

Community Consultation FAQs

1. Summerhill is a successful school...why change?

Simply.... we want to be the best we can, in every way, for every student. We are currently doing well, and the school is in a strong position. However, we know we can be better. The proposal to join Stour Vale will enable us to continue to improve whilst protecting everything that makes Summerhill special. In an unstable educational and political world, we are looking to continue to drive forward for the future generations of Summerhill whilst continuing to be a true community school with its unique identity. Stour Vale provides this opportunity.

2. Will students of Summerhill notice a difference day to day?

The concept of joining Stour Vale is to improve our school further. Students on a day-to-day basis will not feel any difference. Stour Vale do not impose alignment within subjects, style of teaching, times of day etc. What Stour Vale will provide is the platform to develop areas via collaborative work, expertise across schools and a student-centred ethos that is so important to Summerhill.

3. Are the 'golden threads' that make Summerhill, Summerhill under threat by joining Stour Vale?

Absolutely not. The things that make Summerhill special will remain and go from strength to strength. We will always remain a true community school that will have our family feel, which we have been strengthening over the last few years.

4. Will Summerhill become a copy of the other Trust schools?

No. Summerhill will keep its independence, identity and will have secure autonomy, meaning that the leaders within the school, will still be leading the school. We would work collaboratively to take best practice from all schools within the Trust and share our best practice. Stour Vale Academy Trust has been operating locally for nearly a decade, and all its schools have maintained their individual identity throughout that time.

5. Will Summerhill lose staff because of joining a Trust?

There will be no reason for any staff turnover or structure changes. Staff will transfer across from the LA to Trust under the same pay and conditions.

6. Will Stour Vale expect Summerhill staff to move to other schools within the Trust?

No. This might happen in some MATs, but this is not the model that Stour Vale operate with. Summerhill staff would continue to work at Summerhill under the same pay and conditions. They will still have control of their curriculums and would not be expected to align with other schools in the Trust.

7. Will the school lose money through the top slice that the Trust take centrally?

The top slice of 4% represents best value for Summerhill. Stour Vale will provide many of the services we currently purchase from the Local Authority, but the top slice also covers the cost of a much wider range of professional learning and benefits for staff, support and challenge for school leaders, and additional services. What we will receive for the 4% will be a more thorough and productive service for Summerhill, ensuring our students receive a better education. The local authority has struggled in recent years to provide the level of service that we would want for our school.

8. Will the finances that have been protected by Summerhill be used for Summerhill students or shared with all other schools?

Summerhill reserves will remain with the school for the purpose of Summerhill students. It will not be redistributed. Lettings and other income will also be retained by Summerhill and not top-sliced or redistributed.

9. Will Summerhill still have a Governing Board to monitor the school on a regular basis and ensure it serves its community?

We will continue to have a Governing Board that will operate in the same way as it currently does. We will always work closely with our community to ensure that we are keeping up to date with trends and social dynamics to best serve our students and families.

10. If the conversion is to go ahead, what is the timescale of the transition?

This is roughly a 12-month process, so we would be looking to convert around this time next year. Our building adds a complexity as we are PFI building, which adds another solicitor to the discussions as we move forward.

11. Who makes the final decision?

The final decision sits with the Governors. Once the consultations have taken place, the Governors will meet to look at all aspects in moving forward.

12. Do Stour Vale pay to the standard teacher scales and pension schemes?

Yes. They are in line with the teacher pay conditions, and the same for support staff.

13. If more schools are included moving forward, how do schools stay strong as the academy grows?

Growth is a positive, it provides capacity to collaborate and drive school improvement. Stour Vale are prudent and considered in their growth and each decision carries a huge amount of due diligence. Again, growth would not have an impact on Summerhill but just provide extra strength within collaboration.

14. We are aware that we can go to the Governing Body if we have any concerns about school. Who is the port of call for a Trust?

It would still be the local governing body at Summerhill. There is a scheme of delegation, which delegates as much as possible go to the local governing board, they are there and continue to support, challenge and be the critical friend that they are now.