

This survey evaluates the impact on provision and outcomes for pupils where leadership responsibility is shared between federated schools. It looks in particular at a sample of schools that are in federations which have one governing body and in the majority of cases, share a headteacher or an executive headteacher. It also considers the path taken by schools that make the decision to federate and to share leadership in this way.

Between October 2010 and February 2011, inspectors visited 61 schools in 29 federations and examined questionnaires from 111 federations.

The schools taking part in the survey had federated for one of three main reasons (page 4)

- high performing schools that had been approached, often by the local authority, to federate with a school causing concern
- Federations consisting of a number of small schools that had been in danger of closure or were unable to recruit high-quality staff.
- Federations that combined schools across different phases in an attempt to strengthen the overall education of pupils in the community

In all the federations visited provision and outcomes had shown improvement [and federation] was a contributory factor to the improvement.

Key findings (page 6)

- Teaching and learning, achievement and behaviour had improved in all 10 of the federations visited where .. weak [schools] had been federated with a more successful school
- A single system of assessing and tracking pupil progress was used in these federations
- One major advantage was the improvement in the governance of weaker schools
- In 11 of the 13 federations [established] to protect the quality of education, pupils were now enjoying an enriched curriculum and a greater range of opportunities and extra-curricular activities
- In eight of the 13 federations [established] to protect the quality of education, there was greater capacity to meet pupils' needs flexibly and swiftly
- In all the federations visited, effective leadership was critical to their success
- The 27 federations where the leadership was good or outstanding exhibited some common features: a clear vision and good communication of the benefits that federation brought to pupils, driven by the headteacher, but shared by others; well-developed strategic plans with success criteria shared with all staff; rigorous procedures for monitoring and evaluating the federation and holding staff to account; well-established procedures for, and a belief in the importance of, developing and coaching leaders at all levels; and continued professional development of staff
- The impact of governance was varied. In 17 federations visited, good or outstanding governance was instrumental in holding leaders to account. In the others, governing bodies were less effective at challenging leaders
- The biggest potential barrier to federation resulted from concerns from parents, pupils and staff about what the changes would mean to them.
- In 17 of the federations, the local authority facilitated the. In six more federations the local authority had been the driving force behind federation

Recommendations (page 8)

Schools should:

- ensure that the strategic purpose of federation and the subsequent planning to achieve it are sharply focused on the benefits to pupils' education
- make sure that governing bodies establish rigorous procedures to hold leaders to account for their work

- consult and communicate effectively with parents, staff, pupils and the community at the earliest stage when considering federation

The Department for Education should:

- provide details of a range of established federations to local authorities and governing bodies to enable them to learn from good practice and to avoid the pitfalls others had experienced on the road to federation

Reasons for federation (page 9)

1. The first related to successful schools that were approached ...to federate with a school causing concern
2. A second category consisted of small schools in danger of closure, or that could not retain or recruit high-quality staff, that entered into federation in order to protect the education of pupils in the community
3. Finally, there were examples of cross-phase federation, for example between primary and secondary schools, in an attempt to strengthen the overall education of pupils across communities

Steps taken to achieve this improvement [in teaching and learning] included (page 12):

- implementing extremely rigorous procedures to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning
- successfully dealing with behaviour problems in the early stages of federation
- introducing targeted training to improve teaching
- eradicating inadequate teaching swiftly, often resulting in some teachers leaving the school
- strengthening procedures to assess pupils' progress

Governance (page 22)

- All the hard federations visited had a single governing body supported by committees with responsibility for particular aspects of work. In the majority of cases the committees dealt with cross-federation issues
- Nine of the federations visited had separate committees overseeing the work of each school

Common features of effective federation leadership (page 23)

- a clear vision and good communication of the benefits that federation can bring to pupils, driven by the headteacher, but shared by others
- well-developed strategic plans with success criteria shared with all staff
- rigorous procedures for monitoring and evaluating the federation and holding staff to account
- well-established procedures for, and a belief in the importance of, developing and coaching leaders at all levels
- continued professional development of staff

A growing number of local authorities considered the federation of schools to be a solution to solving the sustainability and recruitment problems experienced by small schools and a way of strengthening weaker schools.

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