



Federation: guidance for parents and staff

- responding to your queries and comments



Proposed federation of Rake & Rogate schools

The governors of the two schools announced on 5th March that they were proposing to form a formal federation of the two schools, and launched a consultation process to collect feedback on their proposals. The formal consultation period will end on 1 May 2020. After this, the two sets of governors will meet separately to decide whether to go ahead with their plan – or review / modify it, based on the feedback we receive. If both boards of governors agree, they will dissolve themselves and set up a new unified board on the formal federation date of 10th June.

A copy of our original letter to parents, including the formal “Statement of intent” is available [here](#) and similar letters were sent to staff, the government Department for Education, the West Sussex County Council education department, staff unions, the Chichester diocese and local churches and the local civil parish councils.

Consultation responses so far

We have heard back from the county council, Chichester diocese, the local parish councils and the two church parishes, all of whom support our plan.

We have analysed the results of the parent and staff feedback surveys to date and they are summarised in the following reports, which we plan to update every week or so:

- Parent survey summary: click [here](#)
- Staff survey summary: click [here](#)

As you can see, we have still had responses from only a minority of parents and staff and we would urge you, if you have not yet responded, to fill in the survey – this is a critical decision for both schools and we want to hear from as many stakeholders as possible before making our final decision. Parents and staff have been sent links to the surveys but should contact the clerk to the governors (clerk@rake.w-sussex.sch.uk or clerk@rogate.w-sussex.sch.uk).

You will see that the responses so far are strongly positive but, on the last question – about the federation plan - the only negative responses so far are from some parents who do not feel they know enough to be able to give an informed view.

We have decided to give more information on federation here, so that parents and staff can read as much (or as little) as they wish. We have included some more views from inside both schools and links to some of the research and guidance that the governors considered in forming their plans. We hope you will find this page useful.

Answering your questions

We have done our best to answer the questions we have had so far, and this document will also be added to both school websites so that we can update it with further information as more queries come, so please do use the surveys to send the governors any further comments or questions or email us as above. We will also add a form on the website page for you to submit comments or queries.

What has partnership done for the schools so far?

We tried to address this question in our letter to parents ([click here](#)), mainly using an analysis of the partnership done by the school’s senior leadership team – but the full analysis report is available [here](#).

Next, we asked the teachers to collect some views from children in both schools. They tell us the following comments were typical:

- *I really liked the STEM day. I liked meeting the children at Rogate and I made 3 new friends. We had a lot of fun. It was interesting being in another school. [Rake]*
- *The Adventure Day was great. It was good doing outdoor activities in Rake Woods and we were able to see our Rogate friends again. [Rake]*
- *We’ve been to Fairthorne Manor, Fishbourne, the panto, Weald and Downland, Legoland. We were all in separate groups so didn’t see much of the other children. [Rake]*
- *More joint activities would be good. I still like being in my own school though. [Rake]*
- *“It was fun being with other children I didn’t really know” [Rogate]*
- *“It’s a good idea doing things with another school” [Rogate]*
- *“I wish we could do more football and netball matches against Rake – and go swimming there!” [Rogate]*
- *“We should do joint sports days, and more joint trips and forest school with the same year group.” [Rogate]*
- *“Would it (federation) mean we could have more clubs and bike rides because there would be more of us?” [Rogate]*

To us, as governors, the benefits the staff reported and these happy responses by the pupils were crucial, but we have also had many letters and comments from the local community, and from others with a great deal of influence over the future of the schools . . .

Inset box:



Our local MP

Picture of Gillian Keegan at the joint Rake-Rogate STEM day in April 2019 – she had asked the pupils of both schools how many of them had made new friends that day.

Our diocese:



Extract from minutes of Rake governor meeting with Trevor Cristin, diocese director of education, on 29 January 2020:

“ He thanked governors and DBe for what they had done for Rake and Rogate and for others. He said that federation is not an answer to all of the financial problems of small schools but could help in that area. He said what had struck him was that it was clear finance was not the key to what the Rake-Rogate partnership (RR) had set out to achieve. Rather, it was clear that enhancing learning and providing better opportunities for staff had been given more importance - and he urged governors to protect these objectives. He said that it would be a big benefit to the diocese if RR progressed to formal federation, but that governors should consider, in particular:

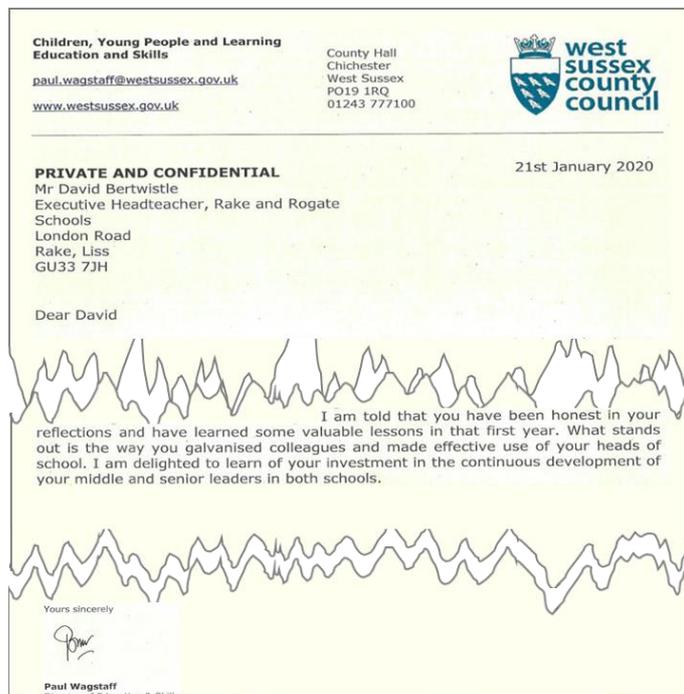
- headteacher workload – eg reporting to multiple chairs, committees, boards etc
- strategic leadership and the clarity that would come from having one GB
- pupils benefitting from this clear vision
- staff security and recruitment
- safeguarding what RR had achieved through a more permanent structure that could cope with changes of staff
- the unstable, unfriendly environment for small schools, which he did not expect to improve significantly

He emphasised that federation was not the answer to everything but could greatly reinforce sustainable viability.”

Extract from the diocese response to our federation proposal:

“ The Diocese of Chichester is fully supportive of the decision of both governing boards of Rake and Rogate Church of England schools, to formally consider federation. We look forward to hearing the outcome following this consultation period in due course and the next steps of the partnership between the 2 schools. ”

Our local authority



Extract from a letter from Paul Wagstaff, WSCC director of education to David Bertwistle following the Ofsted inspections of both schools. He visited Rake a month later and congratulated the staff and governors on their success in focusing their partnership so firmly on school improvement and pupil outcomes.

What are federations and what evidence is there that the structure works?

West Sussex has less experience than most of its neighbouring local authorities (LAs) with federations, so the governors consulted a wide range of other organisations in considering the best way forward. One of the most experienced LAs is nearby East Sussex, which also falls under the diocese of Chichester, so we had good access to some of their guidance and experience. They have produced some excellent short guides to federation – including case histories showing their success - which you can see [here](#). To quote them:

“A federation is a formal arrangement where schools (of any size or type) come together to share a single governing body. The schools retain their separate legal status and have their own budget allocations, individual admissions, performance tables and Ofsted inspections . . .

Federation brings the opportunity to secure strong strategic leadership and work differently to deliver 21st century schooling.”

The National Governance Association also produces some useful guidance on federation, which is available [here](#).

We could quote many others that we have consulted but some of the most comprehensive research on federations can be found here:

- 1. Ofsted report on the impact of federations on pupil outcomes – click [here](#)*
- 2. National College for School leadership report on federations of small schools - click [here](#)*

How is a federation different from what we already have?

A federation is not much different from the partnership we already have: the only real differences are:

- 1. The two existing governing boards are dissolved and one unified board is formed. This will have 12 governors, compared with the current 11 at Rake and 10 at Rogate and still has the executive headteacher and governors appointed by the diocese and the local authority. It still has two governors elected by the parents and one by the staff. This group then choose four of the other former governors to make up the 12. Our plan is to form a local committee for each school, so that some of the governors on the two existing boards would not join the federation board but would continue to ensure that the schools retained their individual strengths with the new federation, whilst the federation board would govern very much for the benefit of both schools equally.*
- 2. The legal status and permanent nature of the partnership. A federation can still be dissolved if it is not a success (whereas an academy trust (the other main alternative) cannot. However, once the federation is formed, we aim to take full advantage of the additional benefits described above by the director of education at the diocese.*

What changes can we expect to see?

Very few initially, as far as parents and pupils are concerned!

As we said in our initial letter about the proposals, our main aim is to offer our pupils even more of the advantages of a bigger school, while retaining the distinctive caring character and ethos of each of our small schools.

More modern IT: *One benefit from the partnership that we did not mention in our letter – because it had not yet started delivering any benefits - is that it helped us to raise £20,000 from local charities to upgrade the IT systems of the two schools and link them, so that:*

- *staff could work more efficiently and reduce their workload*
- *they could collaborate with each other more*
- *we could, eventually, introduce more modern teaching, learning and assessment systems – in other words, benefitting both staff and pupils*

The current lockdown has accelerated this programme and it is now beginning to deliver benefits: already, it has enabled the governors and staff leadership team to hold virtual meetings, and some teachers are already using it to collaborate from home. If the lockdown persists into the summer, the ability of staff to work from home but still connect with their children will be much improved – and we might start using IT more directly for teaching.

We plan to raise more money locally to provide more, better, and more varied computing devices for the children in the schools and prepare them better for today's world – and we believe we are better able to raise local funds together than if we were appealing to the local communities separately.

More joint trips, sports clubs, activities: *These have already been one of the most noticeable features of partnership as far as the children are concerned, but we believe they can go much further. We are not going to force the children to do things together for the sake of it (we have been clear about the importance of the schools retaining their own identities), but it is clear they value them, and that they are good in helping us to prepare the children for much bigger secondary schools, as well as to introduce much broader education for them.*

Wider curriculum – and overall education: *Events like our joint STEM and art days have made a real difference not just to that day but to all the schoolwork before and following them. Obviously, we can afford to do much more if the cost can be spread across a larger group of children, and if we can have a bigger team working on it. Our executive head has always been recognised as a champion of broader education – satisfying the SATS curriculum without dropping all the other subjects that many schools have neglected – and this paid off when Ofsted gave both schools 'Good' ratings just one month after they introduced their new inspection framework, which focuses on the breadth of the curriculum. By combining the staffs of two schools, we have more scope to recruit and/or train specialists in a broader range of subjects and skills and therefore to teach them to both sets of pupils.*

Better staff opportunities: *Similarly, combining two sets of teachers under one unified leadership team and board of governors, we are better able to offer broader training, better career paths and a more supportive, collaborative environment (it can be very lonely being a class teacher in a very small school). As a result, we aim to be able to attract good staff more easily and keep them for longer – which must be a big benefit for the pupils.*

Less volatility, more viability: *Last but not least, we strongly believe that the governors need to look further ahead and try to make our schools less volatile and more viable. Very small schools are well known for highly variable SATs results, Ofsted ratings, pupil numbers, teacher (and headteacher) stability and financial viability. We aim to make our schools far more stable and sustainable, giving staff, pupils and parents more confidence in their future.*

We want them to be the schools of choice for the local area. Rake was already the most successful school in the county at attracting first-choice selection by parents. This coming September, for the first time anyone can remember, Rogate has also attracted its maximum pupil number for its reception class. That's the way we aim to keep it – so we know we need to keep the improvements coming.

The Argus
Sussex schools told they will close
20th February 2008

2008

NEWS
Village school fights to survive
Parents at West Sussex village school have mounted a battle to
win enrolment for closure

2019
—Midhurst and Petworth—
OBSERVER

Protest against proposed school closures
West Sussex County Council has been asked to drop plans to close one school, postpone plans to close a second and explore academy options for a third.

