

School federation and partnerships

Why a governing body should consider partnership and federation

This note outlines factors for a governing body to consider as part of a discussion about whether to explore establishing or joining a formal partnership. Federation is the most formal partnership available to local authority maintained schools, and could be 'phase 2' of a relationship once the partnership has been shown to have benefits to both schools.

Ealing Council is supportive of schools collaborating, believing that this has benefits for staff and pupils. 89 schools are members of Ealing Learning Partnership - set up by the council and schools in 2017, to ensure that every school is connected and supported to realise ambitions for children and young people in the locality.

Partnerships between the council and all its schools to support a vision for school sustainability in the area are strong. Ealing's school place planning organisation working group, comprising school leaders, governors and local authority officers, have actively supported federation as a route towards future-proofing the quality of education in the area.

It is for each governing body to determine whether partnership or federation would benefit their school, and the council does expect each governing body to consider this with reasonable regularity.

The Council expects schools to consider whether to form or join a partnership as part of succession planning for the headteacher role and well before the point that a headteacher may move on. The council would expect to be part of these discussions where the school is either in financial deficit (or projecting to be at the end of the current financial year) or where the school is part of the Securing Good programme.

A partnership or federation could provide potential benefits including:

- **Larger organisation benefits** – such as resilience of staffing structures, culture and practice of shared responsibility, supporting workload through single policies / processes, recruitment and retention opportunities not available to individual schools, and building collective capacity and expertise (such as SENDCo, Business Manager, Executive Headteacher);
- **Quality of education** – more staff to develop resources and lead subjects, opportunities to share practice / learn from colleagues regarding curriculum, assessment etc, joint appointments for specialist staff, opportunity for full-time staff where individual schools only need part-time appointments (or have roles such as SENDCo being combined with other responsibilities)
- **Leadership development and expertise** – benefit of attracting experienced Executive Headteacher, development opportunities for AHTs / DHTs as Heads of School with support from peers and the Executive Headteacher as part of succession planning;
- **Financial efficiency** – targeting of expenditure to reduce leadership / business costs per pupil to maximise sustainability and / or classroom spending.

Factors to consider when exploring a partnership or federation are:

- **Cultural alignment** and shared vision for the future – ensuring that you choose the right partner(s);
- **Practicalities** - sharing staff and joint professional development is easier when partners are geographically close;
- **Leadership structure** – whether there would be an Executive Headteacher initially and, if so, who that would be; the arrangements for day-to-day leadership of each school (such as Heads of School); whether there would be any other cross-school roles (such as a Business Manager, SENDCo, specialist teachers, either initially or in time);
- **Financial arrangements** for sharing partnership costs (including staff who are working across the partnership);

Governance oversight

- **For a partnership**, a joint committee of Governors to lead collaboration (including performance management of the temporary Executive Headteacher), including aligning Governing Body operations to support operational efficiency and senior leader workload;
- **For a federation**, to manage the transition to a new Governing Body, and ensure that there are effective processes for receiving and acting upon feedback from stakeholders at each school (this becomes especially important as a federation grows); and
- **Change management**, including supporting staff, parents / carers, and pupils through any changes that result from the partnership or federation.

Annex 1 sets out further information about partnership and federation, with Annex 2 providing a tabular summary of a partnership and a federation.



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[Annexe 1 and 2 Why a Governing Body should consider partnership and federation July 2025.pdf \(pdf\)](#)

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