

Cabinet Report - Education Estates Strategy (Supplement)

School Admissions

- 1. The council is deciding to not propose changing admissions arrangements (4.1.2 & 8.1) – what alternatives/options have been considered? When was the last consultation on admissions arrangements?**

Response

The council is deciding to not propose changing admissions arrangements (4.1.2 & 8.1)

All admission authorities must formally agree their admission arrangements every year, even if the arrangements have not changed from the previous year.

Where an admission authority decides to propose changes to their school admission arrangements, it must be compliant with the School Admissions Code, and there is a requirement for the admission authority to consult stakeholders, including parents/carers, on the proposed change/s. Consultation must last for a minimum of 6 weeks and must take place between 1 October and 31 January in the determination year.

Admission authorities are required to consult on their school's admission arrangements every 7 years, even if there have not been any changes.

The proposed admissions arrangements in the cabinet report relate to community (LA maintained) schools. The LA is the admission authority for community schools.

Governing Bodies of Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools, free schools and academies are the admission authority for their school and are required to consult on any changes to their admission arrangements. Statutory consultation is required if a school wants to reduce their Published Admissions Number (PAN). The PAN is the maximum number of pupils that the admission authority will admit to each year group.

Some non-maintained schools have consulted on changes to their school's PAN due to high level of surplus places. The proposals for reductions in PAN are designed to improve schools' ability to efficiently plan their staffing and educational provision by offering a more accurate number of places. . In common with many other London authorities, Croydon has experienced a significant fall in the demand for school places, particularly in the primary

education phase. This brings budget pressures that could affect the sustainability of schools and their ability to maintain high standards. If the school is not oversubscribed, all applicants must be offered a place. The oversubscription criteria are applicable if the admission authority receives more applications than there are places in the school.

Schools / Academies that are proposing to reduce their Published Admission Number are required to consult on the change to their admission arrangements.

What alternatives/options have been considered?

We are not proposing a change to the oversubscription criteria for our community schools for 2025/26. Whilst there are other ways admission arrangements can influence the allocation of school places set out in the Code (e.g., giving priority in our oversubscription criteria to children eligible for the early years premium/ pupil premium) no alternative option is being considered at the time of writing this report.

Reduction of Published Admission Number

Some of our Schools - Voluntary Aided and Academies - have consulted on reducing their school's Published Admission Number (PAN) to address the surplus capacity.

For LA maintained / community schools, the main route for managing high level of surplus place has been via in-year variation of the school's PAN.

In-Year variation of admission number

Once admission arrangements have been determined for a particular academic year, they cannot be revised by the admission authority. However, admission authorities may propose in-year variations where they consider such changes to be necessary in view of a major change in circumstances. For community, voluntary-aided and foundation schools, such proposals must be referred to the Office of School Adjudicator for approval.

Academy schools proposing to vary admission arrangements are required to contact the Regional Schools Commissioner.

School closure

School closure is an option that could be considered to manage high level of surplus school places, especially in the primary education phase. However, **Croydon currently have no plans to close any schools**. Our starting point is to work with schools to avoid the need for school closures in the future. We

are working with relevant schools to manage high levels of surplus places through variation PAN reduction and in-year variation of admission number.

When was the last consultation on admissions arrangements?

The last consultation on admissions arrangements for community schools took place in 2016/17 (January 2017 cabinet report) for the 2018/19 academic year.

The next consultation will take place next year for the 2026/27 academic year (to meet the 7 year requirement).

If there are any changes by government policy e.g. via the School Admissions Code, consultation would have taken place by central government and the admission authority would be required to implement the changes.

2. There has been increased demand due to increased housing (4.3.5 & 4.3.8) – is there currently sufficient capacity and does this correlate to where new housing is being built?

Response

Our pupil projections indicated that currently there is sufficient capacity in our primary and secondary schools to meet demand. Likely pupil yield from new housing developments has been taken into account in pupil projections. Planning for school places also take into account in-year growth as a result of new housing. The demand for school places will vary depending on the number of school-age children living in the new homes. Larger homes such as family-sized dwellings typically accommodate more school-age children than smaller homes, such as flats. We have been working closely with our spatial planning colleagues regarding planned new housing developments and this is kept under close review where demand is expected to increase as new housing becomes occupied.

3. Last year we heard that schools with budget deficits were associated with surplus places – is this still the case? How well is the School Organisation Advisory Board proceeding in addressing this?

Response

The majority of school revenue funding is allocated on a per pupil basis. If schools don't have enough pupils attending or suffer from fluctuating numbers, they may not be able to operate in a financially efficient way and risk entering a budget deficit. Therefore, any decrease in pupil numbers will

reduce the funding a school receives. Some primary schools are struggling to balance budgets, due to a combination of factors including inflationary price increases, a shortage of teaching and support staff leading to increased spend on expensive agency staff.

How well is the School Organisation Advisory Board proceeding in addressing this?

Council Officers have been working with individual schools with high levels of surplus school places rather than through an Advisory Board. This has also been done via the Croydon Head Teachers Association meetings.

4. **4.1.12 - the last sentence states that 'Croydon also administer the application process on behalf of the majority of secondary schools, however the admission authority of the secondary schools manages the decisions on who can be offered'; the sentence states that Croydon administers the in year application process for the majority of primary schools including Academy, VA and Foundation schools. This suggests that these primary schools do not manage the decisions on who can be offered - is that correct?**

Response

No. Croydon Admissions administer or manage the in-year applications for these schools, and send the application details onto the schools. The school/Governing Body/Board is the decision maker, based on their admission arrangements.

Each school has a published admission policy, which is used to allocate places where there are more applicants than places available.

The application process depends on the school parents/carers are applying to, as some schools manage their own admissions.

Some schools require the completion of a supplementary information form (SIF) as well as an application form.

Applications to Voluntary Aided Schools and Academies where Croydon Admissions co-ordinate the application form

Parents/carers are required to complete a supplementary information form (SIF) and submit to the school directly in order for their application to be considered.

Receiving an outcome for the application

For applications made to these schools, the outcome of application will be sent directly to the applicant by the school.

Applications to Academies who manage their own in-year Admissions

Applications must be made directly to the school. The outcome of the application will be sent to the parent/carer by the school.

5. Are there any risks associated with an increase in In-year applications?

Response

Yes.

In-year admission applications have increased significantly in Croydon, and across other London boroughs. This is due to several factors, including families moving to different boroughs due to changes in working patterns, while others move into London from other parts of the UK and abroad. Croydon also to receive a high number of refugee and asylum-seeking children and families due to the location of the Home Office in Croydon. In-year admissions can also be challenging for schools as no immediate funding is made available by the Department for Education when these children join. Current funding is on a per-pupil basis, and for children who join the school after the census in October, the school will not receive any funding until the next October.

In-year admissions in years 10 and 11 pose particular challenges as schools have less time to prepare these pupils for exams, leading to some schools refusing to take children in these year groups. This can lead to an increase in the number of children out of school.

6. When an in year admission comes into Croydon, how does the team capture if a family is of a particular faith and check that they know which faith schools have vacancies - should they wish to access them?

Response

Admissions do not capture this information, however we have a schools' prospectus on the Council's website that details faith schools in Croydon, which applicants can access to assist them in deciding which schools to apply for.

7. 4.4.4 - How many schools have reduced their admission number via an in year variation of PAN and are they spread evenly across the borough

or do they reflect local area issues? How do you ensure that all schools with a surplus of places have the opportunity to seek an in year variation? At what time of the year would the variation be sought?

Response

How many schools have reduced their admission number via an in year variation of PAN and are they spread evenly across the borough or do they reflect local area issues?

Since September 2023, one primary school (CofE) has had an in-year variation approved by the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) and one junior school (maintained) is awaiting approval. Both schools were supported through this process by Croydon. Both schools are in the North planning area and reflect individual school positions as well as local issues with high surplus school places.

How do you ensure that all schools with a surplus of places have the opportunity to seek an in-year variation?

This has been discussed as an option in meetings with all Head Teachers, Trusts, Diocese, and individual schools. Council Officers support own admission authority with the process – application to the Office of Schools Adjudicator or the Regional Schools Commissioner.

At what time of the year would the variation be sought?

There is no specific time of year for this. However, the LA would normally suggest that the school waits until at least the end of September, when actual numbers are clearer and a more informed decisions can be made.

In all cases, admissions will try and work with the school and agree a cap in year of entry numbers where the local picture supports this.

School Maintenance

- 1. 4.2.10 - should 'an Academy School Buildings' read 'any Academy School Buildings'? Are there any schools in Croydon with RAAC? What are the risks associated with the use of CLT and Wood Wool? Are the 13 schools with CLT and Wood Wool being all Community Schools? Does a finding like this promote a building to D1 status?**

Response

Yes, should be read 'any Academy School Buildings'.

Are there any schools in Croydon with RAAC?

None in Croydon maintained schools and reports received from academies confirmed no presence of RAAC.

What are the risks associated with the use of CLT and Wood Wool?

Wood wool and CLT are alternative light weight construction materials used instead of RAAC. They are known not to fail suddenly (unlike RAAC) and are safe providing regular safety checks are conducted and after any water damaged areas need to be re-assessed for Structural integrity.

Are the 13 schools with CLT and Wood Wool being all Community Schools?

Yes.

Does a finding like this promote a building to D1 status?

No, as the intention is to monitor the schools regularly. The regular monitoring is about to be programmed in and will be monitored each Spring with a confirmed 4 week for completion.

Childcare Sufficiency

- 1. Page 72 - Childcare sufficiency - Would you talk us through the graph with respect to the take up of eligible 2 Year Olds - why does it vary in Croydon more than National and what are the consequences of this at provider level in Croydon?**

Response

There has been some anecdotal evidence from providers that 2 year old places were less financially lucrative due to the higher staffing ratios, the need for more space and the higher needs of the children eligible for the entitlement and their families.

In addition, it is very likely that the pandemic has affected take up. However, we expect the take up to increase as the council has changed its communication / approach to ensure greater awareness – rather than sending information regarding the entitlement via post, this is being done via direct email to parents/carers.

The impact of the government's children reform is likely to increase take up. From April 2024, eligible working parents of 2-year-olds will be able to access 15 hours childcare support. From September 2024, 15 hours childcare

support will be extended to eligible working parents of children from the age of 9 months to 3-year-olds.

- 2. Page 74 - Would you talk us through the differences in column 2 and column 4, as well as telling us how the additional places will be sourced?**

Response (5.1 - Places required from April 2024)

This is a typographical error – table 4 should be headed as ‘April 2025’, not ‘April 2024’.

The additional places required for April 2025 will be sourced by expansion of existing early years providers and/or new provision. We are currently mapping out wards with the need for places is likely to be the greatest and assessing the capacity of existing providers to expand their numbers. We are also investigating sites where providers may be able to open new settings (e.g. school buildings, church/community halls, etc.).

The DfE is providing local authorities with childcare expansion capital grant funding in 2023/24 to support the provision of new places to support the expansion in delivering the expansion of the 30-hours early years entitlement for working families and of wraparound provision in primary schools.

- 3. Page 77 – Is it correct that if a setting is judged RI in an Ofsted Inspection then it cannot receive funding for 2YO places? If so, how long would it be before the inspectors returned? For 2YOs currently at the provision, does funding stop immediately or is time given for the family to find an alternative provider?**

Response

Yes, if a setting is judged RI then they cannot take any further funded 2 year olds. They can, however, keep the children they already have on roll. Ofsted usually return with 12 months period to the school judged as RI.

- 4. Free Early Education and Childcare for 15 hours a week for children of 2 years of eligible working parents – is this covered under the ESS or would that be elsewhere?**

Response

Yes, this is mentioned in Appendix 6 – Childcare Sufficiency Assessment.

SEND Provision

- 1. SEND demand at NY 0 (5.1.) - Will these numbers expand over time to NCY-1 & NCY-2?**

Response

There is always the potential for expansion within the SEND population and forecasting can be a challenge. We have data that we can review further on this if required.

- 2. What percentage of children with SEND are being assessed within the target timeframes (last year it was 80%)?**

Response

This has been an area for improvement in SEND and is monitored monthly across the year. It has been as high as 100% this year and is consistently above 80%. – although we did dip in December due to short month and staff absence/leave. Average for October / November and December = 78%.

- 3. The 10 SEND pupils who are currently receiving alternative packages (5.1.6) - Is the non-attendance of school provision a choice in their interests or is this simply an observation?**

Response

The pupils on home packages are related to parental choice and access to placements.

Alternative Provision

- 1. The proposed conversion of Saffron Valley Collegiate to 1st April 2024 (2.13 & 7.2) - does this delay have any knock-on effects?**

Response

No, the service level agreement between the Council and the Management Committee of Saffron Valley Collegiate will remain in place to ensure the Council continues to meet its statutory duty to provide education for young people excluded from school who are unable to access a school place.