

Investing in the future for Wallingford families

Consultation update – changing the age range of St Nicholas and Fir Tree

As we move towards the end of the consultation period and next steps in developing plans for St Nicholas and Fir Tree schools, we wanted to provide an update on the feedback so far and some answers to the key questions raised.

We are very grateful to have had lots of engagement with the consultation, including at the meeting for parent and carers and through the online consultation form and inbox. It is clear that overall, there is significant support for changing the age range of the two schools, with a number of key considerations as to how the plan is implemented over the coming years.

There were 18 questions asked at the meeting, covering three broad themes. The same themes are also reflected in the online feedback received so far. We have outlined these themes and responses in the summary below.

Transition in 2026

Transition structure and consideration of opening Key Stage 1 (year 1 and 2) provision at Fir Tree in September 2026

We are keen to make transition plans with families' needs in mind as much as possible. Following this consultation period we do intend to ask families of children who will be in years 1-3 in September 2026 to indicate their preference of school. This will allow us to gauge demand and plan accordingly. While we cannot guarantee to meet all preferences due to educational, space, staffing and funding requirements, we will do our utmost to ensure the transition plan is largely based on what families have told us.

School planning and education

Timeline for the St Nicholas new building

This is due to be completed in Summer 2026 and there is contingency time built into the plans. Further contingency would depend on what causes a delay, but if, for example, one or two areas of the St Nicholas building was incomplete, we will still be able to use the current site if needed. Planning consent and funding is already in place.

Capacity in the new schools for Reception starters in September 2026 onwards

Currently, between the two schools, there are 60 Reception places available each year and all of these are at St Nicholas. In September 2026, the number of Reception places available is expected to remain at 60, with the key difference being that 30 places are available at St Nicholas and 30 are at Fir Tree. Recent birth rates do not suggest more capacity is needed, however both schools have room for expansion if needed in the future. For example, St Nicholas could offer 45 Reception places per year group in the future, if sufficient demand arises from new housing. Class structures would still be based on 30 children per class.



Admissions policies and catchment areas for September 2026

The existing joint catchment area will remain for both schools, and St Nicholas will also add the Highcroft estate. Further details will be published in the admissions consultation, which is likely to be held in November 2024-December 2024.

The admissions consultation is a process which all schools are required to undertake on a regular basis, whether there are changes to admissions or not. It determines the admissions policies and criteria for Reception starters in the new schools from September 2026 onwards. It sits independently from this change of phase consultation, which is held as part of the process required to change the age range of the schools and to inform transition arrangements for children enrolled before September 2026.

Staffing arrangements

As the number of school places available across the schools is expected to remain the same in 2026, the number of staff needed is broadly similar. Teachers have training and experience beyond the year group they currently teach, and ODST has significant experience ensuring high-quality staffing in schools, including SEND support.

Community considerations

Traffic, parking issues and safety

There are parking and access clauses within the plans, and past building projects have been successful. There is a purpose-built car park on Highcroft near the new school. One footpath has been completed and a second is due for completion in 2027. We will pass on feedback regarding safe cycling access to the relevant authority.

Plans for the current St Nicholas school site

The site will be given back to Oxfordshire County Council and will be sold. This forms part of the funding arrangements for the new school. It will not be sold while still in use as a school, and therefore there are not yet any further details on the future of the site.

Further community interest

While the purpose of this consultation is to gather feedback on changing the age range of the schools, we recognise that is community interest related to the new schools. The consultation has been circulated to local stakeholders and we welcome responses. All feedback relating to construction and areas outside the remit of this consultation will be passed to the relevant parties and authorities.

Next steps

Following this consultation period, the change of phase application will be submitted to the Department for Education, including feedback received. We will also provide a further update for you, with information about letting us know your school preferences for September 2026, if applicable.

We would encourage you to complete the consultation form or send us any further feedback before the consultation period ends on 11 October 2024

www.odst.org.uk/consultation

Thank you for your time, feedback and engagement as we move forward with this exciting project.