

# Consultation

14th February 2025 – 28th March 2025

## Proposal for Federation of:



Groombridge St. Thomas CE Primary School

Pioneer Federation

Nutley CE Primary School

Dear School Community,

### *Summary*

In September 2024, we began our partnership with Pioneer Federation. You have received update letters about the progress we have made, and we are now entering the formal consultation stage with parents and staff. The consultation runs from 14<sup>th</sup> February to 28<sup>th</sup> March 2025. While the first week falls during Half Term, this timeline was the best option to meet the required six-week period and align key meeting dates across Nutley, Groombridge and the Federation. If you or anyone else would like to share thoughts, you are welcome to submit comments via email at any time to [clerk@nutleyce.e-sussex.sch.uk](mailto:clerk@nutleyce.e-sussex.sch.uk) regardless of school opening times.

The Pioneer Federation, which currently includes Chiddingly Primary, East Hoathly CE, St Mary the Virgin CE, and Park Mead Primary Schools, has been working with Groombridge St. Thomas CE and Nutley CE Primary Schools since September 2024 to enhance school resources, teaching, and staff expertise. The success of this partnership has led to a proposal for formalizing the collaboration into a six-school federation, with the goal of improving educational standards and providing greater opportunities for students. A formal consultation will be held from February 14 to March 28, 2025, to gather feedback from the school community on the proposal.

The federation aims to create a sustainable, well-supported structure, with a focus on providing high quality, well-rounded education for all students. Each school will retain its individual identity, but a shared governing body will oversee strategic direction, financial management, and school improvements. The federation will not result in merging schools or converting them into academies. The benefits of this model include better access to resources, specialized expertise, and improved curricular opportunities for students, while maintaining strong community ties.

Additionally, the federation will offer staff development opportunities, help secure future leadership, and ensure financial stability. The proposed leadership structure includes an executive headteacher,

individual headteachers or head of school at each school, and a single governing body composed of 17 members, ensuring that the individual ethos of each school is preserved while working towards shared goals. The Christian ethos of Nutley will thus be preserved and the links between school and church will continue to be strong. The consultation process invites input from parents, staff, and the broader community, with several opportunities for meetings and feedback during the consultation period.

Why federate?

As stated above, the Pioneer Federation has been working closely in partnership with Groombridge St. Thomas CE Primary School and Nutley CE Primary School since September 2024, in order to strengthen the infrastructure of the schools and continue to enhance school improvement. The initial rewards of this partnership are clear, with improved resources and teaching and learning opportunities for pupils. Staff already benefit from wider expertise.

We plan to build on this success by establishing a formal federation across the six schools. This is therefore a formal consultation on the proposal for Groombridge St. Thomas CE Primary School and Nutley CE Primary School to join the existing Federation and extend the size of the Federation to six schools. This will enable us to invest strategically in a forward-thinking federation that has the ability to provide the highest of standards across all levels of school life.

The Governing Bodies of all the schools have decided to initiate a consultation to seek the views of everyone that has an interest in our schools. We would like to invite you to share your views on our proposed federation.

This consultation will be open for six weeks from **14th February 2025** until the **28th of March 2025**.

**We believe that federation is the key to future sustainability, not only maintaining our schools, but helping us grow them and improve them for our children today and in years to come.**

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### *Aim*

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Our key aim is to ensure that our children will have access to successful, well-run schools that provide them with an excellent, well-rounded education, with greater curricular opportunities, working in partnership with parents/carers and the wider community. We want to encourage our children to have aspirations that lead to great achievements as they learn and grow in a caring, safe and friendly community of schools.

Our schools currently have a strong ethos of care, creativity and hard work. The strong ethos and deep sense of community that exists within each of our schools are all things that we wish to maintain, encourage and develop further - building on the success of our existing partnership.

We would like to formalise the closer working relationship that has been forged between the schools by establishing a federation. We look forward to entering a consultation period where we can tell you more about our proposals and find out your views.

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### *What is a Federation and why not a MAT?*

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In May 2024, Pioneer Governors explored the possibility of developing an independent Pioneer Academy Trust and started a formal consultation for this development. Many thanks for your questions and time with this consultation process. <https://pioneerfederation.co.uk/sussexpioneer-trust-consultation/> In October 2024, the Government announced the removal of the 'conversion support funding' and this meant that setting up a small school Pioneer Trust would not be financially viable. We will therefore continue to be a Federation of schools within East Sussex Local Authority.

A federation is where two or more schools work very closely together under one governing body. Each school remains legally separate, and parents/carers and pupils should see little change. Federation is not a merger or a conversion to an academy; it represents a stable, long-term commitment to working in partnership for the benefit of children in our schools.

Federation means that Pioneer schools:

- continue to be registered separately with Ofsted, retain their existing judgements and continue to be maintained by the local authority.
- have a single governing body that would set the strategic direction across the schools and ensure educational and financial sustainability and accountability. See more information about the Governing body on page 4.
- Have a combined budget with ring fenced SEND and Pupil Premium funding for each school.
- Have a strong overarching ethos whilst retaining the individual ethos of each school.

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### *Admissions*

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The current admissions processes would be retained:

- ✚ The admissions authority for Park Mead School, Chiddingly Primary School, East Hoathly CE Primary School and Nutley CE Primary School would continue to be East Sussex Local Authority
- ✚ The admissions authority for St Mary the Virgin CE Primary School and Groombridge St. Thomas CE Primary School would be the Federation's Governing Body

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### *Our Proposal*

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The proposal is to federate the Pioneer Federation (Chiddingly Primary School, East Hoathly Church of England Primary School, St Mary the Virgin Church of England Primary School & Park Mead Primary School), Groombridge St. Thomas CE Primary School and Nutley CE Primary School starting on **1<sup>st</sup> September 2025**.

In 2024 an opportunity for Groombridge St. Thomas CE Primary School and Nutley CE Primary School and the Pioneer Federation to work together was presented to the Governing Bodies. We agreed to form a collaborative partnership with the aim of sharing skills to improve outcomes and opportunities for pupils.

By working collaboratively, the schools have been able to develop consistent educational approaches and share skills, expertise and resources and enhance curricular provision across the school communities.

Should the federation go ahead, it will be led by an executive headteacher and an individual headteacher in each school to oversee the continued improvement, with a robust senior leadership structure in place at each school. 'Pioneer Heads of School' will become 'Pioneer Headteachers' to reflect the increased responsibilities within this expanding school structure. The Federation will be divided into 2 clusters, linked by locality to each other. 'Ashdown Cluster' and 'Weald Cluster'. There will be 3 schools within each cluster. The schools in each cluster will work closely together and continue to work collaboratively as a whole federation.

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### *What does a Federation offer?*

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We are passionate about ensuring the very best education for the children in our communities. We are aware of the vulnerability of rural schools which operate as a single entity and recognise this proposed model as being mutually supportive and one which provides long term stability. It brings an opportunity to achieve economies of scale to secure financial stability and sustainability of our schools into the future. Federation has been fully discussed with governors, the Local Authority and the Diocese and we feel it is the best way to achieve our goals and secure a supportive future for the schools.

The benefits and opportunities of federating

There are greatly improved opportunities for children and staff at all schools to interact, learn from each other and share best practice.

See the termly partnership letters here: <https://pioneerfederation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Partnership-Letter-December-2024.pdf>

#### **For children:**

- Children will have greater access to specialist expertise from each school's current staff and a wider range of resources to broaden their curriculum.
- Children within the federation will continue to receive the highest quality teaching and learning, enriched by collaborative working and enhanced resources across the schools.
- Stability and continuity with increased opportunity to meet and work with other children in a wider community.

#### **For parents/carers and communities:**

- It strengthens the ability of our schools to develop and improve while maximizing our ability to cope with changes in educational policy, enabling us to continue to provide excellent education in our villages.
- It extends the opportunities available to children and their families by creating a long-term, stable school structure.

#### **For staff:**

- Leadership will be secured for the future and staff development opportunities will enable our schools to retain valued staff.
- Shared staff meetings and combined staff training have the effect of widening the circle of peers that our staff can call upon for fresh and creative ideas and support.

- Shared ideas and resources help staff avoid needless duplication of effort and materials and will allow for more time to be devoted to teaching and learning.
- Increased joint working enables us to develop our subject leads across the schools as well as giving us an opportunity to jointly develop and plan our school curriculum to the benefit of all our pupils.

**For governors:**

- A single governing body will be formed to replace the existing governing bodies. This new single group of governors will have an increased capacity and be able to benefit from shared experience and good practice whilst retaining good governance
- The membership of the governing body will be skills based.

**The governing body**

The role of the federated governing body will be to:

- Ensure that the character of each school is maintained whilst moving forward as one.
- Define a shared vision and strategic direction for the schools that places the children at its heart.
- Ensure due diligence and financial probity, effective financial management.
- Hold the executive head teacher to account for the educational performance of the schools.

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*Staffing*

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A new single governing body would be formed as required by the School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations 2012, to take overall responsibility for all schools within the federation.

The existing senior leadership structure would continue, led by Mr. James Procter as Executive Headteacher for the Federation. Alongside the Executive Headteacher, the leadership team in the schools will consist of a Headteacher, Heads of School and Senior Teacher/s. Most 'Pioneer Heads of School' will become 'Pioneer Headteachers' to reflect the increased responsibilities within this expanding school structure.

New staff employed by the new governing body will be employed by the new Federation governing body.

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*The Governing Body*

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**The proposed new federated governing body would comprise 17 members. There will be a chair for the federated governing body. This would comprise:**

- 2 Parent Governors
- 1 Staff Governor
- 1 Local Authority governor
- 9 Foundation Governors (includes 4 Ex officios being clergy)

1 Ex officio being Executive Headteacher  
3 X co-opted Governors

Each cluster (**'Ashdown' & 'Weald'**) would have a governing group/committee. This would comprise 8 governors on each with a Chair for the cluster.

There would also be a **Pioneer Finance Committee**, formed of the FGB chair and the cluster chairs and a Pioneer Strategic Group, Local Authority and Diocese representatives would be invited to these strategic meetings.

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### *Federation consultation process*

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The governors of Pioneer, Nutley and Groombridge have set up a consultation process to seek the views of parents, staff, community, the local authority, the Chichester Diocesan Board of Education and other key stakeholders. The consultation process will last six weeks, starting on 14th February 2025 ending on 28th March 2025.

Governors welcome your views and comments and invite you to any of the following meetings, regardless of which is your child's school:

<u>School /online</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>
<u>Groombridge</u>	27.2.25	2.30pm
Pioneer Schools (Chiddingly School Hall)	26.2.25	4.00pm
Nutley	3.3.25	4.00pm

If you are unable to attend one of these meetings, and would like to discuss this proposal, please contact your school to make an appointment in the usual manner.

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### *How do I submit my views?*

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Comments and views must be received by **Friday 28th March 2025 at 3.30pm**.

Written responses should be addressed to the Clerk to your school Governing Body of your school.  
Nutley Clerk: [clerk@nutleyce.e-sussex.sch.uk](mailto:clerk@nutleyce.e-sussex.sch.uk)

A box for written responses will also be provided in each school.

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### *When will the decision be announced?*

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Following the consultation period the 3 Governing Bodies will consider the views and comments before meeting to make a final decision on this proposal.

The governing body from each school will make its own decision at meetings on **Monday 31<sup>st</sup> March**.

We look forward to hearing from you and will, of course, keep you fully informed regarding our final decision by **Friday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2025**.

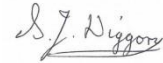
Yours sincerely,



Alan Brundle  
Chair of Governors Pioneer Federation



Birgit Smith  
Chair of the Governors- Nutley



Karen Bye & Sue Diggory  
Co-Chairs -  
Groombridge St. Thomas