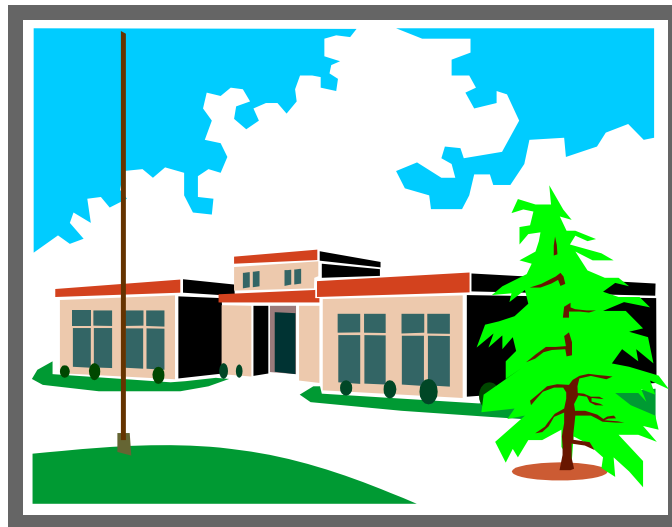


DIFFERENT MODELS OF SCHOOL ORGANISATION



Guidance and Policy on Collaboration and Federation

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Introduction

Changes in government legislation and budget pressures on schools are bringing about a revolution in school organisation. It is increasingly difficult for any school to continue to function in isolation from its neighbours and still maintain the breadth of curriculum and range of services required of it.

The foremost consideration for the Diocesan Board of Education is to ensure that, whatever shifts take place, the quality of educational provision at Church of England schools is maintained and developed. The wellbeing of the children in our schools is paramount, and to achieve the fulfilment of the five outcomes set out in 'Every Child Matters', the Board recognises that schools must look at new models of leadership and co-operative working.

The Diocesan policy 'Changing Lives, Changing Churches for Changing Communities' explores the ways in which every community can work together to achieve a better future, and this certainly applies equally to our learning communities.

The Bath & Wells Education Department has been working with our schools to develop ways of working together that suit each different community and area. This document sets out the principles which must underpin successful partnership working of any type and looks in detail at the options and processes available to schools in 2010.

This document should be a useful guide and checklist to any school looking at options of partnership working, and clearly states the position and policy of the DBE in relation to the different models.

"No school can meet the needs of all its pupils alone. Delivering the Pupil and Parent guarantees will require schools to work in partnership with other schools and with wider children's services, in order to offer more by working together than any one partner could alone and to provide better value for money."

'Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st Century Schools System' DCSF June 2009

The 2009 Government white paper 'Your Child, Your Schools, Our Future: Building a 21st Century Schools' System sets out the government's vision for collaborative working and requires governing bodies to consider different models of school leadership when a headteacher vacancy arises, rather than immediately seeking to appoint a new substantive head solely for their school, so this is a policy that will affect every school at some point and should inform the strategic planning of every governing body.

Any Church of England school headteacher or governing body considering changes of school leadership or organisation can get advice and support from the Diocesan Education Department and should call 01749 670777 or e-mail education@bathwells.anglican.org

There are issues for church schools entering into formal arrangements with other categories of schools which could potentially affect the foundation and Christian distinctiveness of the school. For this reason, the DBE strongly recommends that the Diocese is contacted at the very outset of any discussions about change, to ensure that any issues are resolved at the beginning of the process and that all parties have a full understanding of the implications of their decisions.

Background to Current Position

Legislation allowing formal collaboration and hard federation under a single governing body first came into force in 2004 following the 2002 Education Act, and was updated in the 2007 School Governance (Federations) Regulations.

The legislation was designed as a way of raising standards by enabling schools to work together to share expertise, resources and best practice. Many schools already work together in cluster groups, community learning partnerships and other informal groupings. Some felt that the collaboration regulations gave them the ability to formalise and extend the existing forms of collaborative working, whilst others felt that the existing status quo was working effectively for them.

The most often repeated question in regard to federation was, and still is, “What can we achieve through federation that cannot be achieved through collaboration?” The federation legislation was also aimed at improving standards, perhaps by forming a formal partnership between a successful school and another school facing more challenges. This of course led to the question ‘What’s in it for us?’ It can be difficult for a large and successful school with a substantive headteacher to perceive the benefits of working with schools facing challenges such as falling roll, loss of a headteacher, budgetary difficulties or an issue over standards. Our challenge is to encourage church schools to adopt an outward looking and Christian attitude to their neighbours rather than to adopt an isolationist policy. Where collaborations and federations have taken place more due to necessity than strategic planning, one of the most notable facts is that the larger or more successful schools have gained many positive benefits from the relationship. Every school has areas of expertise and good practice and can make a real contribution to the partnership – such arrangements are never one-sided.

Federations have been used creatively by the local authorities within Bath & Wells Diocese, particularly in Somerset, where the first federation took place back in September 2005.

Case Study

This, like many of the earlier federations, was as a result of a small school being unable to recruit a substantive headteacher. The head of the neighbouring VA school then acted as head for the VC school as well and this led naturally to a federation, with a single head and governing body looking after both schools. While there were issues about the composition of the federated governing body, this was an excellent solution for two small rural schools, enabling education to continue on both sites and meet the needs of two communities. Their pioneering work has helped inform and refine models of partnerships for schools facing similar dilemmas, and much has been learned in terms of streamlining policies and school development plans, sharing resources, effective use of IT and developing a curriculum that meets the social and educational needs of all the learners. It proved an early example of developing middle managers into leadership roles and improving CPD (Continuing Professional Development) across all staff members, thereby improving the educational opportunities for the pupils at both schools. It was an effective pilot for future federations, particularly those in rural communities facing difficulties in the recruitment of headteachers.

Federations were used in Somerset as a means of sustaining small schools within their communities for as long as financially and educationally viable. If circumstances dictate the closure of one of the schools in the federation, the relationship built up within the federation offers a stability and ease of transition for affected pupils and families to other schools within the federation, with a continuity of policy, ethos and curriculum which has proved such an asset to mixed phase federations. In these instances, the results of pupils transferring from first to middle or from infant to junior schools have not seen the drop in performance previously noted, establishing firmly that cross-phase federations can prove a positive educational influence for pupils at transition.

Collaboration with the future possibility of federation or even amalgamation is seen as an excellent means of building the trust so essential for successful partnership working. It offers a less threatening way for schools to learn about each other and break down the traditional barriers of isolationist working which can no longer be maintained in the new educational and financial climate.

Increasingly the model for collaboration and federation is viewed as a step in a longer term strategic plan for a whole town or geographical area, offering a way of sharing resources and developing a strategic approach to maintaining and developing high quality provision for all pupils, and reflecting the new responsibilities of schools toward ALL pupils in the area, and for the cohesion of both their local and wider communities.

Collaboration

When attending training on collaboration, many schools come to realise that they are already collaborating with schools within their area on an informal basis and can look to formal collaboration to strengthen and build on existing good practice.

Research into the benefits of partnership working as set out by Robert Hill in 'Better Together – Models of Collaboration for Small Schools' DCSF 2009 states that collaboration:

- Builds knowledge – schools are too small to be self-sufficient as effective learning institutions for the staff who teach in them
- Adds capacity and supports efficiency by providing an economy of scale for undertaking key activities
- Widens curriculum choice and options for students as schools and colleges come together to provide access to each other's courses and facilities
- Promotes the broader welfare of students by bringing together pastoral, health, careers, youth and other services to meet their all-round needs
- Supports school improvement by enabling schools and colleges to draw on the resources of other institutions to tackle problems, share expertise, raise expectations and address the needs of particular groups of students

Small schools can additionally benefit by:

- Developing networks for personal support
- Sharing expertise and resources
- Organising professional development
- Arranging joint pupil activities

Formal collaboration under the collaboration regulations enables governing bodies to work more formally together and is an arrangement which is legally recognised. Under these regulations, a joint committee with representatives of the governing body of each school can be delegated powers, usually with a specific area for development eg IT or community cohesion. Any decision made by this joint committee should be ratified by the full governing body of each school within the collaboration. Where there is a mixture of church and non-church schools, it would be inappropriate for such a committee to make recommendations on any areas fundamental to the church foundation or Christian distinctiveness of any of the schools.

DBE Recommendation

Both informal and formal collaborations offer a useful and positive development for schools in partnership working and should be considered as a constructive way of maintaining and developing good educational provision at church schools. The DBE supports schools looking to develop this approach to working more closely together.

Federation

A formal hard governance federation (as opposed to the many uses of the word 'federation' for non-statutory models of collaborative working) was facilitated through the 2004 Act, revised in 2007. Schools seeking to form a federation under this legislation will have a single governing body over all schools within the federation, and there is a statutory process and consultation required by any school considering such a proposal.

Key Points of Federation

- There will be a single governing body over all schools within the federation
- Each school retains its name, category, budget, staff
- Each school can retain its headteacher
- In the event of a headteacher resignation within the federation, the federated governing body can legally appoint another headteacher from within the federation as headteacher without recourse to national advert
- Each school within a federation retains the budget for a headteacher, whether or not they have their own
- Each school has its own Ofsted and SIAS inspection, though increasingly these are co-ordinated to happen at the same time for all schools within the federation to minimise stress and disruption
- The federated governing body can use budget, resources and staff across the federation to best improve the educational outcomes for ALL pupils. An audit trail must be kept
- The federated governing body cannot require existing staff to work across all schools within the federation, but can appoint new staff to do so
- Models for the constitution of the federated governing body are set out within the Federation Regulations and cover all combinations of school, ensuring a minimum representation from every school within the federation
- Statutory consultation on federation proposals must take place and the Diocesan Board of Education is a statutory consultee for all church schools

Benefits

- Consistency of teaching and learning methodology especially cross-phase
- Reduced transitional dips in pupil performance
- Streamlining of policies and structure
- Sharing of best practice, preparation materials and resources
- Enhanced opportunities for pupil activities
- Enhanced opportunities for staff professional development
- Increased opportunity for middle management development
- Improved social opportunities for pupils
- Financial efficiencies through economies of scale

Disadvantages

- Heavy workload for governors during inception and first year
- Potential loss of experienced governors (can stay on as sponsor governors or Associate Members)

Keys for Success

- Building of trust between governors and school communities
- Commitment from all schools involved
- Shared vision
- Clear leadership structures
- Sufficient time for all parties to be at ease with the proposed changes
- All to feel like equal partners
- Sense of ownership of process by the schools
- Good communication

The decision to federate lies with the governing bodies of the schools involved, and although it can be encouraged and supported by local authorities or dioceses, they do not have the authority to impose a federation.

Specific Issues for Church Schools in Federations

- 1 While the Federation Regulations allow for the federation of any different type of school, the constitution of the federated governing body can be an issue when church schools federate with other categories of school. Ideally, it is best when VC schools federate with other VC schools, and VA with VA. VC/Community school federations can work very effectively but with the following issues:
 - The maintenance of foundation governors for each VC school within the federation is critical to maintaining the ethos and Christian distinctiveness of the school.
 - A balance of clergy and lay foundation governors should be sought and other clergy look at models of chaplaincy and pastoral support across the federation
 - Foundation governors should not be left to undertake the RE, PSHE, SIAS and Collective Worship policies across all schools within the federation unsupported. There must be corporate responsibility from the federated governing body for **all** aspects of **each** of the schools within the federation
 - The appointment of an executive head across the federation must be very carefully considered (see below)
- 2 The trust deed of each church school must be checked to ensure that there are no requirements contained within it which would inhibit a federation. Most issues can be resolved by making a submission to the Charity Commission, but care should be taken in relation to early years and extended services provision, and if children from a different age range may be taught at the school under the federation arrangements.
- 3 The instrument of government for the federated governing body must contain the National Society recommended ethos statement for all church schools. This and the trust deed are the legal documents underpinning the school's Christian distinctiveness and must not be weakened or overlooked.
- 4 Appropriate training in 'Church School Distinctiveness' should be provided automatically for all members of a federated governing body involving one or more church schools.
- 5 If a VA school federates with any other category of school, then the federated governing body will no longer contain a majority of foundation governors. This is obviously a fundamental issue for VA schools as it could represent a diminution of the strength of the school's foundation and Christian distinctiveness.
- 6 In a mixed VA/non VA federation, the governing body will be the admissions authority for the VA school, while the local authority will be the admissions authority for any VC or community school. While this is possible, the governors need effective training and to have fully embraced the shared vision for the federation.

- 7 In a mixed VA/non VA federation, the governing body will also be the employers of the staff at the VA school, but not at the VC or community school. This can generate issues over contracts for staff working across more than one school in the federation, including an executive head, but work with the LA HR (Human Resources) team can find an appropriate means of resolving any problems.
- 8 The capital funding for VA and non VA schools is different and VA capital cannot be vired across and used in non VA schools. This inhibits the ability to effectively share resources in a mixed federation.
- 9 The federated governing body must bear the governors' 10% liability for capital works at VA schools and must understand this responsibility before entering into the federation.

DBE Recommendations

Given all of these considerations, the recommendations of the DBE are as follows:

- 1 That schools give serious consideration to federation, not only when a trigger point is reached, such as a headteacher resignation, but as part of the governing body's long term strategic planning for the sustainability and improvement of the educational provision at their school and across the area.
- 2 That church schools contact the Diocesan Education Department at the outset of any considerations on federation or different models of school organisation or leadership.
- 3 That, wherever possible, VC schools look to federate with other VC schools, but do not ignore the potential for federation with community schools.
- 4 That VA schools seek to federate with other VA schools wherever feasible, but that other models should be considered where appropriate – the DBE would review such proposals on a case by case basis.
- 5 That the strength of the foundation for any church school entering a federation should be safeguarded by the maintenance of the ex-officio foundation governor role and with a minimum of 2 foundation governors on any federated governing body, with more where more than 2 church schools are federating.
- 6 That full training on Church School Distinctiveness be provided for all federated governing bodies where there is a church school involved.
- 7 That the instrument of government for the federated governing body include the National Society recommended ethos statement.

Executive Headships

One of the main drivers towards federation has been the inability of schools, especially small schools, to appoint substantive headteachers, especially where it is a teaching headship. This situation is forecast to become worse as the demography of existing heads indicates that over a third are over 50 and many will be looking to retire in the short term.

Effective strategic planning from governing bodies should include a review as part of the headteacher's performance assessment as to when they may be thinking of moving on or retiring, so that governors can plan for the future leadership structure of the school (this must be conducted within legal and HR guidelines and in an appropriate manner).

When schools federate, they can continue with substantive heads at all of the schools involved if they so choose. When a headship becomes vacant, the federated governing body can either advertise for a new head or appoint a head from one of the other federated schools to the post without going to national advert. It is also now possible to appoint an executive head across the federation with substantive heads still in place.

When there is a federation involving church and non-church schools, special consideration must be given to the appointment of a head over any church school to ensure their suitability and understanding of the particular role of a church school head, and their ability to uphold the foundation of the school and develop high quality educational provision within a distinctively Christian ethos.

If the headteacher from the community school within the federation is appointed at the church school, the governing body cannot require them to be a reserved post teacher at a VC or to have any Christian faith, as this is illegal at community schools. The federated governing body should therefore give due consideration to any such appointment and have regard to the potential impact on the church school's ability to develop without that element of Christian leadership being incorporated formally into the person specification for the job.

For an executive headteacher appointment where a candidate is arising from existing heads within a federation, it is recommended that there is a formal interview process with the involvement of the Diocesan adviser to ensure the suitability of the candidate.

VC to VA Status

The Diocese of Bath & Wells has clear guidelines for VC schools considering a move to VA status, and only supports such a proposal where the school has a positive and developing relationship with the local and Diocesan church which has been confirmed through a SIAS inspection. Where such a move is a logical next step in the development of the school as the provider of high quality and distinctively Christian education, the DBE would support the school. **If a proposal was put forward for a change of status as part of a move towards a federation with a VA school, the DBE would only feel able to support it if the above criteria were fulfilled.**