
Proposed Changes to the Admission Arrangements 2025/26 for West Berkshire Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools

Committee considering report:	Individual Executive Member Decisions
Date of Committee:	15 February 2024
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Heather Codling
Report Author:	Melissa Perry
Forward Plan Ref:	ID4492

1 Purpose of the Report

This report sets out proposed changes to Published Admission Numbers (PAN) at two maintained schools. The schools are Aldermaston church of England CE Primary School where the current admission number (PAN) is 28 and we are consulting to reduce the number to 15 and Pangbourne Primary School where the current admission number (PAN) is 30 and we are consulting to reduce the number to 20.

There is also a proposal to add a tie breaker to criterion within the admissions oversubscription criteria, to better support service families and Crown Servants who are returning from abroad.

Admission Arrangements are the overall procedure, practices and oversubscription criteria used in deciding the allocation of school places including any device or means used to determine whether a school place is to be offered. The Admission Number (or Published Admission Number – (PAN)) is the number of school places that the admission authority must offer in each relevant age group of a school for which it is the admission authority. Admission numbers are part of a school’s admission arrangements.

2 Recommendation

It is proposed that, subject to the outcome of the current public consultation exercise, the proposals are agreed and implemented for the September 2025 admission round.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	The proposed changes will not result in a cost, financial pressure, or cost saving, but will afford those schools greater protection from potential future cost burdens (i.e. cost

Proposed Changes to the Admission Arrangements 2025/26 for West Berkshire Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools

	avoidance) as a result of pupil numbers not aligning with class and staffing structures.			
Human Resource:	The proposed changes do not have any HR implications. The schools have already acted to re-structure to align with the numbers of pupils being admitted.			
Legal:	There are no legal implications because of these proposals.			
Risk Management:	There is a risk that beyond the forecast 5-year horizon births may increase, but if that were to be the case there would be sufficient time to consider any implications and take any necessary action. Within the 5-year horizon all the data available is strongly suggesting a limited to no risk of pupil numbers at point of admission exceeding reduced PANs.			
Property:	There is no property related issues because of these proposed changes. The lower numbers currently in the schools will have created some surplus accommodation already. The proposed changes will provide for greater certainty on accommodation requirements and thus will improve ability to manage any surplus accommodation.			
Policy:	The proposed changes relate to the School Admissions Code 2021 (issued under S84 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998) and the School Admissions Regulations 2012. In this context these statutory documents define the duties of the local authority in proposing a change to published admissions numbers, where the Local Authority is the Admission Authority.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				

Proposed Changes to the Admission Arrangements 2025/26 for West Berkshire Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools

A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		The proposals to reduce the admission numbers align with demand and so should not have an impact on catchment pupils that seek a place at the school.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		The proposals to reduce the admission numbers align with demand and so should not have an impact on catchment pupils that seek a place at the school, including those with protected characteristics.
Environmental Impact:		X		This will not have an impact on the environment.
Health Impact:		X		This will not have an impact on health.
ICT Impact:		X		This will not have any impact on ICT.
Digital Services Impact:		X		This will not have any impact on Digital Services.
Council Strategy Priorities:	X			The proposals support the Council Priority: A Fairer West Berkshire with Opportunities for All. The proposal will support the commitment to support our local authority maintained schools to drive up standards.
Core Business:		X		This is business as usual, as the policies remain unaffected.
Data Impact:		X		This will not have an impact on admissions data.

Consultation and Engagement:	<p>The public are being consulted on the changes and this exercise concluded on 31 January 2024. This consultation is aimed at key stakeholders, as prescribed by the Admissions Code and relevant legislation.</p> <p>In addition, the proposals have been discussed with the school's leadership teams; with senior officers in the Education Service – including the Head of Service, Principal Advisor for School Improvement, Service Manager for the Admissions Team; officers in Admissions, Education Place Planning and Development Team and the Schools Accountancy team.</p>
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4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 In accordance with statutory responsibilities the LA has consulted on the admission arrangements (which includes school admission numbers) for community and voluntary controlled schools in this area. The consultation ended on the 31 January 2024.
- 4.2 The LA will seek to determine the admission arrangements for these schools by 28 February 2024. This determination will have regard to the outcome of the consultation, as well as the School Admissions Code and all relevant legislation.
- 4.3 Three changes have been proposed through this consultation round. Two concern PANs of individual schools and one concerns a change to the tie-breaker questions in the over-subscription criteria.
- 4.4 It is proposed to reduce the admission numbers for Aldermaston Primary School, by 13 places per year, and Pangbourne Primary School, by 10 places per year. Both proposals are in response to lower numbers in recent years and projected numbers in future years. The reductions would reduce surplus capacity and would align with actual numbers allocated.
- 4.5 It is also proposed to introduce a third tie breaker question. This would further distinguish between individuals who meet the same admission criteria. The proposal is to add children of service personnel and crown servants.
- 4.6 Given that the schools are already experiencing these lower numbers and the proposal would give the schools future certainty, it is recommended that the changes should be approved. This will be subject to the outcome of the public consultation due to end on 31 January 2024.
- 4.7 Implementation of the additional tie breaker is recommended. This would enable the Council to support the Government's commitment to removing disadvantage for service children. This will also be subject to the outcome of the public consultation due to end on 31 January 2024.

5 Introduction/Background

Introduction

5.1 The background and detailed proposals are set out below.

Background

5.2 The district has been experiencing a declining birth rate for some years. This has begun to translate to lower allocations and in some cases lower allocations have become established.

As a result of the lower numbers, choice has increased for families, and this has affected places being sought. Perceived popularity is also a key factor in determining which schools are affected most by the lower numbers, rather than purely local decline in catchment populations.

Two schools are seeking to reduce their PANs to match demand. There have been discussions with these schools about numbers. Numbers are low across several year groups and the predictions for both schools are that these low numbers will continue. This will have a cumulative impact on the schools, as all year groups will eventually be below the current admission number. Some restructuring has already happened, and the change of PAN will formalise this. It will also provide some protection for the schools from unpredictable numbers or from numbers which would not lend themselves to mixed age teaching and could have implications from an Infant class size perspective.

Proposals

5.3 The following are being proposed to allow the schools to reduce their PAN to match the current and anticipated levels of demand.

1. Aldermaston church of England CE Primary School – Admission Number reduction.

The current admission number (PAN) is 28 and we are consulting to reduce the number to 15.

The school has been admitting around 15 for the last 5 admission years. The school also has a small Year 6 cohort and only the current Year 5 cohort is close to the existing PAN of 30. The forecast horizon is 5 years and across this we anticipate that the allocations across these years will be at a similar level.

The current 5-year average number of catchment area children allocated is 9. First preferences average around 12 (5-year average) and an average of 14 are allocated each year. These trends have become established and consistent across the most recent five-year period. Given that the trends are consistent, and that the catchment population is stable, we would expect allocations to continue at a similar level to recent years across the five-year forecast horizon.

2. Pangbourne Primary School – Admission Number reduction.

The current admission number (PAN) is 30 and we are consulting to reduce the number to 20.

Pangbourne has seen a drop in allocations for the last 3 years. This is due in part to a declining catchment population and due to families making different choices.

The current 5-year average catchment allocation is 17 and represents around 50% of the catchment population. The remainder of the catchment population choose a variety of schools and the birth rate across the area has declined significantly in some areas.

These trends have become established across the most recent three-year period. Given that the catchment population is set to be lower across the next five years we would expect allocations around 17-20, and these would be mostly from catchment. The birth rate is particularly low, and this could lead to even lower numbers. This change will ensure the school can structure mixed age group classes of no more than 30 children.

3. Additional Tie Breaker for Service Families and Crown Servants returning from overseas.

Introducing an additional tie breaker question will mean that the needs of service families and Crown Servants who are returning from overseas can be better met through the admissions process. Where a service family or Crown Servant family are moving to the area, it will improve our ability to allocate a school place quickly as they are more likely to be placed at the top of a school waiting list.

Service families are those families which have a member working for the armed forces.

A Crown servant is an officer employed by departments of the United Kingdom Government, such as The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development office (FCDO), UK Visa and Immigration (UKVi) and the Department for international trade (DIT).

Supporting the efficient admission of service families and Crown Servants who are returning from overseas aligns with the aims of the Governments UK Armed Forces Families Strategy 2022-32 and West Berkshire's Armed Forces Covenant.

6 Supporting Information

6.1 Change to Aldermaston Primary PAN from 28 to 15.

Aldermaston has had a consistent catchment population in the mid-20s for most of the last decade. Despite the catchment population being consistent, allocations from catchment have fallen. The allocation peaked at 28 in 2016 and has declined since. The current average (5 year) catchment allocation is 9 and represents around 39% of the catchment population. The remainder of the catchment population choose a variety of schools and the birth rate across the local area has declined significantly in some areas. Parents can make different choices of schools within a short travel distance.

First preferences and allocations have followed a similar pattern, with an average (5 year) of 12 first preferences and 14 allocated each year. These trends have become

Proposed Changes to the Admission Arrangements 2025/26 for West Berkshire Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools

established and consistent across the most recent five-year period. Given that the trends are consistent, and that the catchment population is stable, we would expect allocations to continue at a similar level to recent years across the five-year forecast horizon.

6.2 Change to Pangbourne Primary PAN from 30 to 20.

With a PAN of 20 they should have sufficient capacity for catchment children at the point of admission. In the last 3 years they have attracted around 50% of their catchment population and the most they have attracted in the last 10 admission years is 67%.

Historically we have seen a decline in the size of the catchment population at the point of admission compared to the GP data and this is likely due to those that have moved away or that don't come through the admission process. This reduces the size of the catchment population, as you can see in the table below. The average is a 19% difference, and this was as high as 26% in 2022 and as low as 13% in 2023. Based on the average, the catchment population is predicted to look like this;

Year of entry	Age	No in catchment (currently)	Likely catchment pop (5-year average)
2027	0	17	14
2026	1	26	21
2025	2	33	27
2024	3	28	23

If the school attracts around half the catchment population, then even using a worst-case scenario we would not anticipate catchment allocations to exceed 19. This should therefore leave some capacity for non-catchment preferences or possibly for in-year movement if they don't fill at point of admission. Having looked at the school's cohort survival it looks like they generally lose pupils rather than gain them in-year. This is based on comparing the October census across the last few years and represents the picture at that point in time. Their reception cohort, for example, is already at 20 having been allocated 23. It is likely that the re-structure would take place in the infants first, and that it would roll forward into the juniors each academic year (although the school may change this plan if numbers start to drop in the junior year groups). So, for the time being there would be no problem in taking children into Years 3-6 as the 1FE structure would remain.

Schools Accountancy are supportive of the proposal due to the positive impact this will have on managing future accounts and sustaining staffing structure for the current PAN based on current/forecast numbers.

6.3 Change to Tie Breaker

Introducing an additional tie breaker question will mean that the needs of service families and crown servants who are returning from overseas can be better met through the admissions process.

Proposed Changes to the Admission Arrangements 2025/26 for West Berkshire Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools

For families of service personnel with a confirmed posting, or crown servants returning from overseas, admission authorities must: a) allocate a place in advance of the family arriving in the area (if one is available), provided the application is accompanied by an official letter that declares a relocation date.

The School Admissions Code includes requirements relating to children of Service personnel. The Code requires local authorities to ensure that 'arrangements in their area support the Government's commitment to removing disadvantage for service children'. The Code allows priority in oversubscription criteria to be given to children eligible for the Service Pupil Premium.

In West Berkshire, service families are housed in Curridge Primary school, Burghfield St Mary's Primary school, and The Willink Secondary School's catchment areas. Whenever a family is posted to the area and children need to transfer schools it can be challenging to allocate where waiting lists already exist. We must apply the oversubscription criteria to each application and placing a tie breaker above distance will provide more chance that a child can be placed 1st on the waiting list. If a child is 1st, we can quickly enter discussions with schools to admit.

The following is a summary of the criteria, including tie breakers.

School Admission oversubscription criteria

- A. looked after children, and all previously looked after children including those who appear to have been in state care outside of England and have ceased to be in state care because of having been adopted.
- B. Children who have exceptional social or medical needs
- C. Feeder Schools (this criterion only applies to junior school applications)
- D. Catchment Area Pupils, i.e.
- E. Non-Catchment Siblings
- F - Children of staff at the school
- G. All Other applicants

Tiebreaker

Priority will be given within any of the over-subscription criteria in the following order:

1. For Criteria A-D, priority will be given first to siblings.
2. For reception applications only. A child entitled to the Early Years Pupil Premium Grant.
3. **Children of UK service personnel and crown servants who are returning from overseas.**
4. Child whose permanent home address is nearest to the preferred school.

7 Options for consideration

- 7.1 Both schools have the option to not change their PAN and to continue as they are.
- 7.2 Aldermaston Primary School has already started to restructure to suit a 0.5FE structure. They have experienced several years of low numbers, and this looks likely to continue. Changing PAN won't change the situation at the school and so the school could retain the current PAN. However, this looks likely to lead to a 50% surplus of places at the school which could impact on financial viability, accommodation planning and staffing. It also introduces the risk of having allocations that make teaching in mixed classes difficult.

Proposed Changes to the Admission Arrangements 2025/26 for West Berkshire Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools

7.3 Pangbourne Primary School has experienced lower numbers for the last few years. A recent good Ofsted has given the school some confidence that this could change. The school has a deficit budget and has recently restructured staffing in some areas to match the budget/numbers. The forecasts suggest that similar numbers to recent years, and below 20, are likely. As with Aldermaston, the school could continue with the current PAN but would carry the same risks. In addition, the schools' budget may not be able to support a continuation of the current PAN and this proposal could future proof the finances of the school.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 In conclusion two maintained schools have taken the difficult and considered decision to seek to reduce their admission numbers.
- 8.2 This is in response to current and anticipated levels of demand. The proposals seek to align the admission numbers with this demand and should have a neutral impact on the families that seek a place at the schools and who live within their catchment areas.
- 8.3 These proposals would offer the schools certainty and would enable them to arrange their staffing and accommodation with confidence. This would remove a potential risk, particularly in-year, of allocations that would not align with infant class size legislation and that would make mixed classes of 30 difficult, although this is unlikely.
- 8.4 Subject to the outcome of the consultation exercise, we recommend that these proposals are agreed and implemented.
- 8.5 The proposal to add an additional tie breaker would enable the Council to meet the needs of service families through the allocations process and would align with Government commitments in this area. It is recommended that this proposal, subject to the consultation, is agreed and implemented.

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees or Task Groups within preceding six months | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Item is Urgent Key Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Report is to note only | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Wards affected: All wards.

Proposed Changes to the Admission Arrangements 2025/26 for West Berkshire Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools

Officer details:

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Appendix A

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) - Stage One

What is the proposed decision that you are asking the Executive to make:	Approve reductions in PAN at two schools and introduce an additional tie breaker to the oversubscription criteria.
Summary of relevant legislation:	School Admissions Code 2021; School Standards and Framework Act 1998 & School Admissions Regulations 2012
Does the proposed decision conflict with any of the Council’s priorities for improvement? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes • Support everyone to reach their full potential • Support businesses to start develop and thrive in West Berkshire • Develop local infrastructure including housing to support and grow the local economy Maintain a green district • Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships 	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If yes, please indicate which priority and provide an explanation
Name of Budget Holder:	Melissa Perry
Name of Service/Directorate:	Education; People Directorate
Name of assessor:	Fiona Simmonds
Date of assessment:	04.01.24
Version and release date (if applicable):	

Is this a ?		Is this policy, strategy, function or service ... ?	
Policy	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	New or proposed	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Strategy	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Already exists and is being reviewed	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Function	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Is changing	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Service	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

(1) What are the main aims, objectives and intended outcomes of the proposed decision and who is likely to benefit from it?

Proposed Changes to the Admission Arrangements 2025/26 for West Berkshire Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools

Aims:	To align admission number with demand
Objectives:	To reduce the admission number as proposed
Outcomes:	Reduce the PAN at Aldermaston by 13 places and Pangbourne by 10 places
Benefits:	Provide financial certainty; remove risk of numbers not aligning with structure; enable accommodation and staffing to be structured.

(2) Which groups might be affected and how? Is it positively or negatively and what sources of information have been used to determine this?

(Please demonstrate consideration of all strands – Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex and Sexual Orientation)

Group Affected	What might be the effect?	Information to support this
Age	It is unlikely to affect anyone	The PAN will be aligned with current and predicted demand, so no persons will be affected.
Disability	It is unlikely to affect anyone	The PAN will be aligned with current and predicted demand, so no persons will be affected.
Gender Reassignment	It is unlikely to affect anyone	The PAN will be aligned with current and predicted demand, so no persons will be affected.
Marriage and Civil Partnership	It is unlikely to affect anyone	The PAN will be aligned with current and predicted demand, so no persons will be affected.
Pregnancy and Maternity	It is unlikely to affect anyone	The PAN will be aligned with current and predicted demand, so no persons will be affected.
Race	It is unlikely to affect anyone	The PAN will be aligned with current and predicted demand, so no persons will be affected.
Religion or Belief	It is unlikely to affect anyone	The PAN will be aligned with current and predicted demand, so no persons will be affected.
Sex	It is unlikely to affect anyone	The PAN will be aligned with current and predicted demand, so no persons will be affected.

Proposed Changes to the Admission Arrangements 2025/26 for West Berkshire Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools

Sexual Orientation	It is unlikely to affect anyone	The PAN will be aligned with current and predicted demand, so no persons will be affected.
Further Comments:		
These proposals are based on recent allocations and predicted demand across the forecast horizon. The horizon is 5 years and so birth rate could change in the future. There is therefore the risk that the schools could attract more children than they have places for beyond the forecast horizon but the data from the last decade suggests that this is unlikely.		

(3) Result	
Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could contribute to inequality?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please provide an explanation for your answer: The proposals will match supply and demand and should not impact adversely on anyone in the catchment areas.	
Will the proposed decision have an adverse impact upon the lives of people, including employees and service users?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please provide an explanation for your answer: The schools should still have sufficient capacity to catchment demand and therefore the proposal should not have an adverse impact on any individuals or groups.	

If your answers to question 2 have identified potential adverse impacts and you have answered ‘yes’ to either of the sections at question 3, or you are unsure about the impact, then you should carry out a EqIA 2.

If an EqIA 2 is required, before proceeding you should discuss the scope of the Assessment with service managers in your area. You will also need to refer to the EqIA guidance and template – <http://intranet/index.aspx?articleid=32255>.

(4) Identify next steps as appropriate:	
EqIA Stage 2 required	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Owner of EqIA Stage Two:	
Timescale for EqIA Stage Two:	

Name: Fiona Simmonds

Date: 04.01.24

Please now forward this completed form to Pamela Voss, Equality and Diversity Officer (pamela.voss@westberks.gov.uk), for publication on the WBC website.