

Spinfield School: Considering Academy Status

What's happening?

Spinfield School: Proposal to join The Marlow Education Trust (MET).

Spinfield School is exploring the possibility of becoming an academy and joining the Marlow Education Trust (MET), a local multi-academy trust. The MET currently has three members and a further two local schools are expected to join over the coming months. Nearly all the schools are within the Marlow area including two secondary schools that many of our pupils join once they have left Spinfield. See: <https://www.marlowet.org/>

Around 18 months ago, the school's governors and leadership team started the process to carefully explore the potential of joining a Multi Academy Trust including discussions with other trusts outside of the local area. At the end of summer 2025, the governing board started a detailed process of due diligence with the MET. In November 2025, the Governing Board has put forward a proposal to join the MET creating a hub of local schools that can share their expertise and knowledge.

We are continuing to consult and engage with everyone connected to the school - parents, carers, staff, and the wider community. To that end, we are planning an information session for the parent community to be held at Spinfield, together with the MET, in January 2026. A firm date will be sent out in due course.

If the proposal goes ahead, Spinfield School could convert and officially join the Marlow Education Trust around mid-2026.

In summary, the Governing Board believes that joining the Marlow Education Trust is expected to provide Spinfield School with more opportunities to collaborate, access funding and shape the school's future - while retaining our unique character.

However, no decision will be made until the consultation has closed and everyone connected to the school has had the opportunity to put forward their views.

Why are we thinking about becoming an academy?

There are several reasons the governors and leadership team believe this could be a positive step for our school:

- Long term stability to deliver a better environment for our children.
- Working together locally: joining a trust of nearby schools will facilitate the interchange of ideas, training and specialist support.
- More autonomy in how we run our school: academies have greater control over budgets and can apply directly for government funding for building improvements.

- Stronger together: being part of a supportive local partnership helps us plan long-term improvements and access central services efficiently.
- We expect to benefit from operational and purchasing synergies that will reduce our costs.

What would stay the same?

Parents often worry that joining a trust means big changes. That's not the case here.

If Spinfield joins the MET it is expected to be 'business as usual':

- The school name, logo and uniform will stay exactly as they are.
- Our values, ethos and approach to learning will remain at the heart of what we do. The MET is in an early stage of its development so we hope to contribute to its success as it grows.
- The curriculum will still be designed around our pupils' needs, while linking with the Trust's shared goals.

What about staff?

All staff would transfer to the Trust under TUPE regulations.

That means everyone keeps their current pay, conditions and pensions. There are no changes to national teacher pay scales or entitlements.

We expect staff to benefit from being part of a larger organisation that will provide greater opportunities to develop their knowledge and experience through training and the interchange of ideas.

What are the possible drawbacks?

The decision to join an academy isn't a step to take lightly. The school's governors and leadership team have been exploring this possibility for several years and now feel the MET is in a robust position for Spinfield to join and positively contribute to its planned growth and success.

Once a school joins a trust, it can't return to being local-authority maintained. While a school could move to a different trust later, the process isn't simple.

The governors have discussed this carefully with MET to ensure Spinfield retains its individuality and voice within the partnership.

Who makes the final decision?

After listening to feedback from families, staff and the community, the school's Governing Board will decide whether to proceed.

This is expected to happen a few weeks before any proposed conversion date.

How can I have my say?

We genuinely want to hear what you think.

You can share your views by:

- Attending one of our information sessions at school – a date will be set for this in January 2026
- Send an email or write directly to the school. academisation@spinfieldschool.co.uk

In order to help you make an informed contribution, there is more information below to FAQs covering areas such as education, finance, staff and facilities.

In summary

The governors believe that joining the Marlow Education Trust is expected to provide Spinfield School with more opportunities to collaborate, access funding and shape the school's future - while retaining our unique character.

However, **no decision** will be made until the consultation has finished and everyone connected to the school has had the opportunity to put forward their views.

Q&As – Education Related

1. What impact will joining the trust have on the child's education?

If our current curriculum and teaching methods remain effective, no changes are required. Joining the Trust offers added opportunities to enhance our educational offer through focused school-improvement support.

2. Will our school identity and values change?

Our school's character and values are safeguarded. The Trust recognises that each school has its own context, community and identity - and these will be respected and preserved.

3. Why join a multi-academy trust (MAT) that includes secondary schools?

Having both primary and secondary schools under one Trust can make the transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 smoother. Since many of our pupils progress to nearby secondary schools, deeper collaboration is seen as beneficial.

4. Support for primary-school specifics

The Trust currently has more secondary schools than primary schools but this is expected to change so the trust is actively recruiting primary-specialist personnel. They understand that early years and primary education require distinct approaches and are committed to ensuring appropriate support.

5. Trust's vision for primary education

The Trust's overarching aim is high-quality outcomes for every pupil, regardless of background. They recognise that primary education differs significantly from secondary and are open to adding specialists (e.g., early years experts) to ensure primary-specific needs are met.

6. Trust's track record in primary school improvement

One of the Trust's primary schools, which had previously been underperforming, has shown notable improvement in recent years and is now rated "Good" in all areas. This demonstrates the Trust's capacity to drive positive change.

7. Governance, challenge and support

Our senior leadership team (SLT) will continue to monitor education quality at the school, as now, with the Trust adding an annual review visit. The goal is to provide both increased challenge and enhanced support, with a view to whole-school improvement.

8. Curriculum autonomy

We will retain flexibility over our curriculum. The Trust sets high-level expectations - that learning should be relevant, broad, well-planned and coherent - but each school is free to choose how it meets those standards. Our enrichment programmes and outdoor learning remain unaffected.

9. Academies, inspections and SEND responsibilities

As an academy, we'll still meet the National Curriculum expectations and we will continue to be inspected by Ofsted. Our responsibilities for pupils with SEND remain unchanged. The Trust offers a collaborative support framework for inclusion and SEND, and each school retains its own SENDCo.

10. Subject leadership and specialist access

The shape of subject-leadership roles across the Trust is still being defined. However, being among the first primary schools to join offers us the chance to contribute to how that structure develops.

Q&As – Finance Related

1. Does this proposal mean Spinfield is in a financially unstable position?

It's no secret that many schools across the country are under serious financial pressure at present. A declining birth rate / pupil numbers locally has impacted on financial inflows. Also, national funding hasn't kept pace with rising costs and is putting strain on education budgets. In this challenging context, Spinfield is not alone; virtually all neighbouring schools are grappling with similar headwinds. This is emphasised by the recent announced closure of St. Peters Primary School in Marlow.

Nevertheless, thanks to careful financial stewardship over the past few years, Spinfield is better placed than some. Our exploration of joining the Marlow Education Trust (MET) has not been motivated by a looming financial crisis but rather by a desire to enhance our educational offer through closer collaboration with local partner schools.

2. Would Spinfield benefit financially from joining the MET?

Our due diligence has shown that moving into the MET would yield a modest financial advantage. We would continue to receive our current per-pupil funding. At present, a portion of that is taken by the Local Authority (LA) as a 'top slice' and we pay separately for services such as HR, IT, Finance and any school maintenance. Within the MET model, a similar percentage would be applied but would include centralised provision of those services. It would also open doors to additional capital funding and, over time, greater economies of scale as the Trust expands and shares services across its schools.

3. What savings or efficiencies are expected, and how would they be redirected into the school?

As stated, we anticipate a slight improvement in our financial position. However, the reality is that national school budgets will remain extremely tight - so the benefit is more about sustaining our position rather than generating significant surpluses. Any savings realised would be reinvested back into the school to support our key priorities.

4. What will the MET's 'top slice' percentage be?

It is difficult to make a like-for-like comparison between the MET's central charge and that applied by the LA, as the LA does not publish its percentage and trusts differ in the services they offer. It is true that the MET's percentage is relatively high, yet we believe it represents strong value for the comprehensive services delivered. Importantly, the MET applies its top slice only to our basic funding entitlement, whereas many other trusts charge on the full General Annual Grant (GAG).

5. What services would the top slice cover, and do we currently purchase these services?

The top slice would fund the following MET central services: HR, Finance, IT, Estates/Facilities Management, School Improvement, online CPD, Audit, GDPR support and Governance

clerking. Much of this is already purchased by Spinfield from our existing budget, after the top slice has been allocated to the Local Authority funds. MET considers that its provision of these services is superior in both quality and responsiveness compared with those available through the LA.

6. Will the MET profit from our school?

No. Academy trusts operate as charitable organisations, meaning any surplus or additional income must be channelled into benefiting pupils.

7. Will our existing financial reserves be safeguarded? Will we retain the funds we have worked hard to build?

Yes. The MET operates a reserves policy requiring each school to hold either one month's staffing costs or 5% of its General Annual Grant (GAG), whichever is greater. Any surplus beyond that threshold would remain at Spinfield.

8. Are there any upfront costs or risks in joining the MET?

We would indeed contribute to the MET's central reserves. However, given our current financial position this contribution is manageable. The reserves exist to underpin development and investment across the Trust.

9. Would Spinfield maintain control over its budget? Who would make final decisions on spending?

Joining the MET would mean relinquishing some degree of autonomy. Presently, Spinfield's Governors approve major expenditure. Post-conversion, the MET's Trustees would hold that decision-making power. That said, the trade-off is that we would gain access to a slightly stronger financial base, together with enhanced professional support and guidance around financial management.

10. How will the budget be managed once under the MET? Would surplus funds be spread among schools? What about support for schools with deficits or falling pupil numbers?

Our budget would remain entirely ours: the Department for Education would pay our funding directly to the MET, which would retain its top slice, with the remainder going straight to Spinfield. The reserves held by the Trust are pooled, not ring-fenced for individual schools. Should a school require development investment or face financial difficulty, the MET Trustees may draw on those reserves at their discretion. In addition, capital funding for building or equipment enhancements may be requested through the Condition Improvement Fund (CIF).

11. Would funds raised by our parent/teacher/volunteer group (e.g., Spinfield's PA) be redistributed to other schools?

No. All monies raised by Spinfield's PA or similar school-specific fundraising will be used at the discretion of Spinfield for our own benefit.

12. What is the current financial standing of the MET? Have we been given access to recent audits and reports (including schools with low pupil numbers)?

Yes. The MET shared financial information as part of our recent due diligence exercise. We have been assured that the Trust is financially stable and managing its portfolio of schools appropriately. The MET's financial statements for years ending 2021–24 are available on its website (www.marlowet.org) and include the accounts of schools such as Beechview and Borlase. Schools in trusts are also subject to annual external audits as well as termly internal audits.

13. Are any of the academies in the MET currently in deficit? If so, how is this managed?

We have discussed this directly with the MET and been assured that any schools experiencing deficits have been managed in a way that does not adversely impact other schools within the Trust.

Q&As – HR & Staff Related

1. How would this proposal affect contracts, terms and conditions (including sick pay)?

Staff would enter into a TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings – Protection of Employment) process where all agreed contracts, terms and conditions are transferred unchanged. TUPE

Q&As – Estate & Buildings Related

1. If a school joins a MAT, does that mean it becomes fully responsible for *all* building repair costs?

No – we can still seek financial support from the local authority for certain key projects. If Spinfield does become part of a MET, we can also submit a CIF (Condition Improvement Fund) bid, which is a Department for Education (DfE) route **only** open to academies. The MET also retains reserves to support schools with unexpected major infrastructure costs.

2. Does the MET have funds set aside for major repairs that the local authority no longer covers?

As noted above, for large-scale issues the first option is a CIF bid to the DfE, not the school or the Trust directly. If that bid doesn't succeed, then either the school's budget or the MET's reserves may be used.

If the three Marlow schools (inc Spinfield) expecting to join the MET takes place, the MET will have a combined headcount of over 3,000 pupils. This will provide the MET with access an annual School Condition Allocation (SCA) from the DfE. This funding is specifically ring-fenced for the trust's school maintenance.

3. How do priorities for capital work get decided across the Trust? How are schools involved?

The MET operates a three-year estates plan covering all its schools. Priorities are set first around health & safety needs, then educational requirements. Schools won't necessarily be consulted in detail, but will be **informed** about key decisions. From our view, this level of transparency is a contrast and significant improvement to current local authority arrangements.

4. Have Spinfield's buildings / grounds been inspected for urgent repairs or as part of due diligence?

Yes - a survey took place in September involving the MET's team and Spinfield's relevant governor and found no significant issues or any actions that require immediate attention.

5. Will Spinfield retain income from private lettings of its buildings?

Yes - any such income generated from renting out areas, such as the school hall or playing fields, is retained by the school.

6. Are there any planned or unresolved premises issues at other schools in the Trust that might require central funds?

The MET has committed to improvements at other schools within the trust. The MET's three-year estates plan is the mechanism to deliver transparency around this across all schools in the trust.

7. Will Spinfield keep a say in how its premises are used or changed in future (for example, for expansion or new provision)?

Spinfield expects to maintain a meaningful input into how its premises evolve under the MET framework.