

	Cabinet 12 November 2024
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People
	Lead Member – Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools (Councillor Gwen Grahl)
School Place Planning Strategy 2024 – 2028 1st Refresh	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	N/A
List of Appendices:	One: Appendix 1: Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2024 - 2028 1 st Refresh November 2024
Background Papers:	N/A
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1.0 Executive Summary

1.1. This report provides Cabinet with a refresh of the School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028, approved by Cabinet in October 2023.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

2.1 Approves the refresh of the School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028, as provided in Appendix 1.

- 2.2 Notes the continued focus on planning for the sufficiency of places and the sustainability of schools, based on varying demand patterns impacting on school planning areas in Brent.
- 2.3 Notes there continues to be increasing demand for places that meet the needs of children and young people with SEND aged 0-25 and the intention to further develop the SEND estate capital investment programme with strategies to address this need, as set out in Section 4.
- 2.4. Notes the school place planning actions completed in the first year of the strategy and the actions planned for the coming academic year as set out in section 5.1 of this report.
- 2.5 Notes the update on the success measures set out in the original strategy in section 3.1.3 of this report.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Cabinet Member Foreword

- 3.1.1 The School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028 supports the Borough Plan Strategic Priority 4: The Best Start in Life. By ensuring there are sufficient, suitable early years and school places for children and young people in Brent, the local authority is meeting its statutory obligations and supporting every child and young person to access high quality education locally to them in the borough.
- 3.1.2 In October 2023 Cabinet approved the Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2024- 2028 which presents the objectives and operating principles to underpin the Council's approach to school organisation over four years. The focus of the strategy is both the sufficiency of school places across Brent and the sustainability of schools in the context of falling demand in some areas of the borough, while still ensuring sufficiency of places in other areas experiencing or likely to experience rising demand.
- 3.1.3 The Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2024 - 2028 sets the following success measures and the updated position is also provided:

- All Brent schools are good or outstanding (*as per applicable Ofsted gradings at the time*).

98.8% of schools were good or outstanding at the end of the 2022/23 academic year and 95.3% at the end of the 2023/2024 academic year. The reduction in performance is a result of one primary school moving into the inadequate category and one primary school judged as requires improvement awaiting an Ofsted inspection. In response to the government abolishing single word Ofsted judgements in September 2024, this success measure will be updated to a comparable performance standard in a future refresh once the new Ofsted rating measures are announced.

- Children are able to access education close to home (under two miles for children under 8 and 3 miles for children up to Year 6; within 75 minutes travel time for secondary aged children).

This was the case in November 2023 and remains the same in November 2024.

- Brent net exportation of secondary school pupils reduces over the duration of this strategy to 25% with a stretch target of below 25%.

The baseline was 25.8% for the 2023 Year 7 intake. At 25.1% for 2024 Year 7 intake this shows an improving position.

- An increase in local SEND places in the borough will lead to a reduction in the use of out-of-borough placements and placements in independent non-maintained special schools.

The percentage of placement spend on the independent, non-maintained special school (INMSS) remains consistent at 18.5%.

- The take-up rate of free childcare entitlements in the borough increases over the course of the strategy to 70% for two-year-olds and 80% for 3 and 4-year-olds.

The baseline was 65.4% for two-year entitlement and 79.3% for 3 and 4-year-olds in January 2023. In January 2024 take-up of two-year-old free entitlements was 59.2% and for 3 and 4 year-olds it was 84.8%. The decrease in take-up of the two-year entitlement is consistent with a 7% national decrease in take-up. This is attributed to three main factors in Brent which also mirror national trends: i) falling birth rate in recent years, ii) the transition to universal credit from legacy benefits, and iii) income thresholds for the eligibility criteria remaining unchanged whilst average incomes have risen in recent years.

3.1.4 The principles of sufficiency and sustainability continue to underpin the refreshed School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028. Primary schools with falling rolls are being supported through a number of measures as outlined in the Strategy, with closure seen as a last resort. Where there is unused capacity or spare school sites, these will continue to be repurposed for educational use.

3.2 Background

3.2.1 The Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028 refresh provides the latest assessment of school place demand across the borough based on pupil projections from the Greater London Authority (GLA). The GLA population projection models are updated and revised annually as new methods or data become available, for example the 2021 census, which ensures projections provide the best estimates of future population.

3.2.2 The GLA projections are informed by centrally held demographic data, such as the Office of National Statistics (ONS) census data and fertility and birth rates, as well as locally held information such as migration patterns and planned

housing growth provided by the Local Authority. The methodology also takes account of the percentage of children who historically move into the following academic year in an area and are therefore driven by the number of pupils on roll in the January 2023 school census. The GLA projections also take into account changes in housing growth, so the impact of new housing developments in the borough and those just outside borough borders are reflected in the strategy.

- 3.2.3. The data presented in the refreshed School Place Planning Strategy reflect similar trends across London in relation to falling primary demand and increasing demand for special provision, as set out in the recent report published by London Councils '*Managing falling school rolls in London*' (2024) <https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/test-newsroom/2024/managing-falling-school-rolls-london>. Many London authorities are taking action to address falling primary pupil numbers, including repurposing spare capacity to provide additional provision for children with SEND and consulting on primary school closures.

3.3 Early Years

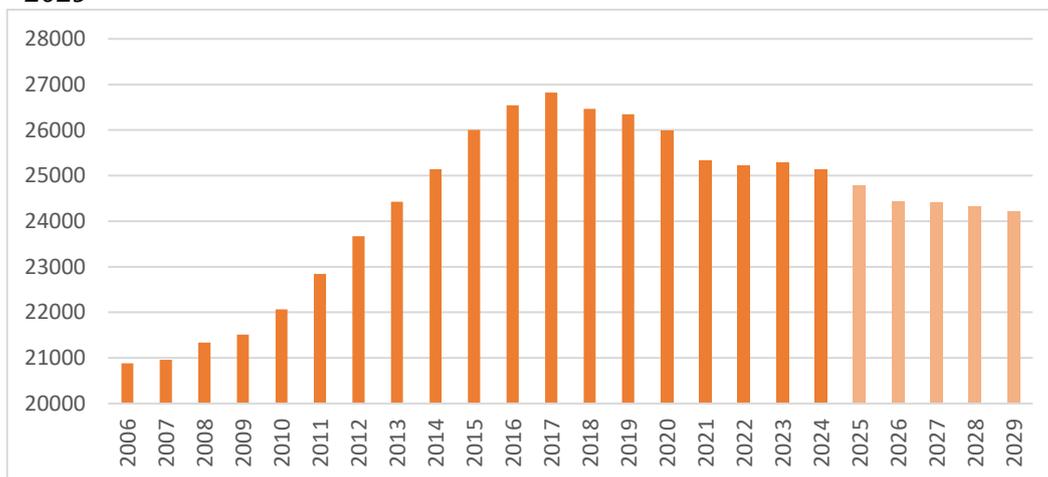
- 3.3.1 Under the Childcare Act 2006 local authorities have a statutory duty to secure sufficient childcare for the needs of most working parents/carers in their area. Brent has a mixed economy of 0-5 childcare provision in the borough that includes private, voluntary, independent (PVI) and maintained settings.
- 3.3.2 The Brent Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2021-2023 showed an overall increase in the number of PVI providers in the borough and a reduction in places in maintained and childminder provision. As of August 2024, there were 290 providers including private, voluntary and independent nurseries (PVI), childminders, nursery classes in schools and maintained nursery schools in Brent. Places for children aged two and under are largely delivered by the PVI sector and childminders.
- 3.3.3 There has been an overall decrease in the number of childminder providers in the borough since 2015 with some moving out of the borough and others resigning as registered childminders. This decrease in provision is reflective of a nation-wide trend. Closures have also been seen amongst group providers in the last 12 months, some quoting rental increases and reduction in demand. Nonetheless there have been other providers who have moved premises to expand and new providers entering the market, indicating an ongoing demand for places.
- 3.3.4 The Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee received a report on '[Early years provision and progress towards meeting the expansion of childcare entitlements](#)' on 18 September 2024.

3.4 Primary Place Need

- 3.4.1 Primary school demand has been reducing since September 2017. The latest GLA projections (based on the 2021 population census and the January 2023

school census) and which run to 2028/2029 (as for any later years children have yet to be born), indicate demand at Reception age will continue to decrease over the next few years (Chart 1). This reduction in demand reflects a falling birth rate and has affected all authorities in London. The number of births across Greater London fell from 134,037 in 2011/12 to 115,735 in 2019/20.

Chart 1: Brent Primary numbers on roll and projections as of January each year up to 2029



- 3.4.2. At a borough level, Brent has sufficient capacity to meet forecast demand for mainstream primary places and maintain a level of 5% spare places to ensure there are sufficient places to respond to in-year movement, migration or any unforeseen increase in demand.
- 3.4.3. However, there are differences across primary planning areas. One planning area is expected to experience significant rising demand (Planning Area 3) and three planning areas are showing sustained lower demand than available places, resulting in a significant number of spare places (Planning Areas 2, 4 and 6). Schools in planning areas with spare capacity will support increasing demand in neighbouring planning areas.
- 3.4.4 While lower demand means parents have an increased choice of places in some parts of the borough, reduced intakes present organisational and financial challenges for schools. Falling primary demand means that an increasing number of schools in Brent are operating as one form of entry, as is the case in many other London authorities. This trend is likely to continue in the context of reducing demand for places in Brent. Small schools have fewer resources to support children, as school funding received via the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is driven by pupil numbers. The impact of vacant school places causes financial pressure for schools, as some overheads remain the same despite reduced income. This can impact on the quality of the teaching and learning offer.
- 3.4.5 Over the past few years, the local authority has been working with schools to put in place strategies to manage changing demand and to support schools to ensure the sustainability of local provision. Measures to support reduced intakes include temporarily reducing admission numbers or placing an informal

cap on admission numbers and repurposing spare capacity, for example, to provide Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP) for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).

- 3.4.6. The sustained reduction in primary demand and the resulting level of spare places that are impacting on some schools means individual measures are no longer an adequate response. The strategy continues to set out a focus on the options available to address the increasing vulnerability of those schools facing the most significant fall in pupil numbers and indicates in which of the six primary planning areas targeted reorganisation proposals to reduce capacity are considered necessary, including updating where these have already taken place.

3.5 Secondary Place Need

- 3.5.1 The latest GLA secondary forecasts project a stable demand for Year 7 places, after the falling demand of recent years. The projections confirm there will be sufficient capacity to meet forecast demand and provide the required 5% of spare places in Year 7 to manage any forecast in-year growth and any unforeseen increase in demand up to 2030/31. (This is a longer timescale than primary as forecasts for secondary year groups are more reliable because children are already attending nursery or mainstream school).

- 3.5.2 A key challenge is in-year demand for secondary places which is expected to remain high in some planning areas and year groups, especially in Year 11. Brent will continue to work with secondary schools to ensure in-year demand can be met, particularly in the higher year groups (Years 9 to 11). This increased demand is caused by inward migration to the borough and population mobility levels. Challenges are further compounded as secondary schools cannot swiftly increase the teaching capacity of a cohort even if they have the building capacity to do so. Where necessary, Fair Access Protocols are being employed to place children who are out of school and who have not been offered a school within 4 weeks of their application.

3.6 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Alternative Provision Need

- 3.6.1 Brent is a borough that has high aspirations for all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Services, schools and settings are needs-led and follow the ethos of early identification and early intervention. Brent and Brent schools recognise SEND is not a fixed or permanent characteristic. At a specific time, a child might have additional learning needs that require tailored or additional support to fully participate in everything the school has to offer, or they may require more specialist support in school for the whole of their education. All schools in Brent are inclusive and where possible a child or young person should be educated in their local mainstream school.

- 3.6.2 There is a range of high-quality provision for children with SEND in Brent encompassing 3 enhanced pre-school providers, 1 primary special maintained

school, 1 primary special academy school, 2 special all through academy schools and 2 secondary special school academies, and a number of Additionally Resourced Provisions (ARP) in both primary and secondary mainstream schools. An ARP is designed to provide specialist and targeted support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities who can function well in a mainstream school, and where the school has appropriate teaching and learning strategies and staff with the skills and knowledge in a particular area of SEND. ARPs provide specialist environments which support the learning needs of each pupil, and many young people with additional learning needs can make better and more sustained progress when they attend mainstream schools.

- 3.6.3. There are 963 places currently in Brent special schools and 185 ARP places. As other boroughs can apply for places in Brent schools (in the same way that Brent children and young people occupy spaces in special schools in other borough), the percentage of out-of-borough children and young people with SEND placed in Brent special schools and ARPs will vary year on year. However, the current figure stands at 11% of Brent's total capacity. As a result, Brent currently only has access to 857 of the 963 local special school place and 165 of the 185 ARP places in Brent schools.

4.0 Demand for specialist provision

- 4.1. As of 1 September 2024, there are 3782 children and young people aged 0-25 with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) on roll at Brent schools, which at 4.6% of the school population is similar to national levels. 11.2% of pupils are identified with additional needs that can be met at SEN support where a need is identified but does not meet threshold for an EHCP (compared to 13% nationally). As of September 2024, 65% of pupils with an EHCP in Brent attend a mainstream school.
- 4.2. Between 2023 and 2024 the number of EHCPs increased across all age groups, with the highest increase in the under 5 age group (42% compared to 25% nationally) and the 5 to 10 age group (9.7%, 11% nationally). The average growth in EHCP numbers has been approximately 10% over the last three years. The modelling work undertaken for the Delivering Better Value Programme of the impact of new approaches to reduce EHCP demand, such as early intervention, anticipated growth to reduce to 7% in 2024/25. For the purposes of this strategy, future growth modelling is based on a more cautious 8% growth year on year to reflect the current presentation of needs for children with SEND.
- 4.3. In January 2022 Cabinet approved £44m of capital investment for additional specialist places in a new secondary special school, expansions of existing special schools and new ARPs in mainstream schools. This will increase ARP provision by 56 places across 3 locations between August 2024 and September 2025. Confirmed additional special school provision includes 40 places at Woodfield special school by January 2027 and 20 places at the Village school, the delivery timescale for which will be confirmed once feasibility work on options is completed.

- 4.4. The ongoing, targeted direct work to support schools and settings to better meet the needs of children with SEND has seen an increase in the number of children remaining within mainstream education in Brent. However, despite increasing confidence in the mainstream sector to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND, and significant investment by Brent to increase the capacity within special educational settings in the borough, additional special school places are still required. Based on data within the strategy, Brent has a current need for an additional 188 primary special places and 34 secondary special places in addition to those being created as part of the current capital expansion programme. This need will increase year on year.
- 4.5. The increasing number of children with complex social, emotional and mental health issues (SEMH) and pupils experiencing Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA) has highlighted a shortfall in provision for this cohort, especially for primary aged pupils for whom there is currently no provision. Based on presenting needs, the establishment of additional special provision will need to include both specialist SEMH provision and special school provision (with a focus on children with autism spectrum condition (ASC) and/or cognition and learning needs).
- 4.6. The School Place Planning Group, that comprises officers and headteacher representatives, has considered how best to meet growing demand for special school provision. There are a number of factors that need to be taken into consideration, including local demand for EHCPs, spare capacity in local schools and proximity to existing provision.
- 4.7. Schools will be asked in the 2024/2025 autumn term if they would like to work in partnership with the Council to develop or increase in size an ARP, provide SEMH provision or partner with a special school to develop a special school satellite provision on their school site. Three schools have already expressed interest in working in partnership.

5.0 School place planning strategy actions undertaken and planned

- 5.1. A number of school place planning actions have been completed that support Brent's sufficiency strategy:
 - Carlton Vale Infant School and Kilburn Park Junior School joined together in a hard federation in April 2024 as a first step towards becoming a single school on one site as part of the South Kilburn Regeneration Programme. This is in response to demand increasing in the longer term beyond the 5 year forecasts in the strategy.
 - Following Cabinet's decision in May 2024 to proceed with the closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School, the LA is liaising with the school to provide support for the phased closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site in July 2027.
 - Wembley Manor School opened in Brent in September 2024 and will move to its new buildings in September 2025, increasing the sufficiency of secondary SEND places in Brent.

- The Malorees Infant School and Malorees Junior School Governing Board has agreed to informally consult on amalgamating the schools, that are currently federated, as a single community school in January 2025. Subject to the outcome of this consultation, a report will be brought to Cabinet in spring 2025 requesting permission to follow the statutory process / formal consultation.

6.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 6.1 Ward members will be consulted on the impact of this strategy where mainstream planning area capacity is reviewed or where additional specialist provision is being considered.
- 6.2 The Lead Member has been and will continue to be briefed about school place planning issues and actions.
- 6.3 School representatives have been and will continue to be involved in discussions about school place planning through the School Place Planning Working Group.
- 6.4 Any proposed changes to provision would be subject to public consultation with parents and stakeholders in accordance with statutory guidance and legal frameworks.

7.0 Financial Considerations

- 7.1 Mainstream school places are funded from the annual Dedicated School Grant (DSG) based on pupil numbers as per the October school census in the preceding year. This means that, although there is a time lag, the revenue cost of mainstream pupil growth is recognised and funded by the DfE.
- 7.2 School budgets are devolved to respective school governing boards but are under pressure due to rising cost of inflation and falling rolls. As schools are funded on the basis of pupil numbers, it is likely small schools and those with falling numbers on roll will find it most difficult to balance their budgets. Larger schools are more likely to successfully manage the impact of these pressures.
- 7.3 Expanding funded High Needs provision will have revenue implications, as it is funded from the High Needs Block of the DSG. In order to help manage the financial pressure on the High Needs block, new in borough provision must replace current out-of-borough arrangements at a lower cost. Reducing out-of-borough provision will also help mitigate the financial pressure on the transport budgets held in the General Fund to transport children and young people to out-of-borough provisions.
- 7.4 Basic Need Capital Grant and the Special School Capital Grant are not time bound or ring-fenced and can be used for any capital purpose. However, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) has stated it is expected to be used for investment in schools, joining up with other capital resources when it is beneficial for schools to do so.

7.5 The nature of SEND education means the development of additional places presents additional complexities, and thus higher costs than primary expansions. The nature of any construction work required to provide additional school places, combined with the site location and layout all affect the cost per place. As proposals to address the forecast demand set out in the School Place Planning Strategy are developed, further reports will be provided to Cabinet with relevant financial information as required.

8.0 Legal Considerations

8.1 The Council has a general statutory duty under Education Legislation to ensure there are sufficient school places available to meet the needs of the population in its area. The Council must promote high educational standards, ensure fair access to educational opportunity and promote the fulfilment of every child's educational potential and increase parental choice. To discharge this duty, the Council has to undertake a planning function to ensure the supply of school places balances the demand for them. (Section 13 and 14, Education Act 1996) and (Education and Inspections Act 2006).

8.2 In addition to securing school places for pupils aged five to 16, the local authority has related statutory responsibilities in relation to children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) up to the age of 25, where the Council has to make suitable provision to meet their needs and early years provision pursuant to the Children and Families Act 2014. The Council has responsibility for childcare sufficiency for provision for disadvantaged two-year-old sand all three- and four-year-olds and ensuring it overlaps coherently with school provision.

8.3 The Council has additional statutory duties under section 19 of the Education Act 1996 to provide education for pupils needing alternative education.

8.4 As a contingency to support the admission to school of children as quickly as possible, the In Year Fair Access Protocol allows for the admission of children over schools' planned admission numbers in the event a school place is not available. Schools are not required to maintain classes over the planned admission number (PAN) but revert to the usual admission number when children leave.

8.5 Statutory processes should be followed for any proposed enlargement of the school premises that would increase the capacity of the school by both more than 30 pupils and 25 per cent or 200 pupils (whichever is the lesser).

8.6 Statutory processes should be followed for the reduction or removal of capacity from any school. These processes are set out in the School Admissions Code 2021 for the reduction of a school's Published Admission Number and in the statutory guidance 'Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools October 2024'.

9.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

- 9.1 Under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Council has a duty when exercising its public functions to have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate discrimination harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a "protected characteristic" and those who do not. This duty is known as the public sector equality duty (PSED). The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. All providers commissioned to deliver public services on behalf of or in partnership with Brent Council are required to comply with the PSED and the Council's Equality and Diversity policies.
- 9.2 Having due regard involves the need to enquire into whether and how a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected characteristic and the need to consider taking steps to meet the needs of persons who share a protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it. This includes removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by persons who share a protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.
- 9.3 There is no prescribed manner in which the Council must exercise its public sector equality duty but having an adequate evidence base for its decision is necessary.
- 9.4 The School Place Planning Strategy 2024-28 aims to ensure there are sufficient, sustainable and suitable school places for all Brent children, and their diverse and changing needs are met including those with special education needs. It also aims to raise the education standards for all and address inequality due to social disadvantage, disability (including multiple complex needs) and/or other protected characteristics and contributes to the delivery of the Council's equality duties.
- 9.5 The findings and the equality analysis screening of the School Place Planning Strategy 2024-28 show a slowdown in demand for primary school places and a stable outlook for secondary school places. Demand for places for children and young people with SEND in the borough is also increasing and the strategy identifies the need for additional local places to meet their needs.

10.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 10.1 The strategy sets an expectation for the school estate to be used efficiently to provide for current and future educational needs. The approach of sustainability and utilising the school estate for other educational provision reduces the use of construction materials and waste production and encourages efficiency in the use of existing resources.
- 10.2 The strategy sets out the need to create additional capacity for SEND provision in Brent reducing the need for children to travel outside of the borough to

receive their education. Travelling shorter distances closer to home will reduce emissions and reduce air pollutants from private cars, minibuses and taxis.

11.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations

- 11.1 Through delivering the strategy there could be some changes to the current use of school capacity, for example an increase in SEND provision through utilising existing spare capacity in the mainstream primary school estate.
- 11.2 School reorganisation proposals that reduce capacity across the school estate could impact on school staff. This could have the potential effect of the need to consider redundancies.

12.0 Communication Considerations

- 12.1 Any proposed changes to provision would be subject to public consultation with parents and stakeholders in accordance with statutory guidance, legal frameworks and the Council community engagement process.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children and Young People