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## DECISION ON FUTURE OF THE BAWB FEDERATION

At its meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> July the full BAWB governing Body resolved to refuse the defederation request from West Burton parents and others. The history and reasons are set out below.

### History

The future of all of the BAWB schools has been under discussion for over 2 years. Discussions and considerations addressed before October 2017 were overtaken by a major change in the context of national schools funding policy, namely the publication of the National Funding Formula (NFF). This was created to address the national crisis in school funding in England and Wales. It had serious consequences for the BAWB schools. This superceded much of the discussions of the BAWB Governing Body on the future of the 3 schools which predated the October 2017 funding announcement.

In December 2017, the cabinet of North Yorkshire County Council voted in favour of implementing the NFF for the 2018-19 academic year. This meant that the school budgets, which had already been produced, had to be revised significantly and it was clear at that point that all the federation, as a whole, would benefit.

Directly as a result of these changes, the Community Engagement Day which had been arranged for October 2017 to consider closure models for BAWB was postponed. The Community Engagement Day was then held in February 2018. It was held after the BAWB Governing Board had proper opportunity to consider the impact of the funding changes on all of the BAWB schools. These changes enabled the BAWB Board to keep all three schools open and discard the closure options. Consequently, the options for the Community Engagement Day all became models for reorganisation and for keeping all 3 schools open.

The Community Engagement Day was held for all 3 schools at different times of the day and evening and was staffed by officers from North Yorkshire County Council, the Acting Head Teachers, and the governors. The sessions were well attended by parents, residents and stakeholders who were encouraged to make written submissions as well.

The result of the consultation was that there was very limited support for the 3 options which provided the greatest financial security, with respondents from across all schools being unhappy about the travelling involved in those options for the children. West Burton responses were largely supportive of Option 3 which meant no change to them. Option 3 would not deliver the most educationally beneficial outcomes across all BAWB schools and did not offer sufficient financial gains to make it sustainable. The governors took on board and responded to the representations made to them. The Board did not proceed with any of these options. The outcome of the consultation demonstrated that this was a genuine engagement process which informed the decisions of the BAWB Governing Board.

The BAWB Board therefore considered another option, identified as "Option 3a". This option placed all nursery, Early Years and Key Stage 1(KS1) pupils at Bainbridge and Key Stage 2 (KS2) pupils at West Burton and Askrigg. The KS 2 class at Askrigg would be split into two due to pupil numbers. This meant that all the pupils of all BAWB schools, where parents wish, would attend nursery at

1 Bainbridge, as is the current system. The pupils would all remain for their education through KS1, as  
2 Askrigg children currently do, returning to West Burton and Askrigg for KS2. Under Option 3a there  
3 would also be one day every week when KS2 children would work together on one site. This would  
4 enable them to work in larger groups to study the core subjects of English and Maths in the morning.  
5 In the afternoons they would be expected to participate in outdoor activities including Games/PE  
6 and Forest schools. There were some travel implications for this, but there were ongoing  
7 negotiations between the school and transport providers to minimise this. This generally found  
8 favour with Bainbridge and Askrigg respondents. The parents of the children who were directly  
9 affected by this at West Burton were contacted by the Acting Head teacher and at this stage there  
10 they did not rule out the plan.

11 The details and reasons for Option 3a were sent to parents and others via the school newsletter,  
12 with a consultation slip attached to be returned to the school. It then became apparent that  
13 whereas those who replied from Askrigg and Bainbridge were generally supportive of this option,  
14 there were a number of West Burton parents and community members who were not happy and  
15 believed that Option 3a would lead to the closure of West Burton School . They believed that their  
16 survival chances would be maximised if they defederated and put in place a new governing board,  
17 drawn from their own numbers, and a new leadership team. The BAWB Board, upon receiving the  
18 request to defederate, then undertook a process of “Due Diligence”, with support from officers of  
19 North Yorkshire County Council and the Leeds Diocese. This involved consultations with local  
20 authority officers from strategic services, covering organisation and finance, HR, and support from  
21 the principal adviser for education. The BAWB Board also commissioned an Independent Educational  
22 Consultant to consider the provision of education, particularly in small schools. Fiona Beevers from  
23 the Diocese of Leeds was also involved as West Burton is a Church of England school. The BAWB  
24 Board also had extensive correspondence with Cllr John Blackie, and the BAWB Board met with the  
25 group that had offered itself as a new governing body of a defederated West Burton school which  
26 was called the Provisional Shadow Board (PS Board).

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## 28 REASONS FOR THE DECISION

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### 30 Educational Evidence

31 The education provided to all of the children in all 3 schools is and must be, the prime concern of a  
32 governing board, and the BAWB Board considered it very carefully

33 Board members considered evidence from OFSTED reports 2013 and 2018, SIAMS report 2017, all  
34 concerning West Burton School, an independent educational consultant’s report and evidence from  
35 teaching staff throughout the federation.

36 The evidence presented was overwhelming that West Burton School had benefitted from being in a  
37 formal federation. The 2018 OFSTED report and 2017 SIAMS report made it clear that, since formal  
38 federation has been in place, leadership has been strong and effective. Also with a greater pool of  
39 teachers, subject specialists have been appointed to lead and develop curriculum areas, which has  
40 and still is, benefitting pupils. Governor monitoring and independent moderation activities have  
41 demonstrated the positive impacts that this has had on pupil enjoyment and success in their learning.  
42 BAWB days, which are days when pupils from all 3 schools join together for learning and activities at  
43 the same site, have been well coordinated by all 3 schools being in a formal federation, which has

1 meant that where there are small groups or only one pupil in a year group (which would be the case  
2 for West Burton's KS1 class next year) pupils were able to work with larger cohorts, thereby  
3 maximising their educational and social opportunities. Staff are concerned that for the effective  
4 delivery of the 2014 curriculum, the Early Years in particular, there needs to be more than one pupil  
5 in a year group. There have also been benefits to pupils since Bainbridge and Askrigg joined their KS1  
6 and KS2 year groups because of low pupil numbers teaching KS1 at Bainbridge and KS2 at Askrigg. This  
7 provides a successful model on which Option 3a is based, and despite early concerns from parents,  
8 there is general satisfaction from them.

9 The PS Board did not communicate any concerns with the standard of education currently provided  
10 at West Burton School. They were prepared to informally collaborate with the other 2 schools, Askrigg  
11 and Bainbridge. The BAWB Board considered the written and oral submissions of the PS Board  
12 carefully. There was some confusion concerning teacher cover for supply and there were a number of  
13 assertions made by members of the PS Board for which there was little or no actual evidence  
14 presented. The BAWB Board did not receive further submissions, or an audit that had been  
15 mentioned, but had to make a decision before the end of term based on the evidence it had received  
16 up to that point. The BAWB Board was working to a timetable which fell within the regulations and  
17 had been clearly communicated to all parties.

18 Although the formal federation has only been in place for 2 years, evidence from that 2-year period  
19 (OFSTED 2018 and SIAMS 2017) has highlighted the benefits of federation to West Burton School. The  
20 Diocese of Leeds also had evidence that federation benefitted small schools. They had evidence that  
21 when one school defederated there were negative impacts on all of the schools, with school closure  
22 more likely to follow. The PS Board cited schools where defederation had been successful, although  
23 Kettlewell school, on which they placed reliance, has re-federated and is not a stand alone school as  
24 is being proposed for West Burton.

25 Therefore, having considered the evidence, the BAWB Board decided that the educational advantages  
26 for the children of staying in a federated West Burton School outweighed any suggested benefits  
27 accruing from defederation.

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## 29 Financial Management

30 The evidence considered included costed options provided by North Yorkshire County Council, budget  
31 projections for the next 3 years done by the school business manager with local authority support,  
32 and the budget plans of the PS Board.

33 The BAWB Board have been working closely with North Yorkshire County Council officers to address  
34 the budget deficit for a considerable amount of time. Option 3a, whilst not being the one which  
35 delivered the greatest financial security, is supported by the local authority, although there are risks  
36 that it will not deliver all the forecast benefits, the greatest risk being a fall in the number of pupils on  
37 roll.

38 The budget presented by the PS Board contained a number of economies, which officers of the local  
39 authority advised the Board might not be fully realisable. Even with these economies in place the  
40 financial forecast for West Burton School is that it would remain in a deficit position, with no recovery  
41 plan or risk assessment in place. Although the PS Board stated they would undertake an audit and  
42 have a recovery plan in place, as required by the local authority, the BAWB Board could only base its  
43 decision on the evidence and figures presented to it before 11<sup>th</sup> July. The local authority, as well as

1 the Diocese, did not feel that the PS Board's suggestions for increasing core funding were sufficiently  
2 robust or secure to underwrite any shortfalls in the funding.

3 The PS Board made submissions that pupil numbers could be grown to improve the financial position.  
4 These comments were largely based on untested and in some cases, untestable, assertions. For  
5 example, future house building plans. However, West Burton school could accommodate more pupils  
6 whether or not it was defederated. Further, the BAWB Board was not convinced that more children  
7 would come to a defederated school, rather than to the existing federated school which is widely  
8 acknowledged to provide an excellent education.

9 On 19<sup>th</sup> June the officers of the local authority firmly advised the BAWB Board that they would not be  
10 able to support a stand-alone West Burton School on financial grounds. This was based on the  
11 evidence provided to them by the PS Board. At the BAWB Board meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> July, the same officers  
12 of the local authority appeared to support a stand-alone West Burton School. They gave no reasons  
13 or evidence for this change of opinion even when asked directly. Any relevant change of mind must,  
14 by definition, be one based on and backed by existing suitable evidence. None was presented either  
15 before or during the meeting on July 11<sup>th</sup>. Given that the Local Authority officers had provided a  
16 considerable amount of evidence, which they had carefully reviewed and which the board considered  
17 on June 19<sup>th</sup>, the lack of any backing for their apparent change of heart by July 11<sup>th</sup> was of concern to  
18 the BAWB Board. That evening the BAWB Board based its decision on all the evidence presented to it.  
19 The BAWB Board was not persuaded that the PS Board's financial planning would lead to a sustainable  
20 West Burton School. Also the BAWB Board could not be persuaded by the unsupported statements  
21 made by the local authority officers on 11<sup>th</sup> July. The BAWB Board considered the evidence as provided  
22 on June 19<sup>th</sup> as there was no other supported financial evidence available to it.

23 There was also a financial impact on Askrigg and Bainbridge if West Burton defederated. These schools  
24 would continue to show an in year deficit until 2022/23 and by then the accrued deficit would be  
25 larger and the payback time was greater than if the 3 schools stayed together.

26 The BAWB board also considered that the high thresholds in place for safeguarding were not  
27 adequately addressed in the PS Board's submission. Safeguarding is one of the highest priorities in  
28 education today and impacts not only on a pupil's education but also on their health and wellbeing  
29 and that of the staff. Safeguarding is assessed at OFSTED inspections and any safeguarding concerns  
30 taken very seriously. The BAWB Board was concerned that due to some of the economies proposed  
31 in their financial documents by the PS Board, in order to improve their deficit position, safeguarding  
32 could be compromised. These included reductions to the local authority catering contract, cleaning  
33 and caretaking services. Also the staff working at West Burton would no longer be part of a larger  
34 network, which has been a benefit to them through federation.

35 The BAWB Board took the view that the greatest financial security and future sustainability for all 3  
36 schools can only be achieved if all 3 stayed together. Defederation could not be supported on financial  
37 and safeguarding grounds.

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### 39 Community Issues

40 Evidence considered by the BAWB Board included responses from the Community Engagement Day,  
41 further written and oral comments following consultation on Option 3a, emails from Cllr Blackie,  
42 letters from Asygarth, West Burton and West Witton Parish Councils, and conversations with parents  
43 from all 3 schools and advice from local authority officers.

1 The BAWB Board recognised the strength of community feeling about all 3 schools, which was evident  
2 at the Community Engagement Day. Universally, those who responded wanted to keep primary  
3 education in the Mid Dale. There was a general consensus that the education which is being provided  
4 by the BAWB federation is very good, hence why they want to keep it.

5 The strength of feeling has been so strong, that some West Burton parents have threatened to remove  
6 their child / children from West Burton School if BAWB governors proceeded with implementing  
7 Option 3a, and also if defederation was denied. In doing so, they must be aware that this would  
8 destabilise the situation for all three school and could ultimately precipitate closure of West Burton  
9 School.

10 If pupil numbers were to increase in the future, as some have suggested, then a federated West Burton  
11 school would still exist to take full advantage of this increase. If appropriate, the organisational  
12 changes brought about by implementing Option 3 a could be altered or reversed. The key threat to  
13 the survival of West Burton school is not remaining federated, it is the continuing pupil decline, which  
14 started pre-federation. If some parents, as threatened, remove their children from the school, this will  
15 make closure more likely.

16 The BAWB Board considered the letters from the Parish Councils, which had apparently considered  
17 the views of PS Board members but had not sought the views of the BAWB Board. The councils were  
18 concerned about the continued viability of West Burton School, as is the BAWB Board. However, for  
19 the educational and financial reasons outlined above, the BAWB Board has come to the view that the  
20 long term sustainability for the school comes from remaining within the federation. So whilst the  
21 BAWB Board is sympathetic to the aims of the councils, it is unable to agree to the means. Federation  
22 provides the greater security for the school than defederation.

23 Community issues did not cause the BAWB Board to change its views formed on the basis of key  
24 educational and financial issues.

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## 26 Conclusions

27 The BAWB Board therefore, on the basis of educational and financial evidence, remain convinced that  
28 continuing the present federation is the best option for pupils, schools and the community. Whilst  
29 acknowledging the strength of community views and taking them very seriously, they do not outweigh  
30 the other considerations.

31 The BAWB Board would be prepared to work with the former PS Board members, as with any other  
32 parents, to find the best outcomes for all 3 BAWB schools as soon as is practicable.

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