

DBE Advice for church schools on Federations and Working Together

Introduction

The DBE is well aware of the changes in school funding which will particularly affect small schools, many of which are church schools. There is a good deal of experience of collaborations and federations among church schools in the diocese. The strongest and most sustainable arrangements involve federation. There is mixed experience of schools in collaborations, with some ending arrangements after a period of time. The DBE wishes to support church schools in their decision-making and offers this advice which is based on the following principles.

Principles

1. The DBE encourages church schools to work together in the most effective and imaginative way, ensuring always that the Christian ethos of the school, on which it was founded, is preserved.
2. The DBE supports small schools, recognises the financial pressures on them and seeks to ensure that they have a viable future serving local communities.
3. The DBE acknowledges the benefits to pupils of small schools working together and there are good examples based on the Pyramid/Family of schools models.
4. The DBE encourages a collaborative approach with successful schools supporting under-performing schools and larger schools supporting smaller schools.
5. The DBE encourages schools to plan ahead for federation and commends Suffolk County Council's toolkit on federations to church schools.
6. The DBE recognises and supports the development of senior leaders as Executive Heads and Heads of School as a key benefit and consequence of schools choosing to federate and sees this as a positive career development opportunity.

Considerations

There are a number of issues to be considered, including:

- Teaching and learning
- Finance
- Shared staffing
- Recruitment and retention

However, it is unlikely that a single issue will be the driver when considering federation.

Recommendations

1. Church schools should consider whether they can afford to continue as stand-alone schools financially. If not, they should actively consider federation, ideally but not necessarily with another church school. In any case, they should consider ways in which they can work together with other schools for the educational benefit of pupils at the school.
2. All church schools should keep the Federation/Collaboration/Academy issue under review, discussing at a full governing body meeting at least annually.
3. All church schools considering federation should contact the Diocesan Education team in the first instance to ensure that they receive all the advice and support available to them. The team is willing to suggest possible church schools with which to form partnerships and to help broker discussions between schools if helpful, on request.

VA schools

4. VA schools should preserve their foundation governor majority whenever possible. In cases where a VA school cannot federate with one or more VA schools within a reasonable distance, VA schools should only consider a reduction in the number of foundation governors after discussion with the Diocesan Education team.
5. The distinctively Christian leadership of a VA school should be maintained wherever possible. The Governing Body's ability to give preference to a candidate on the basis of his/her religious beliefs should not be given away lightly.

VC schools

6. VC schools are also encouraged to federate with another church school but may also consider federation with community schools. The DBE recognises that in a rural county like Suffolk, nearby schools may not be VC schools. When considering with whom to federate some sense of shared identity or community is important.

Leadership

7. The appointment of the leadership staff must be carefully considered to ensure that the Christian ethos of the school is maintained in federations involving VC and community schools. The Diocesan Director or Deputy Director should advise governors on the appointment of a Headteacher in a federation involving a church school.
8. The Heads of School appointed to each school in the federation should reflect the VC or VA nature of the school, as if it were a Headteacher appointment. The appointment of a Head of School in a community school in a federation should be a candidate willing to recognise and support the VA or VC nature of the other schools in the federation.

Governance

9. The instrument of government for all federations including a church school should normally include an ex-officio foundation governor.
10. VC schools should ensure that there are at least TWO foundation governors (including the ex- officio) named in the instrument of government in a federation between a VC and a community school, and THREE foundation governors (including the ex- officio) in an all-VC federation.

Ethos

11. All VA and VC schools joining a federation should consider setting up their own individual Ethos Committee. Model terms of reference for this Committee are available on our website at <http://www.stedmundsbury.anglican.org/index.cfm?page=cyp.content&cmid=442>

The DBE will review its advice in response to developments in this area.

Jane Sheat
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Appendix 1

Definitions

Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) - the statutory body with responsibility for RE and Collective Worship and for promoting church schools.

Collaboration - two schools share one Headteacher but retain their own separate governing bodies working together, using a joint committee of governors to oversee the partnership using the governance collaboration regulations.

Federation - any number, size or types of schools come together under one governing body. Most often (but not exclusively) a federation has one Executive Headteacher and other site-based or federation-wide leadership roles. There are different types of federations but all have just one governing body and must follow a statutory consultation process.

Appendix 2

Other types of working together:

Multi Academy Trusts

Within a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) all Academies are governed by one Trust (the Members) and a board of Directors (the Governors).

The MAT is legally responsible for standards across all schools in the chain and holds ultimate responsibility for all decisions regarding the running of the individual Academies. Having a MAT governing all schools means there is only one employer for all staff, which allows the moving of resources through schools in the chain.

The MAT will ultimately be accountable and responsible for the performance of schools in the chain. The MAT can agree to delegate as much or as little power down to the local governing bodies of the schools involved, which allows each MAT to decide where power should sit according to the circumstances of the schools involved. This can provide effective support for any school which is weaker or requiring additional support for a period. Schools should be aware that it represents a loss of autonomy, however.

For more information, please see the DfE website:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies/primary/steps/b00205443/primarymodels/multi-academy-trusts>

Mixed Multi Academy Trust

A MAT has been until the summer 2013 for schools of the same type, i.e. community, VA or VC. It is now possible for academies consisting of former voluntary aided, voluntary controlled and community schools to be in the same MAT - see DfE website:

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/m/mixed%20multi%20academy%20trusts.pdf>

Umbrella trusts

Groups of schools which are geographically close (such as a pyramid) may form an umbrella trust. Each school converts as a separate Academy Trust but can agree shared governance, collaboration and procurement of services. This model enables schools to collaborate.

For more information, please see the DfE website:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies/primary/steps/b00205443/primarymodels/umbrella-trusts>

Local Collaborative Trusts

Local Collaborative Trusts or LCTs involve schools working together under Collaboration Regulations rather than Federation Regulations. Whilst large schools may feel secure in converting to academy status on their own, smaller schools may have concerns over doing so. Equally they may not wish to give up their independence and autonomy by converting as part of a MAT. LCTs are suitable for any local group of schools and/or academies with or without a religious character. The governance of each school/academy is left intact, while the creation of the LCT enable them to share staff, budgets and committees to whatever extent they wish. LCTs are useful vehicles for schools which require improvement or good schools to work together and to support schools going through difficulties. A LCT enables the sharing of staff and budgets and can buy supplies or services on behalf of all the members. It is an enabling model, although it should be more than a talking shop. The advantage is that it can include both schools and academies.

The DBE

The DBE has set up a diocesan umbrella trust. This enables the trust to appoint trustees to church schools which become academies. The DBE has not set up a diocesan MAT, nor applied to become an academy sponsor. This is kept under regular review.

Schools considering academy status should discuss with the Diocesan Director of Education or Deputy Director in the first instance and should refer to existing guidance – <http://www.cofesuffolk.org/index.cfm?page=cyp.content&cmid=441>

The Academies Act 2010 requires church schools to obtain the consent of the DBE, the diocesan bishop and the local Parochial Church Council (PCC) before making an academy application to the DfE.