# Thornhill Primary School and Laycock Primary School

## Overview of the Consultation on the Proposal to Federate

March 2026

# 1. Executive Summary

1. This report presents the findings of the public consultation on the proposal to federate Thornhill Primary School and Laycock Primary School. The consultation was conducted in accordance with the School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations 2012 and ran for seven weeks from 6 January to 24 February 2026. A total of 95 responses were received. Of these, 58 supported the proposal (61%), 22 opposed (23%), and 15 were unsure (16%).

2. There was a clear divergence between professional and parent opinion. Staff at both schools were unanimously supportive or unsure, with no member of staff opposing: 33 of 39 supported (85%) and six were unsure (15%). All eight governor respondents supported the proposal. Parent and carer opinion was divided, with opposition concentrated among Thornhill parents: of 44 Thornhill parent responses, 20 opposed (46%), 16 supported (36%), and eight were unsure (18%). Only four parent responses were received from Laycock. The principal themes in support were the proven track record of the partnership, shared expertise and professional development, career progression, and strategic sustainability. The principal concerns, raised predominantly by Thornhill parents, were a perceived imbalance of benefit favouring Laycock, leadership dilution, staff movement, financial separation, and a view that consultation materials did not adequately address risks. This report presents the consultation findings factually. The recommendation on whether to proceed, together with proposed next steps, is set out in the separate Recommendation Paper.

# 2. Background and Context

### The partnership

3. In April 2023, Islington Council asked Thornhill Primary School to support Laycock Primary School through a shared leadership partnership. Jenny Lewis was appointed as Interim Executive Headteacher, providing strategic leadership across both schools. Laycock was placed under an Interim Executive Board (IEB) following Local Authority intervention due to previous governance concerns. Thornhill maintained its established governing body throughout the partnership. The partnership has been operating successfully for nearly three years, delivering measurable improvements across both schools.

### The schools

4. Thornhill Primary School is a two-form entry primary school with 463 children aged 3–11, located in Barnsbury Ward. The school is rated Good by Ofsted. Laycock Primary School is a one-form entry primary school with 221 children aged 3–11, including a specialist regional deaf provision serving 35 deaf pupils, located in Laycock Ward. The school is rated Good by Ofsted. Both schools serve diverse communities with higher than national average proportions of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium. Both schools are community schools maintained by the London Borough of Islington.

### Why federation was proposed

5. Thornhill Primary School Governing Body has been considering federation options for a number of years in line with national government expectations that all schools (maintained and academies) will move to collaborative multi-school structures. As the partnership between Thornhill and Laycock progressed and plans needed to be made for governance succession at Laycock, school and Local Authority leaders began to consider options for the two schools to federate. Following detailed consideration by school leaders, Thornhill governors and Laycock IEB members, the two boards agreed to proceed to consultation on federation. The boards identified that federating would create further opportunities for both schools and provide scope to mitigate the challenges facing all schools in the current landscape.

6. Federation formalises the successful partnership that has been operating since April 2023, creating a permanent governance and leadership structure to replace the current interim arrangements at Laycock. It enables continued shared leadership and expertise while preserving each school's distinct identity. Within a Federation both schools would remain maintained community schools within Islington Local Authority.

**Proposed governance structure**

7. A single federated governing body of 12 governors would replace the current separate Thornhill Governing Body and Laycock IEB. The proposed composition is:
    - 2 parent governors,
    - 1 staff governor,
    - 1 Local Authority governor,
    - 1 Executive Headteacher, and
    - 7 co-opted governors (including a deaf education specialist).
8. This composition complies with the School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations 2012. Each school will continue to set and manage its own budget, with oversight from the federated governing body. Each school retains its own Head of School leading day-to-day operations: Paul Robinson (Thornhill) and Fred Hall (Laycock).

# 3. Consultation Process

## Statutory basis

9. The consultation was conducted in accordance with the School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations 2012. Regulation 5 requires governing bodies proposing to federate to consult such persons as they consider appropriate. There is no prescribed minimum consultation period in the Regulations although Department for Education (DfE) guidance recommends a minimum of six weeks.

## Timeline

10. The consultation opened on Tuesday 6 January 2026 and closed on Tuesday 24 February 2026 at 5pm. The total consultation period was 7 weeks, exceeding the DfE recommended minimum of six weeks.

## Who was consulted

11. The consultation was shared with parents and carers at both Thornhill and Laycock; all staff at both schools (teaching and support staff); the Local Authority (London Borough of Islington) and council members. Wider school communities were able to respond as the consultation and response form were published on both school websites. Unions representing staff at both schools were also informed about the consultation. The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) were also notified of the consultation.

## Methods of consultation

12. A written consultation document and an easy-read version were published and details distributed to all parents/carers and staff at both schools. The consultation document, easy-read version, online response form and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document were all available on both school websites throughout the consultation period. Paper response forms were available from school offices on request.

13. Two informal sessions were held where stakeholders could ask questions and meet members of both governing bodies: Laycock Primary School – Wednesday 14 January 2026, 5–6pm; Thornhill Primary School – Wednesday 21 January 2026, 5–6pm. Local ward councillors and the Lead Member for Education were invited to attend the drop-in sessions. Ward councillors were represented at both sessions and the Lead Member for Education was able to attend the session at Thornhill.

14. Stakeholders were informed and reminded about the consultation through the following communications:

    - All staff at both schools were jointly informed at the INSET day at the start of the January term.
    - An email was sent to all staff on the consultation launch day (6 January 2026).
    - Notification was sent to all parents and carers on the consultation launch day (using School Ping/ Dojo/ ARBOR dependent on the school).
    - Staff at both schools were reminded about the consultation in staff briefings during the consultation period.
    - Reminders about the consultation were included in school newsletters.
    - A joint letter from the Chair of Thornhill Governing Body and the Chair of Laycock IEB was sent to all staff, parents and carers on 13 February 2026.

15. The consultation document was available in other languages and audio format on request through school offices.

16. The FAQ document was published on both school websites and was updated throughout the consultation period in response to questions received. The final version of the FAQ is included at Appendix C.

### Response rates

17. A total of 95 responses were received via the online consultation survey over the seven week period. One respondent self-identified as having submitted a second response to add an additional comment. Two further responses submitted on 23 February contained near-identical explanation text but recorded different support answers (one No, one Unsure). All responses are included in the figures below as submitted; these data notes are recorded for transparency. No paper responses were received.

18. Sixty-three responses (66%) were from respondents linked to Thornhill Primary School, 27 (28%) from Laycock Primary School, and five (5%) from respondents linked to both schools.

19. By stakeholder group, 51 respondents identified as parents or carers (54%), 39 as staff members (41%), and eight as governors (8%). Seven respondents selected more than one category (for example, parent/carer and staff member). Of these, five supported the proposal and two were unsure; none opposed. These respondents are reflected in each relevant stakeholder group in the analysis below; the section totals therefore sum to more than 95.

20. For context, the estimated parent and carer population across both schools is approximately 870 individuals (based on approximately 588 at Thornhill and 281 at Laycock). This estimate uses the confirmed number of pupils on roll at each school (Thornhill 463, Laycock 221 including the deaf provision), a sibling adjustment of 1.3 pupils per household consistent with estimates commonly used for inner London primary schools where average family size tends to be smaller than the national average, and an average of 1.65 parents or carers per household reflecting Islington's higher than average proportion of single-parent households. The 51 parent/carer responses therefore represent approximately 6% of the estimated parent population. The 39 staff responses represent

approximately 33% of the total staff body of approximately 120, a significantly higher rate of engagement.

# 4. Summary of Consultation Responses

## 4.1 Overall response

21. Of the 95 responses received, 58 supported the proposal (61%), 22 opposed (23%), and 15 were unsure (16%).

| | Yes | No | Unsure | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **All responses** | 58 (61%) | 22 (23%) | 15 (16%) | 95 |

22. When broken down by the school to which respondents identified themselves as linked, the results show a marked difference between the two school communities:

| School | Yes | No | Unsure | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Thornhill Primary School | 34 (54%) | 20 (32%) | 9 (14%) | 63 |
| Laycock Primary School | 20 (74%) | 2 (7%) | 5 (19%) | 27 |
| Both schools | 4 (80%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (20%) | 5 |

23. Overall a majority of Thornhill respondents – 34 of 63 – supported federation (54%), though 20 respondents opposed (32%) and 9 were unsure (14%). At Laycock, 20 of 27 respondents supported the proposal (74%) with only two opposed (7%).

## 4.2 Staff responses

24. Thirty-nine respondents identified themselves as staff members (including four who also identified as parents/carers). This represents 41% of all responses received.

| Staff responses | Yes | No | Unsure | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **All staff** | 33 (85%) | 0 (0%) | 6 (15%) | 39 |
| Thornhill staff | 14 | 0 | 2 | 16 |
| Laycock staff | 16 | 0 | 4 | 20 |
| Both schools staff | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |

25. No member of staff at either school opposed the proposal. 33 of 39 staff respondents supported federation (85%). The six unsure responses came from Laycock staff (4) and Thornhill staff (2).

26. Staff who provided written comments in support of the proposal referenced: the benefits of collaborative working and shared professional development; the opportunity for career progression within a larger organisational structure; the successful track record of the existing partnership; and the view that federation was a logical formalisation of arrangements already in place.

27. The small number of unsure staff responses raised questions about the practical implications of federation for day-to-day working arrangements, including whether staff could be required to cover at the other school, and whether terms and conditions of employment would remain unchanged.

## 4.3 Governor responses

28. Eight respondents identified themselves as governors (including one who also identified as a parent/carer, and one who selected 'Other' and specified their role as an IEB member). All eight governor respondents supported the proposal. Governor respondents were linked to both Thornhill (6) and Laycock (2).

29. Written comments from governors referenced: the proven track record of the partnership; the strategic importance of securing long-term sustainability for both schools; alignment with government and local authority policy direction; and confidence that each school would maintain its distinct identity within the federation.

## 4.4 Parent and carer responses

30. Fifty-one respondents identified themselves as parents or carers (including those who also selected staff member, governor, or local resident). This represents 54% of all responses received. For context, the estimated total parent and carer population across both schools is approximately 870 individuals (see paragraph on response rates above).

| Parent/carer responses | Yes | No | Unsure | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **All parents/carers** | 20 (39%) | 21 (41%) | 10 (20%) | 51 |
| Thornhill parents | 16 (36%) | 20 (46%) | 8 (18%) | 44 |
| Laycock parents | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Both schools parents | 2 | 0 | 1 | 3 |

31. Of those who responded, parent and carer opinion was divided overall: 20 supported the proposal (39%), 21 opposed (41%), and ten were unsure (20%). The pattern differed markedly by school.

**Thornhill parents**

32. Thornhill parents accounted for 44 of the 51 parent responses and were the largest single respondent group across the entire consultation. Overall more Thornhill parents opposed the proposal: 20 opposed (46%), 16 supported (36%), and eight were unsure (18%). However, these 44 responses are drawn from an estimated Thornhill parent population of approximately 527 individuals.

33. Written responses from Thornhill parents who opposed or were unsure of the proposal raised a number of recurring themes. The most frequently cited concern was that the benefits of the federation appeared one-sided in Laycock's favour, with respondents asking what specific benefit the proposal would bring to Thornhill pupils. Several respondents expressed concern that leadership attention had been divided during the existing partnership, with the Executive Headteacher's focus perceived to be directed more towards Laycock. A number of respondents referred to the departure of specific staff from Thornhill to Laycock as evidence of this perceived imbalance. Financial concerns were also raised, particularly regarding the separation of school budgets and PTA/Foundation fundraising. Some respondents felt the consultation materials presented the case for federation in promotional terms rather than as a balanced assessment of risks and benefits.

34. Thornhill parents who supported the proposal referenced: the benefits of collaboration and shared resources; staff professional development and retention; the successful track record of the partnership; and the wider benefit to the local community.

**Laycock parents**

35. Only four parent responses were received from Laycock. Of these, two supported the proposal, one opposed, and one was unsure. The Laycock parent who opposed raised specific concerns about the deaf provision.

**Parents linked to both schools**

36. Three parent respondents identified themselves as linked to both schools. Two supported the proposal and one was unsure. Written comments from this group included both positive views about the partnership's impact and questions about ensuring Thornhill would not be negatively affected.

## 4.5 Other stakeholder responses

37. One respondent identified as a local resident linked to Laycock Primary School and opposed the proposal. This response raised specific concerns about the deaf provision, including the treatment of families who had raised concerns, the culture of leadership in relation to deaf education, and the impact on specialist expertise. These concerns are noted in the thematic analysis in section 5.

38. One further respondent selected 'Other' and described themselves as a former parent at Thornhill. This respondent supported the proposal, referencing knowledge of other local federations and confidence in the preparation undertaken.

39. No responses were received from Unions or other stakeholders beyond responses to the survey.

# 5. Analysis of Key Themes

40. This section draws together the principal themes arising from consultation responses across all stakeholder groups. It presents the themes factually and does not include opinion or recommendation. The separate recommendation paper will address how concerns can be mitigated and will reference FAQ responses where relevant.

## 5.1 Themes in support of federation

41. The following themes appeared consistently across supportive responses from staff, governors, and parents at both schools.

**Building on a proven partnership**

42. The most frequently cited reason for supporting federation was the track record of the existing partnership. Respondents across all stakeholder groups referenced the improvements delivered over the past two to three years and described federation as a natural or logical formalisation of arrangements already working well. Staff and governors in particular characterised federation as securing or future-proofing a collaboration that had demonstrated its value.

**Shared expertise and professional development**

43. Staff respondents consistently referenced the benefits of collaborative working for professional practice. This included shared curriculum development, joint training, peer learning opportunities, and access to specialist expertise across both schools. Several staff members described the partnership as having already delivered tangible improvements to their professional development.

**Career progression and staff retention**

44. Staff and governor respondents identified the creation of career pathways within a larger organisational structure as a significant benefit. This was framed both as a means of retaining talented staff who might otherwise leave for opportunities elsewhere and as a way of developing leadership capacity across the federation.

**Benefits for both school communities**

45. Supportive parent responses referenced the mutual benefit to children at both schools, including access to broader resources, enrichment activities, and the value of connection between neighbouring school communities. Several Thornhill parents who supported the proposal specifically referenced benefits for Laycock children and the wider community interest.

**Strategic sustainability**

46. Governor responses in particular referenced the policy context, including the direction of government and local authority policy towards school collaboration. Some respondents framed federation as a proactive, strategic choice made from a position of strength, positioning the schools well for an uncertain future.

## 5.2 Themes in opposition to federation

47. Opposition was concentrated among Thornhill parents. The themes below reflect the concerns raised by this group, along with one substantive response from a local resident and former parent at Laycock.

**Perceived imbalance of benefit**

48. The single most prominent theme among opposing and unsure respondents was the perception that federation would benefit Laycock disproportionately, with insufficient evidence of tangible benefit to Thornhill. Multiple respondents used formulations such as ‘what’s in it for Thornhill?’ or described the

arrangement as one-sided. Some respondents acknowledged benefits for Laycock while questioning whether those came at Thornhill's expense.

**Leadership dilution**

49. A number of Thornhill parents expressed concern that the Executive Headteacher's attention had been, and would continue to be, divided between the two schools to Thornhill's detriment. Several respondents argued that Thornhill needed dedicated, singular leadership focused solely on its pupils. This concern was linked to perceptions about the school's perceived trajectory during the partnership period.

**Staff movement**

50. Respondents opposing the proposal referred to specific staff departures from Thornhill to Laycock during the partnership period as evidence of a one-sided arrangement. The concern that federation would accelerate the loss of good teachers from Thornhill was raised repeatedly. Some respondents framed this as an existing problem that federation would formalise rather than resolve.

**Financial and resource separation**

51. Concerns about the separation of school budgets and, in particular, PTA and Foundation fundraising were raised by opposing and supportive respondents alike. Some respondents noted that the consultation document's phrasing ('no plan' to pool budgets) fell short of a firm commitment. The Thornhill Foundation's status as a separate registered charity and the protection of parent-led fundraising were specific points of concern.

**Consultation process and transparency**

52. Several opposing respondents described the consultation materials as promotional rather than balanced, arguing that risks and disadvantages were not adequately addressed. Some respondents expressed a desire for more direct engagement opportunities, including meetings with parent groups. One respondent suggested the process felt as though it was being conducted under the radar.

**Concerns about the deaf provision**

53. One response from a respondent linked to Laycock raised specific concerns about the leadership and culture surrounding the deaf provision and that specialist expertise had been lost. This respondent opposed federation on the grounds that it would entrench the current leadership model. These concerns relate specifically to the deaf provision and are distinct from the broader themes raised by other respondents.

## 5.3 Significant differences between stakeholder groups

**Professional consensus vs parent division**

54. The most significant finding of the consultation is the divergence between professional and parent opinion. Staff at both schools were unanimously in favour of federation or unsure, with no opposition: 33 supported (85%), six were unsure (15%), and none opposed. All eight governors supported the proposal. By contrast, responding parents as a group were divided: 21 opposed (41%), 20 supported (39%), and 10 were unsure (20%).

**Differences between schools**

55. Responses from the Laycock school community were substantially more supportive – 20 of 27 supported (74%) – than those from Thornhill, where 34 of 63 supported (54%). This difference is largely explained by the composition of respondents at each school. Laycock's responses were predominantly from staff (20 of 27), who were uniformly supportive. Thornhill's larger response base included 44 parent responses, which were plurality opposed. When comparing like for like, staff at

both schools were similarly supportive: 14 of 16 Thornhill staff supported (88%) and 16 of 20 Laycock staff supported (80%).

### 5.4 Themes from questions submitted

56. Respondents were invited to submit questions about the proposal. A number of substantive questions were received and have been addressed through the FAQ document published on both school websites throughout the consultation. The principal question themes were:

57. **Governance representation:** how parent and staff governors would be elected across two schools of different sizes, and whether both school communities would be adequately represented on the federated governing body. This was raised by both supportive and unsure respondents. This question was also raised at the in person session at Laycock school.

58. **Financial separation:** specific questions about how school budgets, PTA funds, and Foundation funds would be protected, including requests for detail on legal protections and oversight mechanisms. Questions about protecting the funds raised by the Thornhill PTA and Foundation were also raised at the Thornhill in person session.

59. **Success measurement:** how the governing body would evaluate whether the federation was working, what metrics would be used, and what would happen if federation did not deliver the expected benefits.

60. **Staff implications:** whether staff would be required to work across both schools, whether terms and conditions would change, and how staff shortages at one school would be managed.

61. **Deaf provision:** questions about leadership of the deaf provision, the commitment of the Local Authority to its development, and whether federation would strengthen or weaken specialist support.

62. **Future direction:** whether federation was a precursor to further changes, such as merger or academisation, and how the federation would relate to the wider education policy landscape.

## 6. Appendices

Appendix A: The consultation document

Appendix B: Detailed breakdown of survey responses

Appendix C: FAQ document (final version)

Appendix D: Record of drop-in session attendance

# Appendix A: Consultation Proposal

See separate document in papers.

# Appendix B: Detailed Breakdown of Survey Responses

### Table B1: All responses by support and school

| School | Yes | No | Unsure | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Thornhill Primary School | 34 (54%) | 20 (32%) | 9 (14%) | 63 |
| Laycock Primary School | 20 (74%) | 2 (7%) | 5 (19%) | 27 |
| Both schools | 4 (80%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (20%) | 5 |
| **Total** | **58 (61%)** | **22 (23%)** | **15 (16%)** | **95** |

### Table B2: Responses by stakeholder group

| Stakeholder group | Yes | No | Unsure | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Parent/carer | 16 (36%) | 21 (47%) | 8 (18%) | 45 |
| Staff member | 30 (86%) | 0 (0%) | 5 (14%) | 35 |
| Governor | 6 (100%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 6 |
| Parent/carer and staff member | 3 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| Parent/carer and governor | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Parent/carer and local resident | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Local resident | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Other | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

*Note: Table B2 shows each respondent exactly once, based on the category or categories they selected. The seven multi-category respondents appear in their combined category row only. Totals in Tables B3 and B4 below will differ from Table B2 because respondents selecting multiple categories are counted in each relevant group.*

### Table B3: Parent/carer responses by school (including multi-category respondents)

| Parent/carer responses | Yes | No | Unsure | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Thornhill parents | 16 (36%) | 20 (46%) | 8 (18%) | 44 |
| Laycock parents | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Both schools parents | 2 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| **Total** | **20 (39%)** | **21 (41%)** | **10 (20%)** | **51** |

### Table B4: Staff responses by school (including multi-category respondents)

| Staff responses | Yes | No | Unsure | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Thornhill staff | 14 (88%) | 0 | 2 (13%) | 16 |
| Laycock staff | 16 (80%) | 0 | 4 (20%) | 20 |
| Both schools staff | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| **Total** | **33 (85%)** | **0 (0%)** | **6 (15%)** | **39** |

### Table B5: Governor responses by school

| Governor responses | Yes | No | Unsure | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Thornhill governors | 6 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Laycock governors | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| **Total** | **8 (100%)** | **0 (0%)** | **0 (0%)** | **8** |

# Appendix A: FAQ document (final version)

Posted w/b 06/01/26

**Q1. Who will be the Executive Headteacher?**

Jenny Lewis, currently Interim Executive Headteacher across both schools, will be the Executive Headteacher for the Federation.

**Q2. Will staff be asked/expected to work across either school?**

Staff will maintain their school specific job description and would not be expected to work in the other school unless they apply for a role that is across both schools. There will be opportunities for joint staff development/training.

**Q3. What about jobs?**

Federating creates additional opportunities through shared roles and career pathways. There are no current plans for changes to the staffing structure.

**Q4. Will my child's education change?**

Day-to-day classroom experience remains the same. What improves is access to broader expertise, additional enrichment opportunities, and enhanced specialist support when needed.

**Q5. Will my child have to travel to the other school?**

No. Children will continue to attend their own school building. Some enhanced activities or specialist provision might offer occasional opportunities for cross-site experiences, but this federation is not about merging the two schools, the main shared function is governance and leadership oversight.

**Q6. Will you close one school?**

Whether schools close or not is a decision made by the Local Authority and is dependent on numerous factors. The Local Authority has confirmed that there are no planned closures for the 2025-26 and 2026-27 academic years. The reason we are federating is to provide stable strong foundations for both schools to enable them to thrive.

**Q7. What about the deaf provision?**

Laycock's regional deaf provision is a strength we're championing and protecting. The partnership has already strengthened provision through improved targeted training, development of the deaf resource hub within the provision and joint partnership working with external professionals/organisations. Federating provides additional strategic oversight and financial stability. Qualified Teachers of the Deaf (QTOD) support remains in place and specialist expertise will be enhanced.

**Q8. Will deaf children still receive the same level of support?**

Yes. Qualified Teachers of the Deaf support specialist assessment, and support and interventions continue unchanged. Federating enhances the sustainability and resources available to the provision. Each deaf child will continue to receive support from highly qualified specialist teachers with mandatory qualifications in deafness.

**Q9. Why not join a multi-academy trust?**

We are committed to community-focused education within the local authority framework. Federating allows us to gain benefits of collaboration while remaining accountable to Islington families and maintaining our community school ethos.

**Q10. Are there plans to develop the Federation further with other schools?**

All our current efforts are focused on setting up the Federation for Laycock and Thornhill. Of course, we can't predict the future, but any expansion would be subject to consultation, and would need to align with the Vision and Values of our Federation.

**Q11. Isn't this just about saving money? What's really in it for our children?**

Yes, federating can support financial sustainability - but that's not the purpose. The real opportunity is about what that stability enables for children:

- Access to broader expertise and specialist support across both schools.
- Enhanced curriculum and enrichment opportunities neither school could provide alone.
- Deaf children benefit from inclusive teaching practices informed by Qualified Teachers of the Deaf expertise.
- Protection and enhancement of the regional deaf specialist  provision.
- Career-ready staff who want to stay, grow and innovate with us.
- Meaningful connections with children from neighbouring schools, developing social bonds and a sense of belonging to their local community.
- The experience of being part of something bigger - a network of schools working together, modeling collaboration and community.

In a city as large and diverse as London, it's easy for families to feel isolated even when living close together. By working together through federation we can create intentional opportunities for connection, helping children develop social capital, empathy, and a strong sense of place in our corner of Islington.

This isn't about institutional survival - it's about creating the conditions for children to thrive, both academically and socially.

**Q12. Why Thornhill and Laycock, why not other schools?**

This partnership began when Laycock Primary School needed leadership support and Thornhill Primary School was seeking opportunities to develop partnerships and extend their leadership capacity. After two successful years this is the natural next step.

Posted w/b 12/01/26

**Q13. How will staff movements between schools be managed? Will one school lose teachers to the other?**

One of the key benefits of federation is creating career development opportunities that help us retain excellent, ambitious staff within our schools rather than losing them to other schools or boroughs entirely. This was identified as a priority when we began working together two years ago and is increasingly important for London schools where there is competition for excellent staff.

Multi-Academy Trusts have long benefited from offering career pathways across multiple schools. Federation brings this same advantage to maintained community schools - excellent staff can progress and develop without leaving, which benefits both the staff members and our pupils.

How this works in practice:

Both schools are already benefiting from collaboration, with staff working together to develop curriculum content, undertake joint training, and share expertise in areas like inclusive practice and SEND support. Federation formalises these reciprocal professional relationships while ensuring each school maintains its staffing complement.

As there are no changes to terms and conditions of employment, staff remain contracted to their individual schools. The proposed federation aims to provide greater opportunities for personnel to work collaboratively across both sites, sharing best practice and engaging in professional peer-to-peer learning. Over time, opportunities may arise for staff to be employed across both schools or to access TLR (Teaching and Learning Responsibility) payments for leadership roles that span the federation and staff may choose to apply for promotional vacancies advertised within the partner school.

**Structural protections:**

- Each school maintains its own staffing budget and structure
- Staff continue to be employed by their current school
- Career opportunities enhance retention across both schools

Staff development and career progression are indicators of a thriving organisation. Federation creates the conditions for our excellent teachers to stay and grow with us, bringing their developing expertise to benefit children across both schools.

**Q14. How will you measure whether the federation is successful? How will we know it's working?**

This is an important question, and we're clear about what success looks like.

**Each school remains distinct**

First, it's essential to understand that while we'll share one governing body, and the two schools have come together to form this proposal because we have identified a shared vision and values, Thornhill and Laycock will remain separate schools with their own identities:

- Each school continues to be inspected individually by Ofsted with separate ratings
- Each school maintains its own budget based on its pupil numbers and needs
- Each school keeps its name, character, and ethos

Success means each school thrives as itself, not that we become identical.

**What success looks like for pupils**

The fundamental test is whether children continue to receive the high standards of education we expect, or better, through federation than either school could provide alone:

- Maintaining and raising standards: High attainment and progress for all pupils, with each child reaching their full potential
- A broader, better offer: Access to specialist teaching, enhanced enrichment activities, and curriculum experiences that extend beyond what a single small primary can provide independently
- Smoother transitions and stronger wellbeing: Pupils develop confidence from being part of a school with enhanced capacity and resources, benefiting from improved pastoral support

**What success looks like for leadership and staff**

- Stable, strategic leadership: The Executive Headteacher model provides both schools with experienced senior leadership capacity, allowing Heads of School to focus on excellent teaching and learning rather than being stretched across multiple competing priorities
- Professional development that retains talent: Staff have enhanced career progression opportunities and access to (and opportunities to develop) specialist expertise, which means excellent teachers stay and develop within the family of schools and Islington rather than leaving for opportunities

elsewhere.  By retaining skills and expertise within our family of schools both schools will continue to benefit through our collaboration and shared expertise.
- Shared expertise: Both schools benefit from staff collaboration on curriculum development, moderation and assessment of pupil progress, and joint training that strengthens teaching across both schools
- Efficiency and support: A unified leadership model helps to reduce the workload for both leaders and staff by removing the need to do the same task twice. By working as one team, the schools can share administrative work and resources, allowing staff to spend more time on teaching and learning. This structure also creates a better balance of responsibilities; rather than one person managing a subject alone, staff can share the pressure and support one another across both schools.

**How the governing body will monitor success**

The federated governing body has three core responsibilities: setting strategic direction, holding the Executive Headteacher to account for educational performance, and ensuring financial resources are well spent.

The board will evaluate the federation through:

- School performance data: Tracking pupil progress, attainment, and wellbeing in both schools
- Stakeholder confidence: Regular surveys of parents, staff, and pupils to ensure the federation maintains trust and delivers what our communities need
- Financial sustainability: Monitoring how collaboration creates efficiencies that can be reinvested in teaching and learning
- Board effectiveness: Regular self-evaluation to ensure governors are providing robust oversight and challenge

**Being realistic about timelines**

Some benefits will be immediate - formalising successful leadership arrangements provides stability from day one. Other benefits - like enhanced curriculum opportunities or career pathways - will develop over the first few years as we build on our existing collaboration.

We're committing to building something stronger and more sustainable for both schools, measured by tangible improvements that benefit every child.

**Why we're doing this proactively**

The long-term viability of individual primary schools that are not part of a Community Schools Federation or a Multi-Academy Trust is increasingly uncertain in the current education landscape. By proactively choosing to form a federation between two schools with shared vision and values, who are neighbours and have the support of the local authority, we are setting our own course for the future rather than being forced to follow the currents.

This is a strategic decision made from a position of strength, not a crisis response.

**Our commitment**

If the federation isn't delivering the benefits we've identified, the governing body has a responsibility to review and address this. Both schools are entering this partnership because the evidence shows it works.

This isn't about managing decline or making do. But it is about being realistic about the current and future challenges that individual schools face and the current and future policy direction. It's about creating the

conditions for both schools to be more ambitious in what we offer children, more sustainable in how we operate, and more effective in how we deliver excellent education.

**Q15. Who leads the deaf provision and how will federation strengthen it?**

In January 2026, Ms Sangha was appointed as Lead Teacher for the Deaf Provision at Laycock. She brings specialist expertise in deaf education and is working closely with the Senior Leadership Team at Laycock to strengthen and develop the provision.

**What our partnership has already delivered**

Over the past two years, the partnership between our schools has demonstrably strengthened the deaf provision:

- **Secured funding:** The provision now benefits from a renewed funding agreement with Islington LA, secured through the strategic leadership of Miss Lewis as Interim Executive Headteacher
- **Enhanced strategic oversight:** Ms Sangha has direct access to Executive Headteacher support and direction
- **Increased specialist capacity:** We've increased the number of Qualified Teachers of the Deaf (QToD) since the partnership began
- **Stronger external partnerships:** We've built strengthened relationships with regional specialist agencies
- **Protected capacity:** The deaf provision's capacity has been protected within the school structure, ensuring it remains central to Laycock's identity and purpose

These are not aspirations - they're achievements already delivered through collaborative working.

**How federation strengthens this further**

Federation builds on this success by providing additional safeguards and enhancements:

- **Governance expertise:** The federated governing body will include a deaf education specialist governor, ensuring specialist understanding at strategic level
- **Enhanced accountability:** Formal governance structure with clear accountability for provision outcomes
- **Shared resources and expertise:** Access to training and resources across both schools, increasing awareness and understanding of deaf education throughout the federation
- **Long-term stability:** Federation provides the structural foundation to maintain and develop the provision's regional reputation as a centre of excellence

**Continued excellence**

The core priorities remain unchanged and protected:

- All deaf pupils continue to receive support from Qualified Teachers of the Deaf (QTOD)
- Specialist assessments and tailored interventions are maintained
- The provision's specialist character is safeguarded as central to Laycock's identity
- We have secured capital funding to deliver acoustic improvements across the school, including assistive technology to further enhance the learning experience for all children.

The partnership has already strengthened the deaf provision. Federation formalises and secures these gains, ensuring the provision has the strategic backing, resources, and governance oversight it needs not just to continue, but to thrive as a regional centre of excellence.

**Q16. Can the Executive Headteacher really give both schools the attention they need?**

This is a fair question, and it's important to be clear about how leadership has worked over the past two years and how it would work within federation going forward.

**The past two years: establishing strong foundations**

When our partnership began in April 2023, Laycock needed intensive leadership support to establish strong operational foundations following previous leadership turnover. Miss Lewis focused time and energy at Laycock to put the basics in place - stable staffing, clear systems, improved attendance, and secured funding for the deaf provision.

This was the right priority for that phase.  At Thornhill Paul Robinson, as Acting Headteacher, has provided strong day-to-day leadership throughout, and the school has continued to thrive.

Two years on, those foundations at Laycock are now established. The school is stable, improving, and ready to build on this progress.

**How federation leadership would work going forward**

Federation formalises a sustainable leadership model for both schools:

**Strategic vs operational leadership:**

- Jenny Lewis (Executive Headteacher) provides strategic leadership, vision, and accountability across both schools
- Paul Robinson (Head of School at Thornhill) and Fred Hall (Head of School at Laycock) lead day-to-day operations at their schools
- Each school has dedicated senior leadership onsite every day
- Both Heads of School and Senior Leaders have direct access to Executive Headteacher support when needed

**Why this model works:**

This structure is well-established across London primary federations and offers benefits that single-school headship doesn't:

- Broader perspective on school improvement
- Shared expertise on complex issues like SEND, safeguarding, and curriculum development
- Enhanced support for Heads of School who can learn from each other
- More robust leadership structure with distributed capacity

**The evidence from two years:**

- Pupil attendance improved at Laycock by 4% and remained strong at Thornhill
- Both schools have maintained stable, effective teaching teams
- Both schools have continued to develop and improve
- Partnership working has created additional capacity rather than depleting it

Results at both schools demonstrate that our partnership is facilitating both schools to continue to improve:

The combined measure shows the percentage of Year 6 pupils achieving the expected standard (EXS) or above in reading, writing AND maths - this is the key accountability measure for primary schools.

- **Laycock:** Combined achievement in reading, writing and maths improved dramatically from 34% (2023) to 64% (2025), now above the national average of 62% (2025), demonstrating significant progress in preparing pupils for secondary school

- **Thornhill:** Combined achievement improved from 76% (2023) to 88% (2025), maintaining performance well above the national average of 62% (2025), with particular strength in Greater Depth Standard results showing excellent stretch for higher attaining pupils

**What federation provides**

Now that Laycock has strong foundations in place, federation provides the governance structure for both schools to move forward together on a more equal footing. The intensive phase of establishing basics is complete. Federation formalises a sustainable model where strategic leadership is shared, but each school has the operational leadership capacity it needs.

Rather than "dividing" leadership, federation creates a stronger, more resilient leadership structure that benefits both schools. The model we're proposing has been tested over two years and proven to work - federation now secures this for the long term.

Posted w/b 27/01/26

**Q17. Will one school budget or either schools' PTA/Foundation fundraising be used to support the other school? How will the budgets work?**

No. Each school's budget and fundraising remain completely separate and independent.

**Legal protections:** Under federation regulations, each school retains its own budget allocation based on its pupil numbers and needs. The Department for Education allocates funding to each school individually, and these budgets cannot be merged or transferred without a specific purpose that meets the needs of both schools.

How this works in practice:

- Thornhill receives: Its full budget allocation based on Thornhill pupil numbers
- Laycock receives: Its full budget allocation based on Laycock pupil numbers (including specialist provision funding)

School leaders at both schools remain responsible for budget allocation and use in line with each approved budget.

**The federated governing body:** Provides oversight of financial management at both schools but cannot transfer funds between schools without a clear, specified purpose that meets the needs of both schools. The governing body remains legally responsible for ensuring that school financial resources are used in a sound, proper and effective way.

Schools are required to submit annual budgets to the Local Authority and regular budget monitoring and audits are undertaken by both the Local Authority and the governing body.

**PTA fundraising and Thornhill Foundation Fundraising:** Fundraising undertaken at Laycock by the PTA or by the school remains for Laycock's benefit.

The Thornhill Foundation is a separate registered charity with its own trustees and legal status. Federation does not change this. Funds raised by the Thornhill PTA and Foundation are dispersed at the discretion of their Trustees and are done so in line with their charitable objectives 'to support the education of pupils in the school' and their activities are governed by charity law and overseen by the Charity Commission.

Federation does not change the status of any of these fundraising functions, nor does it impact the charity's independent decision making.

There may be opportunities in the future for the two schools to collaborate to raise money as both schools would bring features that would considerably strengthen the likelihood of securing funding from some grants and trusts.

**What about economies of scale?**

School leaders working with approval of the governing body may choose to jointly procure certain services or resources (such as insurance, training, or educational materials) where this provides better value. However, such decisions will be scrutinised to ensure that both schools benefit, costs and savings are split fairly based on usage, and neither school subsidises the other.

**Q18. Will staff be expected to cover shortages at the other school?**

No, each school is responsible for its own staffing needs. However, it's common practice for school staff to collaborate, sharing practice and skills. Over time, both schools might choose to appoint staff to work across the federation in specific roles or responsibilities. These appointments would be made through an open recruitment process.

**Staff contract protections:**

- Staff remain employed by their current school - Federation does not change your employment contract
- Staff contracts stay the same - Terms, conditions, and place of work unchanged
- Staff work at their existing school - Unless they apply for a role that specifies cross-site working

**What about emergencies?**

Like any school partnership, there may be rare occasions where short-term support between schools would be helpful - for example, specialist teacher coverage or particular expertise needed temporarily. In these situations:

- It would be voluntary - Staff can decline
- It would be by mutual agreement - Both schools and the individual must agree
- It would be exceptional - Not regular or expected
- It would be properly supported - With appropriate briefing, planning, and recognition

**The reality:** Over two years of partnership, cross-site working has been targeted and entirely voluntary. Federation does not change this approach.

Each school has its own staffing structure and complement that is funded by its own budget. The priority is maintaining strong, stable teams in each school.

**Career development is different:** Some staff may choose to apply for roles that work across both schools (such as curriculum leadership positions). These would be:

- New roles or leadership functions (not redeployments)
- Advertised openly
- Voluntary applications
- With job descriptions that specify cross-site working

This is about creating opportunities.

Staff will not be "sent" to the other school. Roles remain at the school staff are employed in unless they actively choose to accept an opportunity or apply for a different role.

**Q19. How will Laycock have fair representation when Thornhill has more staff and parents?**

This is a legitimate question; we've thought carefully about how to ensure both schools have voice and representation in the federated governance structure. It is important to understand both what the regulations require and what all governors' responsibilities are.

**Understanding the role of parent and staff governors:** The School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations 2012 and government guidance make an important distinction: parent governors and staff governors are not delegates or representatives speaking on behalf of parents or staff. According to official guidance:

- "Parent governors act as any other governor does. They are there to operate and make decisions in the best interest of their school, not in the interests of their child or the interests of other parents' children."
- "Staff governors act as any other governor does. They are there to operate and make decisions in the best interest of their school, not their own or other staff interests."

This means all governors, regardless of how they were appointed or elected, share the same three core responsibilities. In a federation, these responsibilities apply to both schools equally:

- Ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- Hold executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the effective and efficient performance management of staff
- Oversee the financial performance of the school and make sure money is well spent

**What the regulations require:** The School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations 2012 specify that federated governing bodies must have:

- 2 parent governors - elected by parents from both schools combined
- 1 staff governor - elected by staff from both schools combined
- 1 Local Authority governor
- Remainder as co-opted governors - appointed for skills and expertise

The specified number of parent and staff governors is both a minimum and a maximum limit. We cannot exceed these numbers. We cannot mandate that one parent governor must come from each school, or that the staff governor must be from a specific school. These are elected positions across the whole federation.

How the governance structure supports both schools:

- All governors serve both schools equally
    - Parent/staff governors bring the perspective and experience of parents/staff, but they're not there to represent one constituency
    - Every governor has responsibility for the success of both Thornhill and Laycock
    - Decisions are made in the collective interest of the federation and the individual schools within it
    - The governing body will ensure expertise relevant to both schools (including a deaf education specialist)
- Leadership representation at meetings
    - Executive Headteacher, Head of School (Thornhill), and Head of School (Laycock) all attend governing body meetings
    - This ensures both schools' operational voice is heard in discussions
- Committee structure will protect both schools' interests
    - Each school's budget, performance, and development will be monitored
    - Heads of School report directly to governing body
    - Both schools' priorities are formal agenda items

**The electoral reality:** It is true that Thornhill has more staff and parents, which could feasibly influence the outcome of elections. However:

- Governors serve the federation, not individual schools
    - Parent and staff governors are elected because they bring lived experience of being a parent or staff member - not to represent a particular school or constituency
- Governing body has collective responsibility for both schools
    - Once elected, parent and staff governors have equal responsibility for both schools
- Good governors seek to understand and represent both communities
- The co-opted governor majority (7 of 12 governors) provides balance

**Accountability:** If either school community feels unheard or underrepresented, this can be raised with the governing body, which has a duty to ensure effective governance for both schools.

What this means in practice: A parent governor elected from Thornhill's community is not a "Thornhill governor" - they're a governor of the federation who brings a parent perspective. They have exactly the same responsibility to ensure Laycock thrives as they do to ensure Thornhill thrives.

Similarly, if a staff governor is elected from Laycock, they serve the whole federation, not just Laycock staff.

This isn't a loophole or weakness - it's how effective governance works. Governors must put the interests of all pupils ahead of sectional interests, whether that's their own child, their employer, or any other personal connection.

We can't change the electoral mathematics, but the governance structure is designed to ensure both schools have a voice, representation, and protection. The governing body's responsibility is to both schools equally.

**Q20. What are the risks of federation and how will you manage them?**

This is an important question. When School Leaders and members of the Thornhill Governing Body and Laycock IEB developed this federation proposal, we identified potential challenges and designed the model to address them from the start. Here's how the federation structure protects both schools.

**Built in structural protections**

Budget independence - The federation model maintains financial separation between schools:

- Regulations require each school keeps its own budget
- Each school's funding allocation stays with that school
- The governing body is responsible for financial oversight of the use of each school budgets and has responsibility to ensure they are used appropriately and to the benefit of each school
- Any joint procurement is voluntary and has the potential to saves both schools money

Individual school identity - Federation preserves what makes each school special

- Separate names, uniforms, buildings, and ethos
- Separate Ofsted inspections maintain individual accountability
- Each school has its own Head of School and senior leadership
- Parents and pupils experience their own school

Staff recruitment and retention - The real challenge facing individual schools is losing excellent teachers to Multi-Academy Trusts and other federations that can offer career progression. Federation creates opportunities single schools can't:

- Career development pathways retain ambitious staff

- Access to specialist expertise across both schools
- Professional development opportunities
- More attractive proposition for recruiting high-quality teachers

**Governance Safeguards**

Clear accountability for both schools - The governance structure ensures both schools thrive.

- Each school's performance formally monitored
- Both Heads of School report directly to governing body
- Committee structure with specific responsibility for each school's budget and outcomes
- All governors have legal duty to both schools equally

Balanced representation - While we can't mandate where elected governors come from, the structure ensures balanced oversight:

- Co-opted governor majority (7 of 12) appointed for skills relevant to both schools
- All governors serve both schools regardless of which community they're from
- Both school leadership teams attend governing body meetings
- Deaf education specialist ensures expertise for Laycock's specialist provision

**Ongoing monitoring and review**

Evaluation framework - Success will be measured through

- Individual school performance data (attainment, attendance, progress)
- External quality of teaching and learning oversight
- Stakeholder confidence (regular parent/staff surveys)
- Financial sustainability for both schools
- Staff retention and development
- Delivery of enhanced opportunities

De-federation option: If federation isn't delivering expected benefits, governing bodies can review the arrangement. While we're confident in this proposal based on two years of successful partnership, this option exists as a safeguard.

**Leadership capacity**

Distributed leadership model - Rather than spreading one person too thin, federation creates a more resilient structure

- Executive Headteacher provides strategic leadership across both schools
- Heads of School lead day-to-day operations at each school
- Strong senior leadership teams at both schools
- Two years' evidence this works (improved attendance at Laycock, maintained excellence at Thornhill)

**External Context**

The wider policy landscape is prioritising formal collaboration.

There is national level direction towards collaboration:

- The previous government (2010-2024) promoted academisation and Multi-Academy Trusts as the primary collaborative model
- The current Labour government (2024-present) encourages school collaboration without mandating full academisation

- A Schools White Paper expected in 2026 will likely focus on SEND reform and collaborative models between schools
- Federation is recognised as a sustainable collaborative model that preserves maintained school status

Federation is aligned with Islington priorities:

- Islington's Education Plan 2023-30 explicitly promotes "collaboration and alternative school models as part of a federated system" (Putting Children First, Pillar Three: School Organisation)
- The Local Authority strategy emphasises building "strong relationships with all our family of schools" through partnership
- The Local Authority has made a commitment to ensure "all children and young people thrive educationally, regardless of their circumstances and the type of setting they are in"

Federation strengthens our influence:

- Federated schools have greater collective voice in local and national policy discussions
- Shared governance structure enables more effective engagement with Department for Education (DfE) and Local Authority
- Partnership model positions both schools as leaders in collaborative practice, not isolated institutions responding to policy changes

Federation strengthens our position in relation to both the challenges schools are facing and the opportunities presented.

Individual maintained schools face increasing challenges:

- Funding pressures are affecting all London primaries
- Falling numbers of pupils (rolls) have been sustained in many London boroughs (including Islington) for a number of years – this increases budget pressures
- Difficulty recruiting high quality senior leaders
- Isolated schools are more vulnerable to policy changes

Federation positions both schools more strongly than remaining separate:

- Maintained school status preserved (not academisation)
- Local authority partnership maintained
- Shared strategic capacity
- Stronger collective voice

There are many local federations in operation including but not limited to:

Islington:

- Newington Green & Rotherfield Federation: Formed in 2022 to bring these two primary schools under one governing body.
- The Learning Quarter federation: Hugh Myddleton & Winton
- St Luke's CE Primary School and Moreland Primary School
- Sacred Heart Primary School and Christ the King Primary School
- Many Church of England primary schools are in established partnerships some of which partner across boroughs including; St Andrews CE Primary School, St Johns Highbury Vale CE Primary School & St Mary's CE Primary School

Hackney:

- The LEAP Federation: Kingsmead, Mandeville, Gayhurst, and Grasmere Primary Schools.

- New Wave Federation: Grazebrook, Shacklewell, Thomas Fairchild, and Woodberry Down Primary Schools.
- Viridis Federation: Orchard, Southwold, and Hoxton Garden Primary Schools.
- The Blossom Federation: Daubeney, Lauriston, Sebright, and Colvestone Primary Schools.
- Primary Advantage Federation: A major federation including St John & St James, Holy Trinity, Springfield, St Matthias, St John the Baptist, Morningside, Gainsborough, and De Beauvoir.
- The Best Start Federation: London Fields and Whitmore Primary Schools.
- St John's & St Andrew's Federation: St John of Jerusalem and St Andrew's (CE) schools.
- Federation of Our Lady & St Joseph: Catholic primary schools within the borough.

**Do the benefits outweigh the challenges?**

Following two years of partnership the school leaders, Thornhill governors and Laycock Interim Board members have concluded that the model works. The federation structure formalises what's successful while adding governance safeguards and supports long-term sustainability. The proposal has been developed with input and support from the Local Authority.

The alternative - remaining as separate individual schools - carries its own challenges in the current education landscape and is contrary to the wider policy direction of the Department for Education and Local Authority. We believe federation is the stronger, more sustainable path for both schools.

If you identify concerns we haven't addressed, we want to hear them. That's what consultation is for.

Islington Council supports this proposal:

Cllr Michelline Safi-Ngongo, Islington Council's Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families, said: *"We're determined to ensure every child, whatever their background or starting point, has the opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential in a great Islington school.*

*"I'm happy to support the federation proposals, which I believe will help us achieve that goal and create a more equal Islington."*

Jon Abbey, Islington Council's Corporate Director of Children's Services, said: *"We've been working closely with the leadership of both Thornhill and Laycock Primary Schools on a shared strategic vision to ensure they can continue to deliver a high-quality education for local children.*

*"We believe these plans to federate the schools will both strengthen leadership and governance and provide a robust model to maintain excellent standards and specialist expertise into the future. We're happy to support their proposal."*

**Q21. How do the two schools' different strengths complement each other?**

Both schools bring distinct strengths to this partnership. Both schools are currently rated as 'Good' schools by Ofsted. The question isn't which school is "better" - it's how different expertise creates more for both communities than either school could achieve alone.

**Laycock's specialist strengths that benefit Thornhill**

Inclusive practice and SEND expertise - Laycock's regional deaf provision, the largest of its kind in the country, has developed deep expertise in inclusive teaching practice that benefits all children, not just deaf pupils. This includes:

- Differentiation strategies for diverse learning needs
- Visual and multi-sensory teaching approaches
- Assessment methods for children with communication challenges
- Creating inclusive classrooms where all children can access learning

Over the past two years, Thornhill staff have accessed training and collaborative planning with Laycock's deaf education specialists. These inclusive teaching strategies enhance provision for all Thornhill pupils, particularly those with SEND.

In January 2026, Education Minister Georgina Gould OBE MP visited Laycock to see this good practice as part of her broader 'national conversation on SEND provision'.

Specialist agency partnerships - Laycock's work with regional specialist agencies (deaf education services, communication support, specialist SEN professionals) brings expertise and networks that Thornhill staff can access and learn from. Through Laycock's specialist provision, Thornhill staff have access to regional deaf education networks and specialist agencies that they wouldn't typically engage with. This brings external expertise and fresh perspectives that enhance Thornhill's practice.

Thornhill's strengths that benefit Laycock

Scale and curriculum breadth - As a two-form entry school, Thornhill offers:

- Broader specialist subject expertise across the staff team
- Well-developed subject leadership structures
- Established curriculum planning and resources
- Experience managing larger cohorts and year groups

Laycock staff have benefited from Thornhill's curriculum development work, subject-specific expertise, and leadership capacity.

Established systems and processes - Thornhill's mature operational systems in areas like assessment, data management, and school improvement planning provide models that Laycock has drawn on during its improvement journey.

Leadership capacity - Thornhill's strong senior leadership capacity has meant that we were able to release Jenny to provide strategic, systems leadership support that has helped stabilise and strengthen Laycock's leadership.

Mutual benefits

Professional development and collaborative practice - Staff from both schools have engaged in collaborative curriculum planning, accessing different perspectives and approaches. This has been particularly valuable in areas like inclusive pedagogy and meeting diverse learning needs. Teachers report increased confidence - Thornhill staff in working with diverse learners, Laycock staff in subject-specific curriculum development.

Leadership development opportunities - Middle leaders from both schools have had opportunities to work across the partnership, developing their strategic thinking and leadership capacity - valuable experience for career progression that small individual schools struggle to provide.

Broader professional networks - Both school communities benefit from expanded professional networks - Thornhill through access to specialist deaf education and SEND networks; Laycock through connection to Thornhill's broader curriculum and school improvement networks.

Maintained and improved excellence – Both schools are rated ‘Good’ by Ofsted.  The evidence from two years demonstrates partnership has strengthened both schools:

- Thornhill's combined attainment improved from 85% to 88%, attendance remains strong, and the school continues to thrive. Partnership hasn't diluted Thornhill's quality - it's enhanced it.

- Laycock's combined attainment improved from 34% to 64% (now above national average), attendance improved by 4%, and the school has established strong foundations for continued improvement.

Shared community - Our school communities are neighbours, they play in the same parks, compete in the same teams, shop in the same shops and have a wealth of shared experiences. These relationships will be enhanced for the benefit of our schools, and the wider community in which we live and serve.

The Ofsted context

Under Ofsted's new inspection framework, schools judged as 'exceptional' are expected to demonstrate that they:

- Deliver high-quality inclusive practice that ensures all pupils can access and benefit from excellent teaching
- Make a positive contribution to the wider education system, sharing their expertise and learning from others

Partnership between Thornhill and Laycock positions both schools to meet these expectations:

- **High-quality inclusive practice:** Laycock's specialist expertise in inclusive teaching enhances Thornhill's provision; Thornhill's curriculum breadth strengthens Laycock's offer
- **Contributing to the wider system:** Both schools actively share expertise and learn from each other, modelling effective collaborative practice

Federation formalises this reciprocal professional learning, positioning both schools to demonstrate the system leadership that characterises exceptional schools.

Schools that work together tend to be stronger than schools that work alone.

**Q22. How has the partnership between Thornhill and Laycock affected school performance so far?**

The partnership has strengthened both schools across multiple measures. Here's the evidence from the past two years:

**Pupil attainment (Key Stage 2 results)**

| **Laycock Primary School** | | **Thornhill Primary School** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2023 | 2025 | 2023 | 2025 |
| 34% of pupils achieved expected standard in reading, writing and maths combined | 64% of pupils achieved expected standard in reading, writing and maths combined | 76% of pupils achieved expected standard in reading, writing and maths combined | 88% of pupils achieved expected standard in reading, writing and maths combined |
| **Improvement of 30 percentage points, now above national average (62%)** | | **Improvement of 12 percentage points, maintaining performance well above national average (62%)** | |

The combined measure shows the percentage of Year 6 pupils achieving the expected standard or above in reading, writing AND maths - this is the key accountability measure for primary schools.

**Attendance**

**Laycock Primary School**

- Attendance improved by 4% during the partnership period

- Persistent absence reduced significantly

**Thornhill Primary School**

- Attendance remained strong and stable throughout partnership period at 95%

**Securing educational excellence**

**Laycock Primary School**

- January 2026: Visited by Georgina Gould OBE MP, Schools Minister, as part of the government's national conversation on SEND provision, recognising the high-quality inclusive practice at Laycock
- Secured renewed funding commitment from Islington LA for the regional deaf provision
- Increased number of Qualified Teachers of the Deaf since partnership began
- Strengthened partnerships with regional specialist agencies

**Thornhill Primary School**

- Autumn 2025: Received letter from Bridget Phillipson MP, Secretary of State for Education, congratulating the school on being one of the highest performing schools in the country for achievement of disadvantaged pupils
- Maintained strong performance whilst supporting partnership development
- Enhanced SEND provision through access to specialist expertise from Laycock's deaf education team

**Staff development and retention**

**Both schools**

- Enhanced professional development opportunities through collaborative working
- Middle leaders gained experience across both schools, strengthening career pathways
- Joint training programmes in inclusive practice, curriculum development, and school improvement
- Collaboration between the schools reviewing new teaching resources and materials and aligning with curriculum

**Operational stability**

**Laycock Primary School**

- Established sustainable leadership structure
- Secured long-term funding agreements for specialist provision
- Strengthened governance through Interim Executive Board
- Created stable foundation for continued improvement

**Thornhill Primary School**

- Maintained operational excellence whilst contributing to partnership
- Provided enhanced leadership opportunities for Thornhill staff resulting in increased leadership capacity
- Enhanced specialist expertise in inclusive practice and SEND support

**Financial sustainability**

**Both schools**

- Secured funding commitments that provide sustainable foundations
- Reduced risk exposure through shared strategic oversight
- Created capacity for investment in teaching and learning

- Maintained separate budgets while benefiting from collaborative planning

**The evidence is clear**

Partnership has had a positive impact on outcomes at both schools - with data showing that attainment across both schools has improved and attendance at Laycock has improved and remained high at Thornhill. . Both schools have improved their results, strengthened their provision, and gained recognition for educational excellence during the partnership period.

Federation formalises the arrangements that are delivering these results, providing the governance structure to sustain and build on this success.

# Appendix D: Record of drop-in session attendance

These sessions were run informally and no register of attendance was required to be completed.

Governors did take note of approximate numbers attending, summarised below.

| | Laycock - 14 January 2026 | Thornhill - 21 January 2026 |
|---|---|---|
| **Staff** | 3 | 0 |
| **Parents** | 4 | 13 |
| **School leaders** | 2 | 4 |
| **Governors and IEB Members** | 3 | 4 |
| **Others including councillors** | 1 | 2 |