National College for School Leadership

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Research Associate Report

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A journey into the unknown

An investigation into the impact of federation upon leadership in a sample of primary schools

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Aims

This research project aims to investigate the impact of federation on leadership in a small sample of primary schools. It explores the benefits, problems and changes that federation may bring to leadership and school development.

Background

New and emerging models of school leadership are a key consideration for the Department for Education and Skills (DfES 2005) and the National College for School Leadership (NCSL). On the one hand, challenges such as failing schools, falling pupil numbers, recruitment difficulties and a large proportion of headteachers set to retire in the near future are all impacting on the system. On the other, opportunities provided through collaboration such as networks are being explored by schools wishing to maximise on shared expertise.

Steve Munby, NCSL's chief executive, states:

> I do think that the College is concerned to make sure that all schools are well-led, not just some, or not even just most, but all. What we are looking to do is to make sure that all schools learn from the best school leadership. There are various ways in which that can be done. It can be done through collaboratives of schools working together in an informal way around local areas, it can be done through hard federations, and it can be done through trusts. One way of helping to ensure that leadership which is not so good in schools in the primary sector as well as in the secondary sector is addressed would be through trusts or hard federations. (Munby 2005)

This report suggests that as times and needs change, other, more creative approaches to providing school leadership may be required.

One solution may be federation. This may occur for a variety of reasons and in different contexts; in its most flexible form groups of schools join together to form network learning forums, in other cases clusters of secondary schools join with their feeder primary or special schools to share best practice and common goals. In other examples, arrangements between schools become more formalised, for example, the leadership team of one school may become responsible for two or more schools with its headteacher taking on an executive role.

Terminology

There are numerous terms to describe federation, which may involve the sharing of leadership teams, governing bodies, budgets or pupils. This paper uses the following definitions as used by the DfES:

- Schools can sometimes *cooperate* on an informal basis and arrange joint INSET for staff or learning opportunities for pupils.
- Groups of schools can learn together through *networks* of local schools planning joint INSET using grants devolved to them.
- A *collaboration* of schools refers to an informal, non-statutory arrangement where the school retains its own budget and governing body.
- A *soft federation* is non-statutory with each school having its own governing body. However, the federation has joint governance/strategic committee without delegated power.
- A soft governance federation is statutory and although each school retains its own governing body, the federation has joint governance/strategic committee with delegated power. All schools share common goals through Service Level Agreement (SLA) and protocol.
- A *hard federation* can involve up to five schools but the key factor is a single governing body. The decision to federate lies with the governors and requires the local authority (LA) to write a new instrument of governance. The structure of leadership varies, the number of headteachers is not prescribed, and some federations may choose to have a single headteacher across group of schools. Schools still maintain separate budgets.

Reviewing the literature

Research detailing the impact of innovative and creative leadership is substantial; however, at the present time, little has been written about federated schools that have successfully remodelled their leadership teams.

In preparation for this study, I have been fortunate to study:

- NCSL research on federations in the Netherlands (NCSL 2005)
- the University of Warwick paper entitled *Evaluation of the Federations Programme* (Lindsay et al 2005)
- the *Collaboration and Federation* paper written by the West Sussex Federations Group (Whiffing et al 2005)
- the *School Federations* research project for the DfES academies division (Potter, 2004)

The main benefits to federation are listed on teachernet.gov.uk and can be described as follows:

1. Raising of standards.
2. Stronger senior and middle management team.
3. Stronger teaching team through the appointment of shared staff including specialist teachers, better training, wider career opportunities.
4. Better support and development opportunities for school governors.
5. Economies of scale.
6. Savings in planning and administration time.

These points echo the findings of the sources identified above and indeed those from this study. They can be organised under the following headings:

- Organisation, structures and staff
- Learning from each other
- Pupils and governors
- Development planning

Organisation, structures and staff

Through the literature, headteachers are identified as the key to successful federation and those involved can be characterised as experienced and innovative leaders. As Lindsay et al (2005: 7) identify:

> Headteacher leadership was the factor heads and governors saw as most likely to lead to success in their federations.

From the academies division report (Potter: 22, 4.4.4), comes the following observation:

> A striking feature of the lead schools interviewed, and of other outstanding schools in the author's experience, is that their heads have been in place for eight years plus…. Jim Collins (2001) analysing businesses which have gone 'from good to great' showed that their take-off was not attributable to any one action or person, but to the cumulative effect of the myriad of changes they had made in previous years.

NCSL's study of federations in the Netherlands (2005: 21), similarly identified leaders' experience as a key contributor to success:

> Several of the more-school heads [principals who had taken on responsibility for more than one school] were very experienced principals who had been asked to take on additional schools.

> The more-school heads and superintendents interviewed were clearly dynamic, charismatic and dedicated individuals who were committed to providing the highest quality education for the pupils in their schools/federations. These individuals were innovative leaders who were not afraid to take risks. They each had a clear vision for their organisation, and a drive and determination to improve standards and the effectiveness within them. In all the schools, the more-school heads spoke with passion and energy about their schools and their vision for improvement. (NCSL 2005: 27)

These leaders needed, however, to consider structures that provided adequate capacity. As Lindsay et al (2005: 8) point out, in leading a federation:

> The main barriers to success are likely to be insufficient time, both for leaders and staff.

In response, the research characterises effective leadership of federated schools by their shift to distributed leadership that provides opportunities for staff and may result in reduced workload:

> … a collaborative partnership needs a strong cohesive leadership, and federations should be interested in developing and sustaining leadership across all levels of the schools. A strong management infrastructure: federations must demonstrate that they have the capacity to deliver. (Potter 2004: 8, 2.12)

> There may be advantages to other members of staff through distributed leadership. It was apparent from the interviews that more-school heads gave other staff more responsibility, which in turn gave them confidence to follow their own approach. (NCSL 2005: 22)

Characteristics of such a distributive culture were reported to include:

- team-based working involving projects and plans;
- heads who saw their “success in the success of others” (Potter 2004: 23, 4.4.5/6);
- the development of new management structures, for example, an associate headship in charge of teaching and learning across the federation;
- enhanced professional development opportunities for leaders, for example, “one senior member of staff said that working across the federation had provided him/her with ‘near risk-free career development” (Potter 2004: 13, 4.1.1);
- more leadership opportunities for staff, in particular middle managers;
- senior teachers in “each school for times when the headteacher is absent from school or away altogether (eg on a conference)” (Whiffing et al 2005: 3);
- opportunities for staff to take on communication and partnership roles with parents as access to the headteacher is more limited.

There was seen to be positive impact on recruitment and retention at all levels, for example, leaders, bursars and support staff, as increased size and flexibility led to a wider range of opportunities.

The literature emphasises the need for organised and clear systems of communication to be in place in schools where one headteacher leads more than one school:

> Accountability and communication systems need to be clearly defined for all staff to ensure problems are only referred upwards when strictly necessary. (Whiffing et al 2005: 3)

Federation may provide opportunities for other initiatives to take place such as those that aim to improve work–life balance and the development of coaching skills:

> One interviewee remarked that there is a transferability of skills and jobs from one school to another which means a reduced workload. (NCSL 2005: 22)

> Pair middle leaders in the two schools for coaching, ensuring that leadership roles can be seen by the many, not just the few. (Potter 2004: 17, 4.1.4)

Learning from each other

An important element of federations is the raising of standards of achievement. Potter (2004: 9, 3.1) elaborates on this as follows:

> [to] raise standards, promote inclusion, find new ways of approaching teaching and learning and build capacity between schools in a coherent manner.

In the West Sussex work (Whiffing et al 2005: 9), "federation was seen as likely to have a strong impact on raising achievement, with over 90% of heads and governors expecting at least a 'quite strong' impact on achievement. Inclusion and gifted and talented were also seen as highly likely to benefit".

The opportunities for schools to learn from each other were mainly by sharing best practice, sharing resources (including staff) and in Continuing Professional Development (CPD). There was seen to be a premium for those working across the federation in understanding how aspects of their work was applied in each setting as well as a "collective intelligence" for those learning from each of other (Whiffing et al 2005: 9).

Professional development opportunities were also seen to be enhanced and to have a positive impact as well as being cost-effective. Financial concerns were also highlighted in the following example from the NCSL study (2005: 34):

> There may be financial benefits for some schools when staff are employed by a federation rather than individual schools, because staffing costs are averaged across all the schools within the federation. Schools with older, and more expensive staff, have a reduction in staffing costs.

This study also highlighted the impact that having a flexible approach to the location and use of staff might have:

> Mobility of staff across the federations exist as a policy within the federations visited…. This can be beneficial because it allows greater flexibility to cover potential problems such as illnesses or curriculum deficiencies. (NCSL 2005: 34)

Pupils and governors

Some of the benefits of federation in improving standards of attainment are described above; however, it is worth noting that there are limits to the improvement that federation may bring. For example, Whiffing et al (2005: 12) note:

> Raising achievement is clearly the major goal for federations but inclusion is also a substantial driver…. It is interesting, however, to note that despite the major goal being to increase achievement, low achieving pupils were not often reported as strongly targeted. The evidence suggests that the federations intend to achieve this goal by spreading their work across a broader pupil constituency.

This study also highlighted how sharing materials and/or resources between schools "could enhance pupil learning and increase the breadth of work covered" (Whiffing et al 2005: 2).

There are also benefits to governing bodies as pointed out by Whiffing et al (2005: 4), although these too need to be balanced against the additional duties that federation may bring.

> In collaboration, governing bodies may benefit form the opportunity to share resources, strategy and policies to take forward leadership and management issues. Building on strengths of governing bodies.
>
> Duplication of governors' meetings for the headteacher could be a drawback of arrangements where two governing bodies were in existence. However, joint committees could 'reduce this and joint school improvement plan could be considered'. (Whiffing et al 2005: 4)

Development planning

Research suggests that federated schools need to have a strong sense of direction, with shared goals and a clear vision in order for them to be successful. Clearly, the role of the headteacher is key to this:

> Heads focused more on the existence of clear, shared goals…. (Lindsay et al 2005: 10)
>
> A collective vision and strong sense of direction and purpose, supported by agreed structures and procedures, which have been formulated and which are owned by all involved, were seen as being crucial to the success of the federation. (NCSL 2005: 40)

Problems regarding leadership or development planning may occur when two schools with different needs are federated as the needs of both have to be maintained while finding common ground through which collaborative approaches will help each advance. The NCSL study (2005: 24) draws attention to the following potential difficulties:

> There may also be issues when a principal takes on another school with different issues to the first school. A couple of the interviewees spoke of the potential difficulties in managing schools with two (or more) differing identities, as there may be a conflict of cultures. The principal may need to adapt to change and may not feel the same for both schools, preferring one school to the other. Different leadership in different schools may result in a burnout issue for the more school head.

Having considered some of the points brought out in the literature reviewed, the nature of this study and its findings are explored below.

Methodology

This research project developed, in part as a personal journey, through being closely involved in a two-year temporary collaboration between two primary schools in West Sussex. Initial reflections, conversations and a professional diary in relation to this involvement began to shape a focus for study. The design for the research project was developed with the support of colleagues at both schools and at NCSL.

This study has drawn on the following sources of data:

- Interviews with headteachers and their leadership teams in four English schools.(see Table 1 for further details of the schools' arrangements and those interviewed). Their answers have provided a detailed account of the evolvement of leadership in their schools.
- Telephone interviews with a number of headteachers involved in federations as part of the work of the DfES Innovations Unit.
- A professional diary that captures the views of the leadership team, chairs of governors, staff and parents in two primary schools in West Sussex focusing specifically on the changing roles of leadership team.

Table 1: The schools

Case	Type of federation	Number of schools	Number of headteachers	Number of deputies	Number of governing bodies	Other features	Leader interviewed
A	Soft federation. Two two-form primaries on separate sites	2	2	2	2	Strategic leadership group to manage federation	1 headteacher, chair of governors
B	Temporary two-year collaboration. One two-form primary, one four-class primary on separate sites	2	1	1	2	Established leadership team with leadership at all levels	deputy headteacher, headteacher, 2 chairs of governors
C	Hard federation. Two three-form entry school on a shared site, one infant and one junior	2	2	2	1	Each headteacher responsible for their own school, deputies are appointed to work across both schools	1 deputy, 1 headteacher
D	Partnership school[a] first and middle school on same site	2	1	2	3	Amalgamation of schools is planned; schools are at very different stages of development. (*Note:* 1 governing body is the new governing body for the amalgamated school)	1 headteacher

Note: [a] The partnership scheme has existed in Norfolk since 2000 and serves to join small primary schools together as a 'partnership' under one headteacher. This reflects the difficulty of appointing headteachers to small primary schools. The scheme enables the partnership head to assume a non-teaching role and offers governing bodies the opportunity to appoint a headteacher to what is potentially a more attractive role.

Data collection

Interviews

A semi-structured interview schedule was followed with similar questions being asked to the headteacher, deputy and chair of governors (the interviewees at each school are detailed in Table 1). The interviews were conducted over a six-month

period between June and November 2005 and each generally lasted about 40 minutes.

Alongside these interviews, it was possible to learn about, and discuss, the implications of federation during informal conversations, for example with the West Sussex rural schools federation and at the conference for partnership schools in Norfolk.

Transcribing and coding of interviews

Some of the data was collected as recordings and then transcribed. In more informal settings notes were made of pertinent comments.

The transcribed interviews were converted into text documents, which could then be coded to allow broad themes to emerge. These codes were then used as categories to help with further reflection and analysis.

Key findings

Clearly, this is a small-scale research project with a limited population size from which it would be inappropriate to draw sweeping generalisations. However, the questions posed have built up a clear picture of how the leadership teams have evolved and how school development and organisation has changed in the schools that were sampled.

The key features of the federated schools studied were:

- the development of a shared vision by all staff;
- experienced headteachers leading the federations (both in the length of time in their post and as a headteacher in other schools);
- distributed leadership at all levels with the deputy(ies) playing a strategic leadership role;
- more effective organisation with day-to-day management supporting leadership and school self-evaluation;
- increased opportunities for staff to work together and learn from each other;
- accelerated school improvement with federation used as a lever for change;
- improved opportunities for pupils to interact with a wider group and for this to ease transition;
- opportunities for governors to extend their sphere of influence.

Case studies

The case studies are presented according to the key features that emerged from the literature review and data. As previously they are:

- Organisation, structures and staff
- Learning from each other
- Pupils and governors
- Development planning

Shared vision was a key theme in all of the schools that were studied and this will be referred to within each section.

Organisation, structures and staff

Leadership teams

The headteachers that were interviewed could be characterised as visionary leaders who identified federation as an opportunity to improve provision in their schools. The headteacher in school A was innovative with a passion for quality learning and teaching; he was very aware that he “only had one chance” to turn around a school to which many parents did not want to send their pupils to one that today has a waiting list for places. He thought that federation could improve opportunities for the pupils, staff and community.

The headteachers interviewed all had previous experience as headteachers in different schools and were confident in sharing leadership with staff at all levels. The headteacher in school A described how the improvement required by the school was not all about him and what he could do; he was willing to ”live with the consequences” of distributed leadership, allowing staff to make decisions. The headteacher in school B was passionate about lifelong learning and encouraged others to “to have a go”. This approach was echoed by the headteacher of school C who believed passionately in quality learning and teaching and was always looking for a way to integrate new approaches to curriculum development.

Shared leadership was a strong feature of all of the schools that were visited. In school B the temporary collaboration created a period of change, which provided opportunities to develop leadership at all levels. The deputy became non-class-based and replicated the role of the headteacher by taking on responsibilities in both schools and working closely with their respective staff. This meant that the key stage leaders then had to fulfil roles that had previously been undertaken by either the headteacher or the deputy, which then had an impact on other roles in the schools. This resulted in acceleration towards shared leadership with all staff confident to take on the responsibility for their leadership role.

In school A, the headteacher set out to focus leadership opportunities on the team of staff so that development within the federation would be sustained and embedded over time and not just focused on himself. This created a strong sense of shared vision and leadership throughout school as part of a long-term shift of ethos to “leadership at all levels”.

The schools that were visited focused on a team approach to leadership and management. In school C, the senior leadership team (SLT) shared responsibilities and their time so that personnel could be directed as appropriate to need or according to an area of expertise. For example, one of the deputies in school C had experience as a special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) in her previous

school and so she took on responsibility for special needs across both schools in the federation, a role that was previously undertaken by two members of staff, one from each school. She used her knowledge and links with outside agencies to ensure efficient provision for both schools, reporting to both SLTs at one meeting. This ensured that the same best practice was developed across both schools and enabled the deputies to “share in the vision as well as the responsibility” that made them “feel valued within the leadership team”. A culture of openness and of shared expertise existed, and one of the deputies described how he felt valued and explained that everyone within the SLT was “open to comments”, and that “nothing is ignored”.

Furthermore, in school C the deputy had a strategic vision to move the school forward. He cited an ability to “look for solutions out of problems” and considered that it was the deputy’s role “to bring things together”. This global view and work with all staff throughout both schools enabled him to achieve this, he considered, by “refocusing a debate … as to how this will benefit the whole school model”.

This global vision was represented in most of the schools that were visited; because of an increased amount of non-contact time and greater input into the leadership and management of the school, the deputies expressed confidence in their role as co-leaders. The federations enabled the deputies to work on a larger scale with the consequence of more people effecting change and creating a shared vision and ethos.

In school C, its two deputy heads were, through working together, able to share their most valuable resource – time. The members of the SLT devolved responsibilities and attendance at various meetings, ensuring that tasks were completed appropriately and not replicated. Each member of the SLT represented the whole team when attending different curriculum and key stage meetings. By working with staff throughout the schools, the SLT could begin to build up a detailed picture of the two schools, matching that to their strengths and areas for development.

In school C, the headteachers had every confidence in both of the deputies and were happy to delegate day-to-day responsibility for areas such as timetabling, performance management, curriculum and special needs to either one of them. This in turn provided quality time for the two headteachers to work together and discuss elements of school development.

At school B there was also a very strong leadership team within which the deputy and headteacher used their different skills and styles of leadership to complement each other. The headteacher became the ‘public face’ of the two schools facilitating innovation through the deputy and key stage leaders, for example, the deputy would write the newsletter or run a staff meeting on an agreed priority enabling the headteacher to attend LA training or meet with local headteachers. The headteacher was adamant that the existence of a strong deputy to whom responsibility could be delegated was vital to the success of the collaboration as it ensured tasks were completed and not replicated. There were also improved opportunities for staff development as members of the SLT could take on new roles with the support of an experienced headteacher to coach them through difficult decisions. The deputy was able to practise many of the skills of headship within a ‘safe’ environment, for example, contacting external agencies for support or meeting with the school improvement partner (SIP).

Organisation and structures

Strong organisational structures with clear staffing roles and responsibilities and agreed systems were a key element to support the shared leadership that was seen in the federated schools.

In school A, the headteacher established a ‘strategic group’ made up of teachers from both schools to take on responsibility for determining the outcomes of the federation. Responsibility was devolved to them and they met together regularly to discuss the key priorities for improvement of the federation. They agreed priorities, such as the purchase of a shared minibus to ensure that pupils from both schools could share the facilities and after-school clubs that were on offer. This suggestion was shared with staff in both schools and then the impact of these arrangements was measured by the group who reported key findings back to the headteacher, governing body and staff. The headteacher then took on the role of mentor, coaching the team and providing strategic direction. This enabled the group to be self-sustaining as they grew in confidence and expertise, become strategic and develop a system of shared leadership.

In the same setting, through the federation and grants from the DfES Innovation Unit five management points were created for members of the strategic group in order that they could be rewarded for their work. Two members of the group have gone on to become fast-track teachers, drawing on their past experiences to develop key leadership skills.

Time management and organisation of staff required school B to look again at the way diary dates were organised and shared with all at the beginning of the year. This had the added advantage of providing advance warning for those affected, including parents who often need to plan time from work in order to attend school functions.

The deputy in school C described how they had worked hard to develop an effective network in both schools: ”The SLT have needed to keep up to date with two sets of timetables and … need to have an awareness of what is happening in two schools at the same time”.

Federation allowed school C to agree what was important for their schools and create a corporate image for the federation in the community and in doing so provide similar experiences for staff and pupils. For example, the pupils shared the same entrance to both schools with one main reception office for parents and visitors. A joint staff room for both schools was created that allowed practice to be shared informally between staff, sharing experiences, and bringing the two distinct ethoses of the schools together.

However, in school D the headteacher found that a great deal of administration was required in one of the schools and described how she had worked on this for five weeks of the summer holiday. As the schools were at completely different stages of development, two separate school development plans (SDPs) were written, in addition to the two school self-evaluation forms (SEFs) and governors’ reports to different governing bodies. The headteacher found these differences to be vast and the replication of so many documents very time consuming. This resulted in her feeling she was falling behind in some of her other tasks. Bringing the two very different schools together allied to a very substantial administrative load, as well as pupil behavioural and staffing issues, was considered beyond an acceptable load. The end result was that the headteacher believed that her ability to fulfil the role to her satisfaction and previous level was to the detriment of her original school and so she decided to resign from her additional post.

Learning from each other

All the schools developed learning opportunities by working closely together. In school B, CPD was a key part of the success of collaboration. Joint INSET days and regular staff meetings were planned for all staff members in order to provide a structured forum for staff to come together. These meetings developed a common understanding and provided the opportunity for staff to learn from each other.

This was especially beneficial for the smaller school, which collaborated with school B where the lack of staff to take on responsibilities created its own difficulties. Other key elements of CPD were arranged in such a way to provide members of staff from both schools the opportunity to work and learn together, share experiences and all grow stronger, for example, the opportunity for leading from the middle (LftM) training was offered to teaching staff from both schools. As part of this three teachers led school-based research groups made up of staff from both schools who, during the year, researched generic curriculum development issues for both schools such as role-play, working together and the PHSCE (Personal, Health, Social, Citizenship Education) curriculum. These working parties organised training for staff at both schools.

In school A, the headteacher described the federation as a “two way learning process” that helped with a “long-term change of ethos”.

The purchase of two minibuses in one pair of schools meant that stronger links could be forged between the two schools, allowing expertise and resources to be shared by bussing pupils between the schools for after-school clubs, visits to the local community, specific lessons and celebrations. School B was involved in a local network, which prompted all the schools in the area to consider how they could collectively improve learning opportunities. This approach facilitated a shift away from competition between individual schools within the town, towards a shared responsibility for children’s learning by:

- developing an action plan that focused on learning
- creating English and Maths coordinators groups for the town
- sharing INSET and performance data
- creating common policies for attendance and admission of reception pupils.

Good practice and resources were shared in the case of school C through a reading scheme’s extension to encompass the needs of pupils in a middle school. Teams of coordinators in English, Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) were also created so that staff could work together and share their expertise and knowledge of the pupils, for example, the two ICT coordinators went on a course together and developed one policy for both federated schools. Similarly, a technician was also shared to support common systems and hardware in both schools.

In school B, the collaboration provided the experienced deputy with the opportunity to refine the skills of headship in a ‘safe’ environment, learning a great deal from the headteacher as a leading practitioner. The shared leadership provided many opportunities for open and frank discussions to share experiences and explain decisions. In school C, the deputies shared an office area and so were in regular contact with each other. By sharing learning experiences one of the deputies considered that their rate of progress and building of credibility within the school had been quicker than if they had been working by themselves. However, one of the deputies in school C was concerned about the type of support that was available for staff in federated schools. He felt that the existing training for deputies was centred

on more traditional school structures, with deputies being class-based and taking on responsibility for one part of the management of the school. He was concerned that the training did not reflect his more global view of the school and would have relished the opportunity to meet with other deputies and headteachers involved in federations.

Pupils

School B prided itself on its broad curriculum with quality learning experiences. Through the collaboration, the pupils from both schools began to share experiences and learn from each other, for example, the Year 6 pupils enjoyed a residential visit together and invited each other to their own end of Year 6 celebrations. This created new friendship groups across the two schools, which were continued through transition projects for the two secondary schools. These new friendships were especially important for pupils at the smaller school as there was a small number of pupils in each cohort, with only six girls in some classes. This benefit was also described by the headteacher in school A, whose pupils were able to visit after-school clubs at both schools allowing them to learn from each other, share facilities, provision and teacher skills. This arrangement also enabled the two communities to work more closely together and to learn from each other.

In schools C and D, the headteachers described how the proximity of both schools, coupled with shared values, sharing of staff and organisation of timetables (that was achieved through federation) led to improved transition for pupils between the two schools, making continuity and progression easier.

Governors

At school A, the chair of governors of one of the schools was interviewed and provided a clear and supportive role as a leader and critical friend. Both the chair of governors and headteacher shared a strategic vision for school improvement that encompassed the benefits that federation brings. The chair of governors did accept that the federation might mean more work but was philosophical, suggesting that the headteacher “would be seeking new challenges anyway”. The governing body saw the federation as something that would interest the headteacher and encourage him to stay at the school rather than looking for new challenges elsewhere.

In school B, the headteacher was clear as to how leadership of the governing bodies was vital to the initial establishment of the two schools’ collaboration: “The governors bring many key skills from their own experiences which enhance the process”. However, the headteacher went on to sound a note of caution by describing how some governors were concerned about the pupils in their school. They felt that by joining with another it would spread staff and expertise more thinly that could result in a lowering of standards or lack of improvement for the school. Some governors were very happy with the school as its own entity and were uneasy about any development which could risk that: “… there are some who still do not always find the collaboration a comfortable experience and present justified and understandable opposition”.

Through the collaboration, the two governing bodies in this context began to work more closely together, learning lessons from each other. The chairs met regularly to discuss progress and two governors from the larger school were co-opted onto the governing body of the smaller school. Likewise a governor from the smaller school joined the governing body of the larger school. A joint curriculum committee was then set up to support both schools. This collaboration provided governors with different experiences and the chance to reflect on the development of their school in the light of examples offered by the other. This provided opportunities for more creative

thought, better analysis of data and questioning of key priorities, all of which enabled the governors to improve their role as critical friend.

> There was a further bonus in that the increased number of governors involved in the curriculum committee supported new governors in their role, which was 'very successful, as it has allowed the newer governors to learn a lot from the experienced governors'. (headteacher, school B)

Development planning

In school B, the headteacher described how the rate of progress within the school had increased as it "retained the capacity to move forward, with a clear focus upon development work and not just collaboration". He explained how the shared leadership described previously had empowered staff, giving them the experience and confidence to take on responsibility for new roles and new projects that would have previously fallen to the headteacher to manage. For example, a new-build project was managed for one of the schools that sustained priorities outlined in the SDP and that improved accessibility and the quality of learning and teaching for Key Stage 1 pupils.

In school A, the federation was used as a lever for change. The heads believed that by joining they had learned from and supported each other and their respective schools. Joint opportunities for staff and pupils, together with £100,000 from the Innovations Unit, had provided additional support, resources and opportunities to increase the rate of change. Unfortunately, the money initially caused some friction between the two schools, as the respective staff were very concerned about how the money would be allocated and 'what was in it for their school'. Once the money was spent on the minibuses it actually helped the group return to why they wanted to be in a federation and consider more creative ways forward for both schools. This has enabled schools to move forward within the federation through their own SDPs.

Conclusion

This paper has looked at the impact of federation on four primary schools and has built up a picture of how the leadership teams, school development and organisation have evolved. This paper concludes that federations may have brought the following benefits and issues to those schools and their communities that formed part of this study.

Leadership

- The headteachers interviewed used federation to develop educational opportunities across the schools concerned. Federation has, in each setting, enabled an ethos and vision to be shared by a greater number of staff.
- Federation has provided headteachers with the opportunity to develop an enhanced range of skills through working within an extended context, in particular developing a strategy appropriate for both schools. While not all continued in this capacity, those that did perceived there to be development benefits for themselves as professionals.
- In one case, the demands of the role, in particular the differences between the schools and the duplication of some aspects, were seen to be unsustainable leading to resignation from the additional post.
- Evaluating the impact of federation in terms of pupil outcomes was a consideration for all and something that was monitored by the leadership teams and governing bodies who needed to develop systems to monitor effectiveness and share this with all stakeholders.

Distributed leadership

- In the schools studied, federations appeared to support shared leadership with the deputy, in particular, playing a more strategic role due to their increased time out of class. This, for some, gave them the opportunity to develop some of the skills of headship.
- Revised leadership structures increased capacity and provided forums that could consider school needs and match the school's resources to meet requirements.
- Opportunities for other staff members to exercise enhanced leadership was also cited. Senior and middle leaders benefited from the 'step up' that the increased deputies' role had for them. They also, in some cases, had the opportunity to lead across schools, either with a colleague from the other school or in a more independent, cross-school role.
- One deputy reflected on the need for external training provision to reflect leading in federated contexts; to be more personalised.

Management, staffing and school development

- Bringing two schools together was reported to accelerate school improvement as it provided a lever for change; for example, by joining two schools it was possible to create a larger leadership team and so members of staff were given opportunities (and financial reward) for increased responsibility and with that they brought new ideas for improvement.
- Staff beyond the schools' leadership structure could contribute to, and benefit from, revised arrangements, for example, site manager or technician arrangements across two sites.
- In all of the cases some staff were shared between the schools, enabling financial savings to be made in terms of salaries.

Learning together

- The federated schools offered real opportunities for staff to work together and learn from each other. There were benefits of working closely with a larger group of professionals that included enabling best practice to be shared and engaging in school-based research. This may not be appropriate if the schools are at very different stages of development.
- Federation, in some cases, improved opportunities for pupils to interact with a wider group and learn from each other. Where one school fed another there was some evidence of improved transition.
- The governors interviewed relished the opportunity to work closely and strategically with another school and appreciated the anticipated potential benefits that this arrangement may bring although some governors were concerned about the loss of their school's individual identity and perceived there may be a negative consequence on their own pupils' education through, for example, staff expertise being potentially more thinly applied.

Implications

Although a small-scale study, the following implications can be drawn from its conclusions.

For schools, they could consider:

1. The extent, informed by self-evaluation, to which joint or dual strategy is appropriate to the schools in the short, medium and long term.
2. Distributed leadership structures that improve the school's capacity to work in new ways.
3. Other staffing arrangements that might suit a federated model better, for example, technician support.
4. Revised governing body arrangements and/or practices that secure links, enable shared approaches and reduce workload, caused by repetition, for the headteacher.
5. Opportunities, appropriate to the schools' respective needs, which bring staff members together to:
   a. develop a shared vision for the federation and what it will provide its pupils
   b. promote shared learning to move improvement agendas together and maximise on staff expertise.
6. Establishing means to both evaluate the impact of federation in terms of pupil outcomes (employing an *Every Child Matters* five outcomes perspective) and of communicating these to stakeholders.

For the system, consideration could be given to:

1. the potential impact of duplication of expected requirements on headteachers leading federations.
2. The provision of training opportunities that better acknowledge varying contexts and support leaders at different levels in leading and managing in these.

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