



17 May 2019

To our whole school communities,

The Governing Body of the Mendip Edge Federation (MEF) has proposed that our four federated schools join the Wessex Learning Trust (WLT), an established multi academy trust comprising upper, middle, first and primary schools around the Cheddar Valley.

In advance of a final decision being made and as part of the due diligence process, the Governors would like to consult with all stakeholders including you, our community of parents, carers, prospective families, volunteers, ex-pupils, village organisations, parish councillors and anyone else who is, has been or may be involved in our amazing schools. The consultation period will run from today until Friday 22 June 2019.

A document has been prepared to answer some of the questions we think you may have. The document is either enclosed with this letter or (to save paper) available online via the schools' web sites or the federation web site at www.mendipedgefederation.co.uk. Alternatively, you may collect a printed copy from any of the school offices. The list of questions and answers is not intended to be exhaustive and we will welcome your constructive input and thoughts to fully consider before the final decision is made on whether to proceed.

There will also be an open-invitation session in each of our four schools:

- Monday 3 June 2019, 3.00pm to 4.00pm – Draycott & Rodney Stoke C of E First School
- Monday 3 June 2019, 6.00pm to 7.00pm – Cheddar First School
- Tuesday 4 June 2019, 4.00pm to 5.00pm – Shipham C of E First School
- Wednesday 5 June 2019, 6.00pm to 7.00pm – Fairlands Middle School

These sessions will be a forum to learn more about the proposal and put questions to the school and governors. You are welcome to attend any of these sessions regardless of whether you have children attending the school hosting that session.

Thank you in advance for your engagement and support in this important process.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Adrian'.

Adrian Warman
Chair of Governors



Community Consultation Questions and Answers

1. Why is the Mendip Edge Federation considering joining a Multi Academy Trust?

Since the Mendip Edge Federation was formed at the start of 2014 there has been a fundamental shift in the education sector. Government funding per pupil is falling and the way centralised services are provided to schools is changing. The local authority status does not offer schools such as ours the same security or support as it has done in the past. We cannot ignore this.

At the same time, the Government has been actively encouraging the formation and development of Multi Academy Trust (MAT) organisations. Schools in a MAT have greater independence and control of their finances, can be more responsive to specific school needs and are able to benefit from services shared within the organisation. We believe the MAT model offers improved security for our schools and opportunities for pupils and staff in them.

2. What is the Wessex Learning Trust?

The Wessex Learning Trust is a local Multi Academy Trust formed in 2016, comprising first, middle and upper schools in the Cheddar Valley. The schools are:

Kings Academy Upper School, Hugh Sexey Middle School, Axbridge, East Brent, Lympsham, Mark, Weare and Wedmore First Schools. Brent Knoll Primary School has also recently joined the WLT.

A Board of Trustees is responsible for the overall strategy and performance of the schools with an Executive Headteacher overseeing the educational elements. Each school, however, retains its own individual Headteacher and Local Governing Body to represent each specific school and its pupils' interests.

3. Why is the Mendip Edge Federation proposing to join the Wessex Learning Trust in particular?

The Wessex Learning Trust is a natural geographical fit. More importantly, we believe it is a great educational fit. We already work closely with them on curriculum, SEND and the smooth transition of pupils through the schools. Our Headteachers also meet regularly with other local Headteachers. Formalising our collaboration would allow us to strengthen these relationships, share and build on what we have already achieved as a federation of four schools.

4. Has the Mendip Edge Federation looked at other options?

Yes. Our Governing Body have recognised the evolving educational environment for some time and been conscious of the possible need to change. We have considered continuing as we are currently set up, joining a range of other MATs and establishing ourselves as a MAT in our own right. We do not believe any of these alternatives would offer the same level of long term, quality education to children in the villages our schools serve.

5. Would Draycott & Rodney Stoke and Shipham C of E first schools still be Church schools?

Yes. The Diocese of Bath and Wells have been involved in discussions about joining the Wessex Learning Trust and are supportive of the move. The Church School status would be retained at Draycott & Rodney Stoke and at Shipham as would the promotion of Christian values within them which has always been so important. In fact the Church would still retain legal ownership of the land and some parts of the buildings and consider the provision of a Christian education on those sites as being central to their involvement in the communities.

6. What would the change mean for pupils currently at the schools?

We wouldn't expect pupils to even notice the difference. They will have the same teachers, be working in the same classrooms and enjoy the same range of enrichment activities such as sports, drama and external visits.

7. Would the character and culture of our school be changing?

When we formed the Mendip Edge Federation we ensured that the individual character of each school was retained. Each of our four schools thrive in their respective communities because of how they've developed over many years; how they set clear expectations and genuinely care for children; and how they prepare pupils for long term learning. The schools already in the Wessex Learning Trust have their own unique characters which work in their communities – we would be joining an organisation that embraces diversity and recognises the need for individuality.

8. Could our school be closed or merged with another school in the Wessex Learning Trust?

We are proposing this change to protect our schools and continue offering excellent education to children in our villages. It is a proposal which would follow the same course as has been chosen by many other small and medium-sized rural schools across the country. Each of the four schools in the Mendip Edge Federation is successful and viable with current and projected numbers and we would be joining alongside similar sized schools to share good practice. The current Governing Body would be retained and continue to offer steer and local governance.

9. Would the school uniform be changing?

There may be some rebranding of school signs and web site but there would be no changes to the school uniform as a result of joining the Wessex Learning Trust.

10. Would the school hours be changing?

No. The Mendip Edge Federation schools have a school day and timetable which works well for each of them and is aligned with the hours of other first and middle in the Wessex Learning Trust. Kings Academy, the upper school in Cheddar, recently changed their school hours to improve timetabling during the day ... evidence of the ability for individual schools within the Trust to make independent decisions for the benefit of their pupils.

11. Would the class sizes be changing?

Class sizes across schools in the Cheddar Valley are determined by the cohort of particular year groups in respective catchment areas alongside the teaching and classroom support resource available in those schools. The structure of classes and resourcing in the classroom would continue to be arranged within the individual schools, as it is at the moment.

12. Would children have to travel to other schools for lessons or extra-curricular activities?

Children would continue to be taught curriculum subjects in their current schools by their current teachers and would not have lessons timetabled in other schools. If we did join the Wessex Learning Trust then it would increase the scope for extra-curricular activities which could be delivered as a shared experience across multiple schools which would not be possible individually.

13. How would the change affect support for particular pupils or groups who need it?

Subject to the effectiveness of any intervention and funding being available, pupils would continue to get at least the same level of support and individual interventions as they receive at the moment. With greater control of finances and shared resources across multiple schools it is anticipated that greater support could possibly be made available.

14. When would any change be effective?

The Department for Education has a strict process to follow in such an important decision and the earliest we anticipate any changes could be effective now are September 2019. With Government and Local Authority resources increasingly stretched it is more likely that the change would be from early in 2020. We are keen not to rush the process and ensure we give sufficient time to hear opinions from the whole school community.

15. How do I get more information or discuss a particular concern?

This question and answer sheet is intended to respond to queries we had anticipated from the broad community. If you have further questions then we encourage you to:

- a) Come and talk to us at one of our open, drop-in sessions at each of the four schools:

Cheddar First School – 6pm to 7pm on Monday 3 June 2019

Draycott & Rodney Stoke C of E First School – 3pm to 4pm on Monday 3 June 2019

Fairlands Middle School – 6pm to 7pm on Wednesday 5 June 2019

Shipham C of E First School – 4pm to 5pm on Tuesday 4 June 2019

and / or

- b) Write to the Clerk to the Mendip Edge Federation Governing Body, Debbie Andrews at:

Email: DAndrews1@educ.somerset.gov.uk

Post: Clerk to the MEF, Fairlands Middle School, Masons Way, Cheddar BS27 3PG

It may not be possible to respond to every letter and email but any matters raised will be

properly documented and fully considered prior to a final decision about whether or not to proceed with this proposal to join the Wessex Learning Trust.

16. When do I need to provide feedback?

This community consultation is open until Friday 22 June 2019. Any comments must be received by the Governing Body before then.

17. Can I get involved with the Governing Body?

There are lots of ways to support the running of the schools. The Mendip Edge Federation's Governing Body is made up of volunteer governors in several categories such as parent, staff, foundation, co-opted and associate. Some of the positions are elected or appointed; other governors are invited to join because of their particular skills and experience.

We meet in the evenings, about 8 times throughout the school year plus sub-committees and working group meetings. We'd be particularly interested to hear from professionals in finance, law, HR or wider education. If the Governing Body isn't for you then please also consider the less formal – but just as important – PTA and friends groups which support the schools with fund raising.