

# All-Age Schooling: A Resource

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# Foreword

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There is a growing interest throughout the education community in the innovative re-organisation of schools. Moving away from the tradition of educating children in clearly defined phase or Key Stage schools, many heads are setting up all-age institutions.

Over the last two years, the DfES Innovation Unit has supported a group made up of headteachers, Local Authority officers and federation co-ordinators, who have attempted to find innovative solutions to many of the problems they face working within the current education system. This group has evolved into the 'Consortium of All Through Schools'.

This guide is the conclusion of their discussions and outlines the potential of this exciting way forward. We hope it provides you with the inspiration and the knowledge to start developing your own all-age institution.

In this booklet, we've used the term 'all-age' to describe the nature of these institutions. However the terms 'all-age' and 'all-through' are used interchangeably by practitioners, but mean the same thing. Please visit the DfES Innovation Unit website, which contains our 'continuum of school federations', to clarify any queries around terminology which you may have.

We would like to thank everybody who has contributed to this booklet and wish them all continued success.

If you would like to discuss any of this with us, please get in touch via the DfES Innovation Unit website where you'll find additional sources of support and contact details.



**Deryn Harvey**

Director

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Over the past few years, it has become apparent that school leaders, of their own volition, are moving closer towards collaborative working. In support of this, an increasing number of programmes and incentives, both led by the DfES and by practitioners themselves, have encouraged schools to work together.

Since its foundation, the DfES Innovation Unit has been working closely with us to explore both existing models of collaboration and new ones that are emerging. Part of the work has been to look at the potential of working across phases.

We have produced this guide to describe our experiences in setting up and running all-age institutions and supplemented it with an online resource area which is hosted on the DfES Innovation Unit's website<sup>1</sup>.

## What is an all-age institution?

There are two main all-age models:

- (i) All-age school federation – this comprises two or more schools which share a degree of governance and pedagogical programmes, but remain funded as separate institutions. They may or may not share one site/campus.
- (ii) All-age school – this is one school comprising all or multiple phases with one governing body and is funded as a single institution. It often occupies a single site/campus or is combining its previously separate institutional sites into a new build.

<sup>1</sup> [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/innovation-unit/collaboration/allage](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/innovation-unit/collaboration/allage)

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## Developing an all-age institution: five principles

As a group of school leaders, coming from a wide variety of backgrounds, and making the journey towards cross-phase education, our experience has shown us that we often share common issues and concerns.

We have organised our ideas and experiences into five areas, which we expand on in the following pages. These are:

- 1. Leadership, Management and Governance**
- 2. Curriculum**
- 3. Resources**
- 4. Ethos**
- 5. Community**

Throughout our discussions we began to see common factors emerging around the creation and management of an all-age institution that affected us, our staff, our schools and our pupils. In our view, the collaboration and continuity that results from working within an all-age institution may lead to:

- raised attainment in all Key Stages throughout the school(s) by reducing the performance dips that can occur when pupils transfer from one school to another
- improved teaching and learning by the sharing of expertise across phases and by offering increased opportunities for personalised learning
- enhanced opportunities for the recruitment, retention and deployment of all staff by offering greater opportunities for professional development and ability for schools to re-market themselves when facing difficult circumstances

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- improved pastoral care for children in challenging circumstances by offering a 'joined-up' strategy for special and behavioural needs
- flexibility in areas such as curriculum design, delivery and school leadership/management – as planning is not broken up by phase boundaries
- improved continuity for multi-agency involvement across phases for pupils, carers and families, especially for full-service/extended schools and maintaining closer community links for longer
- the sharing of resources by connecting those previously separate or disparately spread and benefiting from economies of scale.

We have been able to operate in ways that we had previously thought impossible, enabling us to be truly innovative. This has been a powerful driver for greater efficiency, saving us time, effort and resources.

We hope you find this guide useful.

**The Consortium of All Through Schools**

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## 1. Leadership, Management & Governance

Effective management is crucial for the successful development of all-age institutions. Federating or amalgamating schools will have existing, separate leadership and management structures in place and so moving to a new system can be difficult.

The leadership model most commonly adopted by 'hard governance'<sup>2</sup> all-age school federations or all-age schools, comprises an executive headteacher supported by deputy/operational headteachers who work as leaders of each phase. As an all-age institution develops, leaders are often appointed to specific areas of responsibility. This enables greater continuity in the management of care and conduct, access and inclusion, curriculum and assessment/pupil tracking (using ICT) and community engagement/extended school activities.

This kind of structure can also encourage innovation at middle leadership level, especially with regard to inclusion and personalised learning. Possible appointments may include a cross-phase teaching and learning coach, an inclusion manager, a family liaison officer, an ICT co-ordinator and a literacy co-ordinator, all of whom can promote continuity and seamless phase-to-phase transition.

Others have gone even further. These include the all-age school federation that has appointed middle leadership around the 5 outcomes of *Every Child Matters* in place of phase leaders, and the school with the previous infant head operating as the 'Head of Learning and Pedagogy'.

<sup>2</sup> 'Hard governance' all-age school federations are single legal entities with a single governing body across all schools or sites. This is in accordance with the Education Act 2002, section 24.

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Alternatively, 'soft'<sup>3</sup> all-age school federations with multiple governing bodies can employ a co-ordinator who does not have authority over individual headteachers/phase leaders, but who works closely alongside them. By directly reporting to the governing body, a federation co-ordinator is empowered to fulfil set goals without the full accountability of an executive head.

This arrangement can encourage all-age school federations to completely re-configure their 'phases', as these distinctions become less important. A phase leader may find themselves overseeing a phase comprising years 5, 6, 7 and 8, rather than along traditional Key Stage boundaries.

If you want to find out more about the process by which schools federate, and which statutory Regulations you may have to adhere to, visit the DfES Innovation Unit website<sup>4</sup>.

3 This refers to both statutory 'soft governance' all-age school federations (in accordance with the Education Act 2002) and non-statutory 'soft' all-age school federations. They have made some formalised commitment to work together, but each school in the federation retains a degree of autonomy and its own governing body.

4 [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/innovation-unit/collaboration/allage](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/innovation-unit/collaboration/allage)

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## 2. Curriculum

Creating an all-age institution provides a unique opportunity to make significant changes to the continuity, progression and relevance of the curriculum. It can help overcome the weaknesses that can occur as children transfer between primary and secondary schools or, in a three-tier system, between lower, middle and upper schools.

A recent Ofsted publication entitled *Changing Schools*<sup>5</sup> evaluated transfer arrangements at age 11 in a large number of schools and made the following observations:

*“Continuity in the curriculum and progression in learning as pupils move from primary to secondary schools are longstanding weaknesses of the education system”*

*“Partner primary and secondary schools generally had little knowledge of their respective practices in assessing and recording progress and in setting targets”*

*“There was insufficient discussion between teachers in Key Stages 2 and 3 about the standards of work expected of pupils and about approaches to teaching”.*

Working across phases can help us overcome these weaknesses through:

- developing seamless transition between phases to enable progression in learning
- rationalisation of the amount of testing throughout the school(s)
- creation of a common assessment framework, allowing for more accurate tracking of individual progress and the setting of targets

<sup>5</sup> *Changing Schools: Effectiveness of Transfer Arrangements at Age 11*, Ofsted, 2001



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- personalised learning for pupils
- efficient sharing of relevant information on pupils
- targeting teaching and support staff expertise on pupil needs
- matching the curriculum to the needs of pupils whilst freed from the constraints of Key Stage barriers
- introduction of subject specialisms earlier or extension of basic skills/core competencies for longer to meet the needs of pupils
- better use of literacy and numeracy co-ordinators (and the outcome of related strategies) throughout the school(s)
- offering better opportunities for Gifted and Talented and SEN pupils
- greater continuity and support from parents/carers
- development of the ethos of a learning community.

A recommended starting point to develop many of the above areas is to create a cross-phase team or committee charged with the task of improving the process when pupils move between phases. This enables senior leaders, class teachers and support staff to work together effectively to further curriculum alignment, co-ordinated timetabling, streamlined parental engagement and better use of existing resources.

Working in this way can engage all staff, resulting in a more effective delivery of their plans. The concept of all-age schooling can become increasingly meaningful to staff as they recognise the many opportunities it offers for curriculum development.

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## 3. Resources

An important benefit of all-age schooling is being able to achieve greater cost effectiveness through the sharing of resources in a variety of ways. These may include:

- appointing teaching and support staff to work across phases
- appointing one site manager
- creating common administrative appointments (e.g. overall finance manager or administration team)
- identifying and exploiting opportunities to exercise economies of scale (e.g. production of policies, provision of staff facilities, catering, repair and maintenance, health and safety, etc.)
- sharing equipment, hardware and accommodation
- increasing the range and capacity for community and out-of-hours learning or extra-curricula activities which *generate* additional income
- making effective use of space when re-building.

However, cost effectiveness is not the only benefit from sharing resources. A crucial advantage is the ability to target financial, physical and human resources at key areas of school improvement. Common actions include:

- devoting time and staff to improve primary/secondary transitional arrangements including timetabling staff to mentor pupils
- planning a joint curriculum
- delivering a joint INSET
- creating a single (or common where split sites exist) learning resource centre

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- creating a centralised database to inform teaching and learning
- directing resources at early intervention and the provision of nurture groups
- improving SEN provision
- providing scope for 'acceleration' and/or access to specialist resources for Gifted and Talented pupils
- provision of specialist teaching in Key Stage 2 or extending literacy and numeracy programmes in Key Stage 3
- supporting personalised learning, target setting and common assessment systems
- providing joint outside-hours sports and recreational activities
- increasing community engagement through the creation of full-service/extended schools.

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## 4. Ethos

The desire to develop or maintain a common ethos is often a major factor driving the development of an all-age institution. Special or faith schools, for example, can reap the benefits of an all-age school *federation*, whilst preserving their distinct ethos and identity.

Traditionally, individual schools can have different attitudes towards a particular issue. This can create problems for pupils transferring between them. Variance in teaching styles, classroom management, relationships between staff and pupils, response to behaviour issues and ensuing sanctions can all serve to confuse and de-stabilise children.

A common ethos can provide:

- purpose and direction for all staff and pupils
- continuity in learning and behavioural approaches or expectations
- consistency in classroom management and practice
- a shared set of core values and goals which provide a strong framework for the social, moral and spiritual development of pupils.

New all-age school *federations* should work collaboratively with all stakeholders to establish a commonly valued and clearly understood ethos. During times of change, this can enable an enthusiastic rather than reluctant transformation towards cross-phase working.

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## 5. Community

An all-age institution can also offer the opportunity to enhance all aspects of community development, both within and beyond the boundaries of the school(s), in line with the DfES' *Every Child Matters*<sup>6</sup> agenda.

The school community can benefit from:

- increased opportunities for lifelong learning and vocational courses, especially in the area of child care and related subjects
- the ability to create vertical tutor/pastoral groups to maximise peer influence (e.g. peer mentoring, role models, etc.)
- improved relationships with parents/carers through continuity
- ability to sustain efficient engagement with support agencies when working with parents/carers and families
- access to a wider range of community facilities
- restoration of community pride and raising aspirations through this institutional support.

Additionally, through more informal partnerships, other schools within the community can access and share in these beneficial developments, as all-age institutions provide a powerful driver for community regeneration.

<sup>6</sup> *Every Child Matters*, DfES, 2004

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## Conclusion and Further Information

We hope this guide energises you to see the possibilities that cross-phase working can provide for your staff, pupils and wider community.

As the drivers of innovation in education, we, the practitioners, are pushing to meet the specific needs of our local communities.

However, experience is showing that whilst there is a diversity of approaches adopted, reflecting local contexts, many commonalities are shared by those of us pursuing this exciting approach.

The Consortium of All Through Schools continues to meet regularly. Via the DfES Innovation Unit website, please keep in touch with all our developments, use the database to link up with like-minded practitioners or take part in online discussions in the Online Innovation Community.

We do hope that you will get in touch with us to find out more about our work via the DfES Innovation Unit website at ([www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/innovation-unit/collaboration/allage](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/innovation-unit/collaboration/allage))