

Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee –

School Admissions Update

Wards	All
Service:	Admissions & Education Sufficiency, Access Service
Portfolio:	Councillor Kaur

1. Aim

The aim of this report is to provide the Education Scrutiny and Overview Committee with an update on school admissions activities undertaken by the Admissions & Education Sufficiency Team.

2. Recommendations

That the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- considers the contents of this report and notes that all children who submitted an on-time application to Walsall for a secondary place in 2024 were made an offer of a school place even though the demand had also increased.
- considers the contents of this report and notes that all children who submitted an on-time application to Walsall for a primary place in 2024 were made an offer of a school place
- decides whether any further information or updates are required.

4. Report detail

Following on from the paper brought to the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November 2023, this report provides an update on the current work being undertaken by the Admissions & Education Sufficiency Team.

4.1. Background

Walsall Council carries out a number of school admission activities for its residents in accordance with the provisions of the School Admissions Code (2021) including determination of admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools, coordination of phased admission rounds for all schools, ensuring that parents have access to midyear admission processes, admission appeals for community and voluntary controlled schools and ensuring that fair access arrangements are in place for all children in Walsall.

4.2 Phased Admission Rounds

The Council works in conjunction with its neighbouring local authorities including Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Sandwell, and Dudley to co-ordinate the phased admissions rounds.

Phased admission rounds involve:

- **Reception Transfer Round** - admission to reception class at age 4.
- **Junior Transfer Round** - transfer from Year 2 to Year 3, for those children that are on roll at an infant school and need to transfer to a junior school to continue their primary education.
- **Secondary Transfer Round** – admission to Year 7, age 11.

Applicants can express up to three preferences for Reception and Junior transfer rounds and up to five for Secondary transfer rounds.

Applicants can express preferences for schools outside their home local authority and the purpose of the co-ordinated arrangements between local authorities is to ensure that all parents who submit applications receive a **single** offer of a school place from the local authority at the highest preference school at which a place is available.

Offers are sent to parents who submit an on-time application on National Offer Day from their home local authority – this is 1 March for secondary schools and 16 April for primary schools (or the next working day where 1 March or 16 April fall on a weekend or bank holiday), in the year in which the child will be admitted.

4.3 Phased Admissions - Secondary Round – September 2024

The number of children requiring a school place in Year 7 at a secondary school in September 2024 matched September 2023, as the highest requirement of places needed.

Table below show a comparison of data for September 2024 and September 2023

	September 2024 data		September 2023 data	
	Offers	%*	Offers	%*
Offered 1st preference	3026	77.0	3112	79.2
Offered 2nd preference	388	9.9	399	10.2
Offered 3rd preference	146	3.7	138	3.5
Offered one of their top three preferences	3560	90.6	3649	92.9
Offered a preference	3649	92.9	3713	94.5
Not offered preference school and allocated an alternative	280	7.1	216	5.5
Total Walsall on-time applications	3929		3929	

All children who submitted an on-time application to Walsall were made an offer of a school place for September 2024.

There were 178 late application that were processed following National Offer Day, and all the applications received by the end of summer term were also offered places within a Walsall school. This was a reduction from last year when 220 late applications were received following closing day.

4.4 Phased Admissions – Secondary – September 2025

National Offer Day for children starting Secondary School 2025 is on 3 March 2025.

The portal for submitting applications opened on Monday 2 September 2024. The closing date for on time applications is 31 October 2024.

At the time of writing this report, applications were being received for school places daily, with submitted applications currently being at over 3620. It is expected that there will be approximately 4000 applications into the authority.

In advance of closing date, officers are contacting primary schools in Walsall and neighbouring authorities where Walsall children are currently on roll in year 6 to prompt schools to remind parents of their requirements to apply prior to the closing date.

In addition, officers are liaising with all Walsall primary schools and gaining contact logs for parents/guardians of children who had yet to apply and contacting parents to support them in making applications.

Files are shared between authorities to ensure contact can also be made with any children who are Walsall residents but attend a school not in the borough of Walsall.

Officers have arranged drop-in sessions in areas across the borough where applications in previous years have been reduced to support applications being submitted. These sessions took place on:

Willenhall Library: Tuesday 15 October 9:30am – 12:30pm

Darlaston Library: Tuesday 15 October 1 – 4pm

Lichfield Street Hub: Wednesday 16 October 9am – 5pm

Blakenall Village Centre: Thursday 17 October 1 - 4pm

The service has worked with our colleagues in the Communications Team of Walsall Council and regular updates and reminders have been shared on social media, on Walsall Council's intranet as well as on the external Walsall Council website, to encourage and remind of the need to submit applications.

Where applications are not received on time, it is likely to result in children not receiving one of their preferred schools and an allocation of a school place being made.

In line with the School Admissions Code 2021, local authorities must allocate all Walsall children a school place for the start of their secondary school career. If a preferred school is already at capacity, the closest school to the home address with spaces remaining will be allocated to the child. This could result in a place being allocated at a school further away from the home address than wanted.

Parents will have a right to refuse an allocated school place, they will be advised that in doing so this could result in their child not having a school setting to start in September 2025; subsequently the child becoming a Child Missing Education and referred to the Fair Access Panel for placement at an alternative school.

4.5 Phased Admissions – Reception – September 2024

The number of children who were due to start school in September 2024 has reduced due to the continue falling birth rate across Walsall and nationally. This reduction however led to an increase in the number of children being offered their first preference in a Walsall school.

Reception Offers	September 2024	September 2023
Total Walsall on-time applications	3319	3417
Offered 1st preference	3170 (95.5%)	3154 (92.3%)
Offered 2nd preference	107 (3.2%)	136 (4%)
Offered 3rd preference	7 (0.2%)	40 (1.2%)
Offered one of their top three preferences	3285 (99.0%)	3330 (97.5%)
Not offered any preferred school and allocated an alternative	35 (1.1%)	87 (2.5%)

Of the **35** children in Walsall not offered one of their preferred schools, **29** of these applicants had expressed a preference for only one school - rather than using all of the three preferences that is available to every applicant. Walsall Council always advises applicants to utilise all three preferences and recommends that all families contact their preferred schools before applying.

4.6 Phased Admissions – Reception/Junior Round – September 2025

The portal for submitting applications will open on Monday 4 November 2024 closing on Wednesday 15 January 2025.

National Offer Day for children starting Reception and moving to a Junior school in September 2025 is on Wednesday 16 April 2024.

Officers will be holding drop-in sessions across the borough focusing on areas where in previous years there have been higher volumes of late applications submitted. The following primary drop-in sessions have been scheduled.

Location: Willenhall Library

Date: Tuesday, 3 December 2024

Time: 9:30am - 12:30pm

Address: 1 Walsall St, Willenhall, WV13 2EX

Location: Darlaston Library

Date: Tuesday, 3 December 2024

Time: 1pm - 4pm

Address: 1 King Street, Darlaston WS10 8DE

Location: Lichfield Street Hub

Date: Wednesday, 4 December 2024

Time: 9am - 5pm

Address: Lichfield St, Walsall, WS1 1TR

Location: Blakenall Village Centre

Date: Thursday, 5 December 2024

Time: 1pm - 4pm

Address: 79 Thames Rd, Bloxwich, Walsall, WS3 1LZ

Close work with early years settings and promotion of the application window will be undertaken with services working with families with young children including health visitors, school nursing service, early help, GPs and other educational practitioners to increase the number of applications received for Reception places.

4.7 Mid-Year Admissions Process in Walsall.

Parents and carers need to follow the mid-year admissions application process if they move into Walsall or wish to apply to change schools outside of the year groups and timescales that are covered by the phased admission rounds.

In Walsall, the process for making a mid-year admission application is as follows:

4.8 Primary Mid-Year Admission Application Process:

The Local Authority co-ordinates the mid-year admissions applications for most primary schools in Walsall so applications for these schools need to be made directly to the Local Authority via the School Admissions and Appeals Team.

In line with School Admission Code in 2021, several own admission authority schools have informed the Local Authority that they wish to co-ordinate their own mid-year admissions and for these schools' parents and carers need to make applications directly to them.

As there are different processes for applications to some primary schools, parents and carers are encouraged to review the school admissions webpages on the Council's website for more information about the correct application process for each school.

All primary schools submit return a weekly data return that advise the admissions service where they have vacancies in any year groups – this allows the school admissions to make offers of school places to families in a timely manner and ensures the Council are discharging their statutory duties more effectively in accordance with the School Admissions Code.

This data also assists the Local Authority to monitor pupils in accordance with the following statutory guidance (Children Missing Education (2016) and Keeping Children Safe in Education (2021).

This data is also used to inform the decisions of the Primary Fair Access Panel. The Panel meets every four weeks to consider referrals and make school placement allocations for pupils without school places in accordance with the Walsall Primary Fair Access Protocol.

4.9 Secondary Mid-Year Admission Application Process:

In line with the School Admissions Code, all secondary schools in Walsall have opted to co-ordinate their own mid-year admissions application process as they are their own admission authority. The Council is not the admission authority of any secondary school. Therefore, parents need to approach each school directly to make an application for a secondary school place.

As set out in the School Admissions Code, all admissions authorities should aim to notify applicants of the outcome of their mid-year application within 10 school days and they must notify applicants of the outcome of their application in writing within 15 school days.

Applicants must be informed in writing of the reason for refusal and their right to appeal the decision of the admission authority. Applicants must not be refused the opportunity to make an application or be advised that they can be placed on a school's waiting list instead of making a formal application.

Whilst secondary schools coordinate their own midyear admissions, they still have a statutory duty to return information to the Local Authority on any vacancies they have in schools across the years groups as well as advising of any applications they receive and whether the children are being offered a place or advised on their right to appeal. Schools must additionally advise the Local Authority of any child that has been removed from the school's roll and give reasons for this.

Similarly to the primary process, the secondary Fair Access Panel meets every 4 weeks to consider referrals and make school placement allocations for pupils without school places in accordance with the secondary Fair Access Protocol.

4.10 Oversubscription Criteria

In community and voluntary controlled schools in Walsall, if there are more applications than there are places available, places will be allocated using the oversubscription criteria in the following order of priority:

1. Children and Young People in Care & previous Children and Young People in Care

Children and young people in care are children who at the time of application are:

- In the care of the Local Authority
- Being provided with accommodation by a Local Authority in the exercise of the social services functions.

Previous children and young people in care are children who

- were looked after but ceased to be so due to adoption (or became subject to child arrangements order or special guardianship order) immediately following having been looked after.
- Children who appear to a Local Authority to have been in state care outside of England and ceased to be in state care because of being adopted.

2. Children who have a sibling in attendance at the school or paired junior school when the application is submitted and who will still be attending the school at the proposed admission date.

A sibling is a child who resides at the same address as the child for whom a place is being requested and is one of the following:

- A brother or sister sharing the same parents.
- A half-brother or sister sharing one common parent.
- A stepbrother or sister (i.e. related by their parent's marriage).
- Any other child for whom it can be demonstrated that he or she is residing permanently at the same address (e.g. under the terms of a residence order).

3. Pupils for whom a place at the school is essential on medical or social grounds as supported in writing by a medical practitioner or a social worker. (Applications will be subject to verification by the Admissions & Education Sufficiency Manager)

If parents believe there are specific medical or social reasons for claiming priority for a child to attend a particular school, the relevant part of the application must be completed and evidence to support the claim must be submitted to the Local Authority.

Requests for such consideration will be subject to verification by the service. This is necessary because parents will be asking the Authority to assess the child as having a stronger case than many other children, some of whom may live closer to the school.

Medical Evidence

Medical evidence must be submitted in writing from a medical practitioner and should state why the preferred school is **the only school that can meet the child's needs**. This must relate to either the child or the parents, for example where the parent(s) or the child has a disability that may make travel to a school further away more difficult. Medical evidence, which relates to parent, will be considered in the following circumstances:

- Where the child lives with a single parent who has a medical condition or disability that may make travel to a school further away more difficult.
- Where the child lives with both parents and both parents have a medical condition or disability that may make travel to a school further away more difficult.
- Where a child lives with both parents and one parent has a medical condition or disability that may make travel to a school further away more difficult medical evidence may be considered if the other parent is unable to accompany the child on the journey to and from school because they are the sole carer for the other parent.

Social Evidence

Social evidence must be submitted in writing from an appropriate professional and should state why the preferred school is **the only school that can meet the child's needs**.

Please note that preferences are only given priority under the medical/social criterion in very exceptional cases where medical or social evidence clearly demonstrates that the preferred school is the only school which can meet the child's needs.

4. For applications to junior schools only. Attendance by the child at the relevant paired infant school when the application is made.

The paired infant and junior schools are:

Alumwell Infant	paired with	Alumwell Junior
Delves Infant	paired with	Delves Junior
New Invention Infant	paired with	New Invention Junior
Palfrey Infant	paired with	Palfrey Junior
Rosedale CE (C) Infant	paired with	Short Heath Junior
Sunshine Infant and Nursery	paired with	Blakenall Heath Junior
Whitehall Nursery and Infant	paired with	Whitehall Junior Community

5. For applications to voluntary controlled Church of England primary schools only. Up to 25% of places may be allocated as 'Church Places' to children, regardless of distance between home and school, whose parents are regular

worshippers at a Christian church and whose application is supported in writing by the minister of the church where they worship.

The following voluntary controlled Church of England primary schools have 'Church Places':

- Christ Church CE (C) JMI
- Holy Trinity CE Primary
- Little Bloxwich CE (VC)Primary
- Old Church CE (C) Primary
- Rosedale CE (C) Infant
- St Giles CE Primary
- St John's CE Primary
- St Michael's CE (C) Primary

The number of church places available is determined by the Admission Number of the school. Voluntary controlled Church of England primary schools:

- with an admission number of 30 will offer a maximum of 7 church places.
- with an admission number of 45 will offer a maximum of 11 church places.
- with an admission number of 60 will offer a maximum of 15 church places.
- with an admission number of 90 will offer a maximum of 22 church places.

If there is over-subscription for church places, priority will be given to those living closest to the school as measured in a straight line.

'Regular worshipper' is defined as attending a place of worship on at least one occasion per month over the past twelve months.

6. Distance between the home address and the school as measured in a straight line with those living closer to the school receiving the higher priority.

Distance will be measured in a straight line from the centre point of the home address to the centre point of the school address using the Local Authority's computerised measuring system with those living closer to the school receiving the higher priority.

4.11 Admission Arrangements

When changes are proposed to admission arrangements, all admission authorities must consult on their admission arrangements (including any supplementary information forms) that will apply for admission applications the following school year.

Where the admission arrangements have not changed from the previous year there is no requirement to consult, subject to the requirement that admission authorities must consult on their admission arrangements at least once every 7 years, even if there have been no changes during that period.

Consultation must last for a minimum of 6 weeks and must take place between 1 October and 31 January in the determination year.

Admission authorities must consult with:

- a) parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen.
- b) other persons in the relevant area who in the opinion of the admission authority have an interest in the proposed admissions.

- c) all other admission authorities within the relevant area (except that primary schools need not consult secondary schools).
- d) whichever of the governing body and the local authority is not the admission authority.
- e) any adjoining neighbouring local authorities where the admission authority is the local authority.
- f) in the case of schools designated with a religious character, the body or person representing the religion or religious denomination.

For the duration of the consultation period, the admission authority must publish a copy of their full proposed admission arrangements (including the proposed Published Admission Number - PAN) on the school's website or its own website (in the case of a local authority) together with details of where comments may be sent and the areas on which comments are not sought.

Admission authorities must also send, upon request, a copy of the proposed admission arrangements to any of the persons or bodies listed above inviting comment. Failure to consult effectively may be grounds for subsequent complaints and appeals.

In Walsall, officers are preparing consultation documents to look at the reduction in some admission numbers in primary schools for the 2026/27 academic year due to the reduction in birth rates over recent years. The outcome of the consultation will be considered by Cabinet at its meeting In February 2025.

Determination

All admission authorities must determine their admission arrangements, including their PAN, every year, even if they have not changed from previous years and a consultation has not been required by 28 February in the determination year

Once admission authorities have determined their admission arrangements, they must notify the appropriate bodies and must publish a copy of the determined arrangements on the school's website or their own website (in the case of a local authority) by 15 March in the determination year and continue displaying them for the whole offer year (the school year in which offers for places are made). Admission authorities must also send a copy of their full, determined arrangements to the local authority as soon as possible before 15 March in the determination year. Admission authorities for schools designated with a religious character must also send a copy of their arrangements to the body or person representing their religion or religious denomination.

Our current determined admission arrangements can be found at this link:

<https://go.walsall.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/schools-in-walsall/school-admissions/school-admissions-policies>

Where an admission authority has determined a PAN that is higher than in previous years, they must notify the local authority that they have done so and make specific reference to the change on their website.

Local authorities must publish on their website the proposed admission arrangements for any new school or academy which is intended to open in their area within the determination year, details of where the determined arrangements for all schools, including academies, can be viewed, and information on how to refer objections to the Schools Adjudicator. Local authorities must publish these details by 15 March in the determination year.

Following determination of arrangements, any objections to those arrangements must be made to the Schools Adjudicator. Objections to admission arrangements must be referred to the Schools Adjudicator by 15 May in the determination year.

Admission authorities that are not the local authority must provide all the information that the local authority needs to compile the composite prospectus no later than 8 August, unless agreed otherwise.

4.9.3 Fair Access Protocol

The Fair Access Protocol (FAP) is a mechanism developed by the local authority in partnership with all schools in their area. Its aim is to ensure that vulnerable children, and those who are having difficulty in securing a school place in-year, are allocated a school place as quickly as possible. Every local authority must have a FAP in place.

The School Admissions Code 2021 makes it clear that local authorities must ensure that no school, including those with places available, is asked to take a disproportionate number of children and young people who have been excluded from other schools, or who have challenging behaviour, under the Fair Access Protocol.

Where possible, children should be placed in school through the usual in-year admissions process in the first instance. FAPs should provide a fair and transparent system to ensure that all schools share the collective responsibility of helping the most vulnerable, by admitting their fair share of children being placed via the FAP. This includes supporting those children who have been permanently excluded from other schools and those who display challenging behaviour.

Main Principles of Walsall's Fair Access Protocol

This protocol applies to all mainstream primary and secondary schools and academies in Walsall. The protocol should not be used to circumvent the mid-year admissions process.

Schools will exceed their published admission number where necessary in order to admit pupils under the protocol. The infant class size legislation allows for children to be admitted over number following the exceptions rule.

Pupils identified for placement under the Fair Access Protocol will be given priority over those on waiting lists for the same school.

Fair Access Data

The numbers of children referred to the FAP has slightly increased since last year:

2024 Total: Primary: 368 Secondary: 413

2023 Total: Primary: 328 Secondary: 319

Most in-year applications that are submitted to Walsall continues to remain the highest from people 'New to the LA' or 'New to the country'

5.0 Decide

The Committee may decide to note the current position and request further information or assurance in respect of the progress of the processes.

6.0. Respond

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

7.0 Review

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

Background papers

School Admissions Code (2021)

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