

Consultation on Proposals for a Tibshelf Schools Federation

Background

Tibshelf Infants and Nursery and Town End Junior Schools have been collaborating for the past 9 months by sharing an executive headteacher. This process has been running well, and the governing boards of both schools wish to make this arrangement permanent by entering into a formal partnership known as a federation.

This document explains the reasons both governing boards see this as the best option to secure the future of both schools, at a time when pressures on small rural schools are intensifying.

The main change due to a federation would be the amalgamation of the two existing governing boards into a single governing body, working for the best interests of the children in both schools, and answerable to the school communities

There would be a single Executive Headteacher responsible for the running of both schools. It is not a proposal to merge or close either school. Each school would retain its own distinctive character, though there would be a common vision driving the school leadership. If the proposals to build a new Primary School are given approval early in 2023, then the schools would be in an ideal position to make a smooth transition on its completion

We wish to consult widely with all interested parties before making any final decision, and the timetable for this is given below.

Timetable

3 rd October 2022	Proposal published & consultation period begins.
1 st November 2022	Meeting for staff & parents at Tibshelf Infants and Nursery School to discuss the proposals.
2 nd November 2022	Meeting for staff & parents at Town End School to discuss the proposals.
25 th November 2022	Closing date for written responses, which should be sent to the chair of governors via either school office.
29 th November 2022	Joint meeting of both governing bodies to consider responses and make final decision on whether to apply to the Secretary of State for Education to federate.
17 th January 2023	Incorporation of the new governing board for the Federation. First meeting and election of new Chair and Vice Chairs.
17 th April 2023	New Executive Head begins their role

Reasons for federation

These are challenging times for rural primary age schools, as educational expectations rise and budgets are squeezed. Because of this, there are clearly benefits in sharing skills and expertise of individual staff between schools, and this has been encouraged from all levels of the education system. The governing bodies believe that federation increases the opportunities to share good practice across the schools for the benefit of all their children.

Both schools have been judged by OFSTED as 'good' and are expected to play equal parts in the proposed federation. The current leadership collaboration has worked well for both schools under Mrs Andrews. Although she has now handed in her resignation she fully supports the decision to become a Federation, and believes this is the best way forward to

secure the future for both schools. It will consolidate the ongoing collaborative improvements that are being made.

It is not sustainable to continue with two non-teaching heads. From a purely financial perspective, having one, non-teaching executive headteacher across both schools can save money every year. There are other efficiency savings that can also be achieved from working in partnership which should enable both schools to maintain their current staffing levels, despite budget pressures, and will continue to help in the future.

If we are fortunate to move into a new, modern school in the next few years, then this will help achieve further efficiencies, in particular with savings on energy bills.

Implications of federation

What would change?

There would be little change to the character of each school. Teaching will continue as at present, although over time there will be a convergence of the schools' curriculum and policies, and a common vision from the governors and headteacher. Both schools already have a similar ethos, working very closely together for many years. Membership of the 5 Pits Partnership has also been successful in building strong relationships with other local schools, and this would continue.

While both schools will retain their present names, they will now be described as 'part of the Tibshelf Schools Federation', and this will appear on the school websites and literature.

Governance

The biggest change on federation will be the creation of a new governing board, whose aim will be to achieve the best possible education for the children in both schools. The new governing board will consist of up to 12 governors, representing stakeholders across both communities:

- 2 Elected Parent Governors
- 1 Local Authority Governor
- 1 Elected Staff Governor
- 1 Executive Headteacher
- 7 Co-opted Governors

The new governing board will retain most of the existing governors who are keen to continue, and will co-opt additional members from amongst the parents, staff and community to give a wide range of skills and representation. There will be elections (as required by law) for the parent and staff governors during the summer term.

The new governing board will in general alternate its meetings between the two schools.

Staffing

A new permanent executive headteacher will be recruited to act be the strategic lead of the Federation. Each school will have its own designated operational leader. All other current staff will retain their existing contracts with Derbyshire County Council. We will continue to make opportunities for joint training and staff meetings where possible and take best advantage of the 5 Pits Partnership. It is possible that future appointments could be across the federation, rather than with an individual school, if there is a clear benefit.

Finance

The budgets for the two schools will remain separate, but the governors will have the option to spend funds jointly where that is to the benefit of both schools.

Admissions

The new governing board will set the admissions policy, which will be administered by Derbyshire County Council, as at present. It is important to note that there would be no automatic transfer from Infants to Juniors as they would still retain their own identity, and parents/carers would still have to apply for a place at Town End as they do currently.

What would stay the same?

Most other aspects of school life will stay the same. The governors of both schools believe that federation is the best option for maintaining the schools as we would want them in our village communities.

Response to Federation proposal

We invite parents, staff and any other interested parties to meetings to discuss these proposals on Tuesday 1st November at the Infant & Nursery School, and Wednesday 2nd November at Town End School. Both meetings will start at 5:30pm.

If you would like to make written comments or ask questions, please submit these to the Chair of Governors at either school, or post them on the on-line forum that has been set up. The forum will be updated with comments and answers to questions throughout the consultation period. Use this link to access the online forum: <https://www.tibshelf-inf.derbyshire.sch.uk/questions>

The Chairs of Governors are as follows:

Karen Waring – Infants and Nursery School

Barrie Green – Town End Junior School

Both governing bodies will meet on 29th November 2022 to review all the comments received, and make a final decision on whether to proceed with the federation plan, or to amend the details. A final decision will be circulated early in December 2022.