



**Haringey Council**

<b>Report for:</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 29 April 2013	<b>Item Number:</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	School Places – Conclusions and Recommendations of Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Panel Project		
<b>Report Authorised by:</b>	Cllr Martin Newton Chair, Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Panel		
<b>Lead Officer:</b>	Rob Mack, Senior Policy Officer (Scrutiny)		
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>Report for Key/Non Key Decisions:</b>		

## 1. Describe the issue under consideration

1.1. The Panel has been undertaking an in-depth piece of work on school places. This has focused on the issue of pupils who are not offered any of their preferences for school reception places as expressed by their parent(s) or guardian(s). This report outlines the conclusions and recommendations from this piece of work.

## 2. Cabinet Member introduction

N/A

## 3. Recommendations

That the following be recommended on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the Cabinet:

- (i) That feedback regarding the admissions process be sought from parents and carers through the setting up of focus groups, including those who applied late, and that this includes discussion of the levels of popularity of individual schools in order that a better understanding can be obtained of these;
- (ii) That communication with parents and carers be enhanced further through the following actions;
  - The drafting of appropriate “myth busting” literature;
  - Providing a parent friendly DVD or equivalent that explains the admissions



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process for distribution to schools and to be put on the Council's website;

- Circulating relevant information on admissions to doctors surgeries, post offices, Children's Centres, health visitors and nurseries, including private provision;
  - Banners outside schools reminding people of the need to act;
  - Involving community groups and publicising through the Selby Centre;
  - Using local community radio stations;
  - Ensuring that all community schools have a copy of a map showing the area within which offers were made in the previous year's admission round; and
  - Linking up with community health services and including information within the "red book" given to all parents.
- (iii) That the impact of the benefit cap on school rolls be monitored by the inclusion of a column within the weekly return for schools to specify, where known, the reason why a child has left and that the Admissions Service write to schools governors, Haringey Governors Association and Head Teachers alerting them to this and explaining the reasons for it;
- (iv) That, in the light of current plans for significant residential developments within the Muswell Hill area, urgent action be taken to address the shortfall in reception school places in the area;
- (v) That links with the Planning Service be developed further in order to improve awareness of potential future housing developments, including the cumulative effect of small developments of large family houses that may impact on demand for school changes;
- (vi) That a clear statement be drafted outlining the residency requirements for applications for school places; and
- (vii) That the Admissions Service work with relevant ward Councillors to address issues arising from any proposals by neighbouring boroughs to open or close schools that may impact on the availability of school places in particular areas of the borough.

#### **4. Other options considered**

N/A

#### **5. Report**

##### *Introduction*

- 5.1 The Panel has been undertaking an in-depth piece of work on school places and, in particular, those pupils who were not offered any of the preferences for reception



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school places expressed by their parent(s) or guardian(s). These fell into two categories:

- Pupils who were not offered any school place; and
- Pupils who were not offered any of the schools that they expressed a preference for.

5.2 The aim of the project is to make recommendations on any additional action that could be taken by the Council to reduce the number of those pupils who do not receive an offer for any of their preferred schools in future years. This has been done by analysing the instances from 2012 where no offers were received and tracking the progress of such cases. In particular, it has looked at:

- Were there any specific patterns relating to the applicants who were not offered any of their preferences?
- What happened in the end to the pupils concerned?
- Is any additional information required to assist the Children and Young People's Service further in analysing trends and working with parents to ensure it is better able to respond to their preferences?
- Could anything have been done to avoid some pupils not being offered any of their preferences?

### *Background*

5.3 Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that sufficient school places are available for every child in the area that needs one. They do this through rigorous planning processes that are undertaken up to ten years in advance in order to ensure that they have enough school places to meet demand. Planning is based on actual and projected births and school rolls.

5.4 There has been a large increase in the school age population in recent years. Research by London Councils in November 2011 indicated a predicted shortage of permanent school places of more than 70,000 across London during the spending review period i.e. 2011/12 to 2014/15. The research estimated that pupil numbers in London were likely to increase by 9.2% between 2010/11 and 2014/15. Whilst these were primarily in reception, they covered all year groups. The increase in demand first hit reception classes in outer London but is now a significant issue in the vast majority of London boroughs. It was estimated that demand for reception places in Haringey in the two most recent academic years has been the highest on record.

5.5 Whilst care needs to be taken by local authorities to ensure that there are enough places, they also need to ensure that there is not *over* provision as this could place schools in financial difficulty if they are left with surplus places. The balancing process that local authorities undertake has been complicated further recently by the impact of the recession on the housing market, current and future changes to housing benefit and the advent of free schools which has made projected demand hard to estimate.



- 5.6 Pan London statistics on applications for receptions and the percentage of offers that Councils were able to meet show the following:

Preference offer	2011		2012	
	Haringey	Average	Haringey	Average
% 1st	81.62%	79.364%	80.01%	78.72%
% 2 <sup>nd</sup>	7.38%	7.896%	7.86%	8.31%
% 3rd	2.87%	3.315%	3.41%	3.54%
% 4th	1.36%	1.435%	1.47%	1.67%
% 5th	0.72%	0.773%	0.94%	0.91%
% 6th	0.64%	0.486%	0.53%	0.63%

#### *How Applications are Considered*

- 5.7 School places are offered in accordance with the published admission criterion as detailed in the admission booklet. Each school listed is considered at exactly the same time, including schools in Haringey as well as those located in other boroughs. The published admissions criterion is applied to every school listed as a preference. The Council's computer system works out who can be offered a place at Haringey community schools whilst voluntary aided and free schools and academies apply their own criterion and let the Council know who should be offered a place. Other boroughs apply their criterion and also let Haringey know which residents can be offered places at their schools.
- 5.8 Each school has a set number of places that can be offered and these are offered until the school is full or there are no more applicants for that school. If a child can be offered more than one place, the higher preference will be offered. If an applicant cannot be offered *any* school listed on their application form because other applicants met the criteria better, they will be offered the nearest school with an available place.

#### *Unplaced Pupils*

- 5.9 On offer day on 18 April 2012, 42 Haringey pupils who applied on-time could not be offered a place at any school. These pupils were not offered any school place as, at offer day, they lived furthest away from available places.
- 5.10 Subsequent to offer day, 19 of the original 42 pupils were offered a place at one of their preferred schools. The remainder were all eventually offered a school place at another school or informed the Council that they were seeking alternative schooling arrangements. The dates when these places were offered ranged from the end of May through to September. The majority of those who were not offered any place came from the west of the borough. Only 17 of them used all six of their preferences.

#### *Pupils Not Offered a Place at a Preferred School*

- 5.11 In addition to pupils who were not offered any place, there were 129 pupils who applied on time but were not offered any of their preferences for Haringey schools. Of



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these, 88 were subsequently offered a place at one of their preferred schools before the start of term.

- 5.12 There were also 85 pupils that applied late and could not be offered a place at any of their preferred schools. Offers to late applications are made after places have been offered to all on time applications and, where possible, a school place is offered at a preferred school. If all the preferred schools listed on the application form are full, a place is allocated at the nearest school with a space. Out of the 85 late applications, 70 pupils were eventually offered a place at one of their preferred schools before the start of the new term. The remainder had to be allocated a place at a school they did not list as a preference.
- 5.13 There are a number of reasons why reception applications might be submitted late, many of which are unavoidable such as having arrived recently in the borough from elsewhere. There are nevertheless families who were resident in the borough at the closing date for applications but applied late.

### *Pupil Projections*

- 5.14 The Council subscribes to the Greater London Authority (GLA) School Roll Projection service which provides school roll projections for Haringey. The data that was used to inform the 2012 GLA school roll projections included:
- 2009 to 2012 January school census data;
  - Birth rates, population data, migration (national and international); and
  - Potential child yield from known new residential schemes, both those which have started and which are projected to start on site.
- 5.15 The GLA service also provides a projection of school rolls for ten years ahead. The Council's admissions team has also been working with the GLA demography team to ensure the assumptions in the projections reflect as best as possible the Haringey picture, including the recent school expansions and bulge classes.
- 5.16 GLA roll projections are based on two specific ratios;
- Catchment ratios (C); and
  - Roll replacement ratios (R).
- 5.17 The underlying population in a borough can change over time and sometimes run contrary to past trends. For example, new housing developments may bring in additional school age pupils to the borough. Migration trends, fertility rates and other factors can all contribute to population trends, which subsequently have an effect on school rolls. Information on population changes is therefore a vital part of longer-term school roll projections. The GLA's roll projection model calculates a catchment ratio, which is the ratio of pupils on roll in maintained schools in the borough to the number of people of the same age who are in the local population.
- 5.18 The best single predictor of the number of pupils on roll in any one year is the number of pupils on roll one year earlier. Replacement ratios reflect the net effect of gains and losses of pupils in age groups from one year to the next. This combines the effects of cross-border inflows and outflows and the effects of pupils' changes of school. Pupils



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who live in one borough and go to school in another are included in the actual rolls of the borough in which they attend school. They are therefore included in the replacement ratio and in this way the replacement ratio takes account of cross-border movement. A combination of both catchment and replacement ratios can also be used to project rolls.

- 5.19 For reception, the catchment ratio for 2012 data set is currently used. For the other primary school year groups, the Council uses the catchment and replacement ratio and has tried to account for the natural fluctuations in pupil numbers associated with school organisational changes. For the September 2012, intake the GLA projected that there would be 3,210 reception aged children within our schools in January 2013. However, latest admissions data as of 18 December 2012 showed that a total of 3,324 reception children had been offered reception places within the borough.
- 5.20 The service has therefore updated its primary school roll projections to reflect local knowledge, the recent October pupil count and up to date admissions information. The adjustment factor of 4.12% represents the percentage difference between the GLA's projected figure for January 2013 and the revised projected figure, based on local intelligence. Rolling forward from September 2015, an adjustment factor of 3% has been added to include some more caution to the revised projections.
- 5.21 For September 2012 entry, 5 bulge classes were opened at primary schools or settings, providing an additional 150 reception places to deal with the additional demand for reception places. Haringey will need up to 12 additional reception forms of entry over the next 5 years. Reception requirements for September 2015 and beyond require closer scrutiny of the available data, along with closer work with the GLA. The 2011 census data has become available and will be incorporated into school roll projections from January 2013 onwards.
- 5.22 All Haringey's neighbouring boroughs also buy into the GLA school roll projection service although the way in which they then modify the projections they receive to reflect local intelligence differs from borough to borough. They all use birth data, school census information, admission data and housing data to modify their projections. The service keeps in regular contact with all our neighbouring boroughs to ensure our information on their school organisation plans is up to date. This information is available in the annual school place planning report.
- 5.23 To guide the planning process for any school taking additional pupils the following principles were agreed by Cabinet in July 2005, with a further principle added in 2008: We should:
- Seek to meet demand for places within local communities, having regard for the role of schools at the heart of sustainable communities;
  - Seek to make all our schools popular and successful. Where expansion is needed to meet demand for places, we should favour the expansion of schools where there is proven demand and well-established and successful leadership and management;
  - Have regard to the impact of any changes on the viability and standards at existing and new schools;
  - Bring forward proposals that make best use of scarce capital resources;



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- Work towards more schools having at least 2 forms of entry when building any new schools and through active support for federation of schools to help give each school the capacity to meet our aspirations.

5.33 An officer Pupil Places Steering Group has been tasked to produce a formal strategic capital plan to deal with the rising reception demand. When the Council looks at schools to take additional classes, it also looks at the impact that it would have on other local primary schools as it wants all schools to be thriving in terms of pupil numbers, exam attainment and financial security. To ensure that all views were captured within the plan, the group consisted of officers from:

- School Standards
- Place Planning
- Admissions
- Construction/ Transformation
- School Property

5.44 The group analysed and filtered all the data through a series of gateways, which included the school's physical capacity, leadership and governance capacity, local demand for school places (including shortfall of places in a given area) and building developments in the local area. This work produced a shortlist of schools for both bulge and permanent expansions.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 The Panel considered a range of data on the school admissions process and identified a number of areas that could affect the chances of parent/carers having their preferences taken into account. In particular, it looked at what the Council could do that might reduce the number of parents/carers who are not allocated any place or are not allocated a place of their preferred schools.

6.2 The Panel considered the issue of the number of preferences expressed by parents/carers. Not all local authorities currently offer six choices and several offer only three. However, there is a pan London agreement that six preferences will be offered by all London boroughs. It could be assumed that expressing a higher number of preferences increased the chances of at least one of them being met. However, the evidence showed that those people who had not been given a place at any school had, on average, expressed *more* preferences than those parents living within the same ward who had been allocated a place at a one of their preferred schools.

6.3 From this, the Panel concluded that expressing at least one *realistic* preference within their choices was likely to be more important than the actual number of preferences and maximise the chances of parents/carers having their preferences taken into account. In order to do this, it is essential that parents/carers are aware of what is likely to be realistic. Access to a map showing the area from which pupils were admitted in the previous year is an important way of increasing awareness.

6.4 The Panel is of the view that significant numbers of people may not understand the admissions process fully or may be mistaken in their belief that they do. In addition, there would appear to be a number of myths about admissions. For example, it is



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untrue that it is necessary to put particular schools down as first preference in order to be allocated them. This was changed a number of years ago and is no longer permitted. Equal weight is now given to all preferences and the admissions criteria applied to them. Only once this has happened are parental preferences applied.

- 6.5 The Panel notes that some schools are more popular with parents and carers than others and the reasons for this are not always clear or necessarily well founded. It suggests that action should be undertaken to obtain a better understanding of the reasons for this and, where necessary, work undertaken with individual schools to address the situation.
- 6.6 Feedback from parents and carers would also assist in providing greater clarity on what could be done to both better meet their needs and improve the efficiency of the service. It therefore proposes that focus groups be set up for this purpose, including representation from those who applied late last year.
- 6.7 The Panel therefore feels that communication with parents and carers should be enhanced further to improve awareness and clarity amongst them. This could help to reduce the number of cases where it is not possible for applicants to have their preferences taken into account or where applicants are not offered any place. In particular, the process needs to be communicated and explained in a way that assumes no prior knowledge and from the viewpoint of someone who does not understand the process.
- 6.8 The communications strategy for admissions is currently being reviewed. As part of this, the literature that parents/guardians receive is being looked at to ensure that key messages were being communicated effectively. Amongst other things, this is in order to reduce the number of late applications. In particular, the service will be reviewing the location of late applications to target additional communication campaigns for those areas and ensure there is sufficient additional reception provision to accommodate any late applications from local pupils.
- 6.9 The Panel proposes the following additional actions as potential ways of enhancing communication;
  - The drafting of appropriate “myth busting” literature;
  - Providing a parent friendly DVD or equivalent that explains the admissions process for distribution to schools and to be put on the Council’s website;
  - Circulating relevant information on admissions to doctors surgeries, post offices, Children’s Centres, health visitors and nurseries, including private provision;
  - Banners outside schools reminding people of the need to act;
  - Involving community groups and publicising through the Selby Centre;
  - Using local community radio stations;





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- Ensuring that all community schools have a copy of a map showing the area within which offers were made in the previous year's admission round; and
  - Linking up with community health services and including information within the "red book" given to all parents.
- 6.10 The Panel noted that there is likely to be some turbulence caused by the implementation of the benefits cap. The admissions service has already received high level information on the schools most likely to be affected by it. The affects will be monitored and children and young people tracked. Whilst there is potential for movement away from some schools, it is also possible that people will move into the borough.
- 6.11 All schools are required to complete a weekly return. The Panel suggests that the impact of the benefit cap could be monitored by requesting that schools provide information relating to this through the inclusion of a column within the return for schools to specify, where known, the reason why a child has left. It also proposes that the service writes to schools governors, Haringey Governors Association and Head Teachers alerting them to this.
- 6.12 The Panel noted that admission arrangements are very clear about the addresses that can be used for applications. It is a requirement for individuals to be actually resident at an address although Crown servants are exempt from this. It suggests that a clear statement be prepared regarding this, as is done in some other local authority areas.
- 6.13 There are now more resources to enable the Admissions Service to plan ahead for future demand for school places and regular meetings take place with Housing colleagues. It is important that the Admissions Service is aware of impending housing developments at an early stage so that it can plan more effectively. The Panel noted that local Councillors were often aware of potential new developments at an early stage. It suggests that work could also be undertaken with Planning to investigate forthcoming housing developments that they may be aware of in order to better inform pupil projections. The Panel is, in particular, aware of a number of large developments in the Muswell Hill area and there will be a specific need to address scarcity of reception places in the area due to this. The Panel also suggested that the cumulative effect of small developments of large family houses should be carefully monitored as this could also impact on child yield and pupil projections.
- 6.14 Schools opening or closing in neighbouring boroughs may also impact on the availability of school places in particular areas of Haringey. Ward Councillors may be a useful source of information about such proposals. The Panel recommends that the Admissions Service work with ward Councillors to address such issues.
- 6.15 Only good or outstanding schools are considered for expansion. Percentage of school capacity unfilled varied from year to year but the target was 5% per year group. The current figure for Haringey was between 1 and 2%. The percentage increased in the higher year groups.
- 6.16 Concern was expressed that a reduction in the number of schools rated by OFSTED



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as good or outstanding as a result of the changes to the inspection regime could adversely affect the ability of the Council to respond to demographic changes. There were also fewer schools that the Council had direct influence over due to the increase in academies and free schools. However, it was noted that only a small number of schools within the borough fell beneath this threshold and recent results from inspections had been encouraging with most schools either maintaining or improving their rating. Schools that the Council did not maintain could still be influenced through effective negotiation.

- 6.17 It was noted that there was currently a shortfall equivalent to 4 forms of entry for reception place in September 2013. In terms of where resources were allocated to address this, it was felt important that a range of factors were considered including levels of need, where demand was greatest, where capacity existed etc. It was suggested that the principles used to guide the planning process for schools taking additional pupils should be re-visited.
- 6.18 It was noted that there would be a full report on the outcome of the 2013 process in April. A written briefing for all Members will be produced and there will be a follow-up questions and answer session on Monday 13 May.

## **7. Comments of the Chief Finance Officer and financial implications**

- 7.1 The recommendations contained in this report would need to be implemented within existing resources.
- 7.2 However, there are elements of the recommended communications strategy (such as the DVD) which would require additional funding. A cost benefit analysis would need to be undertaken and, subject to a positive impact, prioritised against other demands against existing resources.
- 7.3 Within the approved CYPS capital programme for 2013/14 to 2015/16 there are a number of projects, either already in train or at an early stage of planning, to cater for pupil place demands as a result of increased population pressures. This includes completing the expansion project at Rhodes Avenue Primary School, the expansion by one form of entry at Alexandra Primary School, and the expansion by one form of entry at Welbourne Primary School.
- 7.4 In addition, feasibility studies are being carried out at a number of schools with a view to considering options for temporary or permanent expansion in the future. Proposals for permanent expansion will be subject to both informal and formal statutory consultation before a final decision to proceed is taken.
- 7.5 The approved programme includes budgetary provision of almost £9m to cater for these potential future expansions.

## **8. Head of Legal Services and Legal Implications**

- 8.1 Under section 14 of the Education Act 1996, the Council has a duty to secure that sufficient schools for providing primary and secondary education for children of compulsory school are available for their area. Available schools must be sufficient in



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number, character and equipment to provide for all pupils the opportunity of appropriate education.

- 8.2 Case law has established that the section 14 duty is not an absolute duty in that even if the Council is not in a position to offer primary school places to all pupils applying then the duty is not breached provided the Council was doing all it reasonably could to rectify the situation. Accordingly provided the Council is taking all reasonable measures to address the current shortfall in reception places, the duty is not being breached.

## **9. Equalities and Community Cohesion Comments**

- 9.1. The report acknowledges that fact that understanding the school admissions process may be a particular challenge for some groups within the community. This would include newly arrived migrants and some minority ethnic groups. The report seeks to address this through proposing ways of improving communication with parents and carers.

## **10. Head of Procurement Comments**

- 10.1. N/A

## **11. Use of Appendices**

N/A

## **12. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985**

Admissions and School Organisation report to Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel Members.