

Pupil numbers update

This summarises our level of concern at the time of the December FTB, taking into account mitigating actions:

Highest concern (Most impact anticipated)	Medium concern	Lowest concern (Least impact anticipated)
St. George’s CE Primary & Pre-school		
St. Mark’s CE Primary		

What do the latest pupil numbers tell us?

The deadline for on-time applications for Sept 2025 has now passed. We have 1094 1st preference applications, 76 fewer than last year. Making some reasonable assumptions about how that may change by census day (oct 2025), we predict an increase to 1134: 89% full. At 38 fewer pupils than we forecast in the financial plan, the impact would be approx. -£190K. By and large, these pupil numbers reflect the same overall level of concern. They also broadly confirm the per-school concerns as indicated above, with some exceptions. These exceptions show that the extent of the challenge is broadly the same overall but there is some movement in which schools are most affected.

Trustees may recall some previous discussion about Lilliput CE Infant, BCP forecasting future decline in pre-school numbers. With 142 1st preference applications against a PAN of 120, we are not yet feeling that impact. The decision to not include this school in the latest PAN reduction consultation was the right one.

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We continue to work closely with BCP and Salisbury Diocese on this challenge. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] There was widespread agreement amongst the LA, Diocese and those MATs represented that this is now a time-critical issue that requires concrete action. This first session was productive in terms of establishing the extent of the issue, the various barriers that exist to solving it and recognition that this shared problem requires a collaborative and mutually-supportive approach. Those strategies put forward by the LA as worthy of consideration were reassuring familiar: PAN reductions, shared leadership arrangements, merging schools, use of space for SEN [REDACTED].

Subsequent meetings will be really important to see how momentum is maintained. I will ensure that CLP remains in the thick of these discussions: watch this space.

Progress with previously determined mitigating actions

Strategy 1: PAN reductions

PAN reductions at Oakdale Junior and Lulworth & Winfrith are included within the proposed 2026/27 admissions policy. There were no objections through consultation. The on-time application numbers confirm that a PAN reduction was needed (raises the further question of whether we have gone low enough). In the paper accompanying the draft 2026/27 policy, we considered that the following schools should be on a watching brief for a possible future PAN reduction: Heathlands Primary Academy & Pre-School, Old Town Infant School & Nursery, Lilliput CE Infant, St. Mark's CE Primary, St. George's CE Primary, Wareham St. Mary CE Primary. That 'watching brief' status has not changed although the risk has reduced for some of them as per the previous section.

Strategy 2: Reducing leadership costs where natural opportunities present themselves.

Lulworth & Winfrith and Wool CE Primary Schools: The shared leadership model is now in place and running across these schools. It showed real strength through its Ofsted inspection on 27th / 28th January. The next step is to establish a single LGB across both schools and there is a plan to achieve this. The two existing Chairs, Joy Allan (L&W) and Richard Bartlett (W) have discussed this and agreed that they'd like to see Joy appointed as Chair with Richard as Vice Chair. I am supportive of that proposal as it enables us to progress this piece of work, keeping positive engagement. However, my instinct in the longer term is that Richard would be the preferred Chair candidate. We should think carefully about this for September 2026. Trustees are invited to appoint Joy Allan as 'LGB Chair elect' so that we can proceed with next steps towards Sept 2025. The immediate next step is for Joy and Richard to establish from their existing pool of governors who wishes to continue to serve within the new single LGB.

St. George's and St. Mark's CE Primary Schools: Following the pay committee's meeting, Katy Astle has now been appointed as single Headteacher from Sept 2025. This news is now public information as we have worked through our communication strategy. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Both existing Headteachers report that parents appear to have received the news well and certainly, at the time of writing, we have received no formal expressions of concern from either parent body. The next steps are to now work with Katy to establish a leadership team with sufficient capacity. As we did at L&EW/W, we will endeavour to work through that quickly to minimise this current period of uncertainty; the longer it takes, the more restlessness may grow.

Strategy 3: Create opportunities to generate income from under-utilised premises.

Potential special school satellite provision at St. George's / St. Mark's: Katy Astle has now visited a variety of satellite provisions linked with Winchelsea Special School (our partner at Old Town Infant). This has helped Katy to understand what we are seeking to achieve and she is very enthusiastic about it. Delta has now shared our ideas with Dorset Council and found them to be positive and supportive (I noted that this idea in principle came up as a feature on the Dorset Council meeting referred to earlier). We are now waiting for Dorset Council to provide an analysis of pupil needs that can be taken into account in forward planning. Once we have that information, we will

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re-engage with Delta and think through the next practical steps. It remains the ambition to have a satellite provision in place, probably at St. Mark's, by Sept 2026.

[REDACTED]

Strategy 5: Growth, including pre-school developments

No further growth developments. I attended an interesting (and very good) conference run by Salisbury Diocese. The Diocese continues to actively encourage all of its schools to find a MAT home and the purpose of the conference was for MAT leaders to collectively form a 'persuasive argument' to encourage continued academisation. The general expectation, however, is that the rate of academisation will now slow in response to the government's apparent 'cooling off'.

Wool Pre-school. Public consultation concluded without any problems. We will be moving to TUPE consultation shortly. We have submitted our application to the DfE's School-Based Nursery Capital Grant. That is to the value of around £130K and we expect to hear an outcome around March. If the grant is awarded, then approval for the school's age-range to be extended will be issued simultaneously. If we are not successful with the grant, then we will need to make a 'significant change' application under separate cover which will cause us some delay. We are working on a Plan B to absorb the pre-school without the need for capital investment.

Cygnets Pre-school at Swanage Primary: Public consultation is underway and, so far, all is quiet. We will be moving to TUPE consultation shortly.

Action for trustees:

- Approve Joy Allan as 'LGB Chair-elect' for the single LGB across L&WandW which we hope to establish from September 2025.