

PROPOSAL TO LOWER THE AGE RANGE OF WHITEHEATH INFANT AND NURSERY SCHOOL, RUISLIP

Cabinet Member & Portfolio	Clr Susan O'Brien, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education
Responsible Officer	Abi Preston, Director of Education and SEND
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Papers with report	Responses from consultation on proposal, carried out from 27 October to 1 December 2025

HEADLINES

Summary	<p>It is proposed that the age range at Whiteheath Infant and Nursery School be amended from 3–11 years to 2–11 years, enabling the school to offer places for eligible two-year-old children. Subject to approval, this change would be implemented no later than September 2026. The school's governing body has formally agreed to put forward this proposal.</p>
Putting our Residents First	<p>This report supports our ambition for residents / the Council of: Have opportunities to earn an income that supports their families</p>
Delivering on the Council Strategy 2022-2026	<p>This report supports our commitments to residents of: A Thriving Economy</p>
Financial Cost	<p>There are no direct costs to the Council associated with approving this proposal. The school may seek early years capital funding from the Department for Education through a separate funding stream. However, approval of this proposal is not contingent upon the allocation of such funding.</p>
Select Committee	Children, Families and Education Select Committee.
Ward(s)	This report relates mainly to Ruislip Ward, though children from neighbouring Wards may also benefit from the proposal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Cabinet:

- 1) **Duly considers the outcome of the consultation and responses received;**
- 2) **Agrees that the age range of Whiteheath Infant and Nursery School be changed from 3-11 to 2-11 years.**

Reasons for recommendation

The recommendation to amend the age range at Whiteheath Infant and Nursery School from 3–11 years to 2–11 years is being made in response to the growing demand for funded early education and childcare places. This need has increased significantly following the national expansion of eligibility for two-year-olds to access funded provision. By extending the age range, the school will be able to support local families, improve access to high-quality early years education, and contribute to meeting statutory duties around sufficiency of childcare.

Alternative options considered / risk management

Alternative Options

1. **Maintain the Current Age Range (3–11 years):** Keep the existing structure without introducing provision for two-year-olds.
 - **Implications:**
 - No additional compliance or statutory processes required.
 - Avoids potential operational challenges such as staffing for younger age groups.
 - Does not address the growing demand for funded early education places for two-year-olds.
2. **Establish a Separate Early Years Unit:** Create a standalone early years provision on or near the school site, managed independently or as part of a federation.

Implications:

- Allows targeted early years expertise without altering the main school's age range.
- Will require additional funding and governance arrangements.
- Offers flexibility for future expansion.

Risk Management

One potential risk of implementing this proposal is that expanding provision for two-year-olds within schools could negatively impact the sustainability of other local childcare providers. However, this risk is considered minimal for the following reasons:

- **Limited Scale of Provision:** The school will offer only a small number of places for two-year-olds.
- **Unmet Local Demand:** An assessment of parental demand in the area surrounding Whiteheath Infant and Nursery School has identified a shortfall in available childcare places, which is not currently met by existing providers.
- **Distinctive Childcare Model:** The school's offer differs significantly from that of many local providers. For example:

- Places will align with the school day rather than extended hours (e.g., 8:00 am – 6:00 pm).
- Provision will be term-time only, whereas many childcare settings operate year-round.

These differences significantly reduce the likelihood of direct competition with existing providers.

Democratic compliance / previous authority

Cabinet authority is required to agree school organisation changes where there are objections.

Select Committee comments

None at this stage.

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 e.g. 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 & CONSULTATION

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. 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. The change does not alter eligibility criteria or introduce barriers for any group with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. Furthermore, as part of the public consultation, respondents were specifically asked whether they believed the proposal would disadvantage any residents. No concerns were raised indicating adverse impacts on individuals with protected characteristics.

Analysis of local provision indicates that whilst there are places available for children, families are not taking up these places suggesting the range of provision available is not broad enough in the area surrounding the school.

It is important to note that it is not solely a matter of having sufficient places; provision must also be accessible and appropriate. This means locations should be within reasonable walking distance for families and offer a delivery model that aligns with their needs, for example, mirroring the structure of a school day for families with older children attending the school to facilitate easier school pick up/ drop off.

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.

Historical data for these areas suggest that take up of places by disadvantaged two-year-olds is generally higher than this. Take up is lower now partly because a greater proportion of funded childcare places are being offered to parents eligible for the Working Families entitlement, making it more difficult for disadvantaged children to access a place. Enabling Whiteheath Infant and Nursery School to take disadvantaged two-year-olds will help these children to access social and educational opportunities, which they may otherwise miss out on and support their learning and development.

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.

Data on potential take-up of places is derived from HMRC eligibility codes provided by the Department for Education to local authorities. This information indicates that among parents confirmed as eligible, the proportion who go on to access childcare is very high. For example, in the Ruislip area last term, over 90% of parents who received a code opted to use funded childcare. This demonstrates strong demand; however, as these families secure places, availability for parents whose children become eligible next term inevitably reduces.

These figures indicate that eligible families are struggling to secure funded childcare places which are appropriate to their needs.

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 and range 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:

1. Overall Support and Parental Interest

The consultation shows a majority of respondents (53%) support the proposal, with particularly strong support from parents at the school (93%). Additionally, 73% of parents expressed interest in using provision for two-year-olds. This indicates clear demand and alignment with the Council's objective to expand access to funded early education.

2. Addressing Developmental and Emotional Concerns

We acknowledge concerns about the suitability of a school environment for two-year-olds. The proposed provision will be delivered in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework, ensuring a play-based, nurturing approach. Dedicated early years practitioners will provide consistent emotional support and care tailored to the developmental needs of younger children.

3. Specialist Early Years Care

The school will adapt its environment to meet the needs of two-year-olds, including age-appropriate resources and spaces. Staff will receive specialist training in early years pedagogy and care, ensuring continuity with best practice standards found in nurseries and childminder settings.

4. Care Needs and Practical Arrangements

Provision will include facilities and routines suitable for two-year-olds, such as toilet training support and rest areas. Staffing ratios will comply with statutory requirements, and the school will work closely with families to accommodate individual needs.

5. Impact on EYFS and Quality of Education

The proposal will strengthen EYFS delivery by integrating two-year-olds into a high-quality early years setting within the school, maintaining the emphasis on learning through play. This approach is consistent with national guidance and will not compromise the developmental priorities of the EYFS stage.

6. Mitigating Disadvantage

While 29% of respondents expressed concern about potential disadvantage, the Council will ensure equitable access by prioritising local families and maintaining transparent admissions criteria. Provision will be designed to complement existing early years services rather than displace them.

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.

Impact of these proposals on existing childcare settings

We recognise that introducing provision for two-year-olds within the school may raise concerns among local nurseries and childminders regarding potential reductions in demand. However, the proposal is designed to complement existing early years provision rather than replace it. The school will offer a limited number of places targeted at families who would benefit from a school-based model, such as those with older siblings already attending the setting. This approach helps meet specific needs without undermining the wider childcare market.

Parents will continue to have the option to use local nurseries, childminders, or other early years settings. The Council remains committed to supporting a diverse childcare sector to ensure families can choose the setting that best suits their circumstances. We will monitor the impact on local providers through regular engagement and data analysis. If evidence suggests significant disruption, the Council will work with providers to mitigate effects, including signposting families to alternative settings and supporting business sustainability initiatives.

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.

CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate Finance

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

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