

## First Federation Visit November 10<sup>th</sup> 2009 ( Ivan Godfrey )

Key points ( not in order of importance )

- There is no single pattern for developing a successful Federation – the current pattern for the First Federation appears to be working very well for the schools involved.
- Federation is an evolving process
- **Everything is focussed on the impact upon pupils – ‘What is right for the children?’**
- 4 schools within federation – 2 (Blackpool + Chudleigh Knighton) from 2006, 2 others (Salcombe + Lady Swards) joined in April 2009
- Distance apart does not appear to be a barrier to success : in fact traditional rivalry between adjacent schools seems to be a common barrier to federation and federation at a distance may be better for some
- Each school maintains its individuality, its own distinctness and its own uniform
- Management structure is 1 Executive Head (EH), 1 GB, 1 Business Manager (BM), 1 Clerk, 4 Heads of Teaching & Learning (HTLs) : EH, BM + Clerk purchased jointly by all schools on a pro rata basis
- Federated BM has task of generating income and looking for funding access
- The SENCO works across all of the schools – economies of size allow possibility of commissioning own EWO in future
- The leadership system is NOT hierarchical : this is a new form of ‘distributive’ leadership
- EH has to stand back and allow HTLs to develop shared values / aims in their own way : EH monitors work across all schools : EH cannot be a ‘control freak’ : EH should do the most reading, be aware of national issues, act as ‘gatekeeper’ as to what is/is not important : EH needs to know the individual nature of each school and undertake coaching and monitoring within the context of each school : EH takes on issues such as Child Protection / Grievance Issues etc
- HTLs are autonomous leaders and have considerable independence : to all extents and purposes they are the HTs as far as parents / the community are concerned
- HTL at Blackpool described his situation as ‘having his cake and eating it’ – involved with all aspects of teaching, people management, promoting and developing curriculum, all with the safety net of EH to deal with paperwork and challenging issues
- Initial parental anxieties swept away within weeks of Federation taking place
- Improved opportunities and standards for children across all 4 schools : all schools have seen / are seeing standards rising
- Staff energised and revitalised by Federation – has given them new opportunities : prevents staff from becoming stuck for too long in one role : HTL particularly enthusiastic about ability to focus on teaching and learning
- Vital importance of ‘internal consistencies’ – i.e. all staff working to promote same standards
- Opportunities for networking of professionals allows staff to share / gain expertise and raise standards to levels of the best wherever that occurs within 4 schools : sharing best practice becomes a reality
- New staff who join the Federation have a Federation contract ... but it is not in anyone’s interest to force staff to work within a school that might be distant from their home (unless they wish to)
- Quality and number of applicants for posts significantly higher than for single schools – applicants perceive greater opportunities within a federation
- GB of 13 has a much more strategic role with a real emphasis on challenge : full GB meets once a term : able to deal with the key issues of education rather than involvement in minor inconsequential items, talk about children rather than schools and, crucially, all children in all schools
- Strategic Leadership Committee (3 senior governors, EH, BM + Clerk) meet half-termly. CoG + EH meet once a fortnight for 2 hours and then joined by BM + Clerk for further 1 – 2 hours
- Clerk plays a crucial and considerably enhanced role
- Parent governors (‘speak with the voice of a parent and not the parents’ voice) linked to HTL in a school other than their own
- PTAs ( or equivalent ) become more important – an active parent partnership may well give a better input than a large number of parents on the GB
- Not a cost-cutting exercise but an opportunity to work more effectively so that money can go to supporting pupils
- A real incentive for federation is that administration and matters of procurement can become more uniform, more cost effective and less time consuming for senior teaching staff
- Former CoG of Lady Swards (joined April 2009) could only see positives from Federation and not identify a single problem
- Beware of federating for the wrong reasons: federation needs to follow clear strategic thinking and be based upon the opportunities for further evolution
- Question should not be ‘Why federate?’ but ‘Why not federate?’