



"Nurturing Excellence"



Seaton Sluice First School

Granville Avenue
Seaton Sluice
Whitley Bay
Tyne and Wear
NE26 4BX

Tel: 0191 2371839

Email: admin@seatonsluicefirst.co.uk

Headteacher Mrs Amanda Bennett

To: Jacqui.Pearson@northumberland.gov.uk

25 November 2021

Dear Ms Pearson

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

I am writing to you, on behalf of the governing body of Seaton Sluice First School (SSFS), to formally express some opinion on the proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle School (SSMS) and Whytrig Middle School (WMS). I would be grateful if you could pass this letter to the Council's Cabinet for their consideration.

The online survey for the consultation does not allow a neutral or don't know view to be stated. It forces participants to respond positively or negatively when asked if they support the proposal. The counting and comparison of those responses is a pointless exercise. As they are forced responses, they will not, provide any reliable indication of positive or negative support for the proposal.

As a governing body, we do not believe that enough information, in terms of both quality and quantity, has been made available to enable an informed response to be made to either support or not support the proposal. This is why we are writing to you instead.

We express our disappointment that the governing body of Seaton Valley Federation (SVF) did not engage with any of the first schools that feed the middle schools of SVF in advance of publishing their proposal and commencing the consultation. Our disappointment is compounded further when on reaching out to the SVF chair of governors we received no reply.

The communication around this proposal has been poor and has certainly not been conducted in the spirit of partnership. If the SVF governing body had communicated proactively with the first schools within Seaton Valley, we are confident that a lot of the questions the parents, governors, and staff of SSFS have now could have been answered within the proposal.

The impression that we get within our community is that this poor communication has created an atmosphere of mistrust. This could have been prevented. It is important that this is resolved and that future communications are transparent and complete.

We would welcome the opportunity to engage with the SVF governing body to explore options collectively in order to benefit all the 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.

The majority of children who go to Seaton Sluice Middle School, Whytrig Middle School and Astley Community High School start their education at Seaton Valley first schools. If this proposal is approved, then we would request that Seaton Sluice First School's governing body and management team are fully involved in planning for it. The voice of the first schools within in Seaton Valley has been essentially ignored and reasonably, that cannot be allowed to continue.

We are concerned that the proposal focuses primarily on the building and facilities. There is very little discussion around the welfare, both physically and emotionally, of the children. This is equally, if not more, important.

There is minimal discussion around provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities, stating only that the proposed ARP will service all pupils. We would like to understand more.

Transition from middle school to high school is mentioned but there is no mention of the need for effective transition from first school to middle school. At Seaton Sluice First School the transition arrangements with Seaton Sluice Middle School are excellent, starting very early in pupils' school life. Throughout their time at SSFS, pupils walk from to SSMS for various reasons becoming familiar, over time, with the school. It is arguable that first to middle school transition can be trickier for children than middle to high school when the children are more mature.

A large proportion of pupils at SSFS live outside of the catchment area, predominately in Blyth. Many of those pupils' transition to Seaton Sluice Middle School. The proposal gives no consideration to the impact that the proposed amalgamation would have on those children, or to future pupils of Seaton Sluice First School who live outside of the catchment area.

Perhaps the most glaring omission from the proposal is the potential location for the merged school. It is unrealistic to expect anyone to be able to make an informed decision to support or not support the proposal when the location of the school is unknown.

To conclude, as a governing body, we would have liked 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.

We thank the Council's Cabinet for taking the time to review our comments.

Yours sincerely,

Elaine Erskine

(Vice Chair of governors on behalf of Seaton Sluice First School Governing Body)