

## Consultation – Have your say

### Proposal for the Federation of: The Thomas Coram Church of England School and Victoria Church of England Infant and Nursery School, Berkhamsted

#### What we're proposing

The Governing Bodies of Thomas Coram and Victoria have been looking at ways of working more closely together to offer the best educational provision for our children. Our vision across both schools is to be a Christian family that ensures the highest quality outcomes for all children through integrated and outstanding teaching and learning experiences. This vision includes building a combined culture of high expectations and continual improvement, which is underpinned by effective and inspirational leadership.

**To help us achieve this vision, we are proposing to move beyond our current 'Formal Collaboration' agreement (see page 2) and set up a 'Federation' between our two schools.**

The following pages explain in more detail how a Federation could work. Compared to our current Formal Collaboration agreement, the key differences in a Federation would be:

- a new single Governing Body would oversee both schools
- all current staff would be employed by the new Federation Governing Body, who is the employer for both schools

Under this proposal Thomas Coram and Victoria **will still**:

- maintain their existing school character and identity
- run their own budgets and apply for funding separately
- have the existing Head leadership structure
- have their own Ofsted and Church of England inspections
- operate from their existing school sites
- keep their school names and uniforms
- continue their close relationship with Swing Gate Infant School and Nursery
- adhere to their existing admissions policies

This consultation runs for six weeks, between 5 January-16 February 2018. We're seeking the views of everyone who has an interest in Thomas Coram or Victoria, by **midday 16 February**. This Federation, called Castle Church of England Federation, is proposed to start on 16 April 2018.

**What has happened under the Formal Collaboration so far**

In May 2017 Thomas Coram and Victoria entered into a Formal Collaboration agreement, which allowed the Governing Bodies to recruit an Executive Headteacher (Mr Halls) and to reorganise the senior leadership teams in both schools. This formal agreement also allowed us to set up a Joint Executive Committee – essentially a group of governors, made up of an equal number from both schools, to work with Mr Halls on this Collaboration and assess our options for the future. Much has already been done to strengthen links between the schools, including:

- joint training sessions for staff and governors
- shared meetings for staff and governors and opportunities for both to visit classes in the other school and share best practice
- combining our Christian vision to cover both schools
- reviewing the curriculum for physical education, religious education, computing and PSHE to ensure consistency of approach across all primary stages

**Why move to a Federation?**

The Victoria and Thomas Coram governors are proposing this move from Collaboration to a Federation, as we believe that a single Governing Body will be able to:

- formalise and protect what has already been developed through our Formal Collaboration
- develop a shared strategic direction for both schools (with consistency of policies, formed by one Governing Body. See page 4 for proposed Governing Body composition)
- streamline decision-making to make more effective use of resources between both schools, ultimately improving outcomes for our children
- offer career development opportunities for our staff - as a single employer for both schools, the Federation can recruit and retain high quality staff across the whole Primary stage

**What we’re asking you to do now**

This consultation runs for six weeks, from 5 January to 16 February 2018 and seeks views from everyone who has an interest in Thomas Coram or Victoria. We are also consulting the Diocese of St Albans and the Local Authority. The deadline for feedback is **midday 16 February**. You can:

<b>Come to an information drop-in</b>	We invite you come and discuss the proposal at one of our open sessions on 15 January, between 7.30pm-8.30pm at Thomas Coram, and 16 January between 2.00-3.00pm at Victoria.
<b>Respond online</b>	Click <a href="#">here</a> or visit <a href="https://goo.gl/mbbsrp">https://goo.gl/mbbsrp</a> to complete an online response form that will automatically be sent to the relevant school/both schools.
<b>Hand in or post a response</b>	The response form and postal address details are included at the end of this document. Copies of this proposal and the response forms are also available from both school offices.

All feedback will be made available to both Governing Bodies at the end of the consultation process and before a decision is made whether to proceed with this proposed Federation. The decision will then be communicated to children, parents, staff and others with an interest in the schools. If a decision to proceed with the proposal is made, the intention is for the Castle Church of England Federation to take effect from 16 April 2018.

## **Further information on the proposed Federation**

### **What is a Federation?**

Unlike a Collaboration, a Federation is when two or more schools work together under one single Governing Body. It is formally constituted using statutory regulations. While a Federation is not a merger (an 'amalgamation'); it does represent a deeper, long-term commitment to working in partnership. Federations are increasingly common in the education sector.

The benefit of moving to a Federation rather than staying in a Collaboration is that the one Governing Body provides strategic leadership by drawing on experiences from both schools, using governors' expertise and skills for the Federation's best interests. Each school in a Federation would still:

- retain its existing character and identity, with uniforms continuing to remain unique to each school, with individual badges and colour schemes
- retain individual budgets and keep their own clear audit trails for all income and expenditure. Over time opportunities for the pooling of budgets in certain areas may be possible (e.g. for specific projects or in order to achieve economies of scale)
- retain its own admission arrangements (each school is its own admissions authority)
- be inspected as a separate school by the schools' inspectorate, Ofsted and the Church of England (SIAMS)

### **What would Federation mean for our children and their families?**

The Governing Bodies of both schools believe that a Federation single Governing Body would:

- streamline decision-making and offer a shared strategic direction and collaborative vision for the schools
- enable each school to further develop the quality of its teaching and learning through sharing expertise and knowledge and to provide a broader curriculum that encourages each child to fulfil his or her maximum potential
- enable the more effective use of resources, so that more energy is put into enriching our children's experience, within the curriculum and beyond
- provide further opportunity for joint community activities
- build upon the increased collaboration that has taken place in recent months, for instance in better aligning term and training day dates so as to more effectively support school-parent communication, especially for those children with working parents
- provide opportunities to address some of the practical difficulties faced by parents with children at both schools in terms of logistical support
- more effectively support the transition from year 2 to year 3 by ensuring that learning initiated in one school could be built upon in the other (using aligned curriculums, shared approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, jointly planned extra-curricular provision and shared technology systems) while retaining the distinct ethos of our separate infant and junior schools
- enable seamless monitoring of pupil progress from ages 3 to 11
- ensure consistency of policies across both schools

- improve outcomes for children with additional needs through the joint working of the Special Educational Needs co-ordinators, joint special educational needs policies, pooling of resources and expertise on quickly obtaining Education Health & Care plans where necessary
- ensure a consistent approach to expectations of behaviour, both in and out the classroom

### **What would Federation mean for our staff?**

The current senior leadership team (with an Executive Headteacher and a Head of School for each school) would remain in place. Our staff teams in Thomas Coram and Victoria are our greatest asset in ensuring our children receive the best educational start in life. The benefits of a Federation for our staff include:

- having access to a wider range of professional and career development opportunities across the Primary stage, enabling both schools to attract and retain the best teachers and support staff
- having the opportunity to teach in different settings (if they wish) and to gain experience working across more than one site
- new staff will be employed on a Federation contract that would enable them to be deployed where their skills and experience are most in need, or across both schools where they have a specialism needed on each site

All current staff will be employed by the new Federation Governing Body, who will be the employer for both schools. All staff contracts will be transferred to the Castle Church of England Federation under TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings, Protection of Employment), meaning staff's terms and conditions of employment are protected.

### **What would Federation mean for our governors?**

The closer governor liaison that has been nurtured over the process of discussing the Federation will continue to grow as a single Governing Body is formed to replace our two existing Governing Bodies. This new group of governors will also be able to benefit from shared experiences and good practice. Their experience and commitment will benefit both schools.

### **Composition of the Governing Body of the proposed Federation**

The proposed Federation will have one Governing Body. It would be composed of representatives from both Thomas Coram and Victoria communities, and would include volunteers from the existing Governing Bodies and governors from new elections. The Federation Governing Body would comprise:

- 1 local authority governor
- 2 elected parent governors (these can be drawn from either school within the Federation)
- 1 elected staff governor
- the Executive Headteacher
- 2 co-opted governors (it is suggested that these positions are filled by the two Heads of School)
- 9 foundation governors (foundation governors include a member of the clergy, and others with links to local church life. Some are appointed directly by the Diocesan Board of Education and some by the Parochial Church Councils of St Peter's and Sunnyside churches).

This would give the Governing Body a total of 16 governors. Once established, this Governing Body would then elect the Chair and agree the associated committee structures and roles. In addition, some existing governors either at Victoria or Thomas Coram, who have particular skills (eg IT systems), may be appointed as associate members to the Governing Body to help us in the set up of and start of the Federation.

**Who would the admissions authority be for the two schools in this Federation?**

While the new Federation Governing Body would be the overall admissions authority, each school would keep their own specific admissions policy.

**What would Federation mean for our relationships with Swing Gate Infant School and Nursery, Ashlyns, and the other Berkhamsted schools?**

The Castle Church of England Federation would continue to work collaboratively with the other schools in Berkhamsted in particular with our partner school Swing Gate. We would still meet regularly with staff and governors at Swing Gate to share knowledge, expertise and best practice and ensure a successful transition of Swing Gate children to Thomas Coram. Both Thomas Coram and Victoria would also continue to engage in joint community events with Swing Gate wherever possible. We invite staff, parents, carers and the wider community involved with Swing Gate to also attend the information drop-ins and respond to this consultation.

The proposed Federation will not change the other close relationships we have with Ashlyns and the schools in the Berkhamsted Educational Trust, and our local church schools. They will continue to be kept informed of this proposal.

**Does this mean Thomas Coram is merging with Victoria?**

A merger ('amalgamation') involves the closure of one or more schools to make one combined school, which is either spread across existing sites or moves to one site. This consultation is proposing a Federation where Thomas Coram and Victoria remain separate legal entities, operating from their existing school sites.

**What about becoming a multi-academy trust ('MAT'), like the Berkhamsted Educational Trust?**

Both Thomas Coram and Victoria School Governing Bodies are fully aware of the Government's ongoing commitment to encouraging schools in England to convert to academy status, either by joining an existing MAT, or setting up a MAT from scratch, like the Berkhamsted Educational Trust. School Federations are also common however, and federating remains a valid option for local schools wishing to come together without taking on the additional legal and governance complexities involved in a MAT.

As it is still possible for a Federation of schools to subsequently join or create a MAT, the Governing Bodies (and the proposed single Federation Governing Body) will continue to assess this option in the future, in the context of the possible benefits it might bring for our children.

At this moment however the Thomas Coram and Victoria School Governing Bodies believe this proposed Federation is a more realistic and practical step in formalising the collaboration between the two schools.



## Confidential Response Form

In response to the consultation document outlining the proposal to form a Federation between The Thomas Coram Church of England School and Victoria Church of England Infant and Nursery School from 16 April 2018. All responses will be treated in the strictest of confidence; however we will not be able to take anonymous comments into consideration. **Responses must be received before midday on Friday 16 February 2018.**

Name:

Address



Postcode

I am a (please select):

Parent / Carer of a child at The Thomas Coram Church of England School

Parent / Carer of a child at Victoria Church of England Infant and Nursery School

Member of staff at The Thomas Coram Church of England School

Member of staff at Victoria Church of England Infant and Nursery School

Other interested party (please specify):

Your response (please select):

I support the proposal

I do NOT support the proposal

I am not sure

Please give your reasons/view if you wish (if necessary use the reverse side of this form):


Please provide your response via the online form (<https://goo.gl/mbbsrp> or click [here](#)) or in writing to the School Office at either The Thomas Coram Church of England School, Swing Gate Lane, Berkhamsted, HP4 2NP or at Victoria Church of England Infant and Nursery School, Prince Edward Street, Berkhamsted, HP4 3HA. Thank you.