



## National Middle Schools' Forum

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### Consultation on the future of Hexham Middle School and Queen Elizabeth High School

Dear Sir

I would like to respond some of the points made in a recent article in the Chronicle.

#### 1) The new school would teach pupils from 11 to 18 and move the town away from the three-tier education system

Is it right that one school should be able to change its status like this – forcing change on the other schools in the community with no suggestion as to how changes at these other schools are to be paid for?

Well, the simple answer is no, it is not right, and such a proposal is unlikely to gain the approval that would be required from the Regional Schools Commissioner. Recent comments from the Schools Commissioner, Sir David Carter, to the National Middle Schools Forum suggest that a single school coming forward with proposals like this without the widespread support of the community will not gain the approval of the Regional Schools' Commissioner.

A similar proposal from Gamlingay First School in 2015 had to be withdrawn, leading to a revision to the School Organisation Statutory Guidance that now makes it clear that applications for changes of age range from individual academies within three tier systems will no longer gain approval:

Where proposals are likely to have a significant impact on other local provision a full business case will usually be required to provide evidence that the education of children in the area, as a whole, will not be compromised.

**Where local provision is organised in three tiers and the aim is to move to two tier age range, the department expects schools to work together to ensure an appropriate co-ordinated implementation, and will only approve any individual proposal in that context.**

*(Making significant changes to an open academy - page 9, DfE 2016)*

A little bit history here is instructive. Recently Tudor Grange Academy in Redditch forced through a similar proposal to change its age range from 13 to 18 to start taking children at age eleven. This change gained the approval of the West Midlands Regional Schools Commissioner, against the wishes of many schools in the area. Parental support for the three-tier system in the area is remains strong and they have not taken kindly to the schools attempt to force through change. This year Tudor

Grange Academy Redditch have abandoned plans to admit children to their Year 7 next September as applications have been so low. The Academy has lost considerable sums of money in the process. It is clear from comments locally and nationally that a similar proposal brought forward now would not gain approval.

**2) They also said pupils moving through the schools can disrupt learning, and that middle schools tend to perform less well on Ofsted criteria than primaries.**

In fact recent Ofsted inspection outcomes show that 84% of middle schools were judged good or better in their latest inspections. This figure compares well with that of both primary and secondary school inspections. There is nothing about the way middle schools systems operate that suggests that they underperform in relation to other forms of organisation. The article attempts to portray middle schools systems as somehow underperforming.

In fact the direct opposite appears to be the case from recent GCSE data analysis. This table compares the outcomes for students in three tier systems in 2016 with those in all schools.

**Analysis of 2016 GCSE outcomes.**

	<b>Percent Gaining C+ Eng &amp; Mat</b>	<b>Percent Achieving E Bacc</b>
National 3 Tier	67.8%	25.4%
National All schools	63%	24.7%

Students in three tier systems nationally achieve higher outcomes in both the combined measure for A\*-C in English and Maths and in the broader measure of those achieving the Ebacc. It may well be that the broader curriculum that many middle schools continue to provide, without the well-known deficit on progress associated with transfer at age eleven, provides a firm foundation for later achievement at age 16.

**3) This consultation only covers the two schools involved - there would be a need for extra year five and six classes in the area.**

Who would be expected to fund the provision of the additional classrooms that would be required? In the proposal from Tudor Grange Academy Redditch, referred to above, the school gave various undertakings about providing funds to the affected first schools that have proved to be valueless. The result was that Worcestershire County Council was left with the liability.

This proposal appears to have been brought forward because of unspecified financial difficulties at the High School. If this is the case then these problems need to be made public. There is an assertion made that closing Hexham Middle School and merging the two schools will resolve this difficulty – but this proposition is not supported by any evidence that this will be the case. Even if it were true that the proposal would ease the difficulties of the High School, this would be at the expense of throwing all the surrounding schools in the community into turmoil, with no detailed plan as to

how the costs of this reorganisation for all the schools in the community would be funded. From the outside this looks like one school seeking to resolve its financial difficulties by casting all the other schools in the area into financial difficulties.

Yours

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