

# Beaufront First School

## Response to HLT Consultation Survey

### 5. Proposal 1: Do you agree that HMS and QEHS should be amalgamated and expand to create an 11–18 Secondary School?

No.

### 6. If you wish, please give the reasons for the answer you have given above.

- 6.1 A detailed response to the “initial informal consultation” carried out in the summer term of 2017 was submitted on behalf of Beaufront First School. We do not consider that the questions that we raised in relation to that informal consultation have been addressed, particularly those in relation to HLT’s financial sustainability. We reiterate the concerns expressed in our response dated 19 July 2017.
- 6.2 We understand that the specific guidance on age range changes contained within the Department for Education Guidance states: “Where proposals are likely to have a significant impact on other local provision a full business case will usually be required to provide evidence that the education of children in the area, as a whole, will not be compromised. Where local provision is organised in three tiers and the aim is to move to two tier age range, the department expects schools to work together to ensure an appropriate co-ordinated implementation, and will only approve any individual proposal in that context.”
- 6.3 This consultation does not adequately take into account the educational and financial consequences that the proposed changes will have across the Hexham Partnership of schools. It is regrettable that this consultation has not been conducted in close conjunction with the wider consultation presently being carried out by Northumberland County Council.
- 6.4 We are concerned that closure of HMS and expansion of QEHS to create a secondary school will be detrimental to the excellent educational outcomes presently achieved by QEHS. Those excellent educational outcomes have their foundation in the Middle and First Schools of the Hexham Partnership. This proposal seeks to dismantle the structure of education in the Partnership but to do so without achieving consensus amongst the Partnership schools.
- 6.5 As such, this proposal:
- will be highly disruptive to the entire Hexham Partnership;
  - is not supported by any clear evidential basis to suggest that educational outcomes will be improved; yet
  - has the potential to be detrimental to the present excellent outcomes.
- 6.6 We do not believe that adequate consideration has been given to the pastoral consequences of this proposal, which envisages the creation of one of the largest secondary schools in the country in a location where primary education is delivered over a very wide area by many small rural schools. If a small rural first school becomes a primary school, it will still be a

small rural school and its pupils will face a quite extraordinary change at year 7. If the small rural first school remains as a first school, its pupils will have to find a place for years 5 and 6, and so face 2 changes within the space of 2 years. We do not believe either option can be in the best interests of our children, and will detract from rather than improve educational experience and outcomes.

- 6.7 The financial advantages of the proposal are not entirely clear and we do not know whether those suggested will prove to be the case with implementation of NFF.
- 6.8 In any event, Corbridge Middle School and St Joseph's Middle School have each expressed their clear intention to maintain their age range. Assuming parents continue to choose those schools (the feedback that we have obtained from parents both at Beaufront and more widely in the public meetings suggests that they will), HLT will lose years 5 and 6, without expansion of years 7 and 8. The supposed financial benefits of the proposal are, in the circumstances, somewhat tenuous.
- 6.9 We welcome HLT's supportive comments regarding small rural schools. We are confident that we are well-placed to continue to provide our children with an excellent educational and pastoral experience into years 5 and 6 should circumstances require us to do so. However, in order to do so, we (and other schools) would require significant capital investment. Thus, assuming this proposal does ameliorate HLT's financial problems (and we are not clear that it will), it creates financial issues for the entirety of the rest of the partnership, both in terms of income and in terms of capital investment. Whilst we appreciate that more pupils = more funding for small schools, more pupils also = more expenditure in terms of teaching costs. In the event that schools are obliged to merge (close) as a result of these proposals, there is an immediate loss of per school lump sum income within the partnership, which lump represents a significant factor in the income of small schools.
- 6.10 We are sure that HLT does want the best educational outcomes and experiences for children. However, we are not persuaded that such radical changes will achieve this. We emphasise that we are keen to work collaboratively with all schools in the Hexham Partnership in order to find a collectively sustainable solution. Whilst we regret that we do not think that your proposal is that solution, we urge you to discuss closer collaboration with the Partnership schools.

**7. Proposal 2: If a decision is taken by Northumberland County Council or the Department for Education to close Haydon Bridge High School, do you agree that QEHS should expand to provide places for children from the Haydon Bridge partnership from September 2019?**

No.

**8. If you wish, please give the reasons for the answer you have given above.**

- 8.1 This question seeks to pre-empt a decision about the future of Haydon Bridge High School which is raised in the Northumberland County Council consultation. The priority should be for a properly considered and constructive solution for Haydon Bridge High School, about which it is not appropriate to comment in the context of this consultation.

- 8.2 There are obvious and substantial practical difficulties in accommodating the children from HBHS within HMS and QEHS.
- 8.3 Ultimately, if after proper consultation, an appropriate solution cannot be found for HBHS and a decision is taken to close that school, then clearly HLT should provide places for children from HBHS.

**9. Alternative suggestions to meet HLT’s objectives of improving educational outcomes and experiences, financial sustainability and capital investment.**

- 9.1 We support appropriate capital investment in HLT by Northumberland County Council, notwithstanding HLT’s academy status.
- 9.2 Recent reports indicate that the future financial difficulties anticipated by HLT are far from unusual: a study by the EPI indicates that 26.1% of council run secondary schools are in deficit; and the Kreston UK analysis shows 55% of academies were in deficit before capital depreciation was taken into account. The vast majority of these schools are part of a 2 tier system: conversion to a 2 tier system does not provide an answer.
- 9.3 The way to improve educational outcomes and experiences (and to improve financial sustainability) is through stronger collaboration with partnership schools. The “collaboration hub” proposal mooted by Corbridge Middle School offers a framework to do so and we believe that can be developed further.
- 9.4 In the event of capital investment in HLT resulting in a new build (with or without the closure of HBHS), careful consideration ought to be given to a combined middle and high school with an age range of 9–18, whether as one school or 2 schools on one site. The former is the model that has been chosen by Gosforth Academy for its new school at Great Park. Gosforth is a successful MAT, running schools on a 3 tier system alongside the 2 tier system that otherwise prevails in Newcastle upon Tyne. We believe that this would offer significant advantages to children with additional needs: less able children in years 7, 8 and 9 would benefit from the expertise of teachers skilled also in primary education.
- 9.5 For the avoidance of doubt, this is the response of the full governing body.