

# Secondary Review in West Gateshead

## Consultation Summary

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## Introduction

On 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2009, Cabinet agreed to carry out informal non-statutory consultation on options for the review and reorganisation of secondary school provision in the West Area of Gateshead.

<b>Option A</b>	To close Hookergate and transfer existing pupils to Ryton School and replace Ryton school on an alternative site.
<b>Option B</b>	To close both Hookergate and Ryton schools, opening a new school for existing pupils of both schools on a new site.
<b>Option C</b>	To close Hookergate School and transfer existing pupils to Ryton School rebuilding Ryton school on existing site.

The aim of the consultation was to gather the views with a wide range of stakeholders to inform the Council's Cabinet decision on next steps, in the light of public opinion.

The outcome of the consultation is a vital decision in terms of "Building Schools for the Future", and the consultation aimed to get respondents to focus on the long-term educational needs of the young people and the communities of West Gateshead. The consultation was neither statutory nor legally binding, but seen as best practice.

This report highlights the key findings from the consultation process, reporting on the results of the survey as well as comments made at the different consultation meetings and documents submitted by a range of stakeholders.

## Methodology

The consultation process included the following elements: -

### Questionnaire

A consultation document was designed to explore and seek comments on the three different options. The document also included a paper questionnaire for return to a FREEPOST address at Gateshead Council. Questionnaires were sent out, through the school network, to the parents, staff and governors at both Ryton Comprehensive and Hookergate Comprehensive. Questionnaires were also given to parents and governors of the primary schools linked to both secondary schools, via schools' distribution arrangements to their parents.

Further questionnaires were also distributed to union representatives, diocesan representatives, admission forum, west area forum and other secondary schools in the borough.

The documentation was also available on the council's website, so as to give members of the wider public options, and a variety of ways to respond. The material on the website was identical to that in the consultation document to ensure that online results could be fed into the broader analysis of responses.

## **Consultation Meetings**

Different consultation meetings were held in the schools for the parents, students, staff and governors of Ryton Comprehensive and Hookergate Comprehensive schools (eight meetings). Seven open consultation meetings were held at the following local primary schools in both secondary school catchment areas: -

Chopwell Primary School, Greenside Primary School, Parkhead Primary School, Blaydon West Primary School, Rowlands Gill Primary School, Ryton Junior School, Highfield Primary School

A time, date and location of the meetings are attached.

## **Letters and Emails**

We received 471 letters and emails commenting on the review and the options.

Of the 390 letters we received from Ryton, 274 were the same circular letter. Key issues have been therefore extracted from this letter and included in the feedback. Where the same letter has been sent from an individual to several recipients at the Council the letter has been counted as one letter. For example 1 letter from 274 individuals = 274 count, 1 letter from 1 individual to 30 recipients = 1 count.

## **Other**

We also received the following documents which have been used as part of the consultation process: -

- Consultation response from Governors of Ryton Comprehensive School (copy attached).
- Consultation response from Governors of Hookergate Comprehensive School (copy attached).
- Consultation responses from Gateshead Association of Secondary Heads and individual responses from secondary schools at Kingsmeadow, Joseph Swan, Whickham, Thomas Hepburn and St. Thomas More RC
- Consultation responses from linked primary schools at High Spen, Greenside and Emmaville.
- Union responses from Unison and NASUWT.
- Petition from Ryton to keep Ryton in Ryton and Greenside Green (logged as part of the Council-wide petitions schedule regularly reported to Cabinet).
- Petition from Hookergate to keep Hookergate open (as above)
- Feedback from the MP's surgery.
- Responses from individual ward councillors.
- Survey of local businesses in Ryton carried out by Ryton residents.

## Key Findings

Overall, 2,494 respondents returned a survey. Of these 94.4% were returned by post and 5.6% by the online survey.

Of the 2,494 returned surveys, 54 had not filled in profile information so we cannot account for the profile of 2% of the respondents.

Figure 1: Profile of participants

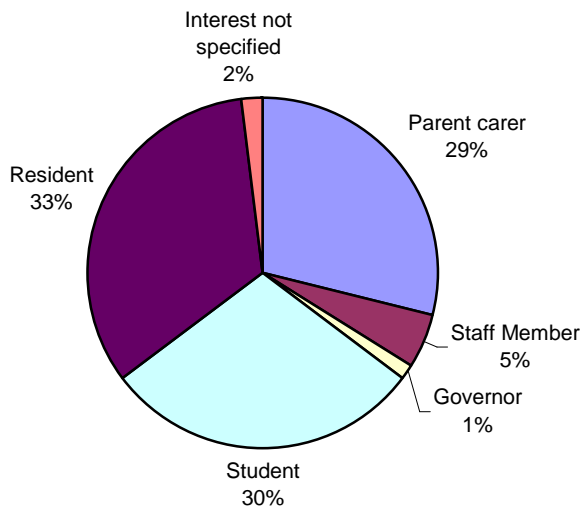
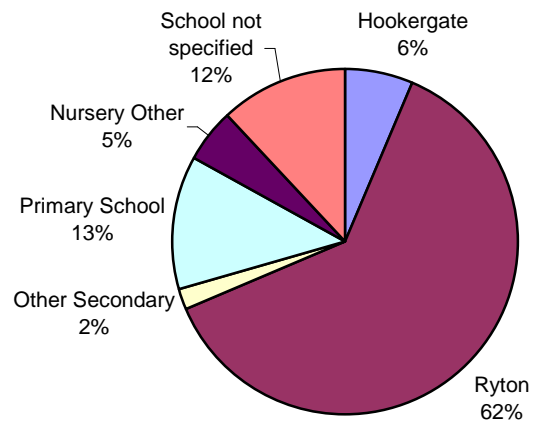


Figure 2: Association with a particular school

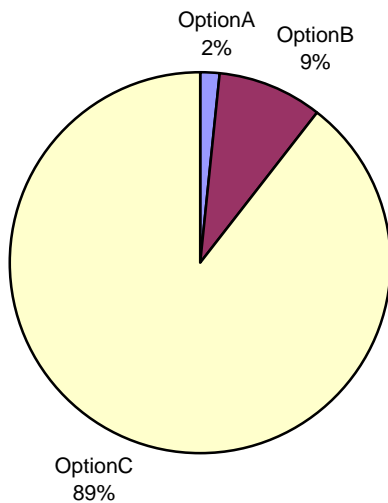


## Options for Change

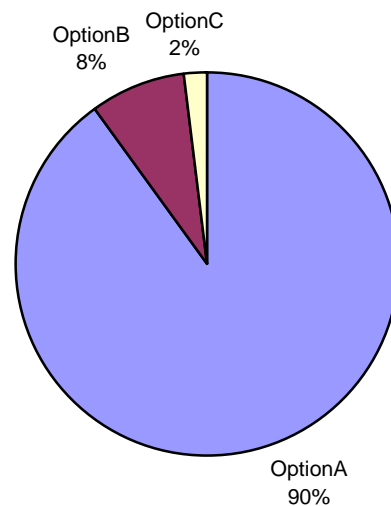
The Council proposed three options but made it clear it would consider other suggestions that could provide viable and sustainable arrangements for the west area.

The following 3 charts break down the first second and third choices relating to the options provided.

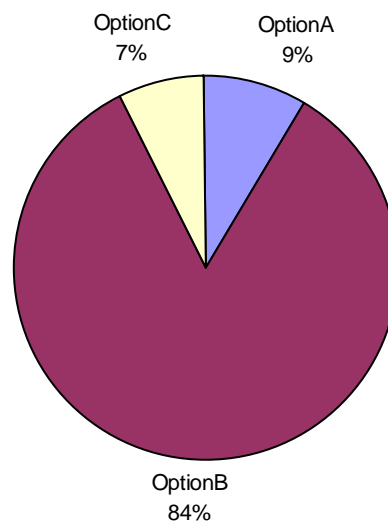
*Figure 3: Overall First Choices*



*Figure 4: Overall Second Choices*



*Figure 5: Overall Third Choices*



Respondents were asked for comments on the preferred options. The following is a summary of the key issues based on correspondence to council from the official response forms. Key comments received via correspondence to council officers, elected members, ward councillors and the local MP are also included. These summaries condense all the arguments received from all respondents.

### **Option A**

- Option B places geography above educational stability. If geography was the only driver Option A would cover this requirement.
- Governors consider Ryton Comprehensive should be located within its community. If a suitable new site could be found within the Ryton area governors may be willing to consider this option.
- The Council should conduct a full and thorough study of all potential sites for improved educational facilities in the West.
- The lie of the land dictates the existing travel patterns, i.e. along the valleys not across them. A site convenient to both communities of both schools where routes converge more naturally would be more sustainable.
- It is difficult to choose this option as a preferred option when there is a lack of clarity over a site.
- This is the best option to build on the success of Ryton and Hookergate, in a new building on an alternative, central site, minimising the disruption to both sets of pupils during construction. All students should move in, once built.

### **Option B**

- Combine both schools into one 'fresh start' new school with a new uniform and ethos utilising the strengths, teaching expertise and leadership of both schools.
- Staff will be treated equally under this merger option and contribute significantly to the successful creation of a 'new' school, bringing with it the support of all the communities across the West.
- Option B is the only option which will treat the students of both schools and the communities they serve with fairness and equity. Integrating students on an equal footing will provide a better climate for smooth transition promoting a more cohesive 'new' school population.
- A new eco-friendly school which is equidistant for all communities in West Gateshead is the best and fairest option for all children.
- Transition should be managed as a two-stage process which includes a new school formally opening covering both sites while the BSF building is constructed.
- This option would address the Hookergate students' concerns that the other communities consider them second-class citizens.
- It is vital that the children retain their teachers during transition, particularly for children during GCSEs and A levels.
- We need to retain some community facilities in Hookergate. At present Active Kidz is delivered from the school site.
- Both Ryton and Hookergate sites are in poor condition and cannot fulfil today's educational requirements, so this is the best option.

## Option C

- Ryton Comprehensive is a popular and successful school, consistently over subscribed. Ryton Comprehensive should be expanded in line with the government agenda.
- Ryton has excellent results. There is no educational argument for dismantling this school.
- The Council seems set on a 'state of the art' new build however it needs to be acknowledged that a successful school is the product of its staff and leadership not just its buildings.
- There are no guarantees of job security for staff from both schools in Option B. The employment of staff in two schools should not be jeopardised.
- At present, 52% of the students walk to Ryton which addresses the "Be Healthy" agenda. Moving the site would mean these children crossing over a dangerous, busy roads.
- Recruitment and retention of staff is an important factor in the success of a school. No one would want to work in a school, or schools, earmarked for closure. Parents may decide to send their children to schools not under threat of closure.
- Ryton has the transport infrastructure to sustain increases in students. An alternative location would need increased investment in street lighting, cycle ways etc.
- Ryton is one of two schools in borough providing a "learning village". The learning, aged 3 through to A levels, is a high success due to the holistic approach to education.
- The transition needs to be managed effectively to minimise the disruption of education. Ryton is recognised by Ofsted as having outstanding pastoral care and very good transition arrangements.
- Temporary accommodation is not a solution to increasing the size of Ryton, even for an interim period. Retain Hookergate site for as long as possible.
- Transition from Hookergate to Ryton could include a change of uniform or school name.
- There is too much uncertainty about Option B. Gateshead Local Authority has demonstrated competent management of schools in the borough and we do not want to take the risk of competition removing the school from the LA's control. We do not want a Trust or Academy.
- Ryton has recently received significant investment and Option C provides the best value in redevelopment of current facilities. In the current economic climate, this would remove the need to waste taxpayers money spent on new sports hall, and repay the investment made to build it.
- There is space on the Ryton site to expand whilst the school continues to function in its existing buildings. This is the 'greenest' option, given that the other two choices require use of greenbelt land.
- Concern over impact and viability of Ryton community including shops and services if the school was removed.
- There are strong links with the community in relation for example, to adult education and the Ryton Football Club.
- Educationally there should be a limit on the size of the school.

- Ryton’s status as a specialist language college should not be lost.
- A development at Ryton would need to address existing and future traffic issues relating to volume of cars parking in local streets, and litter.

### Alternative Options

Respondents were asked as part of the consultation, if they wished the council to consider alternative options. Each public meeting was also reminded of this.

Of the 2,494 returned forms, 774 suggested an alternative option which can be summarised as follows: -

Figure 6: Alternative Options

Keep both schools open/rebuild Hookergate smaller	466	19%
New school at Hookergate site not Ryton	16	1%
Redistribute Hookergate linked schools to other secondary schools	166	7%
Amalgamate Hookergate and Kingsmeadow	50	2%
New school elsewhere	66	3%
Restructure catchment areas	10	0%
No alternative option	1720	69%
	<b>2494</b>	

Key issues raised in correspondence to council officers, elected members, ward councillors and the MP, letters and emails as well as the official response forms: -

- Adopt the solution in the East of Gateshead where both schools stayed open and will be remodelled. Retain Hookergate and rebuild as a smaller school. New name, new uniform - rebrand.
- Create a village campus at Hookergate to include a primary school and offer improved community facilities such as adult education, childcare, health, vets, library, sports and leisure.
- Retain Hookergate by reducing the capacity of other schools to reflect more closely the number of pupils in each of their feeder schools.
- Children thrive in smaller schools. Reduce the intake at all secondary schools in west to sustain Hookergate and Kingsmeadow.
- Keep both schools open whilst the new school is being built to minimise disruption and pupils can start together in new building as equals.
- The review should be considering the size and future of all the schools in the west and not just focusing on Ryton and Hookergate. Additional capacity should be provided in schools in line with parental preferences to remove the expectation for just one neighbouring school to accommodate most children from Hookergate.
- Operate one school, from the two sites at Ryton and Hookergate. Operate the smaller Hookergate site as a sixth form college for the West, an ‘upper school’ plus vocational site.
- Join Hookergate to Ryton and operate one larger school out of two sites.

- Redevelop Hookergate offering a commitment to secondary education provision within the Hookergate catchment area within a state of the art new building, likely to attract significantly greater numbers of pupils to the school.
- Accommodate all the Hookergate students in Whickham School.
- Amalgamate Hookergate and Kingsmeadow.

## Catchment Areas

The respondents were asked how catchment areas and linked primary arrangements should change in this review.

The following is a summary of the key issues based on correspondence to council from the official response forms. Key comments received via correspondence to council officers, elected members, ward councillors and the MP are also included: -

- Catchment areas across west Gateshead should be reviewed to including redesignation of Hookergate pupils equally between Ryton, Whickham and Kingsmeadow, as all three schools are similar distance from the Hookergate catchment area.
- Catchment areas should reflect the geography and transport infrastructure of the area, maximising the opportunities for students to walk to school.
- All primary schools should remain linked to a single school to allow smooth transition from primary to secondary schools.
- Siblings should be accommodated.
- The combined catchment area of 11 primary schools is too large for one single secondary school to accommodate.
- Reduce the intake at all secondary schools to sustain Hookergate and Kingsmeadow, redefining the catchment areas to accommodate to revised school sizes.
- A new combined school should not be too large.
- Catchment areas should be abolished. Give parents their choice of all schools.
- Hookergate linked schools should be added to Ryton and the catchment areas remain the same, served by one school.
- St. Thomas More should be expanded to take in more local children regardless of faith.
- There should be a restriction on how many non-Catholics are enrolled at Catholic schools.
- If Blaydon/Winlaton parents are already choosing Ryton then the catchment should reflect this. The remaining Hookergate schools should form the catchment of a smaller secondary community school.

## Site Issues

Respondents were asked if they had a preference for a new school on a new site to be built. The following is a summary of key issues based on correspondence to the council from the official response forms and key comments to council officers, elected members, and the MP: -

- Morally opposed to any option that builds on green belt land.
- Building on green fields, in a green belt area gives a terrible example for students who are taught the importance of sustainability and looking after our environment.
- Retain Ryton on existing site to maximise funding already spent on site and minimise the waste of taxpayer's money and environment impact.
- The consultation focussed on square miles rather not population distribution. An inappropriate approach to determining the location of a school.
- Schools where a large proportion of students require transport suffer increased attendance and punctuality problems and a negative impact on extra-curricular activities.
- The people of Greenside do not want a new secondary school, which would double the population of the village during school hours. The village does not have the infrastructure for public transport alongside school buses.
- Greenside has active and recent landfills that will contaminate the area long-term if the land is developed.
- If the school was based in Greenside, there would be health and safety risks to 600+ students from Crawcrook and Ryton walk to school, as they would cross busy dual carriageway. Accidents will be inevitable. A site should be chosen that minimises the number of children forced to walk across the A695 bypass.
- A school central to all the local communities would be best located in the Greenside area.
- Within Ryton.
- Locate an amalgamated school on Hookergate's rural site.
- Build in the Blaydon area, a major centre of population with much better transport infrastructure. Axwell Park area, or old Vickers site.
- Barlow area.
- Seven of the eleven feeder primary schools affected are on the south side of the by pass which means the majority of pupils attending a new school in Greenside would not have to cross the bypass.
- Amalgamate separate infants and junior schools at Ryton and rationalise the space to develop the Ryton site as an all-age campus.
- Rebuild an enlarged Ryton on the site previously used as the Ryton Hub. The existing site could still be used as an annexe. Retain the sports hall; develop sports facilities on the previous site by relocating the rugby club, creating football facilities and a leisure centre.
- Provide a list of proposed sites for a more meaningful consultation.
- Do not see the need for a new build.

## Transport

Respondents were asked if they had any other comments or suggestions about sustainable transport arrangements. The following is a summary of the key issues from correspondence to the council, from the official response forms. Key comments to council officers, elected members, ward councillors and the MP are also included: -

- LAA indicators require access to services and facilities by public transport, walking and cycling. Building a school in a rural area would contradict and undermine this indicator, by choosing option B.
- LAA indicators require us to adapt to climate change. We must minimise the number of pupils being driven to school and maximise the number of pupils who have a short distance to travel to school, many of whom will walk.
- There needs to be both adequate commissioned transport services to meet the needs of the children, and negotiations with the transport providers to ensure any new school is easily accessible to children and parents from across West Gateshead.
- A review of safe cycle routes in the west of Gateshead needs to take place.
- Pedestrians rather than motorised transport should be given primary consideration. 52% of students walk to Ryton - this is a sustainable option.
- Half the children also walk to Hookergate. There will be an increase in travelling time, wherever the new campus is located.
- Consideration should be given to parents who will not live more than 3 miles from any new school, but will have to pay for transport, when their children currently walk to school. Financial support would be required for all students who have to travel by bus.
- Develop the existing Ryton site infrastructure in such a way as to minimise the traffic impact on the main road.

### **Any Other Comments**

The following is a summary of key issues in correspondence to council from the official response forms. Key comments to council officers, elected members, ward councillors and the MP are also included: -

- The ultimate preferred option must factor what happens if BSF funding does not transpire and a brand new school will not be possible.
- Must give appropriate consideration to transition arrangements with any option, particularly for parents choosing a secondary place in September/October. Do not make students move twice.
- As all three options suggest the closure of Hookergate the options for some have been limited at this consultation stage.
- Parents and pupils should be given a choice on which school they wish to transfer to increasing admission numbers in relation to demand. It is not supporting parental choice to simply say Hookergate students will transfer to Ryton.
- A school the size of 1600 is too big. Concerns that a larger school could become much more impersonal and pastoral care of students could suffer.
- What will happen to vacated school sites?
- Do not repeat the mistakes made when Blaydon School closed and children were sent to Hookergate creating an “us and them” situation. The reputation of the school tumbled.
- Some agreement should be made with all governing bodies immediately to acknowledge that staff from Hookergate will be applying for posts across the

authority and should be considered first for any post they are qualified for and have experience to fill.

- Do not play politics with the future of our children, as opposed to genuinely caring for their welfare and their educational needs.
- Young people in Chopwell will still not have a real choice of school. Why is the Council investing in the regeneration of the Chopwell area and removing the local secondary school at the same time?
- The timescale for this consultation is too short for such a fundamental issue.
- There are already inadequate on site facilities at Ryton Comprehensive for the students, leading to regular problems with littering in the village. These problems would worsen if the number of students increased.
- Any proposal would have to meet the SEN improvement test, to reprovide and enhance existing SEN facilities at both schools.
- What will happen to the existing infant and junior schools on Ryton site? Should we not be aiming for an 'all-through' campus?
- The education of the children formerly at Kepier Chare Primary School has already been disrupted, and will be disrupted again under these proposals.
- It is vital that any changes are made quickly, but carefully. We need to address the polarisation of the communities.
- The figures presented at the meeting sessions do not account for a large annual loss of year 4 pupils to Northumberland. We need to reverse pupils drifting to other authorities.
- There should have been a consultation meeting at every primary school.

## Where the Consultation Sessions were held

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Hookergate	Students only	24 <sup>th</sup> June 2009
	Staff only	24 <sup>th</sup> June 2009
	Parents only	24 <sup>th</sup> June 2009
	Governors only	29 <sup>th</sup> June 2009
Ryton	Parents only	23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2009
	Governors Only	23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2009
	Staff only	Friday 3 <sup>rd</sup> July 2009
	Students Only	Monday 6 <sup>th</sup> July 2009
Chopwell Primary School	Public meeting	Thursday 25 <sup>th</sup> June 2009
Greenside Primary School	Public meeting	Tuesday 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2009
Parkhead Primary School	Public meeting	Tuesday 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2009
Blaydon West Primary School	Public meeting	Thursday 2 <sup>nd</sup> July 2009
Rowlands Gill Primary School	Public meeting	Monday 6 <sup>th</sup> July 2009
Ryton Junior School	Public meeting	Tuesday 7 <sup>th</sup> July 2009
Highfield Primary School	Public meeting	Thursday 9 <sup>th</sup> July 2009

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