



Proposal to federate Compton & Upmarden (“CU Primary”),
with Rake and Rogate C of E primary schools
as Downland Village Schools Federation (“DVSF”)



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (new bits in orange)

Please help us add to this list of questions by filling in our surveys here: [PARENTS](#) and [STAFF](#) or email us at joint.chairs@dvsf.school

A. Federation

Q What does “federation” mean?

A Basically it means two or more schools coming together into a legal group under one board of governors. You can see a lot more on our website page under “Information about federation”

Q What will change if CU Primary joins Rake and Rogate in DVSF?

A The two boards of governors will be merged into one, and DVSF executive headteacher David Bertwistle will become headteacher of all three schools. He will have two deputies across all three schools and, as CU Primary’s head has decided this role was not right for her, both will be taken by the Rake and Rogate heads of school – Paul Brown and Steph Garwood respectively. Apart from the leadership of the schools, there will be no other staff changes due to federation – although some temporary and supply staff at Compton will be leaving as a result of their contracts ending. DVSF will start a school-to-school support programme to accelerate Compton’s school improvement, with the aim of restoring its ‘Good’ rating from Ofsted. Over time, the benefits of federation will become more obvious - please see the “Presentation to WSCC/WSGA federation & partnership workshop” under “Information from DVSF” on the website federation page.

Q Will CU Primary become just a clone of Rake or Rogate?

A No! The whole aim of DVSF is to future-proof our small village schools, offering both staff and children the benefits of a larger school but retaining the distinctive character and caring Christian ethos that has made all three village schools so important to the communities they serve.

Q So is federation mainly about saving money?

A No. It’s about improving the educational provision for children in our villages now and into the future. If we can save money by training one subject leader across all 3 schools, we can use it to train other teachers to improve our teaching in other subjects. If we save money by taking one larger group of pupils on an educational trip, we can spend it on more trips for the children. But federation also gives our little village schools bigger teams of teaching staff, who can share ideas, experiences and resources, instead of having to duplicate all that effort by doing everything on their own. Please look at the “Information from DVSF” and “Information about federations” on the website federation page to see all the other benefits we aim to achieve for all three schools.

Q Why can’t CU Primary continue as an independent village school?

A All small schools are highly volatile – pupil numbers, pupil outcomes, Ofsted ratings, staff numbers, finances all go up and down too much to allow any long-term planning and budgeting. Government currently don’t allow new schools to be built for less than 420 pupils and their funding policies positively discriminate against schools with less than 150 pupil places. Some schools have catchment areas which don’t provide enough pupils to fill them, and CU Primary, Rake and Rogate are all in that category, along with most of their W Sussex neighbours. These schools can all be vulnerable but when a school cannot even attract most of the pupils from its own catchment area, like CU Primary, it is not sustainably viable as a stand-alone school under current government policies and funding.

WSCC identified CU Primary as one of the 5 most vulnerable primaries in the county in 2019 and included it in its “small schools consultation”, which could easily have led to closure. It only escaped that consultation by agreeing to federate, so failure to do so would put it at high risk of closing forever.

Federation, though, is not just an escape from closure proceedings. The governors firmly believe it offers the best future for all three village schools. A school with a headteacher and just four class teachers cannot easily provide the breadth and quality of education required by the latest Ofsted inspection framework, whereas three schools with a highly experienced executive head, two carefully selected deputies and twelve class teachers can much more easily share their skills and experience across the three schools to make them all stronger than the “sum of their parts”.

Q Will federation change the school catchment areas or secondary transition?

A No. Catchment areas and parent choices of secondary schools will remain as they are now.

Q Is this really a take-over of CU Primary by DVSF?

A No. CU Primary is not joining an existing structure. DVSF and its board of governors will be dissolved and the two sets of governors will set up a new board of governors and senior leadership team. All three schools will have roughly equal representation on the board of governors and the current DVSF governors have already agreed to make sure that CU Primary’s parents are represented on the board. They have also agreed to do all they can to urge the staff of all three schools to elect a CU Primary staff member as the one staff governor that the law allows us to have.

The three schools will still have their own names, budgets and staff teams and the governors aim to maintain the unique strengths of all three schools. Whilst DVSF will initially be aiming to help CU Primary to regain its ‘good’ Ofsted rating, as Rake did for Rogate, the aim is to create an equal partnership where all three schools gain from each other – as Rake did from Rogate.

Q Can one of the schools leave the federation if felt it was not working in its best interests?

A Yes. This is one of the advantages of federation over academisation, which is not reversible. Any school can leave a federation – but we aim to make DVSF so successful that no school would ever want to leave it.

B. Timing

Q Why is this federation move being made in such a hurry?

A It’s not. The CU Primary governors (including the HT and staff governor) have been working on strategy for more than 2 years and have held 3 full-day strategy meetings in the last year, as well as talking to all the potential partners out there.

They identified DVSF as the ideal partner last summer but the pandemic delayed things. However, the strategic problems for CU Primary have not changed: it is viewed by the LA, the diocese and its own governors as not having achieved the improvement required to achieve a ‘Good’ from Ofsted – who could return any time now. These assessments, combined with low pupil numbers, make a strategic change increasingly urgent and the LA has made it clear to governors and headteacher that doing nothing is not an option - closure consultations could be restarted if federation did not take place urgently.

Q Is it right to add more uncertainty at a time like this?

A We aim to reduce uncertainty, not increase it. For staff, pupils, parents and the communities, the federation of these small schools should bring much more stability. Most recently, CU Primary was subject to a WSCC consultation that could have led to its closure and there is clearly a lot of anxiety remaining over the future of the school. Our proposal aims to put an end to this anxiety. Pupils, in particular, should not face any changes of staff that were not already happening, except for one of the school heads, but this does happen now and again and the other staff are more than capable of reassuring their pupils.

Q How can you “consult” properly during a national lockdown?

Obviously large public physical meetings have not been possible, but the main communication routes were all still open - email, virtual meetings, online surveys, websites etc - **and we have been using those**. DVSF did its federation consultation partly during the first lockdown last year and

achieved parent engagement levels (attendance at virtual meetings and responses from online surveys) as high or higher than it normally achieves, as people could link up from home more easily than via physical meetings. **This time, we have held nine staff and parent meetings, launched staff and parent surveys, and received and responded to over 70 letters / emails – probably more response than we might have had in non-covid times!**

Q When will the federation actually take over?

A If the timetable works out as we have planned, the go/no go decision will be made by the two boards of governors meeting separately on 24th March. If they give the green light, the new, merged board of governors and the new leadership team under the executive headteacher will take over on 31st March – giving them time in the holidays to get everything in place for the start of the summer term.

C. Staff changes

Q Is it true the headteacher is being “pushed out” at CU Primary?

A No. Both sets of governors and the local authority have agreed that CU Primary has not achieved the improvement required to achieve a ‘Good’ from Ofsted and that it needs an urgent school improvement programme. We tried to get this set up under a partnership arrangement last November but lockdown restrictions and the lack of clear leadership made it impossible. Both boards of governors agreed with the LA that the only way forward was to federate as quickly as possible under one strong leadership team. The governors looked at a variety of leadership structures, including joint headship or a merged team of four top leaders. In the end, both boards agreed with the LA that these would be ineffective and / or unsustainable, and that the single executive headteacher and two deputies offered the best solution.

As we have said above, CU Primary’s headteacher has decided the new deputy role was not right for her, so these will now be filled by the two heads of school from Rake and Rogate. These two will also retain their head of school roles at Rake and Rogate and David Bertwistle will become head of school at CU Primary.

Q Will there be any other changes of teaching or other staff?

A Not as part of the federation process, no. All three schools employ some staff on temporary or supply contracts, some of whom are due to leave at Easter but that is just normal school life and nothing to do with our proposals. We hope federation will be better for everyone, so we would expect it to lead to less, not more, change in the future. Longer term, the governors have said they would like to see the business manager and inclusion / SEN co-ordinator roles merged across all three schools eventually, but there are various ways this could work and these decisions will not be made until the new executive headteacher and board of governors have had a chance to assess the current arrangements fully. We would also aim to have all future staff contracts written to include provisions for working across all 3 schools but there are no plans for any other changes to contracts or working conditions for other existing staff and any that are suggested later would be entirely voluntary.

Q When Rake and Rogate federated, did any staff leave?

A No. A few staff from Rake left at the end of last summer term because they were looking after special needs year 6 children requiring full-time support, and those children moved on to secondary school. However, two of those staff were re-employed at Rogate in September – so federation gave them more secure jobs.

Q Will CU Primary have its own headteacher?

A **As we have said above,** the executive headteacher will be the official headteacher of all three schools but he and his two deputies will each be ‘head of school’ at one of the schools. Paul Brown will remain head of school at Rake and Steph Garwood at Rogate, and David Bertwistle himself will be head of school at CU Primary, at least initially.

Q If the executive headteacher and his 2 deputies work across all 3 schools, does that mean we will not know who to go to with any problems, and when they will be at our school?

A We have now announced who is the nominated head of each school and, as far as is possible, that head will be available to them. Parents and staff will soon get to know the other leaders and at Rake and Rogate parents' experience is that each of the school leaders is approachable and keen to help. We will also appoint a senior teacher at each school who will be available every day and can act as a point of contact with the leaders.

Q So at least one of the schools will have the disruption of losing its current head?

Yes, but this should be no more disruption than any other change of headteacher, which does happen. After this initial change, future changes of head will be much less traumatic because two of the three leaders of the federation will remain in place.

Q Will staff be wasting a lot of time travelling between schools?

No. In the current DVSF the only staff that travel between schools are those who work in both schools – such as the leadership team, and one or two teaching staff – and they usually spend a whole day, or at least half a day in each place, so there is little time spent travelling during the day. We don't expect this to change. One of the (few) benefits of the pandemic has been that DVSF raised a lot of money in grants and charity funding to invest in state-of-the-art IT systems, so that staff and all pupils can connect to the school systems from either school or from home, so most collaboration takes place virtually. We will obviously extend these systems to cover all three schools as soon as possible.

Q If the pandemic continues into the summer, will staff be at more risk because senior leaders are moving between the schools?

A No. DVSF has put very strict protocols in place for the few staff moving between the schools and these will apply at CU Primary too. We aim to meet or exceed all national and WSCC guidance on staff and pupil safety and to have our IT systems covering all three schools as soon as possible, so that physical presence becomes less necessary.

D. Pupils

Q What will federation mean to pupils?

A Not very much at first – they are unlikely to see any changes of class teaching staff (unless this happens for other reasons, which would have taken place anyway), and their school name and ethos will be carefully protected. Over time, as we have said above, they should see better educational provision and more joint trips and other activities, giving them more experience of mixing with wider groups of children - which should ease their transition to secondary school.

Q Will the school culture and ethos change under a new head of school?

A As we have said above, DVSF's aim has always been to retain the distinctive character and caring Christian ethos that has made all three village schools so important to the communities they serve.

Q In a federation of up to 315 pupils, will the individual caring feel of the schools change?

A No. The individual schools will remain small, so pupils should get the best of both worlds: small caring village schools, but with the resources of a bigger school.

Q Will you be able to maintain the same focus on pastoral care / special needs?

A Yes. Class and school sizes will still be those of small village schools and staff will still only be looking after those small numbers. DVSF's executive headteacher helped to set up and leads the Rother Valley Inclusion Hub – one of the best respected regional hubs in the county, and is well known for his focus on special needs.

Q Have pupils left Rake or Rogate since they got together?

A Not as a result of the partnership. Both schools have had average or below average turnover of pupils since they began their partnership. Rake is still full, with waiting lists in most year groups. Rogate's decline in pupil numbers stopped the year it partnered with Rake and it has since started growing again. In the current school year, it has seen its largest intake for many years.

E. Governance and finance

Q Can one board of governors oversee three schools really effectively?

A Yes. There are many federations across the UK and they are generally thought to have better than average governance. Whilst the number of full governors is less than three separate boards would have, they are overseeing a single – and stronger - leadership team. In addition, DVSF has a local committee for each school which also has additional members from the local community, which not only helps to ensure local responsiveness but also provides additional local oversight. Governors gain from exposure to more than one school and DVSF already has a board with many years of experience between them – at other schools as well as Rake and Rogate, and with a national lead governor, two executive committee members of the W Sussex Governors Association (the local affiliate of the National Governance Association), a member of the W Sussex Schools Forum (the county’s school policy advisory body), a member of the Area Inclusion and Improvement Board and a county councillor.

Q Will CU Primary be financially better or worse off if it federates?

A It should be better off. Paying for one third of a combined senior leadership team will not be significantly different to paying for its own headteacher. In addition, the local authority has agreed to pay for the school-to-school improvement programme that it believes CU Primary needs and has also pledged a degree of financial support for the federation’s first 2-3 years. Further savings should be possible by combined buying and other efficiencies but these would be channelled back into the school for the pupils’ benefit.

F. Responses to questions asked to date

Q Why do we need another school in DVSF?

A We have always believed that three schools (or more - some highly successful federations have up to six) would be necessary to get the full benefits of federation: it would take four schools for us even to achieve the number of pupils that the government now mandates as the minimum for new primary schools! We are strong believers in small village schools, but we want to enjoy the benefits of scale and stability that bigger schools get – the sort of benefits we outlined in our original federation proposal and in the presentation we gave at the recent WSCC federation workshop (see copy on our federation information page). As a result, we structured our senior leadership team accordingly, as we expected opportunities to arise as suitable schools lost their headteachers (as happened at Rogate) and we wanted to be able to move quickly to provide immediate leadership. It was always clear that we could not sustain three people at head/deputy head level for two very small schools for ever, so we would need to a) find a new federation partner; b) hire one or more of our leaders out for part of their time; or c) let one of them go (extreme option only).

Q Have other schools been approached? Are there no better options for the current federation?

A DVSF’s chair of governors, Neil Ryder, is also chair of the governance group for the Rother Valley locality, which includes 14 primary schools. Our vice-chair, Chris Hawker is also chair at Lavant primary, part of the “Chichester North” locality group of schools (including rural primaries like Singleton and West Dean). They are both members of the informal “Chairs info group” in the wider area and are on the executive committee of the W Sussex Governors Association (local branch of the NGA). Chris is a national lead governor and a member of the local W Sussex area inclusion and improvement board (which includes local headteachers), while Neil is a member of the policy-making W Sussex Schools Forum. Another DVSF governor, Kate O’Kelly is a county councillor. All three were heavily involved in fighting the cause of rural primaries in the recent LA consultation on small schools. They therefore have extensive contact with other schools and LA officers and are amongst the most knowledgeable governors in the county on the question of federation options and have discussed them with all of the most eligible other schools.

Q **So why CU Primary?**

A The DVSF board has studied federations in other counties and taken part in workshops and seminars with them, to understand the important factors in choosing partners. Before even discussing federation with CU Primary, we had identified it as one of a small group of schools that we believed would be suitable partners. The most important reason for that is that it has a very similar culture as a small C of E school offering a caring, rural village school ethos. This, and its lovely, rural setting, helps it to attract pupils mainly from areas with bigger schools – like Rake and Rogate do.

We might ideally have waited a little longer for our own federation to settle down, but when we were approached by the diocese, LA and CU Primary governors, the opportunity was one we did not want to miss.

Q **Why now – and why in such a hurry?**

A As we have explained above, the LA, the diocese and CU Primary's own governors feel the school has not achieved the improvement required to achieve a 'Good' from Ofsted – who could return any time now. These assessments, combined with low pupil numbers, make a strategic change increasingly urgent. From DVSF's viewpoint, the longer we waited before starting the school-to-school support for CU Primary under David's leadership, the bigger the problem we would be giving him and the higher the chance that we could end up partnered with a school that failed Ofsted again and would have to wait up to two years for its next inspection. We would have preferred to begin before last Christmas but it became clear that we could not achieve the clear leadership and full co-operation we needed unless we went all the way to federation in one step. The process has therefore actually been slower than we would have wished in some ways and we do not feel there was a better way to do what we needed to do.

Q **I understand the local authority are contributing financially - could you clarify how this money would be shared?**

A We expect to receive funding from the LA for the school-to-school support programme we have agreed with them, and then a two-year package of federation support (not all of it financial) to help us to fulfil the full potential benefits of federation. We have to agree a series of specific measures that we need to put in place to achieve these benefits (such as supply cover if we send some of our subject specialists down to Compton to help train staff there). The money would therefore go to whichever school incurred the extra costs.

Q **I love the thought of more shared days with other schools but I see one of the main benefits is for the children to make friends and have the opportunity to meet children who may go to the same secondary school. Would a nearer school be a better fit?**

A From that one angle alone, a nearer school might have advantages but most secondaries provide opportunities for our pupils to mix with others that will be going there with them, so we do not need federation for that. A lot of the benefits we are looking for do not require physical movement of pupils or staff, especially now that we have the IT systems in place. Where we do need pupils to move between sites, we will at least consider minibuses (as we have already done sometimes between Rake and Rogate) or larger buses (as we have for shared school trips). We have already found the pupils on these mixed days gain a lot from getting used to larger groups and making new friends, which helps their transition to secondary school, even if not all of the new friends go with them.

Q **To me, it is a risk to say that I will support a proposal that has the potential to make one of the current Rake/Rogate heads of school redundant. Why did you plan for the parent consultation to end before the proposed heads of school are decided?**

A We do understand that this was difficult and we are now pleased to be able to give certainty on the leadership team and allow a bit more time for consultation.

- Q** I felt slightly offended that a Compton governor at the parent meeting I attended said they couldn't wait to use the Rake school pool. Perhaps this was a flippant remark, or perhaps it had already been discussed, but our parents have invested heavily into our pool and there seemed no thought given that the children of Rake would have less swimming time in a pool that continues to be heavily funded from the hard work of Rake families.
- A** This was probably more of an example than a specific intention, since we have made no plans to share Rake's pool. If we do propose to share some of our facilities between schools, we would expect it to be on an exchange or paid basis, and we would not allow it to disadvantage the donor school pupils. All three schools, though have very attractive facilities that the others do not have, so we would hope the benefits of sharing would be equally shared and would benefit all three schools and their pupils and parents.
- Q** If David is going to be spending a lot of time at CU Primary to help it regain its 'Good' Ofsted rating, we will see even less of him at Rake and Rogate. Presumably Steph and Paul will also be expected to spend time there to give the school the benefit of their specialist skills. Could we end up with no senior leaders at our school sometimes and hardly ever seeing David?
- A** David will be head of school at CU Primary (at least initially). Steph will be special needs co-ordinator at all three schools and Paul head of assessment and curriculum planning (these roles and others have yet to be fully defined). As they do at present, though, they will timetable their time at all three schools so there will always be one senior leader at each site (where possible). Equally importantly, again as they already do, the three of them will be in constant touch by Teams, so that all three schools will benefit from better leadership than a single headteacher at each site could provide – and in a fully sustainable model of leadership.