



# Wilson Primary School and Oxford Road Community School's proposed federation

## Frequently Asked Questions

*This is a working document and will be updated as necessary.*

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### **Q1: What is a federation?**

A federation is a maintained school structure where two or more schools come together under one governing body. The schools' individual governing bodies are disbanded and a new single over-arching governing body is formed which becomes the accountable body for the schools and sets the strategic direction for the federation. Each school continues to be maintained by the Local Authority, and continues to operate as an individual school in terms of budgets and funding whilst retaining its individual identity and character.

### **Q2. What is the difference between a federation and an academy?**

There has been a rapid and significant transformation of school-based education in England since 2000, with nearly a third of schools now being 'academies' rather than being 'maintained' by local authorities. Academies are owned and run by not-for-profit private trusts (exempt charities) which register as companies with Companies House and are subject to company law. Academies are controlled and funded directly by central government by means of a contract between a trust (i.e. a legal entity) and the Secretary of State for Education, rather than being run by a governing body in accordance with statutory education law, as is essentially the case for maintained schools.

A federation is defined in law as two or more maintained schools operating under the governance of a single governing body.

### **Q3. Why are you investigating the possibility of forming a federation?**

As strategic leaders, the Governing Body must monitor the education landscape and enable the school to navigate changes in policies, in order to ensure the best outcomes for our children and staff, and to ensure that the schools remain sustainable into the future.

The creation and membership of a federation is not just about structural change. It is also about a different mindset where the governors and school leaders share a commitment to improving



the outcomes and life chances for all children across the federation, as opposed to just a single school, through a school-led system of raising standards and driving improvement.

To support this strategic view, working groups were established at Oxford Road Community School and Wilson Primary School to research and appraise a range of options available to us, including remaining as we are, federating or converting to academy status. The working groups presented their findings to their individual Governing Bodies who voted to further investigate the option to federate.

#### **Q4. What are the advantages of schools federating?**

Federating brings a number of expected benefits including:

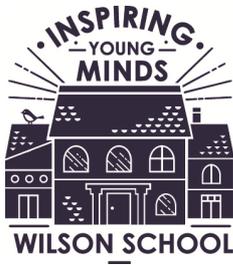
- Improved outcomes for pupils due to collaboration and sharing of expertise;
- A more structured way for our schools to collaborate and for our teachers to share best practice and access high quality learning;
- A means of aiding the retention of good quality staff, especially those who want to gain experience across the sector and key stages. Attracting and retaining the best teachers is vital if we are to continue to offer a high quality provision;
- Opportunities to share some resources and services which will help to deliver financial benefits;
- A basis for stronger partnerships with outside agencies and organisations and with suppliers.

#### **Q5. What does a 'consultation' mean? Is the decision already made?**

No decision has been made to federate our two schools. At the moment, a joint working party is working on a proposal for governors which could be taken forward, amended or withdrawn. Following governors' steers in the autumn, a consultation would be the next stage in the statutory process, and all opinions would be carefully considered before a decision is made by the Governing Bodies on whether to formally federate. The consultation would be the means of gathering information and views from our stakeholders who include: parents; staff; the local community; the Local Authority's Education team; the Department of Education; and local councillors.

#### **Q6. What are the next stages in the process?**

Following a consultation period of six weeks, both Governing Bodies would review the opinions and information gathered during the process and would use this as a basis to make a decision on whether:



- To proceed with the proposal as published;
- To proceed with modifications that the Governing Bodies consider appropriate; or
- Not to proceed with the proposal to federate.

**Q7. What happens if parents say no during the consultation? Are the Governing Bodies obliged to act on suggestions that come out of the consultation process?**

The consultation is a means of gathering opinions and information and would not be a vote. The Governing Bodies would consider all responses carefully, including any objections, and these would be taken into account when a decision was made at the end of the consultation process. If, for example, a particular stakeholder group had a strong objection we would investigate accordingly.

**Q8. How would federating impact on the day-to-day running of the schools?**

Should our schools decide to federate a number of changes would take place, the majority of which would happen at governance and senior leadership level. On a day-to-day basis, we would expect pupils, staff and parents to notice very little difference.

**Q9. Would the schools share a single budget?**

No, each school would continue to receive its own funding, manage separate budgets and keep separate records of its accounts. However, there may be occasions when two federated schools could share costs or combine purchasing as a means of getting better value for money.

**Q10. Would federating impact the funding we get for EAL, SEND and disadvantaged children?**

Each school would continue to receive its funding from the Local Authority in the normal way.

**Q11. Would the schools retain their individual names?**

Yes. There may be an operational name for the group, if federating were to be agreed, but both schools would keep their individual names and identities and continue to operate as normal.

**Q12. Would the uniforms change?**

No, there would be no plans to change the current uniform at either school.

**Q13. Would school start and finish times change?**

No. There are no plans to change the start and finish times at either school. The Governing Body would be required to consult with the Local Authority, parents, carers and staff if it wanted to make changes to start and finish times.



**Q14. Would both schools organise training days and special events on the same dates?**

Yes, where possible. Regardless of the outcome of the consultation on federation both schools have committed to having the same training dates wherever possible and when it is appropriate.

**Q15. Would each school continue to be treated as a single school by Ofsted and other official bodies?**

Yes. Each school would have a separate Ofsted inspection and would be graded separately, as each is now. In terms of school data returns, each school would continue to be treated separately.

**Q16. Would our school's values and ethos change?**

No. We may need to work together for shared values for a federation and this would be led by the senior leaders of the schools, but we have already established that both schools are closely aligned.

**Q17. Would our Governing Bodies remain the same?**

No. Governors from each school, including parent and staff governors, would form a single over-arching Governing Body in accordance with the constitution.

**Q18. Would one school take the lead over the other?**

No. The schools would collaborate and work together as equal partners.

**Q19. Can a federation be dissolved?**

Yes. The Governing Body can choose to end the federation if it is believed that it is no longer in the best interests of the students. This is not an action that would be taken lightly or without due diligence and consultation.

**Q20. How long have both governing bodies been working on future plans?**

Wilson, Oxford Road and Coley have a long history of working together as a partnership, sharing best practice and utilising the knowledge and experience the schools have. As the strategic leaders of the schools, the governing bodies constantly monitor the education landscape in order to enable the schools to navigate changes in policies, roles etc. and that had been a key factor in our endorsement of the close collaboration between the three schools.

In 2016/17 the governing bodies started to look at the different options for the future direction of the schools and Coley stated they would be looking more closely at joining a MAT (multi-academy trust). Option appraisals were then developed in 2017/18 and this consultation is a result of this work.



## Questions received during consultation

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**Q21. How does the move to federation status – which seems to make sense – help prepare the schools for navigating the academy-orientated environment? Is this thinking that academy status is still on the cards for the future or can/should it be avoided if possible?**

A full options appraisal was presented to both Governing Bodies which included looking at setting up as an academy or joining a Multi Academy Trust. These were not chosen for a number of reasons but included the fact that the DfE are not supportive of single academy trusts any more. The schools wanted the opportunity of building on their existing relationships and creating a federation that is focused on the children and community we are part of.

In our locality academies are the norm for secondary schools but that is not true for primary schools where the growing trend is for setting up federations. We can't predict the future but if a directive were to be suggested again for all schools to academies, we believe we would be in a stronger position to direct that ourselves and grow organically through the federation rather than the schools be an attractive proposition, through our results and financial position, for the larger MATs.

**Q22. How would this affect Oxford Road School as it doesn't seem to offer an improvement?**

Q4 lists some of the expected benefits of federation. From Oxford Road's point of view the shared planning and resources would mean that there would be each year group would have three teachers (for example the Y4 teacher in ORCS can collaborate with the two Y4 teachers in Wilson) working together and sharing best practice.

**Q23. What are the benefits of this for pupils, teachers and school? Is there any impact on the current situation?**

Our expectation is that there should be no impact to the education/schools other than a positive one. We are already working with a Head across two schools and this would be made into a permanent role which would bring stability to the leadership of the schools. See Q4 for the potential benefits.

As per Q8 we believe the majority of actual change at the very start would happen at governance and senior leadership level. On a day-to-day basis, we would expect pupils, staff and parents to notice very little difference.

**Q24. The consultation does not mention a timescale. I would like to know that any changes would not disturb the quality of learning for them.**

If the Governors vote to go ahead with federating following the consultation with stakeholders then we would try and move through the formal process required as quickly as possible. This



would then enable us to formalise the structure and provide the stability needed at the senior leadership level.

**Q25. The document states that pupils will notice very little difference in their day to day so therefore what are the benefits?**

What we were trying to say was there would not be a great deal of disruption to pupils on a day to day basis i.e. to their classes, their teachers, the way we have a Head across two schools etc. The benefits would be drawn from sharing the expertise and experience of the staff across both schools.

**Q26. Under Advantages you stated one as “opportunities to share some resources and services which will help deliver financial benefits”. Does that mean you will look to remove resources and services and only have them in 1 school e.g a library or something children will have to travel to use?**

There is no intention to reduce or share any resources like libraries or ICT which are key in the children’s learning. Instead we would be looking at sharing possible back office functions that the two schools could procure together to drive economies of scale such as the recent need to have GDPR advice or IT support.

**Q27. There was no information given about the two schools.**

This can all be gathered from the schools’ websites but in essence Wilson is a two form entry school with a nursery and Oxford Road is a one form entry school also with a nursery, both have Good Ofsted ratings and their recent results have been above national averages.

**Q28. Is there a local example of a successful federation?**

There are a number of successful federations in Reading including: The Kennet Federation which comprises Katesgrove and Southcote; in Tilehurst there is Park Lane and Moorlands: in Caversham, St Anne’s and St Martin’s have set up a federation; and there is the North Reading Schools’ Partnership (made up of six primary schools in Caversham and a nursery).

**Q29. Will the new Senior level structure result in any job losses?**

No there are no expectations for any job losses.

**Q30. I am not sure if this means the schools will be sharing facilities and [Wilson children] having to go to Oxford Road School?**

No the federation is more about collaboration and the sharing of best practice between the schools with the focus of having the best teaching and learning we can rather than sharing of buildings and facilities.



**Q31. [Will] a new school be built or housing both schools on one site to become an imposing large 3 form school?**

There has never been any suggestion that the schools would leave their current sites or that they would merge into one school. Each school will maintain their own identity and stay in their existing buildings.

**Q32. Given the discrepancy in size between ORCS and Wilson it is difficult to imagine that the potential increases in opportunities for staff development/training referred to would work in any way other than staff moving from ORCS to Wilson, rather than the other way round and for a small school staffing changes are very disruptive.**

Staff development is not just achieved from staff moving to a larger school. By working collaboratively with peers they are able to challenge themselves and strive to better their teaching practice through learning from others. As mentioned in Q22, there will be more teachers in the same year group to share ideas and subject leaders will also have another colleague to develop curriculum with.