

Consultation Analysis

Informal consultation

Proposal to lower the age range at
Heather Ridge Infant School



Consultation Analysis

Proposal to lower the age range at Heather Ridge Infant School

Introduction

This report is an analysis of responses gathered on the proposal to lower the age range of Heather Ridge Infant School, Camberley, from 4 to 7 years to 2 to 7 years.

Surrey County Council (SCC) published a consultation on 25 February which ran until 25 March 2025.

The Department for Education's (DfE) latest guidance "*making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools*" published in March 2025, states that there is no longer a requirement for local authorities and governing bodies to follow the statutory prescribed alterations ('change of age range') process when they want to make changes to a school's age range specifically in order to add, remove or change existing nursery provision.

As a result, the decision to proceed with the proposal to lower the age range of Heather Ridge Infant School is now the remit of the school's governing body. In line with this, the consultation responses and full analysis will now be passed on to the school and governing body.

Once a decision has been made, the outcome will be published on the school's website within three months of the end date of the consultation.

Consultation Summary

The aim of the consultation was to seek views on the proposal from all interested parties, including the families of pupils who attend Heather Ridge Infant School, the families of pupils who may attend the school in the future, other local schools, early years providers, and the local community.

The consultation was published on 25 February and open until 25 March 2025. The associated documentation was published on the Surrey County Council 'Surrey Says' website and circulated to local stakeholders. Responses were invited via an online form, with the alternative of email or postal options provided.

A public meeting was held at the school on 10 March 2025.

Key points from the consultation responses:

- The majority of respondents disagreed with the proposal: 63% disagreed, 30% agreed, and 7% stated they didn't know
- 33% of all responses were from a resident living close/adjacent to the school
- Of those who disagreed with the proposal, 38% were residents living close/adjacent to the school and 16% were parents/carers of pupils currently attending the school

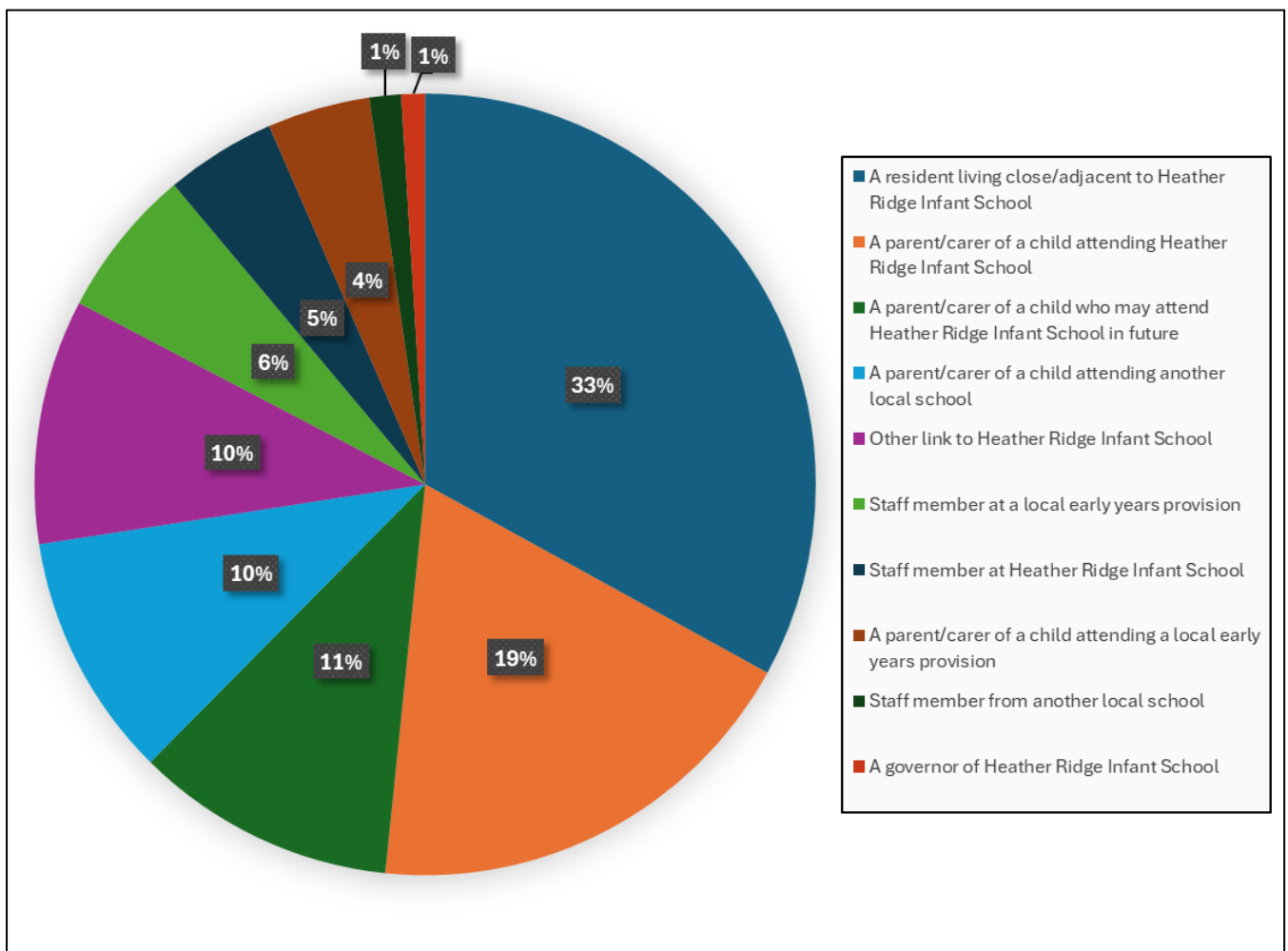
- Of those who agreed with the proposal, 27% were parents/carers of pupils currently attending the school, 20% were residents living close/adjacent to the school

Consultation Analysis

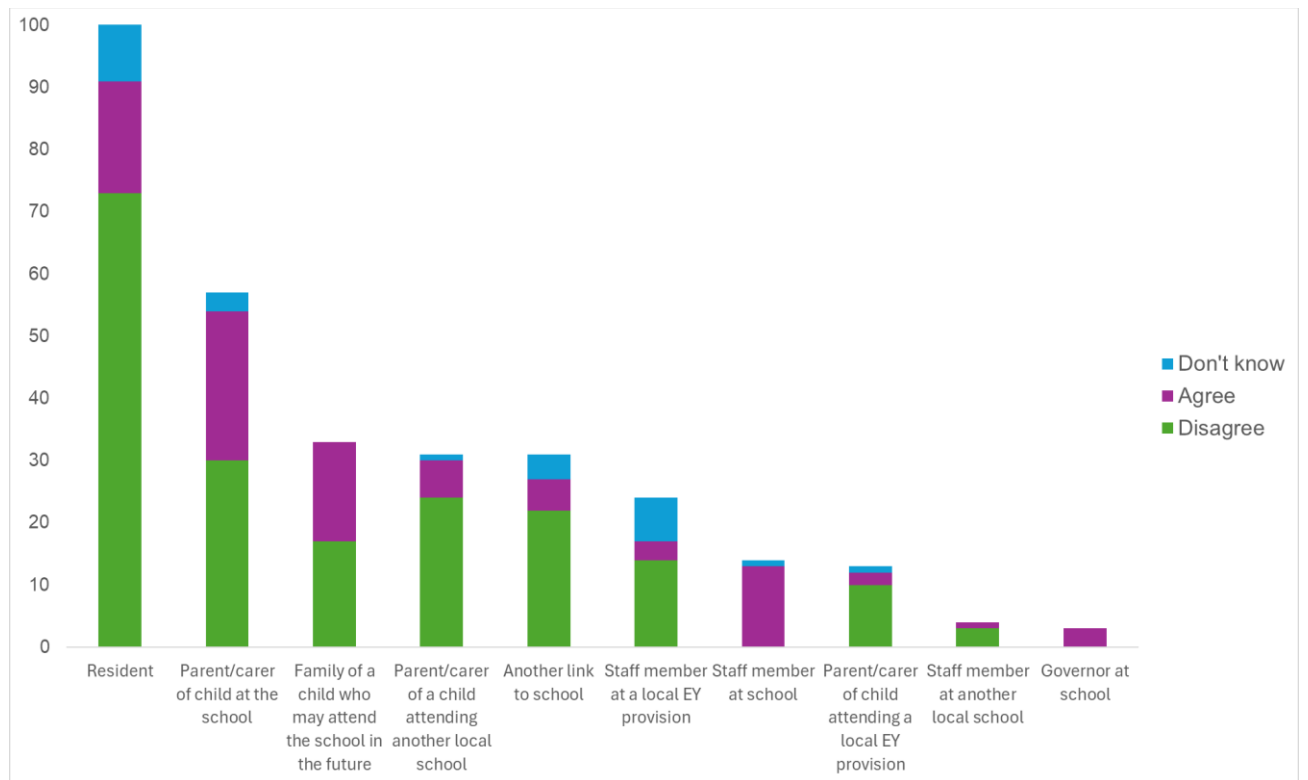
Quantitative Analysis

In total, there were 306 responses to the consultation. 63% of respondents disagreed with the proposal, 30% of respondents agreed with the proposal and 7% of respondents stated they didn't know.

All 306 respondents indicated their relationship with the school. The chart below shows the distribution of respondents to the consultation.



Percentage who agreed/disagreed/didn't know by individual groups



Respondents had the opportunity to add comments at the end of the survey. Out of the 306 responses received, 229 comments were made on the proposal. These comments were broadly themed and then separated into 22 possible tags. Each response could have more than one tag attached. The overall frequency of each of the tags provides an indicator of respondents' main concerns regarding the proposal.

Sub theme	Tag	Number of responses	Prevalence (% out of total responses)
Negatives	Impact on local preschools	129	42%
	Impact on community centre and its users	120	39%
	Insufficient demand in the area	39	13%
	Insufficient sessions to cover demand in area	19	6%
	Staffing/impact on employment	19	6%
	Traffic and parking	17	6%
	Size of the school site	9	3%
	No need for children to be in a school environment	8	3%
	Impact on the children in the school	6	2%
	Local SEND provision reputation	6	2%
	Lack of publicity of the consultation	5	2%
	Unnecessary usage of limited resources	5	2%
Positives	More local choice for parents	25	8%
	Beneficial to the community	22	7%
	Ease the transition from early years to school	15	5%
	Supporting a younger age range	12	4%
	Importance of the school within the community	9	3%
	Positive impact for the school	6	2%
	Reduce travel time for parents	6	2%
	Sustainability of the school	6	2%
	Keep families together	5	2%
	More job opportunities	2	1%
Queries & other comments		14	5%

Qualitative Analysis – key themes

Negative impacts

Respondents identified several potentially negative impacts for the proposal. Many felt there was “no need” for the inclusion of a nursery at Heather Ridge Infant School, while others felt the hours being proposed would not alleviate the struggles many families experience, given the nursery would be term-time only. A common theme cited was the potential negative impact the proposal could have on local provision, and the wider community. Some themes are closely linked and have therefore been grouped together in the following analysis.

Impact on local preschools/local provision SEND reputation

42% thought that the lowering of age range could have a “*detrimental impact*” on existing provision in the area, with many respondents specifically citing Heatherside Pre-School, based in Heatherside Community Centre which is opposite the school. 2% of comments highlighted the setting’s reputation for children with special educational needs. Respondents felt that the opening of a nursery at Heather Ridge Infant School was not necessary, given the provision already existing in the area, and its proximity to the school. Numerous respondents believed the two settings would be in “*direct competition*” and doing so would “*put the local preschool at the Community Centre in jeopardy*”. Many commented on the pre-school’s longevity and importance to the community, with one respondent describing it as “*a community staple for over 30 years*”. Several respondents were concerned about the wider implications of the proposal, feeling that if local alternative early years provisions were forced to close, Heather Ridge Infant School’s proposed nursery “*does not provide sufficient spaces to replace*” these, which would then result in a deficit of places for the area.

When referring to Heatherside Pre-school, respondents praised its “*excellent SEND provision*”, with one stating “*it is well known within the local SEND community as an amazing provider*”. Another respondent advised “*some SEN parents travel far and on public transport to reach us*” and questioned where these children would attend in the future, should the pre-school close.

“I would be distraught to see Heatherside pre-school go”

“This could impact the current pre-school provision”

“It will almost certainly end the pre-school on Heatherside”

“The consequence of this is to place Heatherside Pre-School under financial distress, risking closure”

“In local SEND groups, Heatherside Preschool is recommended repeatedly”

Impact on community centre and its users

39% of the comments related to Heatherside Community Centre. The comments were usually linked to the previous tag, given that the pre-school operates out of the community centre. Respondents relayed concern for the future of the community centre were the pre-school to close, citing its importance as a “*broad community asset*”. The wider community impact of potential closure was stressed, with many responses highlighting the range of activities conducted at the community centre. One respondent stated it provides, “*many events for all*”

age groups [...] and much needed social events for the local residents". Another respondent listed examples such as "OAP groups, ballet & karate lessons, pop up coffee shop, church groups and Scouts", and stated that the centre itself is "the heart of Heatherside and keeps the village feel to this area". Multiple responses stated categorically "this will kill the community centre".

"Please don't let us lose our wonderful community centre"

"Future of the community centre is at risk"

"Heatherside community centre must be preserved"

Insufficient demand in the area

13% of responses questioned the need for further provision in the area, and, similarly to the previous tag, there were frequent references to existing local provision. Many respondents felt, with a *"well-loved charity-run pre-school"* there is no need for a lowering of age range at Heather Ridge Infant School. One respondent felt *"no data has been provided"* to demonstrate the suggested need, and another stated there are already *"sufficient preschool places in the local area"*. One respondent cited *"the current low birth rates"* and described residents as having a *"variety of choice"*. Several responses also referenced existing local provision being undersubscribed in recent years, and felt a more strategic approach would be to work with these settings, as opposed to introducing an entirely new one.

"I do not believe there are enough children in the market"

"There are sufficient pre-school places in the local area, another setting is not required"

"Birthrate is not high enough to open another local preschool"

"I feel that the community centre pre-school fulfils our community's needs"

Insufficient sessions to cover demand in the area

6% of responses felt that, while there is demand for an alternative offering in the area, the hours being proposed are not relevant and do not suit their needs. Many felt the hours are not *"substantially different"* from those of existing local provision, with one respondent stating the proposal offers *"nothing more"*. One respondent stated, *"a lot of parents in the area need wrap around/all year longer care"*. The appetite for *"a full day nursery available outside of term time and from a younger age"* was echoed by other respondents.

"There is not a shortage of pre-school spaces. Younger spaces are required."

"The nursery won't be offering longer hours so I don't see the need"

"The lack of nursery provision is in the 9 month to 2 year old age group"

"The number of sessions provided will not cover the current requirement in the area"

Staffing/impact on employment

6% of comments expressed concerns for the staff currently employed at existing local provision. One respondent, a local childminder, expressed fears for their own business, which they felt *"could also be unsustainable were I to lose children from age 2 to school"*. Another respondent, specifically citing Heatherside Pre-School, stated a hypothetical closure of the pre-school would put *"over 11*

members of staff out of a job” and could lead to “loss of the excellent staff who work and care for the children”. Fearing the knock-on impact, another respondent felt it “would mean having to let go of staff”, thereby resulting in a loss of services at the centre.

*“These positions would be put at risk”
“Their jobs would be at risk”*

Traffic and parking

6% of comments related to traffic and parking in the local area. Several respondents voiced existing frustrations, with one stating *“the road is already very busy”* and another declared residents *“will not tolerate any additional disruption”*. One respondent was concerned that, whilst *“it doesn’t get too manic around the area”*, were the proposal to go ahead *“there will be more traffic in a small area”*. One respondent disagreed, claiming *“traffic would remain the same as it is likely the siblings of children already attending”*. Other respondents highlighted difficulty parking, with one stating *“there isn’t sufficient parking”* and another that during pickup/drop off times people *“park across the access to residents’ driveways, they have also parked on residents’ driveways, as well as block residents’ cars in”*.

*“My main concern is parking”
“I envisage even more traffic, horrendous parking”
“The traffic is already a problem in the morning and afternoon”*

Size of the school site/impact on children in the school/unnecessary usage of limited resources

3% of comments felt the size of the school site is insufficient to accommodate a nursery. A further 2% expressed concern that lowering the age range of Heather Ridge Infant School would have a detrimental impact on the school-age children on roll, and that it would not be a necessary usage of the school’s resources. One respondent stated they *“don’t believe the school has the facilities and space”* required to accommodate an on-site nursery, while another claimed *“the outdoor facilities already on site are not well looked after”*. There was concern from one respondent that *“kids aged 4-7 will get less space”*, citing *“outside space and the class sizes”* as a major factor in parents applying for Heather Ridge Infant School. Another respondent voiced similar concerns, believing *“the quality of care for 4–7-year-old children will be greatly diluted”*. One respondent stated that if the school is *“financially struggling [...] there should be a plan in place to support”*, while another claimed that the proposed lowering of age range is *“a clear waste of limited resources”*.

*“Lack of space within the current school setting”
“Lack of school skills to manage bigger population”
“The school is not very big with limited classrooms”*

No need for children to be in a school environment

3% of respondents expressed an opinion that children of the proposed age range should not be in a school setting. One respondent stated, *“it’s awful to think of children so young in a school environment”* while another believes placing

children into a school environment at such an early age could lead to them *“feeling overwhelmed”*.

“Going to school from the age of 2 is very different from the age of 4”
“I do not feel comfortable sending my child to a mainstream environment”
“Children do not need to be in a school type environment any longer than they do already”

Lack of publicity of the consultation

2% of comments voiced criticism of how the proposal has been promoted, with one observation being *“the way it’s been handled has been very quiet and not at all upfront”*. Another respondent described it as *“underhand”*. A further respondent expressed disappointment that the proposal did not make mention of existing local provision, stating *“there is no detail on this in any of the proposal text”*.

“The form sent out by the school on the Heatherside Residents Facebook page was worded as a survey”
“At the very least this consultation is flawed through lack of proper information at the worse is it unfairly weighted towards Heather ridge school”
“It seemed very bad planning to hold a consultation meeting in the afternoon”

Positive impacts

Respondents identified several potentially positive impacts of the proposal. Some were excited at the prospect of further local choice for parents, providing *“a better range of provisions to pick from”*, along with the benefits for children in the nursery transitioning to the school. Others highlighted the potential benefits to Heather Ridge Infant School, and the school’s importance within the community. Some themes are closely linked to one another and have therefore been grouped together in the following analysis.

More local choice for parents

8% of comments received exhibited enthusiasm towards the prospect of further local provision, and the introduction of an alternative option. One respondent stated there is *“high benefit to having a nursery provision provided by the school”*. Another respondent said a nursery at Heather Ridge Infant School would be *“a valuable and very much needed facility to provide funded provision for local families”*, and that many parents are *“finding early childcare difficult to access”*. Others expressed the opinion that *“the current offering locally does not cover comprehensive hours”*, and that *“with the increase of houses in the area [...] more nursery places would be needed”*.

“An option for parents that does cater for the working family is much needed in the community”
“More childcare places are required”
“I think we desperately need an alternative”

Beneficial to the community

7% of responses identified potential benefits to the community, with one stating the introduction of a nursery at Heather Ridge Infant School would *“help to provide continuous support for children in the local community”*. Other respondents stated this is an *“amazing opportunity”* for both the school and wider community, and would make for *“a wonderful addition to Heatherside”*. Another respondent declared they *“can see the benefits this will bring to our community for young families and future Surrey Heath residents”*.

“Raises the standard of education locally”

“The proposal will further help our community”

“Opening a nursery in Heather ridge would only help Heatherside as a town thrive”

Ease the transition from early years to school

5% of responses expressed the opinion that children attending a school-based nursery would *“help with transitioning”*, and those who join the school for Reception *“would already have familiarity with the setting”*. One respondent stated the opportunity to first attend an on-site nursery would *“have an immeasurable benefit to the potential children who go on to attend”*. Another felt that prior knowledge of the children would help the staff at Heather Ridge Infant School, giving them *“the clarity of knowing the children and how best to support their transition”*.

“Longer continuity at the same school would be excellent”

“It would remove the difficult transition between pre-school and infant school”

“The school offers great outside space, good for transitioning into school years”

Supporting a younger age range

4% of responses felt the proposal was beneficial as it offers support to a currently uncatered for younger age range. One respondent stated it gives parents *“the opportunity to place their children in a nurturing environment that they can attend from the age of 2”*. One respondent feels there is *“a concerning lack of pre infant schooling facilities”* in the local area, another stated local provision *“only accept ages from 2.5”*.

“Families with younger children would benefit from a nursery in the school”

“A sensible way to support children from a younger age”

“Opportunity to place their children in a nurturing environment that they can attend from the age of 2”

Importance of the school within the community/positive impact for the school/sustainability of the school

3% of comments stressed the importance of the school within the community, while 2% respectively expressed how the proposal would have a positive impact on the school, and its long-term sustainability. One respondent described the school as *“supportive and valued”*, and another that Heather Ridge Infant School is *“a fundamental part of our local communities”*. Another respondent stated a nursery would *“make life for students and teachers in Reception a lot easier and increase the quality of learning”*. One comment focused on the school's

sustainability, stating *“to ensure the continued viability of Heather Ridge [...] it needs to increase its reach”*.

“Heather Ridge is an excellent school”
“Without an infant school the area would be significantly less attractive”
“Heatherside needs the school for our growing community”

Reduce travel time for parents/keep families together

2% of comments noted benefits of the proposal by reducing parents' travel times, and 2% also pointed to the importance of keeping families together. Several respondents stated it would be *“so much easier”* for their children to be in the same setting, and another that a nursery at Heather Ridge Infant School *“gives siblings an opportunity to attend the same school as their older ones”*. One comment expressed how *“unfortunately for working parents of more than one child it is easy to spend over an hour doing drop off and pick-up”*. Another respondent cited the example of their child having to attend a nursery further away, which therefore *“made the transition harder”* as *“none of their friends were going to Heather Ridge”*.

“Would make it a lot easier for me and my commute”

More job opportunities

1% of comments felt the proposal could lead to further job opportunities in the area.

“This will also offer new jobs”
“This will create several job opportunities for the local community”

Queries & other comments

5% of comments raised questions regarding some other factors, such as cost, wraparound care, alternative uses of the available space, and the hours being proposed. A few such questions are included below; however, a specific 'Questions and Answers' document has also been published alongside this analysis to answer questions which have arisen during the consultation process.

“Will fees be payable on top of government funding supplement?”
“Where will the children be looked after?”
“How will the school incorporate the needs and requirements for children aged 2-4 in line with the EYFS?”
“Surely the school can be utilised for providing beneficial SEND provision?”
“Will the new nursery take SEN children and who will take on the SENCO role?”

Response from SCC's Early Years team:

Please see attached Appendix 1.

Response from SCC's Education Place Planning team:

Surrey County Council's Education Place Planning team has reviewed this proposal in terms of the council's statutory duty to ensure a sufficiency of mainstream school places, and has no objection to the proposal of lowering the age range at Heather Ridge Infant School. This is because the proposal does not require the use of any

classrooms designated for primary places and will not impact the school's capacity to maintain the number of places that it currently offers. The proposal serves as an ideal opportunity for the school to maximise the use of available facilities and enhances the school's future sustainability by maintaining a steady intake of pupil numbers from the age of two. This proposal supports both the school's development and the wider objectives of local education planning.

Public Meeting

A public consultation drop-in session took place at Heather Ridge Infant School on 10 March 2025. Fifteen people were in attendance, and themes arising from the public meeting broadly reflected the themes from the responses to the consultation.

Questions and Answers

A "questions and answers" document has also been published alongside this analysis to answer questions which have arisen during the consultation process.

What happens next?

Following the publication of this analysis document on [Surrey Says](#), the governing body of Heather Ridge Infant School will make the final decision within three months of the consultation end date. The outcome will be published on the school's website.