

Oak Farm Primary School: Academies Act consultation process and summary

The consultation process

Consultation was undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Academies Act. Consultation was undertaken between 3rd November and 28th November 2025 – a period of four term-time weeks.

The consultation materials consisted of a consultation document that introduced the proposal and a more detailed Question and Answer document for those who wanted further information. There was also a HR Question and Answer document that was only distributed to staff.

The consultation was launched by distribution of the consultation materials to:

1. All staff at Oak Farm;
2. Parents / carers of current pupils at Oak Farm;
3. The Lead Member and Director of Children's Services at Hillingdon Council;
4. The Director of Children's Services at any local authority who maintained an Education, Health and Care Plan at Oak Farm;
5. The local ward Councillors for the ward in which Oak Farm is situated;
6. The Children's Centre on site; and
7. Headteachers of local primary, secondary and special schools.

All materials were available on the school website.

The following meetings were held:

- For staff: on 12th November; and
- For parents: in person on 12th November and online on 13th November.

People were able to respond by completing the online questionnaire (a link was included in the emails distributing the consultation material and was available on the website) or emailing / writing to the Headteacher.

The questionnaire consisted of three qualitative questions as well as quantitative information about the respondent. The questions were:

- What do you think could be the advantages or benefits of Oak Farm joining VLT?
- What do you think could be the risks or drawbacks of Oak Farm joining VLT?
- If you have any questions about VLT or what joining VLT would mean for Oak Farm, please write them here

The consultation responses

Attendance at the meetings was:

- Staff – approximately 30 – 35
- In-person meeting for parents: No parents
- Online meeting for parents: 2 parents.

There were 4 responses to the online questionnaire, two from Oak Farm parents, 1 from a member of Oak Farm staff and one from a VLT parent.

There was a written response to the consultation from Hillingdon Council, with the Council being strongly supportive of the proposal.

Potential advantages or opportunities raised by respondents

Online responses included the following potential advantages or opportunities:

- “Shared best practices and resources across schools can raise teaching quality and pupil outcomes.”
- “Partner schools can support each other during inspections, improvement planning, or periods of challenge.”

Potential concerns, other comments, or questions raised by respondents

Respondents were able to raise potential concerns or drawbacks about joining VLT and also to raise any other questions or areas where further information would be welcomed. There was overlap between these areas as individuals sought further information about areas that they or others had identified as potential concerns. The following table includes themes that were raised, expressing them as questions.

Issue	Response
Would there be reduced autonomy and a change in school culture?	<p>Oak Farm has worked with VLT for over 2 years already. Through this time many staff have interacted with VLT colleagues and got to know the VLT approach and culture. VLT retains educational decision making at school level, alongside aspects like school identity and uniform – they are not ‘identikit’ schools but each has their own personality.</p> <p>The Board of Trustees of VLT is accountable for all schools within the trust, and it focuses its decision making upon the operational aspects such as finance, HR / staffing, and risk – while decisions might be made by the Board, the Headteacher continues to lead preparation and implementation of these areas.</p>
Have VLT / Oak Farm got the capacity to bring Oak Farm successfully into VLT?	This is recognised and accepted as a risk. VLT and Oak Farm colleagues are working together to prioritise areas of work to recognise where capacity is limited. This will be kept under review.
Is there ‘standardised’ teaching within VLT? Will teachers need to learn the ‘Vanguard Trust Way’ of teaching subjects? Will Teachers need to follow a set curriculum used at all schools in the Trust?	All VLT schools follow the national curriculum, but there is not a ‘VLT curriculum’ or a ‘VLT way’ that is imposed. Staff across the schools (within and between primary and secondary phases) collaborate on projects that may result in new resources / practice / approaches, but this is practitioner driven.
Will VLT be able to offer support and shared expertise to EYFS?	The primary schools share their School Development plans with each other and will look at sharing expertise across the Trust. E.g currently year 6 teams teachers meet to moderate.

Will the timings of the school day remain the same or change to be the same as other schools in the Trust?	Timings of the school day remain a decision for each school. There is no proposal to change the Oak Farm school day timings.
What will be the main IT applications that the VLT trust use? E.g. We currently use SIMS, and we are aware that will change to Arbor, what other packages will change? i.e. new finance systems, cpoms?	Oak Farm would adopt VLT finance systems and would move to Arbor (to replace SIMS). Arbor can also do parent communications so this will move over at the point where the service level agreement with SIMS expires (April 2026). VLT uses Google rather than Microsoft. Cpoms is used by Oak Farm and VLT. Oak Farm would move to VLT payroll (Juniper Education) from transfer. Staff will be provided with support and training as they transition to new platforms
When/how will staff be trained on new systems?	This will vary depending on the system and its timeframe for implementation – i.e. training on finance systems for those who will use them regularly will be before transfer as the system will go live at transfer date. If a new system is not being implemented until a later date, the training arrangements would be scheduled accordingly.
What changes will be noticed straight away?	For most staff, day to day experience will be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. Some immediate changes will be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some VLT policies would apply from transfer date – i.e. safeguarding, complaints. During the period of Associate Membership many Oak Farm policies have become aligned with VLT ones and so differences in those would be minimal. A future policy review schedule is currently being developed to bring Oak Farm into VLT review cycles. • Different arrangements for finance to reflect VLT systems / processes and the requirements on academies (as opposed to Council maintained schools). • Letterhead / website would be updated to reflect Oak Farm being part of VLT.
How will it affect the running of the school joining the VLT trust?	Mrs Cheema remains the Headteacher and continues to be responsible for the running of the school. During Associate Membership Oak Farm colleagues have already joined VLT wide fora, including Mrs Cheema as part of the Headteacher group, Ms Hunt at SENDco meetings, Mrs Topliss at safeguarding, Ms Ceccobelli for pupil premium and Equality.
How irreversible is the decision to join the trust, should future incompatibilities arise?	For a school to transfer to a different academy trust requires the agreement of the outgoing trust (VLT), the incoming trust, and the DfE; if the school is eligible for DfE intervention then the DfE does not require the consent of the outgoing trust. It is not possible for the school itself to ‘force’ a change of trust. There is currently no route for an academy school to return to being Council maintained.
What benefit is there being in a Trust to a school and to its staff (teaching and support)?	Being part of an academy trust can increase the opportunities for development and career progression for staff, can help improve professional practice through collaboration with colleagues across the trust, and reduce workload through sharing and developing resources jointly. Being part of a trust can also enable the trust to establish posts that individual schools could not afford themselves, which can enable

	opportunities for staff specialisation and greater overall expertise available within the trust to support schools. Trusts can also procure and manage contracts that operate across the schools, seeking greater efficiency and / or effectiveness.
What have Oak Farm got to offer the Trust?	Knowledge and expertise, commitment to Hillingdon and communities, and a set of values and beliefs that align with the schools already in the trust.
Is there a fee to join the Trust? If so, is there then a yearly fee? How would this be paid?	There is no fee to join. Once within the trust, all schools contribute to the costs incurred by the trust which is applied as a 'top-slice' of the funding received by each school. This funds organisational costs such as costs of accounts and audits required by the DfE as well as staff who work to support schools across the trust. This is factored into the budget planning process. For Oak Farm, this would be part of the budget setting process for September 2026 to August 2027 (academy financial years are the same as academic years) and there would be no 'top slice' for April to August 2026.
Will the VLT be investing money in the maintenance of the School & grounds?	VLT receives capital funding each year from the DfE (called the School Condition Allocation). The trust then prioritises the spending of this based on an objective evaluation of need – i.e. to address the highest priority issues to ensure that schools are safe and continue to function effectively. It is not possible to say whether Oak Farm would or would not receive funding each year, but it would be considered equitably with the other schools in the trust
The school is lacking in resources. Will VLT fund new ones?	Curriculum resources remain the responsibility of each school to fund through their budget. VLT is developing an investment programme regarding IT which Oak Farm would be part of in order to ensure consistency of provision.