



Report on the findings of the consultation on the proposal for: The Federation of The Thomas Coram Church of England School and Victoria Church of England Infant and Nursery School, Berkhamsted

Executive Summary

In May 2017 Thomas Coram and Victoria entered into a Formal Collaboration agreement, which allowed the Governing Bodies to set up a Joint Executive Committee (JEC) to explore future options and recruit a new leadership team (an Executive Headteacher and two Heads of School). The new leadership team started in September 2017, although under this agreement each school retained a separate Governing Body.

In December 2017, the Thomas Coram and Victoria Governing Bodies separately agreed to recommend a move to a Federation under a single Governing Body, and initiated a formal consultation process. The consultation ran for six weeks from Friday 5th January 2018 until midday Friday 16th February 2018. The proposed Federation would be called Castle Church of England Federation.

A full set of consultation documents was sent to stakeholders including parents/carers, staff, Herts County Council, the Diocese of St Albans, the Department for Education, trade unions, local church congregations, Headteachers at Berkhamsted schools and Berkhamsted town councillors. The documents were emailed, made available as paper copies and posted online on each school's website.

Stakeholders were invited to answer a direct question on the response form, provide comments, and/or raise questions at face-to-face meetings (such as staff meetings and public information drop-ins). The Federation consultation was mentioned in school assemblies during the consultation period; children were encouraged to ask questions of staff or adults at home.

A total of 38 response forms were returned either as hard copies or on the online response form. Of these, 33 out of the 38 (87%) respondents indicated support for a Federation. Comments were provided by 15 respondents. The full text from the comments is included in Appendix 1.

Based on these responses, the JEC is making two recommendations, to each school's full Governing Body:

5.1 That each Governing Body now holds a formal vote on the proposal to form a Federation (which requires a unanimous vote from all Foundation Governors to pass).

5.2 If a Federation is voted for, that each Governing Body authorises the JEC to continue to make recommendations (and decisions where appropriate) on the specific actions and a timetable to achieve the 16th April target.



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This report describes the background, the process, and the findings of the consultation on the formation of Castle Church of England Federation under a single Governing Body. It has five main sections and two Appendices.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Governing Bodies of Thomas Coram and Victoria have been looking at ways of working more closely together to offer the best educational provision for our children. Our vision across both schools is to be a Christian family that ensures the highest quality outcomes for all children through integrated and outstanding teaching and learning experiences. This vision includes building a combined culture of high expectations and continual improvement, which is underpinned by effective and inspirational leadership.

In May 2017 Thomas Coram and Victoria entered into a Formal Collaboration agreement, which allowed the Governing Bodies to recruit an Executive Headteacher (Mr Halls) and to reorganise the senior leadership teams in both schools. This formal agreement also allowed us to set up a Joint Executive Committee (JEC) – essentially a group of governors, made up of an equal number from both schools, to work with Mr Halls on this Collaboration and assess our options for the future.

In January 2018 the Victoria and Thomas Coram governors proposed a move from Collaboration to a Federation, as we both believed that a single Governing Body would be able to:

- formalise and protect what has already been developed through our Formal Collaboration
- develop a shared strategic direction for both schools (with consistency of policies, formed by one Governing Body. See Appendix 2 for proposed Governing Body composition)
- streamline decision-making to make more effective use of resources between both schools, ultimately improving outcomes for our children
- offer career development opportunities for our staff - as a single employer for both schools, the Federation can recruit and retain high quality staff across the whole Primary stage

This report describes the process and the outcome of the consultation on the Federation proposal and delivers two recommendations from the JEC for consideration by both Governing Bodies.

2. CONSULTATION PROCESS

The JEC followed the requirements for the consultation process as prescribed by legislation (section 24 of the Education Act 2002) and advised by Herts for Learning and the Diocese of St Albans for schools considering the formation of a Federation.

The consultation ran for six weeks from Friday 5th January 2018 until midday Friday 16th 2018. The documents were emailed or paper copies were delivered to key stakeholders, and were made available online on each schools website.

The consultation pack comprised:

- A letter from the Executive Headteacher
- A document indicating the nature of the consultation process; the proposed structure for the new Federation Governing Body; the reasons why each Governing Body was recommending a move to a Federation; and their vision for the future
- A response form

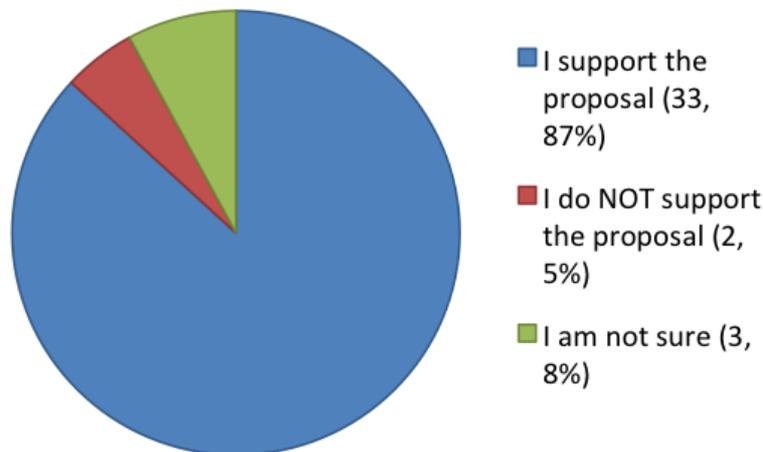
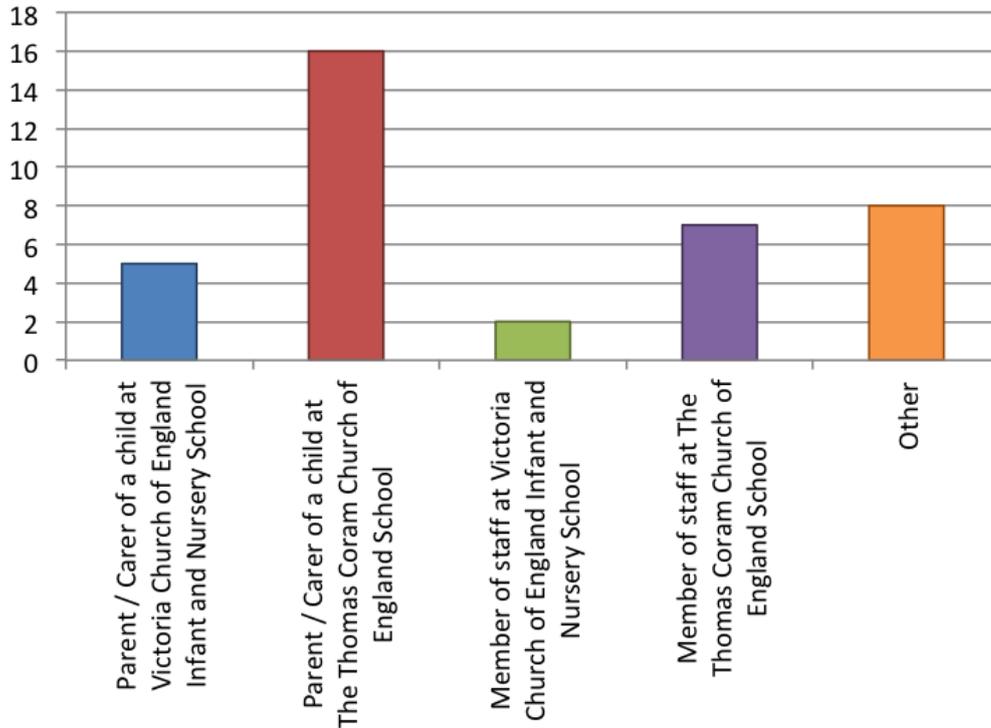
The documents also contained a range of FAQs, and listed two public information drop-in sessions on the consultation. The following stakeholders were consulted:

Parents/Carers	The full set of documents were emailed to all parents/carers. Hard copies were available from each school office. Ways to respond to the documents were also suggested including posting hard copy or submitting online forms or attending one of two information drop-in sessions (attended by the Executive Headteacher and Governors, held in the afternoon and evening). Reminders about the drop-ins, and the need to provide feedback were regularly included in the schools' newsletters, social media and correspondence with parents/carers.
Staff and trade union representatives	Every member of staff received a hard copy of the consultation documents. Meetings were held in December 2017 and covered all teaching, support and office staff. Staff away or on maternity leave were contacted. Trade union representatives were emailed the consultation documents. Governors attended a follow up meeting for staff at the 3 rd January 2018 staff training day. Staff and trade union representatives were encouraged to also attend the information drop-in sessions. No one from the unions or professional associations attended, although one union acknowledged receipt of the consultation and asked to receive any further communication.
Pupils	The Federation consultation was mentioned in school assemblies during the consultation period; children were encouraged to ask questions of staff or adults at home.
Church congregations	The consultation was emailed to congregations, the PCCs and clergy at St Peter's Church Great Berkhamsted, All Saints' Church Berkhamsted and St Michael and All Angels, Sunnyside. Presentations were given during church services at St Peter's and Sunnyside.
Other key stakeholders	The Diocese of St Albans and Herts County Council were formally consulted. The Secretary of State/Department for Education was sent the consultation documents, who acknowledged receipt and provided the following comment: <i>'Whilst we are unable to comment on your specific proposal, the Department's general position is that federations often provide a stronger guarantee that the partnership between schools will be sufficiently high impact and permanent to generate significant and sustained improvements.'</i> The documents were also sent to the Chair of Governors at Swing Gate School, Headteachers at all local Berkhamsted schools, Berkhamsted Town Council, and to key contacts at Herts for Learning.
Berkhamsted community	Poster versions of the consultation were put up in Berkhamsted Town Hall, on town notice boards, in the library, in the three Doctors surgeries and on Church notice boards. There was press coverage of the consultation in the Berkhamsted & Tring Gazette.

3 CONSULTATION FINDINGS

3.1 Response forms

A total of 38 response forms were returned either as hard copies or on the online response form. Of these, 33 out of the 38 (87%) respondents indicated support for a Federation.



	Total	I support the proposal		I do not support the proposal		I am not sure	
	Number	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Parent/Carer of a child at Thomas Coram	16	15	94%	1	6%	0	0%
Parent/Carer of a child at Victoria	5	4	80%	1	20%	0	0%
Member of staff at Thomas Coram	7	4	57%	0	0%	3	43%
Member of staff at Victoria	2	2	100%	0	0%	0	0%
Other interested party	8	8	100%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	38	33	87%	2	5%	3	8%

3.2 Comments on the response forms

Comments were provided by 15 respondents. The full text from the comments is included in Appendix 1. The main themes emerging from the comments covered the perceived disadvantage to Swing Gate children; the potential impact on staffing and finances of both schools; and the balance of governors in the single Governing Body.

3.3 Feedback from information drop-ins and staff meetings

The governor drop-in sessions were very sparsely attended, with a total of three attendees (comprising parents) over two sessions. The comments from these parents were supportive of the proposal.

The staff meetings in December were well attended. Comments given at the meetings were also supportive of the proposal. The questions raised at the meetings included the proposed Federation employment contract and the expectation about working between sites.

3.4 Comments from other stakeholders

There were 10 positive verbal comments made after the presentations to the congregations at St Peter's and at Sunnyside.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The responses to the consultation indicate strong support from a variety of stakeholders for the recommendation of the Governing Bodies to move to a Federation. Nothing in the overall responses or feedback suggests any significant objection that should cause us to reconsider the proposal for the schools to Federate, or that we need to make any fundamental changes to the structure of the Federation Senior Leadership Team or the single Governing Body as proposed.

We believe the questions and concerns raised during the consultation process can be addressed through a commitment and focus on regular communication with staff and parents/carers, and continued engagement activities with the leadership, governors, staff and pupils at Swing Gate School.



5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following two recommendations are now proposed by the JEC to be voted on by Victoria and Thomas Coram Governing Bodies at their separate meetings on the 19th February 2018. The JEC recommends:

5.1 That each Governing Body now holds a formal vote on the proposal to form a Federation (which requires a unanimous vote from all Foundation Governors to pass).

Specifically, for the Governing Bodies to vote on:

- The proposal to form a Federation (entitled Castle Church of England Federation) between Victoria Church of England Infant and Nursery School and The Thomas Coram Church of England School.
- To dissolve the existing Governing Bodies and adopt the new constitution under a single Governing Body (as set out in the proposed Instrument of Government in Appendix 2), with effect from 16th April 2018, subject to formal approval from the Diocesan Board of Education and the Local Authority.

5.2 If a Federation is voted for, that each Governing Body authorises the JEC to continue to make recommendations (and decisions where appropriate) on the specific actions and a timetable to achieve the 16th April target.

The actions will include:

- Notifying parents/carers, staff, pupils, the Diocese of St Albans, the Secretary of State, the Local Authority and other community groups of the decision
- Managing appropriate communications and documentation about the decision (ie this document & a letter announcing the outcome of the votes) to add to the schools' websites, Twitter and press release
- Making recommendations on the Governing Body structure and that of its Committees
- Making recommendations on the process and timing for staff and parent elections
- Making recommendations on Governing Body membership (based on preferences and skill sets of current governors), and actions required to fill gaps

The JEC would like to thank all those who participated in the consultation process. It was a very positive experience, and we recommend that the new Governing Body builds on that experience in developing its programme of Governor engagement with parents/carers, staff and children.

17 February 2018



APPENDIX 1: FREE TEXT COMMENTS FROM THE CONSULTATION RESPONSE FORMS

I support the proposal. It seems that it will improve the governance and running of the school. I have some concerns that the workload for the reduced number of governors may be prohibitive.
Having already been part of a consultation and experience a federation I am supporting the proposal because I have seen the benefits that working together can create. However, it is ALWAYS about the people. The leadership is critical of course, but anyone with any responsibility to drive change needs to be fully on board. Otherwise not much really changes.
This Federation will give gravitas to the C of E's standing in the town & consolidate the education & schooling of children up to 11 year of age within a Christian ethos.
I believe that further collaboration between the 2 schools will be beneficial to both the children and staff and I support the proposal.
We are pleased with how the two schools have been working together so far, and trust that this decision will further strengthen the efforts of staff and governors in providing a rich education and warm environment for pupils.
I support the proposal as it seems an excellent way for the two schools to work in partnership. Transition for special needs pupils should be much better with easier communication between SENCo's, including the transferral of pupil's IEPs and EHCPs. I also think that it is very important to keep the two school's identities and to work closely with Swing Gate School as it is also a feeder school into Thomas Coram.
Common vision and sharing of overhead costs makes a lot of sense
Extract from Town Council's T & E Minutes 29 January 2018: "Following a discussion it was agreed that the Town Clerk should respond supporting the proposals and expressing the Town Council's wish that the existing links with Swing Gate School should prevail following the creation of the Federation."
However, I think that the 2 elected parent governors on the Federation Governing Body should be specified as being one from each school. This would ensure equal parental involvement; and stop any suggestion that one school was given greater consideration over the other as a result of both representatives possibly being from one school. It is important also that the connection with Swing Gate School should be maintained. Perhaps an invitation to SGS to send a representative to sit in on discussions as a spectator, rather than a place on the Body, would be appropriate?
<p>Whilst I can see the rationale for taking this step I have a few comments/observations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Can there be a situation where Victoria is unable to present a balanced budget and therefore be looking to Thomas Coram to provide either additional funding or at least guarantee any shortfall in income. * Is the proposal looking to make financial savings e.g shared services and if so does the financial business case work when taking into account the cost of making the change * Will the cost of setting up the federation and cost of TUPE be made available to parents of both TC and Victoria * Is it envisaged that some of the back office roles will be shared between both schools and if so is there any issue around redundancy * Can parents at Thomas Coram be given any assurances that staff currently at TC won't be transferred to supplement/improve staff at Victoria thus potentially impacting pupils at TC * If both TC and Victoria are separate legal entities and have individual OFSTED inspections has the structure of the federation been agreed in principle with DfE or Herts CC
Both schools will benefit from the deeper relationship that will be built between the teaching



<p>staff at Thomas Coram and Victoria. Obviously the quality of the ongoing relationship with Swing Gate will need to be maintained, particularly to reassure parents that their decision to join the Berkhamsted Educational Trust will in no way conflict, or create barriers, with the new Federation, or disadvantage children in their journey from Swing Gate and on to Thomas Coram.</p>
<p>I think that both schools need to be represented evenly on the Governing body. Will governors have the ability to commit the quality time needed to support both schools? The committees should be balanced and have representatives from both schools as they are running as separate entities. Any donations, funds that the schools receive, will they stay with that school or be lumped together and then spent, as decided by the governing body? If the collaboration is not working how will the governing body unpick the Federation? Do we need to be a Federation before the collaboration has been evaluated?</p>
<p>I feel that significant members of the Victoria governing body could have done far more to support the school and pupils last year and would be concerned if these people were holding positions on the new governing body.</p>
<p>I believe that this distracts from the lack of leadership, vision and staff satisfaction that is currently demonstrated in Victoria.</p>
<p>We are writing about the proposed move to Formal Collaboration between Thomas Coram School and Victoria School. Our concern is that, as things stand, both Swing Gate School and Victoria School feed into Thomas Coram, in roughly equal numbers. However, the proposed Formal Collaboration would seem to enhance links between Thomas Coram and Victoria without at the same time enhancing links with Swing Gate. This strikes us as deeply problematic. In short, EITHER the Formal Collaboration will have no special effect on relations between Victoria and Thomas Coram that aren't supplied in other ways by the non-Formal Collaboration between Swing Gate and Thomas Coram, in which case it is hard to see what the benefits are supposed to be of Formal Collaboration, OR the Formal Collaboration will have such a special effect on relations between Victoria and Thomas Coram, thereby significantly disadvantaging students who move from Swing Gate to Thomas Coram. To see the potential effects here, it suffices to consider elements from your list of potential advantages of Formal Collaboration, for example that it would "enable seamless monitoring of pupil progress from ages 3 to 11", which on the face of it, would seem to significantly disadvantage students not so seamlessly monitored, i.e. all students who attend Swing Gate before Thomas Coram. Similar remarks apply to each of the listed elements of potential advantages arising from the proposed Formal Collaboration. Overall, it seems that the proposed Formal Collaboration will either have no positive effects on the experience of students attending Victoria and then Thomas Coram or, more plausible, will serve significantly to disadvantage Swing Gate students. This seems to us an unacceptable outcome. Minimally, then, we'd like to see much more thought given to the amelioration of that potential significant disadvantage to a large number of future students of Thomas Coram.</p>



APPENDIX 2: PROPOSED INSTRUMENT OF GOVERNMENT FOR FEDERATED GOVERNING BODIES

1. The name of the Federation is: Castle Church of England Federation

2. The names and categories of the schools in the federation are:

Name	Category
The Thomas Coram Church of England School	Voluntary Aided
Victoria Church of England Infant and Nursery School	Voluntary Aided

3. The name of the Governing Body is: The Governing Body of Castle Church of England Federation

4. The Governing Body shall consist of the following:

Category of Governor (state where the term of office is less than four years)	No. of Governors in each category	Name of school (For parent and Foundation Governors)
Parent governors	Two *	Thomas Coram Victoria
Executive Head Teacher	One	
Staff governor	One	
LA governor	One	
Foundation governors	Nine (<i>as in paragraph 6 below</i>)	Thomas Coram Victoria
Co-opted governors	Two	

(* Two parent governors in total. These can be drawn from any school within the federation, in line with the School Governance Regulations amendments September 2016, Regulation 3).

5. Total number of governors: 16

6. Foundation governors:

- a. 1 foundation governor will be ex-officio and subject to paragraph 7(a)
- b. 2 will be appointed by the Diocesan Board of Education.
- c. 5 will be appointed by the Parochial Church Council of St Peter's Church, Great Berkhamsted
- d. 1 will be appointed by the Parochial Church Council of St Michael and All Angels, Sunnyside.

7. a. The holder of the following office shall be an ex-officio foundation governor: the Team Rector or his/her agreed nominee from the team ministry covering the parish in which the federation schools are situated



b. The Archdeacon of the Archdeaconry in which the schools are situated shall appoint a foundation governor to act in the place of the ex-officio foundation governor whose governorship derives from the office named in (a) above, in the event that the ex-officio foundation governor is unable or unwilling to act as a foundation governor or has been removed from office under regulation 21(2) of the Constitution Regulations.

8. The Archdeacon of the Archdeaconry in which the schools are situated may, in consultation with the Diocesan Director of Education, request the removal of the ex-officio foundation governor and may appoint any substitute governor.

9. Each school has a Trust.

10. The ethos of the federation schools is:

Recognising their historic foundations, the schools will preserve and develop their religious character in accordance with the principles of the Church of England and in partnership with the Church at parish and diocesan level.

The schools aim to serve their communities by providing an education of the highest quality within the context of Christian belief and practice. They encourage an understanding of the meaning and significance of faith, and promote Christian values through the experience they offer to all their pupils.

11. This instrument comes into effect on 16th April 2018 (first day of summer term)

12. This instrument was made by order of Hertfordshire County Council on *[LA will add date]*

13. A copy of the instrument must be supplied to every member of the governing body (and the head teacher if not a governor), any trustees and to the Diocese of St Albans.