

13th May 2016

Federation Report

Dear parents, carers and other stakeholders

As was announced on 26th April 2016, the governing bodies of Burley and Sopley Schools met on the 25th April 2016 and voted to federate with effect from 26th May 2016, with the new leadership arrangement coming into effect on the 1st September 2016.

Following this decision, we have now begun taking all of the steps required to put this into effect.

Building on the various meetings held during the consultation period, we want to ensure that all parents and carers of children at both schools are kept as fully up to date as is possible on this process.

This report will be part of a series of communications detailing the work being undertaken on behalf of both schools. We will use this approach to announce key decisions as they are made, and to give all appropriate information regarding the new federation and the new leadership structure that will be in force from the 1st September.

Should any parent or carer feel that they are not receiving the facts or information they require at any stage, please do let us know so that we can take the appropriate action.

In Transition

The new leadership structure will come into effect on the 1st September 2016 and until then, both schools will continue to operate as they do at present.

We were delighted to announce the appointment of Dan Twyman as Executive Headteacher yesterday. This has been our first priority and we are very pleased that Dan has accepted the position after a thorough and rigorous process. We can now start to put into place the next steps.

Equally the existing governing bodies continue as at present until the first meeting of the new Federated Body on the 26th May 2016. The initial composition of the new federated body is the Executive Headteacher, a staff governor, a local authority nominated governor and one parent governor from each school.

This quorum of governors will be responsible for appointing the remaining co-opted governors at this first meeting. In line with the proposal accepted on the 26th April, the new Federated Body will comprise 15 governors in total and the final 10, co-opted, governors will be appointed to ensure that the fully operational governing body comprises individuals with the right skills and experience to ensure the success of both schools.

The nominations have been invited to elect the staff governor and parent governor from each school. We would like to remind anyone who is eligible and would like to apply that the application forms are in both offices and these need to be completed and returned by 12 noon on Monday, 16th May 2016.

Throughout the consultation period we received valuable input towards our research from many parents and other interested parties. If any of those individuals want to put their name forward as a co-opted Governor please contact either Sopley or Burley school offices and the appropriate application forms can be provided, the closing date for these applications is 23rd May 2016.

The process of appointing the Y5-6 teacher and Head of School at Burley is also underway and once appointed an announcement will be made. Likewise, there is an internal selection process underway in respect of the Head of School position at Sopley

Attached to this first report are three appendices covering the rationale and factors contributing to the decision made and we hope you will find these summaries helpful.

Appendix 1.

Rationale for our decision

The governors of both schools have the responsibility of ensuring our schools are best placed to thrive in the future. We have taken this decision following careful consideration and rigorous research.

Aims

Both governing bodies had in mind how best to ensure our schools remained viable and stable and able to retain their own unique identities. We wanted to make sure they would be able to continue to provide the children of our communities with the highest standard and quality of education possible.

Research

We sought advice and opinions from experts, other schools, the Local Authority and undertook extensive research that included papers and case-studies from schools who had federated, throughout the country.

We carefully considered all of the alternative options available to either or both schools (as described later).

Benefits of Federation

For Children

From referencing OFSTED reports from schools that have become federations, in the majority of cases OFSTED reported:

- Federation has been a catalyst for continuing school progress.
- Federation has brought significant improvements in strategic management and leadership.
- Sharing of expertise and resources has enhanced experiences for children and for staff.

For Staff

- Reduced workloads and improved morale and motivation through peer-group support and co-working.
- Enhanced creativity through expertise and ideas sharing.

For the Schools

- Greater financial stability.
- Improved staff morale and stability.
- Improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.
- Greater levels of progress and achievements for pupils.

Appendix 2.

Summary of Feedback following our Consultation process

We had a good amount of feedback, and this definitely made the process more rigorous and thorough; for this we are indebted to everyone that took the time to express their views.

The feedback was received both in writing and verbally and from this we have detailed the main recurring themes followed by our response:

Question

What happens if I want to see the Executive Headteacher and he/she is not on the premises that day?

Answer

Under the current leadership structure there are times when the Headteacher is out of school because of their various commitments. It is not expected that with an EHT operating over two sites that there will be any notable loss of access to parents. An advantage to federating with a school within a short distance is that if an urgent matter arose that required the EHT to be onsite, this could be possible in a short amount of time.

Question

Both schools will suffer not having their own dedicated Headteacher alongside with the reduced visibility/accessibility.

Answer

With the increased pressure on budgets, the provision of a dedicated Headteacher is becoming an unsustainable, expensive resource in small schools. Hampshire has categorically stated that the preferential funding of small schools will be phased out over the next three years, so making the employment of a dedicated Headteacher no longer viable in the near future.

Question

What will be the impact on the teaching if the 'deputy headteacher' is out of the classroom doing other duties?

Answer

The Head of School role involves time out of the classroom to carry out leadership work that will contribute to improving learning across the school, in the same way that our other staff already do. The intention is to offer consistent, good quality, timetabled provision in all our classes – not a patchwork of cover. When the Head of School is not present in class the children's learning will continue to be planned for and organised with care and working within the curriculum. This could include the opportunity for specialist provision e.g. PE and sport to be delivered by specialist staff. The time the Head of School is out of class will also be an opportunity to meet with parents

Question

Both schools will lose their individuality and unique features.

Answer

Governors considered that a fundamental benefit of the Federating model was that it allows each school to retain their own character and uniqueness. Each school will retain its uniform and name.

Question

How will Federating save money?

Answer

Federating does not give either school a greater income, however it does allow for the cost of the Headteacher to be shared. Savings thus made can be reinvested into the provision of targeted support for the children.

Both Schools will retain separate budgets ensuring the money for each school is spent on the pupils of that school whilst allowing sharing where appropriate.

Appendix 3

What alternatives were open to us

Become an Academy

Small schools cannot become stand-alone academies - they would be taken over by an existing multi-academy trust and we would have no say in what happens to our schools.

Collaborate between two schools

There is no half way house; it was suggested that we opt for a 'soft' federation but no such structure exists in law.

Collaboration would have meant that both schools would require a Headteacher who would collaborate and work together, but with none of the management team structure and support benefits that the federation will bring both schools, plus we would still face the financial downsides.

Retain the status quo

This would have meant Sopley having to recruit a new Headteacher, or look to federate with another school.

With many forest schools unable to appoint a Headteacher there was no guarantee that this was a viable option. Equally the similarities between both schools were so close that it was unlikely that either school would have found a better 'fit'.

From a Burley perspective, whilst continuing under its current arrangement was certainly possible in the short term, the financial threats that are, or will be, affecting all small schools in the future, would not have been removed.

Both governing bodies were therefore convinced that the decision made on the 25th April 2016 was, ultimately, the best one for both schools.

Yours sincerely,

Linda Mail
Chair of Governors
Sopley Primary School

Michael Lester
Chair of Governors
Burley Primary School