

Southcote and Katesgrove Schools' Proposed Federation Consultation Frequently Asked Questions

1	What is a federation?	A federation is an arrangement where two or more maintained schools share a single governing body. Schools federate under section 24 of the Education Act 2002. Schools in federation continue to be individual schools, keeping their existing category, character and legal identity, but have their governance provided by the same board. Both schools remain under local authority control and do not become academies or free schools as a result of federation
2	Why are you investigating the possibility of a federation?	The driving idea behind this federation is to ensure the best possible outcomes for all pupils at both schools. It would enable us to make the best use of staff and resources within and across both schools, to the benefit of all children.
3	Why would this be good for my child?	The aim for both schools would be to continue provide an education which allows each pupil to realise his or her potential. The federation would provide greater opportunities for the sharing of good practice to enable both schools to excel.
4	What would happen to the staff at Southcote and Katesgrove?	We will of course consult with staff at both schools but the proposal would be to continue to provide high quality education as at present. Teaching staff levels would not be expected to change significantly following the federation. We believe the proposed federation would continue to provide staff with excellent opportunities to share good practice and expertise.
5	On which site would my child go to school?	Pupils would continue to go to school on their present respective sites
6	Would the schools lose their individual identities?	No. It is very important that each school retains its individual identity and character
7	What does a 'consultation' mean? Is the decision already made?	No decision has been made in relation to the federation of Southcote and Katesgrove. At the moment this is just a proposal, and can be progressed, amended or withdrawn. This consultation is just the first stage in the democratic and statutory process, and all opinions will be carefully considered at each stage before a decision is taken to progress to the next.
8	What are the next stages in the process?	Following the consultation period of six weeks, both Governing Bodies will review all opinions and information

		gathered during this process, and will use this as a basis to make a decision whether to: <input type="checkbox"/> Proceed with the proposal as published <input type="checkbox"/> Proceed with modifications that the governing body considers appropriate; or <input type="checkbox"/> Not to proceed with the proposal to federate
9	Would parents with children already at the schools have to apply for a place at the federated schools?	No. Both schools would retain their own identity and pupils currently attending either school will retain their places. Likewise, pupils due to start and those who are yet to apply would still be considered for each school applied for, and the admissions process for each school would remain separate
10	What would be the benefits of federation?	The benefits are outlined in the main consultation document. They include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved outcomes for pupils due to collaboration and shared expertise • Improved staffing due to increased opportunities working across both schools • More consistency in teaching and learning and stronger staff/pupil relationships due to improved staff retention • Financial benefits due to economies of scale and cost sharing opportunities
11	Is this just a money saving exercise?	No. The proposal is driven foremost by the desire to improve standards by sharing expertise and best practice across both schools. However, there will be significant funding cuts in education over the next few years and a federation would allow for shared cost savings and economies of scale
12	How much disruption would there be for children?	There would be no disruption for children. As both schools currently have an informal partnership agreement, the children would notice no difference if this were to change to a formal federation
13	How successful are federations?	There is an increasing number of examples of federated school arrangements, both locally and nationally. With regard to the curriculum, within each school a federated approach to learning will allow us to share the physical resources, specialist teaching and leadership aptitudes across the federation.
14	Why are parents only being told now if Governing Bodies have been discussing for some time?	It is the role of Governing Bodies to investigate future strategies and develop plans. The issue of federation is complex and the Governing Bodies needed to explore it carefully. It is worth noting that parents and carers are represented through their elected Parent Governors and therefore have been represented in the discussions.
15	What happens if parents say no during consultation?	The consultation is aimed at gathering opinions and information, and is not a vote. The Governing Bodies will consider all responses carefully, including any objections, and these will be taken into account when a decision is made at the end of the consultation process

16	What happens if one school gets into difficulty? What happens if one school fails an Ofsted inspection?	One of the advantages of a federation is that it can prevent schools getting into difficulty through greater scrutiny, challenge and support. The strong leadership and teaching excellence that can be shared would enable both schools to continue to improve on their already good performance
17	How would the schools be inspected by Ofsted?	Both schools would continue to be inspected separately and listed separately in league tables. It would normally be appropriate to ask Ofsted to inspect the schools in the federation at the same time so that a rounded picture of the work of the federations can be formed. Ofsted is increasingly aware of and interested in the role that federations and collaborations play in improving standards. Inspection providers have been asked by Ofsted to use the same team when inspecting schools in a federation.
18	How would the schools be funded?	Each school would continue to be funded individually, however joint costs can be shared across both schools
19	Would the schools be better or worse off financially?	Due to economies of scale and the potential to share costs, there should be a financial benefit to both schools
20	Would we need to buy new uniform?	No. Both schools would retain their individual identities, including uniforms, logos and mottos. The aim is not to create one school.
21	What is the difference between the current informal partnership and a formal 'hard' federation?	A 'hard' governance federation is a legal agreement between schools, where they share a governing body and where the governing body and committees with delegated powers take decisions on behalf of both schools, even though each school retains its own budget share. In the current informal partnership agreement each school has retained its own governing body and each decision is made separately.
22	Why do we need the current situation to change?	The informal agreement cannot continue indefinitely. There is a lot of duplication of work for the leadership team and across both governing bodies, and only limited costs can be shared. A formal federation would allow much more sharing of costs, knowledge and expertise, and would significantly cut the workload for the Executive Headteacher and leadership team, allowing them more time to focus on the pupils' teaching and learning.
23	Would staff change employers if their schools federate?	No, all staff would continue to be employed by Reading Borough Council.
24	Who do I speak to if I have questions about this proposal?	If you wish to send your formal comments please write to Chair of Governors via the school office. Drop in sessions where governors can answer questions are planned in both schools on set days.
25	How does a school leave a federation?	If a school wishes to leave the federation they must: - Make a written request signed by either two or more governors, one fifth of parents of registered pupils, two fifths of staff, or the local authority

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The governing body of the federation must give notice of this request (within one week of the request having been received) to all relevant authorities; the Executive Headteacher of the federation and the Head of each school within the federation; all staff at the relevant school, every parent at that school and anyone else that the federation considers should know; - The governing body must consider the request not less than 14 days after it was made and decide whether or not the school should be allowed to leave and, if they can, when or should the federation be dissolved and, if so, when; - They then tell everyone concerned within a week what they have decided
26	Can a school in a federation apply for academy status?	Yes it is possible for a school within a federation to apply for academy status without having to seek agreement of the other schools within the federation. This is covered in Part 9 of the 2012 Federation Regulations.
27	Can a federation be time-limited?	<p>Federations are seen as long-term commitments and a strong model, which is able to operate as a single legal entity. Federations are more resilient to changes that can happen, in relation to staff or governance. However, it is possible for schools to withdraw from the federation but it is rare, and the amount of work involved in such withdrawals can vary depending upon how centralised the running of the federation has become.</p> <p>Collaborations are often used as a short-term measure to bring schools together to develop more long-term structures for collaborative working. Collaborations are easy to set up but also easy to leave. For this reason they are seen as a weaker model, often leading to more permanent outcomes.</p>
28	Is there an aspiration that teaching methods in the two schools will become even more consistent? Best practice is synonymous with consistency and making consistency takes a lot of time and communication. Consistency means bottom up is stifled and underplays professional judgement. Consistency means easier monitoring by management and is driven by the needs of management rather than the needs of the children. I am worried – do the benefits	Governors, together with the Executive Head and both SLTs, expect all children to be achieving at expected levels and making good progress consistently across both schools. The approach used in the classroom is down to the professional judgement of the teacher. Governors understand that what works well in one school may not be the same in the other due to different staff, children and circumstances, the governors value those differences and will support good teaching. The Executive Head and the SLTs will ensure that staff receive the best CPD and opportunities to work together.

	outweigh the risks? (Question added 13/06/17)	
29	Will there be enough capacity in the new GB to properly drill down for both schools? (Question added 13/06/17)	The Governing Bodies of both schools have members with many years of experience in governance at Southcote, Katesgrove and other schools. The current Governing Bodies will use the Governor Competency Framework to ensure the new Board has the skills needed and will ensure that the knowledge and experience of the individual governors is not lost. The initial structure of the new Governing Board will be set when/if the federation goes ahead and if gaps of capability or capacity become apparent then it is the responsibility of that Board to fill those gaps.
30	Will I be forced to work at the partner school (Southcote or Katesgrove)? (Question added 13/06/17)	Current staff are employed by the individual schools and their posts are designated at those schools. If, in the future, staff would like to work at the partner school and there is an opportunity available the SLT will try to accommodate those wishes. No member of staff will be forced to work in the partner school.
31	Will contracts be changed to reflect the federation? (Question added 21/06/17)	Current contracts are with either Katesgrove or Southcote Primary School. These contracts will not be changed. New contracts will be with the federation, that is both Katesgrove or Southcote Primary Schools. New contracts will be issued for new employees and those current staff who change role or hours.
32	What difference would parents see in terms of the operation of the school? (Question added 21/06/17)	Children will have access to specialist staff working across both schools. There will be access to facilities at the partner school for example the swimming pool at Southcote and the dedicated dance studio at Katesgrove. Parents will not see any change in the day to day operations of the schools.
33	Beyond being asked to work at the other school can you request to work there? (Question added 21/06/17)	Yes, the Executive Head and Governing Board will consider the request of an individual member of staff. The staffing structure will be decided based on the needs of the children and the operational requirements of both schools.
34	If asked to work at the other school, can you say no? (Question added 21/06/17)	Staff can request not to work at the partner school and the Executive Head and Governing Board will consider that request. The staffing structure will be decided based on the needs of the children and the operational requirements of both schools.

35	<p>What are the advantages to Southcote for not federating? (Question added 21/06/17)</p>	<p>Each school would revert to being the individual schools and would be run as before the collaboration being led by an individual headteacher.</p> <p>A specific implication for Southcote of not federating is the need to restructure the Senior Leadership Team to accommodate the full-time hours of the Headteacher.</p> <p>A specific implication for Katesgrove of not federating is the need to recruit a new headteacher.</p>																																								
36	<p>What is the retention level at Katesgrove for this year? (Question added 23/06/2017)</p>	<p>These figures include all staff: SLT, teachers, support staff, admin staff and premises staff. Reasons for leaving include maternity leave, promotion, family circumstances, some staff have been working at both schools and some staff have transferred between the schools. The current collaboration started in September 2015.</p> <p>Katesgrove:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Academic Year</th> <th>Number of staff</th> <th>Leavers</th> <th>Starters</th> <th>% Turnover</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2014/15</td> <td>94</td> <td>26</td> <td>26</td> <td>27.66</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2015/16</td> <td>95</td> <td>29</td> <td>33</td> <td>30.53</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2016/17</td> <td>103</td> <td>21</td> <td>22</td> <td>20.39</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Southcote:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Academic Year</th> <th>Number of staff</th> <th>Leavers</th> <th>Starters</th> <th>% Turnover</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2014/15</td> <td>71</td> <td>11</td> <td>14</td> <td>15.49</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2015/16</td> <td>89</td> <td>10</td> <td>22</td> <td>11.23</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2016/17</td> <td>87</td> <td>7</td> <td>13</td> <td>8.04</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Academic Year	Number of staff	Leavers	Starters	% Turnover	2014/15	94	26	26	27.66	2015/16	95	29	33	30.53	2016/17	103	21	22	20.39	Academic Year	Number of staff	Leavers	Starters	% Turnover	2014/15	71	11	14	15.49	2015/16	89	10	22	11.23	2016/17	87	7	13	8.04
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37	<p>Please can the Governors confirm that one school will not be asked to bear the cost of resources in the partner school without any benefit of this, if it is deemed that the paying school can bear the financial cost better at the time. (Question added 11/07/2017)</p>	<p>The current Governing Boards recognise the hard work and dedication that the Executive Headteacher and both School Business Managers put into monitoring expenditure and planning for harder times ahead, however, the current boards cannot place restrictions on the future spending decisions of a potential new Governing Board.</p> <p>A board's third core function is to oversee financial performance and make sure money is well spent for the children at the school. Each school in a federation keeps its own budget, the budgets are not merged. All financial decisions will be made based on what is best for the children in the school at the time. This may be an expenditure benefitting one school or an expenditure that benefits both schools.</p>
38	<p>Will any reception or back office functions be combined as a result of Federation and, if so, what will happen to the people doing those jobs now? (Question added 11/07/2017)</p>	<p>There are no current plans to combine or reduce the total number of roles that currently perform reception or other office based clerical and support work.</p>