

Diocese of Chichester

Brief Guide to Federation 2019:

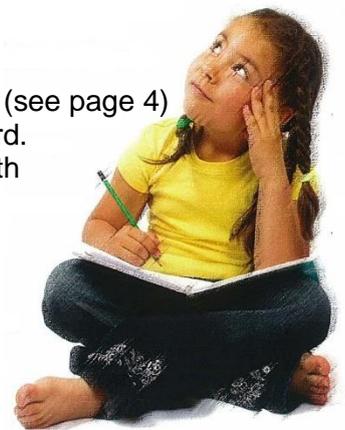
This Guide is intended to support Church schools across the Diocese of Chichester in preparing for the future as they seek to be both successful and sustainable schools. The diocese expects all school leaders and governors to be proactively considering or engaging in some form of partnership working as part of this strategic decision-making.

The Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) has a clear expectation that the Church school ethos and Christian distinctiveness of each school will be actively preserved and upheld through any partnership arrangements under consideration. This will particularly apply when a 'mixed' federation with a community school is being considered.

What is a federation?

A federation is a formal arrangement set out in Government Regulations (see page 4) where 2 or more schools come together to share a single governing board. Each of the schools in the federation retain their separate legal status with regards to: the school category, admissions arrangements, budget allocation, performance tables, SIAMS and Ofsted inspections.

There are an increasing number of federations across the diocese consisting of Voluntary Aided (VA), Voluntary Controlled (VC) and mixed federations with community schools.



Why consider federation?

Federation can bring the opportunity to secure strong strategic school leadership and governance. This enables schools to work differently and in partnership with others to deliver positive outcomes for pupils. It is important that governing boards are considering strategic decisions about the school ahead of when their current headteacher position becomes vacant or is likely to become so in the future.

Increasingly the Executive Headteacher model is being used over all schools in the federation, supported by heads of school/deputy heads in each individual school. However, there are various other models of school leadership that schools will want to explore.

Support from the Diocese of Chichester:

Federation is a governing board decision and not made by the diocese or local authority. However, as the diocese is required to approve the Instrument of Government (IOG) for the federation, early discussion with the diocese is strongly advised. Schools are best placed through their local community, local authority links and knowledge to identify partnership schools. In addition, the diocese can also be key in supporting and brokering partnership where appropriate.

The diocese's wider regional overview can also support knowledge of what is working well across local authority boundaries. The diocese is also mindful of Church schools who may be at risk of becoming isolated.

What are the benefits of federation?

- Strategic leadership and governance structures can allow for school-based leaders to focus on teaching, learning and raising standards.
- Opportunities to strengthen the Church school ethos and Christian distinctiveness and learn from one another across partnership schools.
- Broader learning, curriculum and social experiences for pupils achieved through working across 2 or more schools.
- Opportunities to develop future leaders in roles such as heads of school.
- Attractive recruitment opportunities and retention of staff by providing a greater range of professional development and new career pathways for staff across schools in the federation.
- New opportunities for staff to work together, increasing motivation, reducing workload and isolation through shared professional and planning activities.
- New opportunities for flexibility, sharing of resources, taking advantages of economies of scale and avoiding duplication of resources and effort.
- Shared responsibilities and accountabilities for children across communities and parishes rather than within one specific school.
- The broader offer of extended services across schools and a greater variety of activities, childcare, parental/carers support and community access.
- Community cohesion and help to sustain education provision within some rural communities.
- Recruitment and retention of all governors and in particular foundation governors, drawn from a wider context and providing a broader set of skills.

What are some of the things to keep in mind?

- How governors and staff including the school leadership, will operate their responsibilities and accountabilities for a greater number of children across more than one school.
- Practical and statutory issues of staff deployment, new roles and contracts over more than one school.
- How governors will ensure that they uphold and develop the Christian distinctiveness of Church schools particularly if federating with a community school.
- Addressing potential concerns from parents/carers and staff and perceptions about 'losing' an individual headteacher or the identity of the one school.
- Executive headteachers need to understand cultures and issues at varying stages of development and performance for more than one school.
- Who best to partner with needs careful consideration to ensure that all schools in the federation can benefit from the particular strengths and advantages to be found in each school.

The initial process of federation:

The governing board and school leaders will need to have researched different forms of collaboration and partnership and then actively decide that federation is one of the options to consider further. Some boards agree exploration of federation in principle before approaching potential partners. Early discussion with the diocese is recommended to ensure DBE requirements and timescales for decision making, including Instrument of Government (IOG) approval are considered. DBE meetings take place 3 times a year in September, February and May.

It is good practice to set up a joint committee of governors (with delegated powers) across the schools to prepare the proposal. This joint committee can work on the long-term vision and values and potential structure, including governance, of the federation. The committee can also be responsible for organising the consultation process.

Governors from each school on the joint committee present their proposals to federate, which should be an agenda item and minuted to the full governing board of each school. Each board decides whether or not to proceed to the formal consultation stage. This is also the opportunity to seek DBE approval of the partnership in principle. The DBE will expect that Church schools will have considered carefully how to protect, uphold and develop the Church school ethos before entering into arrangements.

The statutory consultation process as set out in Government Regulations (link to Regulations on page 4):

- The governing boards must draw up the consultation documents and follow the timetable set out in the DfE Federation Regulations 2012.
- The proposals to federate must be published and sent to various stakeholders including the local authority and the diocese.
- There is a minimum 6-week consultation period to include meetings with staff and parent/carers.
- The governing boards proposing to federate must jointly consider any responses to the proposals.
- Each individual governing board must then decide whether to proceed with the proposals, informing the Secretary of State, the local authority and diocese of their decision within one week.
- As part of the discharge process before the start of the federation, each governing board will need to provide a written report outlining how it has fulfilled its responsibilities and providing an inventory of assets to inform the new federated governing board.

Composition of the federated governing board:

- In a federation comprising only VA schools the number of foundation governors must outnumber all the other governors by 2.
- In a mixed federation that contains a VA school the DBE expects that foundation governors should make up 50% of the federated board to protect the Church school ethos and the particular responsibilities required of VA schools. The regulations require that the board is comprised of at least 2 foundation governors.
- In a federation comprising only VC schools there must be at least 2 foundation governors but no more than one quarter of the total.
- In a federation comprising a VC and community school, the board must include at least one foundation governor. However, the DBE expects this to be at least 2.

Key recommendations:

- Ensure that the strategic purpose of federation and subsequent planning are sharply focused on benefits to pupils' education and upholding the Church school ethos.
- Ensure all statutory processes, including timescales and governing board composition are followed.
- Consult and communicate effectively with the diocese and local authority as well as parents/carers, staff, pupils and the community at the earliest stage. The diocese is very willing to provide further advice and ongoing support during this process.

Useful Information:

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The School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations 2012
(and amendment 2016): <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/1035/made>

Diocese of Chichester: Rural and Small Schools Strategic Guidance 2019
(please contact the Diocese of Chichester Education Team)

