



Cabinet
8 November 2021

**Report from Strategic Director,
Children and Young People**

School Place Planning Strategy 2019–2023 Refresh

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Information
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	N/A
No. of Appendices:	One: Appendix 1 Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2019-23 November 2021 Refresh
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Brian Grady Operational Director, Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy Brian.grady@brent.gov.uk 020 8937 4713 Shirley Parks, Head of Forward Planning, Performance and Partnerships Shirley.parks@brent.gov.uk 020 8937 4259

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 This report provides Cabinet with a refresh of the School Place Planning Strategy 2019-2023 that was approved by Cabinet in November 2018.

2.0 Recommendations

That Cabinet:

2.1 Approves the refresh of the School Place Planning Strategy 2019-2023 provided as Appendix 1.

2.2 Notes that the current forecasts for primary places will remain fairly steady over the next five years.

- 2.3 Accepts the recommendation that the Secondary School Expansion Programme, presented to Cabinet on 14 October 2020, does not proceed as the latest forecasts indicate that additional secondary places are not required.
- 2.4 Notes the planned strategies for addressing the significant and increasing demand for places that meet the needs of children and young people with SEND aged 0-25.
- 2.5 Notes the concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on Early Years provision and the strategies to support the sector.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 In November 2018 Cabinet approved the Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2019-2023. The annual refresh of the strategy is provided as Appendix 1.
- 3.2 The School Place Planning Strategy 2019-23 presents the objectives and operating principles that underpin the Council's approach to school organisation to deliver high quality education provision to support the best outcomes for Brent children. The Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2019-2023 sets the following expectations:
- All Brent schools are good or outstanding, with an increased proportion of schools outstanding, over the duration of this strategy
 - All Brent schools thrive in effective partnerships with other schools, promoting resilience and mutual support
 - The Council and schools work together to meet the challenge of providing sufficient school places
 - The delivery of sufficient school places enables the achievement of the aims and objectives of the Brent Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness 2017-2021
 - All schools operate in good quality, safe premises
 - Children are educated close to home
 - Schools work with the local communities they serve
 - The Council and schools work in partnership to effectively meet the needs of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
 - The Council and schools make efficient use of resources.
- 3.3 This annual refresh of the Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2019-2023 provides an updated assessment of school place demand across the borough based on the latest 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 to ensure that projections provide the best estimates of future population based on current available inputs.
- 3.4 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 that is 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 is therefore driven by the number of pupils on roll in the January 2021 school census. The GLA projections are an indicator of need that are refreshed annually, taking into account changes in any key factors, such as the birth rate or the new housing trajectory.

- 3.5 Overall the 2021 forecasts for primary mainstream school places are lower than the 2020 forecasts, while the secondary forecasts are broadly similar to 2020. The primary forecasts reflect a lower than anticipated number of children on roll in the 2020/21 Reception cohort, as well as lower birth rates. While the forecasts will reflect some of the impacts of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic on local populations, there is little information available at this stage to predict whether the trends seen over the last year of some families leaving Brent will remain for the long term. Officers will continue to work closely with Brent schools to ensure that place planning is informed by local information on migration patterns and local populations.

4.0 Primary Place Need

- 4.1 Following unprecedented growth in demand for primary school places in Brent from 2006-2015, primary demand has reduced since September 2017. The latest Greater London Authority (GLA) projections (based on January 2019 school census) indicate that demand for Reception will gradually increase over the next few years. There remains, however, a high number of spare places across the system. At a borough level, Brent has sufficient capacity to meet the forecast increase in demand for mainstream primary places and maintain 5% spare places to ensure that there are sufficient places to respond to in-year movement and migration.
- 4.2 By dividing the borough into five planning areas based on the geographic grouping of schools, the local authority can plan to ensure places are provided near to where children live, while recognising that some children travel across planning areas to attend school. Demand for school places can also be highly localised as parents seek entry to schools perceived as popular.
- 4.3 At a planning area level, forecasts for planning areas 2, 4 and 5 are showing sustained lower demand than available places, resulting in a significant number of spare places. While this means that overall parents will have an increased choice of places, reduced intakes can present organisational challenges for schools. The local authority is working with schools to put in place strategies to manage changing demand and to support schools to ensure the sustainability of 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 for children with SEND.

5.0 Secondary Place Need

- 5.1 The latest GLA secondary forecasts are similar to those for 2020 in relation to both Year 7 projections and anticipated in-year cohort growth. However, while the forecasts indicate some increasing demand as larger primary cohorts

continue to progress into secondary schools, the rate of increase in the longer term is lower than the 2020 projections. Based on the current forecasts, there will be sufficient capacity to meet forecast demand and provide 5% spare places up to at least 2029/30. This includes capacity that will be provided by The North Brent School (180 places per year group). The school has experienced a delay in its plans to move to its permanent site in Neasden until 2023, and will therefore be offering only 60 places in the 2021 and 2022 normal rounds of admission.

- 5.2 On 9 November 2020, Cabinet agreed to delay implementation of a capital programme to increase secondary places through expanding two existing secondary schools that had been developed in response to previous forecasts that indicated there would be a shortfall of places (4 forms of entry), because lower forecasts in 2020 indicated the expansions would not be necessary. It was agreed that the programme would be delayed to allow time to review refreshed forecast demand information in Spring 2021.
- 5.3 The latest forecast demand information confirms that the additional secondary capacity is not required. It is therefore recommended that the Secondary School Expansion Programme presented to Cabinet does not proceed.

6.0 SEND and Alternative Provision Place Need

- 6.1 Despite lower pupil projections, demand for places that meet the needs of children and young people with SEND is continuing to increase. This is in part due to overall population growth, but also increasing diagnosis and the extension of services to children and young people aged 0-25 with SEND. The number of maintained EHC Plans in Brent has risen by 14.8% from 2020, with an annual growth rate of 8.4% since 2017. The number of EHC Plans nationally has risen by 10.4%. In 2021 the highest number of new EHC Plans were issued to children age 5 to 10. As of January 2021, there were 2784 (SEN2 data return) Brent resident children and young people with an EHCP, of whom 2322 were attending a school (reception to year 14) and 415 were attending a further education provision (age-range 16-25). In 2021 48% of children and young people with EHCPs attended a mainstream provision and 52% of children and young people with EHCPs attended a special provision.
- 6.2 Increased cohorts of primary children with EHCPs will be moving through to the secondary phase over the next five years. Despite an increase in special school places over the past three years, there remain insufficient local places for Brent children with SEND for children of both primary and secondary age. Brent continues to be reliant on sourcing places in out-of-borough maintained special schools or Independent schools or colleges. This provision is expensive and can limit children and their families' access to local support networks. To meet this demand and reduce dependence on out-of-borough independent special schools, Brent is planning to commission additional primary and secondary special places to cater for pupils with ASD and Communication and Interaction needs through a new special school, special school expansions and new Additionally Resourced Provision.
- 6.3 There is also a need for the borough to develop additional 16-25 SEND provision to meet the needs of young people aged 16-25 with complex learning

difficulties. Working with parents, young people and partners, including FE colleges, a capital programme is being scoped to establish a 16-25 Skills Centre at Airco Close, which will help support young people locally to develop their independence and participation in community life.

- 6.4 The council has a statutory duty to provide an appropriate full-time education for pupils who have been permanently excluded from school or who are otherwise without a mainstream school. The council provides support to Brent schools to reduce the number of exclusions, with a focus on early identification and prevention strategies working closely alongside pastoral teams in mainstream settings.
- 6.5 Where pupils have been excluded or require provision that includes a vocational element to best meet their needs, Brent and local schools commission places for children and young people in Alternative Provision both in and out of the borough. A new Alternative Provision School with integrated youth provision opened at the Roundwood Centre in January 2021 increasing the availability and quality of local provision for secondary aged children with SEMH needs that cannot be met within mainstream, alongside Brent River College and Ashley College.

7.0 Early Years

- 7.1 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. There are 323 early years providers in the borough and a good balance of free entitlement places across 247 providers of different types. Take-up of free entitlement places in 2021 was below both the London and national averages at 49% for the 2 year entitlement (compared with 64% in 2019) and 71% for the 3 and 4 year entitlement (73% in 2020 and 75% in 2019, national average 94%). In 2020, the number of children attending early years settings significantly reduced in response to COVID-19. Uptake has since increased but has not yet reached 2019 levels (3403 children attending in July 2021 compared to over 4,500 in July 2019). The significant loss of income from fee-paying parents during COVID-19 lockdown periods, particularly for PVI providers, has left many concerned about their long-term financial viability. A number of actions are planned to support provider recovery including persuading parents to take up early years places.
- 7.2 There continues to be evidence of increased numbers of children with SEND accessing specialist nursery places. The addition of a new ARP at Willow Nursery School has helped in supporting more children who need ASD specialist placements to access provision that effectively meets their needs and has helped to free up some spaces across the specialist nurseries for children with disabilities. The council is continuing to work with partners to ensure flexibility in the early years system to help meet the needs of parents of children with SEND, alongside the challenge of the 30 hour offer.

8.0 Financial Implications

- 8.1 Mainstream school places are funded from the annual Dedicated School Grant 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.
- 8.2 School budgets are devolved to respective school governing boards but are under pressure from real terms funding reductions to the DSG. As schools are funded on the basis of pupil numbers, it is likely that small schools and those with falling numbers on roll will find it most difficult to balance their budgets in the medium term. Larger and growing schools are more likely to successfully manage the funding reductions.
- 8.3 Expanding the number of funded high needs provision will have revenue implications, as they are funded from the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (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 lower cost. Reducing out-of-borough provision will also help mitigate the financial pressure on the transport budgets held in the General Fund.
- 8.4 There are no further primary school expansions included in the Council Capital Programme. Capital investment will be required to support the delivery of additional provision to meet the needs of children with SEND. A separate report to Cabinet will detail planned capital expenditure and the capital programme budget implications, including available Basic Need grant funding.
- 8.5 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 ESFA has stated that 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.
- 8.6 The nature of SEND education means that the development of additional places presents additional complexities, and thus higher costs than mainstream expansions. Predicting the future costs of providing places remains inherently difficult to forecast. 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.

9.0 Legal Implications

- 9.1 The council has a general statutory duty under Education Legislation to ensure that 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 that the supply of school places balances the demand for them.

- 9.2 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, where responsibility for childcare sufficiency and for provision for disadvantaged two year olds and all three and four year olds, overlaps with school provision.
- 9.3 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 that a school place is not available. Schools are not required to maintain classes over the planned admission number but revert to the usual admission number when children leave.
- 9.4 Under the current admissions code children can be admitted above the Published Admission Number (PAN). For community/voluntary controlled schools the council as admission authority must consult the Governing Board of the school where it proposes to either increase or keep the same PAN.
- 9.5 Under Section 19 of the Education Act 2006 and School Organisation Regulations, the council can decide to propose an enlargement or amalgamation, follow the statutory process and resolve to do so without requiring the consent of the Governing Board whose redress would be to object to the Schools Adjudicator.
- 9.6 Under section 37 of the Education Act 2011 if the council considers a new school needs to be established in its area, the council must seek proposals for the establishment of an academy.
- 9.7 Given there is a presumption that any new school site provided by a local authority would be for a sponsored academy, the council would in general be expected to grant a 125-year lease at a peppercorn rent to the academy. This approach is intended to be consistent with the existing guidance on community schools converting to academies where a local authority grants to the new academy a 125 lease of the community school site at a peppercorn rent. If in the alternative the council is asked by the Department of Education to provide a new site for a free school, it would also be expected to grant a peppercorn lease to the free school in accordance with Department of Education Guidance updated January 2014.

10.0 Equality Implications

- 10.1 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 that are 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.

- 10.2 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.
- 10.3 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.
- 10.4 The School Place Planning Strategy 2019-23 aims to ensure that there are sufficient and suitable school places for all Brent children and that their changing diverse and special education needs are met. 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.
- 10.5 The strategy will be reviewed and updated every year to reflect changing demographics and to ensure that the diverse and special education needs of Brent children continue to be effectively met. The findings and the equality analysis screening of the School Place Planning Strategy 2019-23 show that there is currently a slowdown in demand for primary school places and lower increased demand for secondary school places than previously forecast. Demand for Special Education Needs school places in the borough is continuing to increase and the strategy identifies the need for additional local places to meet this need.

11.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders

- 11.1 Ward members will be consulted on the impact of this strategy where mainstream planning area capacity is reviewed or where additional SEND places are being considered.

12.0 Human Resources/Property Implications (if appropriate)

- 12.1 N/A

Report sign off:

Gail Tolley
Strategic Director, Children and Young People