

# TOWER HAMLETS CHILDREN'S SERVICES

## School Admission Arrangements Public Consultation Responses 2025/26



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## 1. Introduction

Tower Hamlets consulted on its school admissions arrangements as changes were proposed for arrangements for 2025/26. This is a requirement of the Department for Education's School Admission Code (2021) and ensures that arrangements continue to be relevant, fair and transparent and that as many parents as possible can obtain a place for their child at one of their preferred schools.

The consultation provided opportunity for respondents to comment on the following admissions arrangements for the 2025/26 academic year:

- (1) Local Authority Relevant Area (geographical area) for admissions purposes
- (2) Proposed admissions arrangements for Tower Hamlets community schools:
  - Nursery Schools/Classes
  - Primary Schools
  - Secondary Schools
- (3) Proposed schemes for the co-ordination of admissions for:
  - Reception Year of Primary School;
  - Year 7 of Secondary School;
  - In Year Admissions (Admissions outside of the normal points of entry)
- (C) Proposed Published Admission Numbers for schools in Tower Hamlets;

One significant change was proposed for the admission arrangements for community secondary schools in 2025/26:

1. A proposal to use a CATS4 digital assessment for banding purposes.

The consultation period ran for over nine weeks (eight weeks during term-time) from 26 October 2023 until 2 January 2024. The consultation was conducted online, using the corporate 'Let's Talk Tower Hamlets' portal and was visited 540 times. There were a total of 15 completed and submitted responses, from the 94 who viewed the survey. There was a collective response from the Tower Hamlets Admissions Forum – a group representative of key stakeholders including, parents, governors, headteachers, religious bodies, and community organisations. The Forum's role is to consider and promote a fair and effective schools admission system, which advances social equity and inclusion, ensuring that the interests of local parents and children come first. The Forum's responses are included separately in each section.

## 2. Communication

The table below includes the communication methods that were used to advertise and promote the consultation:

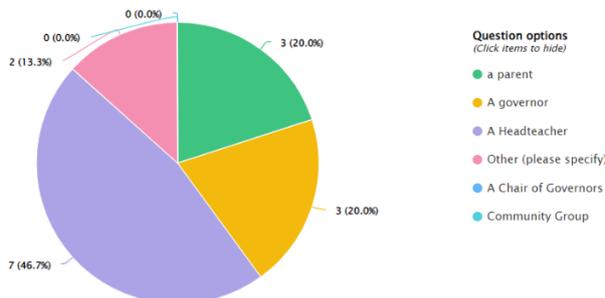
<b>Communication medium</b>	<b>Communication reach</b>	<b>Date actioned</b>
Articles and links on Tower Hamlets council website, intranet page and Residents Newsletter	Local residents, businesses and staff employed by the Council	November 2023
Posts on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram, with target paid for media adverts on Facebook	Local residents, businesses and staff employed by the Council	November 2023

Communication medium	Communication reach	Date actioned
Email to all governors via Governor Services with information on consultation opportunity	All governors	November 2023
Email to all neighbouring local authorities seeking their views	All neighbouring local authorities	November 2023
Pupil Services staff advertise on email signatures	Borough and council wide reach	November 2023
Head Teachers Bulletin, Primary and Secondary Heads Consultative, direct email to own admission authority schools in Tower Hamlets	All head teachers employed by the local authority	November 2023
Members bulletin	All elected members asking for support to engage the local community	November 2023
Admissions Forum – agenda item for discussion and response	Members of the Forum	October 2023
Direct email to the Collective of Bangladeshi Governors	Governors	November 2023
Direct news mailing to all parents known to Parent and Family Support Service Parent Mailing Lists	News mailing to professionals who work with families across schools, health, the LA voluntary sector	November 2023
Direct emails to Parent and Family Support Service Professionals	Email	November 2023
Promotion during Transition’s Team informal school’s events	Local parents and carers	November 2023

### 3. Profile of respondents

#### 3.1 Role

The respondents confirmed the capacity in which they were responding.



### 4. Results analysis

#### 4.1 Local Authority Relevant Area

Respondents were asked to agree that ‘Tower Hamlets, City of London and Hackney’ should remain the ‘relevant area’ for admissions purposes. All 15 respondents (100%) agreed with the proposal.

The Tower Hamlets Admissions Forum agreed with the proposal.

#### **Local Authority Response**

Government Regulations require a local authority to determine the "relevant area" or geographical area it will use for consulting on its school admission arrangements. Currently, the geographical area Tower Hamlets uses for consulting upon its admissions arrangements is the Local Authority area and the neighbouring local authority areas of the City of London and Hackney, as parts of these boroughs are included in the Tower Hamlets School Catchment System.

The LA's primary school catchment areas aim to ensure equal opportunities for children living in areas where there are limited options in applying for a school place. They have been designed to take into account geographical boundaries (such as main roads) to allow for safe walking journeys, the pupil population and any future plans to re-organize or develop primary provision in parts of the borough.

### **4.2 Nursery Admissions**

Respondents were asked to agree with the proposed admission policy and oversubscription criteria. There were no proposed changes. All 15 respondents (100%) agreed with this.

The Tower Hamlets Admissions Forum agreed with the proposal, there were no objections.

#### **Local Authority Response**

The admissions policy and oversubscription criteria provide a robust framework and transparent admissions process, with positive outcomes for Tower Hamlets families. This is consistent with the Local Authority's statutory duties as set out in the most recent revision of the Department for Education's School Admissions Code (2021).

### **4.3 Community Primary School Admissions**

Respondents were asked to agree with the proposed admission policy and oversubscription criteria. There were no proposed changes. 14 respondents (93.3%) agreed with the proposal, 1 respondent (6.7%) disagreed.

The Tower Hamlets Admissions Forum agreed with the proposal, there were no objections.

#### **Local Authority Response**

The admissions policy and oversubscription criteria provide a robust framework and transparent admissions process, with positive outcomes for Tower Hamlets families. This is consistent with the Local Authority's statutory duties as set out in the most recent revision of the Department for Education's School Admissions Code (2021).

#### 4.4a Community Secondary School Admissions

Respondents were asked to consider the proposed change to a digital CATS4 assessment for banding purposes. 10 respondent (66.7%) agreed with the proposal, 5 respondents (33.3) did not.

Respondents were asked to comment if they agreed with the proposed change to banding assessment. 10 respondents provided comments which can be summarised as follows:

- Digital banding assessments are transparent and fair.
- A digital assessment will also provide rich data to support the transition to secondary school.
- The continued use of banding will support balanced intakes across schools.

Respondents were also asked to comment if they did not agree with the proposed change to banding assessment. 4 respondents provided comments which can be summarised as follows:

- Banding assessments create further unnecessary stress and pressure for children.

The Tower Hamlets Admissions Forum supports the proposals.

#### **Local Authority Response**

The significant proposed change to the existing admission policy for community secondary schools is the use of a CATS4 digital assessment for banding purposes.

Tower Hamlets has always used a 'local' banding system to ensure that the Year 7 intake at secondary school is balanced across the pupil ability ranges. The current system assigns pupils to bands using a teacher assessment of their reading level, based on the range of ability of pupils in the borough's schools at the end of Year 5. Pupils are grouped in one of four bands (A, B, C and D – D being the highest level), For pupils where a teacher assessment cannot be obtained, they are automatically assigned to Band B.

The Local Authority is proposing to update its method of banding with a more wholistic approach, which takes account of a wider range of abilities than just a pupil's reading level. This proposed new method of banding will use a digital CATS4 assessment, to be introduced for pupils transferring to Year 7 in September 2025.

CATS4 is a cognitive ability test that assesses a pupil's ability in four areas:

1. Verbal Reasoning – the ability to express ideas and reason through words;
2. Non-verbal Reasoning – problem-solving using pictures and diagrams;
3. Spatial Reasoning – to look at a shape and imagine what it would look like from different angle;
4. Quantitative Reasoning – the ability to use numerical skills to solve a mathematical problem.

The assessment is made up of eight sections, split across three 'parts'. Each 'part' takes approximately 45 minutes. It is taken on either an iPad, PC or laptop. The test scores will allow the Local Authority to rank and band pupils into four equal groups (A, B, C and D), based on:

- 1) the non-verbal reasoning; and
- 2) total standardised scores for all the children taking the test.

All children in Year 6 in Tower Hamlets primary schools, and all out-borough pupils in Year 6 who apply to Tower Hamlets secondary schools, will be assessed using the same method.

The admissions policy, oversubscription criteria and digital banding assessment will provide a robust framework and transparent admissions process, with positive outcomes for Tower Hamlets families. This is consistent with the Local Authority's statutory duties as set out in the most recent revision of the Department for Education's School Admissions Code (2021).

#### **4.5 Co-ordinated schemes for Reception, Year 7 and in-year admissions and transfers**

In line with arrangements in other London boroughs, Tower Hamlets has a system to co-ordinate the arrangements for children to start primary school in the Reception year and to transfer to secondary school in Year 7. This is known as the Pan-London Co-ordinated System, and it enables parents to apply for schools in their own borough and in other boroughs using a single application form.

Tower Hamlets also co-ordinates applications made during the school year and outside the standard points of entry (Reception and Year 7), known as 'in-year admissions'.

There are no proposed changes to the co-ordinated scheme for Reception, Year 7 and in-year admissions and transfers for the 2025/26 school year admissions other than an update to the dates. 13 respondents (86.7%) agreed with this, 2 respondents (13.3%) did not. Consultation respondents were invited to provide comments on the coordinated schemes if they did not agree with them, none did.

The Tower Hamlets Admissions Forum supports the schemes and did not provide any further comment.

#### **Local Authority Response**

##### **Co-ordinated schemes for Reception and Year 7**

The Local Authority has a statutory responsibility to co-ordinate admissions for children starting primary school, moving from infant to junior school and those transferring from primary to secondary school. In accordance with the School Admissions Code, we must ensure that where a place is available, children are offered a place at their highest preference of school. We seek to offer these places at the earliest opportunity.

Co-ordination continues to ensure positive outcomes for Tower Hamlets residents with a high proportion of children gaining a place at a local secondary school or nearby primary school. The percentage of Tower Hamlets children securing a place at one of their parent's top three preferences has remained broadly in line with the London average.

The oversubscription criteria for Tower Hamlets community schools give priority to children living closest to the school, regardless of their borough of residence. Admissions arrangements for schools in other London boroughs are determined by the relevant Local Authority, however there is a coordinated scheme which enables

parents to apply for schools in their own borough and in other boroughs using a single application form.

### **Co-ordinated scheme for in-year admissions and transfers**

The Local Authority co-ordinates admissions for children who require a school place outside of the normal points of entry. We have seen current demand grow from 2180 applications naming at least one preference school (2019-20), to a high of 3168 (2020-21), and 2603 (2022-23). These increased numbers are expected to remain higher than pre-pandemic levels and may be rising again. The autumn term saw 1332 applications received, compared to 1077 in the same term last year.

Co-ordinated in-year admissions and transfers is not a statutory requirement, but it is an essential safeguarding provision that provides the Local Authority with the most effective way of ensuring that children missing from education can be identified and supported back into school quickly, particularly children who have experienced more complex problems and would therefore face tougher obstacles to them getting back into suitable education. So far, during this current school year, 487 applications from children out of school, with a further 590 transfer requests (1077 total applications), have been received and processed by the Local Authority.

A scheme for co-ordinating in-year admissions is also essential at a time when the numbers of children requiring school places outside the normal points of entry remains high. The Local Authority and its schools have put in place a number of measures to support existing residents and new arrivals to the area, including an established Fair Access Protocol that enables vulnerable children to be placed in education provision quickly as well as ensuring that every school takes its fair share of children who are difficult to place.

The Local Authority seeks to improve its in-year admissions and transfer processes to ensure that applications are processed quickly and children are placed in school at the earliest opportunity.

## **4.5 Published Admission Numbers for schools in Tower Hamlets**

The Published Admission Number (PAN) sets out the maximum number of children that each school will admit to the Reception year (Primary), Year 3 (Junior), Year 7 (Secondary) or Year 9 (UTC). 12 respondents (80%) agreed with the proposed planned admission numbers across all Tower Hamlets schools, 3 (20%) did not agree.

Respondents were asked to comment if they did not agree with the proposed planned admission numbers. 1 respondent provided comments which can be summarised as follows:

- Schools should adjust their planned admission numbers to accommodate parental preference.

The Tower Hamlets Admissions Forum agreed with the proposal, there were no objections.

### **Local Authority Response**

The PAN confirms the maximum number of children that each school will admit to the reception (primary) or Year 7 (secondary) in the school year 2025-26. The PAN is

based on the net capacity range of each school, or in some cases a higher or lower figure. This enables the LA to meet its statutory responsibility to provide and maintain sufficient high quality school places, where they are needed and when they are needed, for families in the borough.

Subject to consultation, these numbers may change in the light of increasing/decreasing demand for school places. Any future changes to the PAN will continue to meet the need to provide high quality places where they are required, assist schools to provide stability in their long-term planning and will help to secure financial viability at a time when all schools are under considerable budget pressures. This will allow schools to secure high quality educational outcomes for the pupils currently on roll, whilst ensuring that an appropriate number of places are provided for future pupil numbers, in line with demand.