

Hadrian Learning Trust

## Building a better future for our children



Consultation on Proposals for Significant Changes at  
Hexham Middle School and Queen Elizabeth High School

2 March – 29 March 2018

## Contents

1.	<u>Building a better future for our children</u>	3
2.	<u>Context</u>	4
3.	<u>Proposed changes</u>	5
4.	<u>Reasons for change</u>	7
5.	<u>What would this mean for your child?</u>	10
6.	<u>School transport</u>	12
7.	<u>Admissions</u>	12
8.	<u>What would this mean for other schools?</u>	13
9.	<u>Our staff</u>	14
10.	<u>The multi-academy trust</u>	14
11.	<u>How to take part</u>	15
12.	<u>What happens after the consultation?</u>	16

## Building a better future for our children

The future is always built on the past. For schools in the West of Northumberland, our history is a long one.

It reaches back over 400 years: from Elizabethan foundations; through Victorian Elementary schools; to a system post-1944 with Primaries, Secondary Moderns, Grammar school, and one of the country's very few Technical schools. The 1970s saw the Primary-Secondary model replaced by First, Middle and High schools, accommodating the move to a comprehensive system without re-building the schools' estate.

The what and the how of curriculum, teaching and learning have also continued to evolve over the years.

We are proud of our history and want to build on it.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a school system that delivers the very best education for all our children and the whole community for years to come.

We believe that a Primary-Secondary system is in the best interests of children who will eventually progress to Queen Elizabeth High School.

With careful consideration for children in the transition period; with the right investment across our schools; with the right planning informed by research and the experience of staff; we can create a sustainable system, with access to state-of-the-art, specialist facilities and with the scale to invest properly in children's academic and personal development.

Our vision for the future is:

- to support Primary schools, including small rural schools, to give every child the best start;
- then, in Secondary 'schools within a school', provide the "stepping stone" and pastoral support that are so valued in Middle schools;
- to maintain the high standards and broader opportunities that make QEHS the school of choice;
- and, by the time they leave school, ensure that every child can fulfil their potential.

Achieving this will be challenging; but by working in partnership, by building on what is already a very strong track record, we are confident that we can combine the best of the past with an exciting future.

### **Our consultation**

We are not consulting on ANY of the options set out in Northumberland County Council's consultation. Instead, we are looking to answer two fundamental questions:

1. Should we change the age range of Hexham Middle School and Queen Elizabeth High School to form an 11-18 Secondary school from September 2021?
2. If a decision is taken by the Council/Department for Education to close Haydon Bridge High School, should we expand to welcome those children from September 2019?

Please read this document carefully before helping us answer these questions via the [online form](#) or the other ways set out on page 15.

## **2. Context of the consultation**

Hadrian Learning Trust is a Multi-Academy Trust which currently comprises Hexham Middle School (HMS) and Queen Elizabeth High School (QEHS).

With around 1743 students on roll, we are directly responsible for about half of the children attending Hexham Partnership Schools. On average, 96% of children from our feeder middle schools progress to QEHS. Approximately one third of QEHS students travel from out of catchment and consequently pay their own transport costs. This includes a significant number of students from the Haydon Bridge catchment who actively choose our schools.

In summer 2017, we undertook an initial consultation about a proposal to bring HMS and QEHS together to form a single 11-18 Secondary school. Clearly this would have implications for other schools in the Hexham Partnership and beyond.

In December 2017, Northumberland County Council decided to hold a broader consultation about Education in the West of Northumberland.

Subsequently, the Trust has decided to consult further about significant changes. Our consultation is running in parallel with the Education in the West process but is separate to it.

Hadrian Learning Trust is seeking your views on proposed significant changes to the schools for which we are directly responsible. The questions relating to these can be found in the [Response Form](#). Please note these are not the same as ANY of the options in the Council's document.

Decisions that could potentially affect Local Authority maintained schools can only be made by Northumberland County Council. Questions relating to options for these schools can be found in the Council's [consultation report](#). The Council has stressed that it is open to alternative suggestions.

We encourage all stakeholders to participate in both our own and the Council's consultations.

### **3. Proposed changes**

#### **Proposal One:**

#### **Age range change, amalgamation and expansion to create an 11-18 Secondary school from September 2021**

Following an Initial Consultation in June-July 2017, the Trust continues to take the view that a Primary/Secondary arrangement would be in the best interests of the children who progress through the school system to be educated at QEHS.

Therefore, we are proposing the amalgamation of HMS and QEHS to form an 11-18 Secondary School. In order to allow time for the building work to house the resulting larger school, it is envisaged that HMS would close on 31 August 2021 and that QEHS would expand from 1 September 2021.

If QEHS becomes an 11-18 Secondary, it would need to expand to accommodate Year 7 and Year 8 students. Based on the historic pattern of parental preferences and keeping the same Admissions Number of 306, we estimate that this could result in a school of around 1850 students. However, children's everyday experience would be of much smaller 'schools within a school', where they are known and nurtured as individuals. At the same time, they will enjoy access to the specialist facilities and opportunities that only come with scale.

Changes would be linked to a decision on the re-organisation of other schools, which is being consulted on by Northumberland County Council, and to confirmation of the necessary capital investment. Any change would also require approval of a Business Case by the Regional Schools Commissioner/Department for Education.

#### **Proposal Two:**

#### **Expansion to provide places for children from the Haydon Bridge Partnership from September 2019, if a decision is taken to close Haydon Bridge High School**

Any decision on the future of Haydon Bridge High School (HBHS) is a matter for the Department for Education and Northumberland County Council.

IF a decision is made that HBHS should close, Hadrian Learning Trust has been asked if we would provide places for the displaced children.

We have carefully considered a number of factors, including:

- The Department for Education expects that academies should support the Local Authority's statutory duty to provide sufficient school places in its area.
- QEHS is the nearest alternative Northumberland school – these are the children of our friends and neighbours.
- Prolonged uncertainty about provision in the Haydon Bridge Partnership has a negative impact on children, despite the best efforts of staff.
- Educational outcomes are generally higher at QEHS than HBHS, even though students had similar starting points at the end of Key Stage 2.
- Over 280 students from the HBHS catchment already choose to attend Hexham partnership schools, despite having to pay their own transport costs.
- QEHS does not currently have the capacity to accommodate the 324 students on roll at HBHS.
- This means that investment would be essential not only for a new build but for facilities and resources during the interim period to ensure that educational experience does not suffer.
- Transition points would need to be carefully planned and managed to avoid disruption to both current and incoming students.
- HBHS currently operates a “mixed economy” with admissions into both Year 7 and 9. This might necessitate Year 7 and 8 students joining HMS during an interim period before QEHS changes its age range.
- HMS already has capacity for the extra c.30 students in each of Years 7 and 8.
- An 11-18 school catering for Hexham and Haydon Bridge catchments and out-of-catchment demand would require over 2200 places.
- A school of this size would be very large. However, children's everyday experience would be of much smaller 'schools within a school', where they are known and nurtured as individuals. At the same time, they will enjoy access to the specialist facilities and opportunities that only come with scale.

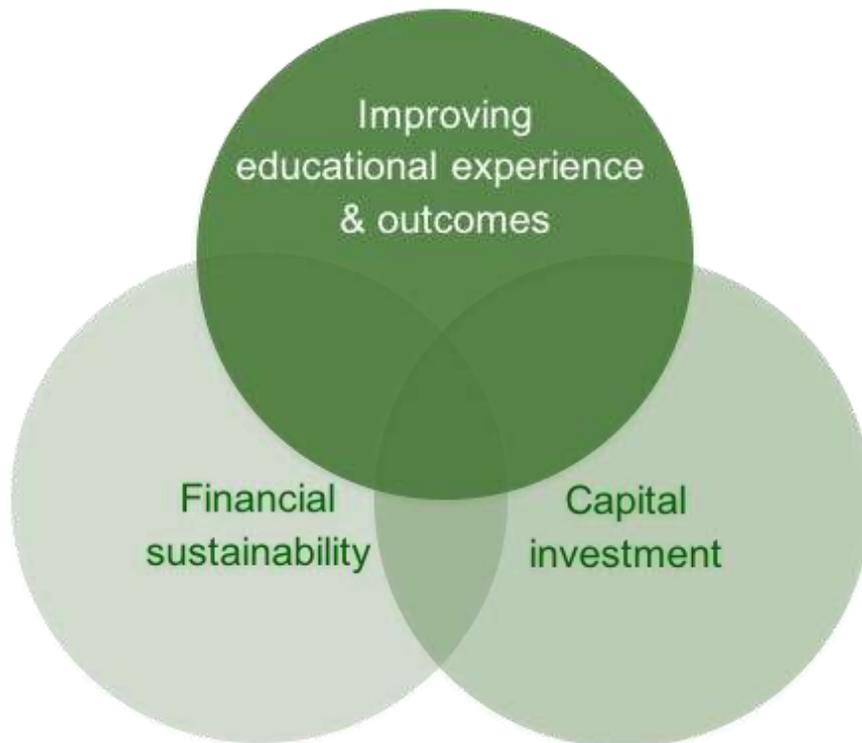
Taking all of the above into account, if Haydon Bridge High School closes, we propose to enlarge QEHS in two phases:

- In September 2019, QEHS would welcome Year 9-13 students from HBHS, with Year 7 and Year 8 students accommodated at HMS.
- From September 2021, QEHS would welcome all students aged 11-18 in new buildings.

These changes would be linked to a decision on the re-organisation of other schools, which is being consulted on by Northumberland County Council, and to confirmation of the necessary capital investment. Any change would also require approval of a Business Case by the Regional Schools Commissioner/Department for Education.

## 4. The reasons for change

The Trust has three interlinked objectives:



**Improving education** is our priority. That means building on the hard work, the broad curriculum offer and other opportunities that enable our young people to leave school with both the academic results and confidence to take their next steps. Although our results are some of the best in the region, we know that not every child fulfills their potential, particularly those who are disadvantaged. We are not complacent; we can and must do better.

Our local Three-Tier system is increasingly out of step with the vast majority of schools nationally, including those in rural areas. For example, the latest Department for Education data shows that there are now only 46 13-18 High Schools (1.4% of all state secondaries). Middle school numbers also continue to decline, with fewer than 120 remaining.

The National Curriculum is divided into Key Stages that take children through their school journey. For example, Key Stage 1 is taught during Years 1 and 2 of a Primary school.

Moving to a Primary-Secondary model would create a better fit with the national system: not only in terms of curriculum, but also assessment (tests and exams) and how schools are held to account (Ofsted and Department for Education performance measures). This is shown in the table below.

ALIGNMENT WITH KEY STAGES, ASSESSMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY														
SCHOOL YEAR	RECEPTION	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
KEY STAGE	FOUNDATION	KS1		KS2			KS3			KS4		KS5		
THREE-TIER	FIRST				MIDDLE				HIGH					
TWO-TIER	PRIMARY						SECONDARY							
ACCOUNTABILITY	RECEPTION BASELINE – KS2 SATS						KS2 SATS – GCSE (PROGRESS 8)				POST 16			

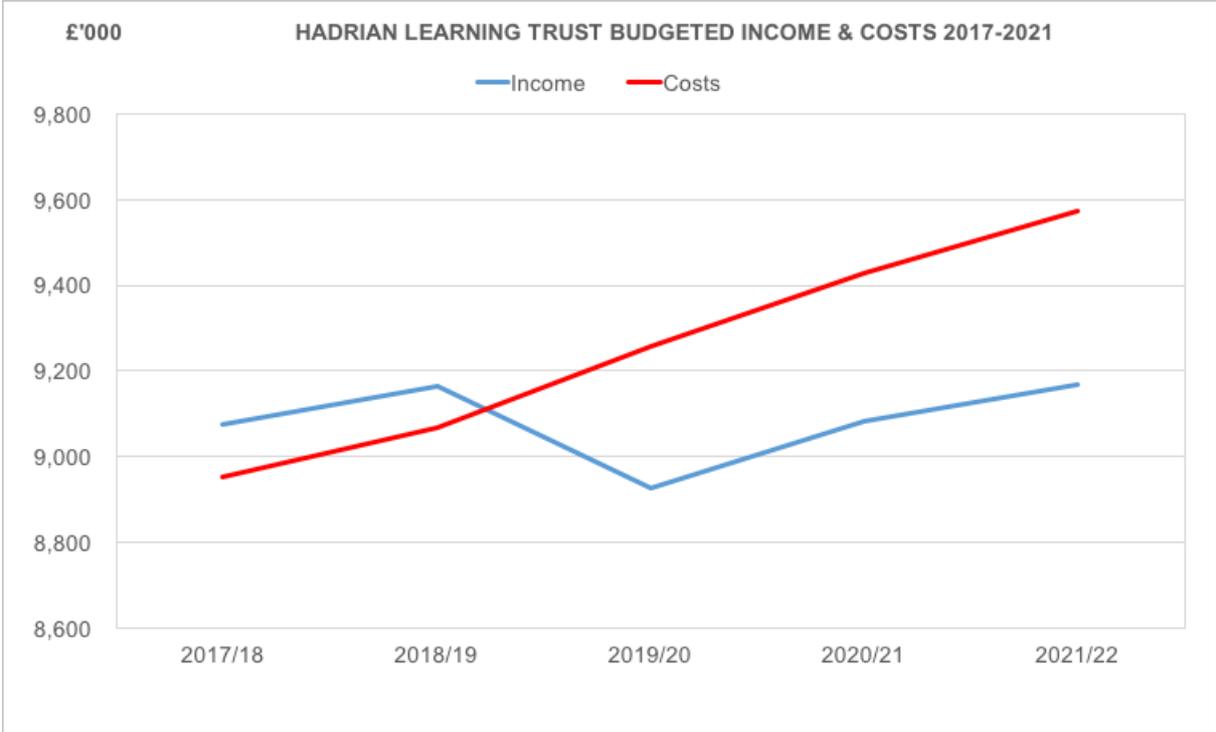
This lack of fit will become more acute in 2020, with the introduction of Reception Baseline testing. This means that Primary schools will be held to account for the progress children make between joining the school and taking Key Stage 2 SATS at the age of 11. This is problematic for Middle schools, because they are under pressure to prepare children for SATS in less than two years. High schools are already held to account for the progress made between KS2 SATs and GCSEs, even though they only have the students for three out of five years.

**Financial sustainability** goes hand in hand with educational sustainability. Every teacher, learning support assistant and classroom resource has to be paid for. Every governing body, whether of a maintained school or an academy, is obliged to set a balanced budget.

Given that funding levels are set to remain very tight for all schools, it is essential that we maximise the money available to spend directly on education:

- A Primary-Secondary system is inherently more efficient to run than a Three-Tier system, avoiding the duplication of leadership, administration and site costs.
- Primary and Secondary schools are both more financially sustainable because they have two additional years of pupils with the funding that follows them, each contributing to the overhead costs of running a school. For small rural schools, that can help ensure they remain viable.
- The National Funding Formula includes a minimum funding guarantee of £4,800 for every Year 7 and 8 student in a Secondary setting but only £4,200 for the same students in Middle schools. We estimate that this would mean QEHS benefiting from an extra £300,000 of funding a year.

Over the next five years, our modelling shows that student numbers and therefore funding will be relatively flat but that costs will continue to rise with inflation.



As a result, the financial position would quickly become untenable at both HMS and QEHS, as shown in the table below.

HADRIAN LEARNING TRUST – PROJECTED YEAR END BALANCES 2017-2021					
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
In year £'000	123	98	(330)	(344)	(404)
Balance £'000	199	297	(34)	(378)	(781)

If nothing else changes, we would have no choice except to implement severe cuts. Since it takes time for changes in curriculum and staffing to take effect, these would have to begin in 2018-19.

We have already made substantial savings in recent years and benchmarking our costs against other schools shows that we operate in a relatively lean and efficient way. Therefore, the necessary cuts would have a damaging impact on the educational experience and outcomes of our students. Far from improving provision and standards, we would risk seeing them decline.

**Capital investment** There was broad agreement in responses to our Initial Consultation that our buildings, facilities and infrastructure are not fit for purpose. The Trust has successfully bid for over £500,000 from the Condition Improvement Fund for essential repairs at HMS and QEHS. However, there needs to be much greater investment if our students and staff are to have the learning environment they deserve.

There have been two significant developments since our Initial Consultation last year:

- First, Northumberland County Council have indicated that they are considering major investment in the West to create state-of-the-art resources, possibly linked with a rationalisation of school sites.
- Secondly, the Department for Education have confirmed that they are prepared to transfer the funding already allocated for the refurbishment of the Hydro at QEHS towards the cost of any new provision.

This injection of capital funding would potentially enable significant change at our own schools, as well as in others that would require investment in any re-organisation. It would also enable us to plan a Secondary school structure that combines the best of the Middle school experience with the specialist facilities and expertise that only a large school can offer. This would be an asset not only for our children but for the whole community.

Before spending tens of millions on buildings that will serve for the next 30-40 years, some basic questions need to be answered. How many students will they have, now and in the future? What age range will schools cater for? Do they fit well with the national system? Will they be viable in the medium to long-term? What educational offer will they provide?

## **5. What would this mean for your child?**

We understand this will be the first question that many parents will ask. The answer depends to some extent on their age but there are some general points to make.

Our aim in proposing these changes is to improve the educational journey for all children by:

- Ensuring that children in the transition period continue to enjoy a good experience.
- Aligning the time spent in each school to the Key Stages in the national curriculum.
- Reducing the number of transitions between schools which can cause dips in learning.
- Smoothing preparation for tests and exams to minimise stress.
- Providing more time in each school to take part in all the other aspects of school life that go to make up a great education.
- Shaping the new QEHS buildings, so that the day-to-day experience for each child is of a school where they are known and nurtured as individuals. There are various approaches to creating 'schools within a school'. These might include separate home bases for different year groups or a strong House system, with what is known as vertical tutoring and mentoring. Decisions about which model will work best in our context will be based on research evidence, seeing first-hand what works elsewhere and utilising the experience and knowledge of colleagues in schools throughout the Partnerships.

The table below illustrates school transfers for Hexham Partnership children, with the red triangle representing the journeys of individual children who are currently in Reception and Year 5. Please note these indicative timings are based on QEHS becoming a Secondary in September 2021 and could change as plans develop. Timings are different to the Council's options and would make change much more manageable.

SCHOOL TRANSFERS BY YEAR GROUP - HEXHAM PARTNERSHIP									
	FIRST	PRIMARY	MIDDLE	HIGH	SECONDARY				
SCHOOL YEAR STARTING IN SEPTEMBER									
YEAR	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Y13									▲
Y12								▲	
Y11							▲		
Y10						▲			
Y9					▲				
Y8				▲					▲
Y7			▲					▲	
Y6		▲					▲		
Y5	▲					▲			
Y4					▲				
Y3				▲					
Y2			▲						
Y1		▲							
YR	▲								

**My child is in Reception/Year 1 or Year 2** Your child would stay in their school with teachers who know them, until the age of 11, then transfer to QEHS in its new buildings.

**My child is in Year 3** Your child would progress as usual to Middle school in September 2019. Then after two years and completing SATS, transfer to QEHS as the first Year 7 in its new buildings.

**My child is in Year 4** Your child would move to Middle School in September 2018 as usual and then after 3 years progress to QEHS in Year 8 and benefit from four years or more in its new buildings.

**My child is at Middle school** Your child would progress as usual to QEHS in Year 9.

**My child is at QEHS** Your child would continue to enjoy a wide choice of subject options and extra-curricular activities without the risk of serious cuts starting in 2018-19.

**My child is at HBHS** If a decision is taken by the Council that HBHS should close, it is proposed that Year 9 upwards would be transferred to QEHS in September 2019. This would enable students who are already on exam courses to complete them without disruption. Year 7 and 8 would be transferred to HMS. From 2021, all children would progress to QEHS in its new buildings.

**My child has Special Education or Disability Needs** Reducing the number of school changes would benefit your child, as they would stay in familiar surroundings until aged 11. Then at QEHS, with improved funding and new facilities, we would be better able to provide the support and environment to meet your child's individual needs.

## **6. School transport**

Transport for individual pupils is the responsibility of Northumberland County Council and arranged in accordance with their Home to School Transport Policy.

Should the proposal for age range change go ahead, some pupils in Years 5 and 6 could have shorter journeys to school, as they would be educated for an additional two years in Primaries in their local communities. For some pupils in Years 7 and 8, journeys may be longer, depending which Middle school they would usually attend. However, many parents already choose to send their children to a school other than their nearest – these journeys are manageable and fall well within Department for Education maximum travel time guidelines.

If a decision is taken to close HBHS, this would mean that many parents who currently pay to send their children to HMS and QEHS would be entitled to free school transport. This could benefit over 280 students.

Moving to a Primary-Secondary system would simplify the co-ordination of school buses. One benefit that we could consult on would be later finishes on some days at QEHS to enable equal access to after-school activities such as sport and the arts for all, including those from the most remote rural areas.

We welcome Northumberland County Council's decision to consult on its Post-16 Transport Policy, which would help ensure that all children have access to appropriate courses and training.

## **7. What would this mean for admissions?**

Hadrian Learning Trust is responsible for setting the admissions policy for HMS and QEHS in accordance with the statutory Schools Admissions Code. In practice, we have continued with exactly the same policy we had as Local Authority maintained schools. Whatever happens, our intake will remain comprehensive.

Changes to age of entry or over-subscription criteria such as catchment area require consultation on a new admissions policy. This consultation usually has to follow a set timeline with the new policy determined 17 months before the September in which it comes into effect. However, there is no requirement to consult on increases to the Published Admissions Number (PAN) or admitting above PAN.

Given timings and that our proposals are linked to the outcome of Northumberland County Council's own consultation process, we are not consulting on admissions at this stage.

If a decision is taken to close HBHS, we could admit the extra students in September 2019 in excess of our PAN, subject to facilities and resources being in place.

If a decision is taken to proceed with becoming an 11-18 Secondary school in September 2021, we would consult on a new admission policy at the appropriate time.

Our intention is that QEHS' main admissions point would be into Year 7, with an admissions number set for that intake. As now, admissions would be possible in later years, subject to places being available.

## **8. What would this mean for other schools?**

Hadrian Learning Trust can only make decisions on behalf of HMS and QEHS but we are acutely aware that our proposals would have implications for other schools.

Put simply, in order for QEHS to become a Secondary, it would have to be agreed that other schools become Primaries.

In other areas that have re-organised, change has taken a variety of forms:

- First schools added Year 5 and Year 6 to become Primaries;
- First and Middle schools merged to become Primaries;
- Middle schools became Primaries;
- Middle schools closed;
- Middle schools changed their age range to become 9-16 or 11-16.

Northumberland County Council's consultation document sets out various options. All include possible school closures, even though only one involves QEHS becoming a Secondary. So, many potential closures are prompted by factors other than age range. It is already clear that these are a source of considerable debate.

In our view, it is not necessary for so many schools to close if the change to a Primary-Secondary model takes place. There are a number of reasons for this:

- Many other rural areas, such as North Yorkshire and Cumbria, have successful small Primary schools. National data from 2016-17 show that there were 2,279 schools with 1-15 pupils in the year group sitting Key Stage 2 tests.
- Primary schools have an extra two years of children, bringing additional funding which helps make small schools more financially viable.
- Some Middle schools are located on the same site or close to First schools – merger could be a better option than closure.
- There may be more creative options to maintain provision in rural communities. Some of these ideas are set out in the 2014 Church of England Report '[Working Together](#)'. Closer co-operation between schools would be essential to make this work.
- Finally, for small rural schools, taking the opportunity to become a Primary may well make them less vulnerable and help secure a long-term future.

Whatever happens in the future, we are committed to working closely with our colleagues in other schools.

## **9. What would this mean for our staff?**

These proposals would have implications for staff in the Hadrian Learning Trust and other schools in the area.

At this stage, it is not possible to detail what these might be as no decisions have been made on how any changes would be implemented. In any case, we would do all that we could to minimise any negative implications. We appreciate that uncertainty can lead to anxiety but hope staff will be reassured that any major changes are not likely to begin before September 2020. Ultimately, the same number of children will need to be taught, whatever the setting.

We would seek at an early stage to establish a staffing protocol, in conjunction with Northumberland County Council, governing boards of other schools and Trades Unions, to ensure that the process of establishing a new structure would be fair and equitable and in compliance with statutory consultation requirements. The staffing protocol would outline a set of principles that all schools agree to work to, covering communication with staff and Trades Union colleagues, consultation on any new structures, recruitment, redeployment, redundancy and support to staff throughout the process.

Beyond the transition phase, we would be able to offer staff a better working environment and investment in their professional development and training – at the moment funding constraints means this is severely limited.

## **10. What would this mean for Hadrian Learning Trust?**

Hadrian Learning Trust currently comprises two schools. If HMS and QEHS were to merge, this would reduce to one. This is by no means unusual: in December 2017 63% of academy trusts had a single school. However, there are advantages in having more schools in a MAT and this is encouraged by the Department for Education.

As we said at the time of conversion, we are open to other schools joining the MAT, if it is agreed that is in everyone's best interests. To be clear, we have never "turned down" a school that has expressed an interest in joining the MAT, although we have had to explain that the timing was not right for us. For example, we decided that it was essential to clarify our position on potential age range first, before getting into substantive discussions on MAT expansion.

Our door remains open to any school in the Hexham Partnership or beyond. However, the due diligence process required by both parties would inevitably highlight issues around educational and financial sustainability and the need for a clear path to essential capital investment. Resolving these strategic issues is a pre-condition to any future MAT expansion.

## 11. How to take part

The consultation will run for four term-time weeks from Friday 2 March until 3.30pm on Thursday 29 March 2018.

Stakeholders consulted will include students, parents and staff of Partnership and other local schools, Local Authorities, Trades Unions, Councillors and the Member of Parliament. We also welcome responses from the wider community. Our school community includes past and future students, parents and grandparents.

We are keen to hear the views of as many of you as possible, including any alternative proposals that meet our three interlinked objectives: improve educational outcomes and experience; become financially sustainable; secure capital investment.

It would assist administration greatly if you could please complete the [Response Form](#) electronically. Alternatively, you can email your form to [consultation@qehs.net](mailto:consultation@qehs.net) OR hand in a paper copy at either HMS or QEHS Reception OR by post to: Consultation, Queen Elizabeth High School, Whetstone Bridge Road, Hexham NE46 3JB

Copies of this Consultation Document and Response Form are available on the HMS and QEHS websites or from Reception at either school.

We will also be holding drop-in sessions on the following dates, when you can speak to Trustees and Senior Leaders and complete a Response Form:

- HMS Staff Only Drop-In: Monday 12 March 16.00-17.00, HMS
- QEHS Staff Only Drop-In: Tuesday 13 March 17.00-18.00, QEHS
- QEHS Parents Only Drop-In: Wednesday 14 March 18.00-19.30, School Hall QEHS
- HMS Parents Only Drop-In: Thursday 15 March 16.30-18.30, School Hall HMS
- General Public Drop-in: Monday 19 March 18.00-19.30, School Hall at QEHS.

We will also be attending the Public Meeting organised by the Council on Saturday 17 March, 10:00-15:00, at Hexham Mart.

We would encourage everyone to respond to the Northumberland County Council [consultation](#).

## **12. What happens after the consultation?**

The Trust Board will meet to consider carefully responses to the consultation.

We will then decide, on behalf of Hadrian Learning Trust, how to proceed.

We hope to be able to signal our intentions by the time that Northumberland County Council's Cabinet meets on 8 May to consider the outcome of its own consultation on Education in the West of Northumberland.

Following that Cabinet meeting, the Trust Board will decide whether or not to submit a business case for any significant change proposals to the Regional Schools Commissioner /Department for Education for their approval.

We hope final decisions will be made by the end of the Summer Term to avoid prolonged uncertainty. We will keep you informed throughout this process.

We know that the prospect of any change can be unsettling but please be assured that whatever the future holds we remain committed to doing our very best for all of our children.