

Board of Education

Serving children, schools and young people



Policy for Church Schools considering Federation or Formal Collaboration

1. The Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) is committed to strengthening the long-term provision of church school places within Canterbury Diocese and to continuing to deliver effective and inclusive Church of England (CE) schools to our communities, focused on transforming the lives of children and young people.
2. During the last decade the DBE has responded proactively to a number of significant policy shifts in education. It has developed its role in school effectiveness and facilitated a 'mixed economy' of schools in federations, different models of partnership and academy trusts. Promoting creativity, diversity and choice, it has encouraged leaders and governors to regularly review all possibilities; the key focus being viable, sustainable options which prioritise local collaboration, mutual accountability and delivering school improvement.
3. As schools' circumstances change within this landscape, they may face challenges in terms of long-term substantive leadership, financial pressures, or difficulties in recruiting or retaining staff. Where these arise, the DBE commits to supporting governing bodies in making appropriate steps and decisions in relation to organisational options.
4. This policy is presented for school leaders and governors wishing to consider Federation or Formal Collaboration (sometimes referred to as Soft Federation) as one of the potential, feasible solutions for their school.

Exploring the Options

5. **Collaboration** is outward-facing and good practice for all schools, but may also be the first step in exploring a more formal working relationship. It is essentially connecting with other schools on joint activities, such as subject leader networking or governor training, learning walks, peer assessment or moderation.

The DBE's role:

In the case of informal collaborative relationships, schools and academies are free to work with whoever they feel can best support the ongoing development of their individual community.

6. A **Formal Collaboration** (sometimes referred to as a Soft Federation) is where schools retain their existing Governing Bodies but work more intentionally together under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). It is likely that partners will agree shared and individual objectives stemming from this collaboration, reflected in their local Strategic Plan, such that the arrangement impacts positively on the efficiency and effectiveness of both schools with outcomes for pupils at the heart of improvements.

These arrangements have no legal description, since nothing of legal consequence has changed.

The DBE's role:

Schools must involve the DBE as a signature on the MoU supporting any formal collaborative arrangement; the Director and Deputy Director of Education have delegated authority to develop and approve the documentation. Officers will work with the Local Authority to ensure the needs of all schools within the arrangement are met, but at all times ensuring that the Christian distinctiveness of the church schools is preserved within the arrangement.

7. In a **Federation** (sometimes referred to as a Hard Federation) the joining schools move to a single Governing Body and often one executive leader responsible for their strategic operation. Heads of School (or similar) are often found within these arrangements.

The DBE's role:

Schools must secure the approval of the DBE in its role as religious/diocesan authority, each separate Governing Body submitting an application for conditional consent (see application form in Appendix (i)). Proposals will be considered by the Board at its next available meeting – these are scheduled for March, June, September and December each year. Officers will offer guidance regarding consultation requirements and will also ensure that any arrangements being considered by the Board have been formulated within the policy principles explored below.

Policy Principles

- 8 The Board welcomes collaboration and support between schools on the following bases:
- 8.1 It is preferable for there to be experience of the given schools working together before a **Formal Collaboration** is proposed
 - 8.2 Schools **must** be able to demonstrate **12-18 months** formal collaboration with positive outcomes for staff and children prior to applying to the DBE for conditional consent to a **Federation**
 - 8.3 The Board will always seek to safeguard the Church of England designation of its schools and the specific characteristics of its Voluntary Aided schools in particular, thus:
 - 8.3.1 **Formal Collaborations** are possible between schools of different category, but the Board will insist on maintaining its existing representation on VC and VA Governing bodies.
 - 8.3.2 **Federations**
Noting the distinctive characteristics of Church Schools, the following combinations are likely to be acceptable:
 - a. Two or more Voluntary Aided Schools
 - b. Two or more Voluntary Controlled Schools
 - c. Two or more Voluntary Controlled schools joining with any number of Community schools, providing there is 25% representation of foundation governors on the Federated Body. The Board would acknowledge and seek to protect the status of the Community school(s), being also open to their change of category to a Voluntary school.

The DBE may also consider a Federation between a VA and a VC/Community school, providing there is majority representation of foundation governors on the Federated Body.

- 8.4 The Board will always seek to uphold the Site Trustees' status and work to ensure that they are enabled to fulfil their legal obligations.

Appendix (i)

APPLICATION FORM SEEKING CONDITIONAL CONSENT FROM THE CANTERBURY DIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION TO FEDERATE TWO OR MORE SCHOOLS

The purpose of this application form is to provide a structure to review and analyse a proposal to Federate one or more governing bodies. Governing bodies must separately complete the application form below in accordance with the guidance under each heading and with regard to the Board of Education's Policy on Federations dated March 2022.

Following receipt of an application to federate, a recommendation will be presented to the Diocesan Board of Education ("the Board") for its consideration. It must be noted that the Board's final consent will be subject to full consultation and further due diligence undertaken by diocesan officers, consequently formal consent may be communicated in due course.

1	School details
	<i>Please provide the following details: name, address, and category - VA/VC, age range, size, Ofsted rating and date of inspection, SIAMS rating and date of inspection, short statement of financial position.</i>
2	Vision
	<i>Please briefly outline the draft name, vision, ethos and strategy for the proposed Federation.</i>
3	Full governing body statement of support for Federation
	<p>Please provide the following resolution:</p> <p>"The decision to further investigate the Federation proposal was discussed at the full Governors' meeting on [date] (<i>please attach a copy of the minutes</i>) where a significant majority of Governors or all the Governors supported the motion to undertake further consultation and due diligence. The Governing Body felt that this step was in the best interests of the pupils at their school."</p> <p><i>Where the Principal Officiating Minister of the parish holds an ex-officio role on the governing body, <u>and</u> where the PCC appoints governors, please attach a letter from each providing their conditional consent for this decision.</i></p>
4	Governing Body Resolution in Principle
	<i>Briefly outline why the governing body wishes to Federate and why they have elected to explore the possibility of this particular Federation</i>
5	Due Diligence to Date
	<p><i>Please provide a summary and where possible attach the minutes detailing GB exploration of the alternative options available to the school i.e.:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. 'Do nothing' b. Collaborative working under a Memorandum of Understanding c. Academy conversion

	<i>If the 'exploration' was delegated to a joint working committee, please detail its membership, frequency of meetings and the reporting mechanisms put in place from the committee to the governing body.</i>
6	Links with local parishes / deanery <i>Please detail parish and deanery links. In seeking to change status, how will the school maintain and further enhance these links in order that children will continue to receive an outstanding education with a distinctively Christian character? Give current examples and future plans.</i>
7	Collaborative working <i>Please explain how long the schools within the proposed federation have collaborated formally (note the expectation that this is at least 12-18 months) and the outcomes of this collaboration.</i> <i>How will the school continue to work with other schools outside of the proposed Federation, to ensure the high-quality learning and well-being of all local pupils?</i>
8	Structure of the Federation <i>The Governing Body confirms that it understands that the federated governing body, in accordance with Sections 24 and 25 of the Education Act 2002 and School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2007 or any successor legislation, will appoint the members of the Local Governing Body according to a combined Instrument of Government. With the Federation, each school retains its separate legal identity in respect of its budget, admissions and performance tables; each school is also subject to separate inspection by Ofsted and SIAMS.</i> <i>Please clarify:</i> 1. <i>The proposed size, structure and shape of the federated governing body (where possible please provide a draft Instrument of Government), noting that:</i> a. <i>by law there must be a minimum of 7 governors made up of representatives of the stakeholder groups of the schools – this is not subject to a maximum.</i> b. <i>Foundation governors must constitute 25% of the total members of the proposed federated board in accordance with Voluntary Controlled status, for VA schools foundation governors must constitute the majority.</i> 2. <i>The proposed staffing arrangements;</i> a. <i>A federation that simply combines the resources of two or more schools should not raise any concerns for staff, as security of employment of all staff will not be affected by these proposals.</i> b. <i>Note that in VA schools the governing body is the employer whereas for VC schools the employer is the local authority, thus it will not be possible to federate VA with VC/Community schools unless the VA identity and structure is maintained.</i> c. <i>Please detail executive and senior leadership arrangements and measures for succession planning.</i> 3. <i>The identity of the admissions authority for each school</i> 4. <i>If there will be a view to establish single policies across the federation</i> 5. <i>To what extent finances may be pooled within the federation (please provide an inventory of any property and assets proposed to be transferred)</i>

	<p>6. The contact details for the Clerk and Chair of the joint working committee with the intention that they will form part of any transition to a new Federated governing Body.</p> <p>7. Suggested timeframe for establishing the proposed Federation including the consultation period (minimum 6 weeks)</p> <p>8. Other such matters as the governing body considers appropriate.</p>
9	Statement to the Diocesan Board of Education
	<p>The Governing Body commits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To ensure that arrangements within the Federation are compliant with the Admissions Code of Practice ▪ To continue to consult with the Board on matters such as capital works, admissions arrangements, senior leadership appointments and the appointment of foundation governors ▪ To uphold the Site Trustees' status and work to ensure that they are enabled to fulfil their legal obligations as custodian trustees of the educational trust upon which the church schools were founded ▪ To develop and enhance the distinctive Christian character of the Church schools, ▪ To acknowledge that the Board will continue to have to give consent, under the Diocesan Boards of Education Measure 2021, to all future capital building projects on Church school sites. ▪ To ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction of the Federation, ▪ To hold senior leadership to account for the educational performance of the schools within the Federation and their pupils, and the performance management of staff ▪ To oversee the financial performance of the schools within the Federation and making sure money is spent efficiently and equitably.
	Sign and print name
Chair of Governors	
Chair of Working Committee	
Date	