

LOWERING THE AGE RANGE OF WHITEHEATH INFANT AND NURSERY SCHOOL

Committee name	Children, Families & Education Select Committee
Officer reporting	Kathryn Angelini, Assistant Director for Education
Papers with report	Consultation responses
Ward	Ruislip

HEADLINES

The proposal is to change the age range of Whiteheath Infant and Nursery School from 3-11 to 2-11, so they can provide places for eligible two-year-old children. This change would take effect at the school no later than September 2026. The governing body of the school has agreed for this proposal to be made.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee note the proposal and consultation taken place; and submit any comments to Cabinet, who will consider this at their meeting on 15 January 2026.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Early years entitlements for two-year-olds

From the term after their second birthday, children can access up to 15 hours of funded childcare, if they meet the following criteria:

- Are receiving an eligible benefit eg Income Support, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance

Or

- Are looked after by a local authority
- Have an Education, Health and Care Plan
- Get Disability Living Allowance
- Have left care under an adoption order, special guardianship order or a child arrangements order

Full eligibility criteria can be found [here](#). This is referred to as the Families Receiving Additional Support (FRAS) eligibility criteria.

From April 2024, the 'working families' entitlement was also introduced which further expanded the number of two-year-olds who are eligible for funded childcare.

The Department for Education projected that, following the expansion of eligibility for funded childcare from April 2024, an additional 955 two-year-old children in Hillingdon would access

funded hours each term. In practice, demand has exceeded these estimates: in Hillingdon, 1,121 additional two-year-olds accessed funded hours during the Autumn term 2025 alone. This demonstrates a significantly higher uptake than anticipated and highlights the pressing need to increase local capacity for early years provision.

Overall, the local childcare market has been able to meet demand for places under the working families entitlement. However, there remain areas within the borough where provision is insufficient, either for the disadvantaged two-year-old entitlement, the working families entitlement, or both. These gaps highlight the need for targeted action to ensure equitable access to funded childcare across all communities.

There is a lack of childcare in Ruislip Ward for both of the early years entitlements for two-year-olds, as demonstrated in the '**Resident benefit and consultation**' section of this report.

Financial Implications

There are no anticipated financial implications for the local authority arising from this proposal. Prior to recommending the change to the age range at Whiteheath Infant and Nursery School, the school was required to submit a financial forecast outlining projected costs and income associated with providing places for two-year-olds. This exercise ensured that the governing body fully understands the financial responsibilities and sustainability of the proposed provision.

RESIDENT BENEFIT

The benefit or impact upon Hillingdon residents, service users and communities

The proposed change will enable Whiteheath Infant and Nursery School to offer additional nursery places for eligible two-year-olds, thereby improving access to funded childcare for families in Hillingdon. Analysis of local provision indicates a clear unmet need for places in the area surrounding the school.

Disadvantaged Two-Year-Old Entitlement

Data shows significant gaps in provision for disadvantaged families:

- In Ruislip Ward, 14 two-year-olds are eligible under this entitlement, yet only five are currently accessing a place.
- Across Ruislip, Ruislip Manor, and South Ruislip Wards, 55 children meet the criteria, but only 26 are accessing a place.

This suggests that existing childcare provision is insufficient to meet demand.

Working Families Entitlement

Eligibility for this entitlement requires parents to obtain an HMRC-issued code, which must be validated by a childcare provider when a place is secured. Local authority data highlights further unmet need:

- In Ruislip Ward, 83 families are eligible, yet only 64 two-year-olds accessed a place in the Autumn term 2025.
- Across Ruislip, Ruislip Manor, and South Ruislip Wards, 284 families are eligible, but only 225 children are accessing a place.

These figures indicate that eligible families are struggling to secure funded childcare places.

By lowering its age range, Whiteheath Infant and Nursery School will be able to offer additional places for two-year-olds, increasing childcare options for families in Ruislip and surrounding wards and helping to address the current shortfall in provision.

Consultation & Engagement carried out

Consultation on this proposal was held from 27 October to 1 December 2025. There were 59 responses to the consultation and the feedback was as follows:

Do you agree with the proposal to lower the age range of Whiteheath Infant and Nursery School from 3-11 to 2-11 years of age?

Yes	31	(53%)
No	25	(43%)
Don't know	1	(2%)
Blank	1	(2%)

Of parents at the school, the response to the question ***Do you agree with the proposal to lower the age range of Whiteheath Infant and Nursery School from 3-11 to 2-11 years of age?*** was:

Yes	13	(93%)
No	1	(7%)

Do you think this proposal will disadvantage any residents in Hillingdon?

Yes	17	(29%)
No	31	(53%)
Don't know	10	(17%)

Whiteheath Infant and Nursery School have assessed the interest from parents with children at the school and 73% have said that they would be interested in using the provision for two-year-olds, if it is available. This showed that most parents who responded would have used the provision.

In terms of the comments received from the consultations, the following issues were raised:

Ability of schools to provide a suitable environment for two-year-olds

- **Developmental concerns:** Several respondents indicated that children aged two might be too young to begin school. They emphasized the importance of emotional, social, and physical development at this age, which could potentially be hindered by a structured school environment.
- **Emotional and social well-being** - several respondents stressed the emotional and social needs of 2-year-olds, noting that they require substantial emotional support, consistent nurturing, and a secure environment to flourish. There was concern that schools might not offer the necessary emotional care, potentially leading to stress and anxiety for the children.

- **Reduced specialisation in early years care:** Nurseries and childminders provide environments specifically designed for the developmental needs of 2-year-olds. Placing two-year-olds in primary schools that are not tailored to their developmental stage might result in developmental delays and challenges for families relying on specialised early years education.
- **The care needs of two-year-olds:** Respondents noted that primary schools might lack the necessary resources and trained personnel to address the specific needs of toddlers, including toilet training and sleep schedules.
- **Impact on existing early years education:** There were concerns about possible disruptions to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) system, designed for children under 5. Respondents felt that integrating two-year-olds into a more formal primary school setting might interfere with this critical period focused on learning through play.

Local authority response to the consultation:

The school has developed a comprehensive plan for delivering places for two-year-olds, recognising that the care, emotional well-being, and learning needs of this age group differ significantly from those of older children currently enrolled. To support this, the school has designed an environment specifically tailored to meet the developmental needs of two-year-olds, ensuring it is safe, nurturing, and conducive to early learning.

In addition, the school will receive ongoing support from the Early Years Quality Improvement Team, both prior to implementation and after places are offered, to ensure high standards of provision and continuous improvement.

Impact of these proposals on existing childcare settings

- **Business and practical concerns:** Some respondents pointed out potential negative effects on private nurseries, which might struggle to remain operational without the attendance of two-year-olds. Respondents mentioned that lowering the age for primary school admission to include two-year-olds could result in the closure of childminders, private nurseries, and reduced availability of childcare options. Additionally, there were concerns about the overall sustainability of the private sector.
- **Impact on existing early years providers:** It is possible that this change could affect local nurseries, pre-schools, and childminders, possibly leading to closures or reduced enrolment in these settings. This shift might impact the early years sector in the borough, affecting the availability and quality of childcare options for local families.

Local authority response to the consultation:

In meeting its statutory duties to ensure sufficiency of childcare, as far as is reasonably practicable, the local authority wants there to be a range of different childcare options available. This gives parents choice for childcare that meets their needs.

With the expansion of funded childcare since April 2024, there has been a large increase in the number of children who are eligible to receive funded childcare. Though many parents in Hillingdon have been able to find a childcare place, a smaller proportion of disadvantaged two-

year-olds are taking up a place, compared to the last few years. Take up by these children in the Ward in which this school is located, and other Wards in Ruislip, is relatively low, suggesting that it may be difficult for these parents to find funded childcare.

For the 'working parents' entitlement' for two-year-olds, in Ruislip, Ruislip Manor and South Ruislip Wards, there are a significant number of parents who have been confirmed as eligible to use funded childcare but are not accessing funded hours. This suggests that these parents may not have been able to find funded childcare which is appropriate for their circumstances.

From September 2025, the 'working parents' entitlement' expanded further, so that the number of funded hours that eligible children can receive has increased from 15 to 30 hours a week, from the term after they are nine months old. The expansion of the eligibility for the early years entitlement has led to an increase in the demand for childcare from parents.

Enabling the school to offer childcare for two-year-olds will help to address a potential shortfall in places, when more parents wish to use funded childcare. Existing childcare provision plays an important role in ensuring that parents have choices to use a range of different types of childcare. Though it is understandable that existing childcare settings would be concerned about additional competition, the school is offering a different model of childcare to most other group childcare settings e.g. open for term time only.

In terms of primary schools not offering flexible hours, they do offer parents a different choice than most other childcare provisions in the borough. With the reduction in the number of playgroups, there are fewer settings that are set up to offer part time, term time only places and this is the type of childcare that schools can provide. School nursery provision is not statutory and so parents have a choice about whether they use it or not. Where parents need full daycare, they can receive additional support from registered childminders, many of whom already drop off and pick up from schools in Hillingdon.

An Equalities Impact Assessment was not considered necessary for this proposal because its purpose is to increase access to early years provision for two-year-olds, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, rather than restrict or reduce access.

Additional comments received highlighted the following:

Parental Support: Numerous comments highlight the advantages of the proposal for parents, including children being able to start school nursery earlier, in a safe and nurturing environment. There was also feedback that this proposal would support working parents and provide continuity of care for children from ages two to seven, at the same school. There was some feedback that the proposal would be beneficial for the local community.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Finance have reviewed this report and concur with the Financial Implications set out above, noting there are no direct financial implications associated with the recommendation within this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The process for making prescribed alterations is governed by the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 as well as the statutory guidance, Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools August 2025. Local authorities and governing bodies must adhere to this guidance unless there is a compelling reason not to do so. There are no legal impediments to the recommendations within the report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.

APPENDICES

Responses to the consultation on the proposal to lower the age range of Whiteheath Infant and Nursery School