



Cabinet
14 November 2022

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

Consultation on Admission Arrangements for 2024/25

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>	Open
No. of Appendices:	Three Appendix 1 List of Primary Community Schools in Brent Appendix 2 Determined Oversubscription Criteria for Brent Community Schools in 2023/2024 Appendix 3 Proposed Oversubscription Criteria for Brent Community Schools in 2023/2024
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Shirley Parks Interim Director, Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy 020 8937 4259 Shirley.parks@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 This report seeks Cabinet's permission to consult on changes to the Admission Arrangements for Brent Community Schools for 2024/25.

2.0 Recommendations

That Cabinet:

2.1 Agrees to consultation on the following changes to the Admission Arrangements for Brent Community Schools for 2024/25:

2.1.1 the removal of all admission criteria determined by catchment area, and their replacement with criteria for all siblings and all other children;

2.1.2 a change to lift the priority of the children of staff criterion to before siblings;

2.1.3 expansion of the Medical and Social Needs criterion to include consideration of the medical or social needs of family members with caring or parental responsibility for an applicant.

3.0 Detail

3.1 This report relates to the admission arrangements and oversubscription criteria of Brent community primary schools only. Brent Council is the Admission Authority for 30 community primary schools in the borough (listed in Appendix 1 below). Voluntary aided (VA) and foundation schools, academies and free schools are their own Admission Authority and determine their own admission arrangements and oversubscription criteria.

3.2 The School Admissions Code issued under Section 84 of the School Standards and Framework Act is the legal framework for school admission matters. The Admissions Code requires that Admission Authorities have a mechanism to rank applications in order of priority. All schools and Admission Authorities must have admission arrangements that clearly set out how children will be admitted, including the criteria that will be applied if there are more applications than places at the school. Admission arrangements for Brent community schools are determined by the Council as the Admission Authority.

3.3 Admission authorities are only required to consult on their admission arrangements if they are proposing any changes, or if seven years have passed since the last consultation. Brent Council last consulted on a change to its admission arrangements in 2019 for the 2020/21 offer year. Cabinet is being asked to agree to consultation on admission arrangements for 2024/25 because changes are proposed.

3.4 The current Oversubscription Criteria for Brent Community Schools for 2023/24 are included as Appendix 2.

3.5 Any consultation to amend or maintain admission arrangements must last for a minimum of 6 weeks and must take place between 1 October and 31 January in the determination year (which is the school year immediately preceding the offer year).

3.6 Admission authorities are required to determine their admission arrangements by 28 February in the determination year.

4. Amendments to existing admission arrangements

4.1 Three main amendments are proposed to the existing admission arrangements (these proposals are not inter-dependent and can be agreed individually):

a) The removal of all admission criteria determined by catchment area, and their replacement with criteria for all siblings and all other children

b) A change in priority for the children of staff criterion so that this is a higher priority

c) Expansion of the social and medical needs criterion to include consideration of the social and medical needs of family members with parental or caring responsibility for an applicant.

4.2 Other minor drafting changes will be made to the full admission arrangements text which do not require consultation, such as updates to the dates throughout the document. The proposed oversubscription criteria for 2024/25 are included as Appendix 3.

5. Removal of Catchment Areas

5.1. Catchment areas have been utilised as part of the admission arrangements for community schools in Brent for over 17 years, with the most recent street level review taking place in 2010. Catchment areas are defined in the School Admissions Code 2021 as 'A geographical area, from which children may be afforded priority for admission to a particular school.' In Brent each community primary school has a catchment area which has been set by using roads, railways and other geographical boundaries. Schools are not necessarily always located towards the centre of their catchment area.

5.2. Existing admission arrangements give priority at each community primary school to children with or without a sibling living within the catchment area over children with or without a sibling living outside the catchment area. The purpose of a catchment area is to ensure, as far as possible, that each child has access to a local school and their chances of admission to that school are not hampered by children living further away who may have sibling priority.

5.3. The School Admissions Code 2021 requires that, in drawing up their admission arrangements, Admission Authorities **must** ensure that the practices and the criteria used to decide the allocation of school places are fair, clear, and objective. Parents should be able to look at a set of arrangements and understand easily how places for that school will be allocated.

5.4. Analysis of National Offer Day data from 2018 to 2022 shows that only two children have benefitted from the catchment area criterion where they were offered a place at a school under the 'Children living in the catchment area' criterion at the expense of siblings living outside the catchment area. This school was Northview Primary. Over the same period, a total of 9305 offers were made to community primary schools, an average of 1861 each year. These figures suggest that catchment areas currently have no real impact on the offer of places and as such are ineffective and redundant.

5.5. To put these figures into further context, over the same time period, only two children have appealed against the decision not to offer a place at a school

where they lived outside the school's catchment area, but where it was their nearest community primary school. Both appeals were unsuccessful. This represents 9% of all Reception appeals heard over the past five years.

- 5.6. Since the catchment areas were last fully reviewed in 2010, several community schools have converted to Academy status. Academies are under no obligation to maintain the local authority's catchment areas. While a few schools have chosen to do so (e.g. Sudbury Primary School), others have developed their own admission criteria without a catchment area (e.g. Braintcroft E-ACT Primary School). The original purpose of catchment areas when they were introduced was to ensure that every child in Brent lived within the catchment area of a local school. With the ongoing academisation of schools, there are areas of the Borough which are no longer covered by any catchment area.
- 5.7. Catchment areas work well where there is high demand and low availability of local school places. The latest primary school pupil projections indicate that demand for primary school places in Brent will continue to fall over the next 5 years. If there is an increase in demand in the future, the local authority could consider reintroducing reviewed or revised catchment areas.
- 5.8. Removal of the catchment areas will make the oversubscription criteria clearer and easier to understand. Furthermore, parents will no longer be disadvantaged by not living in the catchment area of a school they would like their child to attend, particularly where they may live nearer to that school than other children who do live within the catchment area.

6. Change in priority to children of staff criterion

- 6.1. In 2015 the local authority consulted to introduce a criterion to give priority to children of staff. The response was positive and this criterion was introduced with the admission arrangements for 2017/2018, remaining in place ever since.
- 6.2. Priority for children of staff has been given after siblings living in the catchment area, but before other children living in the catchment area, other siblings and other children.
- 6.3. As the purpose of this criterion is to support recruitment and retention of staff in schools, and as the number of children who meet this criterion is low, it is proposed that Brent increases the priority level for this criterion so it is above that for all siblings (regardless of whether the previous proposal is agreed).
- 6.4. This will have a minimal or negligible impact on the admission of siblings (due to the low number of staff children), yet would provide greater reassurance to staff that they will have a chance to enrol their children. It would also bring further clarity to the admission arrangements as the majority of children admitted would fall under the final two criteria (if the first proposal is agreed, or the final four criteria otherwise).

- 6.5 The following amended wording is being suggested for the children of staff criterion to ensure that it is clear and complies with the requirements of paragraph 1.40 of the School Admissions Code 2021:

Children whose parent is a member of staff:

- *who has been employed by the school and has worked predominantly on the school site for two or more years at the time of application; or*
- *who has been recruited to fill a vacancy at the school for which there is a demonstrable skill shortage.*

7. Medical or Social needs criterion

- 7.1. The Medical or Social needs criterion gives priority where a child demonstrates an exceptional medical or social need that necessitates a placement at one particular school.
- 7.2 The local authority considers that each primary school is equally well equipped to meet the needs of any children who do not have an Education, Health and Care plan. Therefore this criterion has always been predominantly used where a child's needs may be met due to a school's location or particular characteristics (such as the design or lay-out of the building, for example that the school is single storey).
- 7.3. On this basis it is recommended that consultation is undertaken on extending this criterion to allow medical or social consideration to be given for other family members with caring or parental responsibility, not just consideration of the child's medical or social needs.
- 7.4. The wording for this criterion would be amended so that it is clear that the criterion may also be applied where the medical or social needs of a family member with caring or parental responsibility necessitate a child's placement at one particular school. For example, this would allow consideration of a parent or a carer with a disability who would find it difficult to travel on a bus to a school further away from their home.
- 7.5 The local authority does occasionally receive requests to consider the medical or social needs of a family member when making offers at community primary schools. Expanding the definition for the social and medical criteria would allow the local authority to consider these requests on a case by case basis.

8.0 Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no specific financial implications for this report.

9.0 Legal Implications

- 9.1 The School Admissions Code has been issued under Section 84 of the School Standards and Framework Act. The proposed admission arrangements (appendix 1) and oversubscription criteria (see section 5 and 6) adhere to the requirements of the Admissions Code, revised September 2021.

- 9.2 Admission Authorities are responsible for admissions and must act in accordance with the Code, the School Admission Appeals Code, other laws relating to admissions and relevant human rights and equalities legislation.
- 9.3 The local authority must agree (“determine”) admission arrangements for 2024/2025 by 28 February 2023.
- 9.4 No other amendments are proposed to the admission arrangements which require consultation. Minor drafting amendments and date updates will be made as required.

10.0 Equality Implications

- 10.1 The Admission Criteria ensure fair access to school places.

11.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders

- 11.1 The Lead Member for Children, Young People and Schools has been consulted on the proposed consultation
- 11.2 As this report affects all wards, consultation with specific ward members has not been conducted.

12.0 Human Resources/Property Implications (if appropriate)

- 12.1 There are no human resources or property implications.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman
Corporate Director Children & Young
People