

School Admission Arrangements 2018/19 – Analysis of Responses to the Public Consultation

1.0 Introduction

The Authority consults on its school admissions arrangements annually, to ensure that school place allocations 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.

This year's consultation included the proposal for the Local Authority to establish a central system for the co-ordination of applications for admissions to community nursery schools and classes. Under the proposal the Local Authority would centrally administer the nursery admissions process with the objective of ensuring that nursery places are offered to as many children as deemed possible in addition to providing better support to families, both through the application process and in securing their free nursery entitlement.

In addition to the aforementioned, this year's consultation also covered:

The oversubscription criteria for:

- Tower Hamlets Community Nursery Schools and Classes
- Tower Hamlets Community Primary Schools and own admission authority schools that adopt these arrangements
- Tower Hamlets Community Secondary Schools and own admission authority schools that adopt these arrangements

The proposed schemes for the co-ordination of admissions for:

- the Reception Year of Primary School and Year 7 of Secondary School;
- admissions outside of the normal points of entry ('In Year' admission)

The Planned admission numbers for:

- Tower Hamlets Community Schools
- Voluntary Aided Schools in Tower Hamlets
- Academy and Free Schools in Tower Hamlets

Consultation Period

The eight week consultation period ran from 1st November until 30th December 2016

2.0 Communication

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

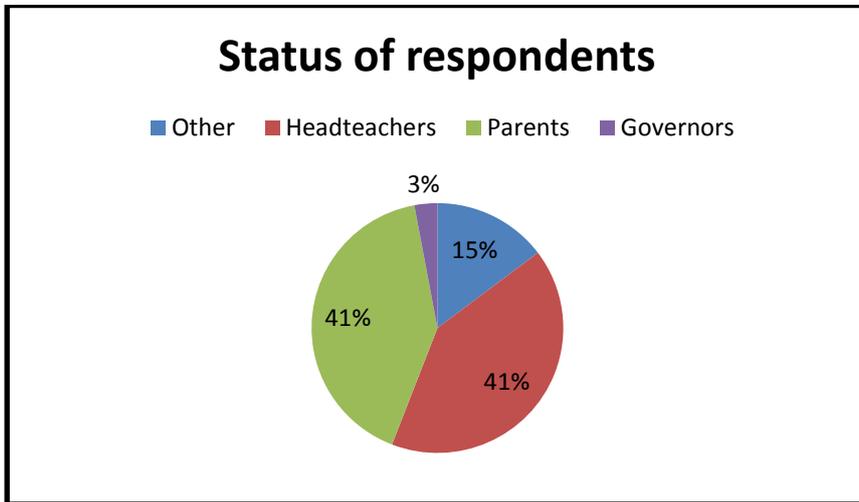
Table A – Communication mediums used for consulting on the 2018/19 school admissions arrangements.

Communication Medium	Reach	
Notice to all governors via Governor Services with information on proposals and consultation deadline	All governors	2 nd November 2016
Notice to all neighbouring local authorities seeking their views	All neighbouring local authorities	1 st November 2016
Notice on Tower Hamlets Council website and intranet with a direct link to online consultation questionnaire to obtain wider reach	All local residents and businesses and staff employed by the council	1 st November 2016
Notice in East London Advertiser Newspaper	Local residents and businesses	1 st December 2016
Notice in weekly Desh Newspaper	Wider community reach including hard to reach communities	1 st December 2016
Headteachers Bulletin and Agenda for Primary and Secondary Heads Phase Consultative meetings	All head teachers employed by the local authority	4 th November 2016
Tower Hamlets under 5 providers including Children's Centres, Playgroups, Nurseries	All under 5 providers in Tower Hamlets	1 st December 2016
Members Bulletin including briefing note for Lead Member for Children's Services	All elected members asking for support to engage the local community	1 st November 2016
Admissions Forum	Members of the Forum	30 th November 2016
Parent Champions	Consultation with Parent Champions to reach parents	14 th December 2016
Councils social media accounts, scheduled releases on Facebook and Tweeter	Wider reach	8 th November 2016

3.0 Profile of respondents

The chart below shows the profile information for those who completed the online questionnaire and who attended the parent’s focus group.

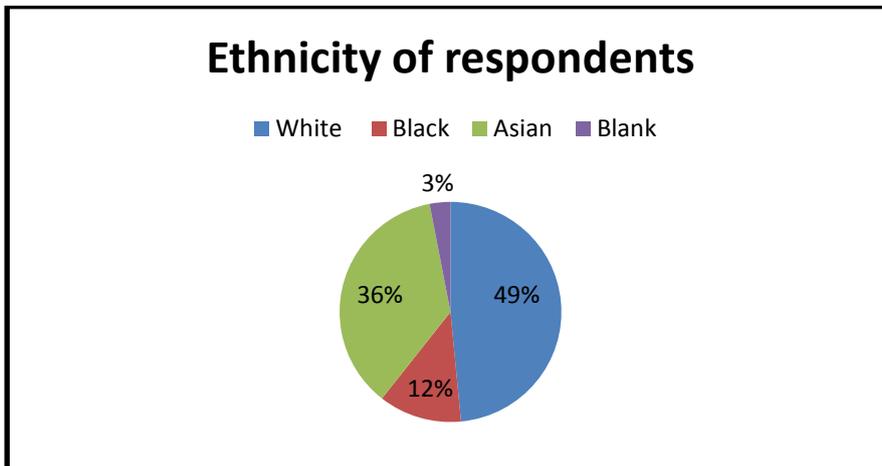
Table B – Status of respondents



The responses were evenly split between parents and schools.

3.1 Ethnicity and Disability profile of respondents

Table C - Ethnicity and disability of respondents



The respondents engaged represented a range of ethnicities. White and Bangladeshi respondents represent the largest groups. Other ethnic groups include: Caribbean, African, Chinese, Somalian, Pakistani and Thai.

26 respondents stated they were not disabled, 2 responded ‘Yes’ while 6 did not specify. There were no dual heritage respondents.

4.0 Summary of Responses

There were a total of thirty four responses to the consultation. Twenty five were completed through submission of the online questionnaire. Nine were completed following an open public event.

There was general agreement to the proposals with respondents positive about ensuring a fair and accessible system of school place allocation. The only change to existing arrangements was the proposal to centrally co-ordinate admissions to community nursery classes and schools. This was supported by 74%, of respondents who agreed that a centralised system would make things clearer and easier for parents as well as remove the need for them to apply to more than one agency. 26% disagreed with this proposal with one of the respondents concerned that a central system would remove the personal connection that parents have with schools as well as limit a school's ability to support families who were in most need. Another of those who disagreed was of the view that the current system, where schools were approached directly, gave parents more control of the nursery admission process.

The parents and carers that responded via the facilitated focus group agreed that a centralised system for all school admissions was fair. Some felt they needed to be provided with information that would help them to better understand school intakes and catchment areas, whereas others believed that the current system was well-organised and easy to follow.

A number of Primary school headteachers expressed concern about the current difficulties with teacher recruitment and retention in the borough. This was having an adverse impact on standards. They would like the Authority to assist with addressing this issue by introducing a new criterion, within the nursery and primary school oversubscription criteria, giving priority to the children of staff who have been employed at the school for more than two years.

One school responded to express concern about its ability to fill all of its places following the introduction and expansion of a new free school in the Isle of Dogs. It was therefore proposing a rationalisation of the places available at schools within the Isle of Dogs area.

There was little comment on the arrangements for secondary school admissions. However, one respondent proposed the introduction of a priority area for Morpeth Secondary School covering the Bow area (east of Grove Road, north of Mile End Road), as they felt this area is currently under-served by local secondary schools.

One respondent expressed concern about the Planned Admission Numbers for schools with one and half forms of entry (i.e. 45 pupils). Schools with one and half forms of entry were required to open classes for very small numbers. In the current financial climate this caused significant problems, especially when nearby schools are not full. There needed to be better consideration at Local Authority level of the impact on schools who had half form entr classes and whether resources could be better allocated.

4.1 Analysis of results

Table D1 – Responses to consultation questions in percentages

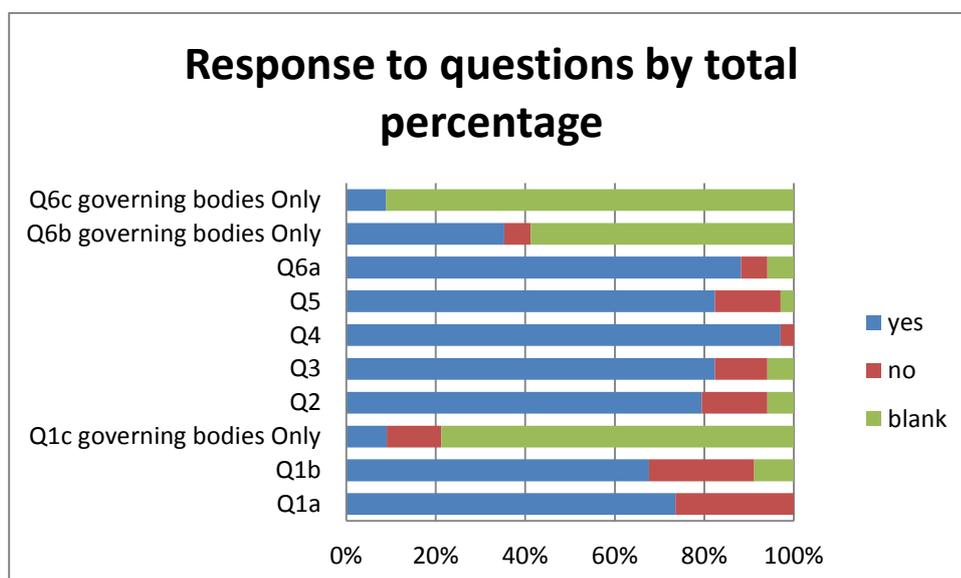


Table D2 – Responses to consultation questions in numbers

Question	YES	NO	Blanks
1a. Do you agree with the proposal for a central system to co-ordinate applications for admission to nursery schools and classes?	25	9	0
1b. Do you agree with the other arrangements and oversubscription criteria for admission to Community nursery schools/classes as set in Appendix A?	23	8	3
1c. Will your school participate in a co-ordinated nursery admissions scheme on the same basis as it does for reception and in-year admissions? (Governing body only)	3	4	26
2. Do you agree with the proposed arrangements and oversubscription criteria for admission to Tower Hamlets Community primary schools?	27	5	2
3. Do you agree with the proposed arrangements and oversubscription criteria for admission to community secondary schools?	28	4	2
4. Do you agree with the proposed scheme for co-ordinating both Year 7 and Reception Year admissions?	33	1	0
5. Do you agree with the proposed arrangements for co-ordinating In-Year admissions?	28	5	1
6a. Do you agree with Planned Admission Numbers schools in Tower Hamlets?	30	2	2
6b. Do you agree with Planned Admission Number for your school? (Governing body only)	12	2	20
6c. Do you agree with the Planned Admission Number for those schools whose admissions might impact on your own school? (Governing body only)	3	0	31

The above table shows a generally positive consensus to the proposed arrangements. For all the key questions (excluding questions for governing bodies where there were fewer responses) the majority of respondents agree with the proposals and some positive comments were received. However, some highlighted concerns or issues that have been addressed in the Local Authority response.

5. Analysis of comments from questionnaire

Question One a, b and c: Proposed arrangements for admission to Tower Hamlets nursery schools/classes	
Respondent	Comments
Unspecified	Priority for working parents needs to be considered with economic changes. Parents do not want a centralised system for nursery – want to keep the personal connection with nursery schools. Current system works. Feel parents have more control with current system. Maybe there should be a 50/50 system. Council should only step in if parent cannot find any place.
Head Teacher	We take the neediest children who are referred directly to us. We have a number of children who defer entry to primary school and therefore have a January intake. We also take three year olds who are eligible for the two year old funding. We are still registering children in July for entry in September. When we sent our list to the LA not one child on that list eventually started here and yet we are full with a waiting list.
Head Teacher	<p>Staff recruitment and retention in Tower Hamlets is now a significant issue in our schools, both for the employment of teachers (specifically those in within the Stepney area) and support staff. The difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff is having a detrimental impact on standards. We can only see this issue becoming increasingly challenging as experienced staff move out of London in order to access cheaper childcare and lower living costs.</p> <p>I would like the LA to help in addressing this issue in its school admission arrangements as a matter of urgency. I believe this could, in part, be achieved by allowing the admissions of children of staff (who have worked in the school for more than two years) to be given priority as part of the admissions criteria. We believe that by changing the admissions criteria to reflect this priority, staff would remain in our schools by being able to access wrap around care in order to facilitate the struggles currently faced with affordable childcare costs.</p> <p>Recent comments from Sir Michael Wilshaw (Head of Ofsted) also confirms our concerns: "There is clearly a perceived shortage," he said, warning that head teachers saw a teacher shortage as "a major bottleneck" to raising standards. Source: BBC News - Pisa tests: UK lags behind in global schools.</p>
Parent	<p>Good for parents. Have open day for nursery. One centralised system and form.</p>

Parent	Clearer and easier for parents to use a centralised system. Open days for parents. Schools should not have to give up September and January in-takes.
Parent	I feel centralised system for nursery admissions is a good idea, however there are several issues to consider. 1. At the moment nursery schools have two intakes, September and January. How will the centralised system work, as children are accepted according to their age 2. The hard to reach parents (especially first children) how will they know how and when to apply.
Parent	Positive: More centralised structured system. Gives certainty to schools and parents. Have anticipated dates in advance. Negatives: Be mindful of how January intakes would work. - especially if the child turns 3 in the spring term. At the moment schools can decide with relative ease. Publicise, Publicise, Publicise, especially target those hard to reach families to advertise in GP's, Health Clinics and Children's Centres.

Local Authority Response

The current nursery oversubscription criteria gives priority for a full-time nursery place to working parents or those studying full-time.

The Authority recognises the challenges currently faced by schools in being able to recruit and retain teaching staff. It will therefore consult on introducing a new criterion giving priority admission to children of staff for admission in the 2019/20 school year.

The Authority considers that there will be a number benefits to the central coordination of nursery admissions, it would:

- Providing parents with one source of information for all admissions stages;
- Enable parents to apply online to one central agency;
- Assisting the Local Authority with its pupil place planning and forecasting need for the reception year of primary school;
- Be more resource effective as it would help to create a database ready for the reception year admission process;
- Facilitate better support for families in securing their free nursery entitlement and thus enable the Local Authority to fully comply with its statutory duty;
- Provide access to information on the demand for nursery places as well as improve the management and funding of these places;
- Identify children entering maintained provision without any prior pre-school experience;
- Better facilitate the transfer of information for children with special educational needs thus enabling schools to undertake the necessary planning to best meet their needs;
- Enable the tracking of children who have accessed the disadvantaged 2 year old entitlement.

Question Two: Proposed arrangements and oversubscription criteria for admission to community primary schools	
Respondent	Comments
Other	The schools need to be able to determine if they are the nearest school when applying the oversubscription criteria - this is not currently possible. This would cut down on the number of families who are offered a nursery place because of the walking distance criteria but then cannot satisfy the nearest school criteria when it comes to applying for a reception place.
Head Teacher	There has to be a coordinated response to the crisis in schools in the west of the borough with empty places.
Head Teacher	<p>Staff recruitment and retention in Tower Hamlets is now a significant issue in our schools, both for the employment of teachers (specifically those in within the Tower Hamlets area) and support staff. The difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff is having a detrimental impact on standards. We can only see this issue becoming increasingly challenging as experienced staff move out of London in order to access cheaper childcare and lower living costs.</p> <p>I would like the LA to help in addressing this issue in its school admission arrangements as a matter of urgency. I believe this could, in part, be achieved by allowing the admissions of children of staff (who have worked in the school for more than two years) to be given priority as part of the admissions criteria. We believe that by changing the admissions criteria to reflect this priority, staff would remain in our schools by being able to access wrap around care in order to facilitate the struggles currently faced with affordable childcare.</p> <p>Recent comments from Sir Michael Wilshaw (Head of Ofsted) also confirms our concerns: "There is clearly a perceived shortage," he said, warning that head teachers saw a teacher shortage as "a major bottleneck" to raising standards.</p>
Head Teacher	I feel staff having worked in a school for two years should be able to have priority for a school place. We are currently faced with losing two of our most experienced teachers as they consider positions in other LA that support such a policy. Equally if staff in primary schools has priority for school places so should secondary colleagues.
Head Teacher	<p>Staff recruitment and retention in Tower Hamlets is now a significant issue in our schools, both for the employment of teachers and support staff. The difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff is having a detrimental impact on standards. We can only see this issue becoming increasingly challenging as experienced staff move out of London in order to access cheaper childcare and lower living costs.</p> <p>I would like the LA to help in addressing this issue in its school admission arrangements as a matter of urgency. I believe this could, in part, be achieved by allowing the admissions of</p>

	<p>children of staff (who have worked in the school for more than two years) to be given priority as part of the admissions criteria. We believe that by changing the admissions criteria to reflect this priority, staff would remain in our schools by being able to access wrap around care in order to facilitate the struggles currently faced with affordable childcare costs.</p> <p>Recent comments from Sir Michael Wilshaw (Head of Ofsted) also confirms our concerns: "There is clearly a perceived shortage," he said, warning that head teachers saw a teacher shortage as "a major bottleneck" to raising standards.</p> <p>Source: BBC News - Pisa tests: UK lags behind in global school rankings 06 Dec 2016</p>
Head Teacher	<p>Staff recruitment and retention in Tower Hamlets is now a significant issue in our schools, both for the employment of teachers (specifically those in within the area) and support staff. The difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff is having a detrimental impact on standards. We can only see this issue becoming increasingly challenging as experienced staff move out of London in order to access cheaper childcare and lower living costs.</p> <p>I would like the LA to help in addressing this issue in its school admission arrangements as a matter of urgency. I believe this could, in part, be achieved by allowing the admissions of children of staff (who have worked in the school for more than two years) to be given priority as part of the admissions criteria. We believe that by changing the admissions criteria to reflect this priority, staff would remain in our schools by being able to access wrap around care in order to facilitate the struggles currently faced with affordable childcare costs.</p> <p>It has proved very difficult to fill three forms of entry to Arnhem Wharf since the opening of the local free school. Being under subscribed has affected our financial stability and the stability of our pupil demographic. We feel that there should be a rationalisation of places available on the Isle of Dogs.</p>
Other	<p>I believe that children of staff (particularly teachers) should be given priority as an incentive to recruit and retain. We lose several experienced teachers each year when their children reach school age.</p>
Head Teacher	<p>Staff recruitment and retention in Tower Hamlets is now a significant issue in our schools, both for the employment of teachers and support staff. The difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff is having a detrimental impact on standards. We can only see this issue becoming increasingly challenging as experienced staff move out of London in order to access cheaper childcare and lower living costs.</p>

	I would like the LA to help in addressing this issue in its school admission arrangements as a matter of urgency. I believe this could, in part, be achieved by allowing the admissions of children of staff (who have worked in the school for more than two years) to be given priority as part of the admissions criteria. We believe that by changing the admissions criteria to reflect this priority, staff would remain in our schools by being able to access wrap around care in order to facilitate the struggles currently faced with affordable childcare costs.
Parent	Parents need a better understanding of catchment areas - also link that map to the holding lot bidding system so parents are informed- maybe also GP catchment areas. Give subscription-priorities, still need to make a note to support wondering parents and give them a priority place.
Unspecified	Parents need a better understanding of catchment areas - also link that map to the housing list bidding system so parents are informed - maybe also GP catchment areas. Oversubscription - priorities, still need to make a note to support working parents and give them a priority place.
Parent	Great to have a more organized and centralised system. Cleaner for parents in terms of dates, offers and selection.
Parent/Governor	More in one system.

Local Authority Response

The oversubscription criteria for Community Primary Schools are administered by the Authority's School Admissions Team not by individual schools. This ensures that the process is fair and consistent. The Authority uses an ICT system that enables it determine if the school applied for is the nearest school and whether or not the school is in the address catchment area.

The Authority recognises the challenges currently faced by primary schools in being able to recruit and retain teaching staff. It will therefore consult on introducing a new criterion giving priority admission to children of staff for the admissions in the 2019/20 school year. It is necessary for parents, schools, religious authorities, the local community and neighbouring local authorities to have opportunity give their views and comments on what would be a significant change.

The Authority's website: www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/equalchance has been designed to provide parents with an understanding of school catchments areas and how they are used for the purpose of school admissions. The 'Starting School' booklet is provided to inform parents about the schools in the area as well as help them with the school application process. There is also opportunity for parents to seek further advice and assistance from the Authority's School Admission Team and the School Choice Advisers provided through the Parental Engagement Service.

Question Three: Proposed Arrangements and Oversubscription Criteria for Admission to Community Secondary Schools.	
Respondent	Comments
Parent	It is not a fair process.
Other	We would like to see a priority area created for Bow, east of Grove Road, north of Mile End Road as this area is currently under-served by secondary schools. There is no mixed school in this area although currently Bow School is able to take many pupils from this area. As it fills up, parents will once again face the problem that they are further away from any other mixed secondary than anyone else from the borough. We would argue for a priority admission zone to Morpeth as those living to the west of the school have the choice of several other schools while those living to the east have none.
Parent	It seems fair.
Parent/Governor	It's fair for the local residents to get in for the criteria.

Local Authority Response

The Authority has previously considered whether or not there is a need to implement a designated priority admission zone for Morpeth School or another school in or around the Bow area. The detailed analysis included an equalities impact assessment on the effects of the relocation of Bow School and its change of designation from a single sex to a mixed (boys and girls) school. The results determined that children living in Bow were able to access a nearby school and most were able to be placed at either Morpeth or Bow School. The Authority is not therefore considering the introduction of a priority admission zone for Morpeth School at this time.

Question Four: Proposed schemes for co-ordinating both Year 7, Year 3 and Reception Year admissions.

Respondent	Comments
Parent	Gives parents more choice.
Unspecified	Ease of filling one form.
Parent	Once again it is more organised. Parents may not understand how things work, but it seems like a fair system.
Parent/Governor	It's good for the local people and residents to go the local area and not to travel.

Local Authority Response

It is evident that, over the years, the system of co-ordinated admissions has led to better outcomes for Tower Hamlets residents. Firstly, resulting in significant increases in the percentage of families who are able to secure a place at a preferred school. Secondly, by ensuring that all children are able to secure a school place at the earliest opportunity.

Question Five: Do you agree with the Proposed Schemes for the Co-ordination of in-year admissions	
Respondent	Comments
Head Teacher	This system needs to be improved to provide more accurate information for schools about pupils transferring in and out.
Parent	It is a fair process.
Parent	If it works.
Unspecified	In year should maybe be controlled by the school. Currently council totally decides where to place child and that may not be convenient for families. Sometimes the school tells parents they have places but council does not give place. In year system does not work.
Parent	Organised and fair.
Parent/Governor	It's good to keep the record so the Local Authority can ensure the children are at the school.

Local Authority Response

The ICT system that allow schools to view their applications, update their vacancy information and monitor the movement of pupils in and out is being improved to ensure that schools have access to the most up to date and accurate information.

In-year admission arrangements are coordinated centrally to ensure that school places are allocated systematically and that the process is fair to all families, especially those with children who are considered vulnerable and at risk of not having early access to educational provision. Experience has found that these outcomes are less achievable when admissions are administered by schools themselves.

Question six a, b and c: Planned admission numbers for schools in Tower Hamlets in 2018/19

Respondent	Comments
Head teacher	Schools with half form entries are often have to open classes for very small numbers. In the current financial climate this is a liability especially when some nearby schools are not filling their forms of entry. There needs to be better consideration at LA level of the impact on half form entries and whether resources can be better allocated.
Parent	Yes there should be flexibility in relation to changes in demand.

Local Authority Response

The Authority makes periodic modifications to its school place planning strategy, based on projected future changes in the pupil population and the Council's planned developments to increase its school place capacity. This Strategy will also take account of the addition of new schools in the Tower Hamlets area through the Government's free school approval process. The Authority will consider how it can lessen the impact of these and other factors on schools with half form entries