



Consultation about whether Oak Farm Primary School should become an academy as part of Vanguard Learning Trust

Academy conversion questions and answers

This document has been issued as part of the consultation about whether Oak Farm Primary School (OFPS) should convert to academy status as part of Vanguard Learning Trust (VLT).

Why has this proposal been put forward?

1. Does Oak Farm have to become an academy?

Schools have been able to choose to become an academy since 2010, and as of 1 September 2025 over 8,100 schools have chosen to become academy schools, including over 5,900 primary-phase schools. The government has the legal powers to require individual schools to become academies in certain situations (usually as a result of an adverse Ofsted and/or lower standards than the Department for Education (DfE) expects), and over 1,850 primary-phase schools have been sponsored to become academies. For schools that are not eligible for DfE intervention, it is a governing body's decision whether to convert. For Oak Farm, it is a governing body's decision about whether to convert.

2. Why is Oak Farm considering converting to academy status?

The primary focus of every school is on providing the highest possible quality education to its pupils. The landscape for schools is one of increased competition to recruit and retain staff, and an increasingly challenging financial situation as a result of costs (including pay but also the other supplies that a school needs) rising much faster than funding. This is coupled with educational change and ever increasing government expectations. The challenge for all governing bodies, therefore, is to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the school. Oak Farm has been an associate member of VLT since April 2023. The Trust supported the school in the recruitment of Ms Cheema, Headteacher, and has provided guidance, advice and capacity with ongoing matters both educationally and operationally. The associate membership has demonstrated our shared values, ethos and culture. It has also demonstrated that VLT is an organisation that will support and care about the school. Governors at Oak Farm believe that now is the right time to convert to academy status and join a local multi-academy trust to ensure that our improvement is sustainable.

3. What are the benefits to Oak Farm of joining VLT?

The support provided by VLT since our Ofsted inspection has demonstrated the value of being part of a multi-academy trust (MAT). We have benefited from VLT's expertise and its greater capacity. We have benefited from VLT's established business processes that enable school leaders to focus on teaching and learning. By utilising expertise available across the schools, VLT supports professional development while also raising performance. Governors believe that being part of a MAT would provide benefits to staff and pupils in terms of sharing best practice, joint curriculum and staff development, a broader range of staff expertise, and more resilience within the staffing structure. As a single legal entity, VLT is responsible for several schools that work together in close partnership to improve outcomes for pupils at all of the schools.

VLT anticipates continuing to expand locally, working with schools as associate members initially to allow the school and VLT to work together before deciding whether to make the arrangement permanent. Being part of a local MAT that includes primary and secondary schools provides access to a greater range of staffing expertise, provides greater resilience in staffing structures, provides more career development and training opportunities, and enables greater financial sustainability.

About VLT

4. Does VLT provide high-quality education? Would SEND provision, or support for disadvantaged pupils, be neglected as part of VLT?

Yes, VLT provides high-quality education.

- Secondary schools: Ruislip High and Vyners both received 'outstanding' judgements at their last two Ofsted inspections (2011 and 2023 for Ruislip High, and 2019 and 2025 for Vyners). Both schools consistently achieve Progress 8 scores of above or well above the national average, and both are well above national averages for Attainment 8 scores and for the percentage of pupils who achieve 5+ GCSEs at Grade 5 or above including English and maths.
- Primary phase schools: All three primary phase schools (Field End Junior, Hermitage, and Ryefield) were judged as 'good' at their last Ofsted inspection. For Field End Junior, its judgement as 'Good' was an improvement from the 'requires improvement' judgement that they had in their previous inspection prior to joining VLT. In 2025, outcomes across the three schools showed strong progress with Field End Junior's and Ryefield's key stage 2 results being overall around or slightly above and Hermitage's well above national data for key benchmark figures.

5. Would SEND provision, or support for disadvantaged pupils, be neglected as part of VLT?

All VLT schools have a strong inclusive ethos as part of their culture. Vyners has a designated resource provision for pupils with additional needs. The Trust has a highly experienced educational psychologist who works with all schools and the Trust has a relentless commitment to inclusive education. The SEND provision and support for disadvantaged pupils are a strength across the Trust and would be beneficial for Oak Farm.

6. What is the financial position at VLT?

The financial year for academies runs from 1 September to 31 August. The latest completed accounts are for the 2023-2024 financial year; these are available on the VLT website (www.vlt.org.uk). They demonstrate the strong financial management within the Trust, including reserves to provide financial security. The accounts for the 2024-2025 financial year will be published in spring 2026; they will continue to show strong financial management.

7. Do VLT schools follow the national curriculum?

Yes.

What is an academy?

8. What is an Academy?

An Academy is an independent state school, funded directly from central government rather than through the Council. A charitable company limited by guarantee (the Academy Trust) is responsible for the academy, and the Academy Trust signs the Funding Agreement (the contract) with the Secretary of State as part of the establishment of the academy.

Legislation requires that an academy has the following characteristics:

- That it offers a balanced and broadly based curriculum;
- That it provides education for students of different abilities; and

- That it provides education for students who are wholly or mainly drawn from the area in which the school is situated

9. How many academies are there?

As of September 2025, there are almost 11,750 academy schools in England. This includes over 2,900 mainstream secondary schools (84% of all secondary schools) and over 8,000 mainstream primary-phase schools (48% of all primary-phase schools). There are almost 500 additional schools that are in the process of potentially converting, of which 400 are primary-phase schools.

Within Hillingdon, 20 of the 22 mainstream secondary phase schools are academies, five of the seven special schools are academies, and 23 of the 68 primary-phase schools are academies.

10. How is an academy different from a foundation school?

Oak Farm is a foundation school. This means that the Governing Body owns the land and buildings, sets the admissions policy, and is the employer of staff (and able to set their own terms and conditions for support staff). The current responsibilities of the Governing Body would transfer to VLT. In addition, an academy has several differences to a foundation school, including:

- Capital funding – foundation schools are reliant upon the local authority for capital funding, whereas academies are reliant upon the Secretary of State. VLT receives an annual capital grant from the DfE for building maintenance, which is £920k in 2025/26;
- Curriculum – an academy has to offer a broad and balanced curriculum for students of differing abilities, including English, mathematics and science, but it does not have to follow the National Curriculum; the Funding Agreement requires that an academy teaches Religious Education. All VLT schools follow the national curriculum;
- Employment – Academy trusts have freedom to set the terms and conditions for future teaching staff, compared to the current position where the Governing Body must employ teachers on national terms and conditions. VLT continues to employ teaching and support staff in accordance with national and local terms and conditions and this would extend to Oak Farm; and
- Governance – Vanguard Learning Trust (which is a charitable company) is responsible for all the schools within the Trust.

11. What does not change if Oak Farm becomes an academy?

The following elements do not change if Oak Farm became an academy:

- Ofsted and national assessments – academies are inspected by Ofsted in exactly the same way as for maintained schools, and pupils at academies still complete the national assessments (Early Years, Reception Baseline, Year 1 Phonics, Key Stage 6 tests in Year 6);
- Freedom of Information – academies are subject to this as if they were maintained schools;
- Charging parents – the Funding Agreement requires academies to act as if they were a maintained school with respect to what they can charge parents for, so that there is no change in current practice;
- SEN – academies are subject to the same SEN obligations as maintained schools;
- Behaviour – academies are required to act as if they were a maintained school with respect to student behaviour; and
- Exclusions – academies are required to act as if they were a maintained school with respect to exclusions.

12. Does Ofsted inspect academies?

Yes, in exactly the same way as for maintained schools.

13. How can the Secretary of State intervene in an academy?

The Secretary of State has the ability to terminate the Funding Agreement for each of the schools within the Academy Trust in specified situations, predominantly following an adverse Ofsted, if pupil performance is unacceptably low, if there has been a serious breakdown in the governance or management of the

academy, or if the safety of pupils or staff is threatened. In this situation the Secretary of State would be able to transfer Oak Farm to another academy trust.

Academy governance

14. How would the academy be governed?

VLT is already a multi-academy trust, and has a Funding Agreement (the contract) with the Secretary of State for each school within VLT. VLT has a Board of Trustees that is legally responsible for the schools within VLT (technically they are the legal Governing Body for each school). Local governance provides support and challenge to the Headteacher and leadership team, and includes parents. An academy trust also has a small number of Members (generally five). These Members have a similar role to shareholders in a private company limited by shares, with the ability to appoint and remove the Trustees. Trustees, Members, and those involved in local governance are not paid.

Academy funding and services

15. Do academies receive extra funding?

Academies receive their funding directly from the Government rather than via their local authority. The budget is calculated in the same way as now, with a few (fairly small) technical changes for areas such as rates. The academy's financial year runs from September to August rather than April to March which is the arrangement for maintained/foundation schools. .

Academy policies

16. Would there be changes to the number of pupils admitted into Reception at Oak Farm, or the over-subscription criteria used to prioritise applications?

No. The admissions policies for the 2025/26 and 2026/27 academic years have already been approved by the Governing Body and these would transfer to VLT. There is no intention to change the number of pupils admitted into Reception or to change the over-subscription criteria that are used to prioritise applications for entry – the expectation is that the 2027/28 policy would be the same as the 2026/27 one apart from administrative details.

17. Would pupils at Oak Farm get priority access into Ruislip High or Vyners?

No. Both Vyners and Ruislip High did consult upon giving higher priority for children who attend a trust primary school and who live within 2km of the relevant high school but decided in spring 2020 (after consultation undertaken in accordance with the School Admissions Code) not to proceed with that proposal.

Educational implications

18. What are the safeguards for vulnerable students?

Under the terms of the Funding Agreement (which is the contract between the Academy Trust and the Secretary of State), an academy has to act in exactly the same way as a maintained school in relation to SEN provision, behaviour, and exclusions.

19. Who is responsible for deciding if a student needs an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)?

The local authority would retain the legal responsibility for assessing whether a child needs a EHCP and determining which school is named on the EHCP.

20. Would the daily experience of pupils change if we join VLT?

The day-to-day timetable and offer would not change, but behind the scenes pupils would benefit from the increased staff collaboration and the increased opportunities for pupils that come from being part of a trust.

21. Would the curriculum change?

No, but staff would collaborate with colleagues in other schools when developing the curriculum and associated schemes of work.

22. What services does the school receive from the Council that it would lose if it converts? How would it replace those services? Would they cost more and / or be lower quality?

The Council provides certain statutory duties for Oak Farm, several of which (such as safeguarding and SEND) would remain. The Council's school improvement role would cease, and VLT would instead provide that. Other Council services are already traded – i.e. the school has the choice whether to buy from the Council or from other providers and we make those decisions based on quality and cost.

23. How would the academy cope in the event of an emergency (such as a fire) if it is not maintained by the local authority?

Academies in Hillingdon continue to work closely with the local authority to collectively provide high-quality education for our community. That relationship continues irrespective of the legal status of the school – we are all on the same team! So if an emergency arose, any local school would work closely with the Council. For a number of issues the Council may still have statutory responsibilities, such as if there was a safeguarding concern. For emergencies that are covered by insurance, such as a fire, the school would continue to have adequate insurance in place and the process would be the same as now; in addition, the local authority retains the legal responsibility for providing sufficient school places and so would need to work closely with the school to secure alternative accommodation if the school building was unavailable.

Employment in an academy

24. What is the impact of Academy status for current Oak Farm staff?

All qualifying staff would transfer from their current employer (the Oak Farm Governing Body) to the employment of VLT. Qualifying staff are generally those who would have been employed at the school on the date of conversion to academy status. This transfer would take place within the TUPE regulations for staff transfer, which ensures that staff retain their existing rights, terms and conditions and pension arrangements, including continuity of service. Academies are required to offer membership to Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) or Local Government Pension School (LGPS) to all staff (the relevant scheme depending upon their role). Employee costs and benefits are set nationally. Access to the pension scheme is therefore not affected by academy conversion.

25. What is the effect of TUPE?

The TUPE Regulations provide that the current employer's "rights, powers, duties and responsibilities" under the contract of employment of any transferring member of staff would be transferred automatically to the new employer, in this case VLT.

26. Academies are not bound to follow national or local Terms and Conditions of employment. Would VLT change Terms and Conditions for future new staff?

VLT employs new teachers in accordance with national terms and conditions (STPCD and Burgundy Book) and employs new support staff in accordance with national (Green Book) terms and conditions. This would apply to Oak Farm as well as other VLT schools.

27. Do academies have to recognise Trade Unions?

Yes. VLT already recognises the trade unions that are recognised by Hillingdon Council (this is a requirement of TUPE).

Land and buildings

28. What happens to the Oak Farm site and buildings?

As a foundation school, the land and buildings are owned by the Governing Body. The freehold ownership would transfer to VLT, and VLT would become responsible for the land and buildings.

29. How does an academy access capital funding?

Academies receive some capital funding, called Devolved Formula Capital, according to the same methodology as maintained schools. This funding is provided directly to the academy. Whereas Oak Farm currently relies on the local authority for funding for more substantial works, whether these are for repair / maintenance or for improvements, academies are generally reliant on central government (as the other schools within VLT already are). VLT receives an annual formulaic allocation of capital funding to the trust, which was just under £1m in 2025/26. The VLT Board of Trustees is responsible for investing this funding to address the highest priority needs and meet their legal responsibilities for safety.

What could change in the future?

30. What could change in the future?

If Oak Farm remains as a foundation school, changes in the future could originate from central government, Hillingdon Council, or the Governing Body. The Governing Body already has the powers to propose changes to the school day or year, to the curriculum, to how the budget is spent, to the admissions policy, and to the terms and conditions of support staff. If Oak Farm converts to academy status, VLT could propose changes in the future. Many of these changes would require formal consultation with parents and / or staff and their Unions. The Trustees could decide some changes, while others would require the agreement of the Secretary of State.

Consultation process

31. Who is being consulted?

Governors want to hear the views of any interested person or group. In particular, Governors want to understand the reasons for those views to help ensure that they have considered all relevant issues before they make their final decision. The school has distributed the consultation document to parents and staff, to Hillingdon Council, to local schools, to the local MP and to local Councillors.

32. Will Governors' listen to the views from the consultation?

Yes, every response will be considered. Responses might include arguments for and against Oak Farm's conversion, as well as questions or concerns about conversion. The information from the consultation will be considered alongside other information about the implications of remaining as a maintained school or becoming an academy.