

Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee –

School Admissions Update

Wards All

Service: Admissions & Education Sufficiency, 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 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 2023 were made an offer of a school place even though the demand had also increased
- 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 March 2022, 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)

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.

4.2 Phased Admissions - Secondary Round – September 2023

The number of children requiring a school place in Year 7 at a secondary school in September 2023 was higher than in previous years.

Table below show a comparison of data for September 2023 and September 2022

	September 2023	September 2022
Offered 1st preference	3112	3055
Offered 2nd preference	399	400
Offered 3rd preference	138	122
Offered one of their top three preferences	3649	3577
Offered any preference	3713	3628
Not offered any preferred school and allocated an alternative	216	208
Total Walsall on-time applications	3929	3836

All children who submitted an on-time application to Walsall were made an offer of a school place for September 2023.

There were 220 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.

4.3. Phased Admissions – Secondary – September 2024

National Offer Day for children starting Secondary School 2024 is on 1 March 2024.

The portal for submitting applications opened on Monday 4 September 2023. The closing date for on time applications is 31 October 2023.

At the time of writing this report applications were being received for school places daily, with submitted applications currently being at over 3000. It is expected that there will be approximately 4100 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:

Litchfield Street Hub – Tuesday 24 October – 9.00am – 1.00pm
Blakenhall Village Centre – Thursday 26 October 1.00pm – 4.30pm
Willenhall Library – Friday 27 October – 9.30am – 12.30pm
Darlaston Library – Friday 27 October – 1.00pm – 4.00pm

The service have 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 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.

4.4 Phased Admissions – Reception – September 2023

The number of children who were due to start school in September 2023 was slightly lower than in September 2022 due to the lower birth rate in 2018/19.

Reception Offers	September 2023	September 2022
Total Walsall on-time applications	3417	3440
Offered 1st preference	3154	3182
Offered 2nd preference	136	152
Offered 3rd preference	40	44
Offered one of their top three preferences	3330	3378
Allocated an alternative	87	94

Of the **87** children in Walsall not offered one of their preferred schools, **66** 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.

4.5 Phased Admissions – Reception/Junior Round – September 2024

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

The portal for submitting applications will open on Monday 6 November 2023.

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.

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.

4.6 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:

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 take co-ordinate their own mid-year admissions and for these schools parents and carers need to make applications directly to them.

Parents and Carers should be sign posted to Walsall's School Admissions webpages 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.

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. Applicant 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 schools 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.

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. 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)

School Admissions Report – Education & Scrutiny Committee – November 2021

Pupil Place Planning Report – Education & Scrutiny Committee – February 2022

School Admissions Report – March 2022

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