

Atkinson House School



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Head Teacher: Paul Sampson **Chair of Governors:** David Harrison

1st December 2021

Dear Audrey and Sue,

The Governing Body met again on Thursday 25th November 2021. Paul provided an update on the various meetings he has attended recently regarding the proposed relocation of Atkinson House School to the former Richard Coates Middle School site in Ponteland.

This enabled Governors to clarify some of the points raised in my letter dated 15th September 2021 and to formulate a collective response to the informal consultation process on behalf of the Governing Body.

Firstly, let me thank you both for taking the time to meet with us during the past few weeks to outline the rationale for the proposal and enable everyone to seek clarification on additional points relating to this.

As we have stated previously, our primary responsibility and that of the Local Authority is to ensure that our current and future students are at the heart of this decision making process and will benefit from the opportunities that the relocation will bring to SEMH provision in Northumberland.

Governors unanimously agreed in principle to support the proposed transfer and the change to become a co-educational site.

We have made progress in some of the areas we identified as requiring clarification, however we would like to take this opportunity to place on record some of the key points discussed during Thursday's meeting and hope these can be addressed as part of the consultation process going forward.

1. We would like to reaffirm our commitment to working in partnership with the Local Authority to develop our SEMH offer within Northumberland and would hope you can share your long term vision for both the school and the County as soon as possible. In particular we are keen to understand :-
 - a. How Atkinson House School and the proposed move to Ponteland, together with the introduction of girls, meets this vision?
 - b. How do all special schools link together, including Atkinson House and the proposed Free School, whilst complementing each other to meet the Authority's vision?
2. Governors have already raised concerns regarding the delivery time of the project. Given the nature of our students and the anxiety the transfer to a new location will bring, what contingency measures can be put in place if the timetable is disrupted by circumstances beyond our control?
 - a. Will the proposed move to Ponteland be on a phased basis?
 - b. If it is a phased move, what is the vision for each phase? What will this incorporate and how much of the total cost is applied to each phase?
 - c. Will there be expected work ongoing after Phase One? When will this take place and how can we avoid disruption to the education of sensitive students?



- d. Will funding be provided to support the transition of the present students to Ponteland? Should consideration also be given to the preparation of any new students, including girls, in the summer term to ensure a smooth transition? Students with Special Educational Needs need preparation, time and space to alleviate any anxieties and fears.
 - e. Delays in projects can occur for various reasons. What contingency plans will support the school if the move cannot take place in September 2022?
This is important as we need to ensure disruption is minimised for staff and students.
3. Whilst we have been provided with some indicative data on potential student numbers going forward, we would request that this is specifically addressed with Paul to enable the appropriate planning to take place in advance of the relocation. You have also advised us that the opening of the new Free School in Blyth has been delayed, however, we are keen to understand what our relationship would be with this new provider and what criteria would be used to allocate students to either of the sites?
 - a. The timeline is very ambitious, not just to refurbish an existing building, but to equally create and staff an appropriate curriculum. When will the school have confirmed numbers for September 2022? This is really important because different age groups/needs/genders may require modified curriculums, teachers and support. To be ready for September 2022, the school will need to know projected student numbers just after February half term to ensure appointments are made for September 2022.
 - b. What will the Local Authority's admissions policy be regarding the proposed new Free School in South East Northumberland and the proposed Atkinson House School in the central area of Northumberland?
 - c. Relationships with our proposed community and neighbours is very important to us. We feel there is a real need for all stakeholders to co-operate to ensure everyone is comfortable and confident with arrangements surrounding:
 - i. Safeguarding
 - ii. Traffic congestion
 - iii. Noise pollution
 - iv. Secondary age students with Special Educational Needs: a greater awareness and understanding of the needs of the students attending.
4. Paul has provided, at your request, some initial proposals covering the upgrade of the Ponteland site. We would of course appreciate some clarity around the level of investment and the facilities being provided to ensure that we can further develop our SEMH provision and ensure that our students are able to follow the pathway most appropriate to their needs.
 - a. We are seeking a commitment to ensuring that we have the best possible facilities available for our students and that they get the same investment in their school and opportunities as other mainstream schools. For example, there are excellent Construction and Motor Vehicle Maintenance resources available at Atkinson House that we would wish to either replicate or continue to have access to as part of this change.
5. As a Governing Body we are acutely aware of the additional workload and capacity issues this proposal will place on the Senior Leadership Team. Our team is small and this additional workload placed on the Headteacher may impact on the current progress of the school, given the day to day challenges faced in a SEMH environment. As Governors, our role is to support the school on a day to day basis, whilst ensuring that staff wellbeing remains a priority and we would hope that we can call on your support to provide additional resources as appropriate.

We know we have made some key progress on the funding arrangements and appreciate there is still some further work to be undertaken to ensure we have a secure financial position moving forward, but would ask that you pass on our thanks to David Street for his ongoing involvement in this area.

During the course of our various meetings, it has become apparent that there may be further opportunities in developing both the Ponteland and Seghill sites in the short and medium term which may present both operational and financial benefits to the Local Authority. Whilst the purpose of this letter is to address the specific consultation requirements of the relocation, we have asked Paul to write to you separately on this matter.

It is our hope that the Governing Body and the Local Authority can work collaboratively on this project to ensure we deliver the best possible provision to meet the needs of our students.

Kind regards

David

David Harrison

Chair of the Governing Body