

The Willow Set

'The Willow Set' has been going for over 35 years and is a charity setting for children aged 2-13 years. It is now located in a purpose-built setting within the grounds of Stoke St Gregory primary school. This is a rural village with a diverse and strong community of which we are very much part of. The Willow Set has achieved 'Ofsted Outstanding' three times in a row, mainly because we are passionate about providing children with great building blocks for their future, through the best play and learning environment we can. We also have strong links with the wider community.

Over the years we have supported other areas of Stoke St Gregory including Rachel, the manager, sourcing a grant of £10,000 which was successful and the whole amount put into the village playing field play park.

The willow set is not just a preschool it provides wrap around care for term time and holidays. In total it caters for children from 7.30am - 6pm, 5 days a week for 50 weeks of the year. Our fantastic facility not only provides busy and working parents' flexible childcare but, allows a wonderful integral setting where little pre-schoolers mix with older school children in a thriving 'learn through play' environment where we have specific activities for children to enjoy and engage with, including sports, gardening, arts, cooking and roller skating, to name but a few. All of this is in a safe rich enabling environment where children can explore and make new friends.

We have had steady growth throughout the last 10 years and in 2018/19 and 2019/20 were at full capacity for most of the days during most of the year. The team and voluntary committee have been looking at options for expansion for some time to enable that holistic growth to continue however as a small charity and with the huge impact of COVID on the bottom line, capital expenditure has been out of reach.

We are now at capacity with a waiting list for children due to go to school September 2021/2022 and 2022/2023. Over 90% of these children are entitled to 15 hours, 30 hours or 15 hours 2-year-old free funding and cannot access this with us if we have no spaces.

Some of the children requesting places are new to the village which we stated would happen in 2019 and are due to start school in September, so it was paramount we address this as quickly as possible as we need to support all children in the transition to reception class. increase weekly.

With this in mind, we have made the decision to temporarily increase the floorspace available with an outside classroom and new rotas to meet the short-term space requirement and fulfil the most urgent requests. This will not be a long-term solution as it will only provide enough space to meet the need until the end of July 2021

The new families going to other settings could hugely impact on our future and have a detrimental effect on our village community as often, families will understandably send siblings to the same setting as the eldest child and possibly use shops in that area etc.