



# 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 Whytrig Middle and Astley High School Staff on  
Wednesday 10<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 Whytrig Middle School            Members of Staff from Astley High School</p>

		<b>Action</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b><u>Welcome and Introductions</u></b>	
	<p>JB welcomed everyone to the meeting and informed attendees that the meeting would be led by Sue Aviston on behalf of the local authority.</p> <p>SA briefing outlined her role and advised that she would run through the presentation, which was the same one used at the meeting with Seaton Sluice Middle School staff on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> November. There would also be a meeting held later this afternoon with governors seeking their views.</p> <p>Requested that any questions be saved until the end of the presentation.</p> <p>During the meeting SA would be supported by colleagues from NCC and the team briefly introduced themselves. There were also representatives from HR and trade unions present and were available to be contacted by individuals outside of this meeting.</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 put forward by the federated governing body to amalgamate Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools. Further details are outlined in the Cabinet report and can be shared with colleagues if required.</li> <li>An opportunity to seek your views as a staff body and for you to ask questions.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Notes, not verbatim, will be taken and these will be published as part of the consultation outcome and made public.</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>The Local authority is currently working on developing a business case for a new build at Astley High/Whytrig Middle Schools.</li> <li>As part of the process the governing body approached the local authority to request the inclusion of Seaton Sluice Middle School.</li> <li>Governing body outlined the following benefits if the middle schools were merged: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved transition (first to middle/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>Pilot 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>Due to the legal framework, local authorities are unable to open any new schools. Any new school would have to be a Free School or Academy.</li> <li>Therefore, to achieve an amalgamated middle school in Seaton Valley, one school would have to close.</li> <li>Under the current proposal Seaton Sluice Middle School would close on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2024 and Whytrig Middle School's capacity would be expanded from 360 to 660 places.</li> <li>The intention, if the proposal to amalgamated is approved, is that the merged middle school along with Astley High School would be given a new name and uniform.</li> <li>There would also need to be a consultation on the increased planned admission number for the middle school.</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>The governing body would be required to develop a new staffing structure for the amalgamated middle school.</li> <li>The HR team from NCC would assist the governing body in the development and roll out of the staffing structure. Ensuring that it is fair and equitable to all staff.</li> <li>It would follow agreed policies and practices involved in re-structure process and staff representatives (unions) will be consulted during the process.</li> </ul>	
<b>6.</b>	<b><u>Timeline for staff Consultation</u></b>	
	<p>Following discussions between the headteacher and HR a rough timeline has been developed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>End of summer term 2023 – staffing structure and appointment process for the merged middle advertised.</li> <li>September to December 2023 – Executive Headteacher and governing body would consult on the proposed structure.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>January to April 2024 – Proposed structure for September 2024 would be confirmed and processes for selection/job filling and redundancy (if required) would commence.</li> <li>May 2024 – Any posts not filled will be advertised externally.</li> <li>September 2024 – Amalgamated middle school on new or existing site opens with new staffing structure implemented.</li> </ul>	
<b>7.</b>	<b><u>What impact would the proposal have on Admission Arrangements?</u></b>	
	<p>The proposals would have the following impact on admissions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For Year 5 intakes in September 2022 and September 2023 there would be no changes to the arrangement procedure and admission into Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools would be as it is currently.</li> <li>For the Year 5 intake in September 2024, parents would only apply for Whytrig Middle School during September/October 2023. There would be no choice of middle school in the Seaton Valley federation.</li> <li>In September 2024 Seaton Sluice Middle School would close.</li> <li>Year 8 students in Seaton Sluice and Whytrig Middle Schools would transfer to Astley High School in September 2024 as usual.</li> <li>In September 2024 students from Years 5, 6 and 7 at Seaton Sluice Middle School would transfer into Years 6, 7 and 8 at Whytrig Middle School unless the parent selected another school.</li> <li>Year 5 in September 2024 would join the recently re-formed and expanded 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 reformed catchment areas would have 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>Already funding available in the Council's Medium Term Plan for replacement buildings for Whytrig Middle and Astley High Schools.</li> <li>Following request from the governing body funding was increased to £37.2 million to support the full development.</li> <li>If the proposal to amalgamate middle schools is approved the business case would be amended to expand the middle school provision to accommodate 660 places. This work is currently being done in parallel but separate to this consultation.</li> <li>If the proposal to amalgamate the middle schools is not approved the project would revert back to the original plans for Whytrig and Astley schools.</li> <li>The funding will not disappear as Astley High School has been judged to be in the worst condition with over £14.8 million of backlog maintenance work.</li> </ul>	

10.	<b><u>What are the implications for home to school transport?</u></b>	
	<p>LF advised that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School transport and eligibility is arranged in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy.</li> <li>• Some students, currently on roll at Seaton Sluice Middle School and who live within its catchment area, may become eligible for transport depending on where they live within the catchment.</li> <li>• May result in additional costs to the Council in respect of home to school transport but any implication will be presented to Cabinet as part of the consultation's outcomes.</li> <li>• Students on roll at Seaton Sluice Middle but who do not live within its catchment area are unlikely to be receiving home to school transport so will unlikely be impacted regarding eligibility.</li> </ul>	
11.	<b><u>Next Steps</u></b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation closes on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021.</li> <li>• Staff encouraged to submit responses to the consultation, both individually or collectively.</li> <li>• If anyone has an alternative suggestion or option, please submit them, or let us know.</li> <li>• Once the consultation has closed, we will analyse the feedback.</li> <li>• Report will be presented to the Family and Children's Scrutiny Committee (FACS) on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2022. FACS can't make any decisions but can make recommendations.</li> <li>• Report, and any recommendations by FACS, considered by Cabinet on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2022.</li> <li>• Cabinet may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Make a decision (or not) to move forward to formal "statutory" consultation. This process would take four weeks and a final decision would be made in March 2022.</li> <li>○ Decide not to proceed with the proposal therefore stopping the process.</li> <li>○ Request officers to consult on an alternative option/suggestion.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
12.	<b><u>Questions from Staff Members</u></b>	
	<p><b>Q – Has the new build of houses in New Hartley been taking into account.</b></p> <p>Yes they have.</p> <p>The local authority has just completed a re-write of its School Organisation Plan. The plan, available on the Council's website, sets out pupil growth across the authority.</p>	
13.	<b><u>Comments from Executive Headteacher</u></b>	
	<p>Reiterated that if the proposal to amalgamate the middle schools goes ahead the intention was to rename the middle and high schools and implement a new uniform for the schools.</p>	

	<p>Added that this proposal gave the federation the opportunity to include Seaton Sluice Middle Schools' pupils and staff in the benefits and opportunities that a new build would bring.</p> <p>In relation to potential restructures within the schools, JB is unable to tell staff any details at the moment but assured staff that any processes would be fair and consistent. All approaches would be open, honest, follow HR advice and be consulted upon.</p> <p>They are about to embark on a pupil survey within the federation, results of which would be passed onto the local authority.</p> <p>If staff have any comments or concerns, they can come and see JB at any time.</p>	
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The meeting closed at 4.36 pm.