultation parents and possible future parents have been given the opportunity to meet with staff and governors. The reduction in PAN threatens to disrupt families' choices and undermine the inclusivity Sele currently offers. As a parent, I had planned to enrol my own child to give him the best chance for academic and developmental success. However, under the new PAN, he would lose his chance to attend Sele altogether. As a class teacher, I have already had to have numerous unpleasant conversations with parents about the PAN who have very young children whom they intend to send to Sele First. Many families have moved to Northumberland and settled in a particular area for work/family support and live just out of the proposed catchment. They are anxious and upset at the thought of having this choice taken from them and being forced to go to a small school they don't feel fits their child's needs.

Impact on the wider community

Given the schools proximity and position in Hexham families visit the town centre on a daily basis. Reducing numbers coming to school can only have a detrimental impact on this and hence an impact on the economy of Hexham. Sele First School currently fosters a unified and inclusive community, which would be threatened by such divisions. We run events for the community such as our Christmas trail, aimed at giving families an opportunity to experience things that cost much more in other parts of the county. This would narrow the viability of these experiences due to cost effectiveness and fundraising. A reduction in children would also affect the local work we do with charities such as Daft as Brush. We have sponsored an ambulance to support people with cancer. There is a much bigger picture.

Environment

One of the factors mentioned to us as we were informed of this consultation was that of wanting all children to walk to school. Many of our parents work in Hexham which means they would be travelling to Hexham anyway. This therefore has no additional impact on the environment. Many parents work in Newcastle and are able to access the out of hours setting before travelling to work, again this has no additional impact on travel. I believe this to be a very weak argument put forward weighed up against all the other factors FOR keeping the PAN at 84.

Impact on a 'Good' school overall

I would like to think that NCC would want its local schools to perform well. As previously mentioned, putting such stress on staff and increasing class sizes is already having a huge impact on staff. Staff may choose to go elsewhere, creating a high turnover and no consistency for the school. All this will have huge impact on the climate and morale in school. Not exactly productive to a committed and happy workforce. Sele First has been graded either Outstanding or Good since I have known it. Changing our structure would impact the quality of this and pose unnecessary challenges to the school.

I urge the council to reconsider this proposal and prioritise Hexham's families, community cohesion, and educational excellence.

Thanks for considering my response.

4. Response to the consultation regarding the reduction of the PAN at Sele First School Hexham

I am writing to formally object to the proposal to reduce the Published Admission Number (PAN) of Sele First School, Hexham.

As a member of staff and a resident of the local area, I am strongly against this proposal and feel it would be detrimental to both the school and the wider community.

- Looking at birth rate data alone is unreliable

Looking at birth rate alone is not an accurate indicator of how many families will apply for a place. Many families move to Hexham while their children are around 2 years of age – in fact, many move to Hexham specifically to enrol their children in Sele First. Every one of our classes in school has pupils in them from families who have relocated to Hexham. Our current Reception classes are close to the PAN of 84 and our current nursery is full with a waiting list.

- Impact on community diversity and unity

Over the last couple of years, the school has become significantly more diverse in terms of socio-economic intake. If pupils were only to come to Sele First based on the catchment area then it is likely that the town would be split into two socio-economic groups. Families with greater economic means will be most likely to get a place at the school through being able to afford a home in the catchment. I believe this would be extremely detrimental in reinforcing stereotypes that are currently being challenged at a young age and would potentially impact on wider life chances.

- Impact on pupils

Pupils at Sele First could end up in very large classes which we do not believe will be capped at 30. As a teacher of many years, I have experienced teaching classes of 30 plus pupils and can testify to the negative impact this has on the children. With the additional needs experienced by so many pupils at this point in time, the need for teachers to have time for each child is paramount both to their education and their mental health. It is also important to bear in mind that the building was constructed over 150 years ago and classrooms are not set up for use by 30 plus pupils.

Furthermore, increased class sizes will mean a high potential for an impact on staff morale and in turn retention. The staff team is at Sele First currently strong, committed and stable and this greatly adds to the quality of the school. Will the local authority still expect its schools to remain good schools when faced with these challenges?

- Impact on the wider community

Given the school's proximity and position in Hexham, families are brought into the centre of the town on a daily basis. Reducing the footfall in numbers coming to school can only have a detrimental impact on the economy of Hexham – its shops, cafes and leisure facilities.

We have many families who have opened businesses in Hexham, enabled to do so by the position of our school and also the provision of our before and after school club. Many local schools are not financially able to offer this. Forcing pupils to go to their nearest school may mean they are not able to attend wrap-around care and this will in turn impact on the ability of parents to contribute to the local economy.

- Impact on parental choice

The schools in the Hexham partnership work closely together and Sele First has a good relationship with all of these. One of the strengths of the partnership is that it has schools of all sizes, giving families choice and enabling them to find a school that fits the needs of their child. This is especially

important in the current climate with the increase in SEND and mental health issues in children and young people and a large number of 'school refusers' across the country. Reducing the Sele PAN will take away the choice that parents currently have. Parents wishing to send their children to the Sele will be forced to go elsewhere. Similarly, schools with a much smaller PAN will fill up very quickly so that those seeking a smaller environment for their child will also be disappointed.

- Impact on a listed building

Sele First School is a beautiful listed building, which brings its own costs. Like any other setting, it has seen utility costs increase hugely. Reducing the income into school whilst still expecting it to function in the same way would be very challenging to the budget and mean that we are unable to provide some of those enrichment that the children currently receive.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this objection. I urge you to reconsider the proposal based on the detrimental effect it will have on individuals, families and on the community at large.

5. I am writing to express how shocked and disappointed I am that you are considering reducing the PAN at Sele First School, Hexham. I am strongly opposed to this reduction.

I have worked at Sele First School for 18 years, I know first hand how important our school is to the local community. By reducing the PAN from 84 to 60 you are affecting a large proportion of Hexham's community negatively, taking away a choice of where their child attends school.

NCC claim the reason for the proposed reduction is due to a reduced birth rate. However numbers used in the consultation document do not take into account, the number of families who move to Hexham after a child is born, this number will surely rise as more housing developments are planned with Hexham and local areas. It seems counterintuitive by NCC to reduce a school PAN while approving numerous new housing developments. Surely, reducing the PAN of a school will mean families will not move to the area as places at a chosen school are not guaranteed.

I hope you take into consideration all of the arguments which oppose the reduction in PAN at Sele First School and come to a sensible decision and keep our PAN at 84.

To close, I would like to re-iterate I am strongly opposed to the reduction of the PAN at Sele First School.

Thank you for taking the time to read this objection.

6. Dear School Admissions

I would like to raise a strong objection to your plans to reduce the pupil numbers at Sele First School. As an employee of Sele First and former parent of the school, I struggle to find any angle for which this action would be a positive move for Hexham as a whole, Sele First, other schools or indeed Northumberland County Council itself.

The impact on Sele First school would be hugely negative. The costs to run and maintain the building will remain the same. Reducing the pupil numbers by a third will mean it will be impossible to keep up the maintenance and repair of an old, grade listed building. The heating system alone is set up where a part of the building cannot be simply closed off to reduce costs. Do the council intend to fund Sele First yearly for this shortfall in income to keep the building safe for the children to attend?

I live in a rural village a 20 minute drive from Hexham. It was not feasible for me to consider our local school as it does not take children from 3yrs and does not offer wrap around care. Jobs are

scarce in small villages and rural areas therefore regardless of whether I had used the local school, I would still have to drive to work in Hexham.

The government has many childcare schemes encouraging parents to work however NCC are not supporting this with the proposal, if children are forced to attend schools within their catchment of rural areas, meaning parents cannot travel to work. Is it preferable to NCC that parents stay out of work in small villages, receive benefits resulting in a higher number of Pupil Premium children?

To reduce the pupil numbers at Sele First school is to actively take away parental choice. All parents have the right to choose a school that they feel suits the needs of their child in order for them to flourish. Larger schools are not always the best choice for some children. There are children in the catchment area of Sele First who attend Beaufront, Slaley, Newbrough. I assume you intend to force children such as these to attend Sele when they'd rather attend a smaller school out of their catchment, as I'm sure you realise it would be highly unethical to impose catchment area restrictions on Sele First alone?

Clearly you hope that in enforcing school catchment areas you will raise pupil numbers in the smaller schools in Hexham and the surrounding areas. The primary benefactor of this proposal is the Hexham schools, mainly Hexham First School. Has a member of the proposal team made a visit to each of these schools to discuss with them if they have the space and staffing to spread approximately 130 children across their schools?

The birth rate data alone is not accurate, as it does not take into account families who have moved into the area to attend Sele First due to the exceptional education offered. If Sele First school is reduced by a third and these children are forced to attend the school in their catchment thus filling all schools in Hexham, where exactly does this fit with the councils plans for 200 family homes on the old HMS site? 'Family' suggests children – where do you intend these children to go to school? Considering this site falls in the 'catchment' of Hexham First, is there a 3 storey extension planned to accommodate all of these children?! Have you discussed with the planning department that you plan to reduce the school numbers in Hexham when they want to encourage families into the town?

By reducing the PAN to 60 per year group means that Sele First will be permanently full with no leeway to accept children moving into the Hexham area – something the council is actively trying to encourage. It will mean bigger class sizes with less staffing to support children with additional needs who have no additional funding from NCC. The proposals would see Sele First become worryingly over-subscribed with the likelihood of numerous appeal processes, as well as very large classes.

Housing in Hexham is expensive, with many families in outlying areas unable to afford a home in the town. Reducing the PAN at Sele First will adversely impact children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not be able to afford property in Hexham. Attendance at Sele First should not be conditional on family income. The Council's proposals would likely render that the case.

This proposal is illogical and ill-advised. I'm frankly stunned that this has gone as far as reaching a proposal in the public domain and was not stopped before making a mockery of Northumberland County Council and its lack of research, investigation and its communication between its own departments.

I hope that this proposal is reconsidered as a matter of urgency.

7. I am writing to express my objection to changing the PAN for Selefirst School.

I am strongly AGAINST this proposal for a number of reasons.

I have worked at Sele First for 19 years. This is a school that is at the very heart of the community. I am passionate about the excellent quality of education that Selefirst provides. The whole staff team work together to provide a first class education.

- Impact on pupils

Pupils will end up in very large classes which I don't believe will stop at 30. The impact on very large classes will directly affect the children. The ever changing needs of children and families is evident. The increase in SEND within schools is increasing. At Selefirst we provide children with Special Education Needs the environment and support that they individually need. We have been able to accommodate these changes. We have a thriving Nursery provision which would be directly impacted by decreasing the PAN.

- Impact on families

The assumption that declining birth rates to justify this proposal is flawed. Families often move into the area after their children are born, specifically to access Selefirst high-quality education. We have many families moving at different times. The reduction in the PAN number will have an impact on families choosing to come to Hexham. Parents/families have the right to choice and reducing the PAN will limit the choice for families.

- Impact on the wider community

Given the schools proximity and position in Hexham families visit the town centre on a daily basis. Reducing the footfall in numbers coming to school can only have a detrimental impact on this and hence an impact on the economy of Hexham. Hexham needs to welcome families to the area, not deter them.

- Environment

Many families work outside of Hexham and use the vibrant and well attended wrap around care. Citing one of the reasons to reduce the PAN is to address the usage of vehicles/transport is flawed.

- Impact on a listed building

Sele school is a beautiful listed building which like any other building has seen utility costs increase hugely. Reducing the income into school whilst still expecting it to function as a school would have a detrimental impact on the budget.

I hope that all objections are considered and taken into consideration before a decision is made.

I urge the Council to reconsider these proposals and to properly consult all schools in the Hexham Partnership to agree a mutually acceptable solution, solutions based on meaningful data analysis which present a true and accurate state of education in west Northumberland, and which promises to properly resource all of the schools in the partnership.

Selefirst School is at the heart of the Hexham community. Decreasing the PAN will have a direct impact on the school, children, families, community and dedicated staff team.

Thank you for considering my response.

8. To whom it may concern,

I would like to object to the proposal to reduce the PAN at Selefirst school. I believe I am in a strong position to do so, working as a teacher here for over 20 years and also as a parent. It is my strong belief that children thrive in a larger school.

The following are reasons I am against the reduction in PAN.

- Birth Rate

Looking at the birth rate in Hexham alone is not a reason to reduce the PAN. Many of our families did not live in Hexham when their children were born. They have chosen to move here from Newcastle, other parts of Northumberland or from across the country. Indeed, I moved to Hexham myself for that very reason. A number of our current staff have children under 5 and have moved to Hexham, so that their children can attend Selefirst.

- Children's Peer Group

Children in a larger school have the opportunity to meet a wider range of people and are more likely to be ready to move to Middle school. Working in Year 4, with 3 classes means that our children have the opportunity to mix, whilst being taught in manageable class sizes. My own child initially started school in a village school: although it was not tiny, there were not enough people there to make a group of friends. With my second child, I did not consider sending her anywhere except Selefirst. In our previous OFSTED inspection, we were criticised for not being diverse enough. We have taken in a number of refugee children. If our PAN number was reduced, we would not have been able to do this.

- Class Sizes

In KS2, we would end up with class sizes beyond 30. This is detrimental to children's education. Throughout my career at Selefirst, each year group has grown in size as we have children admitted. Classrooms at the Sele were built over 160 years ago and are not big enough for those numbers of children. Teachers cannot meet the needs of classes over 30 effectively. The workload becomes unmanageable. In addition, since the pandemic, the needs of children have become greater. There is a far higher number of SEND children. Not only do they need more teacher support, but they need physical space: something you will not get in a class size over 30. What is a 'good' school potentially goes downhill.

- Impact on Families

Many of our families, do not live with in the catchment area. If the PAN was to be reduced, you would have instances where families could end up with children in two separate first schools. Who gets priority? A sibling or someone in the catchment area? This would be hugely upsetting for families. 60 children being admitted to Reception will lead to this happening. Inevitably this leads to price increases in housing, thus eliminating those who cannot afford to pay. Our school has seen an increasing number of children on free school meals. Are we to turn them away, leading to a two tier system?

- Wrap around care

Larger schools can run this as a viable option. Many of our surrounding small schools would find this is not financially viable. Parents want this as an option, choosing Selefirst as it allows them to work.

- Staffing

In the many years at Selefirst, the staff has been stable and a great team to be part of. One of the reasons for this is the large number. Having three form entry means that we have a vast range of

talents and experience to draw upon. Everyone has their skills to contribute. Planning and delivering a varied curriculum is essential to the development of the children. I believe that parents value this. With the best will in the world, one teacher in a small school, (with maybe two or three year groups to teach) cannot do this. Many of our parents, would be faced with sending children to these rural schools. At the Sele, with such a range of staff, the children get more experiences. Extra-curricular activities are delivered by staff. With a smaller staff there would be fewer available.

- Environment

This is quite possibly the strangest reason for reducing our PAN. The idea that most children should be able to walk to school is unrealistic in Northumberland. Whilst many of the children in the town can, the reality is that parents are on the way to work and drop their children off on the way. Having a before and after school club, enables people to continue working whilst having children. This is surely something we need to encourage, if we do not want the birth rate to fall further. In rural areas, people do not walk to school: there are no pavements. You would not walk a young child to school on a dark country lane.

- Wider Community

Having a large number of families come into central Hexham has a positive impact on the local community and businesses. In a time when we need to encourage activity in town centres, surely our local businesses would miss out on a lot of passing trade. Having immediate access to the Sele park and Abbey is greatly beneficial to our children. For most of the year before and after school, many of our children play in the park. This has a huge positive impact on their mental and physical health.

- Parental Choice

Your plans make the Sele a victim of the hard work of the school community and the success and popularity that has achieved. With parental choice removed, only those with the finances to fund private schooling get to select where their child is educated, thus increasing the gap between the haves and have nots.

I hope you take time to consider my opinions along with those of our school community.

9. Objection to the NCC Consultation to reduce pupil admission numbers at Sele First School I am writing to formally object to Northumberland County Council's proposal to reduce Sele First Schools' Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN) to 60 children per year group. I do not support the proposal and firmly believe the reduction is not in the best interests of Sele First School, families or the wider community of Hexham. 1. Sele First School's reputation and the impact on the local community Sele First School has had an outstanding reputation within the local community for many years. They have consistently been rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by OFSTED and for this reason many families choose to move into the area to send their children to Sele First School. To consider the PAN for Sele First School based on birth rate within the catchment area, eliminates the families who move into the area after having children from these figures. A large number of families within the Sele First School community would fall into this category along with some staff members who have moved into Hexham to send their children to Sele First. These families moving into Hexham and those families attending Sele First School from outside the catchment area allow our children to establish friendships with other children from diverse backgrounds. During their last inspection, OFSTED suggested that children at Sele First School would benefit from being exposed to more diversity and therefore limiting PAN to just those in the catchment would reduce the children's experience of engaging with others from different and diverse backgrounds. 2. Parental Preference If the PAN were to decrease, this would take away parental choice of which school to send their child.

Sele First is an inclusive school, supporting children from a range of backgrounds and those with a variety of SEND needs. Parents should be able to choose the setting that is best for their child. As a teacher who has worked in Year 4 at Sele First School, many parents, during the transition to middle school, regularly discuss how much of a benefit it is to move from Sele First School to Hexham Middle School as this transition is less daunting due to moving from a larger first school where their children will know a large proportion of the other children in their year group. Some families have even chosen to move their child in Year 4 to Sele in order for them to be better prepared for middle school due to the larger cohort of children. As a member of the teaching staff at Sele First School, I have considered sending my own child to Sele First School when he is of school age due to its excellent opportunities for children as well as improving my own work-life balance and wellbeing (something that schools, government and unions are striving for, for teachers). However, reducing the PAN and living outside the catchment area would prevent this from being a feasible option. 3. Community impact By reducing the number of pupils attending Sele First School, this could reduce the footfall into Hexham Town on a daily basis putting pressures on local businesses who may already be finding it difficult to survive in the current economic climate. Additionally, if families cannot get a place at Sele First School, they may not move into the area as they initially intended. This would therefore change the demographic of Hexham, further impacting local amenities e.g. Hexham Queen's Hall who host family events, local libraries offering children reading challenges throughout the year and local sports clubs. With a planned housing development, for over 200 family homes to be built in Hexham, the children moving into these homes would not be considered in the local birth rate. A reduced PAN would make it impossible to accommodate these children. 4. Financial Implications As a grade two listed building, the utilities and running costs have increased significantly over recent years. These costs are not going to decrease with a reduced number of PAN however school will receive a smaller budget with less children on roll. This would result in a larger proportion of the school budget being spent on the upkeep of an old building and reducing the spending on children. This would significantly and negatively impact the opportunities provided for the children at Sele First School and impact families who may be asked to contribute more towards school trips etc. – some of whom already face financial difficulty for a number of reasons. 5. Staffing and Wellbeing Concerns Reducing the PAN would force redundancies among the dedicated workforce within Sele First School, many of whom have worked at the school for over a decade. The school's capacity to offer a broad range of enriching activities such as its Platinum Arts Mark and Sports Award programs would be significantly reduced. An increase in class sizes and reduced staffing would be particularly detrimental for staff wellbeing as well as having a significant impact on the children, especially those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. 6. Environmental Impact The council has suggested that reducing Sele's PAN would decrease car journeys into Hexham. However, many families walk or cycle to Sele already. Sele also offers wraparound care which is essential for working families. Other local schools do not offer this provision. Parents who do drive their children to school, often do so on their way to work or on their way to use Hexham's facilities e.g. Wentworth Gym, therefore these journeys would be taking place regardless. Conclusion Reducing Sele's PAN would have significant and negative consequences – fewer opportunities for children and families, a decline in the town's attractiveness to families wishing to move into the area, reduced educational experiences for children who attend Sele First. I urge the council to reconsider this proposal and prioritise Hexham's families, community and the education of the children in our society. Thank you for taking the time to consider this objection. Yours sincerely,

10. Re: Objection to the Proposal to Reduce the PAN of Sele First School, Hexham

I am writing to formally object to the proposal to reduce the Published Admission Number (PAN) of Sele First School, Hexham. I do so as a committed member of staff and as a resident of Hexham.

- Birth Rate Data

Sele First has an excellent and longstanding reputation in Hexham, which attracts families to the area. As a Reception teacher, I frequently engage with prospective parents during our well-attended open days, many of whom are considering relocating to Hexham. Having moved to Hexham myself for my role at Sele First, I am proud to highlight the exceptional opportunities the town offers and the pivotal role the school plays in the community. Relying solely on birth rate data does not accurately reflect or predict our intake, as many families with young children relocate from Newcastle and beyond. This trend positively impacts Hexham's economy, supports local businesses, and contributes to a thriving town.

- Staff Expertise and Children's Opportunities

Sele First offers all children an exceptionally rich curriculum, thanks to the wealth of expertise and experience amongst its large staff team. Many subject leaders hold degrees in their specific subject areas, something which is much harder to achieve if staff numbers are reduced. Our passion for our subjects creates a culture where staff are committed to developments in their field and to providing the best possible education. The school is also recognised for its expertise in supporting SEND pupils. Reducing staff would diminish the support available, especially as the number of pupils with special educational needs continues to rise. Sele First provides a huge variety of free after-school clubs led by staff throughout the year, and crucially offers additional opportunities that children may not otherwise experience, e.g. performing on stage in the Leavers' Concert at the Queen's Hall or participating in the immersive STEM fortnight in school which can inspire new careers. All of these are valuable individually, but collectively they exemplify the unique advantage a large school can give a child. Schools play a vital role in opening doors which children may otherwise never come across. What Sele First offers should be celebrated and valued, not quashed.

- Staff Retention

Sele First has a noticeably long standing and dedicated staff base, many of whom have worked at the school for over a decade. With teacher retention a national concern, this is a striking factor which should be taken into consideration. Being part of a large and supportive team positively impacts workload and thereby the quality of teaching for children. Staff plan and work together in year group teams, enabling teachers to create and deliver engaging and ambitious lessons for all pupils. Staff can draw on the expertise of others and meet the needs of all pupils, including those with additional needs.

- Equality of Opportunity for Children in Hexham

I live in East Hexham and walk to school every day. Of the 35% of pupils who live in other school catchments and attend Sele First School, 68 (50% of the total number of children attending from outside of catchment) are within the catchment area of Hexham First, which is within the Government's statutory walking distance to school each day. I regularly pass parents and children walking and cycling to Sele First from East Hexham, dropping their children off at the school's wraparound care. To suggest that a reduction in the PAN would have environmental benefits is to simplify the data and make assumptions about the way parents travel based on their geographical location.

- Logistical Concerns

The school's listed Victorian building has high maintenance costs that rely on its current budget. A reduced PAN would result in funding cuts, jeopardising the building's upkeep and safety. The school's physical structure and classroom sizes are unsuitable for larger classes of 30. Staff already make numerous adjustments to classrooms in order to maximise their potential as positive learning

environments for existing class sizes. I strongly urge the council to reconsider this proposal for the reasons given above. Thank you for taking the time to consider this objection. Yours sincerely,

The Sele Staff Responses – FOR Proposal:

No responses.

The Sele Staff Responses – Not Sure:

1. Good evening, I just wanted to say how much I understand why many people fear the proposal the council made with regards to reducing the number of pupil admission at the Sele First School. As a member of staff at the Sele, I can see how the announcement has affected the morale of the school's employees. Most of them, understandably, fear for their job and their future and therefore are opposed to the proposal. I can't say whether I agree or not with it, however I know the Sele is definitely over subscribed at the moment. Classes of 25+ kids are becoming very challenging and hard to manage. The increasing number of kids with additional needs is worrying and in my view is what the council should focus on. My suggestion would be to physically split the building into two, with an area dedicated to kids with additional needs. Those kids (with the support of their TA) could spend 50% of their time in the classroom, and 50% in the area where other life skills (communication, physical activities, baking, gardening etc.) could be further developed. It would require a little bit of planning and reorganisation, but if we want the best for those kids and the rest of the kids in school then I believe it is crucial we change the way those kids are supported on a daily basis in mainstream schools. Thanks in advance for taking those kids into account while reviewing your proposal. Their future is our responsibility.