

Save Tynedale's Amazing Rural Schools - Parents of West Northumberland launch Campaign Group

Submitted by: STARS - Save Tynedale's Amazing Rural Schools

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Hexham: 28 February 2018 - A broad network of parents from across West Northumberland have launched a campaign to fight against the proposed closure of 16 rural schools. STARS - Save Tynedale's Amazing Rural Schools - was set up in the wake of Northumberland County Council's controversial schools consultation.

STARS is the next logical step in the process as parents across West Northumberland seek to coordinate and elevate their response to the consultation in an effort to safeguard their children's educational future.

Parents are unhappy with how the consultation has come about and with the three options it has tabled. Chiefly, STARS concerns are that:

- A decision has already been made by Northumberland County Council regardless of the outcome of the consultation;
- The consultation is based on muddled and misleading thinking and information, conflating separate issues such as the future of Haydon Bridge High School and debate over a two versus three-tier school system;
- The proposed changes would lead to poorer educational outcomes and require thousands of children (some as young as four) to travel long distances on inadequate road systems to school every day;
- The loss of local village schools would damage communities and local economies;
- There is little financial justification to close some of the first schools earmarked for potential closure;
- There is little recognition of the exceptional educational outcomes that are consistently achieved by the first, middle and high schools across West Northumberland, which boasts the best GCSE results in the county;
- The current system works best for West Northumberland's unique circumstances and its sparsely populated network of small village and hamlet communities. Megaschools that work for major cities like London present massive logistical, cultural and transitional challenges for children being educated in rural Northumberland, and
- There is an overall lack of information, impact assessments, independent audits and feedback from the council, and nothing from its initial consultation with educational professionals and school governors.

Over 8,000 parents, teachers and concerned residents have now signed petitions set up by STARS members calling for the council to withdraw its ill-conceived consultation and re-evaluate its approach to education in West Northumberland.

The STARS campaign has already gained the support of the National Education Union, Hexham Constituency Labour Party and MP for Hexham Guy Opperman, who has stated he cannot support any of the three options tabled by Northumberland County Council in its consultation.

Parents widespread discontent with the consultation has also been covered widely by the local press and in trade publication Schools Week.

"Many of us were shocked when we first read the consultation that 16 of our rural schools could be closed, particularly as many of these are excellent and much-loved schools," says Fiona Healey, spokesperson for STARS. "We decided that our best defence was to set up a joint response as we fight to save our schools and a system that works best for West Northumberland."

"We are determined to make sure our voices are heard. We are concerned that if these disruptive and ill thought-out proposals are allowed to go ahead, educational outcomes could suffer, children will be forced to travel many miles each day and communities will lose their heart and identity."

"We are particularly angry that having been the main architects of the situation we are now faced with, Northumberland County Council's solution is to quite literally send in the bulldozer. Our children deserve better."

"West Northumberland's rural schools are nurturing places that provide a safe and secure environment for our children to learn and develop. They are filled with exceptionally skilled and inspiring teachers and quite frankly, they deserve better funding and a certain future."

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About STARS

STARS - Save Tynedale's Amazing Rural Schools - is a campaign group set up in response to a number of consultations in the West Northumberland area looking to close rural schools. As parents from the Hexham partnership we are uniting together to challenge proposals to save our vital rural first, middle and high schools. Find out more on our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/STARSNORTHUMBERLAND/