

Camden position statement on structural school partnerships and collaboration Summer 2023

In Building Back Stronger we promised to make a good local school place available for every child. To achieve this we will need to harness the strengths and capacity in our education system for the benefit of all, driving greater equality of opportunity for all children and young people in Camden. This imperative has become all the more urgent in the face of the destabilising pressures of falling pupil numbers, rising costs and reduced funding.

Collaboration is part of the DNA of Camden, and Camden Learning is the vehicle that supports it to take place. One of the four foundations of Building Back Stronger is “a collaborating and federating system” of which all schools in Camden are a part. There is significant work already underway on deepening collaboration between and within schools to improve practice. We will continue to drive and learn from this.

Whatever the structural changes that might take place in Camden schools over the next five years, there is a commitment to maintaining Camden Learning as the glue that holds all schools in Camden together, whatever type of schools they are, as it does now.

Collaboration can take many forms, from the development of ideas and practice through to more structural forms of partnership, with shared staff, leadership and governance. Federations, where more than one school share a single governing body, is one type of structural partnership.

For some schools in Camden, financial and demographic pressures, as well as the increasing complexity of needs of some children and young people, have given a new urgency to the question of how to develop and sustain more structural forms of partnership working, within the wider context of meaningful collaboration. This is because working in a more structural form of partnership is one route to ensuring that schools maintain their quality and viability during these testing times, as it enables the sharing of staff and resources across more than one school.

However, working in a structural partnership is not going to be the right approach for every school. Moreover, research tells us that structural partnerships often start with deep and purposeful collaboration, for the purpose of improving practice, and evolve into something different over time. We therefore cannot divorce our consideration of more structural forms of partnership working from our system-wide commitment to wider and deeper collaboration.

In order to deliver the ambition, set out in Building Back Stronger for a good local school place available for every child, Camden Council and Camden Learning will, together with the Dioceses, be working proactively with schools to ensure that leaders and governing bodies have planned for the future and in doing so have considered a range of structural partnership models that could deliver strength, quality and sustainability.

In Camden, as elsewhere, the ultimate decision on how and with whom to partner rests with the governors of the individual schools. Camden LA and Camden Learning will be supporting schools to make these decisions based on the best available evidence and will work to ensure a degree of system coherence so that the partnerships established today provide a sound bedrock for future sustainability, and that no school is left behind.

Specifically, within the limits of existing resources, we will aim to:

- Support school leaders and governing bodies to scenario-plan for the future, particularly those whose needs seem greatest, to ensure their continued sustainability and viability.
- Proactively broker and initiate discussions about structural partnerships between groups of schools in order to support a coherent, strategic and sustainable approach to the development of structural partnerships across the borough.
- Create a bank of supporting resources for use by schools, such as template MOUs and resource sharing agreements that could be used in developing more structural forms of partnership working.
- Support school leaders and governors to develop the skills and understanding needed to embed system leadership within a collaborating and federating system.
- Keep a watching brief to ensure emerging partnerships are likely to enhance quality and promote sustainability and that all schools that wish to engage have an avenue to do so.