

Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Mainstream School Pupil Place Planning

Wards All

Service: Admissions & Education Sufficiency 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 – Mainstream Primary and Secondary Schools
- Free School Development

2. Recommendations

That the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- notes falling birth rates impacting on surplus places in primary schools which will mean a requirement for conversations with schools about possibly reducing their Published Admission Number, or alternatives, to ensure a school does not become financially unsustainable.
- may require a further report on primary places in Spring or Summer term.
- notes the positive working to meet the forecasted demand for places with our secondary schools.
- 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 place planning 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 Primary Sufficiency

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-24	Sep-25	Sep-26	Sep-27
PAN	3959	3959	3959	3959
Projected Intake	3529	3446	3448	3439
Surplus / Shortfall	430	513	511	520
Surplus %	11%	13%	13%	13%

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.

Falling birth rates suggest that there will be a requirement for conversations with schools about possibly reducing their Published Admission Number, or alternatives, to ensure a school does not become financially unsustainable.

Work within the school place planning team is ongoing to develop a plan to ensure that schools remain financially sustainable during the years that this reduction is showing. This work has been communicated to primary schools through the Primary, Nursery and Special (PNS) head teachers' group and further conversations are being communicated with schools at planning area level.

A further report on the outcome of the conversations with primary schools and any proposed changes to admissions numbers for future years can be brought back to the commission in the Spring or Summer term.

3.3 Secondary Sufficiency

As part of the SCAP submission this summer, the school place planning team has revised the forecasted model based on the variances in the in/out of borough demands. The submitted SCAP model, therefore shows a forecasted shortfall of 308 Y7 places against the schools published admission numbers for September 2024.

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

	Measure	Sep-24	Sep-25	Sep-26	Sep-27	Sep-28	Sep-29
Total	Agreed Intake	3743	3743	3743	3743	3743	3743
	Projected Intake	4051	4036	4063	4117	4159	4003
	Surplus / Shortfall	-308	-293	-320	-374	-416	-260

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 2024. To date, 9 schools (shown in green in the table below) have offered an additional 199 places without requiring any works to be undertaken at the site. Two additional schools are in the process of having works completing within school to create a further 110 places.

A total 309 additional places have therefore been secured for September 2024.

School Name	Base PAN	Uplift	Admitting 2024	
Aldridge School	270	15	285	No works required
Barr Beacon School	252	7	259	No works required
Bloxwich Academy	180	0	180	
Bluecoat CE Academy	150	10	160	No works required
Brownhills Ormiston Academy	150	17	167	No works required
Grace Academy Darlaston	180	40	220	No works Required
Joseph Leckie Academy	240	60	300	Works Required
Shelfield Ormiston Academy	240	25	265	No works required

Pool Hayes Community School	200	50	250	Works Required
Queen Mary's Grammar School	180	0	180	
Queen Marys High School	150	0	150	
Shire Oak Academy	270	0	270	
St Francis of Assisi	180	15	195	No works required
St Thomas More Catholic School	243	0	243	
The Streetly Academy	260	0	260	
Walsall Academy	208	0	208	
West Walsall E Act Academy	210	20	230	No works required
Willenhall E Act Academy	180	50	230	No works required
TOTAL	3743	309	4052	

It is positive that the forecasted demand for places has been secured with the support of several secondary schools. It would be beneficial to secure a 'planning' tolerance to allow for some additional migration impacts of in/out of borough preferences.

Officers in the school place planning team are continuing to engage with secondary schools to secure additional places if they are needed for allocation of school places on 01 March 2024.

Schools will exceed the Published Admission Number (PAN) for September 2024 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.

For the schools that have indicated they require building works to accommodate the additional pupils the Council has undertaken a Net Capacity Assessment (NCA) - a calculation of teaching and non-teaching spaces within the school. The NCA and subsequent schedule of accommodation has been used to determine what shortfalls in the existing spaces the schools have.

Utilising the NCA, the works required at the two schools are summarised below although final drawing and plans are still outstanding from the two schools:

Pool Hayes Academy - 50 pupils per year (250 pupils across the next 5 years)

To expand the school on a permanent basis by a new modular classroom block for September 2024, works required are:

- 7 x general classroom
- 2 x Toilet Blocks

- 2 x offices

Joseph Leckie - 60 pupils per year (300 pupils across the next 5 years)

To expand the school on a permanent basis by a new modular classroom block for September 2024, works required are:

- 7 x general classroom
- 2 x Toilet Blocks
- 2 x offices

As part of the procurement and delivery of these works, academies have opted to deliver their own capital schemes outside of Local Authority procurement exercises. In such circumstances, capital grant agreements, setting out the terms of the use of public funding provided by the LA, are signed by the Academy Trust, placing a legal obligation to deliver the project and provide the agreed number of places.

These agreements cover areas such as accounts and records, information management, warranties, data protection, insurance, and liabilities etc. The agreements should also set minimum terms regarding the repayment of grant should the agreed places be removed or no longer be made available by the Academy without prior agreement with the LA.

The LA will enter into grant agreements with each Academy Trust to allow them to proceed with the design, procurement, and delivery of the projects to provide the additional pupil places. Formal gateway and milestone reviews will be included within the agreements to ensure LA maintains oversight and assurance that the projects are continuing in line with agreed timelines and the projects remain value for money in terms of capital costs.

A further paper will be taken to Cabinet once plans are finalised and costs submitted for approval, following the approved paper to investigate costs that were agreed in December 2022.

Consideration of new provision – Free School

A new Free School has been approved for Walsall providing an additional 180 year 7 places. It is expected that the Walsall Free School will not open until September 2026, but it will significantly reduce the forecasted demand going forwards.

The DfE are currently undertaking a feasibility study for the new school. On completion of the site clearance and geophysical survey an application to the Coal Authority will be made to seek approval for drilling and soil sampling. This will then allow the completion of the feasibility study and a decision to proceed to the next stage of the project – design solution, planning application and procurement of a contractor.

4. *Financial information*

Any capital costs arising from works required will be funded from DfE grant funding Basic Need.

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 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.

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