	Cabinet 9 November 2026
	Report from the Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development
	Lead Member – Cabinet Member for Children Services, Employment & Climate Action (Councillor Jake Rubin)

School Place Planning Strategy 2024 – 2028 Third Refresh

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
List of Appendices:	One Appendix 1: Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2024 - 2028 3rd Refresh November 2026
Background Papers:	N/A
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1.0 Executive Summary

1.1. This report provides Cabinet with a third refresh of the School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028, approved by Cabinet in October 2023 with refreshes approved by Cabinet in November 2024 and November 2025.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

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

2.2 Notes the continued focus on planning to ensure both the sufficiency of places and the sustainability of schools, based on varying demand patterns across school planning areas in Brent.

2.3 Notes the early signs of a reversal of declining pupil numbers in some parts of the borough (resulting from a rising birth rate) and that a requirement to accommodate higher demand in some primary planning areas may be required in the future.

2.4 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 as Brent's strategy to address this need, as set out in sections 4.3-4.5.

2.5 Notes the school place planning actions completed in the first two years of the strategy and the actions planned for the coming academic year as set out in Section 4 of this report.

2.6 Notes the update on the success measures set out in the original strategy in section 3.2 of this report.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Cabinet Member Foreword

3.1.1 The Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2024–2028 directly supports Strategic Priority 4 of the current Borough Plan: The Best Start in Life. Through proactive planning and delivery of sufficient and appropriate early years and school places, the Council fulfils its statutory responsibilities and enables all children and young people in Brent to access high-quality education within their local communities.

3.1.2 Approved by Cabinet in October 2023, the Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2024- 2028 Strategy sets out a clear framework of objectives and guiding principles to shape the Council's approach to school organisation up to 2028. It reflects a strategic response to demographic trends, including declining demand in some areas and projected growth in others. The Strategy prioritises both the sufficiency of school places and the long-term sustainability of Brent's education infrastructure, ensuring that provision remains responsive, equitable and financially viable across the borough.

3.2 Update on Success Measures

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*).

  This was 95.3% at the end of the 2023/2024 academic year, 96.5% at the end of 2024/2025 academic year. In 2025/26 Ofsted changed the School Inspection Framework moving away from single word judgements, so this measure is no longer used. The new measure to be used is the percentage of schools rated as at the Expected Standard or higher in all Ofsted judgements.

- 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 outcome measure was met in November 2023 and has remained unchanged in all subsequent strategy refreshes.

- 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 commencing of the new strategy. This figure was 24.3% in 2024, 23.8% in 2025 and 24.5% in 2026, meaning the target continues to be met. Additionally, the net difference between Brent pupils being offered out of borough schools and out of borough pupils being offered Brent schools is the lowest since recording began (at -112 pupils).

- 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 schools (INMSS) (Lower is better) was 17.8% at the end of the 2025/2-26 financial year which is slightly lower than 18.8% at the end of the 2024/2025 financial year.

- 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 latest figures indicate take-up in Brent as of January 2026 for the two-year entitlement for low/no income families rose to 59.3%. This reflects an increase of 5.9% on the take up in 2025 and is below the London average of 66.8% which has also increased by almost 5.7% this year. The take up for 3 – 4 year olds was 77.5%. This is a decrease of 2.9% on the previous year (80.4%) and is lower than the London average. Brent remains ambitious in increasing the uptake of early years entitlements and the Strategy outlines steps to achieve this as part of Brent's Best Start in Life Programme. This includes a targeted promotional campaign that focuses

on the benefits of early education for shaping future life chances and how childcare can support parents into employment.

3.3 Background

3.3.1 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 national census, which ensures projections provide the best estimates of future population.

3.3.2. 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 2026 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.

3.3.3 A report in 2025 published by London Councils called 'Managing school places and admissions in London' https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/news-and-press-releases/2025/managing-school-places-and-admissions-london-report analysed the four year school places forecasts of all 33 London local authorities (from 2024) and revealed that a collective predicted drop of 3.6 per cent in demand for reception places and 2.9 per cent in Year 7 places. Some boroughs are predicting growth, but the large majority are forecasting cumulative drops in demand. London Council's followed this up in September 2026 with a new report called 'Finding the balance: the London education system's responses to falling pupil rolls' https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/news-and-press-releases/2026/put-children-and-families-first-new-report-reveals-emotional-toll which explores how boroughs, schools and their partners are responding to falling pupil numbers, and the lessons emerging from their work.

3.3.4. 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, including capping admission numbers, reducing Published Admission Numbers and establishing Additionally Resourced Provision for children with SEND in spare classrooms. The Strategy sets out that where there is unused school built capacity that lends itself to alternative use or vacant school sites, these will continue to be repurposed for educational use, with a focus on increasing the number of specialist school places for Brent children and young people. A school closure would only be considered when all other viable options have been exhausted and is deemed necessary to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of educational provision in a given area.

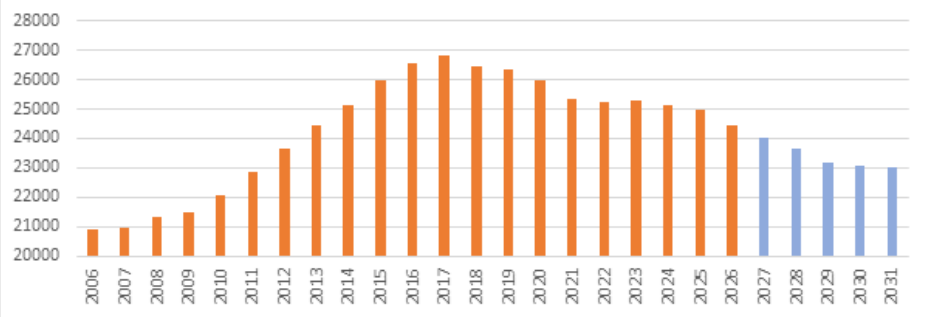
3.4 Early Years

3.4.1 The Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee received a detailed report on 18 September 2024 titled 'Early years provision and progress towards meeting the expansion of childcare entitlements'. This report outlined Brent's progress in delivering expanded entitlements and deploying capital investment to support growth and sustainability across the sector. The Council is currently embarking on delivery of the 'Best Start in Life' local plan, working closely with partners to reach an increased target of more children achieving a Good Level of Development by the end of their Reception year.

3.5 Primary Place Need

3.5.1 Primary school demand has been reducing since September 2017. The latest GLA projections (based on the 2021 population census and the January 2026 school census) and which run to 2030/2031 (because for later years children have yet to be born), indicate demand at primary age across all years (Reception to Year 6) will continue to decrease over the next few years (Chart 1). This reduction in demand reflects a falling birth rate across London and in Brent. 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 2031



3.5.2. Borough-wide Brent has sufficient capacity to meet forecast demand for mainstream primary places and maintain a level of at least 5% spare places. This ensures the borough has the flexibility to respond effectively to in-year movement, migration or any unforeseen increases in demand.

3.5.3. However, the picture in Brent is not homogenous. One primary planning area (Planning Area 3) is expected to experience a significant increase in demand linked to the two major growth areas of Wembley Central and Alperton. In contrast, sustained low demand in three areas (Planning Areas 2, 4 and 6) is reflected in a substantial surplus of capacity. Some schools that have spare places in Planning Areas 2 and 4 will help to support meet the rising demand in Planning Area 3.

3.5.4 While lower demand means parents have an increased choice of places in some parts of the borough, reduced pupil numbers present organisational and

financial challenges for schools. Falling primary demand means that some schools in Brent are operating as one form of entry when they have the built capacity for two or more, as is the case in many other London authorities, and this trend is likely to continue for so long as pupil demand remains low. The key issue for schools experiencing falling rolls is the direct impact on school budgets, as school funding via the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is driven by pupil numbers, although overheads remain the same with no economy of scale. The impact of falling rolls becomes particularly acute for small schools, that while valued for their size and family feel, can face systemic structural, financial and pedagogical constraints that risk negatively impacting the overall quality of education.

3.5.5 Over the past few years, the Local Authority has been working with individual schools to manage changing demand and to support schools to ensure the sustainability of local provision. Measures include temporarily reducing admission numbers or placing an informal cap on admission numbers in specific year groups in schools. A more recent strategy, where appropriate, has been to repurpose some spare built capacity to provide Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP) places for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).

3.5.6. The sustained reduction in primary demand and the resulting level of spare places in Planning Areas 2, 4 and 6, alongside limited spare capacity in another planning area, means individual measures are no longer an adequate response. The third refresh of the Strategy outlines a range of proactive and coordinated options and identifies planning areas where further interventions are required.

3.5.7 There are approximately 31 spare classes in Reception in the 2026/27 academic year (22.4% of Reception capacity). While the birth rate in Brent declined from 5139 in 2014/15 to 4363 in 2023/24, it showed an increase in 2024/25 to 4499. The related increase in the Reception forecast when this cohort starts school in 2029/30 is however relatively low (an increase of 114 children, the equivalent of 4 Reception classes). While longer term forecasting, which is less reliable, indicates Reception demand will rise after 2032/2033, this demand will not be evenly distributed, and some planning areas are likely to retain high numbers of surplus places. This means action will still need to be undertaken in these areas, while ensuring the sufficiency of places to meet any sustained future demand.

3.6 Secondary Place Need

3.6.1 The latest GLA secondary forecasts project a continuation of falling demand for Year 7 places, and there will be sufficient capacity to meet this forecast demand. However, the latest projections indicate the level of surplus capacity across the borough may fall below the target of 5% in some higher year groups from 2027/2028. (Secondary forecasts are for a longer timescale than primary, as they are more reliable because they are based on the numbers of children already attending nursery or primary school).

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

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

3.7.1 Brent is a borough that has high aspirations for all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This was recognised by Ofsted during Brent's SEND Area Inspection in January 2025:

"*Leaders across the partnership understand very well the needs of children and young people with SEND and their families. They have high ambitions and a relentless focus to continue to improve services for children and young people who have SEND*".

3.7.2 As of August 2026, there were 4408 children and young people living in Brent aged 0-25 with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Of these, 2908 are statutory school age, or 6.1% of the school population (similar to national levels, which currently sit at 6%). 13.3% 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 14.8% nationally).

3.7.3 Ongoing targeted 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 and ARPs in the borough, additional special school places are required.

3.7.4 There are currently 225 children in mainstream schools awaiting a place in special (an increase of 49% since this time last year). Of these 225, 198 are primary age and 27 are secondary age. Additionally, Brent currently has 22 children unplaced and receiving home tuition whilst a placement is sought (a 32% increase since this time last year). In addition, the number of children educated in independent special schools at higher cost than local mainstream provision has increased by 9% (placing pressure on the High Needs Block and General Fund School Transport budgets). Furthermore, despite the new government SEND Reforms, the number of children with an EHCP requiring specialist provision is expected to continue to grow. Further expansion of local provision is therefore essential.

4.0 School place planning strategy actions undertaken and planned

4.1. A number of actions have been completed that support Brent's School Place Planning Strategy to provide both sufficiency and sustainability of mainstream school places.

- Carlton Vale Infant School and Kilburn Park Junior School joined together in a hard federation in April 2024 and have recently undertaken an informal consultation proposing that the schools amalgamate as a single school on one site as part of the South Kilburn Regeneration Programme. The outcome of this consultation will be report to Cabinet in due course.

- Following Cabinet's decision in May 2024 to proceed with the closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School, the LA continues to provide support for the school to plan for the phased closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site in July 2027.

- Formal amalgamation of Malorees Infant and Malorees Junior Schools took place in April 2026 to form Malorees Primary School.

- A transition group is in place to support the relocation of Islamia Primary School to the Gwenneth Rickus building in September 2027 following the school's eviction from its current site. This secures the long-term future of the school and will provide improved facilities for its pupils.

- Following informal consultation, formal consultation is currently being undertaken on the proposal for Roe Green Infant and Junior Schools to amalgamate, the outcome of which will be reported to Cabinet in due course.

4.2 Addressing the sufficiency of local places for Brent children with SEND of both primary and secondary age, and for the 16-25 age group is a Council priority. Brent Council has committed investment of over £53m since 2022 to develop additional specialist places across mainstream and specialist provision, including a new secondary special school that occupied brand new premises in September 2025, and a Post-16 Skills Resource Centre for young people with SEND projected to open in September 2027.

4.3 In delivering these programmes, Brent has delivered a 12% increase in special school places in the 2025/26 academic year. Table 1 below details the planned expansion of special school places in Brent 2025-2027, subject to relevant consultations.

Table 1: Additional special school provision for Brent 2025-2027

School	Places	Phase	Delivery time scale
Woodfield school	40	Secondary	January 2027
The Avenue	34	All-through	September 2027
Strathcona site	50	Primary	September 2026
The Manor School	88	Primary	September 2026
The Village School	80 (but net gain of 40)	All-through (but places are for secondary)	TBC (modelled for delivery 2028)
Total	**212 (138 primary, 74 secondary)**		

4.4 This overall growth demonstrates the positive impact of the SEND Capital Programme. The increase in capacity not only supports Brent's commitment to inclusive education but also ensures that children and young people with complex needs can access high-quality, tailored support closer to home. A third phase of the SEND Capital programme is in development is likely to propose a significant expansion of 100-120 places in additionally resourced provision alongside the development of an 80-100 place special school that could also act as a centre of excellence for training and staff development to support inclusive practice in Brent's mainstream schools. The aim is to use spare capacity in the local mainstream sector as a result of falling school rolls to meet this need.

5.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

5.1 Relevant ward members will be kept informed of actions taken under this Strategy particularly where mainstream planning area capacity is reviewed and where additional specialist provision is under consideration.

5.2 The Lead Member has been and will continue to be regularly briefed on school place planning issues and associated actions.

5.3 School representatives have been and will continue to be actively involved school place planning discussions which affect their own establishment.

5.4 Any proposed changes to provision will be subject to public consultation with parents and key stakeholders in line with statutory guidance and legal frameworks.

6.0 Financial Considerations

6.1 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.

6.2 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.

6.3 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.

6.4 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 Department for Education expects this funding to be used for investment in schools, joining up with other capital resources when it is beneficial to do so.

6.5 The development of additional places for children and young people with SEND presents greater complexity and higher associated costs than mainstream primary school expansions. These increased costs are influenced by the nature of the construction required, the specific needs of the cohort of children and the constraints of site location and layout. As and when proposals to meet the forecast SEND demand need to be brought forward, further reports will be submitted to Cabinet, accompanied by financial information to support informed decision-making.

7.0 Legal Considerations

7.1 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).

7.2 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 children aged 9 months to 5 years from September 2025 and ensuring it overlaps coherently with school provision.

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

7.4 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.

7.5 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).

7.6 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 August 2025'.

8.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

8.1 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.

8.2 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.

8.3 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.

8.4 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.

8.5 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 falling demand for secondary school places. Demand for places for children and young people with SEND in the borough is increasing and the strategy identifies the need for additional local places to meet their needs.

9.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

9.1 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.

9.2 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.

10.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations

10.1 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.

10.2 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.

11.0 Communication Considerations

11.1 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:

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Corporate Director Children, Young People & Community Development

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