



OAKHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

ALDERS AVENUE, WOODFORD GREEN, ESSEX, IG8 9PY

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Opossum Federation

After an interim period of support, Oakhill Primary School entered into a soft federation with Newport and Dawlish Schools - both of which are located in Leyton, Waltham Forest. Federations of schools are becoming increasingly common as the government's preferred model of school to school working has become more firmly established.

What is a Federation?

A federation is a group of schools whose governing bodies decide to agree a formal partnership to advance common goals. Each school retains its own character, budget and performance tables and will have separate Ofsted inspections. Admissions processes will not change. Federation is possible between any schools in the maintained sector, including community, church and foundation schools.

How is a soft Federation different to a hard Federation?

A soft Federation is non-statutory - schools can set up soft Federations without having to follow regulations. Each school in a soft Federation has its own governing body. All schools within the Federation share common goals but it is up to the individual governing bodies to authorise decisions/plans. Schools within a Federation (hard or soft) retain their individual budgets and make decisions about spending based on the local needs of the specific school. From time to time, recommendations may be made across the federation to collectively purchase goods or services to obtain best value for money. Leadership positions may be shared across a soft Federation.

Oakhill Primary School is partnered in a **soft** Federation with Newport and Dawlish Schools. Newport and Dawlish Schools entered into a **hard** Federation in July 2014.

The overarching name of our federation is the Opossum Federation.

What are the benefits of federation?

Partnership working facilitates the sharing of educational practice and professional development for staff. This is particularly useful in the small school context as it promotes wider thinking and opportunities to explore new ways of working. Joint planning and moderation sessions are practical examples of the way this operates within the Opossum Federation.

Federation enables a sharing of leadership expertise and experience, enabling each school within the partnership to review their ways of working and improve effectiveness. At Oakhill, this is demonstrated through sharing an Executive Headteacher (Prue Barnes-Kemp), Head of Federation (Lisa McIntyre), Deputy Head (Leon Ojukwu) and experienced SENCO (Michele Moir). For the children and families of the partnership schools Federation, over time, strengthens a sense of community through shared events or collaborative learning projects.

What are the disadvantages of being in a soft Federation?

Studies have shown that when school communities have been asked this question, they have often struggled to find a response. Federations have been shown to be effective in advancing pupil progress, developing staff and refining organisational procedures. The most commonly held concerns in other federations have related to a fear of the loss of school identity and lack

We are a learning first community dedicated to achieving the highest standards of education for all.



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of individual head teacher. The governing body of Oakhill Primary School acknowledges that whilst there may be some similar views within the wider community, protocols are in place to allay those concerns.

Oakhill Primary School is committed to retaining and promoting our individual identity and place within our local community. Working collaboratively with others does not compromise the small school and closely knit community feel which exists. We welcome new ideas and the opportunity to share our good practice with others.

Whilst we now share an Executive Head Teacher (Ms Barnes-Kemp) and Head of Federation (Ms McIntyre) with the other schools in the Opossum Federation, we have a specific interim Head of School, dedicated specifically to Oakhill Primary School. Mrs Brandon is an experienced teacher and long standing member of the Oakhill community; she understands the school context - its strengths and needs. Mrs Brandon is the first point of contact for children and parents with concerns to share. As a recently appointed interim Head of School, Mrs Brandon is able to draw on the resources and experience of other leaders across the Federation.

As a school we feel very positive about the opportunities which are offered through participation in a soft Federation and we look forward to developing our relationship with our local school partners in the year ahead.

Debbie Strowbridge
Chair of Governors