Islington: a borough committed to leading new models of leadership: Strategic Partnerships/Federation

Schools across the country are developing new models of leadership for many reasons and there is now a solid body of evidence that schools working together can drive up standards and improve outcomes for children and young people. Research undertaken by Manchester University on behalf of the National College of Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) indicates:

….. there is evidence of impact on overall performance, in the that while federation and comparator schools perform similarly at baseline, federation is positively related to performance in the years following federation.

In its annual report for 2011/12 Ofsted noted that “strong partnership work between schools is improving standards” and that “the evidence from federations of two or more schools, led by an executive headteacher, is positive”. It went on to say:

In a survey of 61 schools that had formed 29 federations we found that provision and outcomes had shown improvement. In each case the fact that the school had federated was a contributory factor to improvement.

In its report Ofsted also noted the following:

... successful in broadening and enriching the curriculum and care, guidance and support for pupils . . . and had also resulted in better achievement for different groups of pupils such as those whose circumstances made them vulnerable. Pupils’ enjoyment of school and their confidence were also increased because of greater opportunities open to them. As well as maintaining good quality teaching and learning these federations shared a greater pool of resources and expertise that could be used more flexibly across schools.

Ofsted’s study Leadership of more than one school (2011) also highlights the advantages to pupils’ attainment, cost efficiency and governance.

In summary, the benefits of working together within a strategic partnership/federated structure can include:

- Strengthened governance, while maintaining the individual identity and accountability of schools where shared arrangements of good practice are absorbed across the partnership/federation so that: “working as a governor in a federation .... challenges you to think of a bigger picture and take in a different perspective... you have to remember that you are a governor of a federation and not a governor of a school in a federation” (Governing Matters 2013) (ICoS Work Stream 1 and 5)

- Support schools through shared leadership and working arrangements leading to sustained improvements in teaching and learning, behaviour and outcomes for children and young people (ICoS Work stream 1 and 5)
• Cost savings and efficiencies to back office systems, including the sharing of administrative functions and a school business manager, shared HR functions including pay arrangements, savings on maintenance contracts, purchasing and supplies (ICoS Work stream 2)

• Improved opportunities for staff with the sharing of good practice and expertise, joint planning and assessment, richer professional development and training, better recruitment and retention through improved career progression and opportunities to work across a range of schools and in a range of contexts. (ICoS Work stream 3)

• Extending the reach of the best leaders through talent spotting and the development and support of future leaders with the opportunity to work across the partnership/federation and be mentored by experienced leaders (ICoS Work stream 3)

• Improved opportunities for children and young people, including a wider and richer curriculum offering often including cross partnership/federation events in arts, sports, music etc. Improved behaviour, attainment and greater enjoyment of school (ICoS Work stream 4)

The vision of a Strategic Partnership/Federation within Islington

The Islington Community of Schools, together with Children, Employment and Skills (Schools and Learning) are built on a shared commitment to improving attainment, wellbeing and life chances for children and young people and this moral purpose, accompanied by an outward facing vision, is paramount in overcoming future barriers to success.

In Islington, it is acknowledged that there are many informal collaborations that already make a successful contribution to the richness of the Islington Community of Schools. Strategic Partnerships/Federations (state maintained and voluntary aided schools) are a strategic tool that support a self-led, self-improving school system that will ultimately secure the educational landscape across the borough. It is not anticipated that all schools will be in a Strategic Partnership/Federation, however school leaders and those responsible for governance need to consider the following:

1. Future strategic direction of the school
2. Leadership and management including the governing body
3. School improvement and standards
4. Financial security with a long term vision
5. Sharing of expertise and resources
6. Improved transition, especially vulnerable groups
Catalyst for change

School leaders and those responsible for governance need to consider and reflect on many issues that may be a catalyst for change. Through the annual categorisation process (Working in Supporting Schools - WISS) schools and the local authority identify challenges and successes and are mindful of the following opportunities that could be a future catalyst for change.

These are listed below:

- **Better, broader offer for pupils/more opportunity to employ specialist staff – both curricular & extra-curricular** - ‘the various activities and interventions were characterised by a belief that school-to-school collaboration has a central role to play in school improvement’ (Hutchings et al., 2012)

- **Effective and personalised professional development/learning from each other** - ‘more powerful forms of professional learning, more learning-oriented and enquiry-hungry cultures, and increased leadership capacity. Alliances reap benefits of more trusting relationships and openness to sharing and critiquing practice’ (Styoll, 2015)

- **Recruitment, succession planning & retention of staff** - School partnerships provide a good context for supporting and developing aspiring and middle leaders. They enable emerging leaders to observe the style of leadership of leaders from institutions other than their own. They often have the opportunity to take on new responsibilities either in another school or across a partnership. There may well be joint leadership training with colleagues from other schools. (Hill, 2010)

- **More capacity for innovation/stronger governance** – “school leadership from institutional (school) to educational leadership where school leaders have a ‘moral purpose linked to the well-being of the wider community rather than just any individual school”’ (Chapman and Muijs, 2013)

- **Efficiencies – joint services impacting on individual school budgets** - ‘cost-effective, sustainable collaboration requires a focusing or targeting of funds on a limited number of schools rather than dispersing a given amount of resource over a large number of schools. If funds are concentrated in this way, greater possibilities are created for what we have called ‘leverage and synergy’, the capacity to sustain, enhance and make best use of funding’ (Woods et al, 2006)

**Definitions**

**Informal/Loose Collaboration:** a non-statutory collaboration that can be established without following regulations whereby each school has its own governing body and the group of schools meet on an ad-hoc basis. Schools share common goals and work together on informal agreements and ad-hoc issues. Unlikely to have shared staff. Funding is provided at school level based on a local funding formula.

**Soft Federation:** a non-statutory collaboration that can be established without following regulations whereby each school has its own governing body. The federation has a joint governance/strategic committee without delegated powers. Schools share common goals, joint committees can make recommendations, but individual governing bodies must authorise
decisions and plans. There may be common management positions with protocol to underpin the shared posts. Funding is provided at school level based on a local funding formula.

**Soft Governance Federation**: established under statutory regulations made under Education Act (2002) each school retains its own governing body, though the federation has a joint governance/strategic committee with delegated powers. Schools share common goals and maybe some management appointments (e.g. school business manager). Funding is provided at school level based on a local funding formula.

**Hard Governance Federation**: established under statutory regulations made under Education Act (2002) the federation has a single governing body shared by all schools. Schools share common goals and often management and leadership appointments (e.g. an executive headteacher working across all schools). Funding is provided at school level based on a local funding formula.

**Multi-academy trust (MAT)** is a single entity established to undertake a strategic collaboration to improve and maintain high educational standards across a number of schools. A group of schools form a single MAT which has overarching responsibility for their governance. The MAT is accountable for the performance of each school in the group, although each can still have their own governing body which operates subject to delegation of power from the MAT. A master funding agreement with the MAT, and supplemental funding agreements with each individual school, is signed by the Secretary of State for Education.
## Models of Partnership/Federation/Academy/Amalgamation

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<th>What is it and how does it work?</th>
<th>Informal/loose collaboration</th>
<th>Soft federation</th>
<th>Soft governance federation</th>
<th>Hard governance federation</th>
<th>Multi-academy trust (MAT)</th>
<th>Amalgamation</th>
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</table>
| Collaboration between a group of schools. Meets on an ad-hoc basis. Schools share common goals and work together informally. Schools retain their identity. Collaboration can occur between maintained schools and academies. | Collaboration between schools. Schools share common goals but individual governing boards authorise decisions and plans. Schools retain their identity. Collaboration can occur between maintained schools and academies. | An arrangement where two or more maintained schools retain their own governing board, but the federation has a joint governance committee with delegated powers. Schools share common goals through a service level agreement (SLA) and protocol. Schools retain their identity. A soft governance federation cannot occur between maintained schools and academies. | An arrangement where two or more maintained schools share a single governing board. Schools share common goals through a SLA and protocol. A single governing board allows for more efficient decision making. Schools retain their identity. A hard governance federation cannot occur between maintained schools and academies. | A MAT is a single legal entity with responsibilities for schools within it. A school can join an existing MAT or work with other schools to set up a new trust. | This is where two or more schools merge together to become one school. In maintained schools, the local authority or governing board (depending on the school's category) can amalgamate 2 or more schools by:  
- Either publishing a proposal to close two or more schools and publishing a proposal to open a new one  
- Publishing a proposal to |
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<td>maintained schools and academies.</td>
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<td>close one school and enlarge/change the age range/transfer site of an existing school</td>
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**Statutory/non-statutory collaboration**

- Non-statutory collaboration.
- Non-statutory collaboration.
  Each school retains its DfE number.
  Each school retains its DfE number.
- Statutory. An application must be submitted to the DfE.
- Maintained schools must follow a [statutory process outlined by the DfE](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-the-statutory-governance-of-maintained-schools),  
  Academies must also follow a [statutory process](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-the-statutory-governance-of-academies).
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<th>Governance arrangements</th>
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<tr>
<td>Each school has a governing board.</td>
<td>Each school has a governing board. The federation has a joint governance/strategic committee that can make recommendations however each board authorises decisions and plans.</td>
<td>Each school has its own governing board but can delegate functions to a joint committee.</td>
<td>Individual governing board of federating schools cease to exist. Single governing board shared by all schools. Procedures for hard governance federations are outlined in <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-governance-regulations-2012">The School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations 2012</a>.</td>
<td>The MAT consists of a board of members and a board of trustees. The board of trustees govern the MAT. The board of trustees can delegate to individual academies by establishing local governing bodies.</td>
<td>A new governing board must be created to replace the two (or more) existing governing board. In maintained schools, these must be constituted under the <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-governance-regulations-2012">2012 School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations</a>. In academies, the constitution of the new governing board will need to follow the new academy’s articles of association.</td>
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<td>Ownership of the budget</td>
<td>Informal/loose collaboration</td>
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<td>Ownership of land</td>
<td>No change in the ownership of land.</td>
<td>No change in the ownership of land.</td>
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<td>Land and property that was previously held by the governing board of a federating schools is transferred to the governing board of the federation.</td>
<td>The ownership of land will depend on how land was transferred when the individual schools converted as outlined in <a href="#">land transfer advice</a>.</td>
<td>Ownership of land will depend on the categories of schools amalgamating and the amalgamation process being followed.</td>
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Each school has its own budget.

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Each school has its own budget but can pool budgets together as they see fit.

A joint committee may have budgetary powers delegated to it so it can make decisions for the group of schools.

Each school has its own budget but can pool budgets together as they see fit.

The single governing board can make budgetary decisions on behalf of the group of schools.

Each school within the trust has its own budget.

However, the MAT can collect a proportion of the general annual grant funding to form one central fund.

The new school will have its own budget.
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<th>Sharing of staff</th>
<th>Informal/loose collaboration</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Unlikely to have shared staff.</td>
<td>May have common management positions but need to have protocol or contract to underpin commitment to shared posts.</td>
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<td>Often have common management positions agreed in a simple manner e.g. executive headteacher working across all schools.</td>
<td>All staff are employed by the trust.</td>
<td>The new school will have its own staff. Staff can be transferred from the previous schools.</td>
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<td>There is no change to employment conditions and who is responsible for employing staff.</td>
<td>Who employs the staff will depend on the category of schools which are federating. It will not change as a result of federating. Employment conditions will stay the same.</td>
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<td>Often have common management positions such as executive headteachers and will usually have a central administrative team.</td>
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<td>The trust can deploy staff across different academies if their contracts allow.</td>
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For more information, please contact:

SIS Primary Lead: Anthony Doudle  t: 020 7527 3387  e: anthony.doudle@islington.gov.uk
SIS Secondary Lead: Jeff Cole  t: 020 7527 7668  e: jeffrey.cole@islington.gov.uk