Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): Proposed Hard Federation

Valley Gardens Middle School & Marden Bridge Middle School

Overview: This document provides clear, transparent information for parents, staff, governors, and the wider school community regarding the proposed hard federation between **Valley Gardens Middle School** and **Marden Bridge Middle School**.

1. Executive Summary & Governance Structure

What is a Hard Federation?

A hard federation is a formal partnership under English education law where two or more maintained schools join together under a single Governing Body. Unlike a merger, both schools maintain their individual identities, budgets, Ofsted inspections, performance tables, and admissions criteria.

Is this a MAT? What's the difference?

A hard federation involves local authority-maintained schools sharing a single governing body, while a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) is a single legal entity and charitable company where a single trust board governs multiple academy schools.

What status will the schools hold within the partnership?

Both Valley Gardens Middle School and Marden Bridge Middle School will initially remain as **Foundation Schools** and will continue to be valued members of the **North Tyneside Learning Trust (NTLT)**.

How does the governance structure change?

Governance Aspect	Current Arrangement	Proposed Hard Federation Arrangement
Governing Body	Two separate, independent Governing Bodies	One single, unified Federation Governing Body representing both schools
School Identity	Valley Gardens & Marden Bridge Middle Schools	Both schools retain their individual names, uniforms, and character
Trust Membership	North Tyneside Learning Trust (NTLT)	Retained under North Tyneside Learning Trust (NTLT)
School Funding & Budgets	Individual school budget allocations	Separate budgets maintained per school, managed strategically by the single board

How can the federation board accept more schools if all the board places are already taken? It would not be fair for new schools coming into the federation.

If the federation expands in the future to incorporate further local schools, the governing body will be reconstituted in such a way that it can fulfil its legal and moral responsibilities and meet its strategic goals. The current structure is designed for the successful federation of two middle schools.

2. Information for Staff

What happens to my employment and contractual terms?

Your employment remains as it currently is with the same contract that you currently have. You remain employed by the governing body. The only difference is that the governing body will be a centralised governing body rather than one that exists solely in the interests of your current school.

Will we go through a TUPE process?

No - HR have confirmed that your employer technically remains the same and therefore the TUPE process is not required.

Will my pay, role, or job description change?

No. All staff will retain their:

- Current roles and job titles
- Existing pay scales, salaries, and progression pathways
- Job descriptions and key responsibilities
- Continuous service rights and accrued entitlements
- Pensions (Teachers' Pension Scheme / Local Government Pension Scheme)
- Working hours and working conditions

Will I be expected to work across both school sites?

Staff will continue in their current roles at their respective school sites. Any future opportunities or requirements for cross-site working would be discussed transparently through formal consultation processes in full compliance with employment law and contractual agreements.

How does this impact union representation and consultations?

Recognised trade unions and professional associations are being fully consulted throughout this process. Formal consultation meetings will be conducted to ensure all staff queries are comprehensively addressed.

Will we share policies?

We will share some policies, but not all. Policies that are part of maintaining the character of the school such as uniform and behaviour policies will remain as separate school policies. Larger organisational policies such as admissions policies and Health and Safety policies would more likely

be federation policies.

Will our leadership structure stay the same?

Initially,yes. However, as the federation evolves, and when leaders leave the organisation, the governors will review structures.

As Head of Department, will my responsibilities change?

No

Will training days align?

We will align some of our training days to allow for staff from both schools to meet and share good practice. Other training days will be left for schools to use as they see fit.

Will curriculum areas need to be aligned in both schools?

Only where there is a compelling rationale for this. We recognise that a school's curriculum is part of its unique character and we remain committed to each school retaining that character.

Will we share finances?

Each school retains control of its own budget, as it does now, and is expected to be fiscally responsible and ensure good value for money for the school. Any deficit budget situations that arise are the responsibility of the individual school. However, we do envisage joint enterprises that we would share funding of for the benefits of pupils in both schools. This could range from joint appointments to shared facilities.

3. Information for Parents, Carers, and Students

Will the school names, uniforms, or school day times change?

No. Both Valley Gardens Middle School and Marden Bridge Middle School will keep their current names, logos, school uniforms, and daily schedules. Day-to-day school life for students will remain unchanged.

How will this affect teaching quality and classroom learning?

The hard federation is designed to enhance educational outcomes across both schools. Key benefits include:

- **Shared Expertise:** Teachers and specialist staff can collaborate, sharing best practices, curriculum planning, and resources.
- **Enhanced Curriculum Provision:** Broader opportunities for extracurricular activities, enrichment, and specialist subject support.
- **Sustained High Standards:** Pooling leadership insight and teaching talent strengthens the long-term educational resilience of both middle schools.

Will admission arrangements or catchment areas change?

No. Admissions policies, criteria, and catchment areas for both schools will remain completely separate and aligned with North Tyneside Local Authority guidelines.

4. Strategic Rationale & Trust Alignment

Why choose a Hard Federation now?

Collaborating formally under a hard federation strengthens both schools against broader educational and financial challenges, ensuring high-quality middle school provision remains robust and sustainable within North Tyneside.

What role does the North Tyneside Learning Trust (NTLT) play?

As foundation schools within the North Tyneside Learning Trust, both schools will continue to benefit from the Trust's strategic support, collaborative network, and shared commitment to educational excellence across the borough.

5. Next Steps & Timeline

Phase / Milestone	Key Focus Areas
Stakeholder Consultation	Formal consultation period for staff, parents, trade unions, and community members to submit feedback and questions. Face-to-face drop ins to be offered to stakeholders during the consultation period.
Governing Body Decision	Review of all consultation feedback by both Governing Bodies before making the final determination to federate.
Federation Implementation	Establishment of the single Federation Governing Body and formal launch of the hard federation.