

Consultation Document: Proposal for Somerset Nursery School to join the Wandsworth Federation of Maintained Nursery Schools

The Governors of Somerset Nursery School propose to join the existing Wandsworth Federation of Maintained Nursery Schools on 1st September 2022.

This formal consultation follows a decision taken by the Board of Governors of Somerset Nursery School taken at its Spring Term meeting on 29th March 2022, to consult with staff, parents, carers and other stakeholders on this proposal.

CONSULTATION PERIOD: Tuesday 19th April until 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday 1st June 2022 (6 weeks). This will also include the holding of two public meetings at the school, on Wednesday 27th April and Thursday 26th May. The first meeting will be held online using Zoom (details to be made available on the school's website, the second, if practical, will be held at the school. For those unable to attend either meeting, please feel free to use the response form available online at: www.somerset.wandsworth.sch.uk. The response form is also available at: www.balham-nursery.wandsworth.sch.uk and www.eastwood.wandsworth.sch.uk

Summary of the Proposal

- One of the key roles for all school Governing Boards is to set the strategic direction for the schools for which they have responsibility. The Governing Board of Somerset Nursery School has agreed that the children, staff, and the community of the school would benefit from a greater and more formal level of collaboration between the school and the two schools comprising the current Wandsworth Federation of Maintained Nursery Schools (Balham and Eastwood Nursery Schools).
- The Governing Board believes a hard Federation comprising all three nursery schools offers the best opportunity to preserve the high-quality early years education and integrated provision for the children and families currently offered by Somerset Nursery School.
- Federation will provide a more sustainable environment for both children and staff to flourish. The structure of a Federation enables the schools to further share their resources and expertise, e.g. curriculum development, leadership, teaching expertise and facilities, which will help sustain the performance and excellent outcomes for all children in all three schools.
- Federation will provide staff with opportunities for professional development through joint activities and training as well as career progression.
- The school will retain its own identity and admission procedures, will retain its own budget, and will continue to be inspected separately by Ofsted. However, the three schools will have a shared senior leadership team and the current Board of Governors of Somerset Nursery School will be dissolved and some governors will be invited to join the Governing Board of the Wandsworth Federation of Maintained Nursery Schools.

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Introduction

Somerset Nursery School in Battersea has provided a consistently outstanding, high-quality early education for Wandsworth's youngest children for many years. All three maintained nursery schools in the borough have been rated by OFSTED as "outstanding" for their pupils.

As many of you will be aware, Balham and Eastwood agreed to form a 'soft' federation back in September 2019, with a view to forming a 'hard,' federation some 18 months later. In the event, they dissolved their separate Boards in Spring of 2021. Although invited to join at that time, Somerset decided to observe the initial federation by way of a period of 'soft' federation. This enabled Somerset's Board and committee structure to continue while observing the effect and impact of the 'hard' federation. This was perhaps the only difference between the 'soft' and 'hard' federation. Now that we have had the opportunity to observe the federation, we are consulting on the proposal to join the organisation and dissolve the separate Board of Governors for Somerset Nursery School.

What would federation mean for Somerset Nursery School?

A federation would involve Somerset operating under the governance of a single governing body. At present, all three schools share an Executive Head Teacher, but Somerset is governed by a separate Governing Body and three sub-committees.

What would stay the same?	What would change?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Somerset would keep its own identity and name. It is <u>not</u> a merger of schools.• Children would continue to be taught in their school although some activities may be shared. For example, family services, professional services, out of school provision, provision for children with special educational needs or disabilities.• Each school would continue to receive its own budget and be subject to all current funding protocols, reporting mechanisms and financial regulations.• Each school would be inspected separately by Ofsted.• Admission arrangements would not change.• Existing members of staff at Somerset would remain employed by Wandsworth Council on the same contracts of employment.• The current Deputy Headteacher (Kellie Schrader) will continue to run the school on a day-to-day basis, and she will continue to report to the Executive Headteacher of the Federation (Emma Williams)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Somerset Governing Board would be dissolved, and some existing governors of Somerset would be invited to join the Board of the Wandsworth Federation of Maintained Nursery Schools• The new Governing Board would become responsible for all three school budgets and would determine how expenditure could be most effectively used across the Federation.• There would be a single shared senior leadership structure.• Closer working between schools would provide opportunities for career progression and professional opportunities.• With Somerset Nursery School joining the federation, there will be an opportunity to examine the shared leadership structure, and to ensure that it meets the needs of each school• Somerset will also be invited to provide a number of Somerset Governors as agreed in the Instrument of Government of the new enlarged Federation Board

What are the benefits of federation?

In summary, the chief benefits are:

- Sustainability
- Improved opportunities and outcomes for children
- Improved opportunities for staff
- Improved governance, and
- Support for Early Years in Wandsworth

These are expanded below.

Sustainability	<p>For several years now, Somerset has been faced with the steady reduction in the number of pupils on roll and this is forecast to continue. Since the school finances are in large part dependent on the per capita formula employed by the Department of Education, this means that Somerset will have to deal with a shrinking source of finance.</p> <p>Whilst initial forecasts indicate limited, if any, savings in the early years of a Federation, it is likely that over a period of several years savings will be achievable through efficiencies and economies of scale. These may include the sharing of administrative functions, shared HR functions including pay arrangements, savings on maintenance contracts, purchasing and supplies.</p>
Improved outcomes for children	<p>There are advantages for children in federated schools. Research carried out by the National Governors' Association (NGA) in 2014, stated:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“In schools that went forward with federation, standards had risen across the board. Improved teaching and learning was reported to be a major benefit, largely achieved because federation allows leaders greater flexibility with staffing, such as being able to distribute staff across schools, whether it be for cover or to share specialist skills.”¹</p> <p>Governors believe the benefits in standards, teaching and learning described above will accrue from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● the opportunity to share teaching expertise and therefore build stronger pedagogy across the three schools, ● a wider and richer curriculum including cross-federation events in arts, sports and music, ● the opportunity to retain high quality teachers because of staff development opportunities, ● the opportunity to attract ambitious applicants; and ● the opportunity to share teaching resources across the schools. <p>In addition, improvements in teaching and learning will promote improved pupil engagement and behaviour and greater enjoyment of school.</p> <p>The benefits of a Federation to the children will include sharing resources such as Case Managers, Educational Psychologists, and Speech and Language Therapists. These resources enable staff to work together more closely and support each other in meeting the varied needs of the children.</p>
Improved opportunities for staff	<p>The NGA's research in 2014 identified some of the benefits to staff of working in a federated school:</p>

¹ <https://www.headteacher-update.com/best-practice-article/the-road-to-school-federation/66963>

	<p>“Federations also offer a unique set of challenges, allowing them to attract more ambitious applicants when recruiting, as well as to retain their best existing teachers.”²</p> <p>Governors believe the benefits for staff will come about through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • easier and more efficient communication between the staff of the three schools than would be the case if the schools were separate establishments, • more straightforward contractual arrangements relating to working in all schools, • improved induction programme for staff to ensure that all staff work together and in harmony when using school systems and procedures, • the sharing of good practice and expertise, richer professional development, and training, • the building of stronger pedagogy, • improved opportunities for staff with better recruitment and retention through improved career progression and opportunities to work across all schools and in a range of contexts; and • the opportunities for system leadership by middle and senior leaders. <p>Shared training such as on INSET days will enable staff to support each other and learn from one another, thus having a positive impact on the children they teach. Opportunities to share learning and visit each site will provide varied learning opportunities for staff and a positive impact upon teaching. Sharing outstanding practice will be a key strength.</p>
<p>Improved governance</p>	<p>The benefits of shared governance are likely to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a renewed focus, with fresh points of view, on the most effective ways of delivering high quality early education for Wandsworth’s youngest children • greater strategic flexibility in terms of staffing • the opportunity, at the time of federation, to re-constitute with a structure that reflects best practice and members who are appointed with knowledge and skills to continue and build upon the strong governance of all three schools • increased economies of scale in the strategic use of funding. Each school is likely to keep its unique qualities and separate budget. However, it is also likely that each school will contribute to a ‘shared pot’ for shared costs • the streamlining of governing body functions. This last benefit will mean that less staff time is required to service and support both Full Governing Board and Committee meetings
<p>Support for Early Years in Wandsworth</p>	<p>The improved capacity to support the development of even better leadership, teaching and support for children’s well-being within the federation will depend on the improvements in communication, talent-spotting, succession planning, systems and teacher training described above. These same improvements, once established within the federation, can be used to build system leadership across the early years sector in Wandsworth, and more widely, through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effective liaison and collaboration at leadership level with other schools and teacher training establishments • being an outstanding placement for trainee nursery teachers and nursery nurses • being a centre of excellence where high quality early years practice may be observed • offering outreach support to local primary schools.

² <https://www.headteacher-update.com/best-practice-article/the-road-to-school-federation/66963>

What are the alternatives to a Federation?

Unfortunately, remaining as a stand-alone maintained nursery school is unlikely to be viable in the long run. It would necessitate either the promotion of the existing Deputy Headteacher or the recruitment of an additional member of staff i.e. a new Headteacher, both expensive propositions.

Alternatives to forming a Federation between the maintained nursery schools include vertical integration into primary schools or joining a local Academy. However, it is important to the current Governing Board that we preserve the unique identity of our nursery school. Federation with other maintained nursery schools involves horizontal integration which will allow our nursery school pedagogy and quality to remain strong.

How to respond to the Consultation

The Governing Board of Somerset school would really like to hear your views. If you have any comments, please complete the Consultation Response Form sent with this consultation document. A copy will also be made available on Somerset's website at <http://someset.wandsworth.sch.uk>

A document containing answers to Frequently Asked Questions provides further details and is also available on the school's website <http://someset.wandsworth.sch.uk>

Copies will also be made available on:

Balham Nursery School's website <https://balham-nursery.wandsworth.sch.uk> and

Eastwood Nursery School's website <http://www.eastwood.wandsworth.sch.uk>

Please return the Consultation Response Form in an envelope marked FEDERATION RESPONSE by 9am on 31st May 2022.

The Executive Headteacher will arrange for consultation with staff at each school and there will be an opportunity for parents, carers and stakeholders from each community to discuss the proposals either online on **27th April** or at the Somerset Nursery school on **26th May**.

The Governing Board will meet to review consultation responses to decide whether the school will proceed or not with this proposal following the end of the consultation period.

Appendix 1 | Proposed constitution of the Federation Governing Board

Category of Governor	Who appoints them?	Number
Headteacher	Ex Officio	1
Elected Parent Governor	One to be elected by all parents/carers of children on roll at each school	3
Staff Governor	One to be elected by all the staff employed by the Federation	1
Local Authority Governor	Proposed by Wandsworth Council	1
Co-opted Governor	Appointed by Governing Board according to skills	8
TOTAL		14

Somerset Nursery School - 4th April 2022

Consultation Circulation List:

- » Parents and Carers of Children registered at Somerset Nursery School (and Balham and Eastwood Nursery Schools)
- » All Staff, including the Deputy Headteacher at Somerset Nursery School (and Balham and Eastwood Nursery Schools)
- » The Governors and Clerks to Governors of Somerset Nursery School and The Wandsworth Federation of Maintained Nursery School Board
- » Ana Popovici, Director of Children's Services, Wandsworth Borough Council
- » Borough Councillors in whose ward the school catchment area lies
- » MPs in whose constituency the school catchment area lies
- » Secretary of State for Education
- » Chair of Education Committee, London Borough of Wandsworth