

# **PONTELAND COMMUNITY MIDDLE SCHOOL/PONTELAND ACADEMY REPORT ON DUAL CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED AGE RANGE CHANGE AND ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS TO BECOME A PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**Consultation dates: 20 December 2018 to 31 January 2019 for 2020 admission**

## **Introduction**

Trustees collated responses to proposals to change the age range and associated admission arrangements of Ponteland Community Middle School (PCMS) from 9 to 13 years middle school age range to become a primary school for the age range 2 to 11 years. The submission was made as a result of clear direction from Lord Agnew, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the School System.

## **Background**

In 2016, following a consultation which was heavily opposed by the local population (94% of the respondents were against the proposals), Northumberland County Council made a decision to alter the education system in Ponteland from three tier to two tier education. Ponteland Community Middle School (PCMS) was, as part of that consultation, to close. PCMS successfully gained an Academy Order and converted to an Academy, Ponteland Academy Trust, in September 2017. The surrounding schools now operate a two tier system, and the number of children choosing to leave their primary school to join the middle school at year 5 is uncertain, as is the pathway to secondary for children leaving the middle school at the end of year 8; the local high school has only one official intake at year 7. To ensure its survival in a two-tier system, and in response to parental demand, in 2018 the Academy made two applications to extend the age range of the school to GCSE provision. These bids were unsuccessful. Consultation with the Department for Education resulted in a recommendation from the Department that the trustees consider making an application to become a primary school to fit in with the two tier system. The Board of Trustees decided that becoming a primary school would secure the school's future and build on PCMS' highly successful ethos and KS2 attainment, ensuring children thrive and the school flourishes. PCMS is one of the highest achieving schools in England, recently ranked 25<sup>th</sup> in Sunday Times top 100 Primary Schools – in the top 0.125% of schools in the UK.

## **The benefits of change**

Trustees, senior leaders and staff believe PCMS as a primary school will continue to ensure children achieve outstanding outcomes at KS2 giving them the framework to be very successful at KS3 and beyond. The successful school ethos would be extended from current Y5 and Y6 to all Primary years plus Nursery years. The proposal means that PCMS would offer nine years of schooling, ensuring each new generation of children will receive personalised provision, pastoral care, enriched curriculum, knowledge, skills, understanding and emotional maturity necessary to enable a fulfilling and happy life in our society.

## **The Consultation**

Following statutory procedures, trustees consulted on:

1. PROPOSED CHANGES TO ADMISSIONS FROM MIDDLE SCHOOL PROVISION TO PRIMARY SCHOOL NURSERY [from 2 years of age] TO Y6 [11 years] PROVISION FROM SEPTEMBER 2020.
2. PROPOSED 'VARIATION' TO PUPIL ADMISSION NUMBER [PAN] ARRANGEMENTS FOR 2020 IN LINE WITH THE ADMISSIONS CODE OF PRACTICE.

**During the consultation period, it was important to sustain open and honest conversation with:**

- Current students;
- Parents of current students;
- Parents of students at other schools;
- Staff who work at the school;

- Staff who work at other schools;
- Local and neighbouring schools;
- Local community, including pre-school groups and Early Years Providers, and our current site users;
- Governors including Headteachers at local and neighbouring schools;
- Local and neighbouring Local Authorities;
- The Church of England and Roman Catholic Dioceses; and
- other stakeholders

### Staff Consultation Meeting: Monday 7 January 2019

Staff were overwhelmingly supportive, particularly KS2, but understandably concerned. They asked about the transition process; arrangements for children and staff; and how long PCMS would be running Y7 and Y8 provision and how they could be supportive in the process. There were no questions querying the need to convert to primary, focus was more on how the process would be managed.

### Stakeholder Consultation meeting: Monday 14 January 2019

Approximately 90 stakeholders attended. There were 22 representatives from local and neighbouring schools; 6 Trustees; 19 PCMS staff; 40 parents; one union representative; 2 members of the community.

CONSULTATION REPLIES	In Favour		Against		
1. From September 2020, should PCMS change its middle school age-range and provide primary provision from Nursery [aged 2-3, 3-4] to Year 6?	<b>206</b> <b>66%</b>	<b>107 of 206</b> <b>made</b> <b>comment</b>	<b>102</b> <b>33%</b>	<b>88 of 102</b> <b>made</b> <b>comment</b>	<b>Don't</b> <b>know</b> <b>5</b> <b>1%</b>
<b>TOTAL RESPONSES</b>	<b>313 REPLIES</b>				
2. Would you like to see 60 or 90 children in each year group? Please circle or make bold.	<b>60 children in</b> <b>each year group</b> <b>130</b> <b>62%</b>		<b>90 children in</b> <b>each year group</b> <b>73</b> <b>35%</b>		<b>Either</b> <b>6</b> <b>3%</b>
<b>TOTAL RESPONSES</b>	<b>209 REPLIES</b>				
Comments were invited and responses revealed similar themes to a large degree ...					
Questions were invited and revealed emerging themes which fell into similar categories, again ...					
Recipients invited to enter contact details for further conversation. 25 respondents gave contact details.					

### Response numbers according to stakeholder group: some ticked multiple boxes eg as a community member and parent:

For the second time in three years, PCMS was overwhelmingly supported by parents and the community as they recognise, respect and want the school's ethos, standards and attainment to continue.

Yes	No	Don't Know	Stakeholder group	%
122	17	1	Parent of a pupil(s) currently attending PCMS	87% Yes
25	0	1	Member of staff working at PCMS	96% Yes
4	28	1	Member of staff working at other schools	84% No
50	19	1	Parent of a child in Reception to Year 6 in Northumberland schools	71% Yes
4	1		Parent of a child in Reception to Year 6 in Newcastle schools	Low response number
0	12		Governor, including Headteacher, at a Northumberland school	100% No
1	4		Governor, including Headteacher, at a Newcastle schools	Low response number
69	29	1	Member of the local community	70% Yes
1	1 Neutral		Representative of Local Authority, making comments inviting further dialogue, see p3	Low response number
2	1		Representative of a neighbouring Local Authority, see p4 point 12	Low response number
0	1		Representative of a Diocese, 'whilst we understand the difficult position PCMS finds itself in, we cannot support the current proposal to become a Primary school.'	Low response number
18	4		Other (please specify) Yes 2xFormer pupil 6xGrandparents 4xNorthumberland residents 2xPotential new Y5 parent 4xparents of PHS pupils	Other (please specify) No 2xPupil 1xGrandparent Outer West Learning Trust, see p4, point 11 82% Yes

**The consultation revealed emerging themes from both sides of the proposal:**

Emerging Themes	107 'yes' replies with comments: as fraction and %		88 'no' replies with comments: as fraction and %	
Pathway and Transitional Process	45/107	42%	35/88	40%
Effect on local, rural and neighbouring schools	0/107	0%	52/88	59%
Place planning	4/107	4%	56/88	64%
Remain as a middle school	17/107	16%	6/88	7%
Remain as a middle and/or primary and expand	41/107	38%	7/88	8%

**Common Theme 1: clarity for parents regarding parity of pathway** to the local secondary school places; clarity of pathway within the middle school transition period and beyond; the need for parents to know 'now' so they can make choices, ensure stability, cohesion and certainty; and that admissions should be based on postcode rather than feeder schools. Some of these common response themes were not within the consultation remit.

**Common Theme 2: transitional process** from middle school to primary school; the length of the transition; 'how long', 'how soon'.

## Summary of consultation preferences

The comments and emerging themes are very similar. Both groups cited pupil pathway, transition, competition and that another primary could be surplus to requirements. Strong objections were expected and came from the same categories of stakeholders as last year, that is, schools in Ponteland and Newcastle West, and Newcastle Local Authority. Comments regarding finance, buildings, expertise, curriculum, redundancy, decision makers, Pele Trust admissions and MAT partners were outside the remit of the consultation. The business case would address the issues raised. The vast majority of parents and staff were overwhelmingly supportive of the change. Further analysis of these comments is at Appendix 1.

## Board of Trustees Meeting: Monday 4 February

The Board of Trustees met on 4 February to receive and consider:

- Feedback from stakeholders during the consultation process;
- Feedback from the staff consultation 7 January 2019
- Feedback from the stakeholder consultation evening 14 January 2019
- Conversion feasibility proposals including architect drawing

Trustees noted the main themes are areas of concern identified by parents, many of which were outside the remit of the consultation. Trustees agreed to address all comments in a published response on the school website.

After due consideration to the consultation process and report, Trustees decided that there was clearly strong support from parents and staff to convert to Primary and secure a sustainable future for the school. And recognising the need to address and minimise contention, it was agreed to propose a PAN offer of 60 rather than 90.

The Board of Trustees unanimously agreed to recommend that Ponteland Community Middle School converts to a Primary School for September 2020 and that the Business Case and Consultation findings be presented to the Department for Education at the earliest opportunity.

Ponteland Community Middle School  
Part of Ponteland Academy Trust  
Callerton Lane  
Ponteland  
NE20 9EY

01661824853

[Caroline.pryer@ponteland.academy](mailto:Caroline.pryer@ponteland.academy)

Appendix:

Analysis of Responses

## ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES

**'Yes' comments:**

1. Existing **PCMS facilities** would be great for primary children. The school's excellent results and assessment systems already help staff plan for younger or lower attaining pupils to achieve their milestones. It is a happy progressive school and could easily convert to an outstanding primary school. The school lends itself to a primary model. A 2FE is less contentious; more realistic and responsive to local pressures. The school has a lot to offer as a provider of KS1 and Early Years Foundation Stage information. The school has ample space to provide for outdoor learning/forest school. This is a unique opportunity to provide an outstanding primary school.
2. **Clarity before Offer Day on March 1<sup>st</sup> 2019** is essential. We need a confirmed communication for admissions, length of tenure for new and existing children, timescales, schedules, MAT partner, pathway and transition in place before March 2019.
3. Children need a **cohesive pathway** to a 'quality' secondary school if this is to work; we need a cohesive local pathway for local children with relationships with other primary schools; accept primary only if clear pathway to Pele? Could the school keep a smaller Y7 and Y8 for those who wanted a smaller school; transfer later to the UTC or link with private senior schools.
4. Ideally PCMS should **change age-range** to KS4; I would accept primary if we also allow extension in upper age-range; secondary competition in the area should serve to drive up standards.
5. This is not my preferred option but it seems to be the **only option left for sustainability** [to fit in with the two tier system]. If changing the age range will help solve this mess and help achieve a solution, then we fully support this.
6. It is very sad that a **school of this calibre** is under threat.
7. I/we selected 60 as my first choice to reduce **community contention**. The current tension is untenable and needs to be put to bed so parents, academies and children can plan for the future.
8. For the last three years PCMS staff have engaged in **thorough performance management** researching and experiencing their subject or key stage developments either in to upper school/KS4 or to lower primary. This rigorous process has built curriculum knowledge, assessment skills and understanding and confidence in their ability to change provision. PCMS KS3 staff are worried for their future. Teachers and teaching staff are the school's best asset. There are strong existing links, and teacher sharing contracts with North East Futures UTC to build on. The DfE must help preserve this excellent unit of PCMS teaching staff.
9. If PCMS finds its MAT partner, many of the considered '**risks**' identified by Lord Agnew would be mitigated; I would like to see the school grow to 90 in each year group over time; we need a long term vision.
10. We would wish that the current children at PCMS could be offered a more sensible **transition** into PHS i.e. don't put them in temporary classrooms at PHA. Can the children remain at the school until the building of the high school has finished and this would avoid overcrowding at the high school and children housed in temporary classrooms?
11. I think that the DfE should also take into account that both Newcastle and Northumberland councils have built a number of **new estates close to Ponteland** but these estates lack schooling provision. This is not a new problem and concerns about the lack of future provision have been raised recently by councillors in Newcastle. With up to 3000 houses to be built in Newcastle West, PCMS provision is necessary. Given that both Newcastle and Northumberland councils will be working together in the new North of Tyne Authority, it would make sense for places in PCMS to be earmarked for children in these new estates,

especially as the school's reputation would be an advantage in attracting people to live in these estates.

12. I **fully support** any decision made in conjunction with DfE. What funds will be available from DfE or ESFA? Additional funding is required to ensure site safety with fencing surrounding the school and specialist areas. This is within the business case.

**Neutral comment from Northumberland County Council:** 'In line with our response to trustees last year, NCC remains neutral in relation to this proposal.' NCC were satisfied 'there are currently sufficient school places' and expressed an interest in the business case regarding capital costs, budget forecast and transition. Trustees will follow this up.

**'No' comments:**

1. A few considered the **consultation period as being irregular**. For information: A change proposal requires 4 weeks with which this consultation complied. A variation in PAN consultation requires 6 weeks which, with agreement with the DfE, the Christmas holidays were included in order to conclude by 31 January 2019. There was clear direction to consult and complete by 31 January 2019.
2. **Another primary school is surplus to requirements**; PCMS should have considered going primary much earlier. There is already sufficient capacity at primary level in Ponteland for the needs of the local secondary school and community. 'Even a further 1 form primary with 30 pupils would build in over-capacity within the system'. PHS stated that 'there will not be capacity to take all the pupils coming through the new primary based at PCMS'.
3. I am concerned that the proposal of an additional 60/90 primary school places will create a surplus which will be detrimental to the other primary schools. Some new, smaller Pele primaries are 'overcrowded' as parents have been told they will be guaranteed places at the High School. There is already a **surplus of places** evidenced by the number of places being filled by children out of the catchment area. This proposal would jeopardise existing primary schools and destabilise local communities in Northumberland and Newcastle West. There would be an encroachment on catchment areas of neighbouring schools. PHS PAN is 240. [15/2/19: The previous note has been removed. NCC state that the admissions arrangements for 2019/20 had been consulted on for six weeks between 16 October and 26 November 2017]
4. There are not **many secondary school options** and maybe this needs to be addressed rather than turning PCMS into another primary school. You are oversubscribed; you have applicants from neighbouring areas; so there is room for another secondary school.
5. Having an intake from age 2 will have an **impact on the other child care providers**. PCMS does not have secure knowledge of EYFS, KS1 and KS2. Primary schools do not usually offer specialist subjects or specialist facilities.
6. **Unnecessary financial pressure** on all the other primary schools.
7. Progression pathway for Y6 is not clear; '**PCMS is not part of Pele Trust once admissions change for Pele**' or '**PCMS children would have 'no guarantee of claiming a place at Ponteland High [the Secondary School] due to academy admissions criteria'**'. Where will these children go for their secondary education without a guaranteed transitional pathway? It is wrong that children out of catchment are not guaranteed a place at the newly build secondary school if they are currently at PCMS.
8. I choose a middle school education which PCMS is expert in; others merely offer a good primary choice. **What is the provision for current children who do not want to go to the high school?**
9. It seems very erratic '**last ditch attempt to save the school**'. PCMS chose to steer the school through the reorganisation as a stand-alone middle school and did not explore, nor fight, to become a primary school.

10. We should not be causing conflict within the multi academy trust, **primary schools need to support each other** and not be competing against each other which would be the case if we were to introduce a further primary to the partnership.
11. The '**strong objection**' response from Outer West Learning Trust referred to extensive place planning already undertaken by Newcastle and Northumberland Councils; undue competition between PCMS and the OWLT schools putting OWLT schools at risk.
12. The '**strong objection**' response from Newcastle City Council referred to competition for pupils; cohort instability in Newcastle schools; and the obligation to provide local schools for planned housing developments within walking distance.
13. Has PCMS considered that children are stressed and anxious?