

School admission arrangements 2017/18 – Public Consultation response

1.0 Introduction

The Authority consults on its school admissions arrangements annually, to ensure that school place allocations continue to be fair, transparent and that as many parents as possible can obtain a place for their child at one of their preferred schools.

This year's consultation included a proposal on a change to the form of testing for pupil ability banding, used as part of the oversubscription criteria for admission to secondary school in Year 7. The banding test is taken in the summer of year 5 and the local authority consulted on whether or not to continue with pupil ability banding for the 2017/18 school year onwards. The Consultation also encompassed the following:

- (A) Proposed admissions arrangements for Tower Hamlets community schools:
- Nursery School/Class
 - Primary Schools
 - Secondary Schools – including the change to testing for pupil ability banding;
- (B) Proposed planned admission numbers for schools in Tower Hamlets;
- (C) Proposed schemes for the co-ordination of admissions for:
- Reception Year of Primary School;
 - Year 7 of Secondary School;
 - Admissions outside of the normal points of entry ('In Year' admission)

The consultation period ran for six weeks from 19th November 2015 until 31st December 2015.

2.0 Communication

The table below includes the communication methods used to advertise and promote the consultation and its reach.

Table A – communications medium used for consulting on the school admissions arrangements

Communication medium	Communication reach	Date actioned
Email to all governors via Governor Services with information on consultation opportunity	All governors	November 2015
Email to all neighbouring local authorities seeking their views	All neighbouring local authorities	November 2015
Link on Tower Hamlets council website and intra-net to online consultation questionnaire to obtain wider	All local residents and businesses and staff employed by the council	November 2015

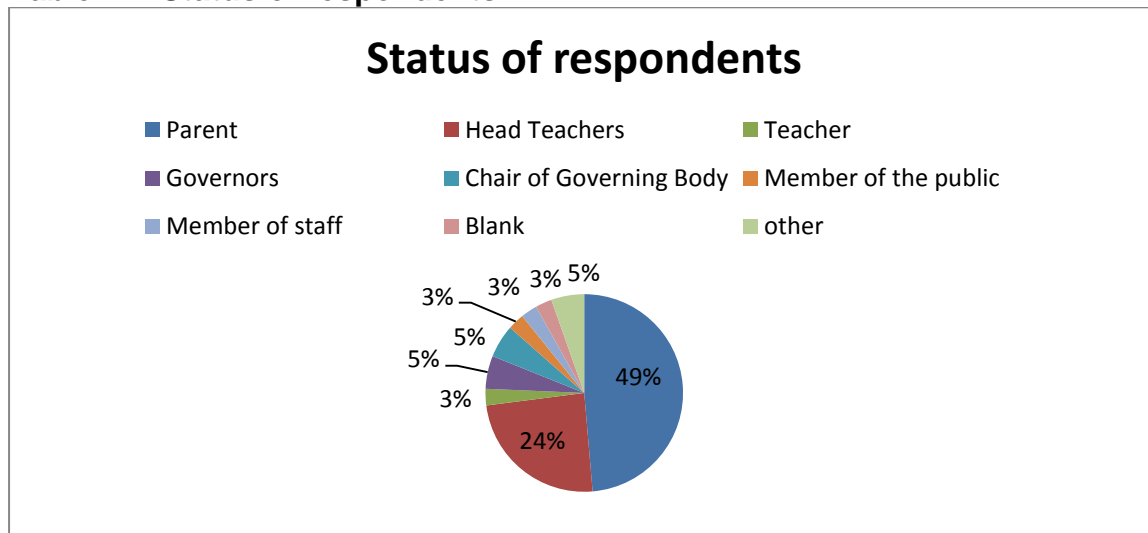
reach		
East End Life Newspaper entry and one paid advert placed at different intervals to allow maximum publicity	Local residents and businesses	November and December 2015
Press release to the local and BME press	Wider community reach including hard to reach communities	November 2015
Head Teachers Bulletin and Primary and Secondary Heads Consultative	All head teachers employed by the local authority	December 2015
Members bulletin and briefing note for Lead Member for Children's Services	All elected members asking for support to engage the local community	November 2015
Admissions Forum	Members of the Forum	December 2015
Public meeting	All members of the public	December 2015
Somali Governors	Targeted group	November 2015
New Residents and Refugee Forum	Frontline professionals working with vulnerable hard to reach children and families	December 2015
Parent Champions	Consultation with Parent Champions to reach parents	December 2015
Councils social media accounts, scheduled release on Facebook and Tweeter	Wider reach	November and December 2015
Partnership Boards including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and Families Partnership Board • Young People and Preparing for Adulthood CDG • Maternity, Early Years and Childhood 	Wider partnership reach	November/December 2015

2.0 Profile of respondents who submitted an online response

This information does not include the profile information for those who attended the parent’s focus group; this is only for those who completed an online response.

3.1 Profile of respondents

Table B – Status of respondents



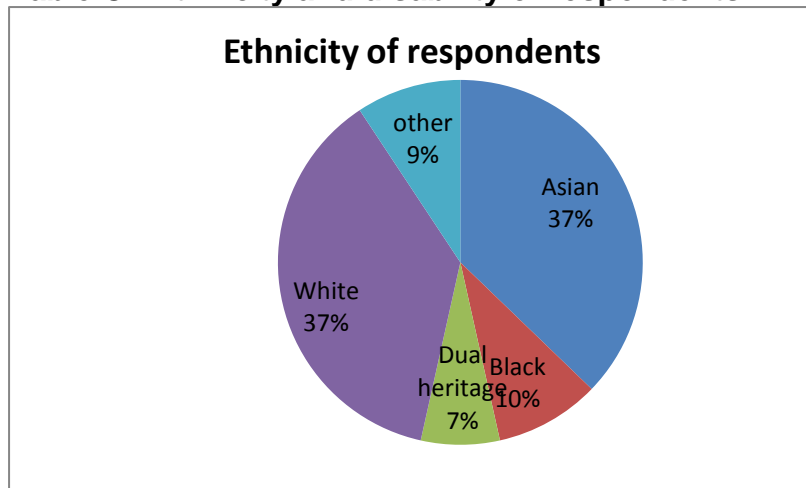
This year we have had a wider reach with more parents engaging in the consultation than in previous years.

3.2 Schools input

Local schools took part in the consultation, these were: Sir William Burrough, English Martyrs Catholic Primary School, Stebon and Osmani Primary School, Morpeth School, George Green's School, Arnhem Wharf School, Stepney Green Maths, Computing & Science College, Stepney Green School.

3.3 Ethnicity and disability of respondents

Table C - Ethnicity and disability of respondents



The respondents engaged include representation from a range of community groups the White and Bangladeshi representing the largest groups.

Other community groups engaged included: African, Somalian, Caribbean, French, Spanish, Polish and Australian, reflecting the changing diversity of the local population.

33 respondents said they were not disabled and 2 responded with yes. They did not raise any issues in relation to their disability and securing a school place.

4.0 Results analysis

There were 37 responses to the questionnaire, in the main these were completed through online submission, 9 were completed at an open public event. There is general consensus and agreement with the proposed changes and respondents were generally positive about ensuring a fair and accessible system of school place allocation. Pupil ability banding is supported by 73%, of the 14% who said ‘no’, one suggested the introduction of a lottery system for allocation.

There was a collective response from the Tower Hamlets Admissions Forum who supports the proposed arrangements. Primary and secondary school head teachers were consulted where there was consensus and support for the arrangements proposed, including support for pupil ability banding. Additionally, the parents and carers engaged in the consultation, made comments through a facilitated focus group. The feedback was in the main positive. All the parents agreed with pupil ability banding. We also received some comments from front line professionals working with hard to reach children and families which suggested improvements around wider knowledge and awareness of the points of access to get support for applying for a school place. These are further detailed in section 6.

4.1 Analysis of online results

Table D1 – Responses to consultation questions in percentages

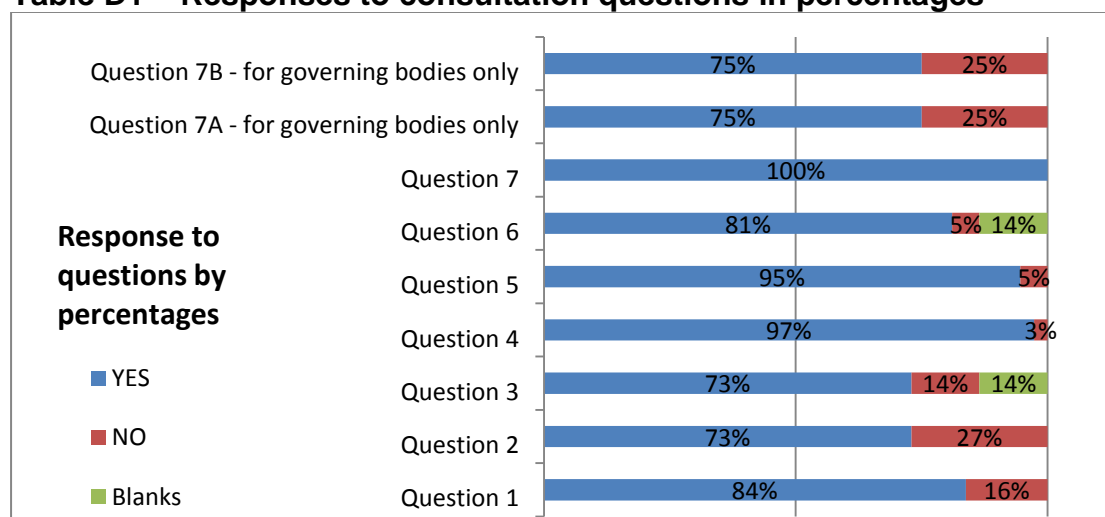


Table D2 – Responses to consultation questions in numbers

Question	YES	NO	Blanks
1. Do you agree with the proposed arrangements for admission to Tower Hamlets nursery schools and classes in 2017/18?	31	6	0

2. Do you agree with the proposed arrangements and oversubscription criteria for admission to community primary schools?	27	10	0
3. Do you agree with the proposal to continue the use of pupil ability banding and therefore the introduction of an alternative banding test for admission to Secondary School in Year 7?	27	5	5
4. Do you agree with the proposed arrangements and oversubscription criteria for admission to community secondary schools in 2017/18?	36	1	0
5. Do you agree with the proposed scheme for co-ordinating year 7 and reception year admissions?	35	2	0
6. Do you agree with the proposed scheme for co-ordinating in year admissions?	30	2	5
7. Do you agree with the planned admission numbers for Tower Hamlets schools for 2017/18?	37	0	0
The questions below are for governing bodies only:			
7a. Do you agree with the PAN for your school?	3	1	0
7b. Do you agree with the PAN for those schools whose admissions impact on your own school?	3	1	0

The tables above demonstrate a positive response to the proposed arrangements. For all the key questions (excluding questions for governing bodies where there were only 4 responses) the majority of respondents agree with the proposals and some positive comments were received. Question 2 which sought views on the arrangements and oversubscription criteria for admission to primary school received a slightly higher percentage of people disagreeing at 27%, the reasons given were varied and generally point to disagreement with the oversubscription criteria –the comments in relation to this are further detailed in section 5.

5. Analysis of comments from the online questionnaire

Question one: proposed arrangements for admission to Tower Hamlets nursery schools and classes	
Respondent	Comments
Parent	<p>'This is to ensure consistency in the way places are offered and, where possible, that children attend the same school for their nursery and primary education'</p> <p>I wholeheartedly support that statement and TRULY REGRET that it was not the policy in force when my child started nursery in 2013, she didn't get a place in reception in any of the 6 schools in her application leading to the horrendous appeal process, always a disappointment and a massive waste of energy for parents. So hopefully the new policy will save young children the trouble to start all over again in another school and the parents the hassle of going through useless appeal procedure and travelling to new school, building new relationship with another school, getting new uniforms.</p>
Parent	<p>Siblings should get priority to keep families together</p> <p>Parents who are studying should get priority over Looked After</p>

	Children
Parent	siblings should get priority to keep families together Parents who are studying should get priority over Looked After Children
Parent	Families which have both parents that work full-time by default should be offered full -time places for their child regardless as it is impossible to make alternative arrangements and obtain approval from work for part-time places, and especially where families like myself have no additional support from extended families. The oversubscription criteria should take this into consideration. 2) Section 6 over-subscription criteria - more detail needs to be provided as to what is meant by 'social reason' for priority 2.
Chair of Governors	We think that the current arrangements are working well.
Governor	I would like the council to initiate a serious consultation on the use of a lottery system for allocating oversubscribed places. This would be much more in line with Tower Hamlet's commitment to equality fairness, because it would prevent people buying their way into the best schools by purchasing property nearby.
Other (Stebon)	Is it possible for Pupil Services to coordinate the Nursery Admissions, instead of each individual school or setting? It would be better for someone independent to have an overall view of which families are more likely to get into specific Reception classes the following year, based on their current addresses and to advise families - also to avoid families from accepting several different places at once, in order to keep options open until the last minute.
Head teacher	The arrangements did not work for us. Parents are still registering up until July. We take referrals from social services etc. Not one child on the list from TH took up a place. The way we offer places is fair and transparent

Local authority response

Children's Services places a strong focus on families and any policies we have in place are not intended to separate children when entering school. However there is extensive demand for school places in Tower Hamlets and this can happen in the context of operating a fair and transparent system which prioritises vulnerable families. The local authority continues to work with parents who wish to remain on a waiting list for a school place. We cannot however give priority to siblings over Looked After Children. The school admissions code issued under Section 84 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 requires that local authorities must have in place an agreed oversubscription criteria and that Looked After Children and those previously looked after are given priority. The Code then requires local authorities to apply the oversubscription criteria to all other applicants using the agreed and published oversubscription criteria. The legal framework therefore, does not allow the prioritisation of siblings over and above that given to Looked After Children who receive top priority.

Working parents and those that are studying are given priority for full or [part-time allocation under priority 4. Priority 1 is required by the School Admissions Code as detailed above and priority 2 is to safeguard and protect vulnerable children and

support vulnerable families – this is within the legal framework and the strategic aims of the Council. We propose priority 4 for working and studying parents in recognition of the additional demands placed on parents who work or are studying.

There is demand for school places in Tower Hamlets and local stakeholders agree that ability banding is the fairest way of allocating school places for both the school and pupils. A lottery system can mean that pupils are placed far from home losing their right to a local place, this can have a negative impact on community cohesion and perpetuate social inequality because there is no balance of pupil ability reflected in the performance of the school and the impact this has on house prices.

Nursery admission is undertaken directly with nursery places. Reception place allocation which is administered by the local authority is a deliberately separated process from the allocation of school place at any other stages – a new application will have to be made in all cases so that all parents are given the choice and opportunity to apply and be considered. The administration of nursery admission is not a statutory requirement; however, the local authority will consult on this when the school admissions arrangements are next consulted on.

The local authority is working with the school where there are issues with places not being taken up.

Question two: proposed arrangements and oversubscription criteria for admission to community primary schools

Respondent	Comments
Member of the public	This policy does not mention that priority is given to children out of school during the year above children who are waiting for a place in a school where they have a sibling but are presently in another school. This is wrong as it creates too much strain on families trying to get siblings to different schools. Priority should be given to children to move schools above those with no school place as ultimately the child who is waiting for a place in the same school as its sibling is will not be taking an additional space only creating one in a different school, which can then be filled by a child without a school place, assuming no other child is waiting for a place with a sibling in that school. That way more children will be placed together relieving the pressure on families, the school in looking after the child at the end of the day, reduce lateness, and reduce transport costs. As the number of spaces in the borough ultimately remains the same, just as many children who are without a school place will be placed in a school, the only overall difference being that many children will be placed in the same school as their siblings. Please take this into account when you are determining your admissions policy. It does not mention any of this in the policy.
Parent	Some applicants outside the catchment area live closer to the school applied for than other applicants who live within the catchment area, in this case priority should be given to the applicant living closer to school even if they don't live in the catchment area. The catchment area should be defined in concentric circle rather than using the ward map, it just doesn't make sense, what matters

	is not the ward boundaries but how far a child has to walk from home to school twice a day.
Parent	Tie-breaker should apply to all oversubscription categories, not just 3-6. While categories 1-2 are unlikely to need such tie-breaker, it would make the design of the system even more robust.
Parent	However, I am concerned as we were informed recently that there are already waiting lists for certain school places in Bow area
Parent	<p>Children who have both parents who work full-time and live within the catchment area but who have no other sibling attending the school (as in first child) should be given priority for a place, and in particular a full-time place, especially where there is only one school in the catchment area who caters for full-time working parents in terms of after school club.</p> <p>I live in poplar area near Langdon park DLR and within my catchment area there is only one school (Bygrove Primary School) which is suitable for me to apply to for my son, who is my only child. it has a breakfast club, but more importantly 2 back-to-back after school clubs from 3.30pm-4.30pm and then 4.30pm-5.30pm which means it finishes at 5.30pm and I can collect him after work. I no other schools in my catchment area has that provision, why should I be disadvantaged as a result of the way the oversubscription criteria is defined and no importance is placed for households with both working parents who are in need of more than one after school club, but only 1 school in catchment area which caters for our needs. If this is oversubscribed, this means my son will have no school place allocated to him at all as that will be the only choice for him due to the after school clubs.</p> <p>In line with this review of the admissions policy, I think there is also a need in parallel to this to ensure the local authority makes it compulsory for schools to offer more than one consecutive afterschool club for those working parents, otherwise it is unfair to impose this admissions policy on us without requesting schools to implement changes as well for working parents. It's unfair on parents who will be left without a school place.</p>
Parent	I would like to choose which school my children get into, this should not be the closest
Chair of Governors	We think that the current arrangements are working well
Governor	I would like the council to initiate a serious consultation on the use of a lottery system for allocating oversubscribed places. This would be much more in line with Tower Hamlet's commitment to equality fairness, because it would prevent people buying their way into the best schools by purchasing property nearby.

Local authority response

Prioritising children who want to move to another school above those with no school places – those who do have a school place through the normal points of entry are considered through the In-Year admissions policy. We view the priority of placing children who do not have a school place as part of our safeguarding ethos

and continue to support children into a school place as quickly as possible.

The catchment areas were consulted on last year and agreed by all stakeholders including parents with children in local schools. The local authority continues to plan the provision of school places and as the borough develops and changes through regeneration there will be a need to reconsider the catchment areas. We will consider this as an option when the school admissions arrangements are next consulted on.

The local authority has to create a balanced and fair system which offers local places for local children, we must enable siblings to attend the same school as far as possible – this is why the catchment area cannot have priority over sibling criteria.

Tie-breaker criteria - we would not apply the criteria to categories 1 and 2 as vulnerable children would have priority under the School Admissions Code for a school place.

Question three and four: Proposal to continue the use of pupil ability banding and the proposed arrangements and oversubscription criteria for admission to community secondary schools

Respondent	Comments
Parent	Error in the proposed maps for the priority area
Governor	I would like the council to initiate a serious consultation on the use of a lottery system for allocating oversubscribed places. This would be much more in line with Tower Hamlet's commitment to equality fairness, because it would prevent people buying their way into the best schools by purchasing property nearby.

Local authority response

See response in question 1

Question five, six – no comments received

Question seven, seven a-b: Planned admission numbers for Tower Hamlets schools

Respondent	Comments
Head teacher	Can Canary Wharf College 3 offer a secondary curriculum with an intake of just 40? Does the Solebay school have sufficient play space for an intake of 50?
Parent	These numbers should take into consideration the demand for school places
Parent	Just hope it is enough. It will be easier to see these numbers put against number of children living within catchment area
Chair of Governors	We do not believe that there is currently a 'natural cohort' of 90 applicants for places at Arnhem Wharf school. We currently have 16 places available in our reception cohort. Although we have only a few vacancies in our year 1 and year 2 cohorts, these year groups face significant mobility (e.g. in year 2 we have had 9 new

	admissions since September) based on never having had full cohorts.
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Local authority response

Planned admission numbers (PAN) are based on the number of school places and capacity at a school. The intention through the consultation is to identify where there is demand, however the planned numbers are also limited by the availability of space and numbers must be planned to recognise that there is demand for school provision in the borough. The planned numbers are a part of how we manage the provision of school place provision; given the demand for school provision we cannot reduce the PAN. The local authority will continue dialogue with schools where there may be local factors impacting on take-up.

6. Additional representation

Additional representation was received and these are detailed below:

Organisation	Point for consideration
Hestia	Children in families fleeing domestic violence should be given top priority under the school admission criteria and be given the same status as looked after children.
<p>Local authority response: This position was considered by the local authority and evidence does not suggest that children in families fleeing domestic violence are difficult to place in Tower Hamlets and to label them as such could be discriminatory and adversely affect a child. The safeguarding and wellbeing of vulnerable children is a key priority for the borough, these children would still receive the highest priority as they would be prioritised under priority 2, priority 1 being required by law for prioritisation of Children Looked After.</p> <p>The school admissions code issued under Section 84 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 requires that local authorities must have in place an agreed oversubscription criteria and that Looked After Children and those previously Looked After are given priority. The Code then requires local authorities to apply the oversubscription criteria to all other applicants using the agreed and published oversubscription criteria. The legal framework therefore, does not allow the prioritisation of children in families fleeing domestic violence over and above that given to Looked After Children who receive top priority.</p>	
New Residents and Refugee Forum	Frontline professionals highlighted a very positive experience and one negative experience. The positive case highlighted how well the arrangements work for getting a child into school quickly through In-Year admissions and the high level of support received. The negative experience indicated that there needs to be more information available at public venues about school admissions to enable residents to quickly make contact with the service and obtain the correct advice.
<p>Local authority response: The local authority will consider and improve the pathways for new residents to obtain advice and access to services to secure a school place for vulnerable children.</p>	
Parent Champions	<p>A focus group with local parents in the borough highlighted the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of parents were in the main supportive of the arrangements in place and feel that it is a fair system; • Children securing school places within 10 days is very positive; • It is positive that the system allows parents the choice to defer entry to reception; • Safeguarding element of the In-Year admission is a positive arrangement; • The local authority deciding rather than the school is fair for all; • Parents were very supportive of pupil ability banding;

	<p>The reasons parents gave for disagreeing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were times when parents tried to understand the decision making criteria and felt that the reasons why a decisions was made was always explained from a policy perspective but this needed to be broken down further and put into context for parents who ring the service because they are unhappy with the outcome or want to understand the decision; • There were some shared experiences of the difficulties of having siblings who are placed in different schools, this was also highlighted as an additional challenge for working parents or parents who are studying, parents suggest that the oversubscription criteria give top priority to children whose parents are working/ and or studying; • If children are in nursery, they should not have to apply for a reception place but be given priority to the linked reception school; • The catchment areas are not fair and can create division between communities; • When new homes are built, consideration needs to be given to ensure school places are available; • St Pauls Way School has allocated places for children with speech and language needs and hearing impaired children - more schools should do the same; <p>The parents who attended broadly reflected the diversity of the borough and welcomed the opportunity and space for a discussion on school admissions arrangements.</p>
<p>Local authority response:</p> <p>The admissions arrangements are technical in nature and we will consider ways in which information can be presented to make it easier to understand including verbal dialogue to improve the customer experience.</p> <p>The school admissions code issued under Section 84 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 requires that local authorities must have in place an agreed oversubscription criteria and that Looked After Children and those previously Looked After are given priority. The Code then requires local authorities to apply the oversubscription criteria to all other applicants using the agreed and published oversubscription criteria. The legal framework therefore, does not allow the prioritisation of children whose parents are working and/or studying. Further, Section 1, 1.9 (f) makes clear that whilst the local authority can agree its own admissions arrangements it must not give priority to children according to the occupational, marital, financial or educational status of parents applying.</p> <p>The primary arrangements had the highest level of disagreement from parents and the reasons given were essentially because they did not agree that a new application had to be made for admission to the reception year. The local authority maintains that all applicants should be given the opportunity to secure a local place and to do this all applicants have to be co-ordinated and considered on the same criteria. Automatically accepting those in nursery settings for a reception place</p>	

excludes those who would not have taken-up nursery provision.

Tower Hamlets is a borough of growth, as part of the planning of school provision new and planned developments are considered. We have previously consulted on catchment areas to reflect this and will consider consulting on this in the future.

St Pauls Way School is a school which has designated specialist provision, providing specialist provision within a mainstream setting. We currently have a number of other schools with specialist provision including Globe Primary, Hague Primary, Cyril Jackson and Culloden School. The local authority supports inclusive settings; however this cannot be at every school as there are resource and feasibility considerations. They are planned on a geographical basis to maximise its use and to make the provision financially viable. We also know that it can difficult to find specialist, qualified and experienced staff to teach at these specialist provisions.

Tower Hamlets Admissions Forum

The Forum is supportive of banding in Tower Hamlets and this must be maintained at banding at a local level so that all schools receive a balanced intake, this must not be at a national level which looks at the ability of pupils nationally.

There should be clarity about the arrangements for obtaining school places in an academy when a school is converted.

Local authority response:

The School Admissions Code permits the use of banding as a form of selection at three levels: a) the full range of ability of applicants for the school(s); b) the range of ability of children in the local area; or c) the national ability range. We are not proposing to change the level at which banding is administered, this will remain at a local level.

The local authority is currently considering the formation of a schools partnership trust, this will be a legal body responsible for a range of education related functions and will consider the arrangements for school admissions for local academies. The school admission policy will be revised to reflect any change to arrangements is this arises. There are already own admission authorities which have agreed to adopt the local authority's school admissions policy.

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