



Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

About proposed academisation with Bourne Education Trust (BET)

1. What is academisation and what does it mean for our school?

Academisation is the process by which a maintained school converts to academy status, joining an academy trust. Academies receive funding directly from the government, have greater autonomy, and operate under the governance of the trust rather than the local authority. Schools joining a multi academy trust (MAT) benefit from shared resources, professional development, enhanced strategic governance, and access to wider curricular and extra-curricular opportunities. MATs are not-for-profit companies and have charitable status.

2. Why is The Vineyard School considering joining Bourne Education Trust?

The governing body has undertaken a period of due diligence before joining as an associate member of BET, finding strong alignment with the trust's vision and values, and a shared commitment to excellence, inclusion, and opportunity for all pupils and staff. Joining BET is expected to further strengthen the school's ability to deliver its vision and values, and to offer the best possible education and support for every child.

3. What is the process for converting to academy status?

- Before converting to academy status the school must hold a formal consultation with families, staff and other stakeholders, such as the local authority.
 - After considering consultation feedback, the board decides whether to proceed. If so, an application is made to the Department for Education (DfE).
 - If approved, the school, academy trust and local authority work on the legal, financial, and HR elements of conversion.
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4. How will my views be taken into account?

The consultation offers every parent, carer, and member of the school community the chance to share their views and ask questions. All feedback will be considered by the governing board before a final decision is made. The board must be able to confirm that a consultation has taken place and that the views expressed were properly considered.

5. What will change for the children and what will stay the same?

For the children, their day-to-day school experience will continue as normal. Pupils will continue to benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum, familiar routines, and the support of dedicated staff. The school will remain committed to offering a range of extra-curricular clubs and activities, nurturing every child's interests and wellbeing. Our extended day provision will continue as it has been.

While these core elements remain unchanged, the main differences are behind the scenes. By joining BET, the school may be able to further broaden its curriculum offer, strengthen its pastoral care, expand wraparound childcare, and provide additional enrichment opportunities. This would be due to leadership having an increased capacity as a result of the central team's support with policies, HR, finance and others. These enhancements are part of our commitment to the highest standards for every child.

6. Will my child's SEND provision be disrupted by academisation?

Not at all. Part of the reason for selecting BET as our academy trust is their commitment to SEND. The Trust has 9 schools with specialist centres including those for Communication and Interaction Needs, Speech and Language, Social, Emotional and Mental Health difficulties, Hearing impaired resource bases and a Visual impairment unit. In addition, the majority of their schools have proportions of pupils with EHCPs that are well above the national average. Our SRP will not be disrupted by academisation. We are looking forward to sharing SEND best practice ideas with the Trust.

7. Will staff remain employed on the same terms and conditions?

Yes. When a school converts, all staff contracts transfer to the academy trust under TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings, Protection of Employment) regulations. Staff continue under the same terms and conditions as before the transfer. There are no planned staffing changes as part of conversion and we expect the school team to remain the same.

8. Will the school change its name, uniform, or admissions arrangements?

The school will not change its name as there is no requirement for a school to change its name or uniform upon conversion. BET's policy is that all their schools retain their own identities, which was another important factor for us. Admission arrangements remain the responsibility of the local authority and there are no proposed changes. Any proposed changes to admission arrangements would require a separate statutory consultation process as set out in the School Admissions Code.

9. What changes will happen to term dates?

If the proposal is approved, The Vineyard School would move to BET's term dates from 1st September 2027. We will share details of these dates with families on our website as soon as these are available but here are the dates for this academic year (note, we will still be following the local authority term dates for 2026/27 so these are for example only). The main change is the two week October half term.

Term dates 2026/27:

Autumn Term	
First Day of Term	Thursday 3rd September 2026
Half term	Monday 19th – Friday 30th October 2026
Last Day of Term	Friday 18th December 2026
Spring Term	
First Day of Term	Monday 4 January 2027
Half term	Monday 15th February – Friday 19th February 2027
Last Day of Term	Thursday 25th March 2027
Summer Term	
First Day of Term	Monday 12th April 2027
Half term	Monday 31st May – Friday 4th June 2027
Last Day of Term	Tuesday 20th July 2027

Making adjustments to term dates is one of the freedoms that academies are permitted by the government. BET's approach to term dates planning aims to create a more balanced academic year, in acknowledgement that the autumn term is long and is traditionally the peak season for pupil and staff illness.

Introducing a two-week October half-term to better balance the long autumn term has positively impacted BET schools, who report improved staff and pupil attendance and increased morale and wellbeing, fostering better learning outcomes as a result.

The decision of when to hold the four inset days during the academic year remains with the school.

10. What is associate status and how is it different from full academisation?

Associate status is a time-limited arrangement (typically 12–18 months) where the school works closely with an academy trust to understand the benefits and consequences of being part of an academy trust before making a final decision on academisation. It is only a temporary arrangement which enables collaborative working, professional development and due diligence.

We have already benefitted from the Central Team services for policy writing, HR questions, legal services, a teaching and learning review, IT review and a safeguarding review.

11. Will the school keep its own headteacher and governing body?

Yes. As part of BET, schools retain their own Headteacher and leadership team and offer enhanced opportunities for these leaders to grow with the school or Trust. BET delegates much of schools' decision making to their Local Governing Committees, who retain responsibility for the school's strategic planning, safeguarding, education standards, family engagement, SEND and financial management - all the parts of education that we expect our families are most concerned about. The Local Governing Committee ensures that the school's voice and local context are reflected in trust-wide decision-making.

12. Will the school receive more or less funding?

Academies receive their funding directly from the Department of Education rather than the local authority but the funding calculation is similar. Richmond local authority retains a small percentage of its schools' income to run services on behalf of its schools and otherwise charges schools to buy its services (eg, HR, payroll, educational consultancy). As an academy school, The Vineyard will make a contribution to BET for central services, which are more extensive than those provided by the local authority, but is still able to buy into any services that it particularly values from the local authority if it chooses. Although we do not expect to receive more funding from academisation, we do expect to have more flexibility as to how we can allocate our costs, so increasing our financial resilience. We also look forward to benefiting from BET's marketing expertise to promote our school.

13. Is there transparency in how funding is allocated within BET?

The academy trust becomes responsible for the school's finances and assets. Within BET, each school maintains its own reserves and is responsible for drafting its own budget, in conjunction with the central team. Centralised finance enables each school to benefit from common procurement opportunities, capital spending priorities (BET is of sufficient size to receive the School Condition Allocation grant) and authorisation for 'exceptional items'.

14. What happens to the land that the school sits on, does this become part of the Trust?

For community schools, such as The Vineyard, the local authority retains the freehold ownership of the land and grants a 125-year lease to the multi-academy trust.

15. How will the school be held accountable for standards and safeguarding?

Academies and their schools are inspected by Ofsted, comply with statutory safeguarding and SEND duties, and are accountable to the Secretary of State for Education and the trust board. The trust must publish governance information and is subject to regular reporting and monitoring.

16. Who will be responsible for The Vineyard's educational performance?

The Local Governing Committee will retain responsibility for ensuring the quality and ambition of our educational provision and challenging and monitoring the performance of the school. It will ensure that resources are allocated in line with the school's development plan and that the staffing structure meets the needs of the school. BET is aware of the school's development priorities and commits to working alongside the school leaders and staff to maintain the high standards already in place. An Education Director and others from within BET are already working with the school team.

17. Will The Vineyard School change the curriculum? Can academies teach what they want?

Decisions around the curriculum remain with the school and there are no plans to change this. We will continue to offer a curriculum that develops all children as curious, courageous and caring learners. Our curriculum is:

- Ambitious, so that every child is challenged.
 - Carefully designed to meet the needs of the national curriculum and the diverse needs of all children at The Vineyard.
 - Coherent and well planned, so that new learning builds on prior learning.
 - Rich, broad and balanced, so that all pupils develop the skills and knowledge to be curious about the world they live in and to want to learn more
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18. Will parents still be involved in supporting the school? How will they be able to do this?

The Vineyard School greatly values the support of parents and this will remain as important as ever. Parents will still be able to be elected Parent Governors to the Local Governing Committee. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and Friends of The Vineyard (FoV) will continue to provide important streams of funding for the school. These funding streams are spent to enhance the education opportunities of all our children. The PTA also aims to foster a strong school community spirit within the parent body and, of course, fun activities for the children. We also value the time and resources devoted by all our parent helpers who listen to our readers or accompany children on their school trips. We will continue to welcome the wide ranging individual offers of time and resources to help the school.

19. How does joining BET help retain and recruit staff?

Being part of a Trust offers greater opportunities for recruitment, retention and professional development at all levels. BET has the capacity to devote resources to creating and funding strategies to ensure the recruitment of the best people. It has a dedicated careers website for both external and internal opportunities. Our staff will also have the opportunities for CPD and collaboration across the trust with a range of collaborative opportunities at all levels.

20. What is the BET leadership and governance structure?

The Trust is led by Alex Russell, Chief Executive Officer, and the Trust board. Alongside Alex Russell and the Trust's Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Penny Alford, there are nine Directors who are responsible for academic and operational functions. Collectively, this team makes up the Trust's Core Group.

The Trust is run by a strategic board which is supported by the Core Group and the Executive Group (which consists of the Core Group and all Headteachers). Each school continues to be run on a local level by its own Local Governing Committee.

21. What other local partners were considered aside from BET?

The Governing Board undertook extensive work to evaluate what is in the best long-term interest of our pupils, staff and school. The Board considered all the multi-academy trusts that operated within the Richmond and Kingston boroughs. The decision was narrowed down to meetings with several multiacademy trusts, combined with comparative analyses and discussions of their visions, strengths and alignment with our own culture and ambitions. Our due diligence and closer collaboration with BET to date has reinforced our decision.

22. What, if any, are the risks to The Vineyard School if we do not proceed to academy conversion with BET?

We believe that the education landscape is changing. We have been fortunate that our local authority has taken education very seriously and Richmond schools perform extremely well. However, the current local authority and school funding environment is driving many schools to join academy trusts and we are not immune to these pressures. We believe that joining a strong academy trust now offers us a more resilient model for the future. We are ahead of the inevitable increase in academisation locally and thus able to choose our preferred trust.

23. Who manages the feedback from the parent consultation?

BET is sharing all the results of the parent consultation with us and we have made some additions to these FAQs in response to your questions. The Governing Board will closely consider all the comments that you have made.

24. What happens if we decide not to proceed?

We would remain a maintained school.

25. Where can I find more information?

- The school website and BET's website
 - DfE guidance: [Convert to an academy: guide for schools](#)
 - A hard copy of these FAQs is available from the school office
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If you have further questions that are not answered here, please contact consultation@bourne.education or attend one of the scheduled consultation meetings:

- Thursday 12th February, 7pm: Online (link will be shared via ParentMail and our website) ●
Friday 13th February, 9am: In person at The Vineyard School