



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

**Template for
Local Authority Report
to
The Schools Adjudicator
from**

**Staffordshire Local Authority
to be provided by
31 October 2024**

Report Cleared by: Name Andrew Marsden

Improvement

Job Title Head of Access to Learning, Inclusion and

Telephone number 01785 278787

Email: andrew.marsden@staffordshire.gov.uk

Date submitted: 15 October 2024

By: Name Samantha Nicol

Service

Job Title Head of School Admissions and Transport

Telephone number 01785 278676

Email: samantha.nicol@staffordshire.gov.uk

Website: [Office of the Schools Adjudicator](#)

Please email your completed report to: [Office of the Schools Adjudicator](#) by 31 October 2024 and earlier if possible

Contents

Introduction

Guidance on completing the template

Section 1 - Normal points of admission	5
A. Co-ordination.....	5
B. Looked after and previously looked after children.....	5
C. Special educational needs and/or disabilities	6
 Section 2 - In-year admissions.....	7
A. Overall level of challenge for your in-year admissions.....	7
B. Looked after children and previously looked after children	7
C. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities	9
D. Fair access protocol	10
E. Directions to maintained schools to admit children	11
F. Other points on in-year admissions.....	12
 Section 3 - Other matters.....	14
 Section 4 - Feedback.....	14

Introduction

1. Section 88P of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (the Act) requires every local authority to make an annual report to the adjudicator. The Chief Adjudicator then includes a summary of these reports in the annual report to the Secretary of State for Education. The School Admissions Code (the Code) sets out the requirements for reports by local authorities in paragraph 6. Paragraph 3.30 specifies what must be included as a minimum in the report to the adjudicator and makes provision for the local authority to include any other matters. Paragraphs 6 and 3.30 of the Code require that each local authority publish its report locally.
2. **This year's report must cover the 2023/2024 academic year and be submitted to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) by 31 October 2024.**
3. Please note that, in response to feedback on the previous template and in the light of consultation with a group of local authorities, changes have been made to various sections of this year's template.

Guidance on completing the template

4. We have included all the guidance on completing specific parts of the template in this section. There is no requirement for local authorities to include the introduction and the guidance in their published reports, but they are free to do so if they wish.
5. We should be grateful if in completing questions which ask for information about primary and secondary schools and/or pupils, local authorities would follow the approach to classification of schools used in statutory provisions and in the Department for Education Statistical First Release¹ and the Education Middle School (England) Regulations 2002².
6. The Code sets out some minimum requirements on the contents of each local authority report stating that each must cover as a minimum "information about how admission arrangements in the area of the local authority serve the interests of looked after children and previously looked after children, children with disabilities and children with special educational needs, including any details of where problems have arisen."
7. The Department for Education's aim through the annual reports from local authorities is to understand how well the admissions system is working nationally, rather than to hold individual local authorities to account. By understanding the effectiveness of the system, including outcomes, the Department hopes to identify areas where the admissions system is working well and areas where it could be improved. With that in mind, when the template asks, "how well does the admission system serve the needs of

¹ [Department for Education Statistical First Release](#)

² [The Education Middle School \(England\) Regulations 2002](#)

children,” the Department appreciates that it is asking local authorities to make a subjective judgement, in the understanding that everyone’s experience with the admission system will be different. The Department encourages local authorities in responding to the open questions and spaces for open comments to set out challenges that are proving difficult to overcome.

8. Guidance on specific questions and/or meaning of specific terms in this report:

- a. “in-year admissions”: This means admissions (that is children admitted to a school and not applications for places):
 - i. to a year group which is not a normal point of entry for the school concerned (for example to Year 2 for a five to eleven primary school); and
 - ii. after the end of the statutory waiting list period (31 December) to a year group which is a normal year of admission for the schools concerned (such as Year R and Year 7).
- b. Not applicable means that there were no children falling within the relevant definition.

9. We welcome all comments that local authorities make in the comment boxes and we aim to reflect those comments in the Annual Report, but we ask for the comments to be entered under the right headings. Section 3 invites comment on any other matters not specifically addressed in this template if local authorities wish to do so. The views expressed in previous years also remain a matter of public record.

10. We ask that where possible, you return the template in Word instead of PDF formatting. A number of you have commented on the formatting of the template and we have tried to make it as accessible as possible, but we are aware that some local authorities use different versions of Word.

11. Where questions request a comparison with the previous year, any new local authorities formed as a result of reorganisation should note this on the form.

Information requested

Section 1 - Normal points of admission

A. Co-ordination

Which of the following best describes the level of challenge for your **main admissions round in 23/24 compared to 22/23?**

Year Group	Much less challenging	Less challenging	No change	More challenging	Much more challenging
Reception			X		
Year 7			X		
Other relevant years of entry			X		

Please give examples to illustrate your answer if you wish:

The coordinated admissions process in Staffordshire continues to run very smoothly with a higher than average national and regional percentage of parental preferences being met.

Well established working relationships with our neighbouring LAs and with other admitting authorities operating within our area aid the smooth operation of this process. Systems have been developed to ensure that the vast majority of the process is automated to ensure that the burden on schools who operate as their own admission authority, is as minimal as possible given their responsibilities in regard to this area.

B. Looked after and previously looked after children

- i. How well does the admissions system in your local authority area serve the interests of looked after children at **normal points of admission?**

☐ Not at all ☐ Not well ☐ Well ☒ Very well ☐ Not applicable

- ii. How well do the admissions systems in other local authority areas serve the interests of children looked after by your local authority at **normal points of admission?**

☐ Not at all ☐ Not well ☐ Well ☒ Very well ☐ Not applicable

- iii. How well does your admissions system serve the interests of children who are looked after by other local authorities but educated in your area **at normal points of admission?**

☐ Not at all ☐ Not well ☐ Well ☒ Very well ☐ Not applicable

- iv. How well does the admissions system in your local authority area serve the interests of previously looked after children at **normal points of admission**?

☐ Not at all ☐ Not well ☐ Well ☒ Very well ☐ Not applicable

v. If you wish, please give examples of any good or poor practice or difficulties which exemplify your answers about the admission to schools of looked after and previously looked after children at **normal points of admission**:

Systems are in place to ensure that children in this category are tracked and their applications validated and cross referenced with our virtual school to ensure that in the main, good and outstanding schools are chosen on behalf of children who are currently looked after and that applications are made on time.

C. Special educational needs and/or disabilities

- i. How well served are children with special educational needs and/or disabilities who **have** an education, health and care plan that names a school at **normal points of admission**?

☐ Not at all ☐ Not well ☐ Well ☒ Very well ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any comments you wish to make on the admission of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities at normal points of admission:

Completion of phase transfer of children with an Educational Health and Care Plan were successfully completed by September 2023 for pre-16 children (100 %) and post 16 pupils (82%). The SEND Teams are working on solutions for the remaining post 16 pupils and liaising with parents, families and settings.

Section 2 - In-year admissions

A. Which of the following best describes the overall level of challenge for your in-year admissions in 23/24 compared to 22/23?

Phase	Much less challenging	Less challenging	No change	More challenging	Much more challenging
Primary			X		
Secondary					X

If you wish, please explain the factors that have changed the level of challenge for your in-year admissions:

There has been a rise of children becoming eligible for referral to the fair access protocol due to the increased reluctance of some schools to admit secondary aged children in-year. This could be a variety of reasons, pressure on available school places in some areas being one. The rise of children presenting challenging behaviour and social/mental health issues being another which means that often schools are reluctant to arrange admission through usual channels. There are a large number of in-year admission requests from parents who having initially opted to electively home educate (either to avoid exclusion or school attendance procedures) now wish to reregister their children (some of whom have missed many months of formal education) at schools. PANs only being legally enforceable at normal age of entry is not helpful and neither is a school's ability to refuse at a level far below the number originally admitted.

Evidence exists that parental applications and enquiries are sometimes not responded to as per the requirements within the school admissions code and training sessions are planned for schools early in the autumn term to try and address some of the common issues and concerns in respect of this area. Clear pathways are established to raise any continuing concerns with Trusts (where applicable) or the appropriate body where the LA is not the responsible admitting authority.

B. Looked after children and previously looked after children

- i. How well does the **in-year admission** system serve children who are looked after by your local authority and who are being educated in your area?
- ☐ Not at all ☐ Not well ☒ Well ☐ Very well ☐ Not applicable
- ii. How well does the **in-year admission** systems in other local authority areas serve the interests of your looked after children?

☐ Not at all ☐ Not well ☒ Well ☐ Very well ☐ Not applicable

- iii. How well does the **in-year admission** system serve the interests of children who are looked after by other local authorities but educated in your area?

☐ Not at all ☐ Not well ☒ Well ☐ Very well ☐ Not applicable

- iv. How well does your **in-year admission** system serve the interests of previously looked after children?

☐ Not at all ☐ Not well ☒ Well ☐ Very well ☐ Not applicable

v. If you wish, please give examples of any good or poor practice or difficulties which support or exemplify your answers about **in-year admissions** for looked after and previously looked after children:

Whilst our Virtual Headteacher acknowledges that improved information sharing between social care, schools and Virtual School has led to more informed decision making in relation this most vulnerable group, there are still schools within the authority that continue to delay in-year admissions for children in care. For these Looked After children that this affects, the impact is extremely damaging.

It remains a particular challenge to secure admission for Y11 and increasingly Y10 Looked After Children. In addition, for children who have complex needs but no EHCP due to multiple school and care placement breakdowns the different approaches between authorities requiring mainstream school to accept a pupil on roll can cause delay as schools will refuse admission on the basis that they are unable to meet need.

Variation between local authority systems can be a challenge for social workers to navigate when they do not know the area and there can be particular difficulty in securing provision in good and outstanding schools.

Whilst we can successfully challenge most schools this delays admission and increases time out of education for children that can have already had significant gaps in education.

The National Association of Virtual Head Teachers are continuing to advocate for strengthening of admission arrangements in relation to looked after children. This needs to be considered alongside cross border funding arrangements for children in care that may need alternative provision as part of their offer which can cause additional barriers and delay to admission.

This year we continue to have challenges in securing education in Y11 for newly arrived unaccompanied asylum-seeking children late in the year, this was overcome for 4 children through using additional funding via the high needs block to support the school to put in a tailored education package. It would be useful to have guidance to schools around the importance of

offering newly arrived children in Y11 the opportunity to be part of a school community and the opportunity to develop language skills. schools are focusing on GCSEs we have found schools that have taken Y11 have found creative ways to engage them in the life of the school.

C. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities

- i. How well served are children with special educational needs and/or disabilities who **have** an education, health and care plan that names a school when they need to be **admitted in-year**?

☒ Not at all well ☐ Not well ☒ Well ☐ Very well ☐ Not applicable

- ii. How well served are children with special educational needs and/or disabilities who **do not have** an education, health and care plan when they need to be **admitted in-year**?

☐ Not at all well ☐ Not well ☒ Well ☐ Very well ☐ Do not know

- iii. Please give examples of any good or poor practice or difficulties which support or exemplify your answers about **in-year admissions** for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities:

Annual Reviews enable consideration of change of placements for children with SEND. The Review process has increased in quality with the increase in SEND Key Workers (+33% capacity) and increase in Educational Psychologists (+33%). The impact of these increases will continue to be felt.

We are experiencing continued challenges with some mainstream settings who are reporting that they struggle to meet the needs of children with SEND. Our response to this challenge is clearly set out in our Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) and SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan. We have launched a significant investment in pre-statutory SEND support across all districts (£10million over 5 years). This involves an Enhanced Asses-Plan-Do-Review Pathway (launched in January 2024) that will increase the robustness of interventions at this phase of the graduated approach. The enhancement will see the consistent presence of Educational Psychologists at this phase and additional financial support to schools (pre-statutory) to enable evidence based intervention and support. Additionally, September 2024 saw the operational launch of 5 of the 8 Staffordshire Enhanced District Inclusion Support Teams (SEDIS). These teams compromise of teams of schools, specifically commissioned by the Local Authority, to deliver SEND and inclusion consultation support to mainstream settings in their district to

improve inclusion practice. This is a significant investment that will enhance the ability of schools to ensure the inclusion of children with SEND throughout the academic year. Currently, over 200 children are supported through EAPDR. Early analysis indicates positive outcomes in terms of learning, behaviour and reduced exclusions.

D. Fair access protocol

What proportion of the state-funded mainstream schools in your area have said that they agree to the local authority fair access protocol?

Primary

- Between 0% and 49% ☐
Between 50% and 74% ☐
Between 75% and 89% ☐
Between 90% and 99% ☐
100% ☒

Secondary

- Between 0% and 49% ☐
Between 50% and 74% ☐
Between 75% and 89% ☐
Between 90% and 99% ☐
100% ☒

If you have below 75% for either phase, please explain why: n/a

- i. How many children were admitted to schools in your area under the fair access protocol between 1 August 2023 and 31 July 2024?

Type of school	Number of Primary aged children admitted	Number of Secondary aged children admitted
Community and voluntary controlled	6	13
Foundation, voluntary aided and academies	18	51

Type of school	Number of Primary aged children admitted	Number of Secondary aged children admitted
Total	24	64

If you have seen a change in the number of children referred to your Fair Access Protocol between 1 August 2023 and 31 July 2024 compared to the previous academic year please indicate what you consider the key reasons for this change to be? **There has been a large increase in the number of cases referred in respect of secondary aged children, in part due to pressure on available places in some areas of the County but also due to the number of children returning to education following prolonged periods out of school where they have been registered as Home Educated or children who are new to the County, are deemed hard to place due to previous school history and length of time out of school.**

- ii. How well do you consider children referred to the Fair Access Protocol are served in in your area?

☐ Not at all well ☐ Not well ☒ Well ☐ Very well ☐ Not applicable

- iii. Please provide any comments you wish on the protocol not covered above:

The majority of in-year admissions are managed through the normal in-year admissions process without reference to the fair access protocol. For the few where school place offers are not forthcoming our fair access protocol ensures that delay is minimised.

E. Directions to maintained schools to admit children³

How many directions did the local authority make between 1 August 2023 and 31 July 2024 to maintained schools for which the local authority is not the admission authority to admit children (including children looked after by the local authority but resident in another area)?

Total number of children	Of which, looked after	Of which, not looked after

³ It is important that only Directions to maintained schools are included here. Numbers of Directions to academies are already held by the Department.

1	1	0
---	---	---

F. Other points on in-year admissions

- i. For the schools for which the local authority co-ordinates in-year applications, in the year between 1 Aug 2023 and 31 July 2024 did you receive

- ☐ Significantly fewer applications than last year
☐ slightly fewer applications than last year
☐ about the same
☐ slightly more than last year
☒ significantly more than last year

- ii. For what proportion of **primary** schools in your area did the local authority co-ordinate in-year admissions during the 2023/2024 academic year

- Between 0% and 24% ☒
 Between 25% and 49% ☐
 Between 50% and 74% ☐
 Between 75% and 100% ☐

- iii. For what proportion of **secondary** schools in your area did the local authority co-ordinate in-year admissions during the 2023/2024 academic year

- Between 0% and 24% ☒
 Between 25% and 49% ☐
 Between 50% and 74% ☐
 Between 75% and 100% ☐

- iv. If you wish, please provide any comments about how **well in-year admissions** works for children who are **not** looked after or previously looked after and/or do **not** have SEND:

v. If you wish, please provide any other comments on the admission of children **in-year** not previously raised (you may wish to include here any comments about cases where it has not proved possible to find places for children):

Section 3 - Other matters

Are there any other matters that the local authority would like to raise that have not been covered by the questions above?

Section 4 - Feedback

We would be grateful if you could provide any feedback on completing this report to inform our practice for 2025.

Thank you for completing this template.

Please return to [Office of the Schools Adjudicator](#) by 31 October 2024