



Partnership between Nutley CE Primary School and Pioneer Federation

The Nutley Governing Body is very pleased to share the exciting news of our intended partnership working with the Pioneer Federation, from September 2024. These four schools are part of Pioneer: Chiddingly, East Hoathly, St Mary's and Park Mead, schools that have enjoyed a successful Federation over many years and have collaborated with schools locally and nationally. There are many potential benefits of schools federating. Among them are opportunities to collaborate; share expertise and resources; develop staff; strengthen leadership, governance and long-term financial sustainability.

On May 23rd 2024, we have had the first of meeting of parents with Nutley governors and Pioneer Executive Headteacher, their Chair of Governors and a Head of School. Below is a summary of the questions that parents had about the partnership.

FAQs/questions from parents/ carers at the Meeting with Pioneer & Governors (23.05 2024)

1. What are the benefits to Nutley?

We will capitalise on the expertise and strengths of Pioneer with the focus on improving experiences and outcomes for all children. Pioneer has been working collaboratively with other schools and can provide improved educational experiences for our own pupils through teaching and learning, an enhanced and engaging curriculum, staff development and opportunities for progression, streamlined services including finance, human resources, legal services, school improvement structures, and governance arrangements. Staff will be receiving outstanding training and development opportunities and access to professional expertise.

2. Do the children mix with the other schools and their children?

Children will be having more opportunities for joint activities with other Pioneer schools such as joint sports days or trips out. The idea of having a pen friend at another school was also welcomed. This will benefit our children when they move to Senior school as they will have mixed with other children and already forged new friendships that may carry over into Senior school.

3. What change will the children see?

It is unlikely that the children will experience any change in their day to day life.

4. In the federation do you have specialists such as for Health & Safety and SEN that are shared across the federation?

Yes, Pioneer employs two SEN specialist and our SENCO member of staff, Mr Russell, has already made contact with them to share experiences. Therefore, children with SEN can benefit from specialists from other members of staff and experts within the group.

5. What is a Federation vs Academy?

A federation is a group of maintained schools that operate under the governance of a single governing body. Each federated school is treated as an individual school, maintaining its existing Department for Education (DfE) category, admissions process, and religious character. Federated schools receive individual budgets, but the federated governing body can allocate budgets to each school or pool them with the agreement of governors.

Academies are state-funded, independent schools, held accountable by the Department for Education (DfE) by a legally binding Funding Agreement. They are independent of the local authority and receive their funding directly from central government. They thus have more autonomy over their curriculum, finances and governance.

6. Is it a Federation or will it be an Academy? If Nutley joins, will we move to the academy too?

At present, Pioneer is a Federation of 4 schools. They have proposed to establish a Multi Academy Trust MAT called Sussex Pioneer Trust. It would be a Diocesan academy trust, co-sponsored by the Diocese of Chichester that will include both church and non-church schools, with the Diocese providing support and expertise for the Trust. It would be a small school MAT, specialising in schools with less than 150 pupils. Pioneer has recently applied to become a MAT in January 2025. Nutley will have to make the decision if joining this MAT in September 2025 is the right decision for our school.

7. What is the time frame for this move, from Federation to MAT?

We will join in a partnership with Pioneer in September 2024 and this will run for one year. After Easter, a joint committee made up of Pioneer and Nutley governors and staff will conduct a formal review of the partnership. After reviewing the impact of the partnership, each Governing Body must take an initial vote on whether to formally federate or not.

If both Governing Bodies agree to federate, the federation process begins with a 6-week consultation process with key stakeholders at both schools. Agreed joint letters will be sent by schools to staff and parents. Meetings will also be called as part of this process.

After the 6-week consultation process, and after reviewing feedback from all stakeholders, both Governing Bodies will then vote again on whether to join the federation. Parents do have considerable input at the federation stage. A similar consultation period applies for academisation.

8. We have tried to federate before, and it dissolved (Mayfield) why is this one different? Why Pioneer?

The partnership with Mayfield was dissolved before it even started. The current Nutley governing body researched federations with due diligence in great detail over many months and evaluated each federation. Pioneer was deemed to be the best fit for Nutley as their values and aims and objectives closely align to ours.

9. If we sign the agreement to formally federate after the partnership, who then is responsible for decisions? Who is the 'Ultimate decision maker' and how will decisions be made?

Similar to our current decision-making structure, the Governing Body will be the body formulating the strategic direction of all schools. The Governing Body will be restructured and made up of governors and heads of schools of all schools in the federation.

10. If we agree to formally federate after the partnership, how long are we then tied to Pioneer?

While entering into a federation is a long-term commitment, it is not a permanent change to the school structure. It is possible to leave a federation. Once a school joins a MAT, it becomes part of that Trust, and leaving is not an option unless specific circumstances arise.

11. If we drop in pupil numbers, how low can we go? Can Pioneer future proof our school?

While East Sussex has said that they value the contribution small schools make to communities, there is no commitment to keep them open. Over the next few years, there is going to be a continued tightening of budgets, and we need to prepare for cuts to school funding. As member of a federation or trust, we can secure greater opportunities for financial savings.

12. Do the budgets of all the schools in the federation combine or stay separate? Would we have less as we have lower numbers?

It would be up to Nutley and Pioneer if we combine budgets with the federation, or if we keep our budget separately.

13. Will Pioneer be able to help with increasing numbers via Marketing, external signage etc?

Pioneer has increased pupil numbers at all four schools and is thus in a good position to help us with their expertise.

14. Do all schools within the federation get a say in other new schools joining?

All schools are consulted.

15. Is there a maximum number of schools that can be a part of Pioneer? How many schools would you want as part of the federation?

At present, Pioneer has 4 schools, with Nutley it will be 5. One other local school has expressed serious interests. Pioneer would not want more than 10 schools to be part of the federation.

16. What are the benefits to Pioneer of Nutley joining?

Pioneer values how the Nutley curriculum has been developed and would like to adopt it in the other schools.

17. With the other schools, are the relationships with their churches still strong? Have they maintained their Christian distinctiveness and ethos?
Pioneer has a mixture of church and non-church schools. They are maintaining and enhancing the schools' Christian ethos in our church schools. The Diocese of Chichester fully supports the federation as well as Pioneer's decision to pursue becoming a MAT.
18. Will you speak with the children at Nutley about joining the federation?
The Headteacher Mrs Robinson will speak to the children about the partnership after half term.
19. Does each school keep their current uniform?
Yes, each school keeps it's uniqueness and their uniform.
20. Will James Proctor and his team be visible physically at the school?
He will be coming into school once a week to work with staff and also will be greeting parents at the gate.
21. Will it make recruitment easier?
Teachers value the experience of working with other teachers to share experiences.
22. Will staff be expected to work at other schools?
Nothing will change during the partnership. If we federate or academise, staff will retain their Nutley contract. They may change their contract to Pioneer if they so wish to enable them to work across the federation.
23. How do the staff feel about joining Pioneer?
Teachers are 'cautiously optimistic'. Change is always difficult, especially for staff who have been at Nutley for decades.
24. What about the office staff? Will that structure stay the same?
Over the partnership, nothing will change for the office staff.
25. As a parent, change is daunting, how will you manage parent communication and transparency?
A committee of Pioneer and Nutley governors and staff will set milestones that are expected to be achieved within the partnership. These milestones will be communicated to the parents via a newsletter and the websites. We understand and appreciated that transparency and communication are key in this transitional process.
26. If this goes ahead formally, has there been success at other schools with making links to local preschools? How can we ensure that the local preschool is a feeder mainly to our school? How can we improve the partnership with the Preschool to make it more robust?
East Hoathly now has incorporated a pre-school into the school.

Plans are underway to strengthen the link between school and preschool with a meeting planned after half term. We have already started working more with the preschool. Little Deers will now be able to use the wild area on the field.

27. Will it impact the PFA and fundraising?

Each school will continue to have their own PFA.

28. What will happen to governors currently in place at Nutley?

If we federate, a new governing body will be established with governors from each school. Each school will be represented by a governor from that school plus the Headteacher/Head of School thus giving each school a say in the governing body. Each governor will have to be voted in.