

Consultation report on Stoke St Gregory C of E Primary (URN: 150233) lowering pupil admission age range to 2 years and for Willow Set Pre-School to merge into The Oak Partnership Trust resulting in a school-based nursery provision on site.

Date published: Thursday 22nd October 2026

1. Background to Consultation

The Oak Partnership Trust consulted on the proposal for Willow Set Pre-School to become part of Stoke St Gregory Church of England Primary School.

Under the proposal, the existing independent pre-school provision would become school-based nursery provision operated by The Oak Partnership Trust as part of Stoke St Gregory C of E Primary School.

The nursery would continue to provide places for children from the age of two. This would establish an integrated educational provision for children from age two through to age eleven and provide up to 24 nursery places.

The Trust was seeking the views of parents, carers, staff, local residents and other interested parties before deciding whether to proceed.

Willow Set Pre-School has worked closely with Stoke St Gregory C of E Primary School for some time and already benefits from a strong relationship with the school and The Oak Partnership Trust.

The Management Committee and Trust believe that bringing the pre-school into the school could build on this relationship and provide greater continuity for children and families.

In particular, the proposal is intended to:

- strengthen continuity between early years and primary education;
- support the long-term sustainability of local pre-school provision;
- provide greater access to educational and specialist expertise;
- strengthen safeguarding, inclusion and support for children with additional needs;
- reduce administrative and governance pressures;
- provide staff with access to wider professional development and support; and
- create an increasingly joined-up educational experience for children from the age of two onwards.

2. How could members of the public find out about the statutory consultation?

There were a number of ways in which members of the public and local organisations were alerted to the consultation:

- Notice was placed on the Trust website
- Consultation was placed on Trust social media.
- School shared with their local community
- Willow Set shared with local community
- Consultation shared with Somerset Local Authority

- Consultation shared with Bath and Wells Diocese

3. Who could respond to the consultation?

Any member of the public was welcome to submit their comments about the proposals.

This could include:

- parents and carers;
- prospective parents and carers;
- nursery and school staff;
- local residents and businesses;
- Somerset Council;
- the Diocese and relevant Church bodies;
- other interested organisations or individuals.

4. Could people object to the proposals?

Yes, anyone was able to object or comment on the proposals.

5. How could people find out additional information before providing feedback?

Members of the public were able to contact the Trust if they required any additional information before submitting feedback. If parents and carers of a pupil on roll had any specific queries or requests for additional information, they were able to contact the school.

6. How could people have their say?

Members of the public could submit views by:

- Submitting their views online via an online survey.
- Emailing office@oak.education
- Writing to:

The Oak Partnership Trust
Central Operations Office
Selworthy Special School
Hazelbrook Campus
Lyngford Road
Taunton
Somerset
TA2 8HD

7. How long did the consultation run?

Consultation opened	Wednesday 23 September 2026
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Consultation closed	Monday 19 October 2026
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8. How many responses were received and what did people think?

The consultation on the proposal for Willow Set Pre-School to become part of Stoke St Gregory C of E Primary School and The Oak Partnership Trust received 23 responses. Responses came from a range of stakeholders including parents, local-residents, staff, governors, church representatives, local authority, business owners and members of the Willow Set management structure.

These were the questions within the consultation.

1. Do you support the proposal for Willow Set Pre-School to become part of Stoke St Gregory C of E Primary School and The Oak Partnership Trust?
2. What do you consider to be the main benefits of the proposal?
3. Do you have any concerns about the proposal?
4. Are there any issues that you believe the Trust should consider before making its final decision?
5. Are there alternative approaches that you believe should be considered?
6. Do you believe the proposal could have any unintended consequences for children, families, staff or the wider community?
7. Are there any equality, accessibility or inclusion implications that you believe should be considered?
8. Do you have any other comments about the proposal?

Overall Level of Support

Do you support the proposal?	Number	Percentage
Yes	18	82%
No	4	18%
Total	22	100%
Respondent 23 requested via letter that the consultation be paused.		

A clear majority of respondents supported the proposal. Support was particularly strong amongst parents, staff, local- residents, local authority and church representatives. The objections raised were largely focused on specific concerns rather than opposition to the principle of closer integration itself.

Key Benefits Identified

Several themes emerged consistently from those supporting the proposal.

1. Improved Governance, Oversight and Management

This was the most commonly cited benefit.

Respondents referred to:

- Stronger governance arrangements.
- Professional leadership and management.
- Better financial oversight and controls.
- Increased accountability.
- Robust HR support and employment procedures.
- Reduced reliance on volunteers to manage a complex organisation.

Many felt that Trust involvement would provide systems, expertise and oversight that a small independent pre-school may struggle to sustain alone.

Typical comments

- "Moving to a professional management and governance structure."
- "Financial oversight and controls."
- "Proper support and HR in place."
- "Improved governance and accountability."

2. Greater Stability and Long-Term Sustainability

Many respondents viewed Trust membership as a way of securing the future viability of Willow Set.

Key themes included:

- Organisational stability.
- Protection following recent operational challenges.
- Stronger financial sustainability.
- Improved resilience.
- Access to central resources and support services.

Several respondents stated that joining the Trust would protect an important village asset for future generations.

3. Stronger Links Between Pre-School and Primary School

Respondents frequently referenced the educational benefits of aligning the pre-school and primary school.

Perceived benefits included:

- Smoother transition into Reception.
- Greater continuity for children and families.
- Better curriculum alignment.
- Stronger relationships between staff teams.
- Increased likelihood of children continuing into Stoke St Gregory Primary School.

This was seen as particularly valuable for a small rural community.

4. Access to Resources, Training and Expertise

Respondents believed Trust membership would provide:

- Access to wider professional expertise.
- Staff training and development opportunities.
- Shared good practice.

- Additional resources.
- Better operational support.

Several responses suggested that staff would benefit significantly from being part of a larger organisation.

Principal Concerns Raised

Although support was strong, respondents identified a number of issues that they would like the Trust to consider.

1. Loss of Under-Two Provision

This was the most significant operational concern raised.

Several parents expressed concern that the pre-school currently begins at age two and no longer provides places for children aged nine months to two years.

Concerns included:

- Limited local childcare options.
- Impact on parents returning to work.
- Potential loss of families from the setting.
- Reduced continuity from infancy through primary education.

A number of respondents encouraged the Trust to explore reinstating provision for children from nine months or one year old in the future.

2. Affordability and Charging Structure

Some respondents wanted greater clarity regarding:

- Future fees.
- Funding arrangements.
- Pricing structures.
- Potential future cost increases.

One respondent specifically stated that support for the proposal would be affected if charges increased significantly.

3. Retaining the Existing Ethos

Several respondents highlighted the importance of preserving:

- The caring nature of the pre-school.
- Relationships with local families.
- Local staff employment.
- Community identity.

- Existing inclusive practices.

Supporters generally welcomed the proposal but did not want the setting to become overly corporate or lose its village character.

4. Confidentiality and Professional Conduct

One respondent raised concerns about:

- Confidentiality of information relating to children and families.
- Professional boundaries.
- Gossip and hearsay within the local community.

The respondent believed the new arrangements could provide an opportunity for a “fresh start” and stronger professional standards.

5. Continuation of Extended Services

One respondent highlighted uncertainty about:

- Wraparound childcare.
- Holiday club provision.

The respondent indicated support would depend upon these services continuing under the new arrangements.

6. Governance and Historical Concerns

Two respondents raised extensive concerns regarding:

- Previous financial management.
- Previous alleged financial irregularities.
- Previous governance accountability.
- Concerns about historical HR issues.

These respondents argued that greater transparency and accountability should be demonstrated before any merger proceeds. They suggested further investigation or review of historic governance matters. One respondent wrote a letter asking for the current consultation to be paused as well as any proposed transfer until assurances on historic matters have been sought.

Equality, Accessibility and Inclusion

Very few respondents identified significant equality concerns.

Where comments were made, they focused on ensuring:

- Affordable access for all families.
- Continued inclusion of children with SEND.
- Support for vulnerable families.
- Fair treatment of staff.

- Retention of existing inclusive practices.

Overall, there was no widespread view that the proposal would have negative equality or inclusion impacts.

Unintended Consequences Identified

The most commonly mentioned potential unintended consequences were:

- Loss of under-two provision.
- Increased costs for families.
- Reduction in wraparound services.
- Staff morale issues if change is poorly managed.
- Disruption to community confidence if governance concerns remain unresolved.
- Loss of the pre-school's distinctive community ethos.

Most supporters stated that these risks could be avoided through effective implementation and communication.

Stakeholder Perspectives

Staff and Governors

Generally, strongly supportive, citing professional support, HR expertise, governance and organisational stability.

Parents

Largely supportive, particularly regarding transition into primary education and organisational stability. Main concerns centred on childcare provision for younger children, fees and retention of services.

Church Representatives

Strongly supportive, citing benefits for the long-term viability of both the pre-school and village school and improved continuity of education.

Local Authority

Supportive and no concerns raised.

Local Residents

Mostly supportive, recognising benefits from improved governance and sustainability. Some residents raised concerns about historic governance and financial matters. One resident asked for the consultation process to be paused; another response asked for it to progress as soon as possible.

Executive Summary

The consultation demonstrates substantial support for the proposal.

The strongest themes in favour were:

- Improved governance and accountability.
- Better leadership and management support.

- Greater organisational stability and sustainability.
- Stronger links between pre-school and primary education.
- Increased access to expertise, resources and staff development.

The principal areas requiring attention before implementation are:

- Clarifying future childcare provision, particularly for children under two.
- Providing reassurance regarding fees and affordability.
- Confirming arrangements for wraparound and holiday provision.
- Maintaining Willow Set's community ethos and inclusive culture.
- Governance matters and ensuring transparency going forward.

9. Decision

Having reviewed the comments received, I remain satisfied that the proposal should proceed. The concerns raised relate primarily to matters that will be addressed through project and implementation planning and were already identified and assessed during due diligence. Furthermore, assurances regarding financial and governance matters, both current and historic, have been obtained through the thorough due diligence process which has involved communication with external agencies.

Mr I Robinson

The Oak Partnership Trust