

Report to OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE AND VALUE FOR MONEY SELECT COMMITTEE

Delivery of Additional School Places and Admissions

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Purpose of the Report

To provide a briefing and update to the Overview and Scrutiny Performance and Value for Money Select Committee (PVFM) on delivery of additional school places and admissions.

To provide an update on the delivery of additional school places and the work of Education Support Services including: -

- Pupil Numbers
- Allocation of school places by preference
- The percentage of residents who are offered a school place of choice (1st and 2nd 3rd preferences)
- Overview of the current school place plans
- Future plans to increase parental choice.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the committee note the contents of the report and feedback any comments and suggestions to the Director of Education and Early Years and the Head of School Support Services.

Additional School Places and Admissions

1 Background

1.1 School Places and Pupil Numbers: -

The LA has seen a slight dip in the numbers of Primary aged pupils in our schools. In 2019 the January census had 24337 pupils in Oldham schools, the number from 2021 is now 24145. In Secondary the numbers of pupils continue to rise, 2019 there were 15800 secondary pupils this now stands at 16711. This year we have experienced a downturn in the number of applications for primary school places. Work is currently ongoing to investigate the reasons behind this and the implications for schools.

We continue to experience place pressure with some year groups at secondary level but are currently able to accommodate this pressure with places available in each cohort. Three schools have places available in all 5-year groups.

The usual trend exists with the borough having some extremely popular secondary schools and others that are less popular. The new provision such as The Brian Clarke Academy will give the borough much needed places but also further choice for residents.

The primary sector has place pressure in year 5 and 6. Year 5 is a year group under significant pressure. There are no year 5 places in Chadderton or East Oldham.

Brexit / covid are current issues that have affected pupil numbers and the number of applications for both Primary and Secondary. In addition, there are a number of families who are abroad and struggling to return due to travel restrictions.

Applications for reception places have reduced on previous years, possibly as a result of a slight decrease in birth rates, but as planned new housing comes online in the coming years it can be anticipated that this will change those rates, in line with current projections.

The Council continues to fulfil its statutory role to ensure that every child in the borough has a school place. In addition to this it is the clear aim of the Council to go beyond statutory requirements and ensure that these places are in good or outstanding schools and that as many people as possible are offered a place in a school of their choice.

1.2 School Allocation Data (Secondary)

Appendix One shows the detail for 1st to 3rd preferences in Oldham. In 2015 81% of parents were allocated a place in their preferred first choice of secondary school, this dropped to 79 % in 2016, 73 % in 2017 and 2018, 74% in 2019 and 75% in 2020. First preferences for secondary have increased in 2021 to 75.7 % and we would anticipate a further rise once the Brian Clarke Academy opens in September 2022. 89.9% of pupils gained a place at one of their top 3 preferences of secondary school in 2021. National rates are included for comparison.

1.3 School Allocation Data (Primary).

Appendix One shows the detail of the number of places in Oldham Primary Schools. The primary sector has been significantly expanded in the years 2011 to date in order to address demand. In 2015 90 % of parents were allocated a place in their preferred first choice of primary school, this has stayed relatively static in the years 2015- 2019 rising to 92.5 % in 2016 and 91% in 2019 and 2020. First preferences for primary have increased in 2021 to

93.7 %. 98.3 % of pupils gained a place at one of their 3 top preferences for primary schools in 2021. National rates are included for comparison.

2 **Current Position (Secondary and Primary School Places)**

2.1 In recent years we have increased the number of places available for pupils at good and outstanding secondary schools. Further work is currently being undertaken to provide additional places in Oldham. As these places become available the number of residents gaining a place at a school of their choice will increase. Increased provision of good and outstanding places will also help to reduce the number of school appeals in future years.

There have been recent increases and further proposed increases in secondary school places at the following schools/academies:

Oasis Leesbrook -150 additional places from 2021

The Brian Clarke Academy (Bluecoat 2) – 240 additional places from 2022.

Saddleworth School Rebuild due to open in February 2022 will offer an additional 20 places per year group.

Regarding primary school provision since the update in 2020 there has now been approval to develop and build a new Primary School in Chadderton (Calderton Primary School) which will provide additional places in the Chadderton area and provide a resource centre for children with SEND.

As more places become available at good and outstanding schools this has been reflected in a reduction in the number of school appeals, below is the latest data on appeals.

	Primary Appeals Heard	Secondary Appeals Heard	Withdrawn
September 2019-20	227	330	88 Pri / 73 Sec
September 2020-21	167	207	70 Pri / 109 Sec

2.2 **Update on Late Applications**

For 2021 we have seen an increase in late applications when compared with 2019 and 2020. We believe this is in the main due to the Covid-19 lockdown. Nursery settings are vital in terms of reminding families to apply as are primary schools for year 5/6 families. The LA have not been able to attend open evenings (which were virtual). We believe this has led to the increase in late applications. We expect the number of late applications to decrease as lockdown restrictions ease and face-to-face communications will again become more regular.

In my last report I outlined how the Admissions Team informs and supports parents and the activities undertaken to reduce late applications. Unfortunately, due to the lockdown it has not been possible to offer the face-to-face support that was previously available. We hope to reinstate this service now that the lockdown has ended.

3 **Key Issues for Overview and Scrutiny to Discuss**

3.1 The key challenges for the borough and the school admissions service are to maximize the number of good and outstanding school places available to parents. This will result in more parents gaining a place in the school of their choice. We will continue to expand only good or outstanding provision in order to meet the preferences of parents.

4 **Key Questions for Overview and Scrutiny to Consider**

- 4.1 Further updates will be provided to the board at this as expansions in the secondary sector have taken full effect. It is anticipated that the number of first, second and third preference allocations in the secondary sector will further increase at that point with an attendant further reduction in the number of appeals.

5. **Links to Corporate Outcomes**

- 5.1 A key link is the ambition to develop a co-operative service with the LA Admissions taking ownership to drive change and continue to work with a resident focus.

6 **Additional Supporting Information**

- 6.1 Please see attached appendix on school places preferences.

7 **Consultation**

- 7.1 N/a

8 **Appendices**

- 8.2 Appendix One – Place Preferences Data