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**Redlands and** **Alfred Sutton Primary Schools**

**Proposal to Federate**

**2025**

FAQs

Frequently Asked Questions

All schools considering federation are required to publish their federation proposal and to hold a consultation period during which any interested party can ask questions and comment on the proposal. We launched our consultation period on Monday 14th October and the consultation closed on Friday 29th November. During this period, we invited questions by email to dedicated federation consultation email addresses and also in person, including at two open drop-in meetings held in both schools on Monday 11th November.

There were some questions submitted by email and asked in person at the meetings. There were also some comments made at the open meetings. For your information these questions and comments have been added as an addendum to this document.

**Background and General Questions**

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|  | **Question** | **Answer** |
| Q1 | What is a federation? | A federation is an arrangement where two or more maintained schools share a single governing body. Schools federate under section 24 of the Education Act 2002.  Schools in federations continue to be individual schools, keeping their existing category, character and legal identity, but have their governance provided by the same single board. Both schools remain under local authority control and do not become academies or free schools as a result of federation. |
| Q2 | Why are you investigating the possibility of a school federation? | The driving idea behind this federation is to ensure the best possible outcomes for all pupils at both schools. It would enable us to make the best use of staff and resources within and across both schools, to the benefit of all children. |
| Q3 | What does a ‘consultation’ mean? Has the decision already been made? | No decision has been made in relation to the federation of Alfred Sutton and Redlands. At the moment this is just a proposal, and it can be progressed or amended. This consultation is just the first stage in the democratic and statutory process, and all opinions will be carefully considered. |
| Q4 | What are the next stages in the process? | Following the consultation period of at least six weeks, both Governing Boards will review all the opinions and information gathered during this process, and will use this as a basis to make a decision whether to: -   * proceed with the proposal to federate as published * proceed after making modifications that the governing board considers appropriate * decide not to proceed to federate |
| Q5 | What would be the benefits of federation? | Federations can increase capacity within the schools in the federation to achieve higher standards. The benefits are explained in the consultation document but they include:   * Improved outcomes for pupils due to collaboration and shared expertise * More consistency in teaching and learning and stronger staff/pupil relationships due to improved staff retention * Financial benefits due to economies of scale and cost sharing opportunities. It is a more cost-effective way of increasing the opportunity for specialist teaching. * The possibility to extend after school curricular activities and out of hours clubs * Saving on curriculum and strategic planning and administrative time. |
| Q6 | How successful are federations? | There is an increasing number of examples of federated school arrangements, both locally within the Reading area and nationally. With regard to the curriculum, within each school a federated approach to learning will allow us to share the physical resources, specialist teaching and leadership aptitudes across the federation. |
| Q7 | What is the difference between the current informal partnership and a formal federation? | A formal governance federation is a legal agreement between schools, where they share a governing board and where the governing board and committees with delegated powers take decisions on behalf of both schools, even though each school retains its own budget share. In the current informal partnership agreement, each school has retained its own governing board and decision making remains within each school. |
| Q8 | Why do we need the current situation to change? | The informal agreement cannot continue indefinitely. There is a lot of duplication of work for the leadership team and across both governing boards, and only limited costs can be shared. A formal federation would allow much more sharing of costs, knowledge and expertise, and would significantly cut the workload for the Executive Headteacher and leadership team, allowing them more time to focus on the pupils’ teaching and learning. |
| Q9 | Who do I speak to if I have questions about this proposal? | If you wish to send your formal comments, or have questions not answered in this document there are number of ways to get in touch with us. You can use the form available in the federation section of the website of each school or you can email questions to us using the email addresses on the front of this document. |
| Q10 | What will the federation mean in terms of each schools’ vision, aims and values? | We will preserve each schools individual identity whist working to align our aims and values to ensure a more consistent experience for all our stakeholders across the Federation. |
| Q11 | How will the outcome of the consultation be communicated? | All stakeholders will be informed about the outcome of the consultation in a written report. |
| Q12 | Is it the intention to keep the different ethos of each school unchanged? | Our vision is to maintain as much individual identity across the two sites as possible – consulting with all stakeholders before making decisions, particularly those that are a huge part of a school’s culture. |

**Questions that children and parents might ask.**

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|  | **Question** | **Answer** |
| Q13 | Why would this be good for my child? | The aim for both schools would be to continue to provide an excellent education which allows each pupil to realise their potential. The federation would provide greater opportunities for the sharing of good practice to enable both schools to excel.  Federation will allow schools to more easily:   * extend the breadth and quality of provision * respond to pupils’ wider needs * widen opportunities for staff professional development deliver greater value for money |
| Q14 | To which site would my child go to school? | Pupils would continue to go to school on their present respective school site. |
| Q15 | Would we need to buy new uniform? | No. Uniform policies in each school remain unchanged. |
| Q16 | What working links between the two schools have already been established and seen benefits? | Currently both headship teams meet on a regular basis to discuss upcoming events and share best practices. There is currently a successful partnership model in place that has given staff in both schools opportunities for career development. |
| Q17 | What effect does Federation have on school admissions? | School admissions would continue to be processed centrally by RBC, with each school maintaining its own admissions list, so admissions would be unaffected by this change. Children currently on roll will continue to be on roll in their current school. |

**Questions that Staff might ask.**

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|  | **Question** | **Answer** |
| Q18 | What would happen to the staff at Redlands and Alfred Sutton? | We are consulting with staff at both schools but the proposal would be to continue to provide high quality education as at present. Staff levels would not be expected to change significantly following the federation. We believe the proposed federation would continue to provide staff with excellent opportunities to share good practice and expertise. |
| Q19 | As a staff member in one of the schools, will I be forced to work at the other, partner school? | Current staff are employed by the individual schools and their posts are designated at those schools. No member of staff will be forced to work in the partner school.  If, in the future, staff would like to work at the partner school and there is an opportunity available the Executive Team will try to accommodate those wishes. |
| Q20 | Will employment contracts be changed to reflect the federation? | Current contracts are with **either** Redlands or Alfred Sutton Primary School. These contracts will not be changed.  New contracts for staff joining after Federation, should it take place, will be with the Federation, that is **both** Redlands and Alfred Sutton Primary Schools.    New contracts will be issued for new employees and those current staff who change role or hours. |
| Q21 | Beyond being asked to work at the other school can staff request to work in the other school? | Yes, the Executive Head will consider the request of an individual member of staff. The staffing structure will be decided based on the needs of the children and the operational requirements of both schools. |
| Q22 | What opportunities will there be for staff development? | Teachers, support staff, school leaders and governors have added expertise in working alongside colleagues to improve provision and outcomes for pupils. Shared continuous professional development and training will enhance the learning experience and offer for children. It will open up opportunities for staff development and leadership opportunities across both settings. |
| Q23 | Will there be more opportunity for teachers and support staff across both schools to work collaboratively? | Staff in both schools have already been working together to plan the curriculum and share expert knowledge and experience to improve outcomes for all children. |

**Questions about resources**

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|  | **Question** | **Answer** |
| Q24 | Is this just a money saving exercise? | No. The proposal is driven foremost by the desire to develop school standards by sharing expertise and best practice across both schools.  Government funding for education remains challenging and Federation would allow both schools to make the most of the funding they receive. |
| Q25 | How would the schools be funded? | The way in which an individual school’s budget is calculated is not affected by federation - each school in the federation will continue to receive its own budget from the LA based on the number of registered pupils at the school plus any other factors (such as SEND funding, for example). |

**Questions about the operation of Federated schools**

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|  | **Question** | **Answer** |
| Q26 | How does federation sustain school standards and support and improve achievement? | One of the advantages of a federation is that it can prevent schools getting into difficulty through greater scrutiny, challenge and support. The strong leadership and teaching excellence that can be shared would enable both schools to continue to improve on their already good performance. |
| Q27 | How would the schools be inspected by Ofsted? | Both schools would continue to be inspected separately and listed separately in performance tables. |
| Q28 | What difference would parents see in terms of the operation of the school? | Parents will not see any change in the day to day operation of the schools. |

**Questions asked during the consultation period:**

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|  | **Question** | **Answer** |
| Q1 | You are not planning to introduce a uniform to Redlands, are you? | We have introduced a PE kit which we recognise has caused some concern amongst parents. The reason for the PE kit introduction was that previously children wore for PE the clothes they wore in the classroom and whilst this was fine when PE was at the end of the day, now we are working with a specialist sports coach across the two schools, PE lessons can take place at any time during the school day. Sitting in the classroom in sweaty clothing is not ideal and it gets the children used to the routine of changing their clothes for PE which is something they will have to do at secondary schools. We have no plans to introduce a school uniform to Redlands. |
| Q2 | You have a bespoke SEND offer at Redlands which I am happy with – will Federation affect the SEND offer? | Federation will not affect the SEND offer in either school. Both have established ARPs (Additionally Resourced Provision) for higher need pupils and both schools have specialist staff teaching and supporting SEND children with a variety of needs. This will not change. We are pleased to hear that you are happy with the SEND provision in Redlands. |
| Q3 | We know the birth rate is falling – what plans do you have to ensure that Redlands is full every year? | We use data from the LA which tells us that the numbers of children entering primary will rise again in 2 years. Historically Redlands always had a positive reputation locally and we are working hard to rebuild trust and reassure parents. We have the capacity now to drive improvements across both schools and parents touring either school will be able to decide which school best meets the need of their individual child knowing that the quality of education received will be equitable over the two schools. |
| Q4 | What is the LA stance on Federation – are they supportive and do you get the support you need from them? | Brian Grady is the Director of Education at the LA and it is his desire to see a small number of larger federations in Reading -especially within the Primary sector. The LA are supportive of our federation proposal. The LA have been working with Redlands over the last 2 years to improve the quality of education – the data is showing that the education offered has improved and hopefully parents will have seen this too. The LA want to improve the provision of education in Reading, especially SEND provision and working together gives our two schools the flexibility we need to improve as well as greater purchasing power for our services. |
| Q5 | I work with BFfC – who is your school improvement officer? | Mo Galway. We have the same SIO over both schools which is also beneficial. |
| Q6 | I have been working with BFfC to make the curriculum more reflective of our local demographics – is this something you plan to do? | In a single-entry form school, teachers are often planning the curriculum for their year group on their own – we have now been planning in teams of at least 4 including ASPS and Redlands staff teaching any single year group. This improves the workload for staff but also means staff are no longer isolated and have more time and resources to make the curriculum more bespoke and the planning process more dynamic. |
| Q7 | As the ERF do you have plans to go out and acquire any more schools? | We want both schools to flourish and it will take time for the new management structure in both schools to settle in and for staff to get used to new ways of cooperative working. We currently have no plans to add additional schools. It is the SLT’s job to managed the operation of the schools and the Governing Boards to determine strategy. The new GB will also take some time to establish itself. |
| Q8 | You mentioned the new Governing Board – what will this look like? | Initially, the new GB will be made up of governors from the current two GBs, so both schools will be represented. There may also be one or two new governors, with more joining in time. The new GB will oversee strategy for the whole Federation – not two schools separately. |
| Q7 | Some time ago Newtown and St Johns primaries federated and at the time Newtown was struggling and St Johns was successful and post federation this situation reversed. Some parents think federation was the cause of this and are concerned that ASPS does not end up on the downward end of this “sea-saw” effect. | The EHT acknowledged that this had occurred after these two schools federated and understood why this might cause some parental concern, however there are big differences. RH has been HT at ASPS for 7-8 years and has built a strong team of SLT members – the majority of whom are still with the school and some of whom are now working across both schools. This brings a depth of leadership over to Redlands to support them, but also retains these skilled staff within the federation as a whole. This gives our federation strong leadership and increased capacity which was not the case in other federations locally. The fact that our work is enriching the offer to both schools is backed up by the data which shows that ASPS and Redlands lead the field locally for performance, especially in maths. |
| Q8 | The proposal mentions that the existing GBs are dissolved and a new one takes effect – but I’m not clear on how that works. | There is a document approved by the LA called the IOG that lays out the constitution of the new GB – specifying the number and type of governors. E.g. the EHT and HoS, an LA appointed or approved governor, 1 staff governor elected by all the staff, 2 parent governors elected by the parent bodies of both schools and the rest are co-opted for their skills and experience so that the GB as a whole has all the skills it needs to function effectively. Once in post, all governor roles are the same and equal. A chair and a Vice-chair are elected from within the GB by the members. |
| Q9 | What date will federation take place? | We have effectively been working as a “soft” federation for the last 18 months but we are due to formally federate in January 25. When the children and parents return to school after the Christmas break they will see no differences in their classrooms or schools. It will however give us the chance to have some economies of scale in some areas such as purchasing and curriculum planning – where many more heads will share the workload. |
| Q10 | Some parents are concerned that one school (the one most in need at any one time or for any one aspect) will get all the focus and attention and the other might be neglected. | We have increased the size of our management team and this is deliberately a very fluid model that can be adjusted as needed to ensure that we have enough capacity to manage all areas effectively. |
| Q11 | I have read the presented advantages of federation but what are the disadvantages that I presume have been researched if not presented? | Federating does not come without potential challenges and disadvantages.  For the proposed ERF senior staff such as head teachers, deputy headteachers and the SBM who previously worked full time in one school are now shared across two. In anticipation of this situation senior appointments have already been made and the operational issues created have been thought through and managed.  In general schools entering a federation find there is the loss of autonomy as decisions regarding staffing and resource allocation are taken by federation leadership rather than at school level.    Another potential disadvantage comes from management distractions that occur as new systems and processes are developed appropriate for a federation rather than a single school.  What works in one setting may not work in another so a degree of reworking and compromise is necessary.    Senior leaders have been working across both schools since the summer of 2023 allowing them to anticipate and mitigate any disadvantage that may occur.  Administrative functions including the workload on the SBM remain a target area to improve and a plan is in place for this. |
| Q12 | I have also read the benefits to Redlands of a federation but can you give more information on the specific benefits to Alfred Sutton? | Benefits to ASPS include, as explained in the previous answer, that we are able to keep a number of key, experienced staff within the federation that might have been looking elsewhere to advance their careers. We are also able to share the cost of these staff over both schools so that there is a financial benefit too. For the children, there will be greater opportunities for broader learning and social experiences leading to improvement in pupil performance. We will be able to share resources, best practice, facilities and expertise. We can place further emphasis on strategic leadership and management structures, and all staff will have new opportunities to work together, share best practise, reduce isolation and offer greater CPD opportunities.  Duplication of effort can be avoided and there is an opportunity to promote better economies of scale. In the last 10 days there was a joint trip by 120 year 5 pupils from both schools who visited Leighton Park school for a literacy event, which it is hoped is the first of many joint school enrichment activities for the children. |

**Comments made during the consultation period:**

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| 1 | I am happy with your Federation plans and feel the last 18 months have gone well. | Thank you. |
| 2 | I am involved with the Redlands PTA – just a comment that the two PTAs should remain separate. | (This is not a school issue but one for the individual PTAs to decide.) |
| 3 | Comment from a governor: I am excited by this prospect as I am a local to Redlands and this Federation keeps us local – we are not joining a group of schools spread over a wide geographic area. | Comment from HoS: We did research into successful federations when we first looked at this and found that schools within a close proximity had greater success. Here, we can walk between the two schools in 10 minutes. There are federations in rural areas, such as Wales, whose schools are many miles distant. |
| 4 | There seems to be a feeling amongst the parents that federation is happening, so there is little point in getting involved in the consultation. | The school acknowledged that this might be what families are feeling, but the schools have to follow the legal process as set out by the government. All staffing changes that have been made so far are interim only – federation is not a “done deal” but most importantly the views of the parents might change the way things are planned and completed. The school are keen to hear views and would encourage everyone to express their views/ask questions using the dedicated email addresses supplied.  The point was made that the primary focus of federation is to improve the education of children in the East Reading area. Parents have the choice of sending their child to a smaller or a larger school knowing that the education received will be equitable in both and that expertise can be shared over both schools for the benefit of all.  The consultation is as much about HOW the schools do things as it is about whether or not it will go ahead.  The point was also made that the political climate locally is supporting the federation proposal, with the LA and Director of Education in favour of it. |
| 5 | The two school communities are very close with perhaps the perception being that Redlands is more “nurturing” and ASPS more “effective” – parents seem concerned not to lose these strengths. | We are keen to retain them too – but also keen to learn from each other, so Redlands becomes more “effective” and ASPS strengthens its nurturing aspect. |
| 6 | The feeling is that this is a positive step, but that the communication has not sold it to parents in a positive light. | We have to follow legal processes and the format of the federation proposal document that we issued is laid out by government who tells us what we have to cover in the content. We have made efforts to communicate with parents over the last 18 months and will be very happy to hold another meeting if the parents feel that they want this – perhaps at a different time if this time is hard for them. |