

PROPOSED CHANGES TO ADMISSIONS CRITERIA FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Cabinet Member(s)	Councillor Susan O'Brien
Cabinet Portfolio(s)	Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education
Officer Contact(s)	Abi Preston – Director of Education & SEND
Papers with report	School Admissions Code 2021

HEADLINES

Summary	<p>Hillingdon Council has a statutory responsibility to secure sufficient early years and school places for children resident in Hillingdon. Over the last eleven years the Council has worked closely with schools in Hillingdon to successfully deliver an ambitious programme of school expansion to ensure every child living in Hillingdon can be offered a school place as close to home as possible.</p> <p>Following review and discussions with the schools, the Council is proposing to reduce the Published Admission Number for Whitehall Infant School and Whitehall Junior School from 120 to 90. This PAN reduction will come into effect from 2025 and there will be sufficient places to ensure that local residents and siblings can access the school. This reduction in PAN will also reduce the distance priority radius from 1250m to 1000m in line with the Council's admissions arrangements.</p> <p>Cabinet is, therefore, asked to consider the proposed change to the PAN for Whitehall Infant School and Whitehall Junior School, to address the findings of the review to provide continuing access for residents to their local school and improve stability of pupil numbers and budgets.</p>
Putting our Residents First	<p>This report supports the council objective of: <i>Thriving, healthy households</i>. The recommended changes to the school admissions criteria contained in this report will support the aim that all children in Hillingdon can be offered a local school place as close to home as possible and ensure effective, and best use of the investment the council has made to expand primary schools across the Borough.</p>
Financial Cost	<p>There are no direct financial implications from the recommendations contained in this report. However, schools with excess places above the local demand can experience part-empty classes which are not</p>

	financially viable, stretching school budgets to cover the staffing and limiting resources available to all pupils. This can lead to an overall deficit and the school seeking a loan from the council Dedicated Schools Grant for maintained schools (community, foundation, and VA) or to their Academy Trust.
Relevant Select Committee	Children, Families & Education Select Committee
Ward(s) affected	All

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. **Considers the proposal to reduce the Published Admission Number for Whitehall Infant School from 120 to 90 and Whitehall Junior School from 120 to 90 and authorises officers to undertake a full consultation exercise in relation to it.**
2. **Agrees to receive a further report at its 15th February 2024 meeting for the purpose of considering the consultation responses for a new Published Admissions Number for Whitehall Infant School and Whitehall Junior School which is set to take effect from 1 September 2025.**

Reasons for recommendation

1. As an education authority, the Council must plan for a sufficiency of places and efficient use of resources. There has been a slight decline in demand across the primary sector since 2018, with some fluctuations, but the overall level of primary surplus places continues to be too high and is pooling in a few schools. Each year the Council reviews the number of places against pupils rolls and projections and considers changing Published Admission Numbers (PAN) in some schools. Across the borough, small annual changes are needed to meet parental demand, up and down. This ensures 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. The PAN is the 'operating figure', and the physical building remains the same. Academy, Foundation and Voluntary Aided (VA) schools make their own decisions, and they must consult the Council and others on proposed reductions, but their Governors/Trusts can agree temporary or permanent increases. The review has included all primary and secondary schools. The Cabinet is the relevant authority for the community primary schools.

2. The Local Authority now recognise a need to reduce the published admission number in two of our community schools, each by 30 places. This is due to demographic changes leading to declining pupil rolls and Reception intakes, and into Year 3 into the Junior school, over the past few years which is projected to continue for another few years. There would be no difference for current pupils after the proposed change takes effect from Reception 2025, and there would be sufficient places to meet future demand from their siblings and other local parents.
3. Following a review of school places, it is proposed to consult to reduce the Published Admission Numbers for:
 - Whitehall Infant School - from 120 to 90 from 2025. All local residents will still be able to access places there. This reduction will also reduce the distance priority radius from **1250m to 1000m** in line with our admissions arrangements.
 - Whitehall Junior School - from 120 to 90 from 2025. All local residents will still be able to access places there. This reduction will also reduce the distance priority radius from **1250m to 1000m** in line with our admissions arrangements.

Alternative options considered / risk management

4. The proposals presented in this report are intended to be reasonable, clear, objective, procedurally fair and comply with all relevant legislation to mitigate the potential future risk that a small number of children living in Hillingdon may not be guaranteed a school place as close to home as possible. Options have been considered to address this risk, some of which are specific to a location in the Borough. Where alternative options have been considered therefore, these are set out in the body of the report.
5. The proposals for a reduction in PAN are to improve schools' ability to efficiently plan their staffing and educational provision and not reducing could lead to schools suffering financial pressures leading to deficits, which in the community schools could then require a loan, further adding to the deficit in the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Select Committee comments

6. The Children, Families & Education Select Committee has scheduled this matter on its multi-year work programme and will consider the proposals as part of the consultation process, before a final report is brought back to Cabinet in February 2024 for decision.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The Statutory School Admissions Code

7. The purpose of the statutory School Admissions Code is to ensure that all school places for maintained schools (excluding maintained special schools) and academies are allocated in an open and fair way. The Code contains mandatory requirements, such as setting a Published Admissions Number for each school. The admission arrangements to community schools are determined by the Local Authority as the 'admission authority.'
8. In drawing up the admission arrangements to schools, admission authorities must ensure that the practices and the criteria used to decide the allocation of school places are fair, clear and objective. Parents should be able to look at a set of arrangements and understand easily how places for that school will be allocated. All schools must have admission arrangements that clearly set out how children will be admitted. The admission authority for the school must also set out in the arrangements the oversubscription criteria against which places will be allocated at the school when there are more applications than places and the order in which the criteria will be applied.
9. To ensure that the criteria applied in prioritising access to community schools which are oversubscribed remains procedurally fair, objective and clear, a review of the criteria has been undertaken using three four years of Hillingdon admissions data to primary school reception places. The focus of the review sought to identify any residual risk that the Council would not fulfil its statutory duty to ensure every child is offered a school place.
10. The review considered the following area:
 - Ensure there are sufficient school places in Hillingdon and eliminate financial constraints where evidence shows a continued and sustained reduction in admissions.

Reduction of Published Admissions Numbers

11. All community schools have a Published Admissions Number (PAN) in accordance with the School Admissions Code 2021. This is the number of school places that the admission authority must offer in each relevant age group (Reception, Year 3 for Junior and Year 7 for secondary) of a school for which it is the admission authority. Admission numbers are part of a school's admission arrangements.
12. As an education authority the Borough must plan for a sufficiency of places and efficient use of resources. The demand and capacity across the primary sector have been variable from year to year since 2012. It is clear that the level of overall surplus places in the primary sector continues to be too high and is concentrated in a few 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, this reduction of the PAN in two Community schools is proposed.

13. Currently there are 14.8% of vacant places across all primary schools (May Census 2023). Pupil numbers will always fluctuate but the aim is to have around 8% vacancies which will ensure there will be places to meet parental demand in each area and for those moving in mid-year, and secure stability for all schools. Having any schools with a PAN over 30 pupils above the level of their local demand, means some schools attract a few pupils from further away requiring more classes to be run, but they are not economic, with a risk that if pupils join or leave, a class may need to be opened or closed. This disrupts education for all the pupils in the year group. To balance school budgets, classes need to include 25 or more pupils. Schools with declining or volatile rolls face big changes in their annual budget, and consequent cuts in staff and risk financial deficit. The aim of PAN reductions is to match the operational level of schools to local demand and improve the focus of resources in each school on their pupils and reduce the risk of deficits. Meanwhile the physical capacity will remain available if demand rises, when it is possible to increase the PAN immediately, without consultation. It is considered prudent that in future PANs should be increased temporarily a year at a time, whilst parental demand is kept under review.
14. Both schools have raised concerns about changes in their local demand and the governing body supports the reduction since it will enable the school to focus their budget and resources better for pupils, so supporting school improvement. The governing body will agree an increase should local demand for places rise. 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.
15. Hillingdon has one of the largest pupil populations in London with growth in some areas and 53,307 pupils in the May 2023 census. The past few years of roll volatility now require annual review and regular changes in PAN, up and down, to adjust the 'operating capacity' of the schools since school finances are so challenging. Most London local authorities have agreed or are planning reductions in primary capacity and increases in secondary places. As the birth rate has slowed, reception numbers have plateaued since 2016 and new pupil roll growth will be from new housing and migration into various year groups, not just to reception. Over half of primary schools are full to capacity but the pockets of surplus places in a few schools continue to grow. The demographic changes in the Borough, short and long-term effects of Brexit, Covid and employment and affordability of housing are all factors being monitored.
16. The Headteacher has updated parents over the summer term in newsletters that a reduction in PAN was being considered, referencing that the school already have many year groups operating at the proposed lower PAN and this proposal would give stability to classes and benefit pupils, and that siblings and other local parents would still be able to access the school.

Next Steps

Proposals to reduce Planned Admission Numbers in 2 community schools.

- a. Whitehall Infant School from 120 to 90 Primary Planning Area 6 – Uxbridge
- b. Whitehall Junior School from 120 to 90 Primary Planning Area 6 – Uxbridge

17. The proposal for consultation is to reduce the Published Admission Number for Whitehall Infant school and Whitehall Junior School from 120 to 90, from 2025. The school is located close to the boundary with South Buckinghamshire and there are many primary schools within one and two miles walk. Rolls have fallen over the past few years with several year groups below the existing PAN. It is clear the school should have a PAN of 90, until local demand rises.

PRIMARY PLANNING AREA 6		CENSUS MAY 2023 ROLL										CONFIRMED RECEPTION/ YR3 NUMBERS IN SEPTEMBER 2023
SCHOOL	PAN	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	TOTAL	IF FULL	% vacant	
Cowley St Laurence	60	58	54	60	58	49	55	60	394	420	6.2%	60
Hermitage Primary	60	59	59	60	60	60	59	57	414	420	1.4%	60
John Locke Academy	90	88	88	89	90	90	73	69	587	630	6.8%	90
St Mary's	30	29	30	30	30	31	30	29	209	210	0.5%	30
St Andrew's	30	29	22	26	30	29	23	28	187	210	11%	26
Whitehall Infant School	120	104	104	92					300	360	16.7%	93
Whitehall Junior School	120				114	87	92	86	379	480	21%	87
Planning Area 6 Total	510	367	357	357	382	346	332	329	2470	2730	9.5%	446

Process For PAN Reduction

18. The process is statutory and must follow the Admissions Code, as amended in September 2021. It requires a six-week consultation between October and January. The Local Authority has reviewed the demand for the school within their local context and discussed with the school and meetings of their Full Governing Bodies will formally resolve they support the proposals.
19. Full Cabinet has to consider the proposal to reduce PAN in the community school as it affects residents access to local schools.
20. If Cabinet approves the consultation, it will then take place from 23rd October 2023 until 18th December 2023, a total of 8 weeks. Consultees will be invited to respond via a dedicated email address and online questionnaire. The statutory requirement for consultation in this case is a

minimum of 6 weeks and must take place between 1st October 2023 and 31st January 2024 for a reduction in the PAN to be published in March 2024 for applications for pupils to start in September 2025 in Reception (or Year 3 in Junior schools and Year 7 in secondary). The outcome of the consultations will be reported to Cabinet in February 2024 to take the final decision.

Financial Implications

21. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, it will help reduce the financial pressure on this individual school and the risk of this school running into deficit. Additionally, it will also reduce the risk of maintained schools requesting contributions from the council to meet redundancy costs in relation to staffing restructures. The spare physical space can be used in future if rolls rise in the relevant areas, and will be used by the schools meanwhile, or kept empty.

RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION

The benefit or impact upon Hillingdon residents, service users and communities?

22. The proposals set out in this report will help to mitigate the residual risk of Hillingdon children not securing access to a place at a local school close to where they live. Local families can access primary places nearby. The rising vacancies in a few schools reflect residents are currently not choosing to fill the school to the level of the current PAN, so the places are not needed. The schools now risk a few more pupils turning up, from further away, requiring an additional teacher which destabilises school budget and staffing and affects all the pupils. The proposals will enable better targeting of resources to priorities to help pupils, in line with the Council's vision to put our residents first.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

23. The statutory School Admissions Code sets out that admission authorities must set ('determine') admission arrangements annually. Where changes are proposed to admission arrangements, the admission authority must first publicly consult on those arrangements. If no changes are made to admission arrangements, they must be consulted on at least once every 7 years. For admission arrangements for entry to school in September 2024, consultation must be for a minimum of 6 weeks and must take place between 1st October 2023 and 31st January 2024. The Code states that this consultation period will allow parents, other schools, religious authorities and the local community to raise any concerns about proposed admission arrangements.

24. To ensure compliance with the Code, the Local Authority will 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) Any adjoining neighbouring local authorities where the admission authority is the local authority:

25. Subject to agreement from the Cabinet, the proposals will be available through the Council's established communication channels for comment. It is proposed that the consultation will last from 23rd October 2023 until 18th December 2023.

CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and confirms that there are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations contained within this report.

Legal

If an admission authority of a mainstream school wishes to increase or decrease PAN, without increasing the overall physical capacity of the buildings, this would be classed as an admissions change. Admissions authorities must follow the processes set out within the School Admissions Code in order to make an admissions change. Details of the processes that must be followed are summarised within the body of this report. There are no other legal implications arising from the recommendations set out at the beginning of the report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

[School Admissions Code 2021](#)