



Consultation on the Future of Thomas Hepburn Community Academy

Northern Education Trust
c/o Thomas Hepburn Community Academy
Swards Road, Felling, Gateshead, NE10 9UZ

Tel: 0191 420 4555

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Introduction

Northern Education Trust are determined to secure the best possible education for the students in our care and are confident that outcomes for our current Year 11 students will be much improved. However, the Trust also recognise that we have a part to play in the wider educational system in Gateshead. For reasons that are outlined below we believe that by working with our partners in Gateshead Council and the Department for Education (DFE) the provision offered across the Borough can be further improved.

This paper sets out the proposal of Northern Education Trust on the potential closure of Thomas Hepburn Community Academy which currently offers secondary school places to 412 11-16 year olds. The document also explains the consultation process and the timescales for making representations/submitting comments, and the decision making process.

Maintaining the current provision, i.e. keeping Thomas Hepburn Community Academy open, is not specifically given as an option in this consultation, but Northern Education Trust could decide on this course of action if deemed appropriate as a result of the consultation.

Northern Education Trust is carrying out a consultation process about the future of Thomas Hepburn Community Academy and is working closely with the Department for Education (DFE) and Gateshead Council throughout this process. The Trust shares Gateshead Council's commitment to ensure the education of students remains at the forefront of the decision-making process.

It must be stressed that no decisions have yet been made by either the Trust or the DFE. As an initial measure, the Northern Education Trust Board is entering into a four-week consultation period to investigate the feasibility of the closure of Thomas Hepburn Community Academy on 31 August 2019. The Trust is asking all interested parties to make representations during the consultation period which will run until 6 March 2018. All comments received will be seriously considered to inform an assessment of the situation prior to the DFE making a final decision on whether to go ahead with the proposals.

Student numbers at the academy have been declining in recent years and there are currently only 412 students on roll. It is projected this number will decline further in September 2018 with the potential number of students entering the academy as low as 40, making the number on roll at that point circa 350. The academy has a Pupil Admission Number of 150 so can house 750 students; meaning the academy would be at less than 50% occupancy. This makes the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum for the students extremely difficult and has significant financial implications.

It is proposed that the current Year 7, Year 8 and Year 10 remain at Thomas Hepburn for the academic year 2018/19 and move into Year 8, 9, and 11 respectively. Current Year 6 students who have indicated Thomas Hepburn as their first-choice secondary school will be offered places in other schools. In addition, current Year 9 students will be offered places in other schools in September 2018 to undertake their GCSE studies in Years 10 and 11.

The quality of the children's education is paramount, therefore Northern Education Trust, Gateshead Council and the receiving schools will work together to support the transition of students into new schools and will provide assistance to individual students and their families if required. In the event of the decision to close being made, relevant stakeholders will consider possible future educational uses for the school site that would be in the best interests of local children and young people. Any future use would have to be agreed with the DFE.

Context and Background

In recent years the number of students on roll at the Academy has fallen significantly below the 750-student capacity from 600 students on roll in 2013/14 to 412 students in 2017/18; making the current occupancy of the building approximately 55%. The smallest year group is the current Year 7 cohort at 56 students and initial indications from Gateshead Council show that the intake for September 2018 would be approximately 40 students based on only 31 first choices received. With 105 students in Year 11, the number on roll is set to decline further to an estimated 350 students. The table below shows the decline in student population in the Academy.

Year Group	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19 (projected)
Year 7	126	122	88	95	88	56	40
Year 8	122	116	125	87	92	89	56
Year 9	130	120	109	117	84	84	89
Year 10	115	122	120	107	104	78	84
Year 11	150	114	115	120	109	105	78
Total	643	594	557	526	477	412	347

With such low student numbers, the Academy would not be able to provide a broad, balanced and high quality curriculum, which our students deserve. The number of specialist teachers would be limited, further reducing the quality of provision to students. Northern Education Trust firmly believes that the children of Gateshead deserve the very best educational provision in order to improve their life chances.

In November 2016, Ofsted judged the Academy to have ‘serious weaknesses’ with a history of significant underperformance at the end of Key Stage 4. At the subsequent monitoring

inspection in May 2017, it was recognised that behaviour and the climate for learning had improved significantly. The Trust is confident that this, coupled with the introduction of a raft of school improvement systems and procedures to secure rapid improvement, will mean outcomes will improve markedly in 2018. However, given parental concerns about the historical performance of the school, they have not had the confidence to send their children to Thomas Hepburn resulting in the decline in student population.

Proposals

Northern Education Trust understands that this process will be difficult for students, staff, parents/carers and all those who support our school. Given the phased approach outlined below and the different timescales involved for each year group the Trust feels it is important to offer individual meetings to students and their parents with a senior leader of Northern Education Trust. This meeting can be used to gather views to inform the consultation and to discuss personal circumstances in more detail. Representations from other interested stakeholders are also welcomed by completing the response questionnaire and will form part of this consultation. The proposals are outlined below:

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.
- Current Year 11 students would remain in the Academy to complete their GCSE courses this summer.
- Current Year 7 and 8 students would become Year 8 and 9 students from September 2018. They would remain in the Academy until Summer 2019 before being supported in their transition to another school to start their Year 9 and 10 studies respectively.

The Trust recognises that any transition is challenging for students, parents/carers and for staff, and that they may be concerned about how this will be managed. Engagement of all these stakeholders via regular communications will help to mitigate the risks and any anxieties associated with this potential change.

The above proposal would mean only Years 8, 9 and 11 would be in the Academy for September 2018 and, therefore, approximately only 230 students would be on roll in the academic year 2018/19.

During the period of transition to closure, during both phase 1 and phase 2, the Academy will continue to provide all remaining students with a high quality education.

It is proposed that the Academy will finally close on 31st August 2019.

Transition

There is a range of other secondary schools within the Gateshead area. Gateshead Council will work very closely with NET and the local secondary academies to ensure there are sufficient suitable alternative places for students. The process of applying for these places will be open and fair while giving parents an opportunity to show a preference. Academies receiving Thomas Hepburn students will ensure that specific programmes and support will be in place to make the transition as smooth as possible. School uniform requirements resulting from the proposals will be addressed as part of the consultation process.

Travel & Transport

Gateshead Council will implement its school transport policy which can be found on the Council website. While sufficient school places will be available in the East of Gateshead, academies across the borough have also offered additional places.

Staffing Implications

A separate consultation will take place regarding staffing implications. Northern Education Trust, Gateshead Council and Trade Unions will work closely together to redeploy as many staff as possible during the phased closure.

Northern Education Trust and members of the Academy Council recognise the continued hard work and commitment from staff during the number of changes in recent years. However, the needs of our students must be at the heart of any decision making process.

Current and Future Use of the Site

A number of local organisations use the site on a regular basis and it is proposed that this will continue until August 2019.

No decisions have been made about the future use of the site but the local schools, the Council, the Department for Education and other interested bodies will meet to decide how best to use the building for Gateshead children and young people. Any future use would have to be agreed with the DfE.

Equality Statement

The Equality Act 2010 requires the Trust to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other prohibited conduct
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

Protected characteristics include: Age, Disability, Gender Identity, Marriage/Civil Partnership, Pregnancy/Maternity, Race, Religion/Belief, Sex and Sexual Orientation.

The gender mix of students in the school currently is approximately 51% boys and 49% girls. There are 1.9% of students with Statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN) or Education, Health & Care (EHC) Plans. Overall absence (2015-16 year) stands at 7.5% compared to a national figure of 5.2%.

It is clear from an analysis of other secondary schools in Gateshead that there is a range of alternative schools that will be available for each student to meet their individual needs. This will enable them to enter a school that has a profile similar to that of Thomas Hepburn Community Academy.

The proposal to close Thomas Hepburn Community Academy will allow students to access an education which can offer a broad and balanced curriculum.

An Equality Impact Assessment has commenced but the views of the public are integral to its development and conclusion. All views gathered regarding the impact of the proposal on equality issues or on the rights of staff, students, parents/carers and others will be taken into account in the completion of this assessment.

Consultation

The Trust is carrying out a 4 week consultation on the proposals which will run from Tuesday 6th February to Tuesday 6th March 2018 inclusive. Individual meetings for parents/carers will be arranged, starting from 8th February 2018. Representations from other interested stakeholders are welcomed by completing the response questionnaire and will form part of this consultation.

Following the consultation process all representations will be seriously considered and assessed to inform the Trust Board's decision. If this is to recommend the closure of Thomas Hepburn to DfE, the Board will submit a full business case to include the outcome of the consultation process to the DfE, for consideration. Any final decision on closure will be made by DfE, and will be notified to all parties.

This consultation has been publicised and made available to all of the appropriate and relevant individuals and groups, including Thomas Hepburn parents, students and staff, leaders at neighbouring schools, Gateshead Council, the relevant MP and Trade Unions.

Observations and comments about the proposal can be made using the appropriate response form:

- www.thomashepburnconsultation.org
- by email to thcaconsult@northerneducationtrust.org or
- by post to THCA Consultation, Northern Education Trust, c/o Thomas Hepburn Community Academy, Swards Road, Felling, Gateshead NE10 9UZ
- additional copies of this document, together with a consultation response

sheet, can be obtained by emailing thcaconsult@northerneducationtrust.org

Copies of this consultation document can be made available on request in a variety of formats in addition to this one e.g. Large Print, Easy read, Audio, or translated into another language.



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Registered Office: Northern Education Trust, Cobalt Business Exchange Central, Unit 5, Silver Fox Way, Cobalt Business Park, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE27 0QJ