# Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

# About proposed academisation with Bourne Education Trust (BET)

# Updated 21 October 2026

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## 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.

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## 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.

The governing body started discussing academisation as a strategic consideration about how we could be best supported to deliver our ambition of being an exceptional school. With around.50% of primaries now being academies, we thought it important to consider the best support mechanism for The Vineyard across the quality of education and school business management, our own capacity, and the quality and ability of the local education authority to support us.

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## 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, which we did in February 2026.
- 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 offered every parent, carer, and member of the school community the chance to share their views and ask questions. All initial feedback was considered by the governing board, as has subsequent engagement as it has arisen, 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.

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## 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. There are more structured opportunities for staff support and development too. 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.

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

No. An important consideration in 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 BET schools have proportions of pupils with EHCPs that are well above the national average. We are looking forward to sharing SEND best practice ideas with the Trust.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 9. Will the school change its ethos, vision or values?

No, the school will not change its ethos, vision, or values. BET appealed to us because our vision and values are already aligned with BET's and BET allows its schools to retain their own unique characteristics and identities, recognising that all schools are different and need to be able to make local decisions about what will work best to enable their pupils to thrive. Governors continue to consider our vision, values and ambition as a strategic priority, especially in light of considering what type of Headteacher we wish to recruit.

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## 10. 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** | |
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| 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 |

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| 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.

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## 11. 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 school improvement partnership, policy writing, HR questions, legal services, a teaching and learning review, IT review and a safeguarding review.

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## 12. 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.

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## 13. 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. We will not receive any more funding from being an academy school but we will get a wider range of support services and the opportunity for some of our staff time to be reimbursed.

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

The academy trust becomes responsible for the school's finances and assets, whereas as a maintained school the local authority is ultimately responsible. Each school receives its allotted funding from the government and determines how it will spend that money. The trust central team only gets involved if a school cannot produce a balanced budget, as is also the case with the local authority. 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'.

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## 15. 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. There will be a specific legal agreement regarding the land that will be drawn up as part of any final transition actions.

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## 16. 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.

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## 17. 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.

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## 18. 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. This was an important part of our governing body discussions, and with staff. 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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## 19. 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 but now to the Local Governing Committee. We appreciate all parent support, whether to run events which help provide fun activities for the children and foster a strong school community spirit, or 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. The Friends of The Vineyard (FoV) and parent organised events will continue to provide important streams of funding for the school.

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## 20. 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 sharing best practice across the trust with a range of collaborative opportunities at all levels. To be an exceptional school we must be able to demonstrate leading on best practice with other schools, and the structure of a multi-academy trust will support this.

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## 21. 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 now five executives who are responsible for academic and operational functions. Collectively, this team makes up the Trust's Core Group. [N.b. please see Q29 below on BET leadership succession.]

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.

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## 22. 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 multi-academy trusts, combined with comparative analyses and discussions of their visions, strengths and alignment with our own culture and ambitions from which we selected BET. Our due diligence and closer collaboration with BET to date has reinforced our decision.

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## 23. 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.

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## 24. Who manages the feedback from the parent consultation?

BET shared all the results of the parent consultation with the governing body and we have made some additions to these FAQs in response to your questions. The Governing Board has, and will continue, to closely consider all the comments that you have made.

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## The following FAQs have been added on 21 October 2026

## 25. Will The Vineyard maintain its high expectations for all pupils?

Throughout our search for a potential MAT to join and our due diligence since becoming an Associate member of BET, the quality of teaching and outcomes has been a core focus. It is essential for us that we only join a MAT if we believe the educational experience of our pupils will be enhanced further. We chose BET because their culture and values are strongly aligned with ours and our collaboration to date has reinforced this view.

There are three main reasons governors have discussed their confidence that education standards will continue to improve at The Vineyard under BET's support.

The first is that our senior leaders will have more time to focus on teaching and learning. An advantage of joining an academy trust is that back-office systems (such as HR, payroll, procurement) currently carried out at the school level, can be done centrally at trust level so freeing up senior leaders. Also, many statutory school policies are written at trust level leaving school leaders to focus on the ones that are important to The Vineyard.

The second is the quality of educational challenge that BET offers its schools. BET has built a team of Education Directors who support and challenge their schools, for example, in best practice in teaching and learning, closing the gap and inclusion, target setting for pupil progress, pupil behaviour management and attendance. This role is done in the Local Authority by the School Improvement Partners but the BET Education Directors offer much more direct contact with their Headteachers. Governors will continue to scrutinise school performance data and ask their own questions. Additionally, BET's Chief Education Officer is himself an Ofsted inspector, is passionate about early intervention and closing attainment gaps and has led SEND and inclusion strategies.

The third are the collaboration opportunities available at all teacher levels, from the headteacher through to subject leads to early career teachers. This collaboration will encourage teachers to try new approaches. To be an exceptional school, teachers are expected to share their leading practice with other schools and this will be more embedded in a MAT model. It is a positive development to have secondary schools and special schools in this mix for the learning to be two-way.

Of course, the school experience is so much more than pupil attainment. We will continue to focus on our broad, bespoke curriculum offering as much experiential learning as possible (the curriculum will remain set by and bespoke to The Vineyard); the breadth of extra-curricular activities that we have on offer, particularly in sport and music; using our wonderful grounds and local environment to create meaningful learning opportunities for our pupils. We want Vineyard pupils to become caring, curious and courageous individuals, ready to take on the challenges of the next stages in their lives.

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## 27. What are BET's expansion plans?

Throughout our engagement with all the MATs we met, including BET, governors asked about their future growth plans. All said they would expect some growth. The response we received from BET was that they would continue to experience growth but would focus on the right schools where the culture and values fit was strong rather than growth for growth's sake.

Governors were keen to join a trust that was still expanding, one that appeared attractive to other schools and offering opportunities for staff to grow with the trust. The governors also looked at the infrastructure the trust was building to make sure that the trust could cope with this growth. The development of local clusters, the introduction of the role of Chief Education Officer, the consolidation of many of the administrative functions under the Chief Strategy Officer, amongst others, all show that the trust is planning its growth and reducing its dependence on any one individual.

The governing body was aware that BET intended to grow further in 2026. Fulham Cross Academy Trust joined BET in September 2026. It consists of 2 secondary schools and while described as a 'merger' this is another 2 schools joining the trust. BET currently has 13 secondary schools, 20 primary schools, 5 specialist schools and 5 associate schools (of which The Vineyard is one). On current plans we would be 1 of 2primary schools in the Thames Cluster, along with Alexandra Primary School, which is an outstanding primary school. The governors have discussed the benefits of 2 very strong primary schools working together in the cluster and across the Trust.

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## 28. What are the school's plans for the SRP?

Since we were first approached by the local education authority on having an SRP over 5 years ago, the school and governors have been supportive of an SRP being part of our school; as a community school it feels right to provide for some of the specialist needs of our local community, and it is in line with our ethos and values to be inclusive.

One of the reasons that governors selected BET was its commitment to pupils with 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 BET's schools have proportions of pupils with EHCPs that are well above the national average. BET's experience and track record with these specialist centres was far superior to other MATs we looked at.

We believe that the Trust offers us many opportunities to learn further about best practice in inclusion.

The school has no plans to change the SRP. Places to attend the SRP will continue to be allocated by the local authority (the local authority remains the admissions authority for SRP and mainstream entry and our criteria do not change). The local authority will put in place a written agreement with BET for the delivery of the SRP should the academy conversion take place.

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## 29. Does the announcement of BET's CEO retirement change BET's strategy and is this a concern?

From our first meeting with Alex Russell, over 2 years ago, we have discussed his succession plan. BET had already appointed a deputy CEO, Penny Alford, to prepare to be his possible successor or to offer support to his successor. The vision of BET is deeply ingrained within the executive team and the levels below them and the BET team are not anticipating any changes. As mentioned before, BET has been planning its growth and succession strategy for a long time and we understand the structures are in place for a smooth transition. BET has shared with us the timetable for the appointment of his successor.

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## 30. Should our own Headteacher's resignation change our strategy?

The decision on whether to academise is a strategic one based on where Governors believe the best long-term support and resourcing will be available. Governors have considered this decision very carefully over two years. The decision to join an academy trust is a collective one by the Governing Board of which the Headteacher has 1 vote out of 13, rather than being driven by the Headteacher. It is important to recruit a new Headteacher who agrees with our vision, strategy and ambition for the school and we are underway with our own recruiting process.

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## 31. How will governance of the school change?

As you might imagine, governors have considered this point very carefully. The Governing Board will become a Local Governing Committee of the main BET Board. Strategic decisions such as the growth of the trust, which schools are allowed to join the trust will be made at the BET Board. However, BET operates as a devolved trust and most of the decisions that matter to the school will be made at the local level. Governors will still set the school budget, decide on the school leadership structure, be closely involved in recruiting a headteacher (although BET will have the final say, as the local authority currently does so for a maintained school), monitor safeguarding and SEND policies, and be responsible for The Vineyard education offer.

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## 32. What happens next if we decide to proceed?

The legal processes for us to join BET will start. We first need the Academy Order from the DfE. We can then begin the TUPE consultation for staff, arrangements for BET to lease the land for the school site from the local authority, and all the academy documentation which will be followed by the final submission of all the documents to the DfE. We expect the legal processes to take several months.

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## 33. What happens if we decide not to proceed?

We would remain a maintained school.

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## 34. 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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