



Northumberland County Council

CABINET

Date: 11 January 2022

Outcomes of Consultation on the proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle and Whytrig Middle Schools

Report of the Executive Director of Adult and Children's Services, Cath McEvoy-Carr
Cabinet Member: Councillor Guy Renner-Thompson, Children's Services
Report prepared by: Sue Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources

Purpose of Report

This report sets out the outcomes of informal consultation on a proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle School and Whytrig Middle School on the current Whytrig and Astley Community High School site in Seaton Delaval or alternative site.

This consultation has arisen as a result of a request from the Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation to the Council following their identification of significant educational and financial benefits for all students within the Seaton Valley Federation that could arise from the two middle schools amalgamating on one site with Astley High School in the planned new buildings already approved for Whytrig and Astley.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Decide, on the balance of the strength of the rationale for the proposal put forward by the Seaton Valley Federation and the qualitative argument of the feedback received from stakeholders including parents during informal consultation, not to proceed to the publication of a statutory proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle School and Whytrig Middle School.
2. Note that the project to reprovide new buildings for Astley High School and Whytrig Middle School on the current shared site or another site will continue to proceed as originally planned.

Link to Corporate Plan

Cabinet 11 January 2022

These proposals are most closely linked to the Council's priority for Learning (achieving and realising potential, but it is also strongly linked with the priority for Connecting (having access to the things you need).

Key Issues

1. Cabinet approved the initiation of informal consultation on a proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle School and Whytrig Middle School on 12 October 2021 at the request of the Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation, which includes Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools and Astley High School.
2. Six weeks of consultation began on 13 October and closed on 1 December 2021, all during school term-time. Feedback from the consultation is summarised in paras. 15 to 27.
3. By their nature, any consultation which proposes changes to school structure are highly emotive. This consultation has been no exception, with more responses received from consultees than would normally be expected from a fairly limited proposal and with a significant number of responses from the local community, albeit in comparison to the number of consultees a small percentage (refer to para. 24).
4. All 3 schools in the Seaton Valley Federation are currently rated 'Good' by Ofsted, with Whytrig Middle School moving from a rating of 'Requires improvement' to 'Good' in November 2021, with Behaviour and Attitudes of students rated 'Outstanding'.
5. However, for the reasons set out in para. 27 of this report based on consideration of the strength of the rationale for the proposal put forward by the Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation and analysis of the feedback received from stakeholders set out in paras. 15 to 26, the conclusion of this informal consultation is that Cabinet is recommended not to move to the publication of a statutory proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle School and Whytrig Middle School in shared buildings with Astley High School and therefore proceed no further with this proposal.
6. The project to reprovide new buildings for Astley High and Whytrig Middle Schools will continue as planned.

Background Information

7. Seaton Sluice Middle School forms part of the Seaton Valley Federation of schools, together with Whytrig Middle School and Astley Community High School. The federation has one Executive Headteacher supported by a head of school at each of the 3 schools, overseen by one Governing Body.
8. During the process of developing an Outline Business Case (OBC) for the capital project to reprovide buildings for Whytrig Middle and Astley High Schools, the Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation identified that the educational benefits already being achieved from the co-location of Whytrig and Astley could be extended to include all students in the federation through the amalgamation of the two middle schools in the planned new buildings.

In summary, the rationale for amalgamating the two middle schools put forward by the Governing body and on which Cabinet made its decision to approve consultation was based on the following benefits:

- Students on roll at Seaton Sluice would be able to benefit from a modern educational environment within new buildings together with their peers who are on roll at Whytrig and Astley;
- Transitions from first to middle and middle to high will be improved by having one middle school for all pupils to feed into at Year 5; students would then move altogether as one cohort into the high school phase;
- The new Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP) at the current Whytrig and Astley site would be able to be accessed by students identified with special needs who are currently on roll at Seaton Sluice Middle;
- Curriculum development would be consistent across the federation;
- One system of continuous professional development (CPD) for all staff across the federation would lead to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning;
- All students within the federation would benefit from the improved sports facilities at the shared site; *“It is the governors view that a swimming pool must be part of the facilities provided in the new build along with the other high quality sports facilities associated with new builds that have occurred in the County.”*
- Student support systems across the federation would work more consistently and effectively;
- Whilst not the most important reason, there would be financial benefits arising from economies of scale that would mean more funding would be directed towards teaching and learning.

The Consultation Process

9. Informal consultation commenced on 13 October and 1 December 2021, a six week period in school term-time, which is in line with DfE guidance. A consultation register of relevant stakeholders was drawn up and is included at Appendix 2 of this report.
10. A consultation document, including a questionnaire, was drawn up which sets out the rationale, background information and implications of the proposal. This document was circulated directly to parents, staff, Governors and other stakeholders as demonstrated in the Consultation Register. The document was also published on the Council’s website, on Twitter and Facebook and a notice highlighting the consultation displayed in the local libraries at Seaton Sluice and Seaton Delaval. In addition, a Seaton Valley Consultation ‘padlet’ was set up, which held the consultation document and frequently asked questions that arose from consultees during consultation and answers and links to the Seaton Valley schools; this was accessed 285 times during the consultation and the link from there to the consultation response document used 276 times.
11. Officers held the following virtual meetings during the consultation period:
 - 8 November – Seaton Sluice Middle School staff, their representatives (unions) and HR advisor;
 - 10 November - Whytrig Middle School and Astley High School staff and their representatives
 - 10 November - Governing Body of Seaton Valley Federation

- 15 November - Seaton Valley Community Council.

Summaries of these meetings are provided at para. 25 of this report.

12. It was hoped that a public event would be able to take place in the Seaton Sluice area during the consultation period, and a venue and date had been arranged to be organised on an appointment basis. However, as a result of the rise in COVID-19 cases it was felt that it would not be possible to maintain the safety of Council staff across the course of the public event day, especially when attendees could not be compelled to wear masks and may also have not adhered to the time allotted to them. Whilst it would have been preferable to have been able to hold a public event, the Seaton Valley Consultation padlet referred to in para. 11 did go some way to answering questions arising from consultees during the consultation period.
13. The questionnaire attached to the Consultation Document simply asked 3 questions as follows:
 1. *Do you support the proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle School and Whytrig Middle School on a shared site with Astley High School with effect from the target date of 2024 in order to gain the benefits outlined by the Governing Body?*
 2. *If you have an alternative proposal to the amalgamation of the schools that you believe would achieve the same benefits, please outline it below.....*
 3. *Do you have any additional comments you wish the Council's Cabinet to consider, for instance do you have a proposal for the use of the current Seaton Sluice Middle building should the proposal to amalgamate the schools be approved?*
14. The summary of feedback from consultation used to inform the analysis and recommendations is set out from para.16 onwards.

Feedback from Consultation

15. Summary of Feedback from Seaton Valley Federation

Following discussions and after reviewing documentation the Governing Body of Seaton Valley Federation (SVF) believe that it is still the preferred to amalgamate the two middle schools.

The federation believe they have listened to the community, but feel that it would be a lost opportunity for students in the Seaton Sluice area to benefit from the new buildings and facilities planned if the proposal was dropped. They note that there are no additional finances available to rebuild or make the necessary repairs or alterations to Seaton Sluice Middle School on the same timescale as plans for Whytrig Middle School. School funds would need to be used just to keep the building safe and secure and would not address any of the suitability issues.

If the proposal doesn't go ahead, parents of future pupils at Seaton Sluice Middle School may choose to send their children to the new build school which would be detrimental, both financially and educationally, to the future of Seaton Sluice Middle School. Therefore, the Governing Body feel that the proposal should go ahead for the educational benefit of current and future generations.

An extract from their response states:

“We appreciate the emotions and concerns raised by the proposed closure of Seaton Sluice Middle School, but we are firm in our belief that it is the best educational option available to us with regard to the new building. We would also pose the question why would we not do this? Purely on educational grounds why would we not take this opportunity? What moral right is there for saying to one third of our federation community that they cannot access the same facilities and opportunities that the new building will bring to the other two schools?”

Commentary

The Governing Body of Seaton Valley Federation have responded that they continue to support the proposal to amalgamate the two middle schools within the federation. While the reasons and rationale put forward in the request of the Governing Body to the Council’s Cabinet to undertake consultation on amalgamation were wholly focussed on its educational benefits leading to improved outcomes for students, the Governing Body’s response to the consultation now appears to place a greater focus on the concerns that there could be a risk to the viability of Seaton Sluice Middle if it is not included in the rebuilding project via amalgamation with Whytrig Middle if this opportunity is not taken and that one third of pupils would not benefit from new buildings and facilities. This appears to be in response to the feedback the federation has had from parents, the community and local politicians.

Feedback from the only two first schools in the partnership that responded to the consultation (see para. 17 and 18) is mixed, with one school tentatively in support but with a number of key questions, and the other unable to support through suggested lack of engagement of the Seaton Valley Federation with its feeder first schools.

This indicates that the Governing Body’s case for change based on improved outcomes for students alone has not been convincing enough to persuade the majority of consultees who responded to the consultation that it outweighs the impact of the closure of Sluice Middle School on area served by the school.

The Council’s programme of backlog maintenance for community and voluntary controlled schools is based on an analysis of condition i.e. those schools assessed as having the most urgent need for repair are at the top of the list. The reasons why the building of Seaton Sluice Middle does not feature close to the top of the programme in the County are set out in para. 28.

16. Summary of Feedback from Holywell First School Governing Body

Recognised the positive impact a new building would have on pupils and their education. However, they also appreciate the wealth of experience and success their feeder middle school has in ensuring pupils are well supported in their transition and hope that it will be a protective factor in any future re-organisation.

The governors did raise some concerns which they would like considered when deciding whether to proceed with the proposal. Those concerns included:

- the potential change in school culture and how that would be handled;
- what mitigation will be in place for the impact of doubling the size of the school;
- what planning is in place to ensure staff are “looked after” throughout the process;
- reassurances that the school will become greater than the sum of its parts for all pupils, particularly existing pupils;
- concerns regarding educating more pupils on the existing Astley/Whytrig site. However, if the current site is not suitable there are concerns regarding the safe travel for our pupils from Holywell village.

17. Summary of Feedback from Seaton Sluice First School Governing Body

The Governing Body of Seaton Sluice First School believe that insufficient information, in terms of quality and quantity, was available to enable an informed response to be made to either support or not support the proposal. They expressed disappointment that the Governing Body of Seaton Valley Federation did not engage with any of the first schools in advance of publishing their proposal as a lot of questions parents, governors and staff had could have been answered within the proposal.

There was concern that the proposal focused mainly on buildings and facilities and not on the welfare, both physically and emotionally, of the children. There was little consideration regarding provision for children with SEND, only that the ARP would service all pupils. Although transition was mentioned there was no reference to the need for effective transition from first to middle school. At Seaton Sluice First School we have excellent transition arrangements with Seaton Sluice Middle School which start early in a pupils’ life.

A major omission from the proposal was the potential location for the merged school. It was unrealistic to expect anyone to make an informed decision regarding the proposal when the location is unknown.

An extract from their response states:

“We would welcome the opportunity to engage with the Seaton Valley Federation’s Governing Body to explore options collectively in order to benefit all children within Seaton Valley schools. Similarly, we would welcome the opportunity to engage with the Council’s Cabinet to understand what role we can play to ensure the very best solution for all the children within Seaton Valley schools.”

“As a Governing Body, we would have like to have been sufficiently informed to be able to clearly support or not support this proposal. However, we are very disappointed, that due to the way this proposal has been developed and presented, that is not possible.

18. Summary of Feedback from Seaton Valley Community Council

Seaton Valley Community Council’s preferred option is for there to be a middle school in Seaton Sluice and in Seaton Delaval. The Council is aware that for this to be possible significant investment would need to be made in Seaton Sluice Middle School within the same timescale. If the new build at Astley High/Whytrig Middle

Schools is completed before any improvements are made to Seaton Sluice Middle School the Council is concerned that parents, particularly from Seghill and New Hartley, may opt to move their children to the new school and thereby impact the viability of Seaton Sluice Middle School.

The Council was unable to fully consider the proposal to amalgamate the middle schools on a new high/middle school site in Seaton Delaval without knowing where the site would be located.

An extract from their response states:

“If Northumberland County Council could be persuaded to make significant investment in Seaton Sluice Middle School then expressing a view on the proposed amalgamation would not be relevant to the discussion.”

Commentary

The Seaton Valley Community Council’s desire to retain a middle school in Seaton Sluice as well as in Seaton Delaval is noted.

However, as stated in para. 16, the timing of backlog repairs to community and voluntary schools in the county is based on a fair analysis of need with the SCIP programme. As the project for the reprovion of the buildings for Astley High School and Whytrig Middle was based on the fact that their current buildings are at a significantly higher level of need of repair than the Seaton Sluice Middle building, it is not possible that the latter would be refurbished on the same timescale as the other schools in the federation. The reasons why the building of Seaton Sluice Middle does not feature close to the top of the list of schools most in need of refurbishment in the County are set out in para. 28.

19. Summary of feedback from County Councillors with wards in Seaton Valley area

Local Member – Cllr. David Ferguson

Cllr. Ferguson, representing Hartley, acknowledged that the proposal put forward is a cost-effective option to provide a modern educational site for all pupils in Seaton Valley. However, he doesn’t think it takes into consideration the wider impact on the community and believes there are a number of concerns which need to be addressed:

- Location – Final location will impact on what can be delivered regarding school buildings but also the knock-on effect on traffic, businesses & residents. Current site does not appear to be large enough or able to handle the increase in traffic associated with a 25% increase in pupil numbers
- Travel – Cannot appreciate the travel implications without the site being confirmed.
- Segregation – Aware that middle and high school pupils would not mix on site however what consideration has been given to segregating pupils on school transport.
- Community Use – Closure of the school and subsequent potential loss of playing fields would have a negative impact.

Therefore Cllr. Ferguson does not support the proposal put forward by the Seaton Valley Federation.

Cllr. Ferguson thinks that there should be an opportunity to explore other options eg. extending the investment promised to Astley and Whytrig to included investment in Seaton Sluice Middle School and leave the school system as it is or move to a two-tier system within Seaton Valley and rebuild Astley as a modern secondary school. The two-tier option would still see Seaton Sluice losing a school; however, it would allow children to continue their education within their own villages for an extra two years. It would also provide an opportunity to invest in all schools within Seaton Valley.

Commentary

Whether the new buildings planned for Astley High and Whytrig, and proposed for Seaton Sluice Middle as part of the amalgamation proposal, are reprovided on the current site in Seaton Delaval or at another site an effective solution for managing the arrival and departure of students and school traffic to the relevant site would be required as part of the project plan.

Currently, there are around 310 students on roll at Seaton Sluice Middle School. 39% of these students are eligible for home to school transport; with 15% of students transported from Seghill and 24% of students transported from New Hartley. Under the proposal, most students from these two villages would become ineligible for transport on distance grounds (although they may be eligible on other grounds such as unsafe walking route or extended rights). Should Seaton Sluice Middle amalgamate with Whytrig Middle, students currently living in the Seaton Sluice and Old Hartley village and north of the catchment area are likely to become eligible for transport on distance grounds (around 26% of the current number on roll). On this basis, there would be a saving to the Council's Home to School Transport budget should the amalgamation of the two middle schools be approved.

With regard to transport arrangements of middle and high school students, it is custom and practice for middle and high school students across the county to be travel on the same vehicles to schools, especially as middle schools in Northumberland are deemed to be secondary schools.

As part of the informal consultation, consultees were asked whether they had any additional comments to make regarding the proposal, including any suggestions on the use of the playing fields at Seaton Sluice Middle should the proposal to amalgamate the school with Whytrig Middle be approved. Requests were submitted as part of the consultation that the playing fields are retained for use by the local community if the middle school was to close. Any proposal with regard to the use of the playing fields would in any event need to comply with the requirements of Sport England's playing field policy.

Local Member – Cllr. Paul Scott

There is very little support for the proposal. The suggestion from the governing body that parents will stop sending their children to Seaton Sluice Middle School if there is

a new middle school in Seaton Delaval is not backed up at all by the parents I have engaged with.

In Seaton Delaval there are significant and genuine concerns about the impact on the village of the 300 extra pupils that are likely to be dropped off and picked up every day. These concerns have been exacerbated by the failure of the consultation to name exactly where a new school would be in Seaton Delaval.

This is a proposal that has come from a governing body and beyond that organisation I am not clear who thinks it is a good idea. I therefore believe that spending £40m is not advisable in such circumstances.

An extract from their response states:

"I do not support it as a County Councillor and neither does David Ferguson in Hartley or Daniel Carr in South Blyth. Les Bowman in his Parish capacity stated a preference for 'two middle schools'".

"If as advised the County Council's role is to simply administer the consultation, then there can only be one outcome and that is a report to Cabinet recommending that the proposal is refused."

Commentary

As noted above under the commentary on Cllr. Ferguson's submission, a plan for the effective management of school traffic at arrival and departure times would be required as part of any plan for re-provision of new buildings.

Cllr Scott's position on the proposal is noted, as is his recommendation to Cabinet.

20. Response of CE and RC Dioceses to consultation

No response received from either the Newcastle Diocesan Board of Education or the Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.

21. Response of local MP (Ian Levy)

Ian Levy, MP confirmed his opposition to the proposal to close Seaton Sluice Middle School and merge it with Whytrig Middle on the same site as Astley High School.

He does not believe that a convincing case has been made and this is reflected in the views of locally elected representatives and the Parish Council. Given the widespread unpopularity of the proposal he believes that the County Council has no option but to reject it and to promptly consider alternatives. Mr Levy does back investment in schools in Seaton Valley and would look forward to participating in a constructive discussion on those alternatives.

An extract from their response states:

"Closing a school is a huge decision, and is not one that is deemed justifiable in this case by parents who live in Seaton Sluice, Hartley, Seghill and Blyth. The impact on

Seaton Delaval has also not been considered with many residents concerned about the impact of more traffic on already busy roads.”

Commentary

Mr. Levy's view on the proposal is noted. The Council's policy for dealing with backlog maintenance in schools via the SCIP programme is set out in para. 28. Again, the impact of school traffic is taken into account when developing building projects as previously stated.

22. Response from other local authorities

No responses were received from North Tyneside or Newcastle City Council.

23. Summary of Feedback from students

Eighteen students from the federation responded to the online consultation and the breakdown of their response is included shown below.

In addition, the Seaton Valley Federation were asked by the Council to gain feedback in the proposal from their students. To do this, the federation developed a questionnaire for students based on the Council's questions, with some additional questions on issues the federation believed would be of interest or concern to their students. There were 533 responses from students across all 3 schools to the Federation's own questionnaire; the summary of the views collected by this method are summarised below, but because of the variation and additions to the questions compared to the Council's questionnaire, they are not included in the overall summary of responses in para. 24:

- 385 students believed the proposal for one middle school was a good idea, while 148 did not;
- 279 students believed having all students in the federation on one site was a good idea, while 254 did not;
- 283 students did not think there would be a problem if Seaton Sluice Middle closed, while 250 did think there would be a problem;
- 304 students thought there would be an issue for students living in Seaton Sluice to catch a bus to the new school, while 229 did not;
- 334 students believed it would be a good idea for the amalgamated school to have a new name and uniform, while 199 did not;
- 505 students believed it was a good idea to have new facilities to be able to use at the amalgamated school, while 28 did not.

A selection of comments made by pupils:

- I want Seaton Sluice to stay open because it will be very confusing for the kids and in the morning the front of the school will be really busy.
- I like the idea of the schools becoming one.
- I think the schools should be closer together but not joined together if that makes sense.
- Yes I think the facilities would be better but what about my sister when she goes to middle school she will be with much older people. Please might get bullied more.

- I don't think it's a good idea combining schools because it will be too big.
- I think it is a good idea because they get to meet new people.
- I like the idea but I would miss Seaton Sluice
- I struggle with changes so I don't know how I will handle it.
- I think it is going to be a good idea.

Commentary

From the responses received to the Federation's questionnaire to students at the Seaton Valley Schools, while there does appear to be a larger number in favour of the amalgamation, there is less support for all students being on one site. Again, while fewer students believed there would be a problem with the closure of Seaton Sluice Middle, a significant number of students believed there would be a problem. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of students believed it would be a good idea to have access to new facilities.

Some of the comments from students also reflect a degree of uncertainty with the proposal which reflects the need to ensure that any significant changes to the organisation of schools must be handled sensitively and with effective communication of how changes will impact individual students, as well as staff.

24. Individual responses to Qu. 1 including parents, staff, grandparents and members of the community

It should be noted that the purpose of the Council's questionnaire was to seek the views of consultees on a qualitative basis in order to inform the decision-making process of the Council's Cabinet, and it is not the intention that these results are used as a referendum on the proposal. Rather the quality of the comments received in the responses to consultation is the main consideration for Cabinet when making its decision on whether or not to proceed to the next phase of formal consultation.

A total of 3529 questionnaires were distributed via an electronic link directly to the consultees set out on the Consultation Register at Appendix 2. A total of 726 responses (not including the student feedback from the Seaton Valley Federation's own questionnaire set out in para. 23) were received via the consultation document; the breakdown of the number of responses against Q1 by type of consultee is provided in the table below:

	YES		NO	
	No.	%	No.	%
Do you support the proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle and Whytrig Middle Schools on a shared site with Astley High School with effect from the target date of September 2024 in order to gain the benefits outlined by the Governing Body in the consultation document?	123	16.94	603	83.06

The main reasons given by consultees in support of the proposed amalgamation were:

- Merging of the two middle schools would have massively benefits, both socially and academically, on the young people of Seaton Valley by creating a consistent education approach.
- All pupils would be able to benefit from the investment in new buildings with modern, purpose-built facilities and teaching areas fit for the 21st Century.
- Would bring financial benefits by economies of scale and pooling of resources.
- Transition would be easier because of the joint site, shared facilities and staff, which would enable pupils to settle into high school easier.
- Sharing of expertise and information between the Middle and High School would improve even further, which should not only have a positive impact on transition, but also significantly enrich pupil experience during their time at Middle School.

The main reasons given by consultees against the proposed amalgamation were:

- Merging the two middle schools, with the number of children on roll, would make this a very large middle school with large class sizes which could affect the teaching offered to students.
- The increased distances some children would be required to travel and the fact that children were too young to make the journey, either on foot or by bus, without adult supervision.
- Younger children on the same site and mixing with older children (eg. nine-year-olds mixing with 16 to 18-year-olds). The younger children could be intimidated or pick up bad behaviour/habits.
- The Ofsted rating of “requires improvement” for Whytrig Middle School compared with Seaton Sluice Middle School’s rating of “good”. Why close a good school in favour of a failing school?
- Impact on an already congested site by increased traffic and parking.
- Impact on our carbon footprint, particularly at a time when there are calls to reduce pollution etc.
- Seaton Sluice Middle School is an essential part of the community.

Commentary

Consultees in support of the proposal appear to echo the views of the Seaton Valley Federation in relation to the perceived benefits of the proposal.

In relation to consultees opposed to the proposal, while the merger of the two middle schools would create the largest middle school currently in the county in terms of number on roll and capacity although, it would not be the largest middle school that has existed in the county (larger middle schools have closed as part of reorganisation from 3-tier to 2-tier (primary/secondary) organisation). In any event, students attending Seaton Sluice Middle and Whytrig Middle do come together in high school in Year 9. A larger middle school would not equate to the creation of larger class sizes, rather additional classrooms and teachers would be required to deliver the curriculum in the new buildings in order to achieve the benefits the Seaton Valley Federation have ambitions to achieve.

If the proposal was approved, there would be a change to the groups of children who would be eligible for transport to the Whytrig site e.g. students living in Seghill may no longer be eligible for transport on distance criteria although there may be eligibility should it be deemed there is no safe walking route (ref para.19). Under the

Council's Home to School Transport policy, children on roll at middle school are eligible for transport to their qualifying school if they live more than 3 miles away. Furthermore, the policy assesses walking routes based on road safety aspects, rather than personal safety aspects and deems it the responsibility of parents or carers to decide whether or not a child should be accompanied when walking to school.

In relation to concerns around middle school students mixing with high school students, Whytrig Middle School is already located on the same site as Astley High School and therefore there are already effective measures in place to ensure the safety and security of all students.

Whytrig Middle School was inspected by Ofsted in November 2021 and has been rated Good with outstanding features. Therefore all 3 schools in the federation are now rated Good.

As stated previously, any project to reprovide new school buildings has to include an appropriate plan to manage student traffic at the start and end of the school day, whether on foot or by vehicle.

Reducing the carbon footprint of Northumberland forms part of the Council's Climate Change Action Plan 2021 – 23. The impact of this proposal on carbon emissions will be considered by the Council's Cabinet when formulating its decision. However, as set out above in relation to numbers of students who may lose or gain transport eligibility should this proposal be implemented, it is unlikely that there would be either a significant positive or negative impact.

25. Summary of feedback received via meetings

Council officers held a number of virtual meetings with the specific groups during the six week consultation period. Summaries of the notes taken at the meetings are set out below.

Summary of the meeting with the staff of Seaton Sluice Middle School

- A meeting with 27 members of staff, trade union and NCC HR representatives took place on Monday 8th November at 4.00 pm.
- A presentation was shared which outlined the rationale, implications and impact of the proposal as well as any protocols in relation to staffing.
- Staff had assumed that both schools would close and a new school opened. They understood the reason why this couldn't happen. They did seek assurance that staff from both schools would be treated the same in relation to jobs within the amalgamated school.
- Asked how the local authority had come to the decision that Seaton Sluice Middle School didn't require a new build and had the idea of a new site been written-off.

Summary of the meeting with the staff of Whytrig Middle School and Astley High School

- A joint meeting of staff from Whytrig Middle and Astley High School took place on Wednesday 10th November 2021 at 4.00 pm.

- There were 42 members of staff, trade union and NCC HR representatives in attendance.
- A presentation was shared which outlined the rationale, implications and impact of the proposal as well as any protocols in relation to staffing.
- No comments were made but it was queried whether the new houses being built in New Hartley had been taken into consideration within the proposal [answer – yes].

Summary of the meeting with the Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation

- A meeting with the federated governing body of the Seaton Valley Federation took place on Wednesday 10th November 2021 at 5.30 pm.
- There were 14 governors in attendance as well as a representative from NCC HR.
- A presentation, similar to the one presented to staff, was shared with governors. It outlined the rationale, implications and impact of the proposal as well as any protocols in relation to staffing.
- Governors' expressed disappointment that the proposal did not mention that there was no funding available for Seaton Sluice Middle, hence the reason for the proposal.
- There were questions raised in relation to site appraisal and transport.
- The governors wanted it noted that the amalgamated school, if approved, would effectively become a new middle school with a new name and uniform.

Summary of the meeting with the Seaton Valley Community Council

- A meeting with Seaton Valley Community Council was held on Monday 15th November 2021 at 5.00 pm.
- Officers from Northumberland County Council, the Executive Headteacher of Seaton Valley Federation and the Headteacher from Seaton Sluice Middle School were in attendance to provide background information and rationale to the proposal.
- Councillors asked several questions in relation to funding – where was the additional funding coming from, was this funding guaranteed and why was there no funding available for Seaton Sluice Middle School.
- Queries were also raised in respect of location. If the current site was not suitable where would the new site be? Location would have an impact on whether or not individuals considered the proposals to be in the best interests of pupils or villages.
- Concerns were also expressed by Councillors in relation to parking as this was the biggest issue with the current Astley/Whytrig site. Documentation stated that it would be managed by having a “drop-off plan” and Councillors asked what was the plan and was the plan being done for the current site or the new site?
- The Ofsted rating of both middle schools was also discussed, and it was noted that a new building with new facilities didn't automatically result in a better standard of education.

Commentary

Staff at Seaton Sluice Middle School in particular raised understandable personal concerns about their future employment should the two middle schools amalgamate.

This concern was not raised at the meeting of Whytrig and Astley staff, therefore it is assumed they are comfortable with the proposal.

26. Alternative Models and general comments received to Qu.2 and Qu.3.

Around 185 consultees suggested alternative models during consultation, although many were variations on a theme. Alternative models or variations with the same basic principles have been themed and are set out below:

Alternative Model Theme A

Keep the organisation of the schools as they currently stand. Use the funding available to rebuild Astley and Whytrig on the current site or a new location and invest in Seaton Sluice Middle School.

Commentary:

The policy and process by which backlog maintenance of schools is managed within Northumberland and why Seaton Sluice Middle School would not be eligible for refurbishment on the same timeline as Astley and Whytrig is set out at para. 28. Therefore, should Cabinet make the decision not to approve the next phase of statutory consultation on the proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools it will be on the understanding that Astley and Whytrig school buildings alone will be provided in the medium term.

Alternative Model Theme B

If the two middle schools have to amalgamate could this not be done on the Seaton Sluice Middle School site and redevelop Astley High School on the current site.

Commentary:

The rationale put forward by the Governing Body of Seaton Valley Federation pointed to the benefits of Whytrig being on the same site as Astley e.g. smoother transition between the schools. By simply creating a larger middle school at Seaton Sluice these benefits would not be achieved. In any event, the school site at Seaton Sluice Middle is not large enough to accommodate the number of students that would be required and would potentially create significant traffic problems for local residents in that area, given the school's location off a residential street rather than a main road.

Alternative Model Theme C

Adopt the two-tier model which would be in line with the rest of the country. The funding could be used on the existing first schools to convert them to primary school and rebuild Astley as a secondary school on its current site.

Commentary:

The Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation have been clear in their view that they believe the 3-tier system in the partnership continues to serve students and the community well and they do not wish to explore the possibility of 2-tier in Seaton

Valley. Furthermore, there has been no significant body of support for the exploration of 2-tier either from other professionals within the partnership or from parents. Without a clear body of support, the Council would not contemplate consultation on reorganisation of the Seaton Valley Partnership to a primary/secondary structure.

Conclusion on Consultation Feedback and Recommendation

27. As previously stated, it is the quality and not the quantity of feedback to this informal consultation that is the basis on which the Council's Cabinet will base their decision. However, the strength of feeling submitted to consultation on a proposal is not ignored and Cabinet do note this accordingly when making an overall balanced decision. As with any decision relating to schools, and in particular when in relation to a proposed school closure, Cabinet will place the most emphasis on the merits of the proposal in relation to its impact on educational outcomes for children and young people at the heart of any decision.

The rationale for the proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle School and Whytrig Middle School submitted by the Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation to the Council with a request to consult on such proposal was based entirely on its educational benefits, as well as some financial benefit. Based on the rationale of educational benefits alone, it would therefore be expected that this proposal could have been put forward by the Governing Body whether or not new buildings were in the process of being provided for Astley High School and Whytrig Middle School.

However, during the course of consultation, evidence emerged from the meeting with the Governing Body and in their written response to the consultation that in fact a key reason behind the proposal to amalgamate the two middle schools was to enable all students in the federation to be educated in the new buildings and facilities, as it was not possible to replace the buildings of Seaton Sluice Middle on the same timeframe as those for Astley and Whytrig; this had not formed part of the original rationale put forward to the Council. While it is not an unreasonable desire in itself for the Governing Body to want good facilities for all the students in the federation, it throws into question the basis on which the informal consultation was brought to the Council i.e. that educational outcomes would be improved for all students within the Seaton Valley Federation simply from the amalgamation of the two middles.

There are 5 first schools within the Seaton Valley Partnership that feed the two middle schools in the federation. Only 2 Governing Bodies responded to the consultation, 1 in tentative support with a number of caveats (although not a feeder school of Seaton Sluice Middle) and 1 not in support due to a lack of information, a focus mainly on buildings and other factors (which is a feeder of Seaton Sluice Middle). Paras 16 and 17 summarise the responses from these 2 schools. It is unclear why the 3 other first school Governing Bodies in the partnership did not respond, in particular because their professional views on the closure of a middle school into which 2 of the remaining schools feed would have been of material interest to the wider consultation. In particular, it would have been useful for the Council's Cabinet to understand their position to assist in formulating its decision.

While the proportion of feedback received from consultees was relatively small compared to the number consulted, it is clear that Seaton Sluice Middle School is highly valued by parents and the wider community in the area. Again, the rejection of

the proposals by the majority of consultees who responded indicates that they have not been convinced that the educational benefits outlined by the Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation outweigh the loss of the school to its local community. This may be in part due to the emphasis that was placed on the re-provision of new buildings as a driving factor by the Seaton Valley Federation once consultation began.

While it has been stressed that consultations of this nature are based on qualitative rather than quantitative feedback, there must be a significant body of support (even if not majority support) across a range of stakeholders including professionals for proposals such as this to be successfully implemented. The lack of expressed support for this proposal across both professional, public and political sectors gives rise to the concern that this proposal would be not only be difficult to implement and would therefore not achieve the improved educational outcomes on which the original consultation was initiated, but may conversely impact negatively on students within the Seaton Valley Partnership as a result of the division it could create.

Therefore, Cabinet are recommended not to move to the publication of a statutory proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle School and Whytrig Middle School in shared buildings with Astley High School and therefore proceed no further with this proposal.

28. Background Buildings Information

A new build school for Astley High School and Whytrig Middle School has been in the MTFP since 2016, due to the condition need of the building with £14.8m backlog maintenance repairs, the school is in the greatest need for replacement when compared to the rest of the local authority maintained school estate, and also has a high level of asbestos that makes repairs and maintenance extremely difficult and even impossible in some areas without closing down large areas of the school and relocating the pupils.

As noted above in the recommendations it is proposed that the Outline Business Case, is developed based on the reduced scope of providing replacement buildings and associated playing fields and sports facilities to accommodate Astley High School and Whytrig Middle Schools only. The work of completing the business case should progress along the same timeline with the target date of April 2022 for a final approval by Cabinet.

Work has been continuing during the informal period of consultation with the development of the OBC, and in particular carrying out a site option appraisal. Due to the commercial confidentiality, it hasn't been possible to share the options currently being assessed by the project delivery team and its technical advisers, however it is hoped that the site options will be able to be shared with the wider community in the early part of 2022 prior to the completion of the OBC, in order to seek the community views.

Seaton Sluice Middle School currently has an estimated £1,359,360 backlog maintenance repair costs which when compared to that of Astley and Whytrig is significantly lower in terms of urgent replacement/repair works. The level and costs of backlog maintenance for Seaton Sluice Middle School when compared to all other schools in Northumberland would be in the bottom 25% meaning it would be many years before there would be a justification purely from a backlog maintenance case

before the schools would become a priority for a new build school. The Local authority has invested nearly £400k in the building at Seaton Sluice middle schools over the last 9 years and further investment of over £200k is already planned for this year with the school's mobile classroom being replaced in 2022, this further investment would also reduce the backlog maintenance figure shown above.

Implications arising out of the report

Policy:	The actions set out in this report support the vision and values set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2020/21, particularly in relation to the value of "We want you to feel safe, healthy, and cared for"
Finance and value for money	The OBC for the reprovision of buildings for Astley and Whytrig will continue as planned limited to these two schools. The funding for reprovision is approved and set out in the Council's Medium Term Plan. The final budget profiling will be reviewed and will form part of the OBC approval expected in Spring 2022.
Legal	DfE Guidelines on non-statutory consultation (pre-publication) have been adhered to as part of this informal consultation process.
Procurement	N/A
Human Resources:	N/A
Property	All property implications will be considered as part of the OBC.
Equalities	An Equalities Assessment is included at Appendix 3 of this report.
Risk Assessment	A Risk Assessment would be carried out should Cabinet approve this proposal to go ahead.
Crime & Disorder	This report has considered Section 17 (CDA) and the duty it imposes and there are no implications arising from it.
Customer Considerations:	The proposal set out in this report is based upon a desire to improve outcomes for children and young people and their families in Northumberland.
Carbon Reduction	N/A
Consultation	This report has been considered by the Executive Director for Adult Social Care and Children's Services and the Member for Children's Services.
Wards	Hartley; Holywell; Seghill with Seaton Delaval

35. Background papers

Report of Report of the Executive Director of Adult and Children's Services, 13 October 2021, Proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle School and Whytrig Middle School

Feedback from consultees received during consultation 13 October to 1 December 2021

Notes of virtual meetings held during consultation

Report Sign Off

Finance Officer	JW
Monitoring Officer/Legal	SB
Executive Director of Children's Services	CMC
Chief Executive	DL
Portfolio Holder(s)	GRT

Report Author: Sue Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources
Sue.Aviston@northumberland.gov.uk
01670 622281

36. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

In carrying out the consultation set out in this report, the Council has acted in compliance with Data Protection Act 1998 via the Council's Data Protection Policy

Specifically,

- Data gathered during this consultation process has been dealt with fairly - e.g. the responses from members of the public have been anonymised, whilst those responding within a public role have been identified e.g. Chairs of Governors, Dioceses and so on.
- The data and information gathered during consultation has been used to assist in informing the recommendations set out in this report and will not be used for any other purpose, i.e. it will not be shared with another service area or any third party.
- The data and information gathered has been limited to that which would assist in informing the recommendations set out that will arise from this consultation.

28.2 The Council has set out how it deals with information received as part of consultation in the Council's Privacy Notice, at

<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/About/Contact/Information.aspx#privacynotices> .

Appendices

Cabinet 11 January 2022

Appendix 1 – Consultation Document
Appendix 2 - Consultation Register
Appendix 3 – Equalities Impact Assessment



Northumberland
County Council

Proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools

Consultation

13 October-1 December 2021



<mailto:educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk>

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If you require a large print version of this document or a translation into another language please call 01670 623611 or educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk

Introduction

The Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation has asked Northumberland County Council to consult on a proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools on one site, together with Astley High School. We would like to hear your views on this proposal.

This consultation document sets out the reasons why the Governing Body believes this proposal would bring significant benefits to students. As a parent/carer, member of staff or a member of the community, you may feel you will want to understand what these proposals mean for young people, yourself and your community and therefore this consultation offers you the opportunity to have your say and to submit your views for consideration by the Council before any decisions on whether or not to make the changes are made.

Therefore, I hope that you will take this opportunity to respond to the consultation and I look forward to reading your comments.

Cath McEvoy-Carr

Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services
Northumberland County Council

What are the reasons for the proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle and Whytrig Middle Schools?

Seaton Sluice Middle School forms part of the Seaton Valley Federation of schools, together with Whytrig Middle School and Astley Community High School. The federation has one Executive Headteacher supported by a Head of School at each of the 3 schools, overseen by one Governing Body. Each school has its own budget and has to comply with government regulations, including having separate Ofsted inspections and other managements processes. As a federation, all 3 schools work closely together.

The proposal set out in this document is to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle School and Whytrig Middle School either on the current Whytrig Middle and Astley Community High School site or an alternative site in Seaton Delaval. This proposal has arisen in the light of the project to reprovide new buildings for Astley and Whytrig Middle School, these two schools already being co-located on the high school's site in Seaton Delaval. Although the initial project looked at reproviding new buildings for Astley and Whytrig only, during the course of working up the project the federated Governing Body identified a number of significant educational and financial benefits that could be gained by all students within the Seaton Valley Federation if they were located on one site in the new buildings.

The benefits identified by the federated Governing Body from the amalgamation of the two middle schools include:

- **Students on roll at Seaton Sluice Middle School would be able to benefit from a modern educational environment within new buildings together with their peers who are on roll at Whytrig Middle and Astley High Schools;**
- **Transitions from first to middle and middle to high would be improved by having one middle school for all pupils to feed into at Year 5; students would then move altogether as one cohort into the high school phase;**
- **The new Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP) at the current Whytrig Middle and Astley High Schools site would be able to be more easily accessed by students identified with special needs who are currently on roll at Seaton Sluice Middle School;**
- **Curriculum development would be consistent across the federation;**
- **One system of continuous professional development (CPD) for all staff across the federation would lead to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning;**
- **All students within the federation would benefit from the improved sports facilities at the shared site;**

- **Student support systems across the federation would work more consistently and effectively;**
- **Whilst not the most important reason, there would be financial benefits arising from economies of scale that would mean more funding would be directed towards teaching and learning.**

Overall, the Governing Body believes the benefits identified would ultimately lead to improved outcomes for all students on roll in schools in the Seaton Valley Federation.

At some point in the future, if the proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle and Whytrig Middle Schools is approved, Seaton Sluice Middle School would technically close as a separate entity and Whytrig Middle School would need to expand its size within the new planned buildings in order to accommodate the students who would previously have been educated in the Seaton Sluice Middle building. The Governing Body are keen that while technically the amalgamation of the two middle schools would not create a new school, as the Whytrig school number would need to be retained, there would be a 'new' school feel with a new name for the amalgamated schools, new emblem and new uniform (phased in) that reflects the history and character of both schools.

Therefore, the number of students admitted into Whytrig would also be increased from an annual intake of 90 students to 150 to accommodate students from the amalgamated catchment areas of the two middle schools.

What impact would amalgamating the two middle schools have on staff?

The Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation would need to develop a new staffing structure to bring the staff of both middle schools together and are keen to maximise the number of employment opportunities. Meetings will be held with the staff and their union representatives during the consultation period and the Governing Body will ensure that they comply with the legal requirements for staffing consultation.

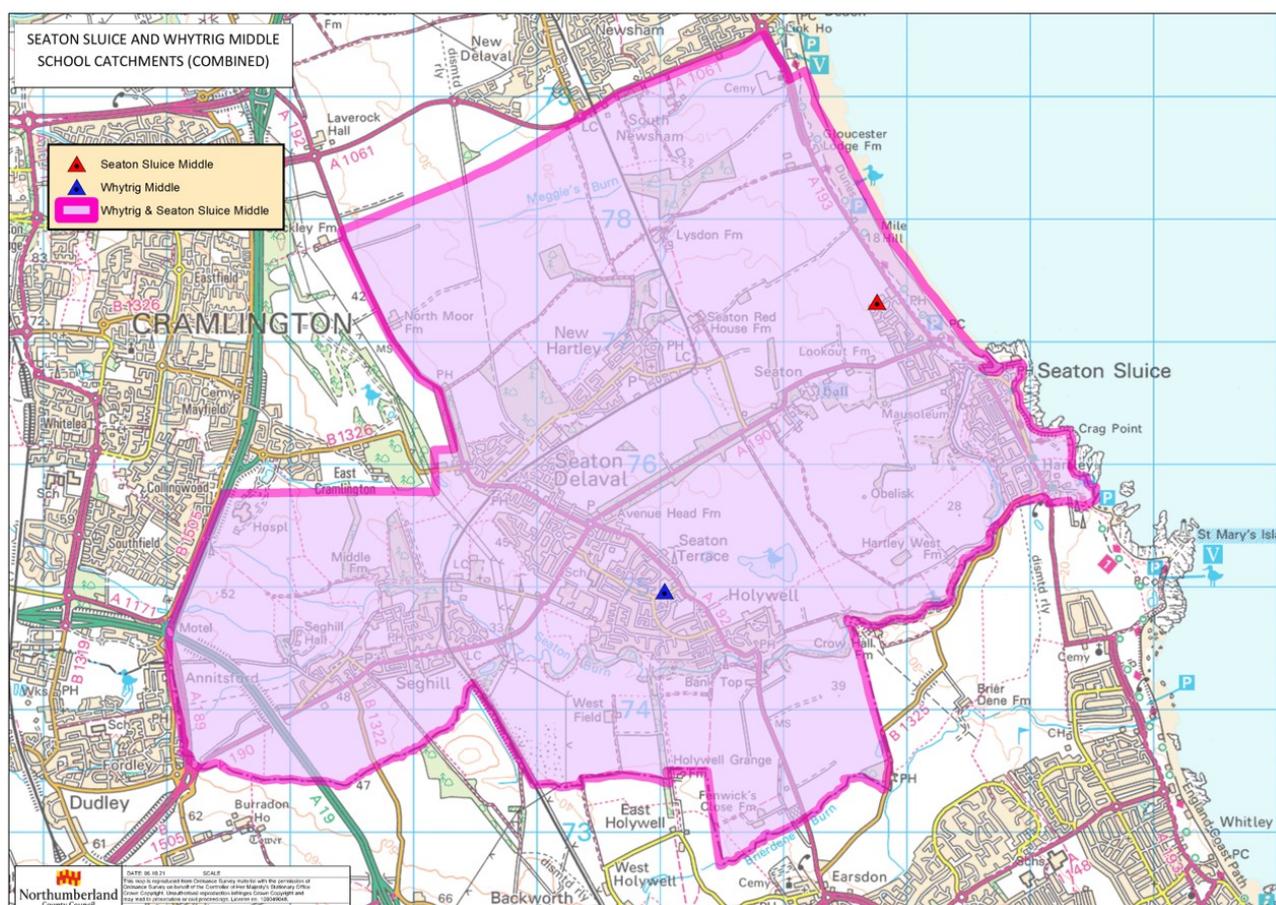
Alongside this consultation, an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) is being carried out to assess what impact the proposed changes could have on identified groups; this will include the impact of the proposal on relevant students on roll in Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools, and Astley High School. Other groups may include staff, parents/carers and members of the local community in Seaton Valley. This EIA will also be provided to the Council's Cabinet along with the results of the consultation.

What would happen to Admissions and Catchment areas?

The amalgamation of the two middle schools is not proposed to happen until September 2024, but the decision on whether to approve the amalgamation will be made in March 2022. Therefore, should approval for the amalgamation be given, students would continue to join either Seaton Sluice Middle or Whytrig Middle in Year 5 on their current sites in September 2022 and September 2023, according to parental preference and the Council's admissions policy.

Students joining the Seaton Valley Federation in September 2024 would become the first Year 5 to join the amalgamated middle school. Students already on roll in Years 5, 6 and 7 in Seaton Sluice Middle in August 2024 would transfer to the roll of Whytrig (or as known by its new name) unless parents make a decision to enrol their child at another school.

With regard to catchment areas, should the two middles amalgamate, their catchment areas would be combined to form one large middle phase catchment area, which would mirror the current catchment area of Astley High School. The map below shows the proposed amalgamated catchment area.



What is the proposed timeline of the amalgamation?

If the proposed amalgamation of the two middle schools is approved, the timeline for implementation would be as follows;

31 August 2024

- Seaton Sluice Middle School would close technically.

1 September 2024

- Whytrig Middle School (or under its new name) would increase its Planned Admission number to 150 places and welcome the new Year 5;
- Students on roll in Seaton Sluice Middle in August 2024 in Years 5, 6 and 7 would transfer to the amalgamated school as Years 6,7 and 8;
- Students on roll in Year 8 in Seaton Sluice Middle and Whytrig Middle in August 2024 would transfer to Year 9 in Astley High School as usual.

What impact would there be on the plans for new buildings as a result of this proposal?

As previously stated, the Seaton Valley Federation identified that the benefits of the new buildings planned for Whytrig and Astley could also be shared with students of Seaton Sluice Middle if the two middle schools were amalgamated. If the proposal to amalgamate the two schools is approved, the additional space and facilities needed to accommodate students from Seaton Sluice middle would be reflected in the Outline Business Case (OBC) prepared as part of any project for new schools' buildings. The OBC would also need to be approved by the Council.

However, should the Council not approve the amalgamation of the two middle schools, this would not affect the provision of new buildings and facilities for Whytrig and Astley, except the OBC would return to the original plan for reprovision of buildings for those two schools only.

How would Special Educational Needs provision be affected by this proposal?

An additionally resourced provision (ARP) for students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs was constructed at the Astley High / Whytrig Middle School site in 2020. This provision is intended for any students

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in the local area who can benefit from it, but any students with these additional needs moving from the Seaton Sluice site would of course have the resource on hand with no need to travel off-site.

What would be the implications for Transport and Travel of additional students to the shared site?

Transport for eligible pupils is always arranged on an individual basis in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy.

Should Seaton Sluice Middle amalgamate with Whytrig Middle, some students may become eligible for Home to School Transport as a result of a longer journey to school that meets the distance criteria or where there is no safe walking route. The Council's Home to School Transport Policy is available on its website at [Northumberland County Council Home to School Transport Policy](#). As a result, there may be some financial implications for the Council's Home to School Transport budget should the amalgamation be approved.

With regard to there being more students on one shared site, it is possible that there would be an increase in traffic to the site as a result of lifts to school from parents. The Senior Leadership team of the Seaton Valley Federation have experience in managing traffic to the current shared site in Seaton Delaval and a plan to manage traffic at drop-off and pick-up times would be developed in conjunction with Council officers prior to the opening of the new buildings. However, as a federation there will already be in place Home to school travel plans which encourage walking and cycling to school initiatives.

What would happen to the current Seaton Sluice Middle School building if students and staff relocate to the shared site?

The Seaton Sluice Middle buildings and playing fields are owned by the County Council and should the school amalgamate, in the first instance it would be assessed whether the site could be used by the Council for education purposes.

However, as part of this consultation we are seeking your views on what other possible use could be made of the site, particularly in relation to community use.

Alternative Proposals

The Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation believe that significant benefits could be gained for all students in the federation if the two middle schools amalgamate. However, you may have an alternative suggestion for gaining these benefits that you would like the Council to consider - you can set out your alternative suggestion in the questionnaire at the end of this document.

How can I find out more about this proposal?

Meetings for staff of the Seaton Valley Federation and the Governing Body have been arranged during the consultation period as follows:

Governors only meeting – Wednesday 10 November 2021 at 5:30 p.m.

An invitation to a virtual meeting will be sent to Governors directly ahead of the meeting.

Staff and staff representatives only meeting:

- **Seaton Sluice Middle School – Monday 08 November 2021 at 4:00 p.m.**
- **Whytrig Middle and Astley High Schools – Wednesday 10 November 2021 at 4:00 p.m.**

An invitation to the appropriate virtual meeting will be sent directly to staff ahead of the meeting.

It is the aim of the Council to hold an event during the consultation period where parents/carers and members of the public would have the opportunity to speak to Council officers and the Seaton Valley Federation about this proposal. This event would need to be managed in line with COVID safety measures. When organised, parents and other stakeholders will be contacted directly and the event will be advertised on the Council's website with instructions on how you may attend in COVID safe conditions.

How can I submit my views about this proposal?

A six-week consultation (school weeks) on the proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle and Whytrig Middle Schools began on **Wednesday 13 October and ends at midnight on 1 December 2021.**

The Council and the Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation are keen to hear your views on the proposal, and also to learn if you have any alternative proposals that could bring the same benefits that have been identified in this document.

A link to a questionnaire is attached to the end of this document; please complete the electronic questionnaire if you can. However, if you or someone you know would prefer to

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send a hard copy, please request a printed form by contacting educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk stating that you require a printed survey form for the proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle and Whytrig Middle Schools consultation (13.10.21 – 01.12.21).

To return your completed form, please send to:

School Organisation and Resources Team
Children's Services,
County Hall
Morpeth
Northumberland
NE61 2EF

At the end of this consultation, all feedback received will be considered by the Council before deciding on whether or not to move to the next step, which is statutory consultation.

Thank you for participating in this consultation

The Consultation Response Form

The consultation response form below is a duplicate of the Citizen Space survey so you can think about the questions and your response before you log on [to complete the survey online here](#).

Consultation on the proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools

Overview

The Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation has asked Northumberland County Council to consult on a proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools on one site, together with Astley High School. We would like to hear your views on this proposal.

This consultation document sets out the reasons why the Governing Body believes this proposal would bring significant benefits to students. As a parent/carer, member of staff or a member of the community, you may feel you will want to understand what these proposals mean for young people, yourself and your community and therefore this consultation offers you the opportunity to have your say and to submit your views for consideration by the Council before any decisions on whether or not to make the changes are made.

Therefore, I hope that you will take this opportunity to respond to the consultation and I look forward to reading your comments.

Cath McEvoy-Carr

Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services

Northumberland County Council

Introduction

1 What is your name? (Optional)

2 What is your email address? (Optional)

If you enter your email address then you will automatically receive an acknowledgement email when you submit your response.

3 What is your role?

(Required)

Please select only one item

- Parent of a child at Seaton Sluice Middle School
- Parent of a child at Whytrig Middle School
- Governor of the Seaton Valley Federation of Schools
- Staff member in Seaton Sluice Middle School
- Staff member in Whytrig Middle School
- Resident / member of the community living in the area served by Seaton Sluice Middle School
- Resident / member of the community living in the area served by Whytrig Middle School
- Member of a Parish Council in the area served by Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools
- Other

4 If you answered 'other' to question 3 please provide details below

The consultation document referenced is this one.

5 Do you support the proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle and Whytrig Middle Schools on a shared site with Astley High School with effect from the target date of September 2024 in order to gain the benefits outlined by the Governing Body in the consultation document?

(Required)

Please select only one item

- Yes
- No

6 Please give the reasons for your answer

(Required)

7 If you have an alternative proposal to the amalgamation of the schools that you believe would achieve the same benefits, please outline it below providing as much detail as possible (or state none).

(Required)

8 Do you have any additional comments you wish the Council's Cabinet to consider, for instance do you have a proposal for the use of the current Seaton Sluice Middle building should the proposal to amalgamate the school be approved?

(Required)

Glossary

1. Roles, responsibilities and powers of the various organisations involved in school establishments.

The table below summarises roles/responsibilities and powers.

Organisation	Role / responsibility	Powers
Local Authority- Northumberland County Council.	Northumberland County Council must ensure that there are sufficient good school places for the parents and children who live in Northumberland. They must ensure sensible place planning. They must hold maintained schools to account for their educational and financial performance (but not academies).	The Local Authority can hold consultations. Elected members of the Council Cabinet are the decision-making body and can merge, close, or extend age ranges of maintained schools (but not academies). They cannot establish solely run academy trusts but can be stakeholders.
Regional Schools Commissioner / Department for Education	The RSC must broker the academy conversion of failing schools. They hold Academy trusts to account for both their financial and education performance.	The RSC has powers to instruct the Local Authority to close(discontinue)schools. The RSC is the decision-making body for any changes to Academies including closure or age range extensions.
Academy Trusts	Academy Trusts are accountable for the financial and educational performance of the academy schools within its trust.	Trusts can hold consultation on changes to age range, closure and growth and set up academies (with the permission of the RSC).
Diocese	The Diocese provides support and advice to its schools through consultation. They can hold consultations. They should be consulted and provide a strategic view on behalf of their schools. Hold its schools to account for their educational and financial performance.	The Diocese can provide capital investment for faith schools. They can support or oppose closures or changes. They can establish multi-academy trusts.

As Seaton Sluice Middle and Whytrig Middle Schools are **community schools**, the only involvement will be the Local Authority as no other organisation listed in the table above are involved in the school.

Ofsted Inspection

Seaton Sluice Middle School was inspected by Ofsted in January 2018 and was judged to be good. This was the first short inspection since the 2013 full inspection which judged the school as good too.

[A detailed list of the Ofsted reports can be viewed here.](#)

Whytrig Middle School was inspected by Ofsted in June 2018 and was judged to require improvement.

[A detailed list of the Ofsted reports can be viewed here.](#)

Consultation Register

Consultees
<p>Seaton Valley Federation (Seaton Sluice Middle, Whytrig Middle and Astley High Schools) affected by the proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Headteacher • Headteachers (3 schools) • Staff across the federation • Chair of Governors • All Governors • Parents and Students at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Seaton Sluice Middle School ○ Whytrig Middle School ○ Astley High School <p>Parents, staff and governors in feeder first schools that may be affected by the proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seaton Sluice First • Seaton Delaval First • New Hartley First • Seghill First • Holywell First
<p>Local Members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seghill With Seaton Delaval, Cllr Paul Scott • Hartley, Cllr David Ferguson • Holywell, Cllr Les Bowman
<p>Neighbouring LEA's</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newcastle • Gateshead • North Tyneside • South Tyneside • Sunderland • Durham • Middlesbrough • Cumbria • Stockton • Redcar/Cleveland • Hartlepool • Darlington

Diocesan representatives

- CE, Paul Rickeard
- RC, Deborah Fox

Parish/Town Councils

- Seaton Valley Council
 - Cllr Susan Dungworth (Chair)
 - Cllr David Ferguson
 - Cllr Jill Henderson
 - Cllr Les Bowman
 - Cllr Eva Coulson
 - Cllr Ann Stanners
 - Cllr Sue Bowman
 - Cllr Eve Chicken
 - Cllr Graham Eastwood

Local MP

- Ian Levy, MP

Unions

- NEU
- NASUWT
- Unison
- Voice
- ASCL
- ATL
- NAS/UWT
- NUT
- NAHT
- Unite the Union

Regional Schools Commissioner

- Darren Radestock

Department for Education

- Jean Jackson

Equality Impact Assessment

Equality Impact Assessment

To be completed for all key changes, decisions and proposals. Cite specific data and consultation evidence wherever possible. Further guidance is available at:

<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=3281>

Duties which need to be considered:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

PART 1 – Overview of the change, decision or proposal

1) Title of the change, decision or proposal:

Amalgamation of Seaton Sluice Middle School and Whytrig Middle School on a shared site with Astley High School in new buildings with effect from September 2024, necessitating the closure of Seaton Sluice Middle School.

2) Brief description of the change, decision or proposal:

Seaton Sluice Middle School forms part of the Seaton Valley Federation of schools, together with Whytrig Middle School and Astley Community High School. The federation has one Executive Headteacher supported by a head of school at each of the 3 schools, overseen by one Governing Body.

At the request of the Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation, the Council has carried out informal consultation on a proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle School with Whytrig Middle School relocate Atkinson House Special School from its current location in Seghill to a former school building in Ponteland with effect from September 2022. The rationale for the proposal as originally put forward by the Governing Body was that having seen the educational benefits of having Whytrig Middle and Astley High Schools on one site, by bringing together all students currently educated in the federation schools onto one site in the new buildings these benefits could be gained by all students.

Should Cabinet decide to approve the publication of a statutory proposal, this EIA would be updated in the light of feedback from such formal consultation.

3) If you judge that this proposal is **not** relevant to some protected characteristics, tick these below (and explain underneath how you have reached this judgement).

Disability Sex Age Race Religion Sexual orientation

~~People who have changed gender~~ Women who are pregnant or have babies
Employees who are married/in civil partnerships

4) The characteristics checked above are not relevant because:

In the medium to long-term, there is no reason to believe that the proposed statutory proposal would affect more positively or negatively than their peers any group of children, parents or staff defined by their religion, race or gender-reassignment status. Should the Council decide to implement the proposed statutory proposal at a future date, during the immediate process of transition, families would be invited to inform the Council that they are concerned about the impact that the change may have on the support networks for any individual children who may be at particular risk of harassment or discrimination. Reasonable adjustments would be made to support individual students where appropriate.

While the Governing Body has expressed that it wishes to keep the number of staff redundancies to a minimum, it is likely that there would be a need for some staff redundancies within the federation schools should this proposal be approved. Existing HR policies covering relocation of a place of work would apply to staff employed at any of the schools where appropriate. These are designed to ensure that the equalities duties of the Council and the schools are fully met. Reasonable adjustments would be made for disabled members of staff. The Council operates a guaranteed interview scheme for disabled members of staff.

PART 2 – Relevance to different Protected Characteristics

Answer these questions both in relation to people who use services and employees

Disability

Note: *“disabled people” includes people with physical, learning and sensory disabilities, people with a long-term illness, and people with mental health problems. You should consider potential impacts on all of these groups.*

5) What do you know about usage of the services affected by this change, decision or proposal by disabled people, about disabled people’s experiences of it, and about any current barriers to access?

There are 9 students on roll at Seaton Sluice Middle School and 14 students on roll at Whytrig Middle School who have been allocated an EHCP.

It is therefore expected that a number of students on roll at these schools will have EHCPs by the time the proposal is planned to be implemented in September 2024. Should the proposal be approved, individual transition plans would be developed to ensure that the impact of the relocation on this group of students is minimal and planned for effectively. Furthermore, there is an Additional Resources Provision (ARP) at Astley High School which would be beneficial to students with Special educational needs relocating from Seaton Sluice Middle School as it would be more easily accessible to them.

Any member of staff, or parent or a carer of a student at Seaton Sluice Middle School who has a disability would not be affected disproportionately by the proposal as any

reasonable adjustments or arrangements would be put in place at the new buildings as part of the design process.

6) Could disabled people be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal?

Refer to para. 5

7) Could the change, decision or proposal affect the ability of disabled people to participate in public life? (e.g. by affecting their ability to go to meetings, take up public appointments etc.)

No evidence has arisen during consultation that the implementation of the proposed statutory proposal would affect any current arrangements for disabled people to participate in public life. However, in relation to residents in the Seaton Sluice area in particular, should any impact in this regard come to light, ameliorating and proportionate measures would be investigated to address any negative impact.

8) Could the change, decision or proposal affect public attitudes towards disabled people? (e.g. by increasing or reducing their presence in the community).

No evidence has arisen during consultation to suggest that the implementation of the proposed statutory proposal would affect public attitudes to disabled people. However, should any impact in this regard come to light, ameliorating and proportionate measures would be investigated to address any negative impact.

9) Could the change, decision or proposal make it more or less likely that disabled people will be at risk of harassment or victimisation?

No evidence has arisen during consultation to suggest that the implementation of the proposed statutory proposal would affect public attitudes to disabled people. However, should any impact in this regard come to light, ameliorating and proportionate measures would be investigated to address any negative impact.

10) If there are risks that disabled people could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal, are there reasonable steps or adjustments that could be taken to reduce these risks?

The premise of the proposal as originally brought forward by the Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation was that educational outcomes for all students in their schools would improve. Therefore, it is envisaged there would be disproportionate advantage of the proposal to all students within the federation.

11) Are there opportunities to create *positive* impacts for disabled people linked to this change, decision or proposal?

Should this proposal be implemented, there would potentially be opportunities for positive impacts for disabled people within the design of the new buildings that are not currently in place in existing buildings.

Sex (Gender)

12) What do you know about usage of the services affected by this change, decision or proposal in relation to people of a certain gender, about their experiences of it, and about any current barriers to access?

Schools in the Seaton Valley Federation are co-educational.

13) Could people of a certain gender be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal?

No evidence has arisen during consultation to suggest that either boys or girls would be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the proposal. However, should this proposal be approved to go to statutory consultation, this EIA would be updated with any evidence where it suggested that there could be any gender based disproportionate advantage or disadvantage.

14) Could the change, decision or proposal affect the ability of people of a certain gender to participate in public life? (e.g. by affecting their ability to go to meetings, take up public appointments etc.)

There is currently no evidence from consultation to suggest that the ability of people of a certain gender to participate in public life would be affected by the implementation of the statutory proposal. However, ameliorating actions stated in para. 5 would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

15) Could the change, decision or proposal affect public attitudes towards people of a certain gender (e.g. by increasing or reducing their presence in the community)

To date, there has been no evidence to suggest that public attitudes to people with people of a certain gender. However, ameliorating actions would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

16) Could the change, decision or proposal make it more or less likely that people of a certain gender will be at risk of harassment or victimisation?

Should the statutory proposal be implemented, the risk of harassment or victimisation of people of a certain gender, such as bullying, would be monitored. Should evidence be identified that risk of harassment had increased, relevant actions stated would be undertaken to address the reasons for harassment or victimisation, including awareness programmes.

17) If there are risks that people of a certain gender could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal, are there reasonable steps or adjustments that could be taken to reduce these risks?

No evidence has so far been identified to suggest that people of a certain gender could be disproportionately disadvantaged through the implementation of the proposal. However, ameliorating actions would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

18) Are there opportunities to create *positive* impacts for people with different sexual orientations linked to this change, decision or proposal?

While none have been so far identified, any opportunities to create positive impacts for people with different genders.

Age

19) What do you know about usage of the services affected by this change, decision or proposal by people of different age groups, about their experiences of it, and about any current barriers to access?

Seaton Sluice Middle School and Whytrig Middle School provide education to young people between the ages of 9 and 13, while Astley High School provides education to young people between the ages of 13 and 18. It is this group of young people who would be most affected by the proposal should it be implemented from September 2024, but predominantly those young people in the middle school phase would be most impacted.

Staff at the schools are employed equitably in accordance with the relevant school and council's employment policies. While the Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation envisages there would be a need for some staff redundancies, they are keen to keep this to an absolute minimum. All appropriate HR processes and procedures would be adhered to throughout any staff consultation and redundancy process in line with NCC policies.

20) Could people of different age groups be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal?

As stated above, all students on roll in Seaton Valley Federation school would be impacted by the proposal. While the premise of the proposal is that students would be advantaged educationally, there may be other impacts such as longer journeys to school that could be seen as disadvantageous to some students. However, no journeys to school of students living within the Seaton Valley greater catchment area would exceed DfE recommended journey times.

21) Could the change, decision or proposal affect the ability of people of different age groups to participate in public life? (e.g. by affecting their ability to go to meetings, take up public appointments etc.)

There is no evidence to suggest from informal consultation that the proposed statutory proposal would have any effect on the ability of different age groups to participate in public life.

22) Could the change, decision or proposal affect public attitudes towards people of different age groups? (e.g. by increasing or reducing their presence in the community)

There is no evidence to suggest from informal consultation that the proposed statutory proposal would affect public attitudes to different age groups.

24) If there are risks that people of different age groups could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal, are there reasonable steps or adjustments that could be taken to reduce these risks?

Should the proposal be approved to go to statutory consultation and evidence come to light that there are risks that people of different age groups could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the proposal, this EIA would be updated and reasonable steps approved to be implemented to address such risk.

25) Are there opportunities to create *positive* impacts for people of different age groups linked to this change, decision or proposal?

The premise of the proposal is to create a positive impact for all students on roll in schools in the Seaton Valley Federation in relation to improved educational outcomes.

Pregnancy and Maternity

Note: the law covers pregnant women or those who have given birth within the last 26 weeks, and those who are breast feeding.

26) What do you know about usage of the services affected by this change, decision or proposal by pregnant women and those who have children under 26 weeks, about their experiences of it, and about any current barriers to access?

There is no evidence to suggest that the proposal would create any barriers to students accessing at the reprovided school as all students eligible for Home to School Transport would receive it.

In addition, any parent of a student in a school in the federation who may be pregnant or who has other children under 26 weeks old would not be disadvantaged as the relocation of students from Seaton Sluice is likely to mean that they would be eligible for transport, while students living in New Hartley or Seghill would either be deemed to have a safe walking route to school, or if not would be eligible for transport.

Any staff of schools in the federation who may be pregnant would have the same rights extended to them at the proposed site as at the current school site.

27) Could pregnant women and those with children under 26 weeks be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal?

No for the reasons set out in para.26.

28) Could the change, decision or proposal affect the ability of pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks participate in public life? (e.g. by affecting their ability to go to meetings, take up public appointments etc.)

No for the reasons set out in para.26.

29) Could the change, decision or proposal affect public attitudes towards pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks? (e.g. by increasing or reducing their presence in the community)

There is no evidence to suggest that the statutory proposal would have any effect on public attitudes to this protected group under the proposals.

30) Could the change, decision or proposal make it more or less likely that pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks will be at risk of harassment or victimisation?

No evidence has arisen during consultation to suggest that the statutory proposal would make it more or less likely that this protected group would be at risk of harassment or victimisation under the proposals.

31) If there are risks that pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal, are there reasonable steps or adjustments that could be taken to reduce these risks?

No evidence has been identified during the consultation period that would suggest that the protected group could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the implementation of the statutory proposal for the reasons set out above.

However, if a decision is made to take the next steps towards implementation of the statutory proposal, and any disproportionate disadvantages are identified during the subsequent phases of consultation and implementation, these would be reviewed and solutions to remove such disadvantages would be sought.

32) Are there opportunities to create *positive* impacts for pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks linked to this change, decision or proposal?

See para. 26.

Sexual Orientation

Note: The Act protects bisexual, gay, heterosexual and lesbian people.

33) What do you know about usage of the services affected by this change, decision or proposal by people with different sexual orientations, about their experiences of it, and about any current barriers to access?

There is currently no evidence to suggest that any student on roll in a school in the Seaton Valley Federation or a member of staff who identifies as LGBT would be disproportionately impacted positively or negatively should approval be given to implement the proposal.

However, should any pupil or member of staff who identifies with this group be identified as requiring support, the authority would encourage staff of schools in the federation to use the Stonewall Education champion's resources and to increase awareness of any potential issues such as increased risk of bullying.

Should a member of staff identifying as LGBT in a school in the Seaton Valley Federation feel that their support networks have been disrupted, staff would be made aware of the support available through the Council's LGBT staff group and managers will be made aware of the guide to supporting LGBT staff on the Council Equality and Diversity webpage. HR policies aim to promote equality and inclusion.

34) Could people with different sexual orientations be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal?

There is currently no evidence from informal consultation to suggest that different sexual orientations would be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the implementation of the statutory proposal. However, ameliorating actions stated in para. 33 would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

35) Could the change, decision or proposal affect the ability of people with different sexual orientations to participate in public life? (e.g. by affecting their ability to go to meetings, take up public appointments etc.)

There is currently no evidence from consultation to suggest that the ability of people with different sexual orientations to participate in public life would be affected by the implementation of the statutory proposal. However, ameliorating actions stated in para. 33 would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

36) Could the change, decision or proposal affect public attitudes towards people with different sexual orientations? (e.g. by increasing or reducing their presence in the community)

To date, there has been no evidence to suggest that public attitudes to people with different sexual orientations. However, ameliorating actions stated in para. 33 would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

37) Could the change, decision or proposal make it more or less likely that people with different sexual orientations will be at risk of harassment or victimisation?

Should the proposal be implemented, the risk of harassment or victimisation of people with different sexual orientations would be monitored. Should evidence be identified that risk of harassment had increased, the relevant actions stated in para. 33 would be implemented.

There is currently no evidence to suggest that any member of the public, pupil in one of the adjacent education settings, parent of a pupil in one of the adjacent education settings or member of staff at one of the adjacent education settings who identifies as LGBT would be more or less likely to be at risk of harassment or victimisation. Should the approval be given to implement the proposal. However, should any of this group of people who identifies within this protected group be identified as at risk as a result of the implementation of this proposal, the authority would encourage the staff of schools in the Seaton Valley Federation to use the Stonewall Education champion's resources and to increase awareness of any potential issues such as increased risk of bullying

38) If there are risks that people with different sexual orientations could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal, are there reasonable steps or adjustments that could be taken to reduce these risks?

No evidence has so far been identified to suggest that people with different sexual orientations could be disproportionately disadvantaged through the implementation of the statutory proposal. However, ameliorating actions stated in para. 33 would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

39) Are there opportunities to create *positive* impacts for people with different sexual orientations linked to this change, decision or proposal?

While none have been so far identified, any opportunities to create positive impacts for people with different sexual orientations would be implemented, possibly through the implementation of the actions set out in para. 33.

Human Rights

40) Could the change, decision or proposal impact on human rights? (e.g. the right to respect for private and family life, the right to a fair hearing and the right to education)

While there is no specific evidence to suggest that the implementation of the proposal would impact positively on human rights, the rationale for this proposal as originally consulted on is to provide improved educational outcomes for all students on roll in schools in the Seaton Valley Federation with a view to improving the life chances of the students.

PART 3 - Course of Action

Based on a consideration of all the potential impacts, indicate one of the following as an overall summary of the outcome of this assessment:

X	The equality analysis has not identified any potential for discrimination or adverse impact and all opportunities to promote equality have been taken.
	The equality analysis has identified risks or opportunities to promote better equality; the change, decision or proposal would be adjusted to avoid risks and ensure that opportunities are taken should they be required.
	The equality analysis has identified risks to equality which will not be eliminated, and/or opportunities to promote better equality which will not be taken. Acceptance of these is reasonable and proportionate, given the objectives of the change, decision or proposal, and its overall financial and policy context.
	The equality analysis shows that the change, decision or proposal would lead to actual or potential unlawful discrimination, or would conflict with the Council's positive duties to an extent which is disproportionate to its objectives. It should not be adopted in its current form.

41) Explain how you have reached the judgement ticked above, and summarise any steps which will be taken to reduce negative or enhance positive impacts on equality.

From the initial analysis of the possible negative or positive impacts of the proposal on the groups with protected characteristics, the premise of the proposal as originally consulted on suggests that students on roll at schools in the Seaton Valley Federation would be disproportionately advantaged. Should a decision be made by the Council's Cabinet to take move to the formal statutory process, any evidence arising from the statutory consultation that suggests that there could be possible negative impacts, identified risks would be analysed to establish whether or not there were certain risks to any or all of those groups. Steps to reduce negative impacts or enhance positive impacts would then be defined.

PART 4 - Ongoing Monitoring

42) What are your plans to monitor the actual impact of the implementation of the change, decision or proposal on equality of opportunity? (include action points and timescales)

This EIA has assessed in the light of feedback from the informal consultation period. Should the proposals be approved and the process move to the publication of statutory proposals, the EIA would be further updated at the end of the statutory period. Appropriate action would be identified in the light of the consultation and where necessary, an action plan with timescales developed.

PART 5 - Authorisation

Name of Head of Service and Date Approved

Once completed, send your full EIA to: irene.fisher@northumberland.gov.uk. A summary will then be generated corporately and published to the Council's website.