

Proposed Changes to Banding Arrangements

Current Arrangements and Proposal

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 holistic 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.

Proposed CATS4 Assessment

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.

CATS4 is a digital (online) test 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 in the following periods:

- Year 6 pupils in Tower Hamlets Schools will test during the September of their final year at primary school.
- Pupils who miss the September date will be tested in November, along with out-borough applicants, in a Local Authority test centre. The test centres will be hosted by Tower Hamlets secondary schools.

A Summary of the Key Changes to the Banding System:

	Current Banding Arrangements for Year 7 entry in September 2024	Proposed Banding Arrangements for Year 7 entry in September 2025
Type of assessment	Teacher assessment – Reading	Digital CATS4 assessment
Assessment Provider	N/A	GL ¹ Assessment
Assessment dates	June in Year 5	September 2024 in Year 6
Assessment venue	Across all Tower Hamlets primary schools	September 2024 - in all Tower Hamlets primary schools November – in a secondary school ‘Test Centre’
How are the banding groups decided	The four banding groups are based on the range of ability of pupils assessed at the end of Year 5 at Tower Hamlets primary schools, who will transfer to secondary school in September 2024.	The four banding groups are based on the range of ability of pupils assessed in the Autumn of Year 6, who will transfer to secondary school in September 2025.
Are results available before the application closing date (31 October)	Yes Results in September of application year	No An assessment outcome will be made available to parents as part of the secondary transfer process.
How does this apply to children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)	Children with an EHCP (complex needs) receive a nominal Band A outcome and placed in the Band A group	Children with an EHCP (complex needs) receive a nominal Band A outcome and placed in the Band A group.
What happens to children who miss the assessment	All receive nominal Band B outcome and are placed in the Band B group.	Late Applications for exceptional reasons are placed in the Band B group. Assessment refusers receive an ‘Untested’ outcome and are placed in the Untested group. They will have their applications considered after the children who have taken the banding test.
Do all Tower Hamlets Secondary Schools use banding	No. There are three schools that do not use banding as part of their admission arrangements i.e. Bishop Challoner, Wapping High and Canary Wharf College.	

¹ GL Assessment is the organisation that provides the CATS4 test that the Local Authority uses for the purpose of its banding assessment.