

# CARDIFF EDUCATION

COLLABORATION AND  
FEDERATION STRATEGY

2024-2033







# Foreword

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Education is consistently ranked as the top priority for children and young people in Cardiff, a key social and cultural right which plays an essential role in overcoming poverty and disadvantage.

Cardiff Council is unequivocal that a good education is the surest route out of poverty and, in turn that, the long-term prosperity of the city relies on us supporting all of our young people to reach their potential with a relentless focus on ensuring no child is left behind.

We are proud to be recognised as a Child Friendly City that places children and young people at the heart of all that we do and every decision we make. To achieve maximum benefits for our learners, their families, our education workforce and local communities we are already working extensively with partners across Cardiff to make sure that children and young people are benefitting from the advantages that only growing up in a capital city can bring, including access to an extensive range of leisure, sporting, and cultural opportunities across our city.

Over the past decade Cardiff Council has worked with schools and partners to deliver sustained improvement in the quality and effectiveness of Cardiff's education system.

We are closer than ever before to making every school a good school, with strong inspection outcomes, education attainment above the national average and the roll-out of the Sustainable Communities for Living Programme investing millions in delivering a high quality learning environments.

Cardiff Education: Collaboration and Federation Strategy 2024-2033 sets out the future shape of Education delivery in the city. It renews our commitment to the principles of Cardiff 2030 and how we plan to harness the power of collaborative working and strong leadership to both maintain and improve our current offer for our learners. We are committed to working towards a more localised Education offer, one that ensures the best possible range of quality of learning opportunities for all learners to achieve high standards and contribute to community development, social inclusion and economic prosperity across the city.

We firmly believe that the our staff, our communities and all families that contribute to our school system should have the very best and we thank all of those parties for their continued involvement and dedication to our city.

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Cllr Huw Thomas,  
Leader of Cardiff Council



Cllr Sarah Merry,  
Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Education,  
Employment and Skills



# Introduction

Strong leadership and governance are a pre-requisite for delivering good educational outcomes for children and young people across the city. The contribution of senior school leaders and governors is therefore critical in embedding the vision, values and culture needed to make every school in Cardiff a good school. Over the past 10 years, our schools have been characterised by highly capable senior leadership and governing bodies, with a recognised pipeline of emerging talent across our education workforce. Together, they have delivered positive outcomes for our learners and a culture of inclusive practice.

Cardiff Education: Collaboration and Federation Strategy 2024-2033 has been developed to build upon the recent achievements across Cardiff's schools, to consider the changing demands for the future and to outline our vision to deliver the themes and goals of Cardiff 2030. The strategy will provide a framework to encourage collaborative working and a toolkit that practitioners should consider in localities across the city.

Cardiff has made significant progress in terms of the number of schools that offer high quality educational experiences to their pupils as evidenced

through a number of Estyn reports. Every school in Cardiff works in partnership with others whether with families and organisations in their local community, with their secondary school transitions or with other schools with a view to enhancing opportunities for learners and staff.

There are also a number of collaboration arrangements and formal federations successfully operating across the city. Much has been learnt from these and there is clear evidence of success with firm benefits in the form of enhanced learning opportunities, a narrowing of the attainment gap for deprived pupils alongside increased scope for professional development of the workforce as well as maximising the skills strong leadership and governance able to achieve improved value for learners and school staff.

Beyond these formal agreements, there are cluster arrangements and sector partnerships aligned within and across age phases. Many of these partnerships are securing benefits from working together to secure additional services and/or access to resources to support learning that may not be affordable for one school alone.



# Meeting Shared Aspirations and Common Challenges: The Case for Change in Cardiff

All schools across Cardiff are facing a series of common challenges, which include:

- Recruitment and retention challenges relating to all levels of staffing;
- A significant increase in the number of children with Additional Learning Needs, with the demand for placements greater than supply for many years;
- Inequality of provision, including access to Welsh medium and post 16 education;
- A deterioration in the wellbeing and mental health of young people, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic;
- The underuse of facilities across our education estate limiting the opportunities for learners and local communities to access high quality physical assets;
- Demographic changes resulting in falling pupil numbers and financial pressures on schools;
- Maintaining the Education estate and lowering the carbon footprint of school buildings.

Successfully addressing these challenges, during a period of significant financial challenge, demands a collaborative approach which leverages the talent and creativity of school leaders across Cardiff. The benefits of collaboration between schools are now well established, with national and international research unequivocal about the importance of shared working in delivering effective school systems.

The Council is therefore committed to effectively coordinating the skills and experience of our most talented education leaders and governors where there are clear opportunities to focus their leadership capacity on common challenges and shared aspirations.

This strategy builds on this evidence, along with incorporating the experience and knowledge of Cardiff Council and Central South Consortium (CSC) professionals, and Cardiff headteachers that are skilled in collaborative working and that have a demonstrated ability to lead high quality teaching and learning organisations that include two or more schools.





# Cardiff 2030: The Benefits of Working together to Deliver Improved Outcomes

“ All children and young people in Cardiff experience high quality education and develop the knowledge, skills and attributes that enable them to become personally successful, economically productive and globally engaged citizens  
(Cardiff 2030 vision) ”

Cardiff 2030 sets out an ambitious vision, underpinned by two themes, five goals and priority commitments:

## THEMES:

- A shared responsibility for education and learning across the city,
- Meaningful participation of children and young people

## GOALS:

- A Learning Entitlement
- Learners' health and wellbeing
- Realising the Curriculum for Wales 2022 in Cardiff
- A world class education workforce
- High quality learning environments

In order to deliver on the Council's 'Stronger Fairer Greener' commitments and meet our Cardiff 2030 aspirations, this strategy places a clear focus on bringing more schools together through collaborative working and formal federations. In doing so, Cardiff will ensure it best placed to secure a highly effective education system that is sustainable into the future to the benefit of all within it.



# Collaboration and Federation Strategy Vision

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The vision for Cardiff Education: Collaboration and Federation Strategy 2024-2033 is to:

“Secure the benefits of Cardiff 2030 for learners and staff through a more localised Education offer via formal collaboration, federation and rationalisation”

## What is Collaboration?

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A collaboration involves two or more schools working together to sharing resources with no change to the formal governance of each school.

## What is Federation?

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A school federation is defined by Welsh Government as “a more formal way of extending collaboration and promoting closer working relationships. It is the principal initiative for achieving formal partnership working amongst schools to improve performance and narrow the attainment gap for deprived pupils.”

## Benefits of Federations and Collaborations

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An extensive range of research and practice has demonstrated the benefits of collaborations, federations and other arrangements whereby schools are brought together to deliver education and realise the benefits of operating as larger organisations. It allows schools to more easily and systematically share learning, provide a greater variety of experiences for young learners, enhances access to pooled resources and offers opportunities to unlock economies of scale. The ESTYN thematic review (2019) and the Federation Process of Maintained Schools Guidance for Local Authorities and Schools (2023) critically considered the research and concluded the following key benefits:

- Strong strategic leadership, governance and management structures allowing school-based leaders to focus on teaching, learning and raising standards
- Broader learning and social experiences for learners supports improved and more sustainable outcomes
- Attractive recruitment opportunities and retention of staff by providing a range of professional learning and new career pathways for staff
- New opportunities for staff to work together, increasing motivation, reducing workload and isolation through shared planning and activities
- Greater opportunities to share resources, taking advantage of economies of scale and avoiding the wasteful duplication of resources and effort
- Shared responsibilities and accountabilities for children across communities rather than just within a specific school for the benefit of all learners
- Extended services across schools and a variety of activities, childcare, parent support and community access which an individual school may not be able to provide supporting community cohesion and helping to sustain education provision

We recognise the importance of schools as anchor institutions within the community and the wider role the school leadership team plays as community leaders. Key to the success of any new model of working will be:

- Managing community perceptions about sharing a headteacher
- Maintaining the identity of individual schools
- Recruiting and retaining committed and talented governors
- Supporting staff during period of transition
- Providing corporate support to schools- including legal, finance and HR expertise- to help establish roles, agree new contracts and manage the establishment of new working arrangements
- Aligning school processes, procedures and the integration of separate curriculums.
- Establishing ownership of and support for the change especially in LA led federations
- Sharing the knowledge and experience of current Executive headteachers

## The Cardiff Collaboration and Federation Model

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In progressing collaborations and federations, the Council will be prioritising the primary school sector, ahead of the special and secondary school sectors, which will be considered on a case by case basis. Whilst every situation is unique and each will require bespoke consideration, collaborations are expected to be used as vehicles on the path to federations. Federation is the preferred model as it has been shown to secure a wider range of benefits. The Cardiff collaboration and federation approach has therefore been developed and costed on the basis of primary school provision. Under the Cardiff model, the preferred collaboration or federation would feature:

- An Executive Headteacher and Executive Deputy Headteacher that are an experienced educationalists with appropriate executive leadership training
- 4 Forms of Entry or above at primary/nursery level
- 2-6 schools collaborated/ federated in each organisation
- a minimum of one Specialist Resource Base
- schools that are in the same secondary school catchment/cluster
- highly skilled staff that work across all schools in the federation in addition to those aligned to individual schools
- community focussed working practices enabling a strong local offer to families within the federation and/or living local to it
- highly skilled and knowledgeable governing body to support and challenge the organisation's leadership effectively
- strong connection to the communities they serve at individual school level and across the federation

Smaller federations can deliver many of the benefits to learners, families and staff as outlined above. However, there are greater opportunities to build in the additional capacity with alternative skills sets to target areas that our Headteachers have told us are presenting the greatest challenges in terms of detracting from the prime focus of ensuring school improvement and highly inclusive education practice where federations are of a larger scale.

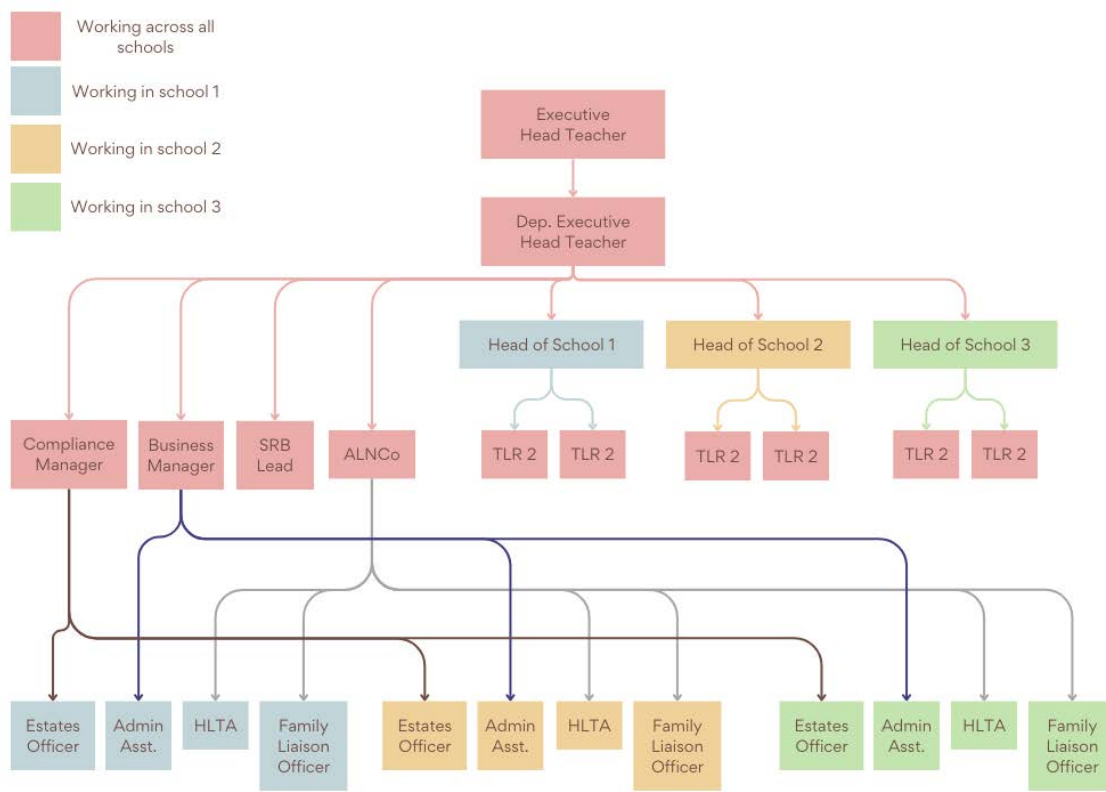
The Council is aware that there are a number of different models that can be considered for a collaboration or federation depending on local circumstances and there is no one size fits all. However, by way of example, the model outlined below has been developed based on the learning from effective practice.

This has been costed against current staffing models in single schools to provide opportunities to add value through building capacity to the senior leadership and core teaching and learning roles. The model will release funding through greater efficiencies, which can be re-allocation of funding to develop and protect priority school services, whilst delivering a balanced budget.

Each and every collaboration or federation developed and implemented would be supported by professionals to ensure parity of opportunity and firm rationale as to each role within it, with clearly defined responsibilities and remuneration to ensure that focus on learner outcomes and school improvement is paramount.



# Example Model - PRIMARY



Whilst every collaboration and federation will be unique, there are a range of core components that would be expected to support school improvement and operational management across a larger number of learners, staff and sites. The rationale specifically for the Cardiff model is as follows:

- Support effective teaching and learning experiences for their learners** – is expected to generate a greater range of opportunities to support schools provide enhanced opportunities for continued professional development and specialisms to inspire and grow talent despite the funding challenges.
- Improving the range of skill sets in the schools** – in addition to the leadership and teaching and learning workforce, the structure will include skilled staff able to support effective estates management and business support along with other middle management roles that will work across the federation. These are intended to ensure high quality professionals lead in their areas of expertise reducing breadth of issues the teaching and learning staff are required to cover.
- Investing in safeguarding and ALN** – investing in safeguarding staff to support pastoral care interaction with families aligned to need is expected to secure improved outcome for the learners, their families and to reduce the burden on the teaching and learning staff ensuring they are able to focus on the wellbeing of the learner and their educational outcomes.
- Effective range of Additional Learning Provision** - the goal will be for federations to develop the requisite skills and provision to meet the full range of needs of learners in the local area served by the federation, with the exception of learners who require a special school placement. This would benefit learners by ensuring needs are met locally wherever possible, and would remove the need for children to travel around the city to access SRB places.
- Economies of scale** – to support organisations with coordinated back office resource provides greater opportunities for efficiencies compared to current individual school back office model.
- Partnership working** – Cardiff is fortunate have a wealth of partners that can support with the development of local collaborations and federations. It is expected that all federations consider the opportunities of public sector partners that support Early Years to adult learning, and Cardiff Commitment that will coordinate support from businesses and citywide partners.

# How will we deliver change?

The strategy will provide a framework to encourage collaborative working and include a toolkit for schools across the city. The following steps will be established to support the school system develop into a model that produces better outcomes and is more sustainable:

1. Establishing an Executive head leadership programme
2. Seeking expressions of interest from those schools that would like to become 'early adopters'
3. Establishing a Governing body collaboration and federation support programme
4. Identifying a delivery route for collaboration, federation and/or rationalisation
5. Undertaking stakeholder consultation as part of any implementation arrangements
6. Reviewing and evaluating the impact of collaboration or federation to inform future developments

## 1. Executive Headteacher Leadership Programme

To support the effective leadership that is essential to ensure high performing school collaborations/federations Cardiff is securing an Executive Headship Training Programme for aspiring leaders that are:

- Looking for new challenges and keen to develop their skills and professional experience.
- Ready to work at a more strategic level dedicated to improving education opportunities for a wider range of learners across Cardiff.
- Committed to inclusive practice and motivating others to fully embrace inclusive teaching, learning with a strong record of ensuring wellbeing of learners, staff and families and experience of leading schools with an SRB(s).
- Committed to inspiring and growing the talent across the Cardiff education sector focussed on supporting development opportunities for middle management to acquire the skills to become the leaders of tomorrow.

Beyond the accredited training, executive leaders will be supported in the form of a collaboration/federation network and with coaching as required. There will also be appropriate guidance provided by the Council and Central South Consortium to support streamlining of systems to support efficient operation.

Training for cross federation staff will be provided to support effective management and delegation of appropriate tasks within individual schools.

## 2. Expressions of interest for early adopters

Every school in Cardiff will be invited to express an interest in participating. For those schools that would like to put themselves forward for school led collaborations or federations, each will set out their rationale and whether they have had thoughts about which schools they could partner with and why this would bring benefits. Areas to consider may include:

- Do the visions and ethos of the schools align sufficiently?
- What it means for teaching and learning?
- What are the value for money benefits/efficiencies?
- Does it support an effective school system?
- What are the view of stakeholders (inc community/workforce/trade unions)?

The process of bringing Cardiff schools into collaboration and federation arrangements is expected to feature all schools that would like to opt in themselves and those that will need encouragement and those where the LA leads the process.

All partnerships established would need to fulfil the aims of the strategy in order to be endorsed and to secure both strategic and equitable opportunities for each school and their school communities.

Each expression of interest will be evaluated by a Federation Panel of relevant officers, including Cardiff's central Education officers (Strategy, Governor Services, HR People Services, Finance, Inclusion), members of Central South Consortium and Cardiff headteachers experienced in executive leadership, to ensure progression on a strategic basis that supports all schools to move into effective collaborations and federations.



### 3. Governing body collaboration and federation support programme

Supporting Governing Bodies is essential to the success of this strategy, which is why a newly developed package of support will be provided to grow the knowledge and skills of prospective governors of collaborations/ federations and a targeted recruitment programme.

Governing Bodies who are involved with collaboration, federation and/or rationalisation procedures will receive a full programme of support from officers across the local authority and consortium on key areas such as school improvement, governance, human resources, finance and data.

A Local Authority officer will be identified to act as a single point of contact to support the governing bodies from the start to the end of the process, assist with the provision of information, support consultation procedures and provide advice and guidance in defining and implementing the proposals. Where appropriate, governing bodies will also be linked with other established collaborating schools/ governing bodies to benefit from the good practice already in place in Cardiff.



## 4. Identify delivery of route for collaboration, federation and/or rationalisation

When proposals are brought forward, as part of the collaboration and federation toolkit, Cardiff sees four potential delivery routes for collaboration or federation or rationalisation:



Cardiff's preferred approach is to phase the rollout of collaborations and federations by schools opting to put themselves forward for school led federations whether as a reaction to a head teacher resignation, or proactively because an area feels that the approach would support improving opportunities for all in their learning community.

However, on occasions it may not be practical or possible for a school led formal collaboration to be developed. On such occasions, if the triggers below are met, Cardiff will engage with schools to consider bringing forward local authority led federation proposals and if required, associated school re-organisation that is area based and largely builds on preexisting cluster relationships and or/partnership arrangements:

- Primary schools with Numbers of Roll below 380 pupils (Reception – Year 6) for 3 consecutive years
- Secondary schools with Numbers of Roll below 800 pupils (Years 7-11) for 3 consecutive years
- Schools in budget deficit that do not have an agreed Medium Term Plan to take it out of deficit.
- Schools where the Head Teacher/ Deputy Headteacher has tendered resignation or expressed a desire to vacate their role at a specific date
- Schools that have been received intensive Education support from the LA/Consortium over an extended period
- Condition D buildings and/or where the asset backlog is in excess of £1m
- Schools located in/adjacent to a community where there is a need to increase the number of places e.g. new LDP communities
- Schools where the demand for places at that school from pupils resident within its catchment area exceeds its Published Admission Number for 3 consecutive intakes



## 5. Stakeholder consultation and implementation

In progressing collaborations and federations, the Council will be considering the primary schools sector as a priority ahead of the special and secondary school sectors, which will be considered on a case by case basis. The city has a range of different local factors, so the Council is expecting to bring proposals forward in waves. Some schools may have more simple proposals that could feature earlier in the strategy whilst others may be more complex to deliver. These waves are outlined in the graphic below:



In any proposal where a significant change is proposed to how a school is governed and led there is clear guidance as to which stakeholders must be consulted as listed below:

### COLLABORATION

- 'School Governors Guide to the Law - Chapter 21 Collaboration and Federation'. The process to move through the required consultation stages before implementation of a collaboration is subject to two governing body meetings.

### FEDERATION

- 'Federation process of maintained schools: guidance for governing bodies and local authorities 2023'. The process to move through the required consultation stages before implementation of a collaboration is 12 months.

### SCHOOL ORGANISATION CHANGE

- 'School Organisation Code Wales 2018'. The process to move through the required consultation stages before implementation of a collaboration is 12 months.

These waves and consultations are not required to run concurrently and may run in parallel.

## 6. Review, reflect and evolve

Following the establishment of collaborations and federations, evaluation processes will be undertaken in conjunction with schools and partners in line with the usual review and reflection processes including feedback. The outcome of these processes will be used to inform mainstreaming of good practice, inform evolution of the models, and identify mentors to provide support for new schools as they enter the process.

The Council will work closely with partners, including the Central South Consortium (CSC), ESTYN and Trade Unions, to review collaborations and federation outcomes when proposals are implemented.

