

**Consultation on the future of South Shields School:
Response from Governing Body of the South Shields School**

1. Introduction

In order to meaningfully engage and respond to consultation on the future of South Shields School (**the School**), we would like to:

- 1.1 Contextualise the position of the School;
- 1.2 Highlight and demonstrate the improvements and culture currently at the School;
- 1.3 Outline alternative education opportunities in the Local Authority (LA);
- 1.4 Demonstrate the future viability of the School making reference to:
 - 1.4.1 Existing and projected student numbers; and
 - 1.4.2 Revised budgeting taking into account both non-staffing and staffing changes; and
- 1.5 Outline some of the implications of closing the school that would prejudice the surrounding community.

2. Context

- 2.1 South Shields School is a small secondary school with a high proportion of students from the least advantaged families.
- 2.2 The School has been through significant change in recent history and was formed from the merger of two schools, King George School and Brinkburn School in 2007. The merger was a very difficult process and the implementation plan behind the merger did not proceed smoothly, despite moving to a new building in 2011.
- 2.3 The changes resulted in strike action from the staff and a long period of unrest which has led to a considerable period of disrupted leadership culminating in poor student outcomes over a number of years.
- 2.4 The School is 70% pupil premium as well as being in the highest percentile for Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) and the lowest for English as an additional language (EAL), as our cohort is predominantly white British students at 98%. Recently data published by Schools North East, showing the relationship between Progress 8 scores and disadvantage, demonstrated that the School ranked second overall even when compared against schools considered more advantaged. In amplification of this Professor Stephen Gorard of Durham

University, who studied evidence on 1.8 million pupils, found that “The most important factor that determines school test and exam results is not the quality of teaching or leadership but who they teach, the proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged through poverty, family circumstances or special educational needs and most crucially the length of time they have been disadvantaged.” More information is available at:

<https://schoolsnortheastblog.wordpress.com/2018/10/16/progress-8-data-release-north-east/>

- 2.5 A significant proportion of our students have very complex home situations for whom the School provides wrap around care for both the students and often the families. The School accesses all available LA support for students and families but more often than not bolsters this support with in-house provision funded by the pupil premium strategy.
- 2.6 Over the past two years since the beginning of the current Headteacher’s appointment the School has invested in a team of counsellors through Place2Be who provide an invaluable resource 3 days per week for our students. Many of our students are affected by a limited understanding of social skills and suffer the implications of low self-esteem. The School has invested in training staff to support these students to reverse the impact of these factors through the pupil premium strategy. It has resulted in increased attendance and improved progress for these students. There has been a 22% improvement for a standard pass in combined maths and English in 2018 for disadvantaged students.

3. **School Improvements**

- 3.1 When the current Headteacher took up post in 2016 the School was in a very difficult position with spiralling behaviour and poor outcomes. Parental confidence in the school was low. Students were not proud of their school, nor did they value their education.
- 3.2 The current Headteacher was selected for the DfE Talented Leaders Programme (TLP) which aims to recruit substantive Headteachers into schools with extremely challenging circumstances, who would otherwise find it difficult to recruit (prior to her recruitment, the school had unsuccessfully tried to appoint a Headteacher). The TLP initiative attracts funding and training to support the Headteacher in the first 3 years of their headship, an appreciation of the complexity of school improvement.

- 3.3 The current Headteacher is passionate about the School and this inspires the staff and students alike. The current Headteacher is committed to leading the continuing school improvement with the ultimate aim of creating better opportunities, in life, for our Students.
- 3.4 Over the past two years the School has successfully recruited high calibre professionals onto the senior leadership team to support the vision of the Governors and Headteacher and their effectiveness was noted by Ofsted in October 2017.
- 3.5 The new Headteacher restructured the staff body including the senior leadership team beginning September 2017 with a brand new team and a high proportion of new teaching and support staff. There was a deliberate strategy to over-staff through Teach First in order to support the developing culture and rapidly raise standards. Over the past two years the school has become a place that the students are now proud to attend. The staff are motivated to work hard for the students, in a culture of high accountability focused on high quality teaching and learning and achievement for all.
- 3.6 The culture of the School is driven by its mission statement and its values; Every child, No Excuses, Lead learning, High Expectations and No Islands. The improved culture has stabilised the school and the systems and processes in place are now leading to rapid improvements in student progress (“The new Headteacher, supported by senior leaders and governors, has a clear and ambitious vision for the school. Leaders know the school well and are clear about what needs to improve. They have the capacity to improve the school further.” Ofsted October 2017).
- 3.7 The focused pupil premium strategy and targeted intervention programme is resulting in rapid improvements in English and mathematics. Improvements across other subjects are also evident as a result of improved culture and more consistent and effective teaching, learning and assessment as a result of an extensive professional development programme. The progress of South Shields School students will most certainly be hampered if South Shields School children are moved to another school, when in-year data indicates they are now rapidly moving towards national averages in English and maths, a significant improvement.

3.8 A Focus on Literacy:

- 3.8.1 Deprivation has a significant impact on the literacy of our students, many of whom are enter Year 7 well below their chronological reading age. To rapidly improve literacy school has a team of staff trained in the delivery of phonics, lexia and handwriting improvement skills as well as providing support for oracy through the stammering support group. The impact of these in-house sessions is resulting in improved attendance for SEN students and increased chronological reading ages as well as more proficiency in writing and speaking skills.
- 3.8.2 To support the tailored literacy provision, literacy is embedded across school and is a feature of all lessons (Literacy is strong, Ofsted October 2017). All staff are trained in providing support in reading, writing and oracy through lessons.
- 3.8.3 If students were to be transferred to another school this would result in changes or interruptions to the literacy provision of these students and this would undoubtedly be detrimental to the progress of our students; and consequently, the life chances of our young people.

3.9 A Focus on the Development of social and cultural capital:

- 3.9.1 Students have opportunities within school to develop their personal skills and experience activities that would otherwise be inaccessible to them. Due to the high proportion of pupil premium students and the impact of being less advantaged, it has taken time for the students to feel comfortable at school and develop their confidence so that they can learn effectively.
- 3.9.2 The school values the importance of cultural capital and insists on students taking part in the co-curriculum of enrichment and support sessions after school. To further enhance the opportunity for new experiences for students, the school opened a Royal Navy combined cadet force unit in January 2017. This has been set up through a DfE initiative funded in tandem with the MoD to improve character education. The unit is the only one in this area and is a significant USP for the school. The CCF unit is a lifeline for many of our students who attend and have subsequently improved their attendance, progress data etc. because of being involved in the activities associated

with the scheme, it is already above its recruitment targets and is now expanding to include lower school children.

3.9.3 Transferring students to another school would most likely result in students dropping out of these activities which will impact on their personal development.

3.10 Further, a copy of the headline performance indicators is attached setting out the actual figures for academic year 2017/2018 and the predicted outcomes for 2018/2019, marked “**Appendix 1**”. These figures show an overall improvement at various key stages and also show a relatively marginal difference in the outcome is expected nationally – they are broadly in line with national expectations. Taking into account the context of the area and the improvements made thus far, if the School were to academise it is hoped that the results would improve on the current progress made on this trajectory.

4. **Alternative Education Opportunities in the Local Authority (LA)**

4.1 The schools with capacity in the LA do not have Good Ofsted judgements and consequently, if South Shields School were not able to academise, students will be transferred to neighbouring schools with RI judgements. Should the schools receive additional students, it is unclear at this stage whether there would be the necessary stability to support our students. We hypothesise that such a move would not be in the best interest of our students.

4.2 One of the schools has held a satisfactory/RI judgement for a number of years and the other has recently dropped to RI. South Shields School is RI in all areas except student outcomes (largely based on ineffective teaching over a number of years as well as a past ineffective pupil premium strategy).

South Shields School is now improving rapidly, a recent Pupil Premium Review and a further LA commissioned review indicated that teaching is increasingly effective and behaviour is conducive to learning, in a culture where leadership and management continue to rapidly improve. This was further evidenced by the recent monitoring visit carried out by Ofsted, in June 2018:

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

- *Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.*
- *The school’s improvement plans are fit for purpose.*
- *The local authority’s statement of action is not fit for purpose.*

4.3 The local authority has not yet been able to support other LA schools with RI judgements to improve to Good. Schools within the LA which are outstanding are all academies.

4.4 If the School were to join a multi-academy trust (a MAT), South Shields School will rapidly improve further through the additional capacity in teaching and leadership and management support provided by a MAT. To our knowledge, there are a number of possible MATs in relatively close geographical proximity of the two schools, although geographical distance from a MAT is largely irrelevant when you consider regionwide MATs or MATs operating across regional boundaries.

5. **Pupil Admission Numbers:**

5.1 Existing and projected low pupil numbers were cited as by the LA as reasons for the consultation. Although the LA presented a snap shot of the status quo the reasons did not take into account the cyclical nature of student numbers and other factors that impact the community which affects our school community.

5.2 Regarding entry into Year 7 in 2017/2018, the School was adversely impacted due to a disproportionate number of students being admitted to another school very late in the academic year. This is an anomaly and the situation is not expected to re-occur as the school concerned has now agreed to lower their PAN.

5.3 Through an association with a MAT we have predicted that our numbers will increase to 70% capacity within the next 5 years. This prediction is based on the increase in student numbers based upon our successful work with our feeder schools and the rapid improvement in school standards. This is a conservative estimate and we anticipate, based the reputation of an established MAT and its Academies, that we would exceed pupil number targets more quickly.

5.4 Accordingly our projected figures for students are:

Academic Year	Capacity	Total pupils	% Full	Yr7	Yr8	Yr9	Yr10	Yr11
16/17 Pupils	850	651	76.59%	129	148	126	111	137
17/18 Pupils	850	553	65.06%	74	128	134	115	102
18/19 Forecast	850	526	61.88%	75	74	128	134	115
19/20 Forecast	850	506	59.53%	95	75	74	128	134
20/21 Forecast	850	477	56.12%	105	95	75	74	128
21/22 Forecast	850	464	54.59%	115	105	95	75	74
22/23 Forecast	850	515	60.59%	125	115	105	95	75
23/24 Forecast	850	570	67.06%	130	125	115	105	95
24/25 Forecast	850	605	71.18%	130	130	125	115	105

5.5 Further, there is new housing planned for the Jarrow and Hebburn areas but the distribution of students in proximity to school indicates that students will travel to South Shields School across catchment areas and as the school improves we would expect to benefit from the new housing, especially if the other schools do not improve at the same rate.

5.6 Public perception in the area, suggests that parents favour an Academy to educate their children. As a result many Academy schools are often oversubscribed. Upon academisation, South Shields School would readily admit students from these oversubscribed Academies and would hope to garner the reputation of an Academy that has public confidence behind it. Therefore, through association with a MAT, it is likely that parents and carers would over time indicate South Shields School as a first or second choice school which would again rapidly increase numbers.

6. Financial Viability

6.1 Through an initial staffing restructure in 2017, significant improvement in the five year financial forecasts and delivery of the curriculum model were achieved. A further proposal to reduce staffing was proposed to offset the impact of the recent fall in pupil number due to an unprecedented number of appeals in July 2017 to a neighbouring school.

6.2 Further, the School openly discussed the option of implementing strategies to reduce expenses with the LA. Part of the strategy would involve reducing the percentage of staff it costs when compared to the income. In response, the LA urged the School to reconsider this plan of action

and proposed that no staffing restructuring take place during the academic year 2017/2018, instead the LA suggested that the School focus on improving results.

6.3 However a progressive realisation of changes to staffing at the School will secure effective financial planning and further improved delivery of the curriculum model in light of changes to performance measures. The cost of redundancy is comparatively low due to the ending of temporary contracts which will not incur redundancy costs. In contrast, should the school close, the LA would have to fund significant redundancy costs and still retains the expenditure of the PFI agreement, further impacting on income available to South Tyneside Council.

6.4 Accordingly progressive realisation of changes to staffing at the School can be made by:

6.4.1 Monitoring teaching and learning responsibility (TLR) payments;

6.4.2 Control over contract workers; and

6.4.3 Encouraging career progressions.

6.5 Accordingly the following non-staff-related savings can be made:

6.5.1 Non staff savings through using MAT central services such as: HR, governance, payroll & finance could save the School in excess of £50k a year;

6.5.2 This forecast does not include any further additional financial benefits from joining a MAT such as joint procurement, potential shared staffing;

6.5.3 The only income that has been included is the AWPU and pupil premium - no additional income has been included. This would provide further security; and

6.5.4 Further non staffing savings include £8k saving on new photocopier contract and £2k saved on new mobile phone contract.

6.6 At the end of March 2017 this was the relevant School budget information:

Revenue Balances	2016-17 Budget	2017-18 Budget*	2018-19 Budget**	2019-20 Budget	2020-21 Budget	2021-22 Budget
Total allocation and income	£4,930,204.00	£4,526,949.00	£3,888,062.00	£3,769,835.00	£3,653,521.00	£3,457,734.00
Revenue gross expenditure	£4,992,066.00	£4,405,647.00	£3,992,733.00	£3,670,090.00	£3,591,114.00	£3,547,943.00
Revenue balance in year	-£61,862.00	£121,302.00	-£104,671.00	£99,745.00	£62,407.00	-£90,209.00
Revenue balance brought forward from previous year	£199,131.00	£137,269.00	£258,571.00	£153,900.00	£253,645.00	£316,052.00
Revenue balance carried forward to following year	£137,269.00	£258,571.00	£153,900.00	£253,645.00	£316,052.00	£225,843.00

Further it should be noted that:

6.6.1 Lease of the school building (PFI). This increases by the RPIX every year, school currently pays £409802. There are 19 years left.

6.6.2 The School also has 1 year left on a lease of photocopiers and printers. This is £28000 a year; the lease is with Siemens through the Concept Group.

6.7 Finally, attached is a copy of an income/expenditure report, marked “**Appendix 2**” which sets out in detail the specific figures that formed the basis of the budget.

7. Implications of Closing the School

7.1 Impact on Students – Distance and Time over Money and Environment

7.1.1 On analysis of the catchment area for the school and the distance of the students’ homes to school, a significant number of our students reside in the immediate proximity of South Shields School. The majority of our students walk or cycle to school from the neighbourhood.

7.1.2 Many of our families rely on the older sibling to walk younger siblings to the local primary schools prior to the start of school. If the school does not successfully academise the students will have to attend a school which would require a bus ride and

would therefore impact on many family arrangements as well as the local council transport infrastructure.

7.1.3 The additional traffic will impact on the environment and contribute to increased road congestion. The local authority would have to plan for an enhanced public transport system to ensure students could travel to school and also work with parents and carers regarding attendance to ensure students maintained rates of attendance as a result of any changes to school location.

7.1.4 It should be noted that attendance across the LA is a significant issue and any alterations to family or school life will undoubtedly impact on attendance improvements the School has made. The School has the highest deprivation factor of all the secondary schools in South Tyneside. Any logistical changes as a result of closure therefore will result in wider reaching detrimental impact on the lives of the children from South Shields School than if the changes were to affect children from more advantaged households.

7.2 Impact on Students – Not in the best interests of the Students

7.2.1 If South Shields School does not successfully academise another cohort of South Tyneside students will be failed by the education system. As referenced earlier our students have extremely complex needs and revoking the academy order would not be in the best interests of the Students.

7.2.2 A large proportion of students have extensive wrap around provision which another school would have difficulty providing. Student progress is now rapidly improving and therefore the life chances of these young people are increasingly looking positive, a trend that has not been seen in the past. Joining a MAT would support students from South Shields School to become successful, happy young adults with the ability to make choices about their future and ultimately contribute to the improvement of their own community within South Tyneside.

7.3 Impact on Students – Instability fosters detrimental outcomes

7.3.1 Through consistent, strategic leadership student outcomes have risen significantly for the first time this year (see **Appendix 1**). If the school does not academise and the school closes, students will be transferred to neighbouring schools with capacity.

7.3.2 There is a risk, that whilst this is not in effect a merger, an influx of a large proportion of students with complex needs into other LA schools may result in de-stabilising the current student cohorts in other schools and will be detrimental to the progress and well-being of South Shields School students.

8. Conclusion

8.1 Contrary to the position set out in the consultation, the Governing Body of the School feel that we have made a case for the viability of the School, in that, given time, it will be financially/commercially viable based upon restructuring changes that affect the budget. This, together with the strategy to improve the quality of education will culminate in improved pupil numbers at the School.

8.2 Further, when compared to alternative offerings of the LA, we feel strongly that the academisation of the School will be in the best interests of our Students and accordingly revocation of the Academy Order by the Secretary of State must not take place.

8.3 In light of the above we the Governing Body will continue to support the efforts of the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team in making representations to the RSC for the purposes of securing an Academy Sponsor.

The Governors of the South Shields School

1 November 2018