
Notice of Motion on Small Schools Federations

- 1** The Chairman of the County Council referred the motion on small schools federations, submitted to the County Council on 19 July, to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills for consideration. The Cabinet Member met Dr O'Kelly on 11 September to discuss the motion.
- 2** The County Council's [School Effectiveness Strategy 2018-22](#) describes the need for a diverse supply of strong schools across the county. It sets out the objectives for school organisation and the criteria against which schools should be assessed in order to meet these objectives. Implementation of the Strategy will help ensure that in West Sussex:

"Primary schools will be of a sufficient size to be viable in the future, offer a high quality and broad curriculum, attract pupils from the local community and provide strong outcomes for children".

- 3** The Strategy highlights that where schools are identified as being at risk, in terms of their viability to provide an effective and financially sustainable educational provision, options for change need to be considered. These options could include:
 - amalgamating or merging two or more schools to become an all-through primary school
 - expanding the age range of a group of schools so each becomes an all-through primary school
 - federating two or more schools
 - finally, consulting on closing a school
- 4** The Strategy also recognises that due to the diverse nature of schools within West Sussex the governing body of the school will have the most comprehensive knowledge of the school and how it operates. Therefore, they are best placed to lead on considering what option for change would work for their school. The benefits of federation are described in the Strategy along with the commitment that the County Council will support and challenge governors who wish to move towards federation or any of the other options for change.
- 5** Over the last year the County Council has been engaging with governing bodies and headteachers about the need for change. In October 2018, an engagement event with headteachers and chairs of governors of schools across the Rother Valley and Chichester area took place where concerns were shared about declining pupil numbers at a number of small, rural schools. Attendees at these events were encouraged to have conversations about potential federation opportunities. Some governing bodies had successfully explored this, whilst others were unable to find suitable partnering schools and regrettably others chose not to take action in this regard. The County Council has also been proactive in improving understanding of federation and other options for change by responding to governing bodies' requests to discuss federation, producing draft guidance for school governing bodies on federation and the process involved in getting there. Particular visits have taken place to a number of schools to discuss potential future options for schools and to explore broader consultation. Such visits and discussions have also involved the Church of England Diocese where relevant. The County Council is planning a conference to take place in the spring of 2020 focused on federations with case studies, workshops and opportunities for

governors and headteachers to network with colleagues from similar schools and to have many of their questions explored.

- 6** When the County Council is approached by schools exploring federation this is followed up with meetings with governors if requested to outline the process and also to clarify questions and answers. Draft guidance is made available and also 'federation' generic job descriptions and associated paperwork where requested. Suggestions are made as to schools that the governing bodies may wish to contact. However, the responsibility for making such contact remains with governors. Where the County Council has significant concerns relating to school performance and governance, through the Schools Causing Concern protocol, it can intervene to require governing bodies to enter into a partnership which may include federation. However, such intervention would only be used in exceptional circumstances. Schools can seek additional School Effectiveness visits through the County Council's traded offer to obtain support around federation if required.
- 7** In relation to the fourth requested resolution in the motion, due to specific circumstances relating to five schools the Cabinet Member took a decision (ES2(19/20) refers) on 25 September to approve the commencement of a consultation in relation to proposals for change at these five schools. Further information about these specific circumstances and [details of the decision](#) can be found on the County Council's website.
- 8** The Cabinet Member has considered the motion. Taking into account the support already provided to small schools and the offer available to purchase further officer support where required, the Cabinet Member is minded to propose an amendment to the motion at the County Council meeting on 18 October. The Cabinet Member's decision on this matter was published via the Executive Decision Database on 8 October.

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Background papers

None