

School Place Planning

Wards All

Service: School Admissions and Appeals Team, Access Service

Portfolio: Councillor Statham

1. Aim

The aim of this report is to provide the Education Scrutiny and Overview Committee with an update on:

- School Place Planning – Early Years Sufficiency, Primary, Secondary, Post 16 and Special Schools
- Free School Development

2. Recommendations

That the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the contents of this report and decides whether any further information or updates are required

3. Report detail

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient school places for resident children who want a school place. A local authority has a general duty, under section 14 of the Education Act 1996, to ensure that there are available, in its area, sufficient schools 'in number, character and equipment to provide for all pupils the opportunity of appropriate education'.

To meet its statutory responsibilities Walsall Council needs to ensure it understands where the pressures on school places will come from. These pressures include changes in the population, housing developments, and cross border migration.

The projections of future demand for school places are based on birth data sourced from the Office of National Statistics, historical pupil retention data from the school census, pupil yield from housing developments obtained from the council's planning department and inward and outward migration data.

For mainstream pupil place, planning purposes the borough has been divided into planning areas. There are 11 Primary Planning Areas and 4 Secondary Planning Areas. These areas were drawn up taking account of ward boundaries, geographical features (such as major roads and housing developments), and patterns from historical school admissions data. (See Appendix A & B)

In order to plan pupil places effectively the Council must be open and transparent communicating the details on the pressures on school places in each planning

area. The Council must also manage expectations and avoid any adverse impact on schools regarding school development proposals. When new capacity is needed, it is important to establish guidelines to ensure that this new capacity is provided appropriately and in the right place:

- We should seek to meet demand locally to allow children a school place within a reasonable walking distance from their home.
- Our planning of school places should reflect our school improvement strategy: we should work to make all schools good or outstanding. When seeking to expand schools, we should favour the expansion of schools where there is proven demand and well-established and successful leadership and management at a good or outstanding school.
- We should consider the impact of any changes on the viability and standards at existing schools. Where necessary we should work with schools to provide optimum forms of entry appropriate to the capacity of the school site and the level of demand for that school. On occasions, over time, it may be appropriate to reduce the capacity of some schools as others grow in size.
- The guidelines set out above will need to be balanced against the need to make best use of scarce capital resources and the physical practicalities of available sites.

The Local Authority adopts an annual cycle to school organisation and place planning, linked to the Department for Education School Capacity (SCAP) survey for mainstream schools. This survey is submitted in July each year and comprises four parts:

- capacity of schools
- forecasts of pupil numbers per national curriculum year group by planning area
- additional places due to be created by planning area
- place planning commentary by planning area of local circumstances e.g. migration, changes of school category

The school organisation service prepares and submits this survey and its component parts, and during the yearly planning cycle updates its core data including changes to school capacity data following alterations and expansion of the school estate, planning department data on housing completions in each planning area, school census numbers and school admission application numbers and preferences.

The outcome of the validated and moderated submission by the DfE is an allocation of funding known as basic need funding. This capital grant is allocated to all LAs who have a forecasted demand for places above their existing capacity to help in meeting the statutory duty in making sure there are enough school places for children in our area

3.1 Early Years Sufficiency

There is currently sufficient childcare in Walsall. Overall, demand for early years and childcare provision has decreased since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, with nearly half of childcare providers (48%) reporting a decrease in demand in the provider audit. Take-up of the early year's entitlements has decreased, both in terms of actual numbers of children participating, and the percentage of eligible children taking up their entitlement.

Between 2020-2021 and 2025-2026 there are plans to develop around 4,074 new homes across Walsall (source: Walsall Planning January 2022). Wards with a high number of planned new homes (over 10% of total) include Blakenall, Birchills, Leamore and St Matthews. Where there are a significant number of new homes planned, demand for early years and childcare may increase as the local population increases.

Data has been analysed to identify wards that have a potential future sufficiency risk based on the composition of current provision, current childcare ratio (supply relative to overall supply) and new homes developments over the period 2020-2026.

In wards where there are a significant number of new homes planned, including Blakenall, Birchills, Leamore and St Matthews, demand for early years and childcare may increase as the local population increases.

Although forecasting demand for early years and childcare is not a precise science, working alongside Planning and Development, the School Organisation team are currently creating a pupil yield in which pre-school children will be included. This will enable us to establish more precisely, not only in which wards we expect future sufficiency issues to arise, but also to what extent.

3.2 Primary Sufficiency

Primary school intakes are forecast based on the number of births in each planning area. However, not all children born in a particular area will stay to attend a school in that area and others may move into the area. To account for this, a 'loss / gain' factor is applied to each area to account for inward and outward migration as well as children attending schools outside of Walsall or in the non-maintained sector. Finally, movement between planning areas is accounted for by comparing where children live and where they have recently attended school.

Since 2016, birth numbers have begun to reduce, which will lead to forecasted reduction in demand for corresponding Reception places from September 2022 onwards. Over the coming years, it may be that there will be too much capacity in some planning areas, so careful consideration will need to be given to removal of some places.

School place planning forecasts must be agile and robust and will need to align to the Council's wider housing and regeneration plans and those of our neighbouring local authorities to ensure the impacts of new housing developments and cross border movement of pupils continues to be sufficiently planned for.

The table below shows the projected number of Reception places required against the capacity in terms of Published Admission Number (PAN) for Walsall as a whole.

Measure	Sep 23	Sep 24	Sep 25	Sep 26
PAN	3974	3974	3974	3974
Projected Intake	3609	3520	3437	3381
Surplus / Shortfall	365	454	537	593
Surplus %	9%	11%	14%	15%

Planning a sufficiency of school places requires a balance between two conflicting objectives. The first is to provide enough places to meet need along with a margin to allow some exercise of parental preference; the second is to ensure that there is not an excess of places overall or in any school or planning area. A working surplus across the whole borough however is necessary to ensure there are sufficient places for in-year admissions and an ability to meet parental preference.

The falling birth rates have led to conversations with Head Teachers at Primary, Nursery and Special Heads Forum (PNS) and cluster meetings with schools in smaller groups. Schools and the local authority are working together to determine the most appropriate way forward to ensure the school remains financially viable with the falling need for places.

The school organisation team are working with Primary Schools across the borough to deal with reduced birth rates and therefore a lower place requirement for school places. This could result in some schools consulting and reducing their published admission number from 2024. This work is ongoing and will feed into the SEN project of space creation.

3.3 Secondary Sufficiency

For each secondary planning area, the number of Year 6 pupils attending Walsall schools living in that planning area is compared against the next year's figure for Year 7 pupils attending Walsall schools living in that planning area to arrive at a 'loss / gain' factor. This is applied to projected future Year 6 figures for each planning area to predict how many Year 7 pupils there will be in Walsall schools living in each planning area. Movement between planning areas is calculated in a similar way as for the primary schools.

The borough's secondary schools are now being affected by the upturn in births that led to primary schools needing to be expanded. To increase the number of places available a review of all secondary school capacities has been carried out and the possibility of those schools admitting higher numbers has been identified.

Year 7 places for September 2022

As part of allocation of school places for September 2022, it became evident of a significant variance to required number of places against previous years modelled forecasted demand.

Whilst there will always be several contextual factors that change the forecasted demand, there are 3 main contributing reasons:

1. More pupils than previously modelled submitted preferences for Walsall schools, leading to less than forecasted numbers seeking out of borough school places.
2. More pupils from out of borough schools than previously modelled submitted preferences for Walsall school places.
3. The delayed opening of the Swift Free School has removed the availability of up to 180 school places being available

The increased demand resulted in all secondary schools being contacted prior to National Offer Day – 1 March 2022 to ask for places to be increased. Schools worked with the Local Authority to provide additional places, within their schools without the need for additional accommodation, by exceeding their Published Admission Number (PAN) to allow more children to be offered a place within their school.

Year 7 places for September 2023

As part of the SCAP submission this summer, the school organisation team has revised the forecasted model based on the variances in the in/out of borough demands. The submitted SCAP model, therefore shows an absolute shortfall of 296 Y7 places against the schools published admission numbers for September 2023.

The current forecasting model for secondary pupil places for Year 7 intakes shows the following:

Planning Area	Measure	Sep-23	Sep-24	Sep-25	Sep-26	Sep-27	Sep-28	Sep-29
Total	Agreed Intake	3743	3743	3743	3743	3743	3743	3743
	Projected Intake	4039	3998	3933	3936	3911	3946	3832
	Surplus / (Shortfall)	(296)	(255)	(190)	(193)	(168)	(203)	(89)

In addition to the SCAP forecasts, a 'planning' tolerance has been added as a risk factor to allow for some additional migration impacts of in/out of borough preferences. A 1-2% factor would increase the shortfall by 40-81 places for September 2023.

Future projections are reviewed regularly based on the October census information, and on-time applications for school places to ensure the forecasted model is as accurate as possible with known information.

The expected shortfall of places across the Local Authority over the coming years is significant, therefore additional capacity is needed across the borough to ensure sufficient places are available.

Through ongoing conversations with schools and academy trusts/governing bodies, additional places have been secured for September 2023. To date, 11

schools have offered an additional 187 places without requiring any works to be undertaken at the site.

Some of these schools have previously admitted a lower number of pupils, however the additional places offered by the schools is reflective of the school sites and their ability to manage additional pupils.

Three schools have offered an additional 150 places however there is a requirement for some building related works to be undertaken to allow the schools to offer these additional places.

Schools	Flatline PAN	Uplift	Admitting 2023	Additional places by uplift	Works Required/Not required
Aldridge	270	10	280		No works required
Barr Beacon	252	7	259		No works required
Bloxwich	180	5	185		No works required
Blue Coat	150	10	160		No works required
Brownhills	150	10	160		No works required
Sheffield	240	20	260		No works required
Shire Oak	270	30	300		No works required
St Francis	180	15	195		No works required
Streetly Academy	260	10	270		No works required
West Walsall	210	20	230		No works required
Willenhall	180	50	230		No works required
Total places without any works required				187	
Grace	180	40	220		Works Required
Joseph Leckie	240	60	300		Works Required
Pool Hayes	200	50	250		Works Required
Total places with some works				150	
	3,743	337	4,080	337	

The number of places required for September 2023 as submitted on the School Capacity (SCAP) return was 4039. If approval is given to create the places with works at the three schools above, together with the additional places offered at schools with no works required, then this requirement has been met and exceeded with 4080 places being secured.

Officers are in continued dialogue with schools and Trusts on an individual basis, together with Walsall Association of Secondary Heads (WASH) as a collective of schools to review existing school capacities and opportunities to increase admission numbers to increase the 'planning' tolerance beyond the 41 places already secured.

Key Milestone dates

Throughout the admissions cycle there are key milestone dates when the forecasted data for additional places can be validated. These include:

- October, January and May Census data of pupils on roll
- Number of 'on-time' applications received at 31 October
- Transfer file dates within the coordinated scheme with other local authorities on preference data
- Timely following up of 'late' applications for those pupils who do not apply 'on-time'

Schools will exceed the Published Admission Number (PAN) for September 2023 to admit additional pupils into the cohort – the additional places offered will allow more pupils to secure one of their preferences for school admission and lead to less pupils being offered a non-preference school which will reduce admission appeals and home to school transport assistance for those pupils offered a place at alternative schools.

Subject to approval at Cabinet, it is proposed that the Local Authority will work with the schools across the borough to increase the capacity at schools and where works are required to support the capacity increases, funding will be available from the Basic Need grant given to the LA from the DfE to ensure sufficiency of school places.

Consideration of new provision – Free School

A Free School has been approved for Walsall and is set to open from September 2025 however there are conversations been the Local Authority, DfE and Free School sponsors for places to be provided in temporary provision from September 2024. This would create an additional 180 places within the borough.

3.4 Post 16

Walsall has a complex picture of education providers for post 16 learners comprising:

- 22 schools with sixth forms, of which
 - 18 mainstream secondary schools of which
 - 16 are academies across eight sponsor organisations and
 - 2 maintained – Voluntary Aided
 - 3 maintained special schools
 - 1 Studio School for learners aged 14-19
- Free School for AP = Ladder School opening to 6th form as part of Mercian Trust
- 1 FE college
- a range of local and national training providers offering programmes of study and apprenticeships

Not all schools with 6th form designation are currently recruiting to 6th form provision.

Post 16 learners travel across the border into neighbouring local authorities for mainstream and SEND including South Staffs College which has a number of sites, Sandwell, Wolverhampton colleges.

Participation:

51% of young people accessing education post 16 remain in their school 6th form placements, 48% accessing college provision. Additionally, there are post 16 learners on apprenticeships and programmes of study with other training providers.

Gaps in provision

Suitable specialised post 16 provision for young people with SEMH, ASC and high levels of anxiety, particularly as Elmwood as the SEMH school is the only one in Walsall without a 6th form.

Increasing demand for provision to meet needs of students aged 19-25 with more severe and complex learning difficulties, those with Autistic Spectrum Condition/SLCN and high levels of anxiety.

There is increased need for local provision for learners with SEND to reduce gaps and the need for young people to move out of borough:

- Specialist provision for young people with Autism - especially with challenging behaviour and those with the highest need
- Provision for PMLD students who would have previously moved to social care but are now staying in education and going to ISP's; looking to develop a joint enterprise with adult social care and education
- Provision for students with Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) especially those with challenging behaviour who can't currently access a place within the existing local provision

There is increasing requirement for suitable provision to meet needs of autism, SEMH, challenging behaviour and PMLD.

Increase in Supported Internship/employment opportunities and progression routes, which will be addressed in some part by the development of the Goscote site by social care. Potential to develop Supported Internships, Traineeships and Apprenticeships and develop an attractive offer to provide in-work training to local employers to increase skills levels of employees.

Requirement for smaller, specialist, flexible provision in appropriate environments to meet the needs of vulnerable young people with complex needs.

External Drivers

T Levels are new 2-year courses which are taken after GCSEs and are broadly equivalent in size to 3 A Levels. Launched in September 2020, these courses have been developed in collaboration with employers and education providers so that the content meets the needs of industry and prepares students for entry into skilled employment, an apprenticeship or related technical study through further or higher education.

T Levels offer students practical and knowledge-based learning at a school or college and on-the-job experience through an industry placement of at least 315 hours – approximately 45 days.

T Levels will become one of the main choices for students after GCSEs alongside:

- apprenticeships for students who wish to learn a specific occupation ‘on the job’
- A levels for students who wish to continue academic education
- other qualifications not served by A levels or T levels, including sport science, performing arts and small qualifications designed to be taken alongside A levels

3.5 Special Schools

The pupil place requirement for SEND places is broader than just Walsall and indeed the Black Country; it is an increasing need for many Local Authorities. There continues to be increased demand for specialist school places and increased levels of SEND needs across the region and nationally. The reasons underpinning this are multi-faceted including improved early identification of needs, changing complexity of need and general increased demand.

The impact of this is that local authority areas may not have the sufficient or appropriate provision and capacity to deliver specialist support in their area and children may need to be educated in out of borough commissioned high-cost independent settings that may not always be able to deliver good outcomes nor be value for money.

Following a detailed review and analysis over the last 3 years, forecasts indicate that Walsall is likely to see an annual demand growth of 6.3% of statutory assessments, which in turn will lead to a need for additional specialist places across the borough. This has considered fluctuations because of the pandemic.

The table below shows the predicted number of specialist SEN places needed by type of need:

	Sept. 2022	Sept. 2023	Sept. 2024	Sept. 2025	Sept. 2026	Total
Cognition and Learning Needs (complex/SLD)	+ 26	+21	+22	+24	+24	+117
Cognition and Learning Needs (MLD)	+36	+29	+31	+33	+35	+164
Social Emotional Mental Health Needs	+40	+32	+34	+36	+38	+180
Sensory and/or Physical Needs	+7	+6	+6	+6	+8	+33
Communication and Interaction Needs (includes Autism)	+64	+51	+54	+58	+61	+288
Total number of places	+173	+139	+147	+157	+166	+782

Current Position

For the majority of CYP, a mainstream education would be the most appropriate provision, however where needs are more complex and significant, a specialist setting may be an option. Consideration of additional ways to support CYP with an EHCP to remain in mainstream provision is one of the key themes in the action plan.

The school organisation team worked with IFM within the Corporate Landlord service to commission work from an external architect company to undertake

desktop feasibility studies, to establish the number of places each school can accommodate based on the ambulant and non-ambulant requirement of children within the school.

The architects, alongside the school organisation team will then review the current arrangements model of our special schools and consider how the existing spaces could be utilised in other ways to create more places within the current school footprint. They will also evaluate the site to determine if an expansion would be possible – considering any site constraints e.g., ground problems/mineshfts, highway implications etc.

Discussions regarding the immediate need from September 2022 have taken place with individual schools and an additional 107 places have been commissioned across special schools and the creation of SRPs in some mainstream schools.

Whilst the 107 places created so far does not meet all of the forecasted shortfall for September 2022, the forecasted demand is for the whole of the 2022/23 academic year, so plans for additional places are included in the medium term for the creation of an additional 124 SRP places in mainstream schools over the next 2 academic years.

Long Term Solutions

In assessing the options for place creation in the longer term, the school organisation team and corporate landlord have considered the potential for the permanent expansion of existing special schools and opportunities within the council property portfolio to repurpose buildings to create new provision.

Currently, our special schools have specific designations for the type of need they meet – we will address this over time, aiming to have generic provisions where appropriate (whilst avoiding dilution of specialisms). This has been included in a Free School application that has been submitted to the DfE, to create an all age, all need special Free School suitable for 312 children.

Successful local authorities will be contacted in late Autumn 2022 to early Spring 2023.

There are a number of options on how the remaining forecasted specialist places could be delivered.

These include:

- Additional SRP places in mainstream schools
- refurbishment and expansion of our special schools eg Elmwood and Phoenix SEMH schools
- refurbishment of the Education Development Centre (EDC) to continue to provide highly complex SLD provision as a satellite site to Oakwood Special School.
- refurbishment of other council sites – either through delivery of an awarded DfE Free School or through the Council running a presumption competition for a new school

This provision, based on the proposed sites, will benefit children and families as we will have a wider geographical spread of available places. It complements our offer available to children and families, supporting our wish to meet parental preference where possible, for children living and being educated in their local community.

Increasing the number of places available over time will allow us, at appropriate times, to bring children in 'out of borough' places back in to borough, delivering associated cost savings including on transport and to ensure that we have all children in the right place at the right time – so for children affected by a current shortfall of places, who are in mainstream but really need a specialist provision, we will be better able to meet need.

Pressure on special schools will be eased and schools who are sometimes forced to go over commissioned number, with a negative impact on their budget and on pupil outcomes will not have to do so with the additional space created, and when we can meet need appropriately, opportunities would be available for commissioning from neighbouring local authorities.

The high-level review and cost estimates will be undertaken to look at the potential numbers of pupils that could be accommodated within the council's portfolio of buildings.

Costs will not be known in their entirety until a decision has been made as to whether the Free School bid has been successful, however following the feasibility a more detailed idea of costs will be known.

A full report on Specialist provision and places will be taken to Cabinet in December.

4. *Financial information*

Any capital costs arising from works required will be funded from DfE grant funding – either Basic Need for mainstream schools or High Needs Provision Capital Allocation for special schools.

5. *Reducing Inequalities*

It is of crucial importance to the Council's strategic objectives that the young People of Walsall can access the right provision to meet their need to achieve the appropriate qualifications, progressing to employment and / or training and to make a positive contribution within the Borough in the future.

6. *Decide*

The Committee may decide to note the current position and request further information or assurance if necessary.

7. *Respond*

Any recommendations made by the Committee will be assessed against the Access and Inclusion planned work and performance board programmes.

8. Review

The work of the Admissions & Education Sufficiency Team is subject to constant monitoring and assessment via the Children's Services Performance Board process.

Appendices

Appendix 1 & 2 – Primary and Secondary Planning Area Maps

Contact Officer(s)

Alex Groom – Admissions & Education Sufficiency Manager

✉ alex.groom@walsall.gov.uk

Rob Thomas – Head of Access

✉ rob.thomas@walsall.gov.uk