Coordinated inspections of hard federations and shared sixth forms

Briefing for section 5 inspection

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| This briefing is designed to assist inspectors in the coordinated inspection of schools that are part of a hard federation or have a shared/collaborative sixth form. |

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# Introduction

1. This briefing is designed to assist inspectors in the coordinated inspection of schools that are part of a hard federation. It is important to emphasise that each school that has a separate unique reference number (URN), will be inspected in its own right, and receive its own report. This briefing is used in conjunction with all other briefings and guidance for section 5 inspections, including *The framework for school inspection* [[1]](#footnote-2) and the *School inspection handbook.*[[2]](#footnote-3) It is intended to give inspectors a framework for managing communication efficiently between inspection teams and with each school. It suggests the main activities that need to be undertaken throughout any co-ordinated inspection process.
2. There are varying types of federations, usually classified as hard or soft. To clarify the difference between hard and soft federations, the Department for Education’s (DfE’s) definition has been used (see Annex 1). Legally, a hard federation exists when two or more schools share one governing body. Within this arrangement, each school maintains its own budget and URN. Further information about federations can be found by using the following link: <http://www.education.gov.uk/vocabularies/educationtermsandtags>

## Benefits of coordinated inspections

1. There are many different contexts in which federations work. Within these varied contexts, there are several benefits for the coordination of inspections. These include:

* fewer demands on staff, senior leaders and governors
* improved efficiency and effectiveness of inspections through, for example, joint interviews with staff, governors or the executive headteacher
* a better understanding of the impact on outcomes for pupils as a result of the federation
* a better understanding of the effectiveness of the leadership and management of the federation
* an opportunity, through inspection, to recognise strengths and to identify areas for development across the whole federation.

# General guidance

## Coordinated inspection of partner schools

1. Schools are involved in many different and often complex partnership arrangements. The scheduling of inspections may be adjusted to facilitate a coordinated inspection. However, most inspections would be scheduled in line with the guidance provided in *The framework for school inspection*.
2. All schools in a hard federation that were given a notice to improve or judged to have serious weaknesses or require special measures at their previous inspection will continue to be monitored following the published arrangements for schools in a category of concern. Similarly, a school in a hard federation that is judged as ‘requires improvement’ will be monitored in accordance with the published arrangements for these schools.
3. For each school in a hard federation, consideration will be given to the date of the previous inspection for each school, together with other local information, which may make it inappropriate for federated schools to be inspected at the same time.

## Making judgements

1. During an inspection, inspectors may take into account the effectiveness and/or impact of the federation for each individual school on the following judgements:

* the achievement of pupils at the school
* the quality of teaching in the school
* the behaviour and safety of pupils at the school

the quality of leadership in and management of the school.

1. This is not an exhaustive list and in all institutions partnership working may inform other judgements made by inspectors. Schools need to recognise that inspectors are not inspecting the federation but rather, the impact and effectiveness of the partnership arrangements on the features noted above, most especially outcomes for pupils.
2. When making judgements about pupils’ outcomes, inspectors will consider the impact of partnership working on improving outcomes, particularly achievement, for the school’s pupils who work off-site and for pupils from other schools or organisations who attend the school for some provision. This will include pupils from another school accessing a particular course. Additionally, if pupils are taught in other institutions, their ‘home’ school should know how well those pupils are achieving.
3. Inspectors are asked to consider ways in which federated provision contributes to the school’s value for money. The school may have an analysis or evaluation to share. This does **not** entail inspectors’ investigation of the precise costs of the partnership arrangements. However, the school may be investing a great deal of staff time and other resources in shared activities and if the investment is not helping to improve pupils’ outcomes then inspectors will discuss this with the school.
4. Partnership activities should have a direct and positive impact on pupils’ outcomes and the quality of provision. Examples of partnership activity in a hard federation:

* shared leadership across several institutions
* sharing of resources including support for professional development

a curriculum partnership with pupils from partner schools.

# Before the inspection

1. When embarking on coordinated inspections, it is advisable that all lead inspectors liaise before initial contact is made with a school so that clear and consistent messages are given to headteachers. Where appropriate, lead inspectors may decide that it would be helpful for one of them to play a coordinating role, but this is not a requirement. Annex 2 provides some issues that lead inspectors may wish to consider together before the start of a coordinated inspection.
2. In the case of coordinated inspections, it is important that the lead inspectors discuss with each other, prior to initial contact with the respective schools, how the initial contact should be handled. Each school should be contacted separately by the responsible lead inspector and, where possible, at the same time. Where the schools are led by an executive headteacher, lead inspectors may need to prepare – following the initial phone calls – for one lead inspector to coordinate the arrangements with the executive headteacher for meetings with senior staff and governors. In the initial phone call, inspectors should take the opportunity to clarify the details of partnership arrangements and whether other schools in the federation have already been inspected.
3. Lead inspectors will confirm whether any other school in a federation has already been inspected. There may be judgements already made about a federation in a previous inspection report which will be pertinent to the pending inspections. Lead inspectors will read the reports from the other school(s) in order to prepare for discussions with senior leaders and governors.

## The initial conversation with the headteacher

1. Careful thought needs to be given as to how communications will be managed. For example, a hard federation may have an executive headteacher with a senior member of staff responsible for each institution. This will be determined by the federation’s leadership structure and working arrangements. The lead inspectors may need to discuss and plan how communication will be managed between:

* themselves as lead inspectors on each site

the executive headteacher and senior staff/governors with responsibility for each site.

1. During the initial conversation with headteachers it is important that they are made aware that there will be an individual report for each school with a separate URN.
2. So that the coordinated inspection runs smoothly, lead inspectors will identify opportunities for joint meetings, if appropriate. For example, one meeting could be held between lead inspectors and the executive headteacher. Lead inspectors should also consider the possibility of holding one meeting with representatives of the governing body.
3. Lead inspectors will need to arrange with the school which senior leaders will attend team meetings. In hard federations, it is likely that an executive headteacher would not be able to attend all meetings and may want to delegate this to another senior staff member.
4. Headteachers need to be made aware that the ‘Introduction’ to each report will carry a sentence on the coordinated nature of the inspection and that the ‘Information about the school’ will provide an overview of any shared provision, leadership and governance arrangements. See Annex 3 for examples of this.
5. Headteachers also need to know that it is possible that some text in the inspection reports may be similar, but it should be stressed that as inspectors consider the variations in the quality of provision and the achievement of different groups of students, the reports will not be identical.
6. It is likely that some aspects of each school’s self-evaluation will be similar and these may highlight particular aspects that are affected by partnership working.

# During the inspection

1. In any federation, the analysis of the questionnaires from pupils/students, parents and staff may reveal differences between institutions and these will be investigated fully and separately for each institution. The results of the questionnaires will be analysed carefully to identify issues that are common across schools. If time allows, these would be shared and discussed between lead inspectors.
2. Inspectors should be aware of the need to check safeguarding procedures for each individual institution. Where staff work across schools within a federation, it is sufficient for inspectors to confirm that teachers have had the appropriate checks.
3. It will be useful for lead inspectors to communicate with each other towards the end of the first day of the inspections. This will provide an opportunity to discuss emerging findings and to determine any additional joint meetings that may need to be planned for day two. It may be relevant to discuss any features that could lead to common areas for further improvement relating to the impact of the federation.
4. It is likely that an executive headteacher would be unable to attend all team meetings across a federation, but it is essential they are closely involved in the inspection. It is essential the pattern of attendance at meetings by school staff, governors and inspectors is determined at the beginning of the inspection, fully taking into account sensitivities and individual circumstances. It is important that senior leaders in schools are kept up-to-date with the progress of each inspection. The lead inspector needs to be sensitive to this, possibly briefing the executive head separately.
5. The decision about how to conduct the formal feedback will be discussed by each lead inspector and agreed, where applicable, with the executive headteacher. In a hard federation where there is an overall executive headteacher and one governing body, consideration needs to be given to timings and locations for feedback.

# After the inspection

1. The school’s formal partnership work will be reflected in the sections of the report where collaboration has a significant impact on the work of the school. There will be a substantial statement on the effectiveness of the federation in promoting pupils’ achievement. Inspectors will need to use their professional judgement when determining the weight and balance of partnership work with other aspects of the school.
2. Wherever possible, lead inspectors will share draft reports before final submission to ensure consistency regarding shared provision. Each individual report from the coordinated inspection should be evaluated by the same inspection service provider quality assurance reader before being ‘signed off’. Although each report will be written for the individual school within the federation, it is important that if judgements are different between schools, the reasons for this are clearly explained.

# Annex 1. Federations continuum

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|  | **Federation**  **(sometimes referred to as hard federation)** | **Collaborative governance (sometimes referred to as soft federation** |
|  | **All schools retain their separate identity and continue to receive individual schools budgets** | |
| **Diagram** | GB | Committee with delegated powers  GB  GB |
| **Governing body?** | **Single governing body** shared by all schools | **Each school has its own governing body, but the federation has joint governance/strategic committee with delegated powers** |
| **Statutory?** | Yes. Hard governance federations are established using **Federations Regulations** made under Section 24 Education Act 2002 | **Yes. Soft governance federations established using Collaboration Regulations made under Section 26 Education Act 2002** |
| **Common goals?** | All schools share common goals through a Service Level Agreement and protocol; having single governing body allows for efficient, streamlined decision making in all areas | **All schools share common goals through Service Level Agreement and protocol; joint committee can make joint decisions in some areas, but not all** |
| **Common budget?** | No, but having a single governing body allows for prompt budgetary decisions on behalf of the group of schools | **No, but if the joint strategic committee has budgetary powers delegated to it, they can make prompt budgetary decisions for the group of schools** |
| **Shared staff?** | **Potential for common management and appointments which would be agreed in a simple, effective manner. Could choose to have single head teacher across group of schools** | **Potential for common management positions and appointments, but need to have protocol/contract to underpin commitment to shared posts** |

For further information about federations please go to: <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/governance/governingbodyprocedures/a0056911/collaboration-and-federations-an-overview>.

# Annex 2. Checklist for lead inspectors

Lead inspectors need to consider how they will approach the following issues when planning a coordinated inspection. The following provides some suggestions and prompts. It is not intended to be a definitive list.

## Before the inspection

Inspectors will:

* check partnership details on the inspection service provider portal
* read previous inspection reports
* discuss and agree with other lead inspectors:
* timing and content of initial telephone calls to the headteacher/executive headteacher and whether particular arrangements for liaising with the executive headteacher are required
* issues arising from any self-evaluation relating to the partnerships within federated schools
* potential shared meetings and time allocated

identification of groups heavily affected by the partnership/shared provision.

## During the inspection

Inspectors will consider:

* timing of and attendance at shared interviews
* attendance at team meetings
* attendance, location and format of formal feedback

timing for lead inspector discussions concerning progress of the inspections, emerging issues and questionnaire responses.

## After the inspection

* Sharing draft reports to check for consistency and accuracy

Inspection service provider quality assurance and sign-off procedures

# Annex 3. Report writing

This section sets out examples of report writing referring to federations.

## Introduction

The school has been federated with a nearby junior school since September 2009 and shares the same governing body. Since the previous inspection, there have been several staffing changes. Two acting headteachers are temporarily sharing the role of headteacher. A new headteacher will be in charge of the school from January 2013.

## Leadership and management – subject leadership for a federation of small primary schools

Subject leadership is strengthened by sharing the roles across the federation of schools. Subject leaders focus effectively on one or two areas of leadership, rather than the multiple responsibilities they had during the previous inspection. These leaders have implemented sharply focused improvement plans which have led to a rapidly improved curriculum.

## Teaching provision in a secondary school federation

The quality of teaching is improving rapidly. Teachers from other schools within the federation are deployed effectively to support departments where staff recruitment has proved difficult. As a result, teaching in these departments has improved and led to good learning.

## Partnerships in a primary school which is part of a federation with a children’s centre

The school’s partnership work contributes very strongly to the school’s value for money. Highly effective links across the federation and with the shared children’s centre have led to rapidly improved outcomes for pupils. Leadership has been strengthened considerably by sharing responsibilities between several highly effective senior leaders in different schools. Shared resources, such as the youth café, the sports barn, a health drop-in centre and exceptional PE facilities have helped to improve attendance and behaviour.

1. *The framework for school inspection* (120100), Ofsted, 2014; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120100](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120100). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. *School inspection handbook* (120101), Ofsted, 2014; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120101](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120101). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)