

APPENDIX 2. SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO PRE STATUTORY CONSULTATION IN RESPECT OF THE CLOSURE OF WILLOWS CENTRE FOR CHILDREN

Consultation Responses

There were 24 responses to the consultation question 'Do you support the proposal?'
These are summarised in the table below

	Yes	No	Undecided
Parent	5	6	
Staff	1	7	1
Governor	3		
Other	1		
Total	10	10	1

There were also three respondents who submitted comments about the unrelated closure of the Catkins at the Willows day care provision

Consultation Drop In Sessions

There were two consultation drop-in sessions, timed for the beginning and end of the school day.

No-one attended the first drop-in session (at the start of the day).

One family and the attached LA Educational Psychologist attended the second session to find out more about the proposal.

Consultation Comments

The following written comments were received.

Think this is a good idea

I have seen evidence to prove Willows has done wonders with children's learning.

Both my sons are developing their learning skills better since attending Willows.

Anything that keeps the centre open is a good thing as they can help more children.

I support it in as much as there is a lack of provision for SEN children. However I think it is very unfair that SEN children have no choice on different schools as their mainstream peers do.

I'm a long term member of staff having seen many changes over the years. I don't think joining Cliffdale is a particularly bad thing but would hope that we don't lose nursery aged children as there is obviously a need. We are already seeing children not attending due to transport not being available. I'm worried that vulnerable children will get lost.

I would like Willows to stay as a separate provision under Solent academy. I feel very sad to think Willows will close, it has been a fantastic provision for children with SEN and children attending day care with SEN have been well supported. Early intervention is very important and we work closely with the parents and children to ensure the children get the support they need. I'm surprised to hear the school is not financially viable, I understand the daycare was not viable but the school has never been in deficit. I would like to see Willows keep its name. I thought Solent academies were taking over the running of the school but didn't think we had to merge with Cliffdale.

I have worked at the Willows for a number of years. It's a disappointment that day care is going. It's a very important part of Willows.

It is a shame to close Willows as it has a very strong reputation and is close to many parents hearts. Can we keep its identity?

Why was SEN money used to keep day care open and not spent on the children?

Nobody has answered this question!

We can and would survive on our own as a school if we didn't have to use some of our budget on day care

Give Willows a chance to stand alone once more and not to merge with anyone.

- Worried Willows will lose its identity
- Would be happy with joining academy if we kept our DfE number
- Successful school/nursery in our own right is academisation necessary?
- Day care deficit has reflected badly on school budget, on its own it would not create any deficit

I feel that Willows will be losing its own identity if merged with Cliffdale. The school has ensured sustainability and was financially viable standing alone before day care, this would remain the same if given a chance.

The proposal fills me with sadness and trepidation. The adage "bigger isn't better" immediately comes to mind. I have worked at Willows for 14 years and I have been proud to be part of a well respected establishment in the City of Portsmouth. The contribution "Willows" has made to the lives of many vulnerable children and families is immeasurable. By closing Willows, the security net offered by a smaller, more user friendly school will be lost forever. I appreciate the high level of expertise and support offered by Cliffdale and I acknowledge the professionalism of the staff employed there but, I feel, the "vibe" of the school is more of a corporate experience where figures and results are paramount. I fully accept that the change is inevitable and is most certainly politically driven, which seems to be the way of the world that we live in now. I reiterate that the whole business saddens me when I think too deeply about it. Please can you confirm that you have read my email and that this whole consultation process isn't just a paper exercise that you have to fulfil.

Thank you.

I accept the proposal because I understand that it will not be financially viable for Willows to be independent, however I do have concerns that we need to make sure that the specific needs of Early Years children are not lost within a Primary school.

Willows joining the Solent Academy will be an opportunity to learn from each other and building upon the other's experiences and expertise. It is important that Willows is seen as a joint partner rather than just an extension of current provision.

I have 2 main concerns about the proposal to "expand Cliffdale provision"

1. If the proposal is not managed carefully then the best practice and experience of a Nursery provision could be lost. The new "Cliffdale provision" needs to consider carefully how to ensure that the Reception and Nursery provision is managed so it is distinct from the primary phase and retains the distinctiveness of early years principles.

Willows Special educational needs provision is built upon good Early Years principles from birth to 5 years. The Reception year group is often the bridge between Early Years and Primary age children but does not always encompass the breadth of the provision required for younger Early Years children. Cliffdale does not have the full range of Early Years expertise.

Willows Centre for Children has built up its approaches on the following Early Years principles:

- **Relationships** as the foundation for learning: the role of the named **key worker** for each child / parent to develop trust and a foundation for learning. Nurturing **parent relationships** through home visiting so that the home and school share information to enable best learning outcomes for the child. When the children first come to Willows the parents often are only just starting to come to terms with their child's difficulties and value the opportunity to talk to staff. Each room has a Team of staff where Specialist Teaching Assistant and Teaching Assistants share in planning and reviewing the learning with the teacher.
 - **Play is a tool for learning** based on using their interests and skills to help them to generalise and make the next steps in their learning. It is often through getting alongside the child's play that the best learning and interactions take place. Play provides an opportunity for the child to develop independence, be relaxed and enjoy learning. The adult has the opportunity to observe how the child uses their learning to plan carefully the next opportunities for learning. It can be surprising at times what skills the children are able to demonstrate in play.
 - **The specific need of 2 year olds.** The nursery recognises the specific needs of the youngest children and has as a whole team looked at the specific needs of the age group and how best to meet them.
 - **The foundation of the Prime areas for learning.** The early years focuses upon the development of the **prime areas** (Personal, social and emotional development, communication and language and physical development) which are the building blocks for other specific areas of learning such as literacy and numeracy to be built upon. Without a curriculum grounded in developing these Prime skills the children will not have the skills to develop their learning in the National curriculum in the Primary phase.
2. "Willows Centre for Children" has an established history of SEN Early Years support in the city. Even before I ever worked at Willows I knew Willows as a beacon of SEN Early Years provision. Willows has a long standing reputation for it's Sen early Years provision and the

particular needs of Early Years phase. A few parents are alarmed about the changes ahead as the proposal talks about the "expansion of the provision at Cliffdale Primary academy". If the name of "Willows" is retained in some form e.g. naming the building or Early Years provision then the positive history of Willows will be retained and parents will be more reassured about the proposed changes seeing it as an opportunity to provide more streamlined provision and share resources and expertise rather than just a "takeover" or merger.

Whilst in support of a more formal arrangement between Cliffdale and Willows with all of the benefits this will bring it is regrettable that the closure of Willows is necessary for this to happen. Willows Centre for Children is a well-established Portsmouth school with a history of innovation and excellence within early years. It has made a positive difference to families and children since 1974 as a Nursery School, Early Excellence Centre, Phase One Children's Centre and Outreach provider. Always judged 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted it has been able to support settings within the community with high quality training and support.

It was disappointing that our Children's Centre had to close and we have strived to continue work with vulnerable families without funding.

The closure of Catkins Day Care in March 2019 takes away the exceptional opportunities for inclusion that have typified the school since 2005 and is a great loss not only to the school but the City.

The decision that Willows has to close in order to become part of Solent Academy trust is a further huge blow.

I am concerned that the provision for the youngest children with high levels of additional need will be further reduced; already 20 of our nursery places are being used for school age children. The number of places for nursery aged children is to be further reduced in 2019. These decisions are difficult ones linked to funding and Special School capacity but are at great cost to early inclusion. I hope that the identity of Willows will remain, the sharp focus upon Early Years excellence be maintained and that the most vulnerable young children and their families will continue to be supported with their individual needs at the heart of what happens.

Having been lucky enough to have a son that benefitted hugely from attending Willows, I think it is a huge loss to the city that such a great nursery is closing. However the changes are necessary to continue the great support given to SEN children and their education.

As the Chair of Governors and member of the working party, I reluctantly support the proposal to close the Willows. My decision to support is made on the information provided to us by the City Council and the fact that the RSC has confirmed that the Willows does not currently meet the criteria to become an academy in its own right. The natural progression would be to join an existing academy and that would be the SAT.

My ambivalence in supporting the proposal is due to the fact that The Willows has been an integral part of the provision for special needs and has always had positive inspections. In addition, the

necessity to close the day care service means the loss of a much needed provision in the city and may mean losing sight of social inclusion.

The Willows has a very committed, experienced and caring staff team who I know will make the transition in a professional manner.