

TOWER HAMLETS CHILDREN'S SERVICES

School Admission Arrangements Public Consultation Responses 2020/21



Version: 1.0

Date issued: 7th January 2019

Prepared by: Pupil Services
Children's Services Directorate

Review Date: January 2020



1. Introduction

Tower Hamlets Council consults on its school admissions arrangements each year, even where no changes have been made, to ensure that its arrangements continue to be fair and transparent and that as many parents as possible can obtain a place for their child at one of their preferred schools. An annual consultation is particularly important to those who might not have previously been interested in school admission arrangements, perhaps because they did not yet have a child approaching school age.

The consultation provided opportunity for respondents to comment on the following admissions arrangements for the 2020/21 academic year:

(A) Proposed admissions arrangements for Tower Hamlets community schools:

- Nursery Schools/Classes
- Primary Schools
- Secondary Schools

(B) 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)

(C) Proposed Published Admission Numbers for schools in Tower Hamlets;

Three significant changes were proposed for admissions in 2020/21:

1. A proposal to change the existing oversubscription criteria for admission to community nursery schools/classes to include priority for the children of staff.
2. A reduction in the Published Admission Number at the linked Elizabeth Selby Infants and Lawdale Juniors Schools from 75 to 60 places.
3. A reduction in the Published Admission Number at Bow Secondary School from 270 to 240 places.

The consultation period ran for a total of 9 weeks (7 weeks during term-time) from 5th November 2018 until 4th January 2019. The consultation was conducted online, with an option to request a paper copy of the questionnaire. There were a total of 39 responses to the consultation. 38 of these were responses from individuals to the online/paper questionnaire. There was a further collective response from the Tower Hamlets Admissions Forum – a group representative of key stakeholders including, parents, headteachers, diocesan bodies, Council of Mosques 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 comments are included separately in each section.

4. Communication

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

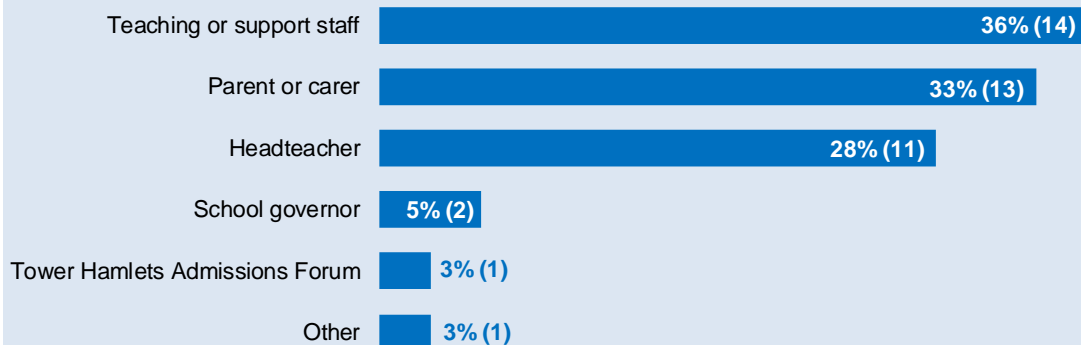
Communication medium	Communication reach	Date actioned
Link on Tower Hamlets council website, intranet page and social media platforms	All local residents, businesses and staff employed by the Council	November 2018 to January 2019

Communication medium	Communication reach	Date actioned
Email to all governors via Governor Services with information on consultation opportunity	All governors	November 2018
Email to all neighbouring local authorities seeking their views	All neighbouring local authorities	November 2018
Pupil Services staff advertise on email signatures	Borough and council wide reach	November 2018 to January 2019
Our East End Newspaper advert	Local residents and businesses	November 2018
East London Advertiser Newspaper advert	Local and neighbouring borough residents and businesses	November 2018
Weekly Dosh Newspaper advert	Wider community reach including hard to reach communities	November 2018
Bangla Mirror online advert	Wider community reach including hard to reach communities	November 2018
Head Teachers Bulletin, Primary and Secondary Heads Consultative, direct email to all Tower Hamlets Headteachers	All head teachers employed by the local authority	November/ December 2018
Members bulletin	All elected members asking for support to engage the local community	November 2018
Admissions Forum – agenda item for discussion and response	Members of the Forum	December 2018
Collective of Bangladeshi Governors	Governors	November 2018
Tower Hamlets under 5's providers including Children's Centres, Playgroups and Nurseries	Email and letter	November 2018
Parent and Carer Council meeting	Local parents and carers	December 2018

3. Profile of respondents

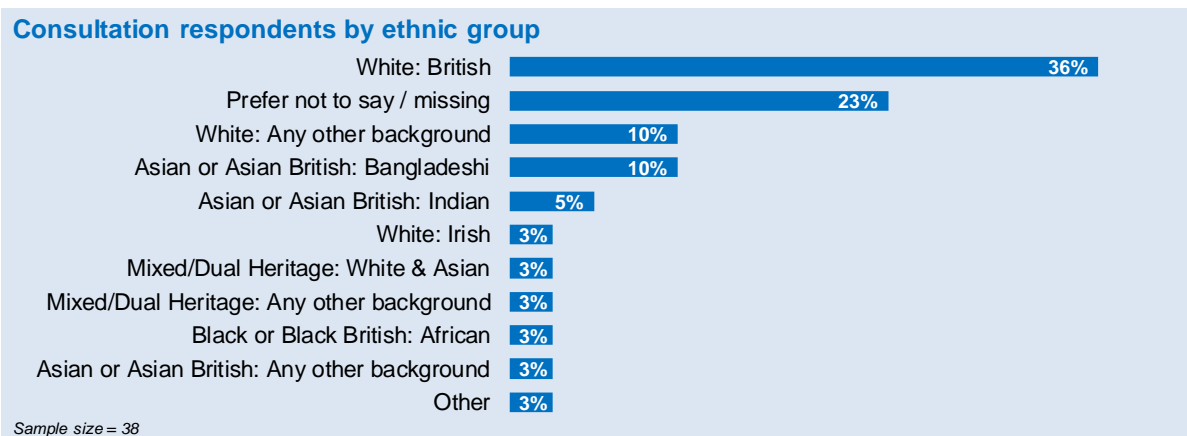
3.1 Role

Consultation respondents by role



Note: Totals of percentages add up to more than 100% and counts add up to more than the total sample size (39) because respondents could have more than one role (e.g. both a parent and staff).

3.2 Ethnicity



3.3 Disability

Two respondents (5%) stated that they were disabled, as defined under the Equality Act 2010, and the remaining 36 respondents (95%) stated that they were not disabled.

4. Results analysis

4.1 Nursery Admissions

Respondents were asked to consider a proposal to change the existing oversubscription criteria for admission to community nursery schools and classes to include priority for children of staff, after children who are admitted under the sibling criterion. To qualify, staff must have been employed at the school for two or more years or who have been recruited to fill a vacancy for which there is a demonstrable skills shortage. Priority will be limited to one place for each nursery class. This brings the policy for nursery admissions in line with that of community primary and secondary schools.

Out of 38 individual responses, 30 respondents (79%) agreed with the proposal. Those who provided additional comment said that they supported the proposal because it would improve staff recruitment and retention, which would, in turn, improve educational standards. 8 respondents (21%) did not agree with the proposal. Reasons for this were that:

- Children should attend the school closest to their home so that they can be a part of their local community;
- Priority should be based on proximity to the school;
- There may be favouritism towards the children of staff in school.

The Tower Hamlets Admissions Forum agreed with the proposal to improve staff recruitment and retention, and to bring the policy in line with that of community primary and secondary schools.

Local Authority Response

The proposal will seek to improve staff recruitment and retention issues within Tower Hamlets community schools, which will enable them to compete in the current recruitment market, and through this, have a wider positive impact on the educational outcomes for Tower Hamlets' children and young people.

4.2 Community Primary School Admissions

There are no proposed changes to the admissions policy and oversubscription criteria for admission to community primary schools for the 2020/21 school year. Consultation respondents were invited to provide comments on the existing arrangements. 11 respondents provided comments which are summarised as follows:

- The policy and oversubscription criteria are an example of good practice, are fair and should be followed by all primary schools in the borough.
- Catchment areas should be reviewed:
 - Because they can disadvantage families living on the borders of catchment areas, who may live close to schools outside of their catchment area;
 - Because they are too small and limit parental choice.
- The oversubscription criteria should be revised to:
 - Remove priority for pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans as this does not require children to attend a 'specific' school;
 - Guarantee children of siblings a place at the school;
 - Remove priority for children of staff;
 - Give highest priority for children living closest to the school.

The Tower Hamlets Admissions Forum supports the scheme but did not provide any further comment.

Local Authority Response

Tower Hamlets Council seeks to operate an admissions system that provides equal and fair opportunities to all applicants, and must also comply with the Department for Education's School Admissions Code. This requires the Local Authority to have due regard for vulnerable children and those with additional needs. The LA's admissions arrangements continue to ensure positive outcomes for Tower Hamlets residents, with a high proportion of children gaining a place at a nearby primary school. The percentage of Tower Hamlets children securing a place at one of their top three preferences (96.5%) remains above the London average (96.1%).

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. There is a need for periodic review and modification to the catchment areas, based on changes to the pupil population and the Council's plans to reorganise and develop primary provision in parts of the borough. Any proposed changes to catchment areas will undergo a public consultation.

Although the local authority cannot guarantee a school place for children of siblings, historically all applicants who applied on time under this criterion have been offered a place at their preferred school.

4.3 Community Secondary School Admissions

There are no proposed changes to the admissions policy and oversubscription criteria for admission to community secondary schools for the 2020/21 school year. Consultation respondents were invited to provide comments on the existing arrangements. 6 respondents provided comments which are summarised as follows:

- The policy and oversubscription criteria are ‘excellent practice’, fair and should be followed by all secondary schools in the borough.
- Admissions arrangements should make it easier for pupils to attend school in another borough to increase parental preference.

The Tower Hamlets Admissions Forum supports the scheme but did not provide any further comment.

Local Authority Response

The outcomes for children starting secondary school remain positive, with 91.2% of pupils securing a place at one of their top three preferences, which is considerably higher than the London average of 87.3%.

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.

4.4 Co-ordinated schemes for Reception and Year 7

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.

There are no proposed changes to the co-ordinated scheme for Reception and Year 7 admissions for the 2020/21 school year. Consultation respondents were invited to provide comments on the existing arrangements. 6 respondents provided comments which are summarised as follows:

- The current system is ‘excellent practice’ and works well.
- The policy of Reception pupils moving to a higher preference school during the first term (where a place becomes available) is disruptive and makes it challenging for school staff to establish class identity and stability.

The Tower Hamlets Admissions Forum supports the scheme but did not provide any further comment.

Local Authority Response

The Pan- London Co-ordinated admission arrangements continue to be an effective means of ensuring that the vast majority of children starting primary school or transferring to secondary school are able to secure a school place at the earliest opportunity. The school preference success rates for children in Tower Hamlets remain positive and are still among the best in London.

In accordance with the School Admissions Code, the LA must ensure that where a place is available, children are offered a place at their highest preference of school. The LA seeks to offer these places at the earliest opportunity.

4.5 Co-ordinated scheme for in-year admissions and transfers

Tower Hamlets 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 in-year admissions and transfers for the 2020/21 school year. Consultation respondents were invited to provide comments on the existing arrangements. 7 respondents provided comments which are summarised as follows:

- The current arrangements are 'excellent practice' and are the most effective way for ensuring that children are tracked, monitored and placed in education as quickly as possible.
- All schools in the borough should follow the in-year admissions procedures.
- The previous change from six to three in-year admissions points is welcome as it helps promote stability in schools.
- The processing of in-year applications can be slow.
- In-year admissions should always endeavour to place children before the School Census.

The Tower Hamlets Admissions Forum supports the scheme but did not provide any further comment.

Local Authority Response

The co-ordinated scheme for 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.

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 LA will seek to improve its processes to ensure that applications are processed quickly and children are placed in school at the earliest opportunity.

4.6 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). Consultation respondents were asked to consider reductions in the PAN at three Tower Hamlets community schools: Elizabeth Selby Infants, Lawdale Juniors, and Bow Secondary.

Elizabeth Selby Infants & Lawdale Juniors Schools

The LA is proposing to permanently reduce the PAN at the linked Elizabeth Selby & Lawdale Juniors Schools from 75 to 60 places from 2020/21. This is because the schools' places have not been filled over the past five admission years; there is restricted teaching and outdoor space; and there is a falling demand for primary school places in the local area.

Out of the 35 individual responses to this question, 31 respondents (89%) agreed with the proposal. 4 respondents (11%) disagreed with the proposal. The reasons given were that the proposal would increase class sizes at the school, and that provision should be increased elsewhere if reduced at these schools.

The Tower Hamlets Admissions Forum agreed with the proposal, as it recognised that the proposal would not limit parental choice (due to falling rolls in the area) and would enable the school to better organise its provision.

Local Authority Response

The Local Authority firmly believes that reducing the PAN will assist the schools to provide stability in their long-term planning and allow them 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.

The proposal would enable the school to organise on the basis of classes of 30, in line with statutory guidelines and the vast majority of community schools. Whilst this is an increase from the current class sizes of 25, it will help the school to improve financial viability at a time when schools are under considerable budget pressures.

Bow Secondary School

The LA is proposing to permanently reduce the PAN at the Bow Secondary School from 270 to 240 from 2020/21. This is because the school's places have not been filled over the past five admission years, and there is limited teaching and outdoor space to accommodate the school's statutory and sixth form provision.

Out of the 35 individual responses to this question, 32 respondents (91%) agreed with the proposal. 3 respondents (9%) disagreed with the proposal. The reasons given were that the proposal would increase class sizes at the school, that provision should be increased elsewhere if reduced at the school, and that other secondary schools have higher admissions numbers.

The Tower Hamlets Admissions Forum agreed with the proposal, as it recognised that the proposal would enable the school to better organise its provision.

Local Authority Response

The Local Authority firmly believes that reducing the PAN will assist the school to provide stability in their long-term planning and allow them 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.

The proposal will not increase class sizes at Bow. The total number of pupils currently on roll at the school is 1,104, which is still well below what would be the school's

reduced capacity of 1,200.

There is enough available provision across the area to ensure that this change will not impact on parental preference outcomes. The LA also has plans in place to develop two secondary schools (London Dock and Westferry) to increase secondary provision in the borough.

Bow currently has the highest PAN in the borough. No other school has a PAN higher than 240, so this change would bring Bow in line with other local schools.