



# Northumberland County Council

**Wellbeing and Community Health Services Group**  
Education and Skills Service

## Proposals for Amalgamation of Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools

Notes of the meeting held with Seaton Sluice Middle School Staff on  
Monday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2021 at 4.00 pm (virtual)

<b>Present:</b>
<p>Sue Aviston (SA) – Head of School Organisation and Resources            Lorraine Fife (LF) – School Place Planning and Organisation Manager            Emma Watson (EW) – HR Representative            Hannah Gregory (HG) – Trade Union Representative            Andrew Gibson (AG) – Trade Union Representative            Deborah Anderson (DA) – Project Support Officer            John Barnes (JB) – Executive Headteacher, Seaton Valley Federation            Members of Staff from Seaton Sluice Middle School</p>

		<b>Action</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b><u>Welcome and Introductions</u></b>	
	<p>JB welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that the meeting would be led by Sue Aviston from the local authority.</p> <p>The local authority is consulting, on behalf of the Seaton Valley Federation, and want colleagues to engage in the process. Agreed that SA would run through the presentation and asked for any questions to be saved for the end.</p> <p>SA and the team briefly introduced themselves.</p>	
<b>2.</b>	<b><u>Purpose of this meeting</u></b>	
	<p>SA outlined the purpose of this meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To discuss the proposal from the federated governing body to amalgamate Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools.</li> <li>• An opportunity to seek your views, as a staff body, of the proposals and there will be an opportunity for you to ask questions.</li> <li>• Notes, not verbatim, will be taken and these will be published as part of the outcomes to the consultation.</li> <li>• Encourage you to respond to the consultation. As this is an informal consultation you can submit more than one response (eg. as a parent, an individual staff member or provide a staff group response).</li> <li>• Noted that this consultation is not a referendum but about the strength of feeling and points raised as a staff body impacted by the proposals.</li> </ul>	

<b>3.</b>	<b><u>Rationale for the proposal to amalgamate the middle schools</u></b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently working on proposals to build new schools for Astley High and Whytrig Middle Schools.</li> <li>• In developing the outline business case the governing body saw an opportunity to bring the two middle schools together so that all students and staff could benefit from modern educational environments.</li> <li>• Other reasons and rationale set out in the letter from the governing body to the local authority outlined the following benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Improved transition from first to middle and middle to high;</li> <li>○ Consistent curriculum development across the federation;</li> <li>○ One system of CPD for all staff;</li> <li>○ Student support systems working more consistently and effectively;</li> <li>○ ARP provision benefiting pupils at Seaton Sluice the same as it does for pupils at Whytrig and Astley;</li> <li>○ Financial benefits arising from economies of scale.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<b>4.</b>	<b><u>What are the proposals?</u></b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In order to achieve the amalgamation of the two middle schools we would need to formally close one school, in this instance it would be Seaton Sluice Middle School, from 31<sup>st</sup> August 2024.</li> <li>• Whytrig Middle School would be expanded from 360 to 660 places, forming one middle school.</li> <li>• The rationale behind this is that local authorities are no longer able to open new schools. Any new school would need to be a Free School or an Academy. Therefore, one middle school would need to continue, and one would close.</li> <li>• However, do believe there will be a planned name change for the high school and the newly formed middle school if the proposal goes ahead.</li> <li>• There would also be an increase in the planned admission number from 90 to 165.</li> </ul>	
<b>5.</b>	<b><u>What are the implications of the proposals for staff in the Seaton Valley Federation?</u></b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A new staffing structure would need to be developed for the amalgamated middle school and this would be the governing body's responsibility.</li> <li>• Our HR team would assist with the development and roll out of this process to ensure it was fair and equitable.</li> <li>• Representatives from HR and Trade Unions are in attendance at this meeting but are available for colleagues to contact separately outside of this meeting if you have any queries or concerns. The local authority would encourage staff to do this.</li> </ul>	
<b>6.</b>	<b><u>Timeline for staff Consultation</u></b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governors, following advice from HR, would advertise the staffing structure and process of appointment at the end of the summer term 2023.</li> <li>• This would take into account the new middle school staffing structure as well as changes to the high school structure following co-location of the three schools.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During September to December 2023 the Executive Headteacher and governing body would consult on the proposed structure.</li> <li>• Between January and April 2024, the new proposed structure would be confirmed including any processes for selection, job filling and redundancy (if applicable).</li> <li>• If, following the selection process, there remained unfilled posts these would be advertised externally, probably from May 2024.</li> <li>• In September 2024 the new site would open, and the new structure would be implemented.</li> <li>• Therefore, there would be a year's work drafting the staffing structure, consulting on the structure, and making appointments into the structure.</li> </ul>	
<b>7.</b>	<b><u>What impact would the proposal have on Admission Arrangements?</u></b>	
	<p>The arrangements for admissions would be as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For admissions in September 2022 and September 2023 the arrangements would remain as they stand currently.</li> <li>• In September/October 2023 parents would apply for Whytrig Middle School based on its extended PAN. There would be no choice of middle school in the partnership for parents to choose.</li> <li>• In August 2024, Seaton Sluice Middle School would close.</li> <li>• In September 2024 the year 8 students on roll in Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools (in August 2024) would transfer to Astley High School as usual. Students in years 5, 6 and 7 would transfer to the Whytrig Middle School roll unless parents selected an alternative school.</li> <li>• The new year 5, in September 2024, would join the newly formed middle school.</li> </ul>	
<b>8.</b>	<b><u>What would be the impact on catchment areas?</u></b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SA shared the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A map showing the current catchment areas serving Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools.</li> <li>○ A map showing the amalgamated catchment area if the proposal was agreed.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The current catchment areas would combine and become one catchment area for the newly formed middle school. It would be the same footprint currently serving the high school.</li> </ul>	
<b>9.</b>	<b><u>What are the implications for buildings?</u></b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The local authority already has funding allocated for replacement schools for Astley High and Whytrig Middle Schools.</li> <li>• Should these proposals be approved, additional funding has been allocated. £37.2 million is in the Council's medium term financial plan to deliver the full scheme.</li> <li>• If the amalgamation didn't go ahead, we would revert back to the original plan for Astley High and Whytrig Middle Schools.</li> </ul>	
<b>10.</b>	<b><u>What are the implications for home to school transport?</u></b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eligibility for school transport is arranged in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current students at Seaton Sluice Middle School, who live in its catchment area, may become eligible for transport.</li> <li>• Cabinet will be presented with an analysis of costs as part of the consultation.</li> <li>• Out of catchment students, currently on roll at Seaton Sluice Middle, will unlikely be receiving school transport unless it is the nearest school.</li> <li>• A number of students who pass through Seaton Delaval (eg. students from Seghill) may have a shorter journey.</li> </ul>	
<b>11.</b>	<b><u>Next Steps</u></b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This consultation closes on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021.</li> <li>• As a staff group you might want to submit a joint response and/or respond as an individual.</li> <li>• Consultation feedback will go to the Council's Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (FACS) on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2022. This group don't have any decision-making powers but can make recommendations.</li> <li>• The report, and any recommendations from FACS, will be presented to Cabinet on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2022. Cabinet reviews the feedback, rationale of the proposals including costs and decides whether or not to move to a statutory consultation.</li> <li>• If statutory consultation is approved, it will go ahead for four weeks and a final decision will be made in March 2022.</li> <li>• If a decision is made not to go ahead with the proposal the process will cease in January 2022.</li> <li>• Alternatively, depending on the outcome of the consultation, Cabinet could request officers to go back out and consult on a different aspect.</li> <li>• The governing body have set out their reasons and rationale for this proposal. However, SA reminded colleagues that there was an opportunity, during this informal consultation stage, for members of staff to put forward alternative suggestions/options or ideas for consideration.</li> </ul>	
<b>12.</b>	<b><u>Comments from the Executive Headteacher</u></b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• JB advised that if the proposal to amalgamate the middles schools goes ahead the intention was to rename the middle and high schools and there would be a new uniform.</li> <li>• JB added that this was an opportunity to have a new school and facilities which would benefit all the pupils in the federation not just two-thirds of the pupils.</li> </ul>	
<b>13.</b>	<b><u>Questions from Staff Members</u></b>	
	<p><b>Q – Staff had been under the impression that both middle schools would be closing and a new middle school opened. Now understand the reasons why this can't happen. However, if Whytrig Middle Schools is the school that remains open are all staff from both schools in the same position regarding jobs/posts?</b></p> <p>Yes, that's correct. The staffing structure would be created then it would go out for consultation. There is no guarantee that Whytrig Middle School staff would be appointed. All posts within the consultation would be set up, then staff identified for either slot ins or competitive interview.</p>	

<p><b>Q - How has the local authority come to the decision that Seaton Sluice Middle School doesn't require a new build and our only opportunity for a new build is to do it this way?</b></p> <p>It is based on condition of the buildings and priority order. Astley currently has £14.8 million of backlog maintenance. However, Seaton Sluice Middle School is considerably further down the list and factoring in other priorities potentially wouldn't be identified for refurbishment/new build for a while.</p> <p><b>Q - Have there been any questions/comments from parents or the community that the school would like clarification on?</b></p> <p>Very few comments received from the community. Aware there is a Facebook page "Save Seaton Sluice Middle" but in terms of the parents or the community contacting the school there has not been anything raised.</p> <p><b>Q - A parent has asked a staff member if they would still be "small enough to care the way they do now"?</b></p> <p>The size of a school does not impact on the ethos and desire of staff to care. Can't see that amalgamating the middle schools would change this practise. We would continue to offer the best support we can.</p> <p>By amalgamating it gives us more facilities and opportunities to provide this care and support.</p> <p><b>Q - There is a lot of talk about us moving up to Elsdon Avenue. Has the idea of a brand-new site been written off?</b></p> <p>The local authority is currently working on the business case and as part of this work will be looking at alternative sites. Until discussions with third parties have been concluded the local authority is not in a position to share further details but will do so as soon as we can.</p> <p><b>Q – Will a public event be held?</b></p> <p>During consultations it is normal practice to hold a public event. However, due to the current pandemic and following advice have taken the decision not to proceed with a public event. We will however be providing additional information via the website and padlets.</p> <p>A set of frequently asked questions, which have been generated from responses received to the consultation, has also been produced and will be available on the website.</p> <p><b>Q - Can the presentation be shared with Trade Unions?</b></p> <p>Yes, the presentation will be shared with Trade Union representatives as well as being available on the County Council's website once the meetings with staff from Whytrig Middle and Astley High Schools have taken place.</p>	
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The meeting closed at 4.40 pm.