

Statutory Consultation Report

Proposed Changes to Wadham School in the Academic Year 2025/26

Background

Wadham School is a voluntary-controlled secondary school located at Yeovil Road in Crewkerne catering for around 800 pupils.

In partnership with the governing body of the school, Somerset Council proposed two significant changes to the school to come into effect from September 2025.

The two changes proposed were:

- (1) The creation of an onsite Special Educational Needs (SEN) Unit for six local children that have an Education, Health and Care Plan whose needs cannot be met within a mainstream classroom.
- (2) A reduction in the school's age range from 11 to 18 to 11 to 16, resulting in the closure of the school's sixth form provision.

Somerset Council and the governors of Wadham School believed that both of these changes would better respond to the needs of children and young people who live in the school's locality.

This report explains the consultation undertaken, and summarises the feedback received.

Proposal One: New SEN Unit for Local Children

What is an SEN unit?

An SEN unit is a separate classroom and facilities within a school setting for children that have special educational needs that cannot be met within mainstream classes.

By educating these children within a small specialist environment that has been designed to meet their needs, it is much more likely that their educational potential will be realised.

Why is an SEN unit needed?

There is currently a shortfall of specialist education places in the county. Most of the existing special schools, autism bases and SEN units are already full to capacity. As a result of this, Somerset Council is currently having to purchase high-cost placements from schools in the independent and non-maintained sector. These schools often require children to travel long distances from home.

Somerset Council's ambition is to open a number of new SEN units around the county on mainstream school sites, enabling children with SEN to attend their local school. The Council will be refurbishing and equipping existing rooms within school sites that are not required for the delivery of mainstream provision.

Wadham School will be one of the first to benefit from the new provision.

Who will the new school places cater for?

The SEN unit will cater for children that have education, health and care plans that set out their social, emotional and mental health needs. 'Emotionally-based school avoidance' is a term used to describe children and young people who experience challenges in attending mainstream school due to negative feelings such as anxiety, and who would benefit from a specialist teaching environment.

How many children will attend the SEN unit, and how will places be allocated?

There are likely to be six to eight children educated in the SEN unit at any one time.

Places will be allocated by Somerset Council's Statutory SEND service in consultation with staff at the school. Children placed at the SEN unit will be local children from the South Somerset locality.

Will school transport be provided to children attending the new SEN unit?

Yes, if they qualify under Somerset Council's published school transport policy, a copy of which is available to read or download at:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/children-families-and-education/the-local-offer/education/school-travel-assistance-and-special-educational-needs-and-or-disabilities-send/>

Who will run the new SEN unit?

A range of specialist staff will be deployed to meet the needs of students, and the unit will be run by existing school staff already responsible for the successful Alternative Provision unit on site.

How will the new SEN unit be funded?

The Council received capital funding from government to increase the number of 'high needs' places. Further details are available from this website -

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/children-families-and-education/the-local-offer/education/high-needs-provision-capital-allocation-somerset-plan/>

Somerset Council will provide the school with the necessary capital funding to refurbish and equip an unused room to create the SEN unit. The cost is expected to be in the region of £75k.

When the new unit is open, the school will also receive high needs revenue funding for each of the six new places which will cover the unit's ongoing operating costs.

Will the arrangement affect other schools in the area?

It is unlikely that other state-funded schools will be affected as there are so few vacancies at special schools in the county.

When will the SEN unit open?

The SEN unit will open in the 2025/26 academic year. Pupils are likely to be admitted to the unit in September 2025, November 2025 or January 2026.

Proposal Two: Reduction of the School's Age Range, and Closure of the Sixth Form

What does a reduction of the School's Age Range mean?

The current age range of Wadham School is **11 to 18**, which includes provision for sixth-form students. Under the proposed changes, this will be reduced to **11 to 16**, meaning the sixth form will be closed and the school will no longer offer post-16 education on site.

Why is the Sixth Form being proposed to close?

Wadham School has experienced a steady and persistent decline in sixth form enrolment over the past 15+ years. Despite efforts to revitalise the provision—including research into a vocationally aligned 'pathway offer' and strong CEIAG (Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance) from Year 8—the sixth form has remained unviable. The school has actively supported students in accessing alternative post-16 providers through assemblies, workshops, and college visits.

What other Further Education is available in the area?

If Wadham School's sixth form is closed, students in the area will still have access to a wide range of post-16 education and training options. These include both academic and vocational pathways:

A-Level Providers

- Richard Huish College
- Bridgwater and Taunton College
- Exeter College
- Strode College
- Yeovil College

- Holyrood Sixth Form
- Beaminster School

Vocational and Further Education Providers

- Kingston Maurward College
- Bicton College
- SPACE
- Yeovil Town Football Club

What will happen to the resources such as rooms and teaching staff for the sixth form?

If the proposal to close the sixth form is approved, the space currently used for post-16 provision will be repurposed to support the school's 11–16 curriculum. This may include general teaching classrooms, intervention spaces, or facilities for inclusion and SEND support. The reallocation of this space will help accommodate an increase in the school's overall capacity. Teaching staff currently delivering sixth form subjects will be supported through a formal HR process, which may include redeployment to Key Stage 3 and 4 teaching roles or support in securing alternative employment within the education sector. The school and Somerset Council are committed to managing this transition sensitively and in consultation with affected staff.

When will the sixth form close?

The Sixth form will close at the end of the 2024/25 academic year.

Stakeholder Consultation

Why was the consultation necessary?

When considering a proposal of this nature, Somerset Council and the school both wanted to find out what local stakeholders thought about the proposed new SEN unit.

It is also a requirement of the DFE's 'Making Significant Changes ('Prescribed Alterations') To Maintained Schools' guidance to run a statutory consultation.

When did the consultation take place?

The consultation period ran from Monday 09 June to Monday 07 July 2025 inclusive. The closing date was Monday 07 July 2025.

How could people find out about the consultation?

The consultation was publicised in three ways:

- An article was uploaded to the school's website, along with a downloadable copy of the statutory proposal;
- A notice was placed on the school grounds directing people to the website
- An advert was placed in the local newspaper (the Western Gazette) that directed people to the website

Where could people read the statutory proposals?

The statutory proposal document was hosted on the school's website, and was available to download.

What did the statutory proposal document set out?

The proposal document outlined the proposed new SEN unit, and reduction of the age range at Wadham School, and how people could provide their views.

What feedback was being requested in the consultation?

Somerset Council wanted to know whether people would support the proposals, and whether stakeholders had any specific feedback they would wish to be considered.

How could people provide their feedback?

The statutory proposal provided a website link and a QR code, both of which took people to a questionnaire on MS Forms.

What did the questionnaire ask?

The questionnaire asked the following three questions:

(1) *Do you support the proposal to create a new SEN unit for local children on the school site?*

There were three options that could be selected:

- Yes, I would support this proposal
- No, I would not support this proposal
- I am undecided

(2) *Do you have any comments to make on the proposal to create a new SEN unit?*

A free text box was provided.

(3) *Do you support proposal two to lower the school's age range, and the removal of its sixth form provision?*

There were three options that could be selected:

- Yes, I would support this proposal
- No, I would not support this proposal
- I am undecided

(4) *Do you have any comments to make on the proposal to lower the school's age range, and the removal of its sixth form provision?*

A free text box was provided.

(5) *Are you an individual or do you represent an organisation?*

If a respondent said they were an individual, they were asked how they would describe themselves.

There were four options that could be selected:

- I am the parent or carer of a child currently on roll at the school
- I am the parent or carer of a child currently on roll at another school
- I am a neighbour / local resident
- Other

If a respondent said they were representing an organisation, they were asked to state the name of the organisation.

Who could respond to this consultation?

Although Somerset Council particularly wanted to hear from stakeholders likely to be affected by the proposal, or people with an interest in education provision in the area, any member of the public or organisation was welcome to submit their comments.

What happened if someone required require additional information before providing their feedback?

The statutory consultation proposal advised people to contact the school if they required any additional information. Alternatively, if they had any questions for Somerset Council, a named officer was identified, and contact details provided.

Stakeholder Feedback

How many people responded to the consultation?

On this occasion, there were 47 responses to the consultation.

Who responded to the consultation?

Of the 47 respondents:

- 43 were individuals
- 4 responses were on behalf of organisations.

The organisations were Wadham School (x3) and Beaminster School

Of the 47 respondents:

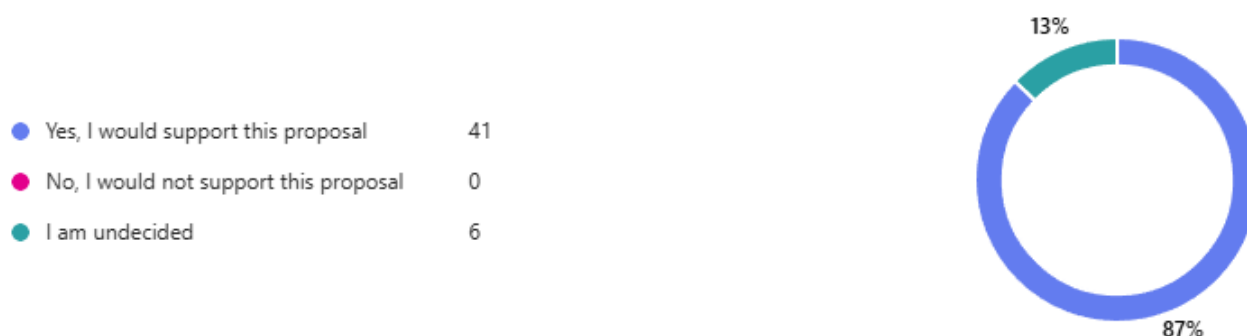
- 22 people were parents of carers of a child currently on roll at Wadham
- 1 person was a parent of a child currently on roll at another school
- 4 people were neighbours or local residents
- 16 people were 'other'
- 4 people did not answer this question

Stakeholder Feedback on the SEN Unit

How many people supported the proposal to create an SEN Unit?

As can be seen from the graphic below, there was strong support for this proposal.

1. Do you support proposal one to create a new SEN unit for local children on the school site?



How many comments were received concerning the SEN unit proposal?

19 respondents provided their comments, many of whom regarded the SEN unit as a positive and much-needed development for the school and local area. It was seen as a step towards greater inclusivity, and better support for diverse learning needs.

Some of the comments were:

- *“This is a good move for the area and the school. This will be supportive of the schools progressed.”*
- *“This is a much needed resource, and one that Wadham School is well positioned to provide.”*
- *“I feel this will be a huge benefit for families in the local area.”*
- *“I feel that this is great opportunity to enable Wadham more inclusive and sensitive to individual needs.”*
- *“I think this is a great opportunity.”*

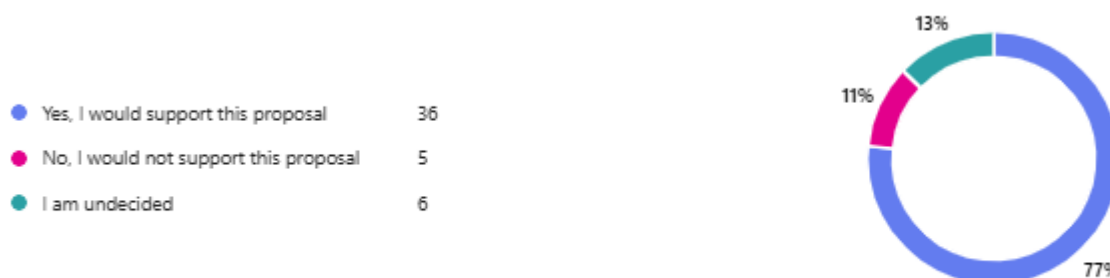
There were some concerns about whether the school has sufficient space and staffing to support the unit; its impact on the school’s existing Alternative Provision offer, and whether resources might become stretched.

Two people suggested that other local facilities in South Somerset should be prioritised or better utilised. One person felt the unit should support not just EHCP holders, but also those with unmet or emerging needs, and another felt there should be additional places provided.

Stakeholder Feedback on the Lowering of the School's Age Range

How many people supported the proposal to lower the school's age range, and the removal of its sixth form provision?

As can be seen from the graph below, there was strong support for this proposal.



How many comments were received regarding the change of age range and closing the Sixth form?

There were 27 responses to the proposal, which were as follows, which have been summarised into themes below:

Supportive of Closure

- *“Money saved, staff time and space can give Wadham a better y7-11 focus. This is overdue.”*
- *“The 6th form has been failing for many years with limited numbers and it’s very surprising that it is still open.”*
- *“I think that this is a good idea as there are lots of other alternatives that school leavers can access and changing setting is perhaps better preparation for entering the workplace or going to university.”*

Concerned About Impact

- *“Crewkerne doesn’t even have a regular hourly bus service to Yeovil let alone a bus to Taunton. I am sure for many family’s the financial impact of this will result in children failing to meet their full potential.”*
- *“Even £5 per day on the bus will be prohibitive.”*
- *“It would be a shame to lose the higher education support especially for those who struggle with large crowds.”*

Suggestions for Alternatives

- *“Could it not be the centre of excellence for one particular area or link up with Yeovil college or something so pupils could be across the two sites?”*
- *“Why aren’t you looking at why pupil numbers are low for the 6th form, rather than just closing it?”*
- *“As Beaminster School is a local school with a sixth form... we would ask that we are included under the list of A-Level Providers.”*

SEN Considerations

- *“Staying on at the same school would maybe be good for them because it wouldn’t be such a change for them.”*
- *“A SEN unit I feel would benefit the school more. As SEN units are very far between.”*

Scepticism About the Process

- *“I am skeptical about any 'consultation' involving Somerset Council, as we all know they have pre made their decisions, this is just a tick box exercise for them.”*
- *“I do think this has been the plan all along so not sure why the consultation is even required.”*

Next Steps

What happens next?

A copy of this report will be provided to the decision maker.

What will the Lead Member decide?

There are four possible options available to the decision-maker. The Lead Member can decide to:

- reject the proposals
- approve them without modification
- approve them with some modifications, or
- approve them subject to certain conditions being met.

On the basis that there were no adverse feedback to the proposal, the Lead Member will be recommended by officers to approve the proposal without modification.

Who will take the decision?

The decision will be taken by Cllr Heather Shearer in her capacity as Lead Member for Children, Families and Education.

When will the decision be taken?

The decision will be taken during August 2025.

How will the decision outcome be made available?

A copy of this consultation report will be appended to the eventual key decision paper in August 2025, which will be published online at <http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/>

Please contact Somerset Council if you require any assistance accessing the decision. The e-mail to use is Lewis.Andrews@somerset.gov.uk

The position will also be confirmed on the school’s website when the school opens in September after the summer break.