



EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 20TH MAY 2024

SUBJECT: FEDERATION OF SCHOOLS

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION AND
CORPORATE SERVICES**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek Scrutiny endorsement on the recommendation to Cabinet to proceed to consultation, in partnership with each Governing Body, in respect of the Federation of Cwmaber Infants School and Cwmaber Junior School, with effect from the start of term January 2025.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The report provides a background to the Welsh Government's Federation of Maintained School in Wales Regulations introduced in 2014. It outlines processes and practical aspects of establishing a federated school governing body.
- 2.2 The report identifies the Schools and Governing Bodies who wish to proceed to formal consultation in partnership with the Local Authority (LA).

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Prior to a report being presented to Cabinet, Scrutiny Members are asked to: -
- a) Note the contents of this report
 - b) Endorse the recommendation to Cabinet, via vote, to proceed to consultation, in partnership with each Governing Body, in respect of the Federation of Cwmaber Infants School and Cwmaber Junior School with effect from the start of term January 2025.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To seek Scrutiny Member endorsement to Cabinet to proceed to formal consultation on the proposal to federate the following schools:

- Cwmaber Infants School and Cwmaber Junior School

4.2 To work in partnership and support the schools identified in 4.1 in undertaking a consultation exercise on federation which if approved will formalise the successful collaboration that has been in place for a number of years.

5. THE REPORT

Background

5.1 The term “Federation” describes a formal and legal agreement by which a number of schools share Governance arrangements.

5.2 The Welsh Government’s Federation policy objective is to promote collaboration between all parts of the education system to improve outcomes. School federation is a more formal way of extending collaboration and promoting closer working relationships and is the principal initiative for achieving formal partnership working amongst schools to improve performance and narrow the attainment gap for deprived pupils.

Summary of Federation Regulations

5.3 The federation of schools is a legal process which enables schools to work together through a formal structured process by sharing a governing body that will make decisions in the best interest of all the schools, staff and pupils in that federation.

5.4 The term federation describes a formal and legal agreement by which a number of schools (between two and six) share governance arrangements and have a single governing body.

5.5 The most important reason for considering federation must be the benefits such an arrangement would bring for children and young people in the federating schools by enhancing educational provision through working together efficiently to raise standards, improve services and increase opportunities.

5.6 A federation can provide a foundation for sustainable long term development and improvement.

5.7 To be successful, federation needs to be based on a commitment to work as a group of schools and a willingness to do things differently for the added benefit of all pupils, their well-being and achievements.

5.8 One of the advantages of federation is that schools that federate remain in their communities and keep their individual identity. However the existing governing bodies will be dissolved and replaced by a new, single governing body which will have oversight of, and equal responsibility for, the work of all schools within the federation.

5.9 The membership of a governing body for a federation of schools is almost identical to the membership of an ordinary governing body with all stakeholders being represented although there is more flexibility in the proportions of representation of each category of governor. This means that a governing body of a federation can choose a constitution and membership which suits their particular circumstances as

long as they have a minimum of 15 governors and no more than a maximum of 27 governors and adhere to the minimum and maximum numbers of governors set out in the regulations.

- 5.10 Schools in a federation will also be able to maintain their own delegated budget, name, character, school uniform and ethos, but will be able to explore the advantages of sharing resources such as facilities, IT, staff, school buildings, etc.
- 5.11 A decision to federate by either schools or LAs will not override the need for a LA to intervene or act on school improvement or school organisation issues.
- 5.12 Each school can retain its headteacher if it wishes although if a single headteacher and deputy headteacher post is created to manage all of the schools in the federation, those posts do not have to be advertised nationally if one of the headteachers or deputy headteachers expresses an interest in the post.
- 5.13 Each school has its own Estyn inspection, though increasingly these are co-ordinated to happen at the same time for all schools within the federation to minimise stress and disruption.
- 5.14 The governing body of a federation can use budget, resources and staff across the federation to improve the educational outcomes for all pupils.
- 5.15 An audit trail must be kept and separate accounts produced for each school in the federation.
- 5.16 The governing body of a federation cannot require existing staff to work across all schools within the federation, but they can negotiate with the school staff unions over whether flexible contracts can be introduced.
- 5.17 New staff can be appointed to work across schools in the federation.
- 5.18 It is a statutory requirement to seek the views of stakeholders on federation proposals, whether the federation has been proposed by the respective school governing bodies or the LA or in joint partnership.
- 5.19 Local authorities must allow the governing bodies 20 school days (excluding inset days) to respond to proposals and cannot establish a federation until a period of at least 100 days has expired from the date they publish proposals.

5.20 **What are the benefits of Federation?**

By entering into a Federation, the schools will agree to work together for the benefit of all pupils in the local area. There will be a formal arrangement where the schools share a single governing body. The schools retain their separate legal status and have their own budget allocations and Estyn inspections.

The shared governance structure will allow the schools to:

- Work together efficiently and sustainably to raise standards, improve services and increase opportunities for pupils and staff;
- Share resources, expertise and facilities;

- Federations do not bring cashable savings to the Local Authority but they may ease financial pressure within schools because resources can be shared and deployed across the Federation;
- A single strategic Federation Governing Body means that the schools can work formally together to improve opportunities for children. This may lead to:
 - Broader learning and social experiences for children;
 - Better continuity of provision from early years to the end of the primary schooling;
 - Strong leadership using more strategic leadership and management structures, allowing school-based leaders to focus on teaching, learning and raising standards;
 - Opportunities to develop future leaders;
 - An aligned and coherent curriculum, increasing the opportunity to fulfil individual pupils' needs, extending curriculum entitlement and giving the potential to share resources;
 - A single Federation Development Plan, single school policies, reducing duplication;
 - More opportunities to share resources, particularly for arts, music and sport.
- A Federation would allow each school to keep its own individual character within a strong overarching partnership and each school will be able to learn from each other.

There is no blueprint for a Federation but schools will have the opportunity to work together to shape their Federation, so that it is able to meet the needs of the pupils and communities.

5.21 **What are the challenges of Federation?**

Some of the challenges to taking forward a Federation are as follows:

- Building trust between governors and school communities;
- Need to ensure full commitment from all schools involved;
- Need to develop and agree a shared vision for the school;
- Need to ensure clear governance and leadership structures;
- Need to ensure sufficient time for all parties to be at ease with the proposed changes;
- All partners should feel equally valued;
- Increasing the workload of governors, particularly during inception and first year of establishing a Federation;
- Potential loss of experienced governors;
- Operational issues - increased workload for a single headteacher;
- Estyn inspections – currently, Estyn inspects each school within a Federation separately.

For a Federation to succeed, it is imperative that trust is developed between the governors and individual school communities. It also requires full commitment from the schools involved and a shared vision for the development of the Federation.

- 5.22 Due to the successful informal collaboration already established between both schools the majority of the challenges identified in 5.21 have already been successfully addressed

5.23 **Composition of the Governing Body**

The regulations stipulate that each federated governing body should have a minimum of 15 Governors and a maximum of 27 with a proposed composition made up as follows for each federated school:

- (a) at least one but no more than two parent governors elected or appointed to represent the interests of parents of registered pupils at that school;
- (b) at least one but no more than two teacher governors;
- (c) at least one but no more than two staff governors;
- (d) at least two but no more than four LA governors;
- (e) at least two but no more than four community governors;
- (f) the head or acting head of the federation, if one is appointed or the headteacher or acting headteacher of each school in the federation unless those persons resign as a governor.

5.24 The present position with both governing bodies is as follows:

Cwmaber Infant School / Cwmaber Junior School

The schools have been informally “collaborating” since September 2020. Both schools share the same Head Teacher.

The Governing Body of both schools have agreed to proceed to formal consultation for federation status in partnership with the Local Authority, subject to Cabinet approval.

A draft Proposal Report has been produced.

The Federation process

In establishing a Federation the following steps need to be noted:

Step 1: Exploration and Preparation

This phase involves:

- Report specified as an item on Governing Body agenda;
- Governing Body to give preliminary consent to an agreement to explore Federation options from School(s) involved and the Local Authority;
- The co creation of an initial briefing paper for consideration of staff and governing bodies;
- Agreement of the key drivers and purpose for Federation;
- Informing staff in both schools of the process and any implications and keeping unions informed;
- Setting up a working group with representatives from both schools to draft a formal Proposal Report;
- Determining a date for the operative start of Federation.

Step 2: The report and consultation

- The governing bodies in partnership with the Local Authority to prepare a formal Proposal report to consult with all stakeholders.

This report will:

- Include full details of proposal including the size/composition of single governing body, senior staff arrangements and management arrangements, admissions, authority (ies) deadline for comments – 20 days from publication;
- Explain reasons for Federation and benefits (and how potential challenges would be met);
- Include the date for when Federation takes place – must be at least 100 days from the date proposals are published, i.e. sent to stakeholders;
- Consultation with stakeholders – Local Authority, parents/carers, staff of all schools, school staff unions.

Step 3: Post consultation

- Governing bodies and local authority to consider responses;
- Provide a summary report of responses for each governing body to consider.

Step 4: Implementation

- Governing bodies and local authority meet to make the final decision on nature and timing of Federation;
- Governing bodies and local authority inform stakeholders of decision;
- Local Authority in consultation with the governing bodies liaise over the new Instrument of government and election and appointment of new governors;
- Consider making arrangements for governor support for the Federating schools in the interim before the joint governing body is in place;
- Senior leadership roles and responsibilities formalised;
- Joint Committee of governors is established and provides strategic planning and roll out the Federation;
- Single governing body meets to elect chair and vice chair;
- Calendars and professional processes aligned;
- Look at how new technologies can support Federation development.

Step 5: Evolution

- Implementing new systems and structures, policies and practice;
- New staff roles operating (Performance Management structure and process);
- School Development Plan targets resources and expertise at raising standards across the Federation;
- Monitoring and review by governing body, staff and the local authority.

5.25 Officers have met with all Governing Bodies concerned who have formally agreed to proceed to formal consultation on the proposal. Although the Governing Bodies could proceed in isolation each Governing Body have requested the Local Authority consider the proposal and agree to proceed in partnership with the individual schools to formal consultation.

5.26 The next stage of the process, subject to Cabinet approval, would be to commence the consultation process for all 4 groups of schools. It is expected that this process will commence early in the Autumn term, subject to the detailed timeline, being agreed by each Governing Body.

5.27 A draft consultation document is attached at Appendix 1 which will be adapted for each of the school federations outlined above should the proposals be endorsed.

5.28 **Conclusion**

Members are asked to endorse the recommendation to Cabinet, via vote, to proceed to consultation, in partnership with each Governing Body, in respect of the Federation of Cwmaber Infants School and Cwmaber Junior School with effect from the start of term January 2025.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

6.1 No assumptions have been made in relation to this report.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 As the proposal seeks to Federate the two school governing bodies only, and they are have been in an established collaboration since September 2020, there is no requirement under the statutory process to undertake a wider Integrated Impact Assessment in this instance.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The Federation process does not bring any savings to the Local Authority but may ease financial pressures within schools by sharing resources which can be deployed across the federation.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Due to collaboration arrangements already being in place, in both schools, for a number of years there are no personnel implications anticipated directly resulting from this proposal.

9.2 Governing Bodies have the responsibility for the management of staffing within schools.

10. CONSULTATIONS

10.1 The draft report was distributed as detailed below. All comments received have been reflected in this version of the report.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Federation of Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations 2014
School Organisation Code 2013 (Welsh Government)

School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013

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Background Papers:

None