

Consultation

The Willows School and Early Years Centre – Proposed change of age range

This four week consultation from 30 June 2025 to 27 July 2025 is to gather opinions on a proposal for The Willows School and Early Years Centre to change its age range from 2 to 7 years to 0 to 7 years.

What is the current position?

The Willows School and Early Year Centre is a community infant school located in Fishermead that provides education for children up to the age of 7 years. The school also provides early years education for children aged 2, 3 and 4 in a maintained nursery class. Children attending the provision are registered at the school as their published age range is 2 to 7 years. The school operates a successful nursery class and, as at Spring 2025 school census, have 75 children aged 2 to 4 years attending sessions at this provision. The school's last Ofsted inspection was held in July 2023 when it was rated 'Good'.

35 children have been allocated a place in Year R at the school for September 2025; 34 of these attended the nursery class at the school and this high transition rate highlights the popularity and strong reputation of the nursery provision within the local community.

Why is this change being proposed?

As part of the government's initiative to expand nursery provision, from September 2025 eligible working parents will be able to access up to 30 free hours per week (over 38 weeks a year) for children aged from 9 months old until they start school. The Willows School and Early Years Centre is located within the Conniburrow and Pebbles Family Centre reach area which, as a result of the entitlement expansion, currently projects a shortfall of provision for the under two year old age group. The family centre reach covers a large area and it must also be noted that there is currently limited provision in Fishermead itself to meet this additional projected demand without any change.

Local families have made enquires to the school regarding this phase of early years but currently the school are legally unable to provide this provision without any change to their age range. In order to meet the projected increased demand, the school are proposing to deliver early years provision from 9 months from January 2026 to support this expansion of the early years parent entitlement.

The school has the required qualified staff to deliver this provision and a large nursery space that will be used to accommodate extra children and has also been successful in bidding for a grant to make minor amendments required to remodel this space to ensure it is suitable for children aged from 9 months old. They intend to provide at least an additional 6 places locally in the under 2 age group.

The objective of this proposal is to support to ensure that the council is able to fulfil its statutory duty to provide sufficient early years places in this area.

The council, the headteacher and the governing body of the school have worked in partnership on this proposal and believe that it brings potential benefits to the school and the local community including:

- supporting the government agenda of supporting families into work
- supports the council to meet its statutory early years sufficiency duty
- an increase in the number of places available at a school that is judged Good by Ofsted (July 2023)
- an increase in provision available to parents across the family centre area and within Fishermead itself
- greater opportunities for staff, making it more likely the existing high quality staff will be retained and high quality staff would be attracted to work at the school
- lowering the age range may attract more children to the school at an earlier point and could increase the number of children applying to the school in Year R supporting the school's longer term stability and growth
- Many of the existing families that have children attending the school and nursery class also have younger siblings who will be able to access appropriate and local provision.

What are the next steps?

As The Willows School and Early Year Centre is a community school, the council are required to consult with stakeholders about the proposal to change the age range from 2 to 7 years to 0 to 7 years from January 2026.

This consultation seeks views from parents and staff directly involved with The Willows School and Early Years Centre, from other local schools and any other interested parties. We are keen to hear as many views as possible about this proposal. Please go online and complete the web form by using this [link](#).

If you are unable to access the online form, you may respond by email to sufficiencyandaccess@milton-keynes.gov.uk

This consultation will close on 27 July 2025. The council and the governing body of the school will then consider the responses and determine if the proposed change in age range should be implemented. If the change proceeds, the school will be able to offer places to children from the age of 9 months from January 2026 subject to meeting the relevant OFSTED registration requirements.

Who has this consultation been sent to?

- All parents and staff at The Willows School and Early Years Centre
- All schools in Milton Keynes
- Early years providers within a two mile radius
- Local MPs
- Ward Councillors
- Parish/Town Council