

# Worcestershire County Council policy/guidance on School Collaboration and Federations

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# SCHOOL COLLABORATION AND FEDERATION POLICY STATEMENT

## 1. Background

In 2005, in response to the 2002 Education Act, which established the legal basis on which locally managed schools could formally work together at the level of strategic governance; Worcestershire County Council approved a policy in support of school federations and collaborations.

Since that time there have been a number of changes and developments which have given rise to the need for a review.

- Strong national political move to support closer working between schools as exemplified through the National Strategies and the Office of the Schools Commissioner.
- National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services offering Models of Leadership involving collaboration and federation at the levels of leadership and governance.
- Inability of schools particularly small schools to recruit headteachers.
- New Education Inclusion Policy giving greater emphasis on area-wide, locally commissioned provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and those pupils who are vulnerable or difficult to place.

This draft revision of the policy offers a more positive and pro-active approach on the part of the County Council to collaborations and federations of schools.

## 2. Policy Statement

2.1. The County Council supports school collaboration and federation in the interests of:

- raising standards;
- improving teaching and learning; and
- extending opportunities for all pupils.

2.2. Local initiatives to develop informal or formal collaboration or partnerships will be actively supported by the LA where the focus is on the above objectives.

2.3. Collaboration or federation will be actively promoted as a future pattern of provision where it will be in the best interests of pupils and the local community.

## 3. What is collaboration or federation?

3.1.1. Within this policy the County Council has taken as its reference the models set out in the National College 'Introductions to Models of Leadership - A brief guide to 21<sup>st</sup> Century school leadership and partnerships'. ([www.nationalcollege.org.uk/modelsofleadership](http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/modelsofleadership))

3.1.2. Partnerships

Where groups of schools establish formal and informal agreements to work together. Such as:

- Staff training, or Governor training;
- Shared residential visits;
- Shared curriculum resources or specialist staff.

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### 3.1.3. Collaborations

Formal partnerships with a strategic group across the partnership making policy decisions which are binding on all members. Such as:

- Co-ordinated post 16 curriculum options with other high schools and colleges;
- Joint policies and planning;
- Work to improve the transition of pupils between schools at age of transfer.

### 3.1.4. Federations

Where two or more schools are governed collectively under a single governing body. This organisational model necessitates considerations of internal leadership arrangements.

### 3.1.5. Trusts

Where two or more schools provide a broad structure within which schools and their partners collaborate.

3.2. Within these general structures there is any number of permutations with the possibility of federated schools being part of a Trust or collaboration with other schools. More formal arrangements are generally preferred where a longer term commitment is required.

3.3. Voluntary Aided church schools must consult their diocese when considering collaboration or federation with another school.

## 4. The benefits of collaboration/federation

By looking creatively at sharing knowledge and expertise, pupil attainment can be raised through improved teaching and learning.

### 4.1. For pupils

The benefits are numerous and the pupil remains central to all the collaborative working. A simple example is the extension of curriculum options e.g. where the collaboration of a number of high schools and colleges can extend the range and type of courses available at post 16, shared expertise or pooled resources can provide for particular special educational needs in the locality of the pupil, or small schools working together to extend the opportunities to their pupils.

### 4.2. For staff

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.

### 4.3. For governors

Opportunities to influence developments and initiatives across a group of schools for the benefit of their own and future pupils. More effective use of resources with the benefits of economies of scale. Sharing of good practice and expertise. A wider support network.

### 4.4. For the wider community

Collaboration and federation complements the extended schools policy approved by the Council. Not only can schools promote extended school activities within their own school but by collaborating within an area a greater range of opportunities can be provided and co-ordinated.

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### 5. Possible disadvantages of collaboration/federation

- 5.1. Locally managed schools have had extensive autonomy to determine their own priorities and identity. Some schools may feel that there will be a dilution of this with more structured or formal arrangements of partnership or federation.
- 5.2. There will 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.
- 5.3. Some partners may be wary of the stronger influence of larger schools therefore, recognition of the contribution of all partners must be established at the outset.

### 6. Circumstances when the County Council will promote collaboration or federation

- 6.1. The County Council sees schools working together as a positive activity. There is a history over recent years of active promotion of many types of partnerships. It is intended that this will continue.
- 6.2. There are also circumstances when the County Council will consider approaching a school to be part of a partnership, collaboration, federation or Trusts as the circumstances of the school would suggest additional and focused support would be of benefit to the pupils in the school. Some of these situations are given below:
  - School Performance such as a school in an Ofsted category of 'Notice to Improve' or 'Special Measures' or when GCSE results potentially fall close to the National Challenge floor target of 30% A\*-C (including maths and English).
  - Leadership issues such as a school struggling to recruit a suitably qualified and competent headteacher or leadership inexperience or long term sickness when a school would benefit from a more stable and secure school leadership.
  - Curriculum Opportunities requiring formalised systems such as Post 16 provision or commissioning of SEN support in an area.

### 7. Promoting collaborations and federations

- 7.1. Worcestershire County Council recognises that the decision to become involved in collaborations, federations or Trusts is the responsibility of the Governing Body of individual schools.
- 7.2. No decisions will therefore be made on behalf of schools, but representatives of the County Council will engage with governing bodies to share their reasons for more formal arrangements.

### 8. Finding suitable Partners

- 8.1. The individual situation of the school will be the basis of the identification of suitable partners.
- 8.2. Links can be made horizontally with schools of a similar phase or vertically with schools of a different phase. Location and individual circumstances will be taken into account when sourcing partners.

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8.3. The County Council will consider sourcing partners from outside the county if this will be beneficial. Professional networks including Government Regional Office and DCSF will be accessed for these purposes.

### 9. Conditions for Success

9.1. The following conditions have been identified and will be promoted as part of good practice when establishing collaborations, federations or Trusts.

- Common purpose
- Clear Governance arrangements
- Clear leadership and management structures
- Trust amongst partners
- Commitment to the goals
- Review mechanisms.

9.2. Quite often the conditions for successful collaborative ventures need time to become established, although outside influences can make the exploration of a partnership or federation critical to the future of a school. If the preparation for close working has not been established then time needs to be given to build the essential building blocks for a successful collaborative venture.

### 10. Resources

10.1. It is not the intention of the County Council to establish a budget to promote any particular model of collaboration or federation. Schools will be encouraged to use their own resources and build on the good practice that is well established across the county.

10.2. Where Government funding is provided or offered to promote a particular initiative the LA will encourage schools to take advantage of this funding where it will be in the best interests of the pupils and maximum benefit can be accrued from participating.

10.3. If through school re-organisation or review there is support for a federation of two or more schools the funding implications will be evaluated and any variation to the funding of schools will be subject to consultation.

### 11. Summary

11.1. Collaboration and federation provides positive benefits for the raising of pupil attainment. Governors and staff in schools will be encouraged to explore opportunities for all forms of co-operation or collaboration where it can be seen to benefit the pupils.