



Questions and Answers for all the schools on the proposal that Whimple Primary School joins Exe Valley Federation Parents and Carers

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

Q1: I can't make either of the meetings on 22nd or 27th March, 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, 5th May**. 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 your child's school office addressed to 'The Chair of Governors'.

Q2: What is a school federation?

A federation is a formal arrangement where schools (of any size or type) come together to share a single Governing Board. The schools retain their separate legal status and have their own income streams, admissions, performance tables and Ofsted inspections. Each federation is different, but they work together to maximise funding, resources and expertise. Federation brings a security in leadership, but with room to allow schools to work differently to secure the best outcomes for children.

Q3: What is the Exe Valley Federation?

The Exe Valley Federation currently consists of six village primary schools, Thorverton, Cheriton Fitzpaine, Newton St Cyres, Brampford Speke, Silverton and Sandford. Sandford was the most recent school to join the Federation in early 2021.

They are all rural village schools which still maintain their own individual personalities and characters, but there are lots of differences: a mixture of old and new buildings for example, and different ways of doing things in each school.

The Federation has one Governing Board that currently consists of 13 governors, two or three of which look after each school and who go on learning walks and get to know the staff, parents and children of that school; it's a really good system that works well. We are also able to use associate governors to good effect.

Each school in the Federation is run by a Head of School, which is slightly different to a Headteacher. The Executive Headteacher, Mr John Jolliffe, oversees everything, making sure he sees all the schools in the federation as much as possible. Essentially, the benefits of EVF are working together and sharing ideas; when we come across a challenge in one school, we find a solution in another. All the Heads of School meet weekly which is hugely beneficial.

Q4: Will the EVF Governing Board change if Whimple joins?

If Whimple joins EVF this will mean that the Whimple Governing Board will disappear and EVF's overarching Governing Board will take its place.

EVF will have one governing board which will be made up of representatives from each school community and there is scope for some Whimple School governors could join the EVF Governing Board. At the moment we have two parent governors, a Local Authority governor, two staff governors and co-opted governors which total 15. There can be associate governors as well.

If Whimble joins EVF, the make-up of the governing board has to comply with 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 participate in 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 re-federation. The proposed size of the federated governing body would remain at 15 and this 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

Q5: What are the benefits of the Federation for children in particular?

From the children's perspective, they have shared opportunities, in sport particularly, and are generally just part of the same organisation. For example, EVF has a band (which also helps to solve the problem of too many of the same instrumentalists in one school) from which the children gain so much. There are residential visits where children learn how to be part of a bigger group, which is important in preparing them for secondary school. What is really important to say is that day to day, nothing changes for the children as a result of joining the federation: same uniform, teachers, school signage etc. The changes are further up the chain. It's also reassuring to be part of a bigger organisation like EVF.

Q6: What are the benefits of the Federation for staff in particular?

Staff gain a tremendous amount working with each other across the Federation. Working in classes with different year groups can be a challenge, and something which you don't often find in bigger schools. EVF knows how mixed year groups work and so staff can support each other. Staff can share professional development as well. EVF can buy in a speaker that just one school could not afford on its own and the cost per person is then lower. Mrs Shilston will carry on as Head of School if Whimble federates. There will be better and extra training for staff and sharing of expertise. It also provides lots of development opportunities for staff without them having to leave the Federation, meaning that we can retain good staff, for example curriculum specialists can share their knowledge and responsibility in a collaborative team.

Being part of the Federation will mean that staff are less lonely and can access best practice, which ultimately will benefit the children.

Q7: What are the benefits for the current EVF schools if Whimble joins?

With Whimble, EVF would have nearly 700 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 Whimble does that EVF would like to share in, such as outdoor learning, sport and music, but also staff expertise generally. If Whimble joins, the staff would join the EVF curriculum teams and that will really help to strengthen their impact across all the schools,

Q8: Why has Whimble Primary School decided to explore federation now?

The Whimble Governing Board has been exploring formal collaboration with other schools for many years now, as the local authority obliges schools to do and particularly as the pressure on school budgets just gets bigger and bigger as time goes by. There is huge pressure on schools, particularly around workload, recruitment and funding.

Q9: How will this change Mrs Shilston's role leading Whimble?

Mrs Shilston will continue to lead Whimble School on a day-to-day basis. Generally, EVF Heads of School split their time 80% leading and 20% teaching. It's really important that that is maintained so that Heads of School can spend the greater majority of their time leading their respective schools.

Q10: Does EVF intend to move all the schools into one big mega-school site? If Whimble joins EVF, can Whimble make sure that EVF can't sell off any part of Whimble School's site?

Building a mega school for all the schools in the Federation really wouldn't work. Villages need schools to maintain vitality and there is no intention to change that. EVF believes in village schools and that children have the right to

go to a school that is sited in the heart of their community, in their village, and Devon County Council supports this. There is also a small school grant that is quite substantial that would be lost if there was one big mega EVF school which would mean that EVF would no longer be viable. In terms of selling off school buildings and land, again this is not something that would be a desirable, or viable, option. In a federation model the ownership of the land and buildings remains with the local authority (unlike multi-academy trusts) and there would be many legal hurdles to overcome for the local authority to do that, particularly in relation to playing fields. Sport England is very proactive in objecting to the sale of any school playing fields as well. It would also be really very hard to surmount the legal hurdles to be able to build a mega school.

Q11: Will more schools join EVF apart from Whimble?

It is likely that a few more schools may join the existing 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 Exe Valley Federation.

Q12: What is EVF's relationship with Devon County Council and what does Devon County Council think about the proposal?

Collaboration is important, with schools working together. Devon County Council has always been pro-active 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 Whimble possibly joining the federation.

Q13: How long does federation take?

The consultation period is six weeks long. It started on 13th March and ends on 5th May 2023. There are several potential parent and carer meetings in that six week period to attend, on 23rd March and 27th March. Details on how to attend each of these meetings will be in the weekly newsletters. The governors of Whimble and the Federation will meet separately as well after the consultation period has closed at 3.30pm on 5th May. If, after taking into account all the views of the stakeholders across all the schools, including you the parents and carers, each governing board agrees that Whimble will join EVF, this will take place on 19th May 2023.