

APPENDIX 1



NORTHERN EDUCATION TRUST

**OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION ON THE
PROPOSED CLOSURE OF
THOMAS HEPBURN COMMUNITY ACADEMY**

REPORT: MARCH 2018

Background

With low numbers currently on roll at Thomas Hepburn Community Academy (412) and only 31 Year 6 students expressing it as their first choice for September 2018, the breadth and quality of the curriculum and, subsequently, the life chances of students are significantly reduced.

Following discussions with Trustees of Northern Education Trust; leaders at Gateshead Council, and the DfE, it was decided to launch a consultation on the proposal to close the academy. The consultation started on Tuesday, 6th February and ended on Tuesday, 6th March 2018.

The proposal outlines a phased approach:

Phase One:

- The Academy would not admit new Year 7 students in September 2018. Gateshead Council will contact parents/carers of Year 6 students who have already expressed Thomas Hepburn Community Academy as a preference.
- The current Year 9 students would be supported in their transition to another secondary school from September 2018 to undertake their GCSE studies in Years 10 and 11. Clearly, it is the view of the Trust that an earlier transition for Year 9 students to enable them to focus on their GCSE courses is in their best interests. This transition would be managed sensitively and in coordination with colleagues in neighbouring schools. The Academy will offer individual meetings with all students and parents and work closely with Gateshead Council to find the most appropriate placement.

Phase Two:

- Current Year 10 students would remain in the Academy from September 2018 to allow them to conclude their Year 11 GCSE studies before the Academy closes in the Summer of 2019.

There has been a number of meetings with secondary head teachers in the borough regarding capacity for current Y9 students of THCA and current Y6 students who opted for THCA in September 2018. These discussions are ongoing.

Communication

There was a structured and tightly coordinated approach to the launch of the consultation:

- Staff attended a confidential initial briefing on Monday, 5th February. They were all given a copy of the consultation document so this could be digested prior to a full staff meeting led by the CEO at 3.30pm on Tuesday, 6th February 2018.
- Union reps attended a meeting at 2.30pm immediately before the full staff meeting. They were available to meet all/any members of staff afterwards.
- Consultation packs for any staff absent from the academy were sent first class on Monday, 5th February.
- Consultation packs for parents were collated and posted first class on Monday, 5th

February. A reply slip to make an appointment with senior leaders was included along with a direct contact number (manned by a senior member of staff) and an assigned email address (set up by the Trust).

- Assemblies with all students took place on Tuesday, 6th February. Different year groups received slightly different messages depending on the impact a potential closure would have. For example, it was stressed to Years 10 and 11 that this would have no impact and they would continue their secondary education at THCA. The assembly with Year 9 emphasised that it was a consultation but if it was approved they would be supported in finding another secondary school for September 2018.
- A consultation summary document was circulated to the local neighbourhood.
- The head teachers of the primary cluster attended a meeting on Tuesday, 6th February at 4.30pm so they had a consistent message to deliver to their Year 5 and 6 students.
- The Central Team, Executive Principals and Principals of NET were informed via a confidential email on Sunday, 4th February.
- The Chair of the Academy Council was involved in all stages and contacted all academy council members in person by Monday 5th February.
- An invitation to a meeting was sent to all Ward Councillors to seek their views on the proposals but no representation was made from any ward.
- All stakeholders were given a copy of the questionnaire to complete (optional).
- 121 meetings were offered to parents/carers, students and staff.
- A meeting with the Evening Chronicle took place on Tuesday, 6th February.
- Consultation documents were also sent first class on Monday, 5th February to all head teachers in the Borough, Community Zone users, Libraries, relevant members of the local authority, MPs and Ward Councillors.

Feedback from Questionnaires

In total, 21 completed questionnaires about the proposal to close were received.

| | No of questionnaires received | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|---------|---|
| Members of staff | 5 | | |
| Parents | 14 (Breakdown by year group) | Year 7 | 3 |
| | | Year 8 | 4 |
| | | Year 9 | 5 |
| | | Year 10 | 2 |
| | | Year 11 | 0 |
| Governors of other schools | 2 | | |

Members of staff

- All questionnaires received were completed by support staff.
- All stated that the rationale for the proposed closure was clear.
- 3/5 disagreed with the proposal whilst the remaining 2 did not make a selection.
- All 5 stated that there had been significant improvements in the academy through the result of everyone's hard work.

- Suggestions around supporting smooth transition included parental meetings, support for students including visits to other schools and redeployment of staff within NET.

Parents

- Of the 14 completed parent questionnaires, 12 stated that the rationale was very clear. The other 2 understand the impact on numbers but suggested there must be other ways to ensure the academy remains open.
- 11/14 parents did not support the proposal to close.
- To ensure a smooth transition, parents suggested that students are supported to find the most appropriate school by providing information and conducting visits.
- 4 parents felt the timelines were very tight and they would like their child to finish their secondary education at THCA and close more gradually.
- A key feature of the responses was about ensuring effective communication at all times.

Governors from others schools

- One questionnaire supported the proposal to close and suggested working with colleagues in the Borough to support the transition of students into other schools/academies.
- One questionnaire stated that a business plan should be prepared and agreed about maintaining the building to secure its long term future.

Parent/Carers and Student meetings/communication

To ensure all parents could contact the academy, NET set up a 'hotline' and a dedicated email account. In addition to this, a reply slip was included in the consultation pack; once returned, the academy contacted the parent(s) to organise a 121 meeting.

In total, 59 parents used one of the above methods to speak to a senior leader at the academy. 36 individual meetings were set up and hosted largely by the Principal and/or the Associate Executive Principal.

All 59 parents understood the rationale for the proposed closure - all but 2 were against it. Questions raised by parents have been collated to form a FAQ factsheet (please see attached). 32/59 of the parents had a son or daughter in Year 9 where the main concern was about the process in finding a different school. Parents were keen to know how the transition would be managed.

During the process, the academy has received 37 transfer requests.

| | Telephone contact | Parental meeting | Transfer requests received |
|----------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| Year 7 | 8 | 3 | 1 |
| Year 8 | 9 | 4 | 7 |
| Year 9 | 32 | 28 | 28 |
| Year 10 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Year 11 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Other (Y5 & 6) | 4 | 0 | N/A |

Only 3 people (all parents) used the online tool to contact the academy. All 3 were enquiries about the process of transferring their child out of the academy.

Staff Meetings

Individual staff meetings were offered and 7 members of staff attended. Questions were speculative but the launch of the separate staffing restructure consultation on Tuesday, 20th February resolved many of these. All staff have now been given a 1 2 1 meeting to discuss their individual circumstances. Union reps have been in attendance.

Summary

Despite circulating in excess of 800 consultation packs, offering individual meetings to parents/carers, students and staff, the response to the proposals has been relatively low.

The key theme that permeates through most responses has been about the transition and support for the students and, in particular, the current Year 9s.

Leaders at NET are keen to work with the local authority admissions team to ensure students are placed in the most appropriate school. Ongoing discussions will continue to take place to discuss the proposed strategies around transition (please see attached). These include 1 2 1 meetings, school visits and providing information on all schools.

Staff at the academy have remained positive and professional during the consultation period. Staff have recognised the improvements in the academy over the last 12-18 months but also appreciate the restrictions of the curriculum with such low numbers moving forward.

Many of the responses asked for continued communication about the decision and the actions that will be put in place should the closure go ahead.