

Quarterly School Places Planning Update

Committee name	Residents, Education and Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee
Officer reporting	Dan Kennedy, Residents Services Sarah Phillips, Residents Services
Papers with report	None
Ward	All

HEADLINES

This report updates the Committee on primary and secondary school places, noting that all pupils starting school in September 2019 have been offered a place. At secondary level, five schools offered extra places for September 2019, equating to 82 additional places. The current primary school rolls and offers for September 2019 Reception suggest the reduction in demand for primary places is now a steady trend and therefore it is time to consider the option to reduce the number of primary places at some schools across the Borough, in a managed way. Discussions with schools are underway and proposals are being developed for Member consideration, and subject to agreement, will be brought to Cabinet in the Autumn.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Committee note that:

- 1. all children starting secondary school in September 2019 have been offered a school place, despite a record number of applications being received;**
- 2. detailed secondary school places planning is underway to ensure there are sufficient places for the period to September 2023;**
- 3. primary school rolls have stopped rising and in some areas are beginning to decline. Proposals are being drawn up, led by schools, to reduce some primary Published Admissions Numbers, for Member consideration.**

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Secondary School Places

4. As previously reported to the Committee, rising demand for secondary school places is evident, as forecast. For September 2019, all children have been offered a school place. There are still some late applications coming in but it is anticipated that all will be accommodated. Nearly all secondary schools will be full or close to being full. The exception is Harefield Academy, where a number of offers of places were declined by parents.

5. Since this increase in demand is set to continue for the next five years, detailed work is underway to review options for meeting this need and make recommendations to Members. This includes the new Free School north of the A40, approved by the Department for Education (DfE). It is predicted that there will also be a need for some more places in the next five years in the south of the Borough, which may be accommodated in temporary or permanent expansions of existing schools. Feasibility studies are underway and will be reported to Members in the first instance.

Primary School Places

6. Overall primary school rolls peaked in 2013-2015 and from 2016-19 are on a slow decline (about -1% year) which is supported by the latest available data on primary admission offers for September 2019. There are no signs yet of either significant population growth or sharp decline.
7. In the table below, the 2019 reception offers are as at May 1.

Table 1 reception capacity, roll and surplus places 2012 - 2019

October / start of school year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total Reception Capacity	4086	4431	4581	4527	4581	4581	4551	4551
Total Reception Roll	3994	4132	4063	4240	4181	3960	3993	3911
spare places	92	299	518	287	400	621	558	640
% vacant	2.25%	6.75%	11.31%	6.34%	8.73%	13.56%	12.26%	14.06%

8. As an education authority, the Borough must plan for a sufficiency of places and efficient use of resources. The table shows that the demand and capacity across the primary sector has been variable from year to year since 2012. Now, after some fluctuations, it is clear that the level of surplus in the primary sector continues to be too high, pooling in a few schools. There is the opportunity therefore to review the number of primary places and potentially reduce Published Admission Numbers (PAN) in some schools to ensure schools and the authority best meet the needs of all pupils across the Borough, and make effective use of resources in schools and between them. Importantly, though the process to reduce PAN requires considerable data and consultation, it is easy to reverse, so admissions authorities can quickly respond to a rise in demand and decide to admit over PAN on a temporary or permanent basis.
9. The autumn census determines each school’s budget share and the number of classes needed to meet the legal Infant class size limit of 30 pupils per teacher. A mismatch between the total roll and the need for classes and teachers across the seven primary year groups can create financial pressures for schools. As funding levels are so tight, schools need nearly all the classes to be of the order of 25 pupils, ideally full. Schools with declining or volatile rolls face big changes in their annual budget.

10. Most London Authorities have agreed, or are planning, reductions in primary capacity and some also have informal 'caps' on admissions. The volatility requires more regular changes, especially since school finances are so challenging. New pupil roll growth will be from new housing and migration into different year groups, not just reception.
11. Most primary schools in the Borough are graded good or better by Ofsted, with better buildings (many having been improved by the Council), more trained staff, and more pupils than ever. Improved buildings and facilities give a good basis to flex the offer through this period of volatility. Planning for school places is closely linked to the SEND review of places to optimise the use of school budgets.
12. Reception numbers overall remain at a similar level since 2016. There are big variations in how full to capacity schools are and the pockets of surplus places in a few schools continue to grow. The press has recently reported on the movement of young families out of London to the rest of the country. It is clear that in Hillingdon private sector rents have risen and there are some changes to housing tenure which have decreased the number of families - as some houses are being rented to adults only / single persons households.
13. Hillingdon is one of the largest London Boroughs and some schools serve relatively isolated 'village' communities or specific faith groups, others are urban but most serve 'suburban' residential areas. Primary schools are larger than the national or London average - most are PAN 90 (3FE) or 4FE or 5FE, with fewer 1FE and 2 FE. The 70 primary schools have rolls ranging from 165 to 933.
14. Proposals are being prepared that still need final checking in September and discussion with schools and then consideration by Cabinet, for some reductions in Planned Admissions Numbers. Because rolls are so volatile the final decision on a few of these schools will be taken in September after it is clear exactly how many pupils have started in Reception. The relevant governors are each very supportive and keen for these changes. These schools are all evenly spread across the Borough and all are graded Good by Ofsted except one which requires improvement. Several have high mobility of pupils moving in and out.
15. The emerging proposals for Member consideration and agreement would reduce the surplus capacity to about 6% in areas where there will be other places nearby in 'good' schools for parents.
16. The process of reduction has legal status and requires governors of schools to formally agree, and Cabinet to agree the changes in respect of the community schools. Proposed changes would be subject to consultation. If agreed, changes will take effect from September 2021. Should an Academy school decide to reduce their PAN then they have to submit their proposals to the DfE but must consult the local authority.
17. In those few cases where there are clearly places in nearby schools, officers are investigating criteria for applying some 'temporary caps' to reduce the capacity until demand rises, or a permanent change is agreed. Capping is used in other authorities to provide an immediate but temporary means of withdrawing some places until the need increases and the Planned Admission Number can be restored. It cannot be applied to the Reception year.

18. This is temporary, often in advance of a legal variation to the PAN. The admissions team would promote places at an alternative nearby school - particularly when there are places nearer to the pupil's home. In most cases, parents will be anxious that their child would be joining a class going through upheaval with an unknown new teacher and will accept the advice and accepted the diverted offer. Should a cap be applied, it will be lifted when there is an upturn in applications, or a legal variation in the PAN takes effect.
19. The LA Admissions team would monitor and manage the need for removing the caps in joint partnership with other admission authorities to identify which school could most easily absorb more pupils in a specific year group.

New projections to 2026

20. The GLA has processed all our demographic and housing data and has drafted revised projections for schools places in each area which are currently being checked and tested. They will be submitted at the end of July as the council's formal data return to the DfE on future capacity and demand. They highlight the number of pupils in our primary schools is stable so the changes to reduce surplus places are needed - and that the totals for year groups already in our primary schools exceed our secondary school capacity and so reinforce the need for more permanent school places.

Implications on related Council policies

21. The actions noted in the report support the council's desire and statutory responsibility to ensure sufficient school places.

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

22. The recommendations set out in this report ensures that there is effective scrutiny of the school place planning process, thereby contributing to ensuring that there are sufficient school places for Hillingdon residents.

Financial Implications

23. There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations set out in this report.

Legal Implications

24. Actions underway will help ensure schools and the council meet the legal framework governing school places and admissions arrangements.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

25. None.