



## The Exe Valley Federation & Moorsway Federation



### RE FEDERATION PROPOSAL

#### **INTRODUCTION**

As you are aware, there have been a lot of changes within education recently which have challenged school communities to think more creatively to ensure that we are best placed to keep our thriving village schools open for children in future years. After considerable research into the alternatives, Moorsway Federation and the Exe Valley Federation governors took the decision to form a Management Partnership in September 2023. Since then, we have gained from an increase in leadership capacity, opportunities for staff to work together at different levels, including senior leaders, curriculum leaders and class teachers. The collaborative work completed by teachers at Moorsway alongside colleagues from the Exe Valley Federation on curriculum design was well-received by our Leadership and School Improvement Adviser, Julie Stephens, who has been working with us since the start of the year. Staff from Moorsway have also been able to share their expertise with colleagues from the federation and this is developing into a genuinely collaborative partnership.

#### **PROPOSAL**

The Governing Board of Moorsway are now proposing to make the partnership arrangement a permanent one by moving into a formal federation whereby Moorsway Federation and the Exe Valley Federation join together and create a new federation. We believe this will ensure continuing strong leadership and high standards in teaching and learning whilst maintaining each school's individual ethos and values. The Exe Valley Federation already has a great deal of experience in operating as a federation and an excellent track record in school improvement. Both governing boards recognise many potential benefits for all ten schools. Moorsway will share the Executive Leadership of John Jolliffe. He is a very experienced school leader who works closely with the federation schools and across Devon supporting school improvement. He has a clear vision for the future direction of the federation and the Strategic Plan outlines six key aims for its continuous development [this may be found on the EVF website under 'Key Information' and then 'Strategic plans'].

#### **FEDERATION PRINCIPLES**

A federation is a family of schools, with each school retaining its unique character, its own budget and performance tables and having a separate Ofsted inspection; Church schools will continue to have separate SIAMS inspections. The current admissions processes will remain the same. There is no single blueprint for federation; each federation is tailored to the needs of the different schools and communities that are involved. There are currently approximately 30 federations across Devon involving over 80 schools, with the first federations in Devon forming in 2006 and many others considering this as a successful sustainable model for their school's future. Although the future direction of the education system is still unclear, the drive to academisation is likely to continue and by being part of a larger organisation, each member school can demonstrate that they are already part of a family of schools and derive benefit from working together. This should enable us to retain our autonomy and ensure that we protect the unique values of our schools into the future.

#### **BENEFITS**

We want to take this opportunity to explain our reasons behind this proposal, and offer you the chance to respond. The benefits of our proposed federation would give further opportunities for collaboration and ensure that Moorsway remains sustainable for the future. For the existing schools in the Exe Valley

Federation there are benefits from working with another school through sharing good practice and achieving greater economies of scale. In addition to this, we see the following benefits for the schools:

- Sharing strong and proven leadership
- Opportunities for middle leaders to develop leadership skills across a broader range of schools
- Joint planning and curriculum development opportunities for staff
- Opportunities for teachers to moderate children's work across a broader range of schools

For children, the benefits are as follows:

- Collaborative work on curriculum design and implementation of the curriculum ensure that children are able to learn more and remember more
- Shared teaching expertise and sharing best practice and joint training of staff impact positively on children's learning
- Opportunities to share support strategies for children with complex needs through SENDCO team days
- Greater availability of teaching resources across schools
- Greater access to a wider range of resources (human and physical), and opportunities to make some savings to reinvest in children's learning

We have seen the benefits of being part of a larger group of schools through the support we have received and the opportunities that we have had to share our good practice with colleagues from the Exe Valley Federation. Governors, senior leaders and teachers have all been very positive about the benefits of working collaboratively with the Exe Valley Federation and we have the support of Devon Education Services and the Diocese of Exeter in building this partnership. We are also starting to work collaboratively with the South Hams Federation, which comprises four village schools that are also very similar to ours. Mr Jolliffe has been working with Mrs Baker, Mrs Newman and Mrs Penhallurick every Thursday since September 2023 and was able to support the staff team during the Ofsted inspection at Cornwood in November. Other leaders from the Exe Valley Federation have also visited our schools to support work in early years, introducing Little Wandle phonics and to develop the work of middle leaders in delivering the curriculum. This has also enabled EVF leaders to refine their own practice as they have shared it with colleagues and benefit from the experience and expertise of the Moorsway leaders and teachers.

### ***CHURCH SCHOOLS***

There will be four church schools in the proposed federation. This means that the senior leaders of the church schools can work closely together to ensure that the vision and values of their respective Trust Deeds are sustained and developed. We have already done a lot of work on aligning our Christian vision for education and ensuring that our values support this vision with clear theological underpinning. Working together to prepare for SIAMS inspections will mean that we can learn from each other and share good practice, with the aim that all our schools are able to demonstrate that through its vision and practice, the school is living up to its foundation as a Church school and is enabling pupils and adults to flourish.

### ***GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE***

The schools within the federation will share one governing board made up from representatives from all school communities. Together they will make decisions in the best interests of all of the children across all of the schools. The make-up of the governing board has to adhere to the 2012 Constitution Federation Regulations, as amended in 2016. The membership of this single governing board includes representation for parents and staff, foundation (church) governors, co-opted governors and a local authority governor. Together this group of people will take overall responsibility for all the schools within the federation. Each school within the federation has two 'home school' governors who are involved in school reviews and spend time in their school to get to know the staff and children there. The election of parent and staff governors will take place at the end of the consultation period if both governing boards agree to proceed

with the new federation. The proposed size of the federated governing body would be 17, which would comprise:

- 2 Parent governors
- 2 Staff governors (including the Executive Headteacher)
- 1 Local Authority appointed governor
- 3 Foundation governors (to include an Ex-Officio)
- 9 Co-opted governors

As the new federation will include ten schools, groups of schools and governors will work together to challenge and support senior leaders in three local hubs. This will enable governors to keep in touch with their 'home schools' and maintain strong links with the staff and children there. The three hubs will comprise:

East Exe Valley Federation: Brampford Speke C of E School, Silverton C of E School, Thorverton C of E School and Whimble School

West Exe Valley Federation: Cheriton Fitzpaine School, Newton St Cyres School and Sandford School

Moorsway Federation: Cornwood C of E School, Shaugh Prior School and The Erme School

The hub meetings will take place termly, alternating with full governing board meetings, which all governors will attend. The Governing Boards are proposing that the federation start date would be 1<sup>st</sup> January 2025.

### **LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE**

In order to ensure that there is sufficient leadership capacity at a senior level, Mr Jolliffe will assume overall responsibility for the work of the federation. Mrs Baker would continue in her role as Executive Headteacher at Moorsway and will retain a high level of autonomy and the same level of responsibility held by the other Executive Heads in the federation. They will continue to work closely with the Heads of School, who are responsible for the everyday running of their schools and meet weekly to ensure that they have the support they need to sustain school improvements.

### **CONSULTATION OPPORTUNITIES**

The Governors of Moorsway Federation and the Exe Valley Federation have set up a consultation process to seek the views of parents, staff, the community, the Local Authority, the Diocese and other key partners. The consultation process will last six weeks, starting from Friday, 27<sup>th</sup> September 2024. Governors would welcome your views and comments and invite you to any of the following meetings with Mr Jolliffe, the Chair of Governors of the Exe Valley Federation and the Chair of Governors for Moorsway Federation:

**Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> October at 9.15am at Cornwood C of E School**

**Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> October at 9.15am at The Erme School, Ivybridge**

**Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> October at 3.30pm at Shaugh Prior School**

**Friday 11<sup>th</sup> October at 2.15pm at Silverton C of E School**

Staff are welcome to come to these meetings but additional opportunities for staff to express their views will be arranged during the consultation period. If you are unable to attend the above meetings and would like to discuss this proposal with Mr John Jolliffe, Executive Headteacher, or your Chair of Governors, please contact your school office and make an appointment in the usual way. A Q&A sheet has been added to this email and is also on the school website. It is based on previous re-federation consultations and will be updated after each consultation meeting.

Responses to this consultation report on re-federation should be addressed to the Chair of Governors of your school and must be received by **Friday 15<sup>th</sup> November 2024 at 3.30pm**. For all schools these can be

emailed to **federationconsultation4@gmail.com** or in writing c/o the Clerk to the Governors at your child's school or handed in to the School Office at any of the schools addressed to 'The Chair of Governors'.

It is the Governors who will make the final decision, drawing upon a broad evidence base including the views of all stakeholders [parents, staff, children, Trade Unions and Parish Councils]. The governing board from each organisation considering federation takes its own decision. As with any governing board decision this is a simple majority vote taken at a governing board meeting. This will take place on Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2024 and we will let you know about the outcome of the decision soon afterwards.

### **Questions and Answers on the proposal that Exe Valley Federation and Moorsway Federation join to create a new federation**

*These questions have been asked in previous re-federation consultations. They will be added to as the consultation meetings with Moorsway Federation take place.*

#### ***Q1: I can't make any of the consultation meetings, but I want to ask a question/share my views, how do I do this?***

If you are unable to attend these meetings and would like to discuss this proposal with the Executive Headteacher, or your Chair of Governors, please contact your school office and make an appointment in the usual way. Alternatively, you can write with your question/views, addressing them to the Chair of Governors of your school, but they must be received by Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2024. For all schools these can be emailed to **federationconsultation4@gmail.com** or in writing c/o the Clerk to the Governors at your child's school or handed in to your child's school office addressed to 'The Chair of Governors'.

#### ***Q2: What are the benefits for the current EVF schools if Moorsway joins?***

A: With Moorsway, EVF would have nearly 900 pupils in total (together with the budget that goes with that number of pupils) and this means that it is far less likely that EVF could be taken over unilaterally, say by a Multi Academy Trust in the future. There are also lots of things that Moorsway does that EVF would like to share in, such as outdoor learning, sport and music, but also staff expertise generally. If Moorsway joins with EVF, the staff would join shared curriculum teams and that will really help to strengthen their impact across all the schools.

#### ***Q3: Will more schools join EVF apart from the Moorsway Federation?***

A: It is likely that a few more schools may join the new federation. All decisions would be made on a school by school basis and they would need to fit with the current schools so as not to alter the ethos of the existing federations. There have been occasions in the past when the Exe Valley Federation has been asked to re-federate or join at MAT and we have decided that this has not been the right course of action for us.

#### ***Q4: What is the federation's relationship with Devon County Council and what does Devon County Council think about the proposal?***

A: Collaboration is important, with schools working together. Devon County Council has always been proactive on the federation front generally, probably because Devon has a lot of small village schools. It doesn't matter if you are an academy or a local authority maintained school.

When Sandford consulted the local authority on joining the federation, they received a letter which was overwhelmingly supportive of the proposition and acknowledged that it is becoming increasingly challenging for schools to stand alone and for leaders to work in isolation whilst continuing to deliver everything that is expected of them both by Ofsted and parents. We will be consulting the local authority as part of the process for Moorsway and Exe Valley joining together in a new federation.

***Q5: What is the federation's relation with Exeter Diocese and what does Exeter Diocese think about the proposal?***

A: The Exeter Diocesan Board of Education Committee (EDBE) recommends all schools should be working in a strong formal partnership (academy trust or federation) or have a clear direction of travel to join such a partnership. Currently 89% of Church of England Schools in the Diocese of Exeter are in formal partnerships. The EDBE respects and values local governance. It supports partnerships which seek to secure the best opportunities for children, young people and wider school communities, and recognises that we can achieve more together. We will be consulting the diocese as part of the process for Moorsway and Exe Valley joining together in a new federation.

***Q6: Does the Exe Valley Federation have a development plan?***

A: There is a Strategic Plan for 2021 to 2026 and this outlines the six key areas for development within five years. This the 'big picture' plan for the federation's future and each year this is broken down into objectives that will ensure we meet the overarching aims. This is published on the EVF website. Underneath this, there is an annual Federation Development Plan that outlines the specific aims for the year under the same six headings. This is shared with parents at the start of the school year. Each school then has its own development plan that identifies specific objectives to work on during the year. Governors review the progress of schools towards meeting these objectives at its hub board meetings.

***Q7: Is there a cap on the size of the federation?***

A: The EVF's growth plan was developed in late 2022, following the government's Education White Paper plans for 2030. We know we need to grow a bit more to be confident of being able to convert to an academy trust in our own right or at least be a significant partner in joining an existing one. We are committed to working with similar schools and to growing at a rate that is manageable and sustainable for all the members. We are currently working collaboratively with the four schools in the South Hams Federation and this is already proving to be beneficial.

***Q8: Will it become a MAT in 2030?***

A: The DfE stated in 2022/23 that it expects all schools to be in a strong group of schools by 2030 and preferably a MAT. This is because the dual system of local authorities and academies is not sustainable and this direction of travel is shared by all political parties but nothing is set in stone.

***Q9: What are the gains and losses in terms of funding and finance?***

A: There are marginal gains in terms of sharing membership fees for curriculum resources and some contracts like photocopying and school meals. There can be benefits to schools in terms of pooling resources to ensure that one school gets what it needs at one go, rather than piecemeal. This is particularly true of technology equipment. Pooling contracts usually means getting a better level of service through sharing across a larger number of institutions.

***Q10: If for any reason in the future, the Federation finances look bleak, this would surely have a knock-on effect to the existing federations. Is this a one-way ticket? Or could one school leave the Federation if we didn't like the way things were looking in the future?***

A: Any school can leave a federation if the governors vote in favour of this. It happens very rarely but it is possible if things changed in future and a better option became available. A new governing board would need to be established and systems for effective leadership and governance would need to be re-instated.

***Q11: I assume there will be operating terms agreed to, which specify ways of working and authority of respective parties? Is it possible that these terms could change in the future, potentially reducing local decision making authority? Or do the terms remain static long-term?***

A: There is a Scheme of Delegation which makes it clear where responsibility for decisions at different levels lies in relation to the Executive Head's authority and that of Heads of School and governors. There

will be governors on the new board who are responsible for knowing and understanding Moorsway Federation schools and if there are governors who are willing to move from the Moorsway Federation board to the new board, they will be the link governors for the first year at least. As long as the federation remains under the control of the local authority, this is unlikely to change. Academies have a different set of operating procedures and scheme of delegation which would be agreed by governors prior to conversion. In large Multi-Academy Trusts, the authority sits with the Trustees and Members but some responsibility can be delegated to local boards.

***Q12: Is it possible to exit the federation if the terms did change adversely?***

A: It is possible for a school to leave a federation if this is proposed to the governing board. It does happen occasionally but usually when a significant change is about to take place or there is a major alteration in values and ethos. If the EVF ever had to convert to a MAT, there would be a full consultation process before any decision was made and it would be possible to de-federate at that point. Once schools become academies, they cannot revert to local authority control but can be re-brokered if necessary and joined to a different MAT.