

# Leadership of more than one school

An evaluation of the impact of federated schools

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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.

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## Executive summary

The aim of this survey was to evaluate the impact, structure and practice of federated leadership arrangements on pupils' education in a small sample of established school federations. Within federations the leadership and governance arrangements of more than one school are shared. The survey considered the reasons for federating and the barriers encountered during the journey. Features of successful federation leadership were also identified.

Between October 2010 and February 2011, inspectors visited 61 schools in 29 federations that shared leadership. During the visits, they scrutinised school assessment information and pupils' work, observed lessons and met with pupils and staff. In addition, they examined questionnaire returns from the leaders of 111 federations and analysed inspection judgements from 102 of the schools within these federations that had been inspected by Ofsted three years after federation.

At the time of the survey, there were around 600 known schools where leadership arrangements were shared through federation arrangements. In the large majority of cases, these were characterised by the establishment of one senior leader across more than one school. Incomplete data prior to 2009 makes it difficult to judge whether the rate of schools entering into federation arrangements is accelerating.<sup>1</sup> However, evidence gathered during the survey showed that governing bodies and local authorities were likely to consider federation routinely, particularly when there was a change in school leadership.

The schools taking part in the survey had federated for one of three main reasons.

- In 10 of the federations visited, high performing schools had been approached, often by the local authority, to federate with a school causing concern.
- Thirteen federations consisted of a number of small schools that had been in danger of closure or were unable to recruit high-quality staff. The aim of federation in these cases was to increase capacity and protect the quality of education available across the schools.
- A further six federations 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. In each case, the fact that schools had federated was a contributory factor to the improvement. In the federations where weaker schools had joined forces with stronger ones, the key areas of improvement were in teaching and learning, pupils' behaviour and achievement. Those federations which had been set up to improve capacity among small schools, had been successful in broadening and enriching the

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<sup>1</sup> Between 5 January 2009 and 24 April 2011, 163 schools gained approval, and 19 were awaiting approval, from the Department for Education to hard federate.

curriculum and care, guidance and support for pupils. In these cases federation had also resulted in better achievement for different groups of pupils, such as those whose circumstances made them vulnerable; this included those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils' enjoyment of school and their confidence were also increased because of greater opportunities open to them and a larger circle of friends. 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. In the case of cross-phase federations between, for example, primary and secondary or infant and junior schools, federation had resulted in stronger academic transition procedures between schools.<sup>2</sup> This meant less disruption to the progress made by pupils.

Effective leadership by headteachers and senior leadership teams was the single most critical feature that helped to generate improvements and build capacity for federations to be sustained.<sup>3</sup> These leaders were able to apply the characteristics of effective school leadership successfully across all schools in the federation. The most effective leaders had a single vision and drive focused on raising expectations. This was underpinned by rigorous procedures for holding staff accountable by checking the quality of provision and, in particular, assessing the quality of teaching and learning. Federation leaders maximised the greater flexibility of increased resources and opportunities for professional development to achieve their priorities.

Overall, inspectors found no evidence to suggest that any particular leadership structure across the federated schools visited was more effective than another. The most important factor was how well the structure had been tailored to meet the individual circumstances of the schools in each federation. Inspectors found that there was no one model of successful leadership development. Crucially, training and development were carefully tailored to meet the needs of the school. This accorded with a key finding in another Ofsted report on developing leadership.<sup>4</sup>

In the two federations visited where leadership was judged to be only satisfactory, insufficient attention had been paid in the early stages to the strategic purpose of the federation beyond protecting schools from closure. In these circumstances, leaders had lacked sufficient vision and had not changed or adapted well enough from a single school model to make the best of the new opportunities, such as the flexible use of resources or the sharing of good practice.

Governing bodies were also instrumental in the successful establishment of a federation, although their impact once the federation was established was more

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<sup>2</sup> Academic transition arrangements ensure that teachers in the receiving school have sufficient information about individual pupils so that teaching and learning is tailored to meet their requirements. If this is done effectively the disruption to pupils' progress in learning is minimised.

<sup>3</sup> Federation leaders are referred to by a range of titles. These are: headteacher, executive headteacher, principal or executive principal. In this report the federation leader is referred to as the headteacher which is the most common title used.

<sup>4</sup> *Developing leadership: National Support Schools* (090232), Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090232](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090232).

variable. In the best federations visited, governing bodies were very effective at holding headteachers to account for the strategic development of the federation. In other federations the strong record of school leadership meant that governing bodies did not challenge headteachers and senior leaders with sufficient rigour.

The school leaders and governors spoken to were generally very positive about the benefits of leading more than one school in a federated arrangement. They saw professional development, staff retention, greater availability of resources and the ability to attract high-quality leaders as the key reasons behind improvements to provision.

The path towards federation was not always easy. Barriers experienced by nearly all of the federations visited could be split into two groups. The first group comprised concerns expressed by staff and parents about how the changing arrangements would affect them and their children. These had been successfully overcome in nearly all the federations seen by good communication and consultation. The second group was associated with the logistics of federation, such as financial matters and distance between schools. In some of the federations surveyed, the role of business manager or bursar had grown in importance and was instrumental in overcoming these barriers.

Across the schools surveyed, leaders and governors identified that local authorities had typically played a part in facilitating the establishment and development of the federation. In particular cases, where a successful school was to be brought together with one causing concern, the local authority had actively encouraged governors to federate schools. For a few schools the local authority had provided little help, generally because of their limited experience of federating schools.

For some schools, federation is not the final step in their development. Data show that since 2009, at least three federations have disbanded and one that was visited as part of this survey was preparing to do so. At least 12 federations have amalgamated, involving the closure of schools.<sup>5</sup>

## Key findings

- Teaching and learning, achievement and behaviour had improved in all 10 of the federations visited where schools previously judged by inspection to be weak had been federated with a more successful school. The quality of provision and outcomes had been maintained in all 10 of the successful schools.
- In all cases, a single system of assessing and tracking pupil progress was used in these federations. This was always an extension of the existing procedures in the stronger school and was one of the first steps taken by leaders who needed accurate information to identify weaknesses in learning.

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<sup>5</sup> This information is drawn from the full survey list of schools in federations and questionnaire returns.

- One major advantage of federation governance was the improvement in the governance of weaker schools as a result of having shared arrangements.
- In 11 of the 13 federations where schools had federated to protect the quality of education, pupils were now enjoying an enriched curriculum and a greater range of opportunities and extra-curricular activities. In the two federations of this type where leadership was judged to be only satisfactory, insufficient attention had been paid in the early stages to the strategic purpose of the federation beyond protecting schools from closure. In these circumstances, leaders lacked sufficient vision and had not changed or adapted well enough from a single school model; the federated schools had been slow at making the best of new opportunities, such as the flexible use of resources or the sharing of good practice.
- In eight of the 13 federations where schools had federated to protect the quality of education, there was greater capacity to meet pupils' needs flexibly and swiftly. This was particularly the case for pupils whose circumstances made them vulnerable, such as those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This was because of the effective pooling of resources and expertise and central coordination by a single special educational needs coordinator.
- In all six federations where the federated arrangements enabled pupils to transfer from one phase to another, academic transition was greatly enhanced by a common approach to teaching, learning and assessment between schools. As a consequence, when pupils started their new school, provision was better tailored to meet their needs.
- In all the federations visited, effective leadership was critical to their success in building good capacity for sustained improvement. There was no evidence to suggest that any particular leadership structure across the federated schools was more effective than any other. More important was how well the structure was tailored to meet the individual circumstances of the school in each federation.
- The 27 federations where the leadership was judged by inspectors to be 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 for the strategic ambition for the federation. In the others, governing bodies were less effective at challenging leaders to be accountable for strategic development.
- The biggest potential barrier to federation resulted from concerns from parents, pupils and staff about what the changes would mean to them. Nearly all the federations visited had avoided or overcome this difficulty by effective communication and consultation in the early stages of federation.

- In 17 of the federations, the local authority facilitated the process of federation effectively, particularly during the early stages where it provided valuable expertise and guidance. In six more federations the local authority had been the driving force behind persuading governing bodies and headteachers to embark on federation.

## Recommendations

Schools embarking on federation 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 that go beyond the initial steps taken to establish the federation
- consult and communicate effectively with parents, staff, pupils and the community at the earliest stage when considering federation so that barriers that may arise as a result of concern about change are avoided.

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.

## Why federate?

### The national context

1. The term 'federation' describes collaborative leadership and governance arrangements between schools. There are two main types of federation: hard federations consist of a single governing body; and soft federations retain separate governing bodies in each school but have joint governance through committees with delegated powers.<sup>6,7</sup> All but two of the survey visits were to hard federations as the purpose was to examine the impact of leadership of more than one school. This was best served where schools shared a governing body. The two soft federations visited featured schools that shared one headteacher.
2. At the time of the survey, at least 600 schools nationally were known to share leadership arrangements. In the large majority of cases, these were characterised by the establishment of one headteacher across more than one

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<sup>6</sup> Hard federations are established using federation regulations made under section 24 of the Education Act 2002; [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/section/24](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/section/24).

<sup>7</sup> Soft federations are established using collaboration regulations made under Section 26 of the Education Act 2002; [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/section/26](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/section/26).

school. In 23 of the 29 federations visited there was one headteacher leading the federation.

3. Incomplete data made it difficult to judge whether the rate of schools entering into federation arrangements was accelerating. Detailed information about the rate of federation, or even the number of schools that federated between 2002 and January 2009 is not available because no systematic recording of this information was in place nationally. Information from Ofsted inspection reports and information from local authorities suggest that at least 400 schools federated during this period. Since January 2009, a list of schools wishing to hard federate has been kept by the Department for Education. This showed that by April 2011, 163 had federated and 19 were awaiting approval to do so.

### Reasons for federation

4. There were three main reasons why the schools visited had decided to federate.
  - The first related to successful schools that were approached, often by the local authority, and took the decision to federate with a school causing concern.
  - 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. This was particularly the case for small primary schools often in rural locations.
  - 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.
5. In 10 of the federations visited, and 42 of those that responded to the questionnaire, a school that had experienced difficulties or was causing concern had federated with a successful school. The most commonly perceived benefit for successful schools that federated with schools causing concern was that it enabled them to retain an effective headteacher as a result of the enhanced professional challenge offered by the extra responsibility for leading more than one school.
6. The most common reasons schools gave during the survey for federating were those of pragmatic and economic necessity. This was the case in 13 federations visited. These reasons arose from schools, governing bodies and local authorities endeavouring to maintain and protect the quality and existence of education in the local community. Two sets of circumstances were related to this.
  - Schools that were too small to be sustained and were threatened with closure. This was particularly the case in rural communities. This did not necessarily result in major cost savings, but greater flexibility in the

deployment of finances meant that schools benefited from a broader range of resources.

- Small schools that were having difficulty in recruiting high-quality leaders or in retaining those of proven ability who were looking for greater leadership responsibility in larger schools. In these cases, federation was aimed at making recruitment a more attractive prospect or enabling schools to offer more responsibility and financial reward to existing leaders.

One primary school visited was very small and vulnerable to closure. Its partner primary school had experienced a falling roll and concerns were heightened when the school was unable to appoint a headteacher. Consequently, a decision to soft federate was made with the headteacher from one school taking over leadership of both schools. The formation of the federation allowed an additional teacher to be appointed because of savings in leadership salaries and it was possible for both schools to maintain two classes.

7. Often the decision to hard federate was a compromise or alternative course of action from the one originally proposed. In seven federations visited, the local authority had initially planned a school closure or amalgamation. This decision had been met with opposition from local communities and the schools. As a result the decision to federate was made.

One federation consisted of two small primary faith schools in villages situated two miles apart. The federation was the outcome of negotiations with the local authority and diocese, the former having initially proposed a merger of the two schools. There was significant local opposition to merger in both villages; neither wanted their schools to close. Both schools, with vociferous parental and community backing, opposed the plans. Federation offered a pragmatic solution to the local authority proposals. Funding levels were becoming very challenging and the notion of a shared headteacher made the possibility of maintaining both schools more viable.

8. Federation can also be used to provide greater progression between phases, thus strengthening pupils' education across schools. This was the case in six of the federations visited and in nine that responded to the questionnaire survey. In four of the federations visited, the schools were in areas that experienced high social deprivation. Federation, therefore, was perceived by governors and school leaders as a means of improving the education of pupils across these communities. Strong features of such arrangements were more effective transition arrangements between schools, as well as the ability to better support vulnerable pupils right through their school education as a result of consistent procedures for care, guidance and support throughout the federation.

## Does federation work? The impact on provision and outcomes

9. In all the federations visited inspectors found that aspects of provision and outcomes were improving, albeit at varying rates. Trends could be identified that linked specific improvements to provision and outcomes directly to the reason for federation. Where a successful school was federated with a weaker school, for example, the greatest improvement was always in teaching and learning, achievement, behaviour and often attendance. This did not mean that other aspects of provision were neglected, but demonstrated the effectiveness of leaders who prioritised and drove improvements in areas that were the most important to the federation and their reason for formation.
10. In the federations formed to protect the quality of education in the community, the priority was to enrich and broaden the curriculum and to make the procedures for care, guidance and support more flexible and responsive to need. In these federations the improvements in outcomes tended to be reflected in the achievement of different groups, such as pupils whose circumstances made them vulnerable; this included those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. In addition, pupils' enjoyment of school and confidence was increased as a result of improvements to aspects of their personal development and well-being.
11. The main reason some schools federated was to improve the quality of education in the community by establishing much stronger links between schools in different phases. The priority in these cases was to improve the continuity and progress made by pupils in their learning.<sup>8</sup> Academic transition procedures in these federations were a particularly strong feature, which resulted in less disruption to the progress made by pupils.

### The impact on provision and outcomes in federations of successful and weaker schools

12. In all 10 federations of successful and weaker schools visited, teaching and learning in the weaker schools were improving. For example, in one primary school visited, teaching had been judged inadequate when the school was placed in special measures by Ofsted prior to federation in 2008, but was now judged to be good after its most recent inspection in 2010. Good features of teaching and learning seen in the previously weaker schools during the survey visits, reflected the fact that teachers now employed a wider range of strategies, such as involving pupils in self-assessment to engage them in their learning. Lessons observed were brisk in pace and the teachers' ability to pitch work to meet the needs of groups of pupils of different ability was effective.

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<sup>8</sup> Four of these were federations between primary and secondary schools and two between infant and junior schools.

One secondary school was placed in special measures in 2001 and removed in 2006 after federation in 2004. Teaching and learning were now judged by inspectors to be good. There was evidence of consistency in the quality of teaching and learning assisted by the use of a learning and teaching toolkit, devised by lead teachers in the federation that teachers were expected to use. This emphasised the importance of planning work for a variety of different groups of learners.

13. Teaching and learning in all of these schools were improving as a result of effective and ambitious leadership, in all cases driven by the executive headteacher of the successful school. Steps taken to achieve this improvement included:
- 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.
14. All of the weaker schools in this category had adopted the rigorous procedures of the stronger school to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning. This involved senior leaders in activities such as lesson observations, work scrutinies and detailed examination of assessment information. Priorities to improve teaching were identified from these procedures. In all cases, teachers in the weaker school were involved in professional development. Staff from the successful school shared good practice and senior and middle leaders had the role of coaching staff. Training courses were held jointly. In one federation where pupils in each school had a similar social profile the headteacher identified the need to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils could achieve. He succeeded in this by ensuring that teachers in the weaker school visited the stronger school and saw examples of pupils' work and the quality of learning in lessons. This convinced them that their own pupils could also achieve more.
15. Leaders of federation schools were very aware that there was a danger that staff morale in the weaker school would be undermined and took care to raise staff confidence. For example, in two federations headteachers made sure that the strengths in the weaker school were identified, built upon and good practice adopted by the stronger school. However, they did not shirk from their responsibility to eradicate weak teaching. In six of the federations visited this had resulted in teachers leaving the school. In addition, professional development was mandatory and closely linked to the individual development

needs of teachers and performance management procedures that held them to account for improvements.

16. In all cases a single system of assessing and tracking pupils' progress was used in these federations. This was always an extension of the existing procedures in the stronger school and was one of the first steps taken by leaders who needed accurate information to identify weaknesses in learning. These procedures were then used rigorously to identify whether improvements to teaching and learning were having the required impact on achievement.

Assessment results showed that in one weak school progress was significantly below average prior to federation. The headteacher introduced an assessment system to be used in both schools. It was used for performance management purposes to hold staff to account for the progress of pupils in their care. This also helped to show staff what pupils should be expected to achieve. It aided the sustained rise in progress of pupils in the weaker school which was now significantly above average.

17. In all of the schools visited in this category, inspectors found evidence that achievement in the weaker schools was improving because pupils' progress was accelerating and attainment rising. While it was not possible to conclude that this was solely as a result of federation, actions taken by the federated leadership teams, such as strengthening the use of assessment information and increasing accountability, had had a positive impact on pupils' outcomes. For example, as a result of the improvements to teaching and learning brought about by federation, achievement in English and/or mathematics had risen to some degree in all the federations visited.

In one primary school, assessment information showed that prior to federation, attainment and progress in English and mathematics were significantly below the national average. In 2010 assessment information, scrutinised by inspectors, showed that as a result of the improvements to teaching and learning, achievement had risen considerably. Pupils now made progress that was significantly above the national average and attainment was average. The federation had successfully decreased the gap in attainment between its pupils and national expectations.

In a weak secondary school that had been placed in special measures prior to federation, achievement had also improved considerably. In 2007 the percentage of students gaining five GCSEs at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, was 18%; in 2010 it was 46%.

18. The rate at which educational attainment had improved varied across the sample of federations visited. This reflected the fact that some federations were more recently formed than others; four of the 10 federations in this category were less than three years old.

19. Another important improvement in the weaker schools that had federated was the behaviour of pupils. In nine out of the 10 schools visited in this category, behaviour had been judged to be either inadequate or no better than satisfactory prior to federation. This contrasted markedly to the position in the stronger schools in these federations, which all had a track record of good or outstanding behaviour. In order to raise staff and pupil morale and to improve teaching and learning, school leaders had made it their priority to tackle poor behaviour in weaker schools shortly after federation. As a consequence, in eight of the 10 weaker schools inspected by Ofsted after federation, behaviour had been judged to be good or better while the other two were judged satisfactory.

In one primary school visited, behaviour had improved significantly and was one of the major factors which led to the school being judged good some three years after being placed in special measures. Around the school and in all classes visited, pupils behaved very well and were fully engaged in learning. Parents reported that the change in behaviour had made a major contribution to school improvement.

20. The federation leaders spoken to used tried and tested procedures operating in the successful schools to bring about improvements in behaviour across the federation as a whole. For example in one federation, the weaker school adopted the stronger school's ethos where success was encouraged and rewarded in many ways, which had a major impact on behaviour. Behaviour management was consistently applied across the two schools with clear boundaries set. This also had a very positive impact on the morale of teachers in the weaker school who had previously experienced much poor behaviour that had undermined the quality of teaching and learning.
21. Senior leaders, however, explained that improving behaviour at the start of federation was a difficult and challenging process. This was often a result of weak teaching prior to federation and a break down in the relationships between staff and pupils that had resulted in staff and pupils sharing low expectations of what constituted good behaviour.

In a weaker school where behaviour was judged to be good at the last inspection, there were significant behaviour issues at the commencement of federation. The headteacher recalled the struggle of the early days. Improving behaviour required resolute leadership, strong staff support and effective support from the successful school. Well-focused strategies for behaviour management were implemented and the federation resources enabled high-quality specialist support staff to be employed. Strategies to 'bring parents on board' worked well. Effective community work by governors and outstanding curriculum development, all contributed to a changed culture and increased confidence of teachers, leaders, parents and students.

22. Parents whose children attended the stronger school commonly expressed concern that the quality of education would suffer if leadership was shared.

Inspectors found no evidence to support this concern. For example, in five out of the 10 stronger schools that had been inspected at least a year after federation, achievement had been maintained as good or outstanding; in two more it had risen from good to outstanding. There had also been benefits to the provision in these schools. Headteachers who had identified the strengths in the weaker schools, particularly in the curriculum and teaching and learning, ensured such practice was shared with the stronger school. Examples from five federations demonstrated that provision improved in the stronger schools as a result of gaining from the good practice identified in the weaker schools in the following areas: extra-curricular activities; the teaching of the Early Years Foundation Stage; the teaching of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities; the teaching of physical education and sports; and the curriculum for music and dance.

23. Another benefit to the stronger schools identified by governors and local authorities, was that they were able to retain their headteachers. In four federations visited it was reported that these headteachers would have looked for greater challenge elsewhere without federation. Headteachers reported that it gave staff in the stronger schools the opportunity to develop their leadership skills as they worked with colleagues from the weaker schools.

### **The impact on provision and outcomes of federations formed to protect the quality of education in the community**

24. The priority for most of the schools in the 13 federations formed to protect the quality of education in the community, was to maintain and refine the existing quality of teaching and learning rather than to drive improvement. Twenty-one of the 26 schools in these federations already had a track record of effective teaching and learning prior to federation; teaching and learning had been judged good or outstanding in their last two inspections. In the other five schools, teaching and learning had been judged satisfactory. All the schools in this group taught pupils in the primary phase and were below average in size. At least three federations had only three classes in each school. Prior to federation, low admission rates meant that they were in danger of reducing the number of classes because they could not afford to keep all the teachers that they had. Federating had enabled them to maintain staffing levels because of the greater pool of resources available and savings as a result of shared responsibilities, such as the post of headteacher. Generally, the schools in these federations had taken the opportunity to share their expertise, resources and facilities; to offer specialised teaching and learning; to enrich the curriculum and to improve the care, guidance and support received by pupils. Consequently, pupils in the schools in these federations had benefited from a much richer education than was offered to them prior to federation.
25. All the schools visited in these federations had shared their expertise to improve the curriculum for English and mathematics. A greater pool of staff expertise had meant that responsibility for subject coordination was shared. In seven of the federations, for example, there was a single coordinator for English and

also mathematics. For the small schools this had increased learning opportunities for pupils considerably.

In one federation, where each primary school only had three classes, pupils were highly enthusiastic about Fridays when what they had learnt in literacy and numeracy was reinforced throughout the day; all pupils spent the day at one school applying recent learning to different problems in mathematics and English. This was a whole federation area for improvement identified by the headteacher.

In another federation, schools had been able to raise standards still further in English and mathematics in Years 5 and 6 by teaching pupils from both schools together in ability groups on the same day.

26. In all these federations, pupils had benefited from a strengthening of the curriculum for foundation subjects. Small schools, in particular, had taken the opportunity to share expertise amongst staff in the federation to lead and plan for these subjects. In one federation staff reported that the time savings and support that the federation brought, meant that they were now more willing and able to ensure the curriculum was exciting. In seven federations, pupils benefited from much improved resources for information and communication technology (ICT). For example, in one school, a group of Year 5 pupils impressively demonstrated their virtual learning platform with no aid from adults. In seven of these federations the curriculum for subjects such as dance, modern foreign languages and music had been improved by the employment of specialist teachers that schools could not otherwise have afforded on their own.
27. A greater pool of resources was made available through federation. Extra-curricular activities had also been enriched in all 13 federations in this group. For example, in seven of these federations, sporting opportunities had been improved. Prior to federation, these individual schools had had too few pupils to form teams for games such as football. Federation had enabled them to form teams and take part in local competitions. Schools without facilities, such as playing fields or a hall, had been able to take advantage of the facilities of their partner school. In the other federations, where schools were larger, they had used the opportunity to develop inter-school sports competitions. Pupils had also benefited from more educational visits as a result of federation. By coordinating the curriculum, pupils from all schools in the federation were able to go on visits together; the viability of such visits was increased by reducing the cost per head. In six federations pupils were able to go on residential visits for the first time.
28. All of these federations had a very strong history of care, guidance and support. Twenty-four of the 26 schools had been judged good or outstanding in this respect at their last two Ofsted inspections. The pooling of resources, made possible through federation, meant that there was greater capacity to meet the needs of pupils flexibly and swiftly. This was particularly the case for pupils

whose circumstances made them vulnerable including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

In one federation where pupils moved from an infant school into a junior school, the federated arrangements had had a positive impact on the outcomes for a growing number of vulnerable pupils and their families. This was a result of the strong working relationships between the federated infant and junior schools. The two schools worked closely with outside agencies to ensure that pupils received the best support that could be offered. Sharing expertise meant the communication and support for families and their children were more robust. Specific issues were better understood across the federation and targeted actions were more effective to ensure appropriate provision was made available for individual pupils and their families.

29. Six of the federations visited shared a special educational needs coordinator. This ensured that resources were used more efficiently and that there was effective communication between schools.

One parent interviewed spoke of how impressed she was that when a personal issue relating to her child in Reception at one school emerged on Thursday, the teachers at the other school, where the child was taught on Friday, were already fully aware the following morning when she arrived there to explain the situation. This had increased her confidence in the federation and reduced her anxiety about her child.

In other federations the pooling of resources enabled schools to share specialist staff. For example, they were able to employ a speech therapist or learning mentor.

30. The equality of opportunity for pupils in the small schools was greatly enhanced by federation. For example, one school had identified only one more able pupil in a small cohort of Year 6 pupils. By working with the partner school, this pupil was able to join a larger group of five more able pupils, thus helping prevent isolation and increasing the pupil's enjoyment of learning. An examination of assessment information in all these federations showed that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities made good progress because of the better tailored support that the schools were able to provide as a result of sharing resources.
31. Pupils in all 13 federations reported how much they enjoyed their time in school. In schools where the cohorts were small they enjoyed the shared activities that meant they made new friends. In eight federations, parents and staff reported that it had increased pupils' confidence and broadened their horizons.

Federation had brought two school communities together, one of which was geographically isolated in a remote dale. Pupils and parents felt that

the major benefit of federation had been the degree to which pupils could socialise and gain confidence as individuals about what they could achieve because of their enriched experience. Pupils at both schools considered that they were part of one family with two schools. They looked forward to being together through opportunities such as National Sports Week and weekly trips to the swimming pool because everyone got on so well. The federation had launched an anti-bullying and e-safety initiative which pupils contributed to through the joint school council and class activities. Pupils spoke very positively about behaviour and enjoyed friendships established across the federation. Comments such as, 'everyone gets on well' and 'we are all friends' reflected the very positive relationships.

32. Another outcome for pupils, in the federations made up of small schools, was that they were much more confident about moving to the next phase in their education as a result of widening their circle of friends. They were confident that they would meet these friends when they started the next phase of school together.

### **The impact on provision and outcomes of federations formed to establish stronger cross-phase links**

33. The six schools in the group of federations formed to establish stronger cross-phase links, often benefited from the improvements to provision and outcomes identified in the earlier two sections of this report, but they had also strengthened the arrangements for transition between schools within the federation. Pupils were involved in transition between different schools that were federated:

- from the Early Years Foundation Stage to primary or infant school
- from infant to junior school
- from primary to secondary school.

34. A previous report by Ofsted, which evaluated the primary and secondary national strategies, found that pastoral transition arrangements in schools were generally much stronger than academic transition.<sup>9</sup> However, the difference in the federated schools visited during the survey was that they had strengthened the academic transition arrangements so that there was much less disruption to pupils' learning than there had been prior to federation. This is illustrated in the following example.

Prior to the federation of one infant and junior school in 2005, pupils in Year 3 made slow progress; each year the attainment of 40-50% of pupils in reading and writing was low. The federation resolved the issue of the slow progress made in Year 3 (Key Stage 2) by establishing phase

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<sup>9</sup> *Evaluation of the Primary and Secondary National Strategies 2005–07 (070033)*, Ofsted, 2008; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070033](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070033).

leadership that spanned Key Stages 1 and 2. This resulted in consistent year on year improvements to progress, so that in the 2010 Year 3 cohort, there were less than 10% of pupils whose attainment in reading and writing was low.

35. These federations also employed a range of strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning across the schools. This had had a beneficial impact on transition because as pupils moved from one school to another they experienced a continuity of approach to teaching and learning. Three federations had a shared teaching and learning policy with procedures that spanned the primary and secondary phases, establishing continuity in expectations. For example, members of the federation leadership group from a primary and secondary school had worked jointly to develop a teachers' learning community. This used selected outstanding practitioners from the primary and secondary school to share and develop good practice across the federation. In another federation, of a primary and secondary school, staff were working together with a common goal to improve the teaching and learning of more able pupils.

In one federation teachers in nearly all subjects taught in the partner school. Having identified the benefit this had had to smooth transition between primary and secondary school, they were now developing a curriculum that took children from the Early Years Foundation Stage through to Year 11.

36. In federations which consisted of a combination of primary and secondary schools, a better range of assessment information had been used to closely match classes and work to pupils when they entered Year 7. In one federation, for example, secondary teachers were developing an understanding of different types of assessment data available in the primary phase to help them to tailor activities more sharply to meet needs of pupils as they progressed into Year 7. In all these federations, parents expressed confidence and trust in the transition process. They reported that the arrangements improved their children's confidence. The following examples indicate good practice in this respect.

Excellent examples of data tracking were seen across one federation and were used especially well to support transition. For example, Year 7 groupings were based on English and mathematics scores at Year 6. In addition, a set of benchmarking tests had been developed by the federation and were completed on transition days before pupils joined the secondary school. This had enabled the secondary school to ensure that groupings were more finely tuned to better meet the needs of individual pupils.

In another federation pupils were taught by their new teacher in the July before they started their new school in September. This facilitated transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage into primary school as

well as the primary transition into secondary education. Each year group moved up at the same time across all the schools. This period involved discussions between staff about the pupils, passing on assessment data and sharing other relevant information. Pupils reported that the arrangements helped them feel less worried because when they started in their new school they already knew their teacher, the buildings and other pupils.

## What makes federation work? Features of effective leadership

### Models of leadership

37. The majority of federations surveyed were led by a single headteacher or executive headteacher. This was the case in 23 of the federations visited and 98 that responded to the questionnaire. In addition, all but one of the federations using the executive headship model had senior leaders within each federated school. The reasons given for this by governors and headteachers were: to ensure that parents recognised the school leader; to maintain the individual school characteristics; or because of the distance between schools.

The leadership structure of one federation included the headteacher who spent 50% of his time at each school. Federation enabled the appointment of an additional senior leader; previously at one school there had been no deputy headteacher for three years because of a budget deficit. The deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher both had senior leadership roles, one at each school. This structure was adopted to achieve greater clarity about roles of senior leaders and to give a visible presence of senior leaders even if the headteacher was located at the other school. This had helped to resolve an initially negative perception by some parents who believed they had lost their headteacher to the other school.

38. In nearly all the federations visited, leadership structures were evolving to capitalise on the opportunity to make better use of expertise and resources. This opportunity was often taken when leaders at various levels left the schools and, increasingly, new appointments were made to the federation rather than to individual schools. The headteachers spoken to reported that this enabled them to achieve greater flexibility in the use of resources. Below are two examples that illustrate how differing leadership structures had been tailored to meet the needs of the particular schools in the federations.

One federation was formed so that a successful school could support one that was causing concern. The leadership structure was changed to ensure a mirror image in each school with the weaker school adopting the structure of the stronger school. There was a single headteacher who divided his time equally between both schools. A deputy headteacher in each school, supported by a third band of leaders known as 'senior

developers', managed major aspects of each school such as pupils' progress and teaching and learning. This model was adopted to ensure that there was strong leadership in both schools in the absence of the headteacher.

Another federation consisted of a secondary and primary school. Its purpose was to create a single learning community and improve educational outcomes for the local community. At the start of the second year, the federation leadership group was reshaped by the joint headteachers, following evaluation of the first year of federation.

The group now comprised a number of teams of leaders who were cross-phase and took responsibility for one of the following:

- raising attainment, particularly in English and mathematics and for the more able
- quality of teaching and learning
- cross-phase curriculum development
- personal development and well-being
- developing community cohesion.

Federation leaders believed that the current model of leadership was much better than the former structure of two separate schools as they could already demonstrate the benefits for pupils particularly at, or approaching, transition between Key Stages 2 and 3.

39. In the federations visited, inspectors found no evidence to suggest that any particular leadership structure was more effective than any other. More important to success were the effectiveness and the strength of leaders and how well the structure was tailored to meet the individual circumstances of the school in each federation. In the best examples, careful attention had been paid to ensuring that the leadership structure met the requirements of the purpose of federation and also reflected the individual circumstances of the community within which the schools were located. Comments made by 28 leaders of federations in their questionnaire responses made it very clear that strategic planning and vision for leadership were crucial to their reported success. Where insufficient attention had been paid to the purpose of the leadership of the federation, then the impact in terms of benefits to pupils was less apparent. The following example illustrates this point.

A federation between a primary school, a nursery and children's centre was preparing to move to amalgamation. At the time of the survey visit, the federation was led by one headteacher and an acting headteacher. Before this, the federation had been led by the two headteachers. This approach was to some extent designed to allay concerns of parents. The headteachers only collaborated over the Early Years Foundation Stage, but worked separately on school improvement. Consequently, federation

developed slowly and had little impact on improvement. With hindsight, school leaders thought that one leader from the start would have been a better solution, insofar as, it may have led to faster improvement of the schools, provided greater clarity about federation and smoothed and speeded the path to amalgamation. The new arrangements had brought about a greater level of teamwork.

## Governance

40. 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. For example, the governing body of one federation of primary schools had committees that were made up of governors who all had a link role with one of the schools for monitoring and evaluation purposes.
41. Nine of the federations visited had separate committees overseeing the work of each school. In four cases, this was finance-driven because of the requirement to have separate budgets. In the other federations, it was to ensure that equal attention was paid to each school. Finances were strictly divided along school lines.
42. Governing body committee structures in the schools visited had evolved as governors learnt that the structures that they had originally put in place at the time of federation could be made more efficient. One federation, for example, found that its committee meetings were too long and focused on a wide cross-phase remit covering attainment across all key stages. Consequently, the structure had been reshaped so that there were now three committees with a primary, secondary and federation-wide focus respectively.
43. Governing bodies were instrumental in establishing federation arrangements successfully. In all the federations visited, governors were very clear about the purpose of federation and the reasons for embarking on this course of action.

A small, highly skilled and strategic governing body of 12 had played a key role in the development of a federation between a secondary and a primary school. The governors had confidently stepped beyond a single school model and embraced fully the notion of wider federation. The quality of succession planning and the ability to see the strategic picture of education in the local learning community were complemented by the governors' attention to meeting the differing needs of each school. A central tenet of the federation, right from the beginning, had been that regardless of size both schools had an equal say and would be treated as equal partners. This was a real strength of the federation and one of many reasons for its success.

44. For some governing bodies, particularly where a successful school was federating with a weaker school, there had been a need to be very sensitive to

the charge of taking over the other school. In one federation for example, nearly all members of the governing body of the weaker school had resigned as a result of the decision to federate. This was demoralising for the school in the short term, but had the effect of removing governors who had been ineffective in addressing the school's weaknesses. Seven federations visited had solved this problem effectively by inviting all existing school governors to be part of the federation governing body. This meant that they had large governing bodies, but governors believed that all schools in the federation were represented equally.

45. In 17 of the 29 federations visited, inspectors found that the governing bodies were particularly effective at holding leaders to account for the work of the federation. Their attention was very well focused on improvements to achievement and provision as a result of federation. In one particularly strong federation a very experienced governing body continually challenged the highly respected headteacher who readily used the body as a critical friend. In the remaining 12 federations, however, while the governing bodies all gave leaders good support, they were less effective at systematically holding them to account. For example, in one federation, the governing body contributed to the strategic direction by drafting the school improvement plan with the headteacher at the inception of the federation. However, the rapid pace of change over the last three years, and the greater demands of governance of more than one school, had resulted in less rigour by governors in the evaluation of improvement. Governors in three federations visited reported that the major challenge for them had been learning to take a federation rather than a school perspective of strategic development. In other federations, assertions made by headteachers about the success of the federation were not sufficiently challenged by the governing body. For example, in one federation visited, claims that standards were rising were accepted by governors without any evidence being offered to support this.
46. One major advantage of federation governance was the improvement in the governance of weaker schools as a result of having shared arrangements. This either happened as governing bodies of the stronger school shared good practice with those in the weaker school through their amalgamation, or where governance was enhanced by the stronger governing body taking on the role of governance for the federation as a whole.

### **Common features of effective federation leadership**

47. The 27 federations where the leadership was judged by inspectors to be good or outstanding exhibited some common features:
  - 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.
48. These features were illustrated succinctly in the comments made by one federation headteacher.

‘My advice to those considering federation would be to have a five-year plan. Such an enormous change has to be managed carefully. Systems of communication and the development of a shared vision are essential.’

49. In seven of the 11 federations where leadership was judged to be good, the federation was less than two years old. During that time period, important features had been established such as strategic planning, resulting in improvements to provision and outcomes. In the two federations where leadership had been judged to be satisfactory these features were not as well developed, resulting in slower improvements to provision and outcomes.
50. These characteristics, of effective federation leadership, are no different from those to be expected in the effective leadership of single schools. However, it is the success that leaders have had in transferring these characteristics successfully to larger, more complex federations that is noteworthy. Where leadership of the federation was judged to be only satisfactory this was not carried out as effectively.

## Vision

51. A clear vision of the potential benefits of federation was an important characteristic for success. This varied depending on the reason for federation. In the 10 federations visited where a successful school was federated with one causing concern, the vision was clearly about improving the weaker school by sharing good practice, but leaders also emphasised that the stronger schools would benefit from the particular strengths of these weaker schools. This was also a key finding in the Ofsted report which examined the work of National Support Schools, where partnerships with other schools were established to develop leadership.<sup>10</sup> While these partnerships retained separate school leadership arrangements, the benefits to both the stronger and weaker school of such arrangements were similar to the findings in this survey of federated schools.
52. Leaders, in the federations of stronger and weaker schools, actively looked to identify good aspects of provision that the stronger school could adopt from the

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<sup>10</sup> *Developing Leadership: National Support Schools* (090232) Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090232](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090232).

weaker school. This helped to maintain the self-esteem of staff in the weaker school.

In one federation, the curriculum had improved in both schools due to learning from each other. The tried and tested curriculum developed in the successful school had been largely adopted by the weaker school. The headteacher also encouraged the weaker school to feedback its ideas and areas of strength. An example of this was the strengthening of the physical education and sports provision of the successful school as it adopted ideas from the weaker school.

53. In all but two of the other federations visited the central vision was clearly about the benefits to provision and outcomes in all schools as a result of federation. However, there were differences in emphasis. For example, in the federations where small schools served separate communities the vision was to capitalise on the opportunities for partnership while retaining the distinct characteristics of each school.

In one federation, the parents were determined to maintain the characteristics of the individual schools and were initially suspicious of the partnership. The executive headteacher promoted a vision of 'two individual schools together in a federation that is greater than the sum of their parts'. There was a clear strategy to maintain the individual characteristics of both schools embedded within their distinctive village communities, but clear recognition that both schools needed to change if they were to be strengthened. For example, within the governing body each school was represented by a sub-committee of governors. The clarity of this vision statement as a cornerstone for this federation provided necessary reassurance to both village communities and strategic direction for both schools.

54. In the federations where schools served different phases of education, such as a primary school and a secondary school, the vision was typically expressed in terms of the consistency of the quality of education.

In one federation of a secondary school with a primary school and children's centre, the vision for federation was to create a single learning community by improving the consistency of education from early years to age 16, and consequently improving educational outcomes for the community.

55. In all the federations visited, and particularly those formed of weaker and stronger schools, leaders were effective at raising expectations and staff were enthused by the federation's vision for high-quality learning. This resulted in a consistency and belief in the whole federation approach to teaching.

In a well-established federation of primary and secondary schools, lessons across both schools were characterised by mostly good or outstanding

teaching. The use of the STEP process (synergy, tenacity, enterprise and ponder) in the secondary school, and a simpler version at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 (share, try and try again, explore and pause for thought), was a key part of all lessons observed and used well by teachers. The use of new technology as a tool for learning was evident. Pupils in both schools demonstrated a real keenness and engagement in learning as a result of the quality of teaching.

By separating the phases in a special school federation, much stronger specific teaching and learning had been established. This was because staff were able to specialise in meeting the needs of pupils within either the primary phase or secondary phase. This had increased expertise as practice was shared and also considerably raised the expectations of what pupils could achieve.

56. In the best federations visited, regular opportunities for communication were carefully planned so that the vision could be shared. Federation senior leadership team meetings, shared training events, staff meetings, curriculum coordinator meetings, year-group planning meetings and ICT learning platforms were commonly employed by these federations.

In the formation of one federation, there had been a lot of open, transparent and regular communication throughout the process. This had been used to build up trust and highlight the benefits of collaboration between schools from different phases. Leaders used their knowledge of staff effectively to create well-balanced groups for joint training days. A joint teaching and learning policy was developed and joint staff meetings were used regularly for staff to share their views and their expertise. Opportunities to run cross-phase projects and to teach cross-phase were embraced by staff in both schools.

## Planning

57. The most common approach to planning was to have a single federation development plan; this was the case in 20 of the federations visited. In the others, the schools within the federation had their own plans. In all cases the specific needs of each school were addressed as well as identifying the priorities for the whole federation. There is no evidence to suggest that any one particular method of planning was more effective than another. The following examples illustrate three different approaches to planning adopted by federations visited during the survey.

When the federation was created, the principal established a group of leaders of all levels across both schools that met on a fortnightly basis and was known as the Strategic Development Group. This group met for the first two years of the federation, constructed the development plan and looked at cross-federation initiatives and opportunities for partnership

working. This group was also important in giving colleagues from both schools the opportunity to share information and discuss practice.

In another federation, there were two school development plans to accommodate the characteristics of each school and its pupils and community. The formats were standardised and linked to the Ofsted self-evaluation form criteria. The governing body monitored development plans. They received evaluations and termly reports from the heads of schools.

In one federation, improvement plans were based on the vision statement concerning maintaining the individual characteristics and traditions of each school. Planning was jointly shared between governors and senior management. It was fundamentally focused on strengthening each school. The combined strengths of federation contributed to the strengthening and continued progress of each school. This was delivered through shared resources, sharing staff skills and joint curriculum ventures.

58. Where planning was most useful, federation leaders had embedded sharply focused success criteria in their development plan to enable them to measure success. In addition, all staff and governors were well informed about the plan and the contribution they were expected to make to federation improvement. While this was a particularly important feature of all the school development plans seen by inspectors, it was especially crucial in federations where many staff with leadership responsibilities were spread across a number of sites and senior leaders relied on staff to carry out federation developments. The following examples illustrate this point.

In one federation, governors and senior leaders were responsible for establishing challenging success criteria for each school. Senior leaders communicated the success criteria to each school's staff. The criteria used were formed within the character, tradition and current circumstances of each school.

In another federation, improvement planning had been shared and developed by all staff under the highly effective leadership of the headteacher. Success criteria were understood and teachers could demonstrate confidently how they contributed to different aspects of the plan; they were fully involved in evaluating the small steps to meet success criteria. This process was linked to performance management and staff were motivated because they could see how and where their professional development and their own ideas to secure improvement were being included in the strategic plan for the next three years.

59. In four of the 11 federations where leadership was judged to be good, the development plans accurately identified the necessary areas for improvement, but success criteria were not sharp enough for overall federation development to be measured.

In one federation of an infant and junior school, success criteria were in some cases insufficiently precise so they were difficult to measure. For example, one aim was to increase the number of high achievers. However, it was not clear whether the priority was in mathematics or English or how they would know when the steps taken to improve the outcomes had been successful.

60. In the federations that were judged only to have satisfactory leadership, they had not established a plan or vision for the benefits to all schools at the outset.

The purpose of one federation had been to avoid school closure. Once this was achieved the partnership was slow to develop as the two headteachers did not share a common plan or vision for the federation. With hindsight federation leaders reported that one leader would have been a more successful solution to developing the federation.

## Accountability

61. The federations that had the most effective planning procedures also had rigorous procedures to hold staff to account for developments. Procedures to monitor and evaluate the work were clearly understood. The priorities identified from these procedures were then linked directly to performance management priorities that ultimately held staff to account for their work. The tools used were the same as those that are often used where schools are led singly and included: lesson observations; assessment data scrutinies; pupil and parent questionnaires or interviews. They were most successful where leaders at different levels were involved in the work and were expected to take a cross-federation perspective.

In one federation, monitoring and evaluation were extremely rigorous and led to rapid improvements to provision and outcomes and success in achieving whole-school priorities. Activities such as meetings to consider pupils' progress were very effective in embedding school improvements. The headteacher had successfully empowered staff and established a strong sense of common purpose. Through regular monitoring of plans, work and lesson observations, middle leaders demonstrated that they had a very thorough understanding of how to ensure the effectiveness of their teams.

In another federation, the creation of parallel management structures in each of the schools enabled senior and middle leaders to jointly monitor and evaluate progress across the federation. As a result, all leaders had a

greater understanding of current performance and used this effectively to identify areas for improvement. For example, the federation had rightly prioritised improving writing as well as improving teaching.

62. In the best cases, there was effective moderation of assessment and planning across the federation to improve the quality and consistency of lessons. An emphasis on using assessment information to ensure that work was pitched at the correct level for all groups of learners was evident. Assessment information from marked work also informed pupils of the next steps they needed to take to improve their learning and to set personal targets.

### Leadership development

63. In all the federations visited that were judged good or outstanding the importance of developing leadership at all levels was explicit. This was expressed by governors, headteachers and other staff. One reason for this was to retain or attract high-quality staff by providing greater opportunity for development. This was particularly important in federations of small schools. The range of development opportunities is illustrated in the examples below.

Three middle leaders reported that they had expected to move on from the school before it became federated, but the increase in opportunities offered had kept them there. They felt that there were now much wider leadership opportunities and they enjoyed the chance to work across the whole federation recognising that it was to their own personal benefit.

In a federation between a primary and secondary school, the range of opportunities for leadership extended across the schools. Members of both school communities were now part of a federation leadership group and were developing transferable skills. For example, new posts to aid transition between schools and to ensure the continuity of learning were established. The schools were also building capacity at all levels of leadership.

64. Federated arrangements also aided governors and headteachers in succession planning for senior and middle leadership posts as the following examples, from three different federations visited by inspectors, illustrate.

In one federation, succession planning proved very effective both in preparation for federation and following the departure of the executive headteacher. A new secondary-phase leader shadowed the retiring headteacher and was able to assume the role, firstly of phase leader and then headteacher, quite easily.

In another federation leadership of the second, weaker, school had improved considerably as a result of the headteacher's very good leadership and coaching. There was a strong track record in the lead

school of middle leaders going straight into deputy headship. A system of having two deputies in each school ensured that they had real opportunities to develop and practise leadership skills during the headteacher's absence.

In one federation, an excellent contribution was made to developing leadership opportunities for current and aspirant leaders. The federation actively looked to develop greater internal capacity to 'grow their own' future leaders while developing teaching, pastoral and leadership expertise. There were now greater opportunities to broaden horizons and develop capacity because of federation. For example, deputy headteachers from each school were engaged in a full-scale curriculum review with a view to the development of a three to 16 curriculum.

### Continued professional development

65. In all the federations visited and in the questionnaire returns from 80 federations, staff and leaders expressed a belief that one of the greatest benefits of federation was the increase in opportunities for professional development. The best federations were able to demonstrate the impact of this development on outcomes and provision.

The federation of a primary and secondary school had enabled a strong professional development focus on identifying, implementing and monitoring high-quality teaching and learning. Teaching across the federated schools had been enhanced by the collaborative work undertaken to improve the quality of pupils' learning. Regular sharing of expertise and joint staff training sessions had led to the construction of a federation-wide teaching and learning policy. This defined clear expectations of what effective learners would look like by the end of Year 11 and was supported by a range of identified opportunities and strategies for turning principles into practice. The accompanying professional dialogue had given teachers the confidence to engage in cross-phase learning activities and was being used very effectively to develop teachers' skills. As a consequence, the federation had been better able to attract high-calibre teaching staff to target specific areas requiring development, such as writing at Key Stage 1 and English in Year 5. Teachers said that they were attracted by the professional development programme and the opportunities to teach across the phases.

Sharing of best practice was a key strength of one federation and had enabled improvement across both. For example, the strength of literacy teaching in one school had enabled the other to improve its provision; the strength of mathematics teaching at the other had enabled the first school to improve its provision in that area.

An effective Year 6 French lesson in a primary school taught by a secondary teacher, was notable for the range of activities used which built well on learners' previous experiences. The use of target language and new technology dovetailed well to involve and engage all pupils. This lesson was a good example of subject expertise being used to motivate and develop primary pupils. At the same time it provided an excellent development opportunity for the Year 6 class teacher; she had jointly planned the lesson and then provided support while developing her own skills in using the target language.

66. Inspectors found examples of targeted support for staff with perceived weaknesses. The flexible use of increased resources resulted in federations improving teaching with the minimum of disruption to pupils' education.

In one federation, the schools reviewed the quality of teaching three times a year. Teachers judged as no better than satisfactory or inadequate, were provided with coaching to improve to good. This was non-negotiable. The coaching team carried out joint observations and provided staff with sharply focused training and support. Judgements reached about individual teachers were moderated by senior leaders.

## Overcoming barriers

67. The visits to federations found that schools are likely to encounter a number of barriers during their journey towards federation. These can be split into two groups:
- those associated with the uncertainty about the impact of change
  - those that are related to the logistics of federation, such as finance, site management and geographical distance between schools.
68. Inspectors found that all the federations visited had either successfully overcome the barriers experienced or were taking effective steps to remove them. The extent to which these barriers had hampered progress varied, with the majority of federations overcoming them quickly.

## The uncertainty about change

69. The most common barrier experienced in the early stages of federation was anxiety and uncertainty about what the changes would mean for parents, pupils and staff. In nine federations visited and in 27 questionnaire returns from other federations, senior leaders reported that parents had expressed concern about the impact that the changes would have on their children. For example in one federation, parents had been extremely unsettled about the arrangements and wanted to retain the school that their children went to in its present form. They perceived that by having the headteacher from the other school as federation leader, their school would be 'swallowed up'. In addition they were concerned

that as a result of this pupils at the other school would get preferential treatment.

70. The staff who worked in the schools being federated also had concerns about change. In just under half the federations visited, staff shared a range of reasons for these concerns. In some federations there were concerns about how jobs would change or possible staff redundancies, particularly where a successful school had been federated with one that was causing concern. In others, there was a lack of trust in the reason for federation. In a meeting to consult over federation in which the view was held that one school was 'taking over' the other, one teacher commented, 'We are being stabbed in the back'. In other federations, staff were not fully aware that federation was not just 'a marriage of convenience' to assure an individual school's survival. They did not realise that federation went beyond simply securing the future of the schools they taught in, but meant that there would be collaborative arrangements to improve provision across schools that they would have to embrace.

In one federation, the view of the headteacher was that the most obvious challenge had been the loyalty of staff to their individual schools; for some going back more than 20 years. They very much viewed themselves in the context of 'their own school' and while accepting that the federation had secured its survival they showed some reluctance to engage as fully as they might in federation-wide responsibilities.

71. In 12 of the federations visited, effective communication, consultation and trust in an existing headteacher, had played a large part in overcoming the barriers to federation. Leaders stressed that in the early stages procedures for effective communication and consultation were best planned with the involvement of staff, parents and the community. Once staff felt secure, and parents were confident that their children's education would not be adversely affected, they gave their support to the federated arrangements. The following two examples demonstrate how school leaders and governors had communicated and consulted effectively with staff to overcome their fears.

In one federation there was initial staff reluctance to federate. They perceived it more as amalgamation which would result in job insecurity. The governing body worked hard to explain the purpose of federation and guaranteed that there would be no change in their conditions of service. This did much to resolve staff concerns and they became fully committed to federation.

In a federation of primary and secondary schools initial weaknesses in communication with staff had been successfully overcome, resolving their concerns. Primary staff had seen the initial barrier as 'fear of the unknown' and identified that communication initially was not always effective. There was an over-reliance on email and a lack of consultation and involvement, for example in the development of subject policies. The feeling that these problems had now been overcome was unanimous. This

was achieved by leaders providing staff from the primary schools with opportunities to come together for meetings and training. They also ensured that non-contact time for teachers in the same year groups in both schools was planned to take place at the same time so that they could meet and work together. This contributed to building trusting relationships and an understanding that each school faced the same issues.

72. The following example shows how leaders overcame parental concerns in a federation of a successful school with one that was causing concern.

Some parents at the weaker school were concerned by the changes but they were won round when learning started to improve and when communications improved dramatically. Parents at the other school were slightly concerned by the perception that they were losing their successful headteacher but this soon dissipated when they realised that he was easy to contact and still spent much time in their school.

73. Inspectors also found examples of how parental and staff trust in the headteacher overcame concerns about federation.

In one special school which had become part of a federation, pupils had to move to a different site for lessons. Parents did not want their children to move to another school site to what they perceived to be inferior facilities. The headteacher met with them and explained the arrangements, offering visits for pupils and parents so that they could see the advantages of the new arrangement. Parents reported that they were eventually persuaded because they trusted the headteacher.

Staff in the federation had also expressed anxiety over their job security. The headteacher supported by the governors, overcame this by regular, open communication. Staff were regularly consulted on their futures both as individuals and in groups. They were able to give preferences and the headteacher worked hard to accommodate them. As one member of staff said, 'It was an anxious time, but also exciting'.

74. In two federations visited it had proved more difficult to help parents overcome their concerns. This was because these went beyond organisational changes resulting from the federation and reflected historical and wider community factors.

In a federation of two primary schools in separate villages, parents perceived the schools as separate communities which reflected the limited links between the two villages. There was historical hostility between communities over 150 years rooted in cricket. More recently, these differences had been related to the socio-economic characteristics of each village. Some parents at one school were negative about federation and considered that the school has lost its headteacher because she spent too

much time at the second school. However, parents at the second school were much more positive about federation and believed it was good, both for the children and the community.

Federation leaders had undersold the positive impact of federation by being too cautious about publicising federation activities so as 'not to rock the boat'. The federation had, however, reduced hostility from parents by: emphasising that each child was a valued member of the federation; developing good relationships between pupils by ensuring that all were treated equally regardless of their backgrounds; challenging any negative attitudes or behaviours; and encouraging all parents to participate in school events.

75. Where a successful school was federated with one causing concern, headteachers had taken a rigorous approach to staff in the weaker school who had demonstrated a lack of support and occasional hostility for the arrangements. In five out of 10 federations visited in this situation, this had resulted in staff leaving the school.

## Logistics

76. Five federations visited and questionnaire responses from 19 additional federations, identified the geographical distance between schools as a potential barrier to successful federation. Two main reasons were given for the distance being a barrier, these were:
- the physical difficulty of distance for staff who may need to work together travelling between sites, and for the headteacher needing to have a presence on two sites
  - in three federations visited the schools, while recognising the benefits of federation, wanted to maintain their own identity. For example, in two federations schools were in separate villages and wanted to retain their places in the heart of the community.

However, these difficulties were not reported as being insurmountable. In all cases the solution was similar; each school had a recognised leader who maintained the day-to-day management of the school and communication with parents and a federation executive headteacher who took the strategic federation lead.

## Finance

77. In 22 federations that returned a questionnaire, the financial arrangements were perceived to be a barrier to the establishment of federation. Nine leaders said that they would advise other schools considering federation to ensure that they have effective management of finances so that leaders could concentrate on improving teaching and learning. The role of a single business manager or bursar was of increasing strategic importance in the federations visited, so

much so, that in seven federations the business manager was a member of the senior leadership team. This was because of the complexity of finance, site, personnel and information and ICT management in federations. For example, in five federations visited, schools initially experienced difficulties in enabling administrative ICT systems to communicate with each other. Often, the local authority oversight and payment procedures were too inflexible to recognise transactions between services and federations so that business managers had to apportion costs to separate school budgets.

In a federation consisting of two primary schools, two early years' settings and a children's centre, the bursar had successfully streamlined administration systems across the five settings, but still had five separate budgets to manage. This presented some difficulties. For example, each of these budgets was subject to separate auditing arrangements.

78. The following example illustrates the barriers that can occur early in federation when insufficient attention is paid to administrative arrangements relating to finance, and how they can be overcome.

In one federation the major barrier was finance. The budget allocation was, until recently, incorrect because the local authority had little experience of federations. As a result the headteacher had to set four budgets each year. In addition, there were two bursars, one in each school, who each used different computerised systems that were not connected. The appointment of a single financial bursar had overcome this problem and been very economical for the federation in terms of saved salaries and procurement.

## The influence and support of local authorities

79. Inspectors found evidence that 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. For example, in one local authority where the sustainability of small schools was a particular problem, a senior adviser had been appointed to lead on the issues related to the leadership of more than one school. Another local authority had facilitated the formation of a federation headteacher support group.
80. In six federations visited, the local authority had been the driving force behind federation. In three cases this was because the authority had concerns about a particular school. In others it was the strategy of the authority to encourage federation when headteachers retired, particularly where small schools were involved.

In one federation, a successful school was federated with a school causing concern. The local authority recognised that the school was in serious decline and that the other school had a developing capacity that allowed

them to take on fresh challenges. The local authority promoted the federation and helped to tackle challenges to it especially from the governors at the weaker school. Throughout the establishment of the federation the local authority had offered much support and advice.

In another federation of small schools, senior staff reported that the local authority had provided excellent support to enable well-informed decisions about the process of the federation and its future expansion. The authority had worked hard to be innovative and to highlight best practice while offering clear and supported routes to different partnership possibilities. The advice given had been comprehensive and set out clearly all of the key issues, considerations, benefits and potential pitfalls when considering federation.

81. In another 17 federations visited, the local authorities facilitated the development of federation following a request for support from governing bodies by:

- holding meetings with governors, staff and parents
- providing training, information and guidance
- conducting consultations
- helping to overcome staffing and financial issues
- supporting the recruitment of federation leaders.

In one federation, the local authority had been very supportive when schools made an approach about federation. Records of meetings indicated that it had provided all appropriate information and supported the consultation and appointment process of senior leaders to the federation. The secondary school improvement partner, employed by the local authority, had been particularly helpful to the two acting headteachers in reviewing improvement plans and evaluating the impact of actions taken to raise attainment.

82. In four federations visited, the support of the local authority had been less useful. This happened particularly when local authorities had little experience of federation or were suspicious of the motivation for federation. However, in all cases, the success of these federations had helped to influence the views of the local authorities who now saw federation as a positive solution to strengthen provision and leadership, or to ensure a more efficient use of resources. In seven federations visited the local authority drew upon the expertise of headteachers to advise other schools considering federation.

### **Federation is not always the final step**

83. Sixteen of the federations included in the survey were in the process of taking, or had already taken, a step beyond federation. Twelve of these federations

were in the process of amalgamating and becoming a single school. In most of these cases, federation had been planned as a step towards amalgamation; such had been the case in the federation of a primary school with a nursery. In other cases, such as the federation of an infant and junior school, the headteacher had preferred amalgamation, but the potential financial loss incurred by moving from two budgets to one made this unattractive at the time.

84. Inspectors found one case in the sample where schools were preparing to de-federate. This was where a successful school had federated with a weaker school and the weaker school now had increased capacity, as illustrated in the following case study.

The weaker school had been in special measures since 2001 and the local authority was seeking resolution to the school's difficulties. Federation offered an opportunity to address those difficulties. While federation was the route to supporting improvement in the weaker school, whether or not it was to be a permanent feature was not clarified at the start. The weaker school emerged from special measures in 2006. By 2007, the executive headteacher had retired. In order to sharpen the focus for improvement in each school, governors took a strategic decision to change the leadership arrangements by appointing separate headteachers. Since 2007, both schools had demonstrated sustained improvement in student outcomes and this improvement was reflected in the most recent Ofsted inspections of both schools. Capacity in both was judged to be good. In the period leading up to February 2011, the federation's governing body had formally considered whether to de-federate because they perceived that the aims of the federation had been achieved. However, they were keen to retain the strong sense of partnership and good practice which existed between the two schools.

## Notes

Between October 2010 and February 2011, inspectors visited a sample of 61 schools in 29 federations that shared a headteacher. The purpose of the visits was to examine the effectiveness of leadership of more than one school and its impact on provision and outcomes. The survey also looked to gain a greater understanding of the reasons, benefits and characteristics of federation and the barriers encountered on the path to federation.

The federations visited were selected based on the availability of the schools in a federation amongst Ofsted's other inspection activities. The sample was biased towards higher performing federations. For example, federations that included schools that had been judged inadequate or were in a category of concern could not be visited. Those that had schools judged to be satisfactory at their last inspection were more likely to be involved in other inspections, which meant that they also could not be visited.

The federations visited incorporated a wide variety of structures. Federations consisting solely of all-through primary schools were the most common type with 14 such federations in the sample. Of the others, four were comprised solely of secondary schools; four consisted of infant and junior schools; three involved nursery and primary schools; two were cross-phase federations consisting of primary and secondary schools; and two were cross-phase special school federations. Four of these federations had children's centres included. Nearly all of the federations visited comprised two schools. Two had three schools in the federation and one had four schools. Twenty-seven federations visited were hard federations and two were soft federations (as defined on page 8). The soft federations were included because they shared a headteacher. The federations visited were in rural, town and city locations.

All the schools in each federation were visited. Inspectors gathered evidence from meetings with headteachers, other leaders, governors, parents, staff, pupils and representatives from the local authorities. Lessons were observed and documents, such as improvement plans, evaluation reports, inspection reports and assessment information were scrutinised.

In addition, a questionnaire was distributed to the leaders of 293 known federations from which 111 responses were received (a response rate of 38%). This provided additional evidence on the reasons for, barriers to, and benefits of federation.

## Further information

### Publications by Ofsted

*Developing Leadership: National Support Schools* (090232), Ofsted, 2010;  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090232](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090232).

*Evaluation of the Primary and Secondary National Strategies 2005–07* (070033),  
Ofsted, 2008; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070033](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070033).

### Websites

Further information about federated schools can be found at:

Department for Education; [www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk).

National College for School Leadership; [www.nationalcollege.org.uk](http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk).

## Annex A: List of federations visited

Federation	Schools	Local authority
Alvanley and Manley Primary Federation	Manley Village School	Cheshire West and Chester
	Alvanley Primary School	
Birley Federation of Schools	Birley Community Primary School	Sheffield
	Birley Community College	
Chipstead Valley Primary and Coulsdon Nursery Schools Federation	Coulsdon Nursery School	Croydon
	Chipstead Valley Primary School	
Chumleigh Community School Federation	Community College Chulmleigh	Devon
	Chulmleigh Primary School	
Carlton and Faceby CofE (VA) Primary School and Bilsdale Midcable Chop Gate CE (VC) Primary School Confederation	Bilsdale Middlecable Chop Gate Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School	North Yorkshire
	Carlton and Faceby Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School	
The Nightingale and Elsley Schools Federation	Elsley School	Wandsworth
	Nightingale School	
Federation of All Saints, Sapcote and Sharnford Church of England Primary Schools	Sharnford Church of England Primary School	Leicestershire
	All Saints Church of England Primary School, Sapcote	
Federation of Lord Scudamore Foundation School, Sutton Primary School and Kings Caple Primary School	Lord Scudamore Primary School	Herefordshire
	King's Caple Primary School	
	Sutton Primary School	
Federation of Swale Catholic Primary Schools	St Edward's RC Primary School, Sheerness	Kent
	St Peter's Catholic Primary School, Sittingbourne	
Gold Star Federation	Goldbeaters Primary School	Barnet
	The Orion Primary School	
Monteney and Foxhill Federation	Fox Hill Primary School	Sheffield
	Monteney Primary School	
Federation of Pine Ridge and Lorraine schools	Lorraine Infant School	Surrey
	Pine Ridge Infant and Nursery School	
Sheerness West Federation	Rose Street Primary School	Kent
	West Minster Primary School	

Federation	Schools	Local authority
St Aloysius RC Schools Federation	St Aloysius' RC Voluntary Aided Junior School	South Tyneside
	St Aloysius RC Voluntary Aided Infant School	
The Beacon Federation	Cutcombe Church of England First School	Somerset
	Timberscombe Church of England First School	
The Brook Learning Partnership	Rivington and Backrod High School	Bolton
	Ladybridge High School	
The federation of St. Mary's Priory Catholic Infant and Junior Schools	St Mary's RC Junior School	Haringey
	St Mary's RC Infant School	
The federated primary schools of Bishop Sutton and Stanton Drew	Bishop Sutton Primary School	Bath and North East Somerset
	Stanton Drew Primary School	
Federation of Seagry and Somerfords' Walter Powell Primary Schools	Seagry Church of England Primary School	Wiltshire
	Somerfords' Walter Powell VA CofE Primary School	
The federation of St Alphege Church of England Infant and Nursery School and St Alphege Church of England Junior School.	St Alphege Church of England Infant and Nursery School	Solihull
	St Alphege Church of England Junior School	
The federation of Thomas Wall Nursery and Robin Hood Infant schools	Thomas Wall Nursery School	Sutton
	Robin Hood Infants' School	
Kingsway Federation	Green End Primary School	Manchester
	Ladybarn Primary School	
The Monks' Dyke and Tennyson Learning Federation	Monks' Dyke Technology College	Lincolnshire
	The Mablethorpe Tennyson High School	
Kingsley St John and Norley Church of England Federation	Norley CofE Primary School	Cheshire West and Chester
	Kingsley St John's CofE (VA) Primary School	
The Primary Advantage Federation	St John & St James CofE Primary School	Hackney
	Holy Trinity Church of England Primary School	

Federation	Schools	Local authority
The Two Rivers School	Two Rivers High School	Staffordshire
	Two Rivers Primary School	
Wellington Primary School and College Gardens Nursery	College Gardens Nursery	Waltham Forest
	Wellington Primary School	
West Grantham Federation	The Earl of Dysart Primary School, Grantham	Lincolnshire
	Grantham Spitalgate CofE Primary School	
	Grantham St Hugh's CofE Mathematics and Computing College*	
	The Charles Read High School	
West Trafford and South Manchester Learning Partnership	Broadoak School	Trafford
	Ashton-on-Mersey School	

\* Closed