FORMAL PUBLIC CONSULTATION PROPOSAL

Proposed Hard Federation of Valley Gardens Middle School and Marden Bridge Middle School

Consultation Period:	19th October 2026 – 4th December 2026 (6 Weeks)
Proposed Implementation Date:	1st January 2027
Proposing Governing Bodies:	Valley Gardens Middle School & Marden Bridge Middle School
Target Audience:	The governing bodies are committed to seeking and considering the views of all stakeholders likely to be affected by the proposal, including parents and carers, staff, pupils where appropriate, trade unions, partner schools, the Local Authority and the wider community.

This consultation is being conducted in accordance with the School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations 2012 and current Department for Education guidance on federations.

1. Executive Summary

The Governing Bodies of Valley Gardens Middle School (VGMS) and Marden Bridge Middle School (MBMS) are presenting a formal proposal to establish a hard federation. Under this arrangement, both schools will operate under a single, unified Governing Body, effective from 1st February 2027. For many years, schools within the Whitley Bay three-tier educational system have maintained strong, loose, informal partnerships. Whilst these historical relationships have facilitated smooth first to middle transitions, they are no longer sufficient to protect individual institutions from current regional, educational, economic, and demographic pressures.

This proposal initiates a formal 6-week statutory public consultation phase. The process is designed to ensure all local partners, families, staff members, trade unions, local authority representatives, and community ward councillors (specifically across Monkseaton, Whitley Bay North, and Cullercoats & Whitley Bay South) can thoroughly inspect the operational framework and provide feedback before any final transition is approved.

2. Rationale for the Proposed Federation

2.1 Regional Context & Town-Wide Pressures

Valley Gardens Middle School and Marden Bridge Middle School have a long standing history of working together and collaborating. Both schools are strong schools with above average SATs results, high levels of attendance and behaviour is recognised as being strong. The schools share a strong culture of high expectations and inclusive education.

The two schools wish to federate in order to take advantage of multiple benefits of working together to secure better outcomes for their pupils. These benefits include:

- Establishing common key policies across our schools
- Establishing a common curriculum journey
- Pooling expertise to improve teaching and learning and inclusion
- Aligning assessment strategies
- Aligning professional development opportunities for staff
- Providing more succession planning opportunities for our future school leaders
- Taking advantage of economies of scale as a bigger organisation
- The sharing of resources
- The potential for shared leadership posts
- The appointment of cross school roles

2.2 Strategic Realignment under National Educational Policy

The proposed federation will strengthen collaboration between the schools, support the sharing of expertise and resources, enhance leadership capacity and help ensure long-term sustainability whilst maintaining the distinct identity of each school. The Department for Education's (DfE) white paper, 'Opportunity for all: Strong schools with great teachers for your child', emphasises the creation of strong, localised 'families of schools'. The white paper notes that school clusters operating under unified, single-governance models are far more resilient and better equipped to handle localised crises.

The proposed structure directly addresses the key elements of this national strategy:

- **Coherent Local Planning:** Unified governance allows geographic clusters of schools to collaborate rather than compete, coordinating local pupil spaces to preserve the viability of the entire local tier.
- **Enhanced Inclusivity & Shared Support Services:** Single governance allows schools to pool resources to hire specialist personnel—such as Educational Psychologists, specialised SEND therapists, or Speech and Language therapists—which would be financially impossible to support on an individual, single-school budget.
- **Stabilisation of the Local Estate:** By operating as a unified system, the schools can buffer against localised funding deficits, protecting community facilities and minimising the risk of forced closures.

3. Structure of the Proposed 'Links Learning Federation'

3.1 Protection of Individual Identities, Branding, and Budgets

A key priority of this federation proposal is that both Valley Gardens Middle School and Marden Bridge Middle School will maintain their distinct characteristics, identities, historical logos, and individual uniform standards. The Governing Bodies fully recognise that the local community highly values the unique character, values, and traditions of each school.

Furthermore, each school will continue to receive its delegated funding allocation. The federated governing body will be responsible for the strategic oversight of financial resources and ensuring funding is used effectively to support the needs of pupils across the federation.

3.2 An expandable model

The federation marks the first phase of a broader, long-term educational strategy. The long-term vision is to actively expand the federation to incorporate other local schools. This would create a truly integrated educational pathway for children in the locality, streamlining curriculum delivery, enhancing learning, and easing the transition process. An extended federation could help to alleviate some of the local educational issues that are highlighted below.

Schools within North Tyneside’s North East Planning Area (NEPA) are encountering acute demographic challenges. A sustained regional drop in birth rates has heavily impacted school rolls, placing local budgets under considerable strain. This demographic contraction has previously triggered local authority viability reviews, threatening the immediate future of multiple schools within the local cluster.

To illustrate, the combined reception class intake for the NEPA feeder first schools in September 2026 was just 361. This is significantly lower than the combined Published Admission Number (PAN) capacity of 450 places and is equivalent to 3 reception classes of unused spaces across our first schools. This deficit of 89 pupils (roughly a 20 % gap in utilization) creates cascading funding implications as these small cohorts transition through to the middle school level, and eventually on to high schools.

At such time as the federation decides to expand to include other local schools, the governing body will be reconstituted to allow for an equitable model of governance that represents the interests of all schools.

4. Structural and Operational Governance Model

4.1 Proposed Unified Governing Body Constitution

Upon the official inception of the federation on 1st February 2027, the two separate governing bodies will dissolve, and a single Federation Governing Body will assume legal control of both schools.The proposed governing body has been designed to provide an appropriate balance of skills, experience and stakeholder representation to govern both schools effectively.

The Federation is proposing the following constitution:

- **Parent Representation:** Exactly two parent governors, appointed by the current schools' governing bodies.*
- **Staff Representation:** Exactly two staff governors,one from each school, appointed by the current schools' governing bodies.*
- **Headteacher Representation:** The Headteachers of both Valley Gardens and Marden Bridge will automatically serve on the unified board.
- **Local Authority Representation:** Exactly one Local Authority governor nominated by North Tyneside Council.
- **Co-opted Governors:** Four high-calibre individuals from the local community appointed based on specific skills gaps (e.g., finance, legal, HR, or estate management).
- **Foundation Governors:** The federation will include three foundation governors nominated by the North Tyneside Learning Trust. The Trust has a long-standing role in supporting collaboration and school improvement across schools in North Tyneside and will continue to contribute to the strategic governance of the federation through its foundation governor representation.

**these posts have already been through the election process*

Appointments to the federation governing body will be made in accordance with the federation's Instrument of Government and relevant regulations. Different categories of governor may be elected, nominated or appointed depending on the requirements applying to that category of governor. Appointed governors will remain in their new federation governor role until such time as their current term of office expires. The new Chair Of Governors will be duly elected by the new governing body members. The governing bodies will continue to work closely with North Tyneside Council throughout the federation process to ensure compliance with statutory requirements and the successful establishment of the federation.

4.2 Dual-Tier Governance Structure: Local Boards

To ensure that individual local school representation is not lost, a 'Dual-Tier' governance model will be established:

- **Federation Governing Body (Tier 1):** Holds ultimate legal and statutory accountability. Retains control over financial strategy, core curriculum alignment, human resources, standardised assessment, local authority negotiations, and admissions policies.
- **School Local Boards (Tier 2):** Local advisory committees established for each school. They focus on site-specific issues, including uniform rules, rewards systems, pastoral strategies, student behavioural frameworks, and community engagement initiatives.

4.3 Leadership Model Continuity

Under the initial terms of the federation, both Valley Gardens Middle School and Marden Bridge Middle School will retain their individual leadership structures, including separate Headteachers. This guarantees operational continuity and specialised on-site guidance for both communities. Over time, the unified Governing Body may review the leadership model during periods of natural attrition to explore further resource coordination.

5. Technical, Financial, and Statutory Frameworks

To provide complete clarity to stakeholders, the following matrix explains the statutory impact of the proposed federation across key school operations:

Operational Area	Statutory Status & Transition Impact
Ofsted Inspections	Both schools remain separate registration entities and will continue to receive independent Ofsted inspections. Individual performance ratings and historic timelines will not merge.
Staffing & Employment Contracts	All employee contractual arrangements, including terms and conditions, are fully protected. School leadership is actively working with HR advisors and trade unions to ensure compliance with all statutory guidelines.
School Admissions Policies	Both schools will remain separate maintained schools within the federation and admissions arrangements will continue to be determined in accordance with the relevant statutory requirements and admissions authority responsibilities. The federation will explore opportunities to align approaches where appropriate whilst ensuring each school continues to meet its statutory admissions responsibilities.
Academy Orders	Both schools maintain their current foundation school status. Establishing a federation does not change their maintained status, and both schools remain subject to the standard DfE performance guidelines.

6. Public Consultation, Timeline, and How to Respond

6.1 Scheduled Consultation Process

The 6-week statutory public consultation runs from 19th October 2026 to 4th December 2026. This period is dedicated to capturing, analysing, and addressing the viewpoints of our families, staff members, local trade union representatives, and community partners.

Phase	Date / Target Window	Operational Status
1. Pre-Consultation Phase	June – October 2026	Completed (Governing Board Approvals)
2. Formal Consultation Period	19th October – 4th December 2026	Active Public Phase (6 Weeks)
3. Evaluation of Responses	Week of 14th December 2026	Scheduled Analysis
4. Proposed Implementation	1st February 2027	Target Date for Federation Launch

6.2 How to Submit Feedback

Stakeholders are strongly encouraged to submit their formal feedback, observations, or questions during this window. The Governing Bodies will host public drop-in sessions across both school sites to answer questions directly. You can submit feedback in the following ways:

- **Google form consultation response:** Submit your comments securely through the dedicated consultation form which can be accessed here. You can also access the form directly from the schools' websites. (Valley Gardens Middle School or Marden Bridge Middle School) Alternatively, you can access the Google Form via the QR code below:
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- **Written Submissions:** Hard-copy consultation feedback forms can be requested at either school's administrative office and submitted in the dedicated dropboxes located in the main receptions.