APPENDIX B

School Places Strategy – Consultation Report

January 2026

Purpose of the Report

To share the results and feedback from the School Places Strategy consultation.

Contents

1. Purpose of the consultation

2. Method of engagement

3. Findings from engagement

Purpose of the consultation

To engage with local people, communities and partners to understand their views on the draft School Places Strategy for 2026-31, and to consider these views in finalising the Strategy. This included ensuring the Strategy clearly sets out local demographic trends and key challenges impacting school place sufficiency in Leicestershire, and our proposed approach to forecasting, commissioning and reorganisation of schools where this is necessary which will together help us to ensure an adequate number of school places are available in the right place at the right time.

Method of engagement

Who

The consultation aimed to seek the views of local people, communities and partners including responsible bodies such as diocesan representatives and academy trusts, and local planning authorities.

How

Online: All visitors to the council's website during the consultation period were invited to complete the consultation survey which was visible on the 'have your say' page of the Council's website.

Paper: A paper copy of the survey was made available upon request to ensure all local people wishing to take part in the consultation were able to.

The media: Multiple media releases were sent out which were picked up by a number of media outlets to encourage local people to provide their views.

Social media: Messages encouraging people to take part in the consultation were sent out via the Council's Facebook pages and via LinkedIn

Targeted communications were sent to:

- Head Teachers across Leicestershire for onward circulation to parents and carers via school newsletters
- Elected Members. All elected members received the press release advising them of the start of the consultation. In additional the Children & Families Scrutiny Committee received a report as part of the consultation exercise at its meeting on 20 January 2026 inviting them to comment on the Strategy.
- Local Planning Authorities, Diocesan representatives and CEOs of Leicestershire's Academy Trusts and Multi Academy Trusts were contacted directly and invited to respond to the consultation.
- Internal staff. Employees of the County Council were made aware of the consultation through All Staff meetings within Children and Family Services
- All were invited to comment on the Strategy via the survey link or to request a paper copy of the survey.

Questions asked within the survey:

Q1 In what role are you responding to this consultation? (list of options)

Q2 Are you providing your organisations official response to the consultation?

Q3 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the strategy clearly sets out local demographic trends and key challenges impacting school place sufficiency in Leicestershire?

Q3a Why do you say this?

Q4 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the approach to forecasting and school place planning set out in the Strategy?

Q4a Why do you say this?

Q5 To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to ensuring an adequate number of school places are available at the right time and in the right place?

Q5a Why do you say this?

Q6 To what extent do you agree or disagree with Leicestershire's approach to commissioning of school places?

Q6a Why do you say this?

Q7 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed approach to reorganisation of schools within Leicestershire set out in the Strategy?

Q7a Why do you say this?

Q8 Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with our draft School Places Strategy 2026-2031?

Q8a Why do you say this?

Q9 Do you have any other comments about the draft School Places Strategy 2026-2031?

Q10 What is your gender?

Q11 Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth? If you're aged under 16, please skip this question.

Q12 What was your age on your last birthday?

Q13 In which local authority area do you live?

Q14 Do you have a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity?

Q15 What is your ethnic group?

Q16 What is your religion?

Q17 Are you an employee of Leicestershire County Council?

Q18 What is your sexual orientation? If you're aged under 16, please skip this question.

When

The opportunity for local people, communities and partners to share their views on the School Places Strategy was available between 20th November 2025 and 4th January 2026, via the method outlined above.

Findings from the Consultation

36 surveys were returned during the consultation period. All were submitted online. During the consultation period, there were no requests for paper versions of the survey.

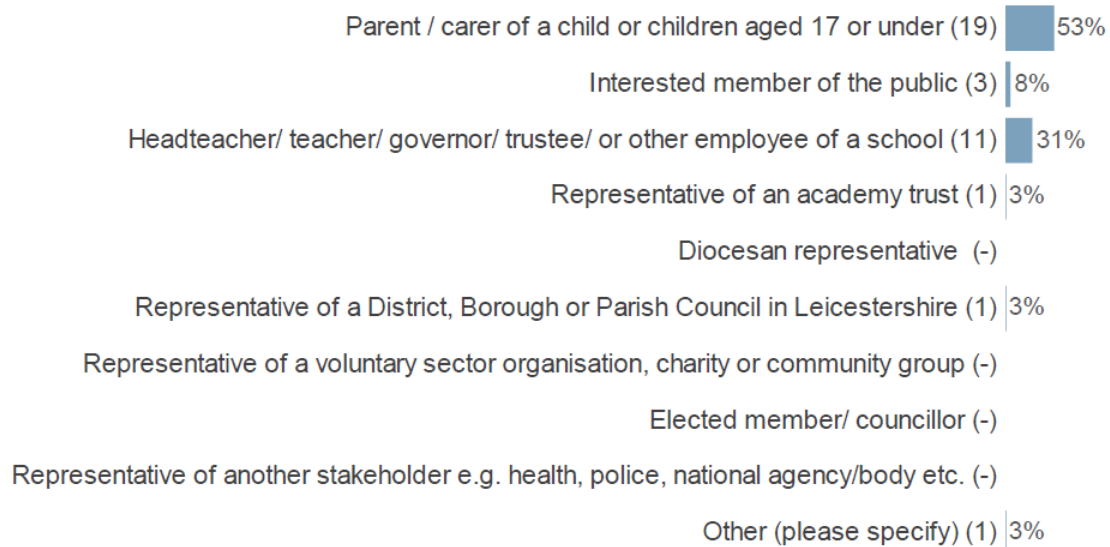**About respondents**

The majority of respondents were:

- Female (82%)
- Aged 25-64 (90%)
- A Leicestershire resident (100%)
- A parent or carer of a child or young person aged 18 or under (53%)
- Did not have a long-standing illness or disability (100%)
- White ethnicity (100%)
- No religion (62%)
- Straight/heterosexual (100%)

8 respondents provided their organisation's official response to the consultation.

Responses to 'Your role' questions

Question 1:

In what role are you responding to this consultation? Please select <u>one</u> option only.

Parent / carer of a child or children aged 17 or under (19) — 53%

Interested member of the public (3) — 8%

Headteacher/ teacher/ governor/ trustee/ or other employee of a school (11) — 31%

Representative of an academy trust (1) — 3%

Diocesan representative (-)

Representative of a District, Borough or Parish Council in Leicestershire (1) — 3%

Representative of a voluntary sector organisation, charity or community group (-)

Elected member/ councillor (-)

Representative of another stakeholder e.g. health, police, national agency/body etc. (-)

Other (please specify) (1) — 3%

Question 2:

Are you providing your organisations official response to the consultation?

Yes (8) — 57%

No (6) — 43%

Responses to 'About you' questions – categories with zero responses removed

			No. of responses	% of total responses to question
Q10	Gender	Female	18	82%
		Male	4	18%
Q11	Gender identified with the same as sex registered at birth	Yes	22	100%
Q12	Age	Under 15	1	5%
		15-24	1	5%
		25 - 34	2	10%
		35 - 44	10	48%
		45 - 54	4	44%
		55 - 64	3	14%
Q13		Blaby District Council	2	9%

	Local authority area	Charnwood Borough Council	4	18%
		Hinckley and Bosworth District Council	1	5%
		Melton Borough Council	14	64%
		North West Leicestershire District Council	1	5%
Q14	Illness or disability	No	21	100%
Q15	Ethnic group	White	22	100%
Q16	Religion	Christian (all denominations)	8	38%
		No religion	13	62%
Q17	Council employee	Yes	3	14%
		No	19	86%
Q18	Sexual orientation	Straight/ Heterosexual	19	100%

Responses to questions around the draft Strategy

Insufficient responses to the consultation were received to include responses by respondent profile to avoid identification of individual responses. Overall responses to each question are shown below.
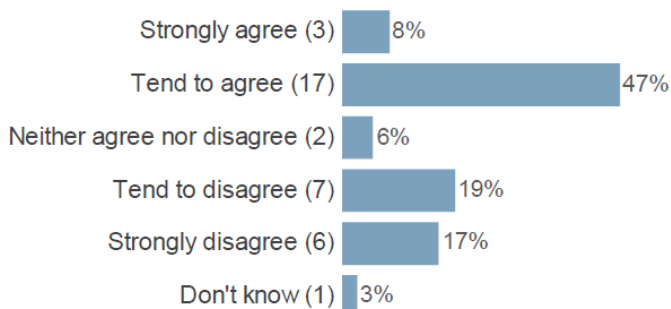
Question 3:

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the strategy clearly sets out local demographic trends and key challenges impacting school place sufficiency in Leicestershire?
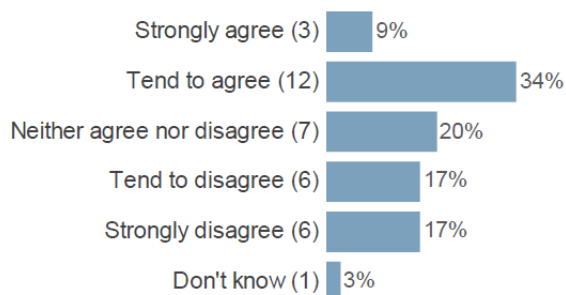
Strongly agree (5)	14%
Tend to agree (17)	47%
Neither agree nor disagree (4)	11%
Tend to disagree (7)	19%
Strongly disagree (3)	8%
Don't know (-)	

Question 4:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the approach to forecasting and school place planning set out in the Strategy?

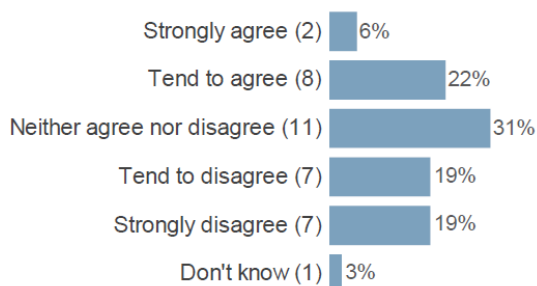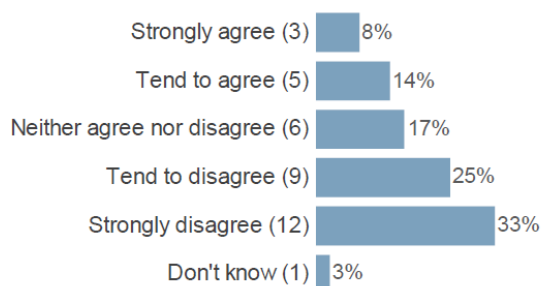|	
Strongly agree (3)	8%
Tend to agree (17)	47%
Neither agree nor disagree (2)	6%
Tend to disagree (7)	19%
Strongly disagree (6)	17%
Don't know (1)	3%

Question 5:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to ensuring an adequate number of school places are available at the right time and in the right place?
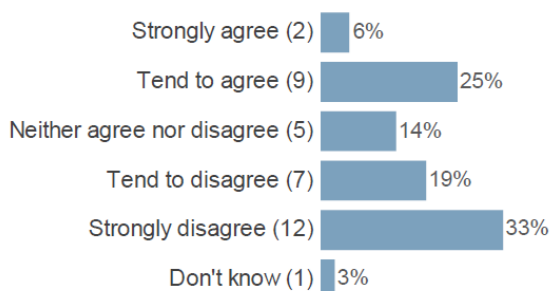
Response	Percentage
Strongly agree (3)	9%
Tend to agree (12)	34%
Neither agree nor disagree (7)	20%
Tend to disagree (6)	17%
Strongly disagree (6)	17%
Don't know (1)	3%

Question 6:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with Leicestershire's approach to commissioning of school places?

Response	Percentage
Strongly agree (2)	6%
Tend to agree (8)	22%
Neither agree nor disagree (11)	31%
Tend to disagree (7)	19%
Strongly disagree (7)	19%
Don't know (1)	3%

Question 7:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed approach to reorganisation of schools within Leicestershire set out in the Strategy?

Response	Percentage
Strongly agree (3)	8%
Tend to agree (5)	14%
Neither agree nor disagree (6)	17%
Tend to disagree (9)	25%
Strongly disagree (12)	33%
Don't know (1)	3%

Question 8:

Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with our draft School Places Strategy 2026-2031?

Response	Percentage
Strongly agree (2)	6%
Tend to agree (9)	25%
Neither agree nor disagree (5)	14%
Tend to disagree (7)	19%
Strongly disagree (12)	33%
Don't know (1)	3%

Summary of themes from open comment questions

Below is a summary of themes observed from responses to open comment questions within the survey.

Q3a To what extent do you agree or disagree that the strategy clearly sets out local demographic trends and key challenges impacting school place sufficiency in Leicestershire? Why do you say this?

14 responses

- Respondents who agreed felt the strategy was clearly written, logically structured, and easy to understand. They noted that the information sources were transparent and the rationale behind proposals was well presented.
- Respondents questioned whether the strategy adequately considers the role, sustainability, and future of rural or small schools within local communities.
- Some expressed concern that although housing growth has been significant over time, school provision has not kept pace.
- Some responses showed partial agreement with the approach but signalled doubts about whether forecasts fully capture localised effects—such as developments, migration patterns, or community-level changes.

Q4a To what extent do you agree or disagree with the approach to forecasting and school place planning set out in the Strategy? Why do you say this?

16 responses

- Insufficient SEND school places within the current system were noted, along with concerns around long-term proactive planning for SEND capacity.
- Several respondents stated that schools—particularly small ones—are not funded appropriately, and this impacts their ability to deliver quality education and accommodate needs effectively.
- Some responses agreed that the principles of forecasting "make sense," but felt the approach does not fully account for local housing developments, the impact of internal migration and how many additional children new developments may bring.
- Respondents emphasised that rural schools provide vital community value and strong SEND support. They expressed concerns that strategic changes may overlook their importance and unique context.
- A few respondents described the strategy document as too long or difficult to read, which affected their ability to fully engage with it.

Q5a To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to ensuring an adequate number of school places are available at the right time and in the right place? Why do you say this?

20 responses

- Several respondents agreed in principle with ensuring places are available, but stressed that new builds should follow full utilisation of current provision to avoid unnecessary expansion and avoid destabilisation of existing neighbouring schools.

- A prominent theme is the number of specialist SEND places not meeting need. Comments highlight long waits, shortfalls in local provision, and the importance of approaches that reduce out-of-area placements.
- Respondents underlined the community value of rural/smaller schools and their ability to offer personalised support, warning that reorganisation or closures could undermine access, especially where families have limited transport options.
- Practicalities matter: some comments focus on catchment boundaries, walking distances and unreliable buses, arguing that these realities should shape sufficiency decisions so pupils can safely access a local school.
- While the methodology is acknowledged, respondents worry that it doesn't fully capture local housing developments or population fluctuations (e.g., a birth-rate dip), which may lead to mismatches between provision and demand over time.
- A small number of comments supported the proposals in principle but noted that the success of the strategy will depend on how plans are implemented.

Q6a To what extent do you agree or disagree with Leicestershire's approach to commissioning of school places? Why do you say this?

13 responses

- Respondents noted that in some areas there are not enough school places and that class sizes are already too large, particularly in primary schools. This raised concerns about whether the proposed approach can realistically meet need.
- Some comments suggested that the approach set out in the strategy is reactive, lacking forward planning and failing to integrate parental views meaningfully.
- Many respondents stressed the emotional and practical impact of potential rural school closures.
- Some respondents questioned the logic of building new schools in areas where existing schools are not yet full, suggesting that upgrades or improvements might be more appropriate than new builds.
- Concerns about inclusivity and long-term thinking around commissioning. Comments also noted tension between national and local commissioning policy, with national expectations around academisation for example limiting local flexibility and reducing school-level influence and governance

Q7a To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed approach to reorganisation of schools within Leicestershire set out in the Strategy? Why do you say this?

21 Responses

- Those who agreed with the proposed approach considered it to be important to ensure the sustainability of schools, noting that some schools may not be viable where there are very low numbers of children on roll and the challenges this presents in providing a quality education

- Responses noted the importance of small and rural schools, particularly emphasising their importance in community identity, ability to provide nurturing, personalised support, and SEND-friendly environments. Some responses expressed concerns around closures or weakening these schools and urged that reorganisation must not erode rural provision.
- Several respondents stressed that SEND places are urgently needed and noted that maintaining SEND-supportive rural schools is essential for stability and wellbeing.
- A number of responses suggested that existing capacity should be filled before creating new schools in order to avoid the need for reorganisation
- Some comments highlighted real-world challenges for families where there are not sufficient local places, particularly when siblings are placed in different schools or when catchments split communities.
- Respondents valued the distinctiveness of individual schools—their character, culture and relationships—and felt reorganisations risk homogenising or undermining these strengths.
- Some responses expressed frustration that decisions appear to be made without sufficient engagement with school-level practitioners, stating that those "on the coal face" understand local realities better than central planners.
- A minority noted that while the strategy outlines principles, it must become more proactive, strategic, and responsive to local circumstances rather than reactive or financially driven.

Q8a Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with our draft School Places Strategy 2026-2031? Why do you say this?

16 responses

- Some respondents provided comments which strongly emphasised protecting small and rural schools
- Respondents asked for clearer, more specific local plans for each area
- Visible mechanisms for regular consultation with schools, parents and community stakeholders and assurance that those "on the ground" (e.g., school leaders) will be genuine partners in decision-making.
- Some respondents expressed uncertainty about how the sustainability of small schools will be judged, particularly how issues like deficits, fluctuating pupil numbers, and SEND funding pressures will be taken into account. They queried whether reorganisation criteria could unintentionally disadvantage smaller settings
- Mixed perceptions of the strategy's completeness. Comments reflected a recognition of positives, but also highlighted omissions, particularly around plans for delivery.
- Some respondents argued that their local area already has sufficient capacity, with no evidence of future pressure and proposed that existing schools can absorb additional demand.
- A number of comments drew attention to underfunded SEND provision and the strain on school budgets, the need to consider SEND implications carefully before reorganising provision.
- Some respondents expressed concerns around commissioning through academy trusts and the focus on finances over education quality

- A few responses emphasised that children should attend schools rooted in their communities, highlighting that local schooling supports wellbeing and community identity.
- A minority of respondents noted the length and complexity of the document, suggesting the need for clearer communication and accessibility.

Q9 Do you have any other comments about the draft School Places Strategy 2026-2031?

15 responses

- Some respondents emphasised the need for the LA to respond to shifting demographics, avoid investing in unsustainable schools, and ensure decisions are pragmatic rather than politically driven.
- Mixed views on whether additional provision is needed, with several responses focused on the current sufficiency of schools in specific local areas
- Strong emphasis on protecting siblings' access to the same school
- Respondents noted that any changes should not undermine stability for children with additional needs.
- A number of respondents criticised the current approach to SEND, describing it as insufficiently collaborative with parents and failing to adequately meet young people's needs. They emphasised that improvements must be embedded in any future strategy.
- Rural schooling was described as vital, both educationally and socially. Respondents noted that it was essential for maintaining community identity and providing a valued alternative to urban schooling. Respondents warned that closures would undermine community sustainability and reduce parental choice. Deeper community impact assessments were proposed as part of any reorganisation considerations and consideration of sparsity funding if rural schools close.
- Some viewed the document as a starting point rather than a strategy, lacking clear targets, actions and specifics on where provision would increase or reduce. This created uncertainty about whether sufficiency could be achieved.
- Individual concerns highlighted about specific planning areas including split, inconsistent catchments across new estates, long, unsafe, or impractical travel distances and unreliable public transport affecting punctuality and attendance
- Some comments noted inconsistency between housing growth and Section 106 and planning issues that may undermine local sufficiency.