



Office of  
the Schools  
Adjudicator

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

**Staffordshire Local Authority  
to be provided by  
31 October 2026**

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

**Please email your completed report to: [Office of the Schools Adjudicator](#) by  
31 October 2026 and earlier if possible**

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## 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 2025/2026 academic year and be submitted to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) by 31 October 2026.**
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 Release<sup>1</sup> and the Education Middle School (England) Regulations 2002<sup>2</sup>.
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

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<sup>1</sup> [Department for Education Statistical First Release](#)

<sup>2</sup> [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 25/26 compared to 24/25?**

| <b>Year Group</b>             | <b>Much less challenging</b> | <b>Less challenging</b> | <b>No change</b> | <b>More challenging</b> | <b>Much more challenging</b> |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| 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.**

**Individual decisions made by admitting authorities regarding admissions over PAN without consideration of the wider local impact, can adversely affect neighbouring schools. The lack of powers available to us to intervene in such cases is a continuing concern.**

#### 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 applications are made on time.**

**We have not experienced any difficulties relating to children who are looked after or previously by other local authorities but are educated in our area or vice versa.**

### 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:

**Staffordshire currently oversees 11300 Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP). As of September 2026, Staffordshire has seen a sustained increase in the percentage of children with an EHCP accessing mainstream education, a rise to 36% from 31%.**

**Staffordshire, like most Local Authorities in England has seen a dramatic rise in SEND with over 2470 requests for EHC Needs Assessments (EHCNA) with the Local Authority agreeing 79 % of these requests. This increase in demand coupled with a national and regional shortage of Educational Psychologists has continued to compromise Staffordshire's ability to complete EHCNAs within the statutory 20 weeks. Although timeliness has increased to over 35% and the assessment backlog decreased to less than 400. Staffordshire has invested significant resource in the SEND team and as of 16 November 2026, a new SEND team with significant resource will be launched. This redesigned and strengthened team will address the challenges around timeliness and quality of the assessment process.**

**A key strategic activity for Staffordshire is the commissioning of up to 50 Enhanced SEND Resource Bases (ERBS) for children with an EHCP. The first wave of these ERBS will be operational as of 1 September 2027 with an estimated 10-15 places per base.**

## **Section 2 - In-year admissions**

**A. Which of the following best describes the overall level of challenge for your in-year admissions in 25/26 compared to 24/25?**

| <b>Phase</b> | <b>Much less challenging</b> | <b>Less challenging</b> | <b>No change</b> | <b>More challenging</b> | <b>Much more challenging</b> |
|--------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Primary      |                              |                         | X                |                         |                              |
| Secondary    |                              |                         | X                |                         |                              |

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

**We have seen a large reduction in the number of children becoming eligible for referral to the fair access protocol this year which leads us to believe that the in-year admissions process works well for the majority of children in Staffordshire.**

**We continue to notice that often some schools are reluctant to arrange admission through usual channels for “hard to place” children. 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.**

**We have strengthened and continue to reissue guidance to schools in relation to the requirements within the school admissions code in respect of in-year admissions 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.**

**Concerns regarding the large cohort of children requiring admission to school following lengthy periods away from formal education where parents have initially opted to electively home educate (either to avoid exclusion or school attendance procedures) continue to exist.**

## **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:

**Despite progress in information sharing between social care, schools, and the Virtual School - leading to more informed decisions for vulnerable pupils, some schools within the authority continue to delay or decline in-year admissions for children in care. This year, the Virtual School has observed an increase in the number of children entering care without an existing school place, requiring urgent placement activity at the point they become looked after. These children often present with complex educational, social or emotional needs and can face significant delays in accessing suitable provision.**

**While many schools work constructively with the Virtual School to facilitate admissions, resistance is more commonly encountered within the secondary phase than in primary schools, particularly where pupils present with complex educational, behavioural or pastoral needs. Secondary schools are more likely to raise concerns regarding capacity, their ability to meet need, or the cumulative impact of supporting a high number of vulnerable pupils already on roll. Schools may decline admission on the grounds that they believe they are unable to meet a child's needs, particularly where those needs have not yet been formally recognised through an EHCP.**

**The Virtual School is frequently required to provide sustained advocacy and challenge to secure responses from schools and progress applications. Although this approach is often successful, the process can result in applications extending beyond expected timescales, delaying access to education and increasing the risk of further disruption to learning, stability and wellbeing.**

This academic year, the Virtual School successfully supported one admission appeal which was subsequently upheld. In other cases, schools initially resistant to admitting a child in care agreed to offer a place following challenge and discussions regarding the potential use of direction powers. One maintained primary school required intervention from the Head of the Virtual School and the Assistant Director for Inclusive Education and Learning before agreeing to admit a Year 1 child. This enabled a positive transition and allowed three siblings to remain together within the same school community.

When applying for school places for our UASC school age children, there have been challenges when applying for places out of county, but there are no delays from Staffordshire schools, which is positive.

Differences in local admission processes, thresholds for decision-making and approaches to vulnerability can create additional barriers for social workers and carers seeking placements, particularly when applying outside normal transition points or where children require alternative provision.

The National Association of Virtual Head Teachers continues to advocate for stronger admission protocols for looked after children, and Staffordshire would support greater national consistency in this area. Consideration should be given to strengthening national expectations and oversight so that all admission authorities and local authorities apply the highest-priority status of children in care consistently and without delay, regardless of placement location. Greater consistency across local authority boundaries would help reduce unnecessary delays and ensure vulnerable children can access suitable education at the earliest opportunity.

### 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:

**In the academic year 2025/26, we have seen a significant increase in the number of schools accessing Local Authority pre-statutory support through Enhanced Assess Plan Do Review (EAPDR) and SEDIS (LA commissioned school teams providing systems level school improvement). In the latter example, evaluation of school feedback suggests overwhelmingly positive experiences of SEDIS support. Of note, schools report outcomes related to increased confidence, skill and outcomes for children post SEDIS intervention. In the case of EAPDR, children that then progress to an EHCNA are more likely to have their assessment concluded within 20 weeks – due to the quality, completeness and coproduction of the assessment process.**

**The LA is restructuring their Childrens Services, in particular, their SEND team. The current 8 district SEND teams will be brought in centrally under SEND Senior Leadership and there has been a significant investment in capacity of this team. The new structure goes live in November 2026.**

**In addition, Staffordshire has been informed by the DfE that the SEND partnership reform plan has been agreed and the partnership is busy implementing what is an exceptionally strong and coproduced plan.**

**Notwithstanding these strong and productive activities, demand for SEND service continues to grow. The lack of clarity regarding the reforms to statutory process and the uncertainty that this creates in parents, carers and schools is not optimal. We welcome a timely position from the DfE regarding this element of the proposed SEND reforms.**

#### **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:

- i. How many children were admitted to schools in your area under the fair access protocol between 1 August 2025 and 31 July 2026?

| Type of school                            | Number of Primary aged children admitted | Number of Secondary aged children admitted |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Community and voluntary controlled        | 1                                        | 0                                          |
| Foundation, voluntary aided and academies | 4                                        | 26                                         |
| Total                                     | 5                                        | 26                                         |

- ii. If you have seen a change in the number of children referred to your Fair Access Protocol between 1 August 2025 and 31 July 2026 compared to the previous academic year please indicate what you consider the key reasons for this change to be?

**We have noted a large reduction in the number of children requiring admission through the Fair Access Protocol. We are extremely grateful that the majority of in-year admissions were managed through the normal in-year admissions process with our schools playing their part in admitting children requiring school places in accordance with the Admissions Code.**

**For the few where school place offers are not forthcoming our fair access protocol ensures that delay is minimised.**

- iii. 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

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

**The vast majority of children that were referred to the Fair Access Protocol resulted in admission to the identified school.**

### E. Directions to maintained schools to admit children<sup>3</sup>

How many directions did the local authority make between 1 August 2025 and 31 July 2026 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 |
|--------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
|                          | 0                      | 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 2025 and 31 July 2026 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 2025/2026 academic year

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

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

- iii. For what proportion of **secondary** schools in your area did the local authority co-ordinate in-year admissions during the 2025/2026 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 2027.

Thank you for completing this template.

Please return to [Office of the Schools Adjudicator](#) by 31 October 2026