Academisation FAQs

1. Why academisation?

- As Cranmere is a community school and not under statutory intervention, what specific issues is academisation intended to solve that cannot be addressed within the local authority?
- Why cannot these be addressed through remaining maintained, federation, or collaboration?
- Was a written options appraisal produced, and can it be shared?

Our Governing Body is currently responsible for setting the strategic direction of the school. We, as Governors, want Cranmere to thrive in the short, medium and long term and to be a sustainable school in the future. The Headteacher and the Governors strongly believe joining a trust would achieve sustainability and most importantly, drive higher academic standards. Cranmere's recent Ofsted visit showed a very good outcome for the school and our recent year 6 SATs are an excellent set of results. As a progressive school, we are always looking to build on those outcomes and improve even further - providing the very best education for the children. Joining Bourne Education Trust (BET) will open up a wider professional network and provide access to extensive shared resources further supporting Cranmere staff to enhance their practice, provide the opportunity to use improved resources in the classroom and raise the quality of teaching for our children. It should be noted that different options were discussed across multiple governor meetings.

2. Choice of Trust

- Why was Bourne Education Trust selected over other trusts?
- What risks or weaknesses were identified during due diligence?
- What exit arrangements exist if the partnership does not work?

Having considered a number of trusts and organisations, the Governors determined that BET is best placed to support Cranmere in preserving its established identity and ethos, which are fundamental to the school's culture. As highlighted in our meeting with parents, safeguarding Cranmere's unique identity as a school rooted in its local community was a non-negotiable for the Governors. BET fully supported this, whereas other organisations were unable to provide the same assurance.

The Governors and headteacher have discussed and challenged both the risks and opportunities for academisation. Having spent a number of months completing due diligence with BET and also attending a number of meetings with the BET organisation, both at the Senior Leadership Team and Governor level, we believe this is the best fit for Cranmere.

Associate status provides the school with the opportunity to experience being part of BET before making a final decision whether to legally convert to academy status. Nothing is finalised until the legal documentation is signed. We have already experienced benefits from being part of this partnership including through support with our local governance arrangements, marketing and financial planning.

Joining a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) is a significant step and is intended to be a long-term commitment, less like a service contract and more like joining a family of schools. Because the trust and the school become one single legal organisation, there isn't a simple notice period. This permanence is designed to give the school, staff and pupils long-term stability and financial security.

Although a school cannot unilaterally choose to leave a trust, there are safeguards in place. The Department for Education can intervene if a trust is not providing high-quality education, including directing a transfer where this is in pupils' best interests.

The school continues to have a voice through trust leadership structures and its Governing Body, helping ensure its identity and ethos are protected.

We recognise that exiting a trust is a complex and rare process, which is why governors and the leadership team have undertaken extensive due diligence. Our priority remains to ensure that joining BET provides a stable, supportive and high-quality educational environment for all our pupils.

3. Funding & top slicing

- Based on Bourne Education Trust's published financial model, please confirm the exact percentage of Cranmere's General Annual Grant (GAG) that would be top-sliced by the Trust each year, the specific services this top-slice would fund, and which services currently provided through the local authority would either cease or require additional buy-back following conversion.
- In addition, please clarify how much of Cranmere's existing financial surplus would transfer into BET's central reserves on conversion, and what safeguards are in place to ensure that these funds continue to be used for the direct benefit of Cranmere pupils.

Currently, Cranmere pays an amount annually to the local authority for their services from their School Budget Share (SBS). On conversion to BET, this contribution will cease. The contribution to BET is 5% of school General Annual Grant (GAG) funding. The school will benefit from a range of central services, including: strategic and risk management; brand and marketing management; business development; compliance; cyber security and IT: data protection; education support; estates and procurement; financial management and HR advice and resources.

With regards to the school's surplus, the amount on conversion will remain with the school and will not be transferred into central reserves. The school is not forecasting surplus in the 3 year budget plan. The support of BET, with their greater economies of scale, will enable the school to budget more effectively in the short and medium term.

4. Governance & real decision-making

- Which decisions would transfer from the local governing body to the Trust board?
- What decisions would remain at Cranmere level after joining Bourne Education Trust, and which decisions would move to the Trust, particularly around staffing, curriculum and budget?
- How many local governors will Cranmere retain, and what real decision-making powers will they have?
- How long are these arrangements guaranteed?

There is a scheme of delegation agreed for all schools within BET, the Trust will expect the Governing Body to be responsible for:

- Ensuring the quality of educational provision.
- Challenging and monitoring the performance of the school.
- Reviewing the school's annual budget.
- Ensuring resources are allocated in line with the school's development plan and curriculum.
- Reviewing and monitor health and safety and ensure compliance and accessibility.
- Reviewing the staffing structure and appointing staff.

Being part of BET allows Cranmere to leverage best practice with regards to policies and procedures, e.g. SEND policies, safeguarding training, etc. We can draw on BET's expertise across key areas, while retaining the autonomy to run the school and continue to drive improvement, supported by BET's experienced professionals and established best practice. We intend to retain our existing Governors with the above decision-making powers remaining with the Governing Body. As with any set up (whether it is with Surrey County Council (SCC) or a trust), arrangements can change from time to time, but these will be consulted on, where required.

5. Parental voice & accountability

- How will parents raise concerns or challenge decisions once Cranmere is part of Bourne Education Trust?
- Who would ultimately have the authority to act on those concerns?

Parents should continue to raise their views and concerns with the Head Teacher and/or the Chair of Governors. Parents may refer to the school's Complaints Policy when raising a concern. The policy sets out clearly who is responsible for responding to different types of concerns.

6. SEND provision & support

- How would SEND support change if Cranmere joins Bourne Education Trust, specifically which services currently provided through the local authority would be replaced, reduced or centrally managed by the Trust?

- Will SEND support be strengthened in any way after joining the trust?
- Can the School count on more SEND related, hands on support, considering a significant demand for 1:1 support at school at the moment?

There are some services which SCC must continue to provide to all schools as part of the funding they continue to receive from the Department of Education. These include, for example, SEND services, some services relating to emergencies, and support for Children in Care and children known to the SCC Children's Services. These will not be replaced by BET.

Most services currently provided by SCC can be bought back on a Service Level Agreement (SLA) when the school becomes an academy. The school will continue with some of its contracts. Some services currently bought from SCC are provided through BET so they will no longer be bought from SCC.

Joining BET and accessing their SEND outreach offer will strengthen the school's SEND services as we will have access to advice for SENDCos on key SEND processes e.g., consultations, securing funding, facilitating meetings with SCC, outreach, SEND reviews on request, Educational Psychology access and access to SENDCo networks.

7. BET's published financial information indicates significant variation in per-school expenditure across the Trust. Please clarify the criteria used to allocate central resources between schools, whether allocations are linked to size, phase or level of need, and how equity and transparency are ensured so that Cranmere would not be disadvantaged financially following conversion.

In regard to estates, the Trust allocates School Condition Allocation (SCA) funding in accordance with the Department for Education's *Good Estate Management for Schools (GEMS)* guidance. In line with best practice, the Trust's primary focus is addressing condition priorities identified through professionally conducted building condition surveys, ensuring that health, safety, and statutory compliance risks are mitigated at the earliest opportunity. This approach is supplemented by systematic safeguarding reviews that ensure all environments remain safe, secure, and suitable for pupils, staff, and visitors. Sustainability considerations, including energy efficiency, carbon reduction, and whole life value, are embedded within the decision-making process to support long-term resilience and responsible stewardship of the estate. Collectively, this ensures that SCA funding is deployed transparently, responsibly, and in a manner that delivers the greatest benefit to educational outcomes and the long-term performance of the Trust's buildings.

Excluding SCA funding, there is no direct allocation of central resources to the schools in the Trust. Schools receive their own funding and control their own expenditure. The differences in school expenditure therefore reflects the level of funding received by each school and the level of reserves carried forward from previous years. The central team support all schools in the Trust, with the level of support depending on need.

8. BET's accounts show significant funds held in central reserves. Can you explain the rationale for maintaining this level of reserves? What financial risks are they intended to cover?

The purpose of maintaining a central surplus is as follows:

- It generates a central surplus to be able to target funding, to have greater flexibility to respond to specific needs in individual schools and/or to direct funds to facilitate MAT policies that are being implemented to support the trust's vision
- It supports recovery plans for schools in financial difficulty, simplifying the provision of support to schools in the Trust ensuring costs align to the numbers of pupils on roll
- It creates a contingency for cashflow issues or unforeseen emergency costs
- It increases central resource and allows us to achieve efficiency savings MAT-wide (through centralisation and procurement).

The Trust's Resources Committee has recently agreed that they will reduce the size of the central surplus, so that the funds can be released to further support the growth of the Trust.

9. The presentation to parents focused primarily on the anticipated benefits of joining the academy trust. For balance, could you please outline the potential drawbacks, limitations, or trade-offs of academisation for Cranmere — including any restrictions the school would face compared with remaining a maintained school — and whether the Headteacher or Governors had any initial concerns about this proposal that have since been mitigated, or any that remain?

Potential limitations, as outlined in the risks question above, include, a 'mismatch' between Cranmere and BET. We have, however, completed a significant amount of due diligence with BET over a number of months and are comfortable that the 'fit' works well with Cranmere's culture.

Another potential limitation, for any academisation, is the Trust insisting on adopting their values and behaviours. However, as emphasised in our parent meeting, BET is fully committed to all schools within the Trust retaining their unique identity. Cranmere will not change its values, culture, nor its community spirit.

We want the very best for our children, and being part of a wider organisation gives us access to highly skilled professionals and high-quality resources, we can further enhance the educational experience for all pupils.

10. Can the Governing Body confirm whether the Senior Leadership Team, particularly the Headteacher, Mr Gilbert, fully supports the proposal for Cranmere to join Bourne Education Trust, and whether he is committed to seeing any proposed changes through into the next academic year? Additionally, are there any anticipated changes to the school's senior leadership as part of, or alongside, this process?

The Headteacher fully supports the proposal to become an associate member of BET and the drive to full membership. Initial conversations and links with BET were made by the Headteacher. Changes to leadership would always be agreed at a school level as the school and governors retain oversight of school budget and staffing.

11. How could feedback from parents at this consultation realistically influence the final decision?

Parents can continue to provide their feedback either to the Headteacher and/or Chair of Governors. All feedback will be considered as part of the overall decision to join BET.