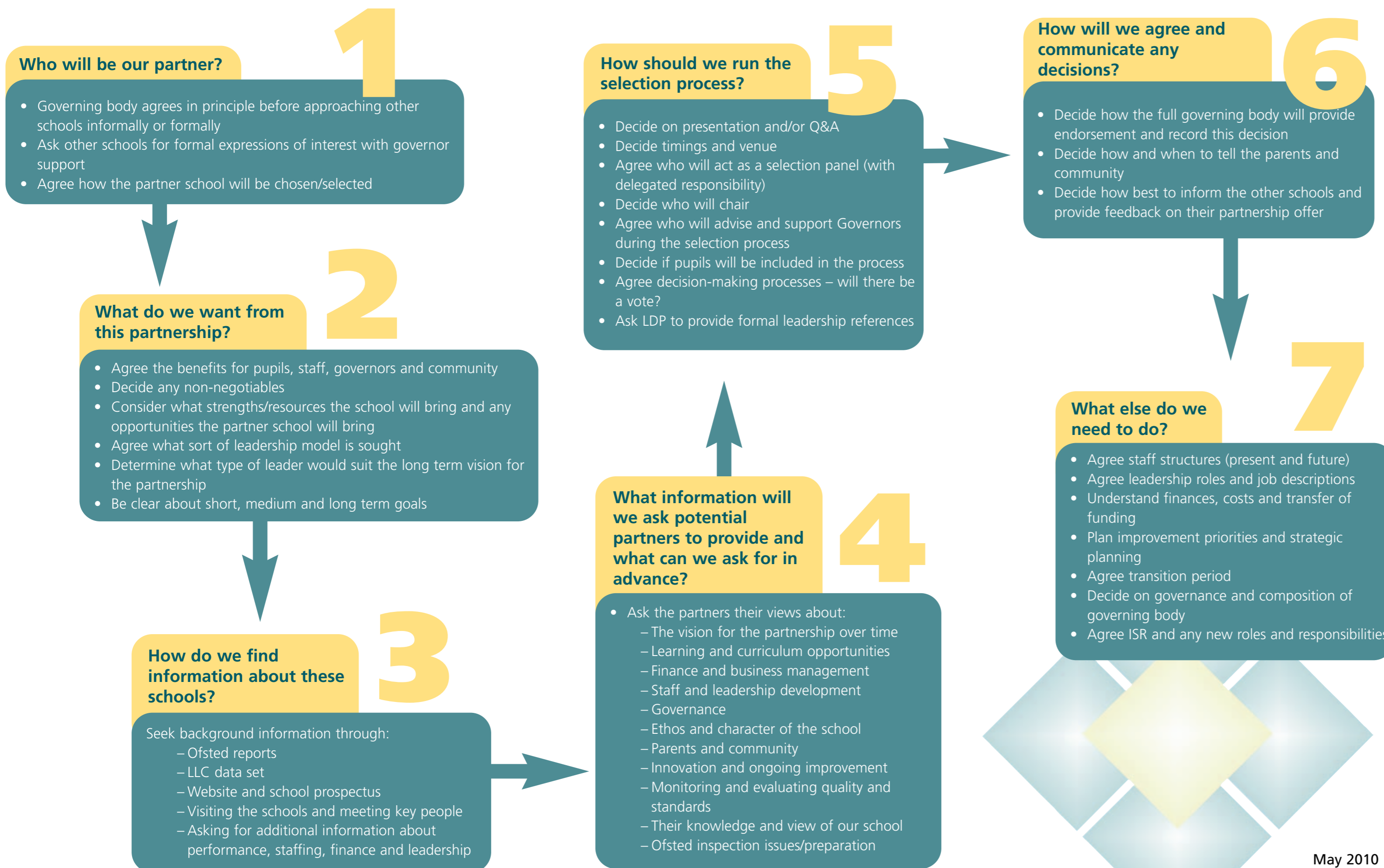


Partnership Selection Process: Step by Step

This process begins once the Governing body has decided to seek formal partnership with another school or schools



Partnership Pathways

Finding the perfect partner is always a challenge and therefore searching for a partner school requires realism about both the issues and benefits of partnership arrangements.

Formal partnerships can bring exciting opportunities and new experiences but can also mean learning how to build new and unfamiliar relationships, working differently and adjusting our own behaviours and attitudes.

This guidance aims to inform governors about how they might go about finding a partner school for a Management Partnership or for the move to Federation. The same process can be adapted to bring together a cluster of schools seeking to acquire a shared Trust. However, it is not the partnership structure that needs to drive this change but clarity about why a school should move into partnership working.

Governing bodies need to consider what can be gained by working within a partnership and any outcomes that cannot be achieved by working alone. In some cases, schools will have much to bring to a formal partnership arrangement but will receive very different, perhaps less obvious, benefits in return.

Once schools decide that they wish to work in a formal partnership they need to register their interest with the Local Authority by contacting sue.clarke@devon.gov.uk who holds a confidential partnership register. Schools may also wish to discuss partnership or a potential partnership with their SIO (School Improvement Officer) and, where appropriate, with the Diocese.

Both the Anglican and the Catholic Diocese provide advice and support for church schools considering federation.

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Identify the benefits

Whatever the driver for partnership, schools must be clear about what they see as the potential benefits for children, young people and the staff. Otherwise, governors should not proceed.

There are many reasons why schools actively seek partnership and these include:

- The opportunity to provide a broader curriculum and offer wider social opportunities for students
- Peer support and challenge for both the children and staff
- Issues around recruitment and retention of high quality school leaders
- To address the impact of falling roles and tightening budgets
- To support another school experiencing difficulty
- To secure better value for money through pooling resources and expertise across schools
- To provide locally based professional networks and new social partnerships in response to the changing role of the Local Authority

Choosing the right partnership model

The chosen partnership model must be able to deliver longer term aims and aspirations for learners and appropriately match both the context and school community. The following questions can help identify the right partnership model.

- What new opportunities will partnership bring for
~ leadership
~ curriculum and standards
~ social opportunities
~ business and financial management
~ access to external expertise
~ peer support and challenge
~ extended services?
- How formal and sustainable do we want our partnership to be?
- Will we need to lead our school through statutory and structural changes?
- What are the issues or concerns about working closely with another school or schools?
- What unique strengths will we bring to the partnership and what skills are we seeking?
- Does the size, location or status of the other school, or schools, matter to us?

A quick reminder of the three main formal school partnership models

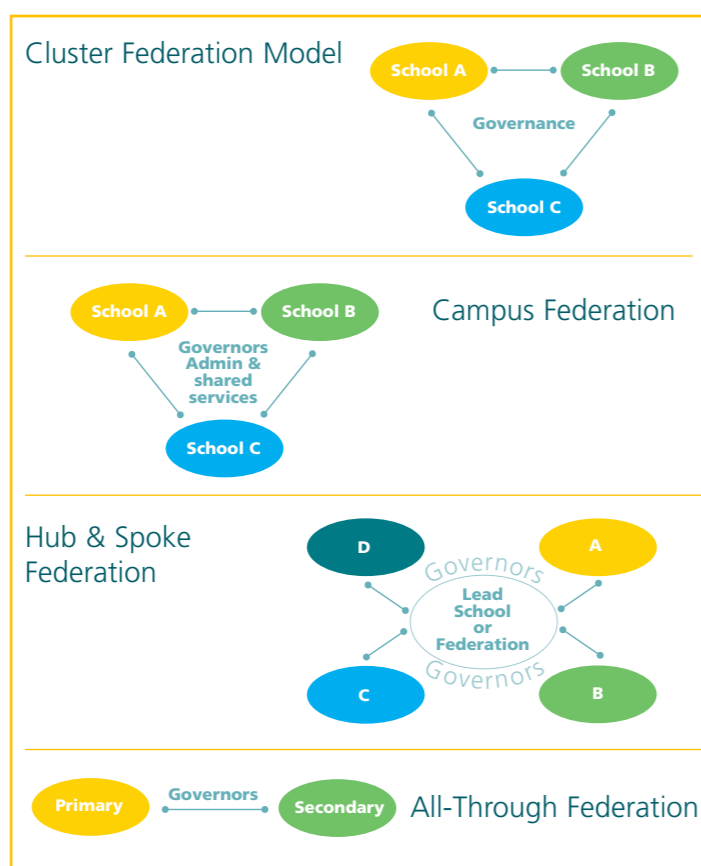
Management Partnership Two schools share one headteacher but retain their own separate governing bodies using a joint committee of governors to oversee the partnership.

Trust Schools The school (or schools) is supported by a Board of Trustees who bring a range of skills and expertise to enhance the work of the school(s) and particularly the strategic leadership. The school usually retains its own governing body but the Trustees are represented on the governing body. Schools have to move to Foundation Status before they can acquire a Trust and schools that already have a Trust deed cannot relinquish this for another trust. (Trust schools are not explored in this leaflet but further information can be found at www.devon.gov.uk/j4s-trust-schools.pdf)

Federation Any number, size or type of schools come together under one governing body. Most often (but not exclusively) a federation has one executive headteacher and other site-based, or federation-wide, leadership roles.

Models of federation

There are many different types of federation but all 'hard' federations have just one governing body and have to follow a statutory consultation process.



Making the first move

Sometimes it is difficult for schools to know how best to approach other schools to start a dialogue about partnership working. There are a number of different strategies which have been successfully used by schools and these include:

- Sending a circular or even a targeted letter to schools across one geographical area
- Approaching an existing federation
- Approaching a local school which the school may have already worked with
- Approaching another school which the school may not have worked with before but might offer new partnership opportunities or has known strengths
- Using local knowledge and networking
- Asking the Local Authority to recommend or approach school on your behalf either through SIO, the Diocese or through the DCC Partnership Register (Sue Clarke)

Whilst these approaches have most often resulted in positive outcomes, these strategies cannot always guarantee positive responses. Offers will depend on the overall awareness of schools across the area and the timing of such an approach in the development of a school or its Ofsted cycle.

However, where some schools have actively sought out partners they have attracted so much interest that a selection process has been held to decide which partner is best suited to the needs and aspirations of that school.

Support available

Governors can draw upon and purchase a range of advice from DCC, the Diocese and LDP to support their partnership journey. The Local Authority or Diocese cannot (unless it is a National Challenge school or in an Ofsted category) instruct a school to federate, so in almost all cases the governors need to be proactive, inviting input and support from Local Authority Officers. Specialist advice is available and this support is applied at different stages of the process. The Devon Federation Protocol provides a good overview of who is able to help at each stage of the process. These include:

Personnel advice on employment and contractual issues

Finance financial information about staffing structures, different site costs and financial management

Governor Services advice on governance and statutory processes

Remodelling adviser providing advice on different approaches to staffing structures, roles and responsibilities

Achievement Through Collaboration information giving, model documentation brokerage and facilitation

Diocese support for faith schools (ethos and governance)

School Improvement Officer (SIO) Brokerage for TISP schools and school improvement issues

Devon's Federation Protocol

1.1 The term Federation is often used loosely to describe a family of schools but it is actually a formal and legal agreement by which any number of schools share a single governing body which is formally reconstituted. Federations can involve a mix of primary, special and secondary schools of any type or size.

1.2 The decision to federate is made locally by the governing bodies of the individual schools following a consultation process with their community and key partners. There will be a number of different reasons why schools decide to federate but for some schools Federation would bring few benefits and should not be considered.

1.3 There are no blueprints for Federation and the design or operational workings of a Federation will depend entirely on the circumstances of those individual schools and the focus or purpose of their partnership. It is governors through a stepped planning process who work out the detail of their Federation.

1.4 The most important factor for the consideration of Federation must be because such an arrangement would bring benefits for the children and young people in those schools by enhancing educational provision.

1.5 There are formal consultation processes to follow when schools propose Federation. The governors of each school are required to consult with key stakeholders including parents, staff, the Local Authority and other appropriate partners or community groups. Church schools will need to involve the Diocese. The unions will be involved in any consultation about proposed changes to staffing structures or conditions of service. They can also make representation on behalf of staff during the initial consultation period.

1.6 A local decision to federate will not override the need for the LA to intervene or act on school improvement or organisation issues.

1.7 The LA has four functions. These are:

- To be formally consulted. The LA will either support or oppose Federation of particular schools. There will be no blanket, one size fits all policy. Any decision, to either support or to oppose will be made according to the individual circumstances and sustainability of such an arrangement.

• To give information and advice to those schools considering and implementing Federation processes.

• To issue the new Instrument of Government as a new governing body is formed.

• To monitor the effectiveness and impact of Federations through its normal school improvement procedures.

1.8 The following pointers act as a prompt for further exploration and discussion between the LA and schools. This conversation can be prompted by governors or the LA as part of its responsibility to monitor schools. This will take place where a Federation can secure:

• A significant contribution to standards, breadth of curriculum provision and improvements to the quality of learning for all members of the school community.

• Recruitment of staff, headteachers and governors particularly if there have been difficulties.

• Support for schools in difficulty.

• Opportunities to maximise resources and professional expertise particularly where there are financial difficulties or low pupil numbers.

• Access to better facilities for pupils in schools with accommodation issues.

• A partnership structure for delivering extended services at a local level.

• Opportunities for the creation of new roles that can be shared across schools, e.g. bursar, ICT technician.

1.9 Formal collaboration between schools can bring the following benefits but these need not necessarily be gained through Federation alone:

• Practitioner exchange that combats professional isolation and shares the workload.

• Schools with many strengths and a good record of collaboration can contribute to the learning of others.

• Opportunities for school leadership beyond a single school.

• Better work-life balance where the headteacher has a very high level of teaching commitment.

2.0 There are a number of circumstances where Federation would be inappropriate as it brings too few longer term benefits for the school community. These include:

- Geographical location. Where schools are far apart but particularly if the local geography is difficult for quick access between school sites. Travel time and safety must be a consideration.

• Where leadership capacity is weak.

• Where schools are too small.

• Where falling rolls mean that one or more schools in the Federation might become educationally unviable within three years.

• Where arrangements might be predatory, leading to resources from one school being used to subsidise another.

Other support

Devon Federation Network

Network of professionals and governors working together to support schools working in federations. Heads and governors act as champions and advocates for federation and the Network provides co-production of key documentation, e.g. job descriptions for Executive Headteacher and Head of Teaching and Learning. Contact Sue Clarke (sue.clarke@devon.gov.uk).

LDP

Devon's Learning and Development Partnership provides a range of school improvement services that can be purchased. Contact David Lowes (david.lowes@devon.gov.uk).

CATS

Consortium of All-Through Schooling promotes Federation and All-Through schooling models. Contact www.allthroughschooling.org

Websites

DCSF: www.governornet.co.uk
www.teachernet.gov.uk/educationoverview/briefing/currentstrategy/21schools/
www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/federations/

National College Models of Leadership
<http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/index/leadershiplibrary/leadingschools/leading-change/understanding-your-school-context/modelsofleadership.htm>

Other Resources

Devon County Council, *Exploring Federation: A Toolkit for Schools* - Purchase only

DCC, A Guide to Federation
www.devon.gov.uk/j4s-federation-guide.pdf

DCC, Management Partnerships
www.devon.gov.uk/j4s-management-partnerships.pdf

DCC, Trust Schools www.devon.gov.uk/j4s-trust-schools.pdf

DCC, Federation Protocol
www.devon.gov.uk/dgs-federationprotocol.pdf

DCC, Typology of Schools
www.devon.gov.uk/j4s-learninglandscape.pdf

DCC, It's Our Business - Purchase only

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