

GOVERNANCE

Developing Your Federation

Federation is ‘happening’ in Devon. There are many federations already in place, with a number of others currently in consultation or about to get off the starting blocks.

This leaflet seeks to disseminate the learning experience of governors and heads involved in our federations. It aims to share both the good practice, and some of the frustrations with colleagues who are embarking on the federation journey.

The over-riding outcome from Devon’s Area Reviews was a clearer understanding by schools and governors involved that a change of our existing pattern of schools in Devon is inevitable. As the key decision-makers in many of these change processes it is imperative that all governors become well acquainted with current debate and possible options. Our greatest champions are those governors who have warmed to the process and been crucial to the successful implementation of an organisational change.

Federation is not the only option available to governing bodies prepared to embrace change, but it has proved the overwhelming preferred model for the following reasons.

- All schools in a federation retain their own individual identity, character and ethos;
- All schools retain their individual budgets but are able to use their budgets strategically across the federation;
- A federation can have as many headteachers as it decides. A federation does not necessarily deliver a single Executive Headteacher model;
- Each federation is different and dependent upon local context and drivers;
- Governing bodies are the decision makers following local consultation;
- The opportunities for children across a federation are increased, for example access to a wider range of professional input and expertise, shared sporting and cultural activities, trips and residential;

- The opportunities for staff across a federation are increased, for example shared CPD, shared planning and assessment opportunities, different roles to aspire to;
- Federation is seen as a long-term commitment to partnership set within a legal framework;
- Last, but by no means least, the very positive messages, outcomes and experiences being recorded by our existing federations. Ofsted inspectors have commented, ‘the benefits of the federation are already clear; team leadership and staff sharing expertise during training sessions has strengthened provision and monitoring the schools’ effectiveness’.

Devon has built a lot of expertise and experience around federation. The DfE and National College flag Devon as a national leader in this field and highlight to other Local Authorities the range of advice, support and information that Devon has to offer.

There are many publications available on the Babcock LDP Governor Support website (www.babcock-education.co.uk/lpd/governors) ranging from how to take the initial steps when you are interested in exploring a more formalised partnership to guidance on how best to set up a federated governing body that works well.

It is very timely for all governing bodies to ask the questions:

- Where do we see our school in five years time?
- Do we have a succession plan in place for our headteacher?
- How could a formal partnership arrangement deliver better opportunities and outcomes for our pupils and staff?

Our thanks go to the Federated Governing Bodies in Devon and the Devon Federation Network who have contributed to these guidance notes.

“The difficulty of reducing the number of governors was not as great as anticipated. Some have become associate governors and others have become helpers in the school”

What enabled the development of your federated governing body?

Governors responded:

- Strong governors, who are very clear on their strategic role
- Clarity of vision and values
- Governors' integrity and foresight in securing a stable future
- Willingness to listen and to seek and take advice
- Coordinate an 'away-day' style of session to discuss and agree the vision and values – consider using an external facilitator
- Quality of leadership from the Chair of Governors is essential
- In an all-through environment ensure an equitable mix of governors with experience of each phase (primary and secondary)
- Using maximum delegation for effectiveness and time-management
- Careful thought went into the formation of the governing body, size and structure
- Governors need to be people with dedication and a commitment to wanting the best for all children in all the communities involved
- Clear communication, transparent and open culture
- Using the model job description for a federation governor (on Governor Support website)
- Effective communication between committees or portfolio governors on the full governing body
- Understand that federation is a process and does not provide all the answers

What were the blockers to developing an effective federated governing body?

Forming an effective federated governing body is a challenging task. The following comments contain useful hints of what may hinder the process:

- Expecting the federation to solve all of the schools' problems
- Expecting the federation to bring immediate savings to an already difficult budget
- Constantly looking to the past
- The culture of one head per school and one school for every village

- Governors not engaging with the other schools sufficiently
- Governors not understanding their role and not participating in training
- Reluctance to open the doors of communication
- Reluctance to step away from the norm and tradition
- The need for governors to get to know three schools offered challenges of time

What have been the main benefits for children in federations?

Governors commented:

- Shared federation transition sessions and events at both Foundation and Year 6
- We now share transport to attend events
- Shared after-school clubs and extended services activities
- Combined curriculum events
- Shared worship
- Shared Arts Week and sports days
- We share equipment and books across schools
- Our children have attended a residential together with all the schools

“Develop a vision for the whole Federation whilst considering the individuality and needs of the member schools”

What have been the main benefits for staff in federations?

Both children and staff need to benefit from being part of a federation. Below are examples of immediate gains from working in a federation.

- Cascading the learning from training courses to all staff in the schools
- Shared resources and lesson planning
- Shared subject leadership (eg SENCOs)
- Teachers have opportunities to teach in different schools across the federation, to disseminate good practice and for personal career development
- More effective procurement
- Shared INSET and ICT training
- We have been able to negotiate federation discounts
- Staff in small schools now have colleagues working with the same age groups to share and exchange ideas
- Using staff and services across phase

What changes to staffing have fostered an effective federation and federated governing body?

Federations have developed and utilised staff in a number of different ways; however, the points below are vital for success:

- An exceptional clerk
- An effective and respected senior leader in each school
- A senior level business manager whose role includes finance, health and safety, premises and personnel and who attends the appropriate committees
- Our three administrators each have an individual area of responsibility for personnel, finance, premises and health and safety and attend the appropriate committees

How does the federated governing body continue to engage with parents and the community?

After the initial consultation period, established federated governing bodies are clear about the importance of maintaining a constant flow of information to parents and the community. In addition, there is a need for ensuring a forum where parents can discuss, be listened to and feel they are participants in the federation.

- Organising parent and community forums in each school
- Federated school website
- Text, email and Twitter
- Federated governor newsletters
- Having 'give us your feedback' postcards and/or a suggestions box
- Sports and drama activities for the parents and community to attend
- Federated family learning workshops
- Through a governor with a parent and community portfolio

How did you use the expertise of your former governors?

Federation will see an inevitable reduction in the number of governors required on the new federated governing body. This has been viewed as an obstacle; however established federations have found innovative ways of retaining ex-governors. Below, federations have shared some solutions to this issue:

- Enough of our governors were willing to resign and not be part of the federated governing body
- Appoint associate members where individuals hold specific skills across the federation

- Some parent governors were happy to join the parent association
- Appoint ex-governors as members of the ethos committee
- Devon Association of Governors (DAG) is interested in experienced governors becoming governor mentors
- Devon Governor Support can nominate experienced and committed governors to schools with governor vacancies.

What support was helpful in developing your federating governing body?

Existing federation governors commented:

- Attending the federation network meetings
- Governors learning from and linking with other federations and visits during 'Federation Open Week'
- The services and experience of the Governor Support Team
- The advice and experience of a range of Local Authority Officers in finance, HR, school improvement
- Training and networking courses for governors
- Using an external facilitator to ensure agreement and decisions for the best way forward.

What support will be available in the future?

The learning from the existing federations is documented in a number of papers and guidance leaflets which are available on the federation pages of the Governor Support website. In addition there are examples of documents from a number of federations, eg terms of reference for committees and model job descriptions.

Devon Local Authority will continue to provide a comprehensive package of advice, guidance, training and officer support at meetings as part of a purchased service by schools, available through Babcock LDP.

Babcock LDP, working in partnership with Devon County Council, will continue to organise regular Federation Network meetings and Federation Open Week. There is an exchange of good practice at these sessions within a climate of peer to peer support.

"All our governors undertook roles and responsibilities training together"

How will academies impact on federations?

Current legislation enables federations with at least one school that is performing well to submit an application to convert to academy status which will cover all the member schools in the federation even where some or all of the other schools are not 'outstanding' in their own right. Academies cannot federate the federation regulations relate to maintained schools only.

For further information go to www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies/academiesfaq/ and other documentation on the Governor Support pages of the LDP website www.devonldp.org/

Different Governance Models

The legal make-up of the federated governing body can be accessed via the School Governance (Federations) England Regulations 2007.

The categories of governors you need to include will depend on the types of schools within the federation. The responsibilities of the governing body of a federation are the same as those of individual schools.

Each federation needs to establish a governance structure to manage responsibilities that suits their own context. It is vital to ensure that lead governors and their committees are well trained, have clear terms of reference with delegated powers to avoid duplication at full governing body meetings.

There are many different types of federated governing body structures. Below are four examples from Devon:

Example 1

- ~ Full Governing Body
- ~ Teaching and Learning Committee
- ~ Resources
- ~ Premises, Health and Safety Committee
- ~ Ethos group – to uphold the Christian distinctiveness of the church school
- ~ Working parties as required
- ~ Standing committees in place as required – all governing bodies must have these in place

Example 2

- ~ Full Governing Body
- ~ Finance and Premises Committee
- ~ Curriculum and Standards Committee
- ~ Pupil and Personnel Committee
- ~ Ethos Group(s)
- ~ Standing Committees

Example 3 – Cabinet Style Structure

- ~ Full Governing Body
- ~ 5-6 portfolios with a Lead and Shadow governor
 - Standards and Improvement/Teaching and Learning Portfolio
 - Finance Portfolio
 - Personnel Portfolio
 - SEN and Inclusion Portfolio
 - Marketing and PR Portfolio
 - Premises with Health and Safety Portfolio
 - Parents and the Community Portfolio
- ~ Ethos committee(s) in addition to the portfolios
- ~ Chair has a two-year term of office with a maximum of two terms of office
- ~ Full Governing Body – six meetings a year – portfolio update at each FGB
- ~ Standing Committees
- ~ Lead governor partnership board for each school (with staff and parent governors from other schools)
- ~ HT report reflects the structure of the portfolios

Example 4 – Federation that includes a Community College

- ~ Full Governing Body
- ~ Resources Committee
- ~ Learning and Standards Committee
- ~ Facilities Committee
- ~ College Status Committee
- ~ Standing Committees

Church of England Schools

C of E Diocesan Education Officers work very closely with church schools and the Local Authority around federation.

The Diocesan preferred position is that church schools federate with other church schools wherever possible, preferably VA with VA, VC with VC. However Devon does have a number of mixed category federations that work very well.

Church schools seeking a federation partner should make early contact with Diocesan Education Officers

Contact Information

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