

Brief Guide to Federation (Updated June 2021)

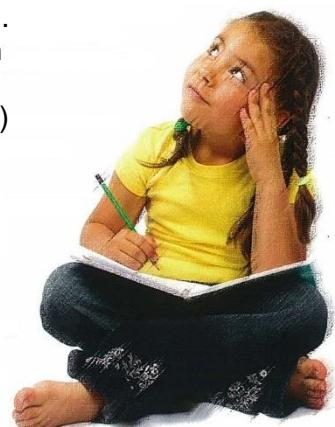
This Guide is intended to support Church schools across the Diocese of Chichester in preparing for the future as they seek to be both successful and sustainable schools. The diocese expects all school leaders and governors to be proactively considering or engaging in some form of partnership working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

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



Why consider federation?

Federation can provide the opportunity to secure strong strategic school leadership and governance. This enables schools to work in partnership with others to deliver positive outcomes for pupils. It is particularly 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, but not exclusively, the Executive Headteacher model is being used across schools in federations, often supported by heads of school/deputy heads in each individual school. However, there are various models of school leadership that governors will want to explore.

Support from the Diocese of Chichester:

In DfE Regulations it is clear that federation is a governing board decision and not made by the diocese or local authority (LA). However, as the diocese is required to approve the Instrument of Government (IOG) for the federation, early discussion with the diocese (alongside the LA) is strongly advised.

Schools are best placed through their local community and contextual knowledge, as well as any current local authority links, to identify potential partnership schools. However, due to the wider strategic role and perspective of the DBE for all Diocesan Church schools, it is essential to involve the Diocese at an early stage of discussions. This will enable strategic and future

implications of governing board decisions to be more fully taken into account for all the schools involved, particularly if academy status is to be considered at some point.

The diocese's wider regional overview can support knowledge of what is working well across local authority boundaries. At the same time, the diocese is also mindful of any Church schools that may be at risk of becoming isolated. The diocese may be able to support and broker partnerships where appropriate.

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 vision, 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 through 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 more than one (sometimes small) school.
- 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 can provide a greater variety of activities, childcare, parental/carer 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 (particularly where a VA school is involved).
- How governors and school leaders 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 the broader community needs, differing cultures and varying performance and other issues, when leading over 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 most appropriate options to consider further. Some boards agree exploration of federation in principle before approaching potential partners. Early discussion in the process with the diocese and LA is recommended to ensure DBE and DfE requirements and timescales for decision making, including the Instrument of Government (IOG) approval are considered. DBE meetings take place 3 times a year usually in September, February and May. These timescales need to be factored in.

It is often seen as good practice to set up a joint committee of governors, with some delegated powers across the schools, to prepare the proposals on federation for the governing boards of each school to consider. This joint committee can also be tasked with working on the draft plans for the longer-term vision and values and any potential staffing structure, including proposed governance, of the federation. The committee can also be responsible for organising the consultation process (required in regulations). The diocese will be one of the key stakeholders as part of the consultation process.

Proposals to federate, must 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. 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 (updated 2016).
- 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.
- In terms of the foundation governor positions on the federated Board, the diocese expects as a minimum for there to be one foundation governor (laity) and one (but no more than two) ex officio (clergy).

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 in line with Government regulations and DBE expectations.
- 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 and LA are available 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/uksi/2012/1035/made>

