



Northumberland County Council

Notes of Meeting

Meeting Name: Atkinson House Consultation Governor's Meeting

Meeting Location: Online Teams meeting

Date & Time: 4 November 2021 at 4:00 – 5:45 p.m.

Notes By: Jacqui Pearson

Present: Initials

NCC

Sue Aviston

SA

Lorraine Fife

LF

Jacqui Pearson

JP

Atkinson House

Special School

Paul Sampson

PS

Little Tinkers Nursery

Georgina Lester

GL

Apologies: None

No.	Matter
1	<p>Introductions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● As noted above● NCC Officers expanded on their roles for the benefit of the GL as follows:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- SA – Head of School Organisation and Resources for the LA (Local Authority), which is really everything except School Improvement and is also GA's line manager in her School Meals Manager role.- LF – School Place Planning and Organisation Manager, which involves managing the consultation process, gathering feedback, analyses and presenting to cabinet for a decision.- PS Headteacher of Atkinson House
2	<p>Scene setting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">€ SA explained that we are following informal consultation€ The rationale to the consultation was set out in the consultation document which has been circulated to stakeholders. This highlighted the increase in demand for SEMH and ASD. There has been an increase through Primary phase, and we now need to grow the Secondary sector.€ SA explained that Atkinson House Special School is the only specialist provision in Northumberland for SEMH and ASD.€ There is additional provision being created at Blyth, which is a DfE project

	<p>and has been delayed by a year on the construction element due to supply chain issues. The LA is unable to open a school now due to regulation changes, hence Blyth is a Free School.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> € So, to address the shortfall, the proposal is to relocate Atkinson House Special School to grow capacity and meet the needs of pupils in the West of the County. Hexham Priory the only other special school in the west is for moderate to severe learning difficulties so would not be suitable for SEMH. € As this is informal consultation, the LA identifies the problem, which is the need to increase capacity and we are open to suggestions and ask people to respond to the questions in the document. € Usually, we would run public events and have these conversations face to face but due to Covid-19 and the increase in numbers this has not been possible. Our Director of Public Health has advised against such gatherings, we have undertaken risk assessments on venues but concluded that we cannot 100% guarantee the safeguarding of individuals – staff or public. Due to the lack of safeguarding measures, e.g. face masks not being mandatory anymore we are holding virtual meetings like this with directly impacted stakeholders. € We have met with Ponteland Town Council several times, the local school and Pele Trust and now with you, Little Tinklers. € The Headteacher added that GL will have questions about Atkinson House Special school and of the LA for clarity and that is what we will answer this afternoon.
3	<p>Questions - safeguarding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> € GL mentioned she was honoured being the only invitee to the meeting and would like to highlight her significant concerns. GL is teacher trained herself and understands the need for the provision whilst looking after the welfare of her children and having senior students on a primary school site. € The nursery has low level fencing and security. € Primary and SEN provisions are very different. € The age, security, safeguarding, child protection (or the compromise of this), the entrance to the site and security of all pupils are a concern. <p>€ The Headteacher replied to describe the current set up of the school and how it is envisaged for the former Richard Coates Middle School site to operate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If we look at the model of the Ponteland High School with the leisure centre, there are safeguarding concerns of the primary, secondary and members of the public being co-located. Atkinson House Special School is therefore no different. - All students require an EHCP to be in Atkinson House Special School, it is not a secure unit, students are all from mainstream schools. - Students suffer from anxiety – ASD and Autism, ADHD which is medicated. They have no learning needs; their issues are identity and attachment. In the right environment they are confident. - There is a myth that Atkinson House Special School is a ‘naughty boys’ school’, this is not the case at all. There is a myth that Atkinson House Special School is a secure unit – this is not Atkinson House Special School. - Every child has a therapeutic profile – we understand their needs – it can be speech and language, anxiety, social by not being able to maintain friends but they can study. - We have four main groups: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nurture – like a primary school, 6-9 in class size and these students need attachment and support so stay in the same class for all subjects with support staff. From experience, the Headteacher has seen more fights in a

mainstream secondary school as a Headteacher than he has at Atkinson House Special School.

2. Vocational class – PE, Construction interests as examples for this group
 3. Mainstream
 4. Academic – 1 pupil last year left with 6 GCSEs of grades 4 and 5.
 - We are about attainment not restraining.
 - Students have learning gaps, and this can be from being with LSAs or Exclusions.
 - We are full at 80 students and currently have 71 on roll. This is our normal growth pattern towards Christmas where we got to 83 on roll last year.
 - Some students have a bespoke programme including where we teach in the community; we have additional providers on roll and there is a hybrid model.
- Taxis arrive on site for all students. Currently there are 18 taxis and we discussed this with Ponteland Town Council where it was suggested that students arrive using the Morpeth entrance to the site rather than Thornhill Road via the Blackbird pub and it was agreed this sounded a good option to look at and inform those taxi companies who have the transport contract.
 - Taxis will arrive at the former staff car park entrance and drop off around the turning circle. This is the entrance on the opposite side of the building to the nursery.
 - There is one student who leaves home at 7.22 a.m. to come to Atkinson House Special School. Taxis tend to arrive between 8:35 and 8:55 a.m. for an advised 8:45 a.m. arrival depending on the travel route, so it is a natural staggered arrival.
 - We offer a free breakfast on site, and some go straight to their classrooms (if they prefer smaller social sized groups to be around) while some eat in the canteen.
 - We offer onsite activities from 8:30 e.g. gym.
 - We can talk start times and pinch points to avoid conflict.
 - We have no parents dropping off and we have no buses accessing site.
- We would anticipate increasing numbers by 20 students to 100 on roll. The school was built for 500 pupils, so this is well under the capacity of the school due to our smaller class sizes. The additional 20 students would equate to approx a total of 23 taxis.
 - Collection is on site and then leave to the North towards Morpeth to alleviate traffic congestion.
- GL asked the percentage of students excluded from mainstream school.
 - The Headteacher replied that most could be classed in this category until the point they were identified as needing a COSA. If students came from Special School, it is less likely that they would be classed as excluded as they would have a COSA. Those who do not have a COSA and fall through the net would be identified as disruptive, or naughty but they are being excluded for needing support and not receiving what they need. It is as though exclusion is the start of the identification process of their support requirements.
 - SA tried to set a Northumberland context. Exclusions became part of SA's team remit about 2-3 years ago when there were 200 exclusions per year. Systems have been developed, staff and resources have been developed and there were 50 last year. This has bucked the regional and national trend. The system lets the children down.
 - GL raised students become excluded as they demonstrate inconsistently inappropriate behaviour whether that be violent or sexual.....
 - The Headteacher counteracted that every school has challenges.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The number of excluded pupils is unknown, but the Headteacher will find the number and confirm. - Some students demonstrate poor behaviour due to the environment and the culture being wrong, e.g. needing a class of 6 students rather than 30. - Exclusion numbers for the academic year as of today is 6 (fixed term not permanent) in comparison to Ponteland High, which has 1. There are figures of 64 and 70 in other Special Schools. - There are no exclusions associated with sexual behaviour, it is verbal abuse, use of mobile phones (but not bullying). - Students conflict in anxiety. They have a key worker, so it is more therapeutic and supportive. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● GL raised that she is aware that you walk into a Secondary School and can be told to f*** off. As Atkinson House Special School is right at the nursery front door, GL does not want nursery children to hear this. - The Headteacher confirmed the awareness of the school and the set up. - Today there were 57 students in school and 27 staff. Due to the ratio of staff to pupils, staff can see the triggers for each student. The environment needs to be safe and secure. - Occasionally there are 6 students who can leave the site (not all together and not every day) who go to the shop and then return to school. The school is addressing the need of a tuck shop on site to help stop this. They don't roam the community or vandalise the community. - The Headteacher highlighted that he has received emails from the Seghill community to say that they will be disappointed to see the school leave Seghill – the school is involved in community garden work. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● GL raised students will have mobiles and there is a concern they walk past the nursery gardens to exit the site and being unattended, they could take photos of the nursery children. Students can display adverse behaviour, and some leave the site past the Primary School site and as a minimum this risk needs to be mitigated. - The Headteacher identified that when he has been on a site visit, he has seen members of the public have access to the site, so this cannot be brought back to just Atkinson House Special School students. - The Headteacher will respond to comments and apply risk assessments to reduce risks. - Some pupils wear ear defenders to reduce noise levels and don't leave the classroom at all. There is a full spectrum of needs at Atkinson House Special School. - We look at the students' needs and work together to address these.
4	<p>Transport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Transport is a concern. Nursery pupils arrive from 7:30 and depart up to 18:30 hours. ● The peak times for congestion are 9:00 a.m. drop off and then 3:00 p.m pick up ● Double yellow lines on Thornhill Road have caused more chaos and is dangerous. ● Across the whole site, there are probably 70% of pupils walking in and out. This is a huge footfall. There is a shared narrow driveway, and you turn off right for the nursery and straight on for what Atkinson House Special School would be. - The Headteacher and SA identified that the traffic flow will be to the other side of the school where the taxis come in – e.g. former staff car park on the left-hand side of the school and the right hand-side of the school (nearest to

	<p>the nursery) will be staff car parking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SA screen shared a design concept which is being worked up to show the 'planned' entrance and GL acknowledged this design as acceptable having the student entrance away from the nursery side. - Access near the nursery will be staff and visitors. - There was a discussion around the secure line to safeguard all pupils, which is expected to be 2.4m minimum fence. - The external space will address students' individual needs and activities are available in school. - The Headteacher mentioned that the Richard Coates Primary School Headteacher (Heather Cape (HC)) had raised concerns about PE lessons, lack of available space etc. The Headteacher is a PE teacher by trade and understands the difference and thoughts of mainstream school. Atkinson House Special School class size would be 6 students. Now students have a gym, sports hall, they go swimming and climbing as well as going on the minibus to do mountain biking. They are used to these facilities and provisions. - HC discussed shared facilities and sports day and how these could work. - It would be the same if the nursery had an event – look at car park sharing and work together. The nursery caters for 45 children per day.
5	<p>Emergency containment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GL asked about emergency containment as it could be an occasional risk. There is a duty of care to students in particular and if there is a risk to the nursery this would be an open discussion. - The Headteacher confirmed that he works within professional boundaries and GDPR regulation, but he would make sure it all works well. The Headteacher did reiterate too that this is a two-way street so if the nursery had parental concerns of violence for example, he would be told to further increase safeguarding of his students. • GL revisited if a student had sexual predatory behaviour, would additional support and monitoring be put in place? GL doesn't want children to hear f*** off. - The Headteacher identified that he understands this, and students receive an EHCP, staff work through the EHCP to identify the school can meet needs. The Headteacher highlighted that he must protect his students too, in terms of additional students coming into the school. These students are vulnerable so no sexual predator would enter the school. A risk assessment is done on every individual student. The type of student being described would be in a smaller setting - The Headteacher re-iterated that he must protect his vulnerable students, and everyone is risk assessed. • GL questioned if the Headteacher had the right to refuse a student if he felt the school was not suitable. - SA confirmed that Atkinson House Special School, is a special school, not an alternative provision. If a student does not have an EHCP, they are not even considered for Atkinson House Special School. - SA confirmed permanently excluded students do not attend Northumberland schools. - The Headteacher confirmed Atkinson House is a therapeutic centre to meet needs, not a last chance saloon. - Students come from for example The Dales School or a primary school if there has been early identification.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some of the 80 students (8) go to an alternative provider as Atkinson House Special School is too big for them.
6	<p>Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Headteacher identified that people don't like change, the school has an inaccurate reputation and a stigma attached to this that the school needs to amend. ● There will be an additional 20 students to current role, some additional cars. ● If the move is approved, we will set up the transport. ● Building work will look at the single driveway access / control ● The Headteacher confirmed that he will work together with his neighbours if the school moves and look at the traffic issue. ● GL re-iterated that the yellow lines have exacerbated the situation. ● SA confirmed the project will look at the highway concerns and see if anything can be addressed within the project. ● This is informal consultation until 1 December 2021 and then LF will analyse the data, write a report and this will go to Elected Members to confirm if they want to approve statutory consultation which will be a further 4 weeks. ● This gives us all time to work together. ● LF asked if GL had submitted a response and if she wishes to revise it following this meeting. GL confirmed she will review her response, but her objection still stands as it is a primary site. ● GL confirmed that her funding is as a private venture, not Government funded so she cannot have parents leaving her nursery. This was understood by the group. ● SA thanked GL for her time and hopefully some of her fears have been alleviated.