

# **North Yorkshire County Council Children and Young People's Service**

## **A Guide to Models of Collaborative Working (Collaborations, Federations and Amalgamations)**

## 1.0 Purpose of this Guidance

This guidance has been put together to support governors and headteachers by providing an overview of three collaborative models - collaboration, federation and amalgamation.

Maintained schools can use this guidance, and the sources referenced within it, to explore the options available to them. Local Authority (LA) Officers are able to support and advise schools on the detail of these options once there is commitment by governors to pro-actively explore them.

If you govern an academy, you should be considering the same sort of issues, but the relevant structure is a multi-academy trust (MAT).

## 2.0 What is collaborative working?

Collaborative working includes partnership working of all kinds between schools, from informal partnerships, through sharing staff and/or services, to amalgamation. This can take place between maintained schools of different categories – community, voluntary controlled, voluntary aided, foundation and special schools – and of different age ranges.

This guide examines three specific types of collaborative working:

**Collaboration:** formal partnerships with a strategic governance group across the partnership making policy decisions. Schools frequently share headteacher/s. (This has previously been referred to as 'soft federation', 'formal collaboration' or 'confederation'.)

**Federation:** a formal and legal agreement to bring together two or more governing bodies

**Amalgamation:** the creation of a single school from two or more schools

**At its simplest, collaborative working is two or more schools working together to the mutual benefit of their pupils with the overall aim of improving outcomes for all. This has the potential to broaden opportunities and contribute to efficiencies - it is important for governors to keep collaborative working in their sights.**

## 3.0 Why collaborate?

Governing Bodies need to pro-actively consider collaborative working as early as possible. Increasingly schools find themselves in a challenging environment and too many schools wait until their headteacher has resigned or they are facing serious issues relating to pupil numbers, finances, governance or uncertain standards – this is often too late.

LA officers can support schools in considering the options open to them and in carrying out processes required for federation and amalgamation, once governors have made a firm commitment to explore them. It is recommended that schools take some time in working through the separate **audit tool** before involving LA officers, in order to get best value from their input.

**Governing Bodies need to consider what will be gained by collaborative working and any outcomes that cannot be achieved working on their own.**

### 3.1 Benefits and opportunities of collaborative working

The potential benefits vary from one school to another but can include benefits for pupils, staff and governors, including:

- introducing more sustainable models of leadership including headship
- broader opportunities for learners and an enriched curriculum
- improved lesson planning and peer-to-peer challenge and support
- sharing of data and the benchmarking of best practice
- access to a better range of professional development including classroom coaching and expert practitioners
- development of leadership talent
- more effective business management.

**Benefits for pupils must be at the heart of decisions about collaborative working. In the most general terms, by looking creatively at sharing knowledge, resources and best practice, pupil outcomes can be raised through improved teaching and learning.**

Resources can be used more efficiently and effectively with the benefits of economies of scale e.g. shared procurement.

Benefits for school staff will often also benefit pupils. Recruitment of staff can be challenging, particularly in isolated communities where there is little opportunity for career development. Schools which are collaborating can provide a more attractive opportunity for prospective staff, with opportunities for career development and additional experience and support. Shared CPD can be advantageous. A larger pool of staff allows for increased opportunities for succession planning. There will be access to colleagues with a wider range of curriculum expertise, opportunities to share and learn from good practice offering more flexible working and career development.

## 4.0 Context

### Demographic Changes

There are significant variations in pupil number trends between different schools and different geographical areas. Pupil number forecasts for planning areas and individual schools are available on request from the LA's Strategic Planning team. Understanding future pupil number profiles is an important consideration when looking at collaborative working.

### Leadership succession planning

We are aware that in North Yorkshire almost a quarter of headteachers are 56 or over, and many are considering retirement. It is therefore important that Governing Bodies (GBs) examine succession plans and / or explore alternative leadership models in a planned way, rather than in response to a resignation or retirement.

## **5.0 Models of Collaborative working**

Collaborative models lie on a continuum from very informal arrangements between schools to amalgamation, where two or more schools merge to become a single school. This guide sets out three models: Collaboration, Federation and Amalgamation. Governors, through a careful planning process, and using the relevant toolkits, can work out the details of their collaborative work.

**There is no one size fits all solution for collaborative working and the design and operational workings will depend on the circumstances of individual schools and their communities and the focus or purpose of their partnership.**

### **5.1 Collaboration - summary**

These are formal partnerships, with a written agreement setting out the basis of the collaboration (e.g. a Service Level Agreement for shared headship), including the setting up of any joint committees and their terms of reference. A strategic governance group may make policy decisions across the partnership. There may also be common policies, shared staff across a number of schools, and work to improve the transition of pupils between schools at age of transfer. Each school retains an individual GB and retains its budget share. There can be workload issues as each GB must be serviced and each school will have a separate Ofsted inspection (and SIAMs inspection for church schools). Decision-making can be slow as information may be fed back to the individual GBs.

In North Yorkshire, there are several collaborations which have a single headteacher (often known as an executive headteacher) across the schools involved although shared leadership is not a requirement.

The decision to collaborate formally is made locally by the governing bodies of the individual schools following a consultation process with their community and key partners. Although not statutory, this consultation process is strongly recommended.

NB This model can create considerable workload for executive headteachers across more than one school and may only be suitable for a short period of time for a specific purpose or with a view to moving towards formal federation.

#### **5.1.1 Collaboration - process**

SEE COLLABORATION TOOLKIT

#### **5.1.2 Collaboration - withdrawal**

The written agreement between the schools will allow any school within a collaboration to withdraw from the arrangement after an agreed period of notice. It is recommended that the withdrawal period be agreed at the start of the collaboration and have a fixed period of time e.g. one term minimum.

## **5.2 Federation - summary**

Federation is a formal and legal agreement whereby two or more schools share a **single governing body**. In many cases, a federation will have a single headteacher and some shared staffing, although this is not a necessary part of federation.

There is a legal requirement to prepare a formal consultation proposal (known as the **statement of intent**) and to consult publicly on this with parents, staff, unions / professional associations and the wider community.

Federations can involve a mix of maintained primary, special and secondary schools of any size. Federated schools retain their budget share which they would receive if they were not federated, although budgets can be pooled should governors wish to do so.

There will be a number of different reasons why schools decide to create a formal partnership through federation. Whilst many benefits of collaborative working can be achieved through less formal partnership, federation provides a formal framework, including shared governance, which can provide a single strategic direction and a more permanent commitment. A challenge is that there can be workload issues, particularly for a single headteacher, as each school will continue to have a separate Ofsted inspection (and SIAMs inspection for church schools). This might be offset, though, if the federation removes the need for a headteacher to have a significant teaching commitment, and it is helpful to have a single federated governing body with governance of both schools.

### 5.2.1 Federation - process

SEE FEDERATION TOOLKIT

### 5.2.2 Federation – adding another school to an existing federation

Follow the Federation Toolkit. All schools (including those currently within the federation) will need to prepare a formal consultation proposal (known as the **statement of intent**) and to consult publicly. A new federation **instrument of governance** and a new federated governing body will need to be created.

### 5.2.3 Federation - withdrawal

The federation can be dissolved or one of the federated schools allowed to leave. In practice this is not a frequent occurrence. The following can make a signed request in writing to leave a federation:

- Two or more governors
- The parents of at least one-fifth of the registered pupils at the relevant school
- At least two-fifths of the staff who are paid to work at the relevant school
- The local authority
- The trustees of the relevant school (or)
- A body entitled to appoint foundation governors to the GB of the federation

When such a request is received, the GB of the federation must inform, within one week:

- All relevant local authorities
- Headteacher of the federation and of each federated school
- Trustees of any trust relating to the school; the appropriate Diocese or religious body
- All staff paid to work at the relevant school
- Parents of registered pupils at the relevant school
- Others the GB considers appropriate

The GB must then meet, at least 14 days after receiving the request, and decide whether to

1. Dissolve the federation and on what date
2. De-federate one school and on what date
3. Not allow the school to leave the federation

Following the meeting the GB must notify its decision to those bodies it informed about the original request. If the GB decides that a school should de-federate it must also inform the DfE.

#### **5.2.4 Federation - governance**

When schools federate, a new federated GB is created.

There must be no fewer than 7 governors; there is no upper limit but governors need to consider whether a smaller number would allow business to be conducted more effectively.

The GB of a federation must include:

- Two elected parent governors from across the federation
- The headteacher
- One elected staff governor
- One local authority governor
- GBs may also appoint co-opted governors

Federations including foundation and voluntary schools are required to have partnership or foundation governors. Please consult the LA Governance team and, where applicable your Diocesan Adviser, for further information.

#### **5.3 Amalgamation**

Amalgamation is the creation of a single school from two or more schools. E.g. a primary school created from the amalgamation of an infant and a junior school.

Amalgamated schools have a single budget and a single Ofsted inspection.

An amalgamation usually consists of the technical closure of one or more schools, and the expansion (and change of age range if necessary) of one school. This means that, in school organisation terms, there are two or more linked proposals. The Ofsted inspection judgement from the school that remains open becomes the Ofsted judgement for the amalgamated school until it is inspected again.

A decision to amalgamate is usually made by the Local Authority following a statutory consultation process. GBs of voluntary or foundation schools can also publish proposals to close their own school.

If you are considering amalgamation, please contact the Local Authority and, where applicable, your Diocese, to discuss the process and timescales.

#### **6.0 Possible challenges for collaborative working**

Locally managed schools have had extensive autonomy to determine their own identity and priorities for many years. Some schools may feel that there will be a dilution of this with more structured arrangements for collaborative working. In small communities, there may be traditional separation which governors would need to work with the community to overcome.

There may be anxieties around the increased time commitment on already hard-pressed staff. Central to this increased commitment is the need to establish good communications with all partners. It is generally the case that the less formal the collaboration, the greater the increase in workload. For example, in a collaboration there are still **separate GBs** and separate Ofsted inspections **for each school**; in a federation there is **one GB** but separate Ofsted inspections **for each school**; in an amalgamated school there is **one GB** and one Ofsted inspection **in total**.

Some partners may be wary of the stronger influence of larger schools, or schools which are perceived to be in a stronger position. Faith schools may find it more challenging to identify an appropriate partner school.

## 7.0 HR (staffing) considerations

Each model of collaborative working is likely to have some staffing considerations. It will be important to seek advice in order to explore the particular implications for each school.

## 8.0 Next steps

As a first step, it is suggested that governors work through the **audit tool**. It is important to focus particularly on the potential benefits for children and young people.

If governors decide to develop their thinking further, LA officers will be able to support them in exploring their options. A range of core and traded support is available, which is set out in the toolkits. The expectation though is that governors will lead the process.

An LA Officer can offer a presentation to governing bodies wishing to explore federation as part of the LA's core offer to schools.

## 9.0 Summary

	Share Headteacher	Service Level Agreement	Single governing body	Single Ofsted inspection	Single budget share
Collaboration	Usually	Yes			
Federation	Usually		Yes		
Amalgamation	Usually		Yes	Yes	Yes

## 10.0 Further sources of information

National Governors' Association - Federations

<https://www.nga.org.uk/Guidance/School-structures-and-constitution/Federations.aspx>

The School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations 2012 and subsequent amendments

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/1035/made>

DfE, *Effective school partnerships and collaboration for school improvement: a review of the evidence Research report* (October 2015)

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/467855/DFE-RR466 - School improvement effective school partnerships.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/467855/DFE-RR466_-_School_improvement_effective_school_partnerships.pdf)

Ofsted, *Leadership of more than one school: An evaluation of the impact of federated schools* (2011)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/leadership-of-more-than-one-school>

Church of England Education Office, *Embracing Change: Rural and Small Schools* (March 2018)

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/Rural%20Schools%20-%20Embracing%20Change%20WEB%20FINAL.pdf>

## 11.0 North Yorkshire information

### 11.1 Contacts

In the first instance, you may wish to discuss collaboration / federation with your School Improvement Adviser or Diocesan Adviser. Other LA contacts are:

Subject	Contact	Email
Strategic Planning - General advice on collaborative working	Craven: Julia Temple	<a href="mailto:Julia.Temple@northyorks.gov.uk">Julia.Temple@northyorks.gov.uk</a>
	Hambleton: Mark Ashton	<a href="mailto:Mark.Ashton@northyorks.gov.uk">Mark.Ashton@northyorks.gov.uk</a>
	Harrogate: Sue Turley	<a href="mailto:Sue.Turley@northyorks.gov.uk">Sue.Turley@northyorks.gov.uk</a>
	Richmondshire: Mark Ashton	<a href="mailto:Matt.George@northyorks.gov.uk">Matt.George@northyorks.gov.uk</a>
	Ryedale: Matt George	<a href="mailto:John.S.Lee@northyorks.gov.uk">John.S.Lee@northyorks.gov.uk</a>
	Scarborough: Matt George Selby: John Lee	
Governance	Governor Support team	<a href="mailto:Governor.Support@northyorks.gov.uk">Governor.Support@northyorks.gov.uk</a>
Finance	Sally Dunn	<a href="mailto:Sally.Dunn@northyorks.gov.uk">Sally.Dunn@northyorks.gov.uk</a>
HR	Your HR Adviser	

### LINKS

Collaboration toolkit

Federation toolkit

Audit toolkit

January 2019; update January 2022