



Friday, 10th March 2023

Dear Parents and Carers,

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, Whimble School and the Exe Valley Federation governors took the decision to form a Management Partnership in September 2022. 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 Whimble alongside colleagues from the Exe Valley Federation on curriculum design was well-received by the Ofsted inspectors who came to visit Whimble in December. The lead inspector was very interested in the Management Partnership and you may recall, commented in her report that governors "Have been instrumental in supporting the school to work with a federation to develop the curriculum further." Staff from Whimble have also been able to share their expertise with colleagues from the federation and this is developing into a genuinely collaborative partnership.

The Governing Board of Whimble are now proposing to make the partnership arrangement a permanent one by moving into a formal federation whereby Whimble School would become a member of the Exe Valley 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 has an excellent track record in school improvement. Both governing boards recognise many potential benefits for all seven schools. Whimble 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']. Mr Jolliffe works closely with the Heads of School, who are responsible for the everyday running of their schools and meet weekly to share their work. Mrs Shilston would continue in her role as Head of School at Whimble and will retain a high level of autonomy and the same level of responsibility held by the other Heads of School in the federation.

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. The current admissions processes will remain the same. The schools within the federation will share one governing board

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Newton St Cyres Primary School Station Road, Newton St Cyres, Devon EX5 5DL T: 01392 851267 newtonadmin@exevalleyfederation.org.uk

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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. 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.

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 Whimble 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
- Sharing teaching expertise and sharing best practice and joint training of staff to impact on children's learning
- Greater availability of teaching resources
- Increasing opportunities for the children to mix with a wider group both academically and socially
- Greater access to a wider range of resources (human and physical), and opportunities to make some savings to reinvest in children's learning
- Joint planning and curriculum development opportunities for staff

The federation will have one governing board composed of representatives from each school community. 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 or three 'home school' governors who lead Learning Walks 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 15, 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)
- 7 Co-opted governors

The Governing Boards are proposing that the federation start date would be 1st September 2023.

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The Governors of Whimble School 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 Monday, 13th March 2023. 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 Whimble School:

Wednesday 22nd March at 9.15am at Whimble Village Hall. This will be led by Whimble Governors with presentation by EHT, followed by Q and A.

Presentation at Whimble School, Monday 27th March at 6.00pm for parents. This will be led by Whimble Governors with presentation by EHT, followed by Q and A.

Thursday 20th April at 3.45pm at Thorverton School. Presentation to EVF parents [Whimble parents are welcome to come too]

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 meeting at Whimble.

Your questions and written responses should be addressed to the Chair of Governors of your school and must be received by **Friday 5th May 2023 at 3.30pm**. For all schools these can be emailed to **federationconsultation3@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 seven 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.

We look forward to hearing from you and will, of course, keep you fully informed regarding our final decision which each governing board will make on 18th May 2023.

Yours sincerely,



Linden Best, Chair of Governors,
Whimble Primary School



Jackie Enright, Chair of Governors,
Exe Valley Federation

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