

## **Statutory Consultation January/February 2021**

### **Summary of responses**

The statutory consultation was open from 27 January to 24 February 2021. During that time, 611 responses were received to the online questionnaire.

In addition to the responses to the questionnaire we also received responses from the following organisations:

Town and Parish Councils:

- Haselbury Plucknett Parish Council
- Misterton Parish Council
- Crewkerne Town Council

Governing bodies:

- Merriott and Haselbury Plucknett Federation
- Greenfylde First School
- Misterton and Ashlands Federation
- Misterton Pre School.

In addition, 7 letters or email responses were received from individuals.

A petition against the proposals containing 334 signatures was received from Yeovil Liberal Democrats. The text of the petition read:

Conservative-led Somerset County Council wants to abolish our highly successful 3-tier school system in Crewkerne and Ilminster, replacing it with 2-tiers and closing Misterton School.

Coronavirus has put enormous pressure on school staff, students and families over the past year. The last thing they need is further disruption and upheaval caused by these proposed changes.

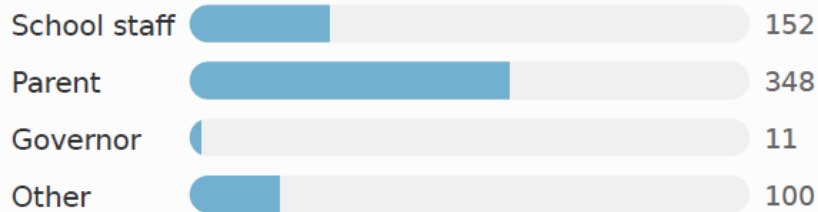
We believe it is WRONG for the Conservatives to force these changes through when up to 80% of parents and carers oppose them. We say they should press 'pause', and think again.

We, the undersigned, call on Somerset County Council to shelve their plans for schools in Crewkerne and Ilminster.

## Information about respondents:

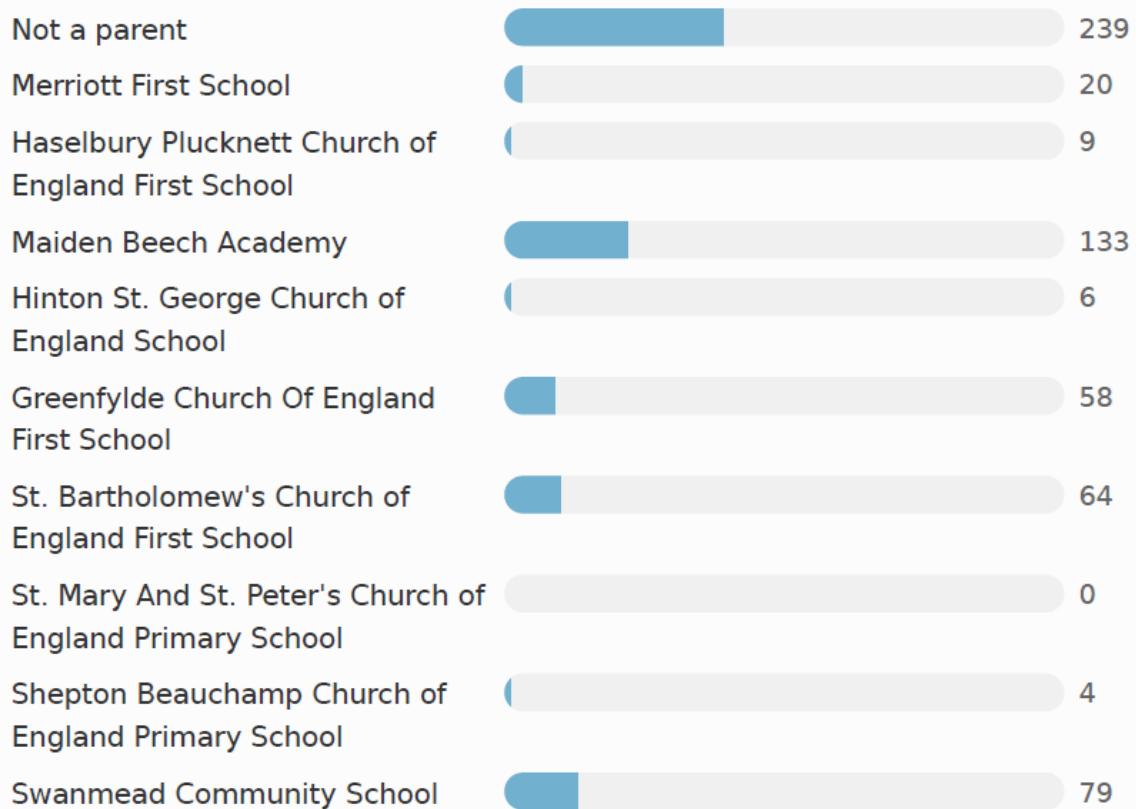
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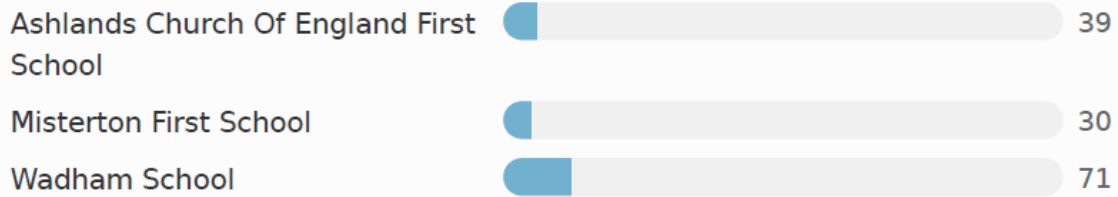
Please indicate which of the following options best describes you:



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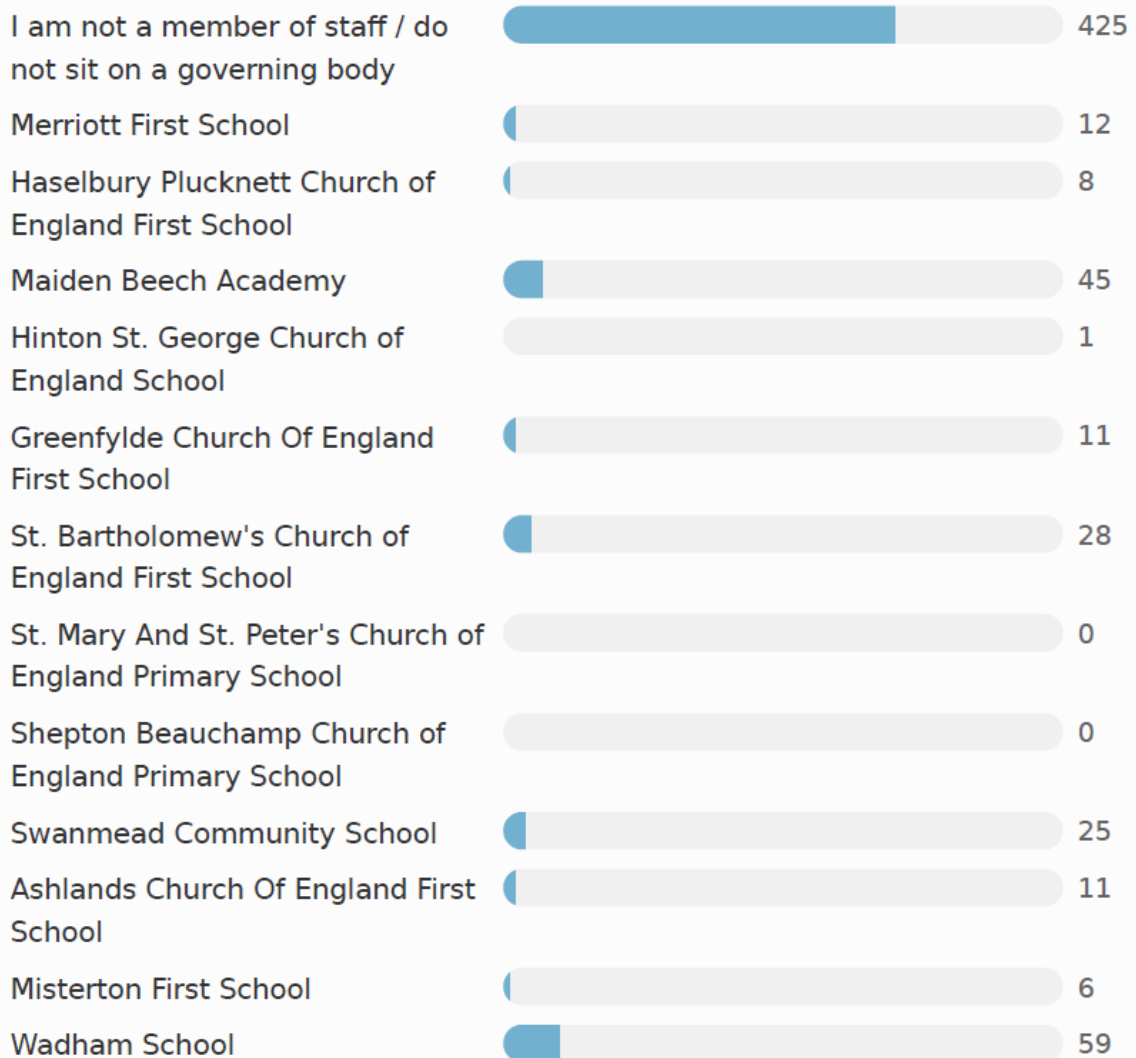
If you are a parent, which school or schools do your children attend?





### 3

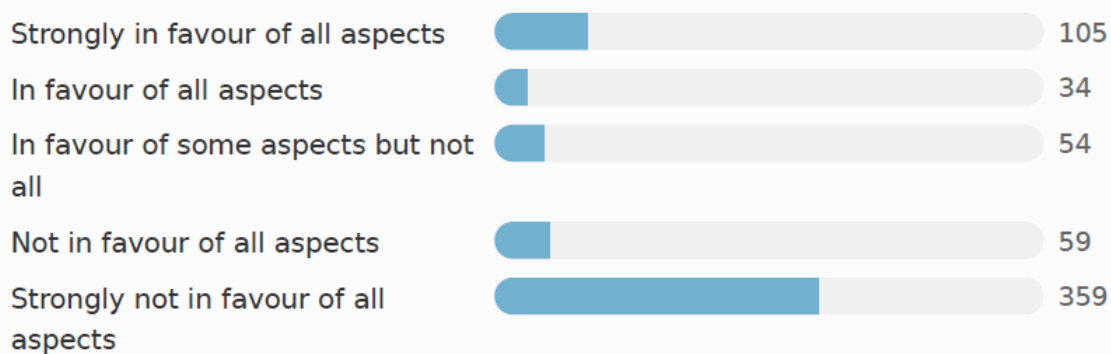
If you are a member of staff or sit on a governing body, at which school or schools?



## Responses to the proposal

4

What is your view of the proposal?



	School staff	Parent	Governor	Other	No answer	Total
Strongly in favour of all aspects	47	44	4	10		<b>105</b>
In favour of all aspects	11	14	2	7		<b>34</b>
In favour of some aspects but not all	15	34	2	3		<b>54</b>
Not in favour of all aspects	13	40	1	5		<b>59</b>
Strongly not in favour of all aspects	66	216	2	75		<b>359</b>
No answer						
<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>611</b>

Respondents were asked to select which of the common comments received in response to the pre-publication consultation most closely matched their views.

The most common reasons for supporting the proposal were:

- I believe that fewer transition points would be helpful for children with SEND and other vulnerabilities.
- I believe starting secondary school in year 7 can help better prepare children for GCSEs.
- I believe it is advantageous to have a two-tier system as this is in place in most of the rest of the country.

The most common reasons to oppose the proposal were:

- I disagree with the method and timing of the review and consultation period
- I believe the three tier and Middle School system is preferable.
- I am concerned about the potential loss of specialist subject teaching for years 5 and 6.

### **Qualitative responses**

Respondents were asked to provide other comments on any aspect of the proposal. The following were common responses received in support of the proposal.

#### Financial

- It has to happen financially to put schools on a sound future financial footing.

#### Transition Stages

- Schools should be responsible for their own key stage - students coast in years 7 and 8 at Middle School.
- Better for children to be at Wadham in Year 7 to prepare for GCSE's
- Fewer transitions is a good thing.
- If children go to Wadham in year 7 rather than year 9, they can build more solid relationships with pupils and give them good habits.
- Year 7 and 8 at Middle schools are not as good as years 5 and 6.
- Children need longer at the nurturing environment of their first schools.

#### Quality of Education

- It will improve the quality of education.
- This should have happened years ago to make Wadham as strong as possible.
- The current system is disadvantaging the children against students in 2 tier areas.
- This proposal would ensure that the schools in the system work together.
- It would bring the area into line with other areas.
- Some people prefer the two-tier system of education.

The following were common reasons received in objection to the proposal:

### Quality of Education

- Why change what isn't broken.
- Some people prefer the three-tier system of education
- This proposal would lead to the under use of facilities at current Middle Schools.
- Risks mixed age classes in Primary schools.

### Transition Stages

- Children get a head start in specialist subjects and better facilities in years 5 and 6 at Middle School.
- The middle school is a useful stepping stone from a small first school to a large upper school.

### Timing

- Concern about making changes during COVID and the impact on mental health of children.
- Disagree with the timing – not enough time to develop alternative proposals.
- Children have already been disrupted due to COVID.
- Is the timeline for implementation long enough?

### Ilminster

- Ilminster may become a less attractive place for families if education in the town is only up to age 11.
- Concern for parents in Ilminster who don't drive and children being bussed to Wadham at 11.

### Wadham School

- Concern about whether Wadham is equipped to deal with Years 7 and 8 - in terms of children's education and emotional well-being.
- Wadham integrates well with the Crewkerne community, but not with Ilminster.

### Other

- Concern about limit of intake to 10 in Crewkerne schools, which will lead to mixed age classes.
- Maiden Beech site is not suitable for younger children.
- Will adversely affect children with SEND.
- Disagree with the closure of Misterton school
- Concern of young children having to travel from Misterton into Crewkerne.
- There is a risk that good teachers leave the area.
- Concern that transitioning 3 year groups to Wadham at the same time won't work.

### **Alternative models suggested by respondents and assessment**

#### *Federation between St Bartholomew's, Ashlands and Maiden Beech*

There is no legal route that would allow federation as Maiden Beech is already an academy. Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust cannot take St Bartholomew's and Ashlands into the trust as it does not have church articles, no avenue is open for it to take church articles, and these are church schools.

#### *Upper and middle schools join Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust*

Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust cannot take Wadham as it does not have church articles, no avenue is open for it to take church articles, and this is a church school.

#### *Maiden Beech leave Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust and they all join a different MAT*

Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust could voluntarily surrender Maiden Beech to another trust. However, the possibility of identifying a different trust has been previously explored and no alternative MATs were found who were willing to accept the financial risks involved. The Regional Schools Commissioner has provided the following statement:

The RSC respects the consultation process that Somerset County Council have been undertaking, as part of the proposed schools reorganisation, to ensure school viability. We will not consider further transfers or conversions until decisions have been made about the future of school organisation in the area.

#### *Expand Wadham's sixth form*

There are four colleges in Somerset that already operate in a highly competitive environment, including Yeovil College which is only 9 miles distant. If Wadham was to keep the same proportion of sixth form pupils from its Y11 pupil cohort as Kings of Wessex this would only provide around another 70 pupils which would be

insufficient to give it financial stability. Both Kings of Wessex and Frome College have over 1000 pupils. With an additional 70 pupils Wadham would have only 550 pupils.

#### *Close Wadham's sixth form*

The sixth form is currently not contributing significantly to the deficit because it is supported by the unavoidable over-staffing in Key Stage 4. However, if this proposal was agreed, this would likely change and therefore the sixth form would need to be reviewed at that point when a new staffing structure would be available. A review of Wadham's finances has been undertaken by a qualified School Resources Management Advisor appointed by the Department for Education. This review has confirmed that Wadham's deficit is structural and an adequate curriculum offer cannot be sustained as an upper school. The SRMA has confirmed that it was appropriate to remove the sixth form from initial consideration but that it should be reconsidered if a secondary structure is put in place in order to assess viability within such a context.

#### *Delay until after resolution of unitary consultation*

The pressures relate to schools funding which is provided by central not local government. Therefore, reorganisation will not result in a different context. Irrespective of the structures of local government in Somerset, and no matter which of the possible future models of local government is selected, the quality of education in the Crewkerne and Ilminster area would still need to be secured. It wouldn't serve children's interests to wait until 2023 to address the current issues.

#### *New year groups join Wadham in different years (some in 2022, some in 2023)*

All schools would need to take new year groups at the same time in order to successfully manage the process of finding new roles for staff. Staff reorganisation would require a single exercise otherwise opportunities would not be open and fair to all.

#### *Review reasons for Wadham's deficit*

A review of Wadham's finances has been undertaken by a qualified School Resources Management Advisor appointed by the Department for Education. This review has confirmed that Wadham's deficit is structural and an adequate curriculum offer cannot be sustained as an upper school. The alternative would be to offer a severely constrained curriculum offer which would be a significant detriment to the options and quality of education available to pupils.