



Diocesan Board of Education



FEDERATION GUIDANCE

What is a federation?

Many schools in the Diocese of Coventry already work in a collaborative way with other educational establishments in their area. A federation is simply a more formalised agreement to work together and can best be described as “schools working together for the benefit of all pupils and their communities”.

One way of thinking about this is as a continuum:

Partnership:	this is where two or more schools establish formal and informal agreements to work together
Collaboration:	this is a formal partnership model using the collaborative regulations to establish a strategic group across the partnership where at least one committee has delegated powers
Federation:	this is where two or more schools are governed collectively under a single governing body

Federations can be between two or more schools and although these are often schools already working in partnership or collaboration this does not necessarily have to be the case. Likewise, there may be more than one head teacher in a federation.

Although there is only one governing body, each school in a federation retains its own separate legal identity in terms of its school category, name, ethos and usually its budget.

Federation works on the basis that all schools have their own particular strengths and advantages, whether it be facilities, staff or resources. Sharing these assets can make every school even better for its pupils and there are a growing number of federations running successfully throughout the Diocese.

	Federation	Collaboration	Partnership
Governing Body	Single governing body shared by all schools	Each school has its own governing body but the partnership has joint governance/ strategic committee(s) with delegated powers	Each school has its own governing body, however, the partnership may have joint governance/ strategic committee(s) without delegated powers
Common Goals	All schools share common goals. Having one single governing body allows for efficient, streamlined decision making in all areas	All schools share common goals. A joint committee can make decisions in some areas, but not all – depending on delegated powers	All schools share common goals. A joint committee can make recommendations but it is up to each individual governing body to ratify any decisions
Common Budget	This is possible but rare. Having a single governing body allows for prompt budgetary decisions on behalf of the group of schools	No, but if joint committee has budgetary powers delegated to it , it can make prompt budgetary decisions for the group of schools	No, but could make budgetary recommendations for the group, which in turn would have to be approved by individual governing body
Shared Staff	New appointments are agreed in a simple, effective manner. Contracts of existing staff remain unchanged	Staff are employed by an individual school within the collaboration	Staff are employed by an individual school within the collaboration

Collaborations and Partnerships

Although it is possible to move straight to a federation, many schools decide to work together in a collaborative way first.

This initial phase of collaboration is often instrumental to the success of a federation with many of the concerns from parents, staff and the local community being overcome at this stage.

This preliminary stage also gives governors across the partnership, in particular Chairs, the opportunity to begin building relationships. This does not necessarily have to be restricted to formal meetings – Chairs can also meet informally to share ideas which can play an important part in developing the collaboration further.

Once other governors see their Chairs working together, they can be encouraged to build positive relationships with one another, especially if governing bodies have joint meetings, either of the full governing body or of committees.

Why federate?

Many schools benefit from informal collaboration, so why federate?

There can be greater strategic flexibility in terms of staffing, for example, the opportunity to develop staff leadership skills leading to improved succession planning.

Streamlined governing body operations cut the workload for the head teacher, clerk to governors and the governing bodies themselves if they have been in a partnership.

In many successful federations, standards have risen across the board with improved teaching and learning being a major benefit. This is because federation allows schools greater flexibility with staffing, such as being able to distribute staff across schools whether for cover or to share specialist skills.

Federations also offer a unique set of challenges, allowing them to attract more ambitious applicants when recruiting, as well as retain their best existing staff.

Federation can offer significant benefits, but making it work requires governing bodies to ask challenging questions, really know their schools and build strong relationships, all of which are essential components of any effective governing body.

Challenges to federation

Good communication is the key to a successful federation but if schools have been working together in a collaboration any challenges can usually be overcome.

Often parents and staff can be concerned about moving into a federation feeling that they are handing their school over to a group of strangers or that one school is “taking over the other” which can lead to a “them and us” mentality.

Holding meetings for staff and parents to discuss federation is a good way of ensuring a smooth transition and gives colleagues and parents from all schools the opportunity to get to know one another in an informal situation. One of the easiest ways to dispel concerns is to get everyone in a room together talking to each other. This includes the members of the governing bodies concerned as well.

Which schools can federate?

Any maintained school can agree to work collaboratively with another. Federated schools will not be subject to a change in category and can involve any type of school, including those with Foundation Status.

Primary phase schools can federate even if they have traditionally served two different high schools.

Where there is more than one type of school, e.g. Community, VA or VC, the Local Authority and Diocesan Boards would need to work closely together.

Federations could be considered between:

- primary schools
- an infant and junior school
- a high school and some or all of its partner primary schools
- high schools

Church and Foundation schools considering federation must discuss the matter with the appropriate Church Authority, i.e. the Diocese of Coventry, at an early stage.

Church Schools considering federation must give due weight to the legal requirements contained within their trust deed and to the ethos statement within their Instrument of Government.

Careful consideration must also be given to the change of composition of a federated governing body and the potential diminution of the foundation governor element. This is a particular issue for VA schools contemplating a federation with other categories of school.

What does not change under federation?

Federated schools continue to operate as individual schools. They retain their existing character and category including their religious affiliations.

Admission to each school continues to be determined by the appropriate admission authority.

Published admission numbers and catchment boundaries will not be affected.

Schools will continue to be inspected as single establishments and publish individual test results.

Schools may retain their individual budgets but there is flexibility to use budget allocations across all of the schools within a federation.

Powers of intervention are not affected by a school's membership of a federation.

What other things must schools consider?

Schools may find it useful to set up a working party or committee from the individual governing bodies to work specifically on the issue of federation. This should involve a range of governors from all schools involved in the potential federation.

It is vital that all members of staff are kept informed of developments throughout the transition. Existing staff are not obliged to travel to other school sites within the federation if they do not wish to do so, but new employees can have such a requirement written into their contract.

Schools need to carefully consider all travelling issues – not just staff travelling expenses between sites, but safe and secure transport for pupils, which would necessitate additional insurance cover.

Schools need to decide the best allocation of resources across the federation.

When schools federate, it is appropriate to reconsider their core principles and objectives and ensure that these are shared by all member schools.

What is the process for federating?

The Department for Education (DfE) regulations set out the process for establishing governance federations, which is initiated by governing bodies and involves a six school week consultation process with all stakeholders.

These will include:

- The Local Authority (or Authorities if across Authorities)
 - The headteacher of each school
 - All staff paid to work at any of the schools
 - The parents of registered pupils at any of the schools
 - The local Diocese (if a church school)
 - Such other persons as the governing bodies consider appropriate
 - Parish Councillors
 - District Councillors
 - County Councillors
 - MP
 - Other local schools including high schools
 - Anyone else locally that might be interested
 - The Secretary of State
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- Each governing body must meet to discuss federation (normally at a scheduled governing body meeting) before deciding to proceed with a working party or committee to investigate further. This must be a separate agenda item and a vote should be taken to consent to their school **consulting** on federation.
 - The Chairs of Governors should call a meeting of the working party to discuss the proposed federation and receive a briefing from the Local Authority and the Diocese.
 - A joint proposal/consultation document is produced and must be ratified by the governing body of each member school individually. This is published for six weeks as a stakeholder consultation.
 - At the end of the six weeks, each individual governing body should meet to make a final decision on whether to proceed to formal federation following a review of the responses to the consultation. This can be done simultaneously during a joint governing body meeting.
 - Once formal federation has been agreed by each governing body, a federation date will be also need to be agreed upon. On the federation date, the governing bodies of the federating schools dissolved, and the governing body of the federation is incorporated. All land and property which, immediately before the federation date, was held by the governing body of a federating school transfers to, and by virtue of the Regulations vests in, the governing body of the federation; and all rights and liabilities subsisting immediately before the federation date which were acquired or incurred by the governing body of a federating school are transferred to the governing body of the federation.

Schools may find it useful to discuss federation with staff and parents from an early stage, before any formal consultation, to establish any issues that may need to be addressed before proceeding.

Characteristics of a successful federation

A sense of **shared identity** between schools either through geographical proximity or a sense of being an inclusive community.

A sense of **common purpose** – the groups of schools involved in a federation should have a shared sense of what needs to be done and how it is to be done, as well as having a joint vision for improving the attainment, achievement and progression of young people.

Leadership – a federation needs a strong cohesive leadership, and federations should be interested in developing and sustaining leadership across all levels of the schools.

A strong **management** infrastructure – federations must demonstrate that they have the capacity to deliver.

Trusting relationship – having trust between schools is fundamental to effective federation and should be built into every level of management. Schools need to share a sense of openness and a willingness to operate in a joined-up and united way.

A **system of review** – federations will need to be monitored and evaluated to show that they are being effective.

Commitment – schools must be prepared to commit both time and resources to ensure that the federation is effective and sustainable. They will also need a commitment to raising standards and achievement in all of the schools in the federation, and to continually improving progression for young people.

Communication – excellent communication mechanisms are required when introducing change, particularly where several schools are involved.

Sustainability – there must be a clear sustainability strategy in place to enable a federation to cope. For example, if the leadership in one of the schools changes, if additional schools wish to join or if existing schools wish to leave. If committing to contracts or expenditure for any length of time, financial sustainability is vital.

As of the date of this document, the Regulations that apply are:

http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/1035/pdfs/uksi_20121035_en.pdf

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