

Brighton & Hove school admission arrangements 2026/27 – Frequently Asked Questions document to inform public consultation

This document is intended to help residents understand the proposed arrangements and consider the impacts. It is not intended to be a definitive or final answer on an individual circumstance.

These are examples of questions that parents/carers are already asking the council or ones we anticipate being asked. People may have other questions and the public consultation meetings are available as somewhere direct questions can be asked of the Council's Members and officers.

This document will remain live and may be updated anytime. This version was published on 24 December 2024.

Q I live in Kemptown and will now be in the catchment area for Longhill under the proposals. I have a child in year 9 at Dorothy Stringer school, will I be able to use the sibling link for my year 5 child?

A: Yes, if your older child will still be attending Dorothy Stringer school when your younger child starts year 7, the sibling link will apply despite the change in your home address catchment area. For this to apply it will require that your older child remains enrolled at Dorothy Stringer when your younger child starts in year 7.

Q: My child has autism and additional needs when it comes to travelling to school and during the school day. They do not have an EHCP. What consideration will be made for my child's needs?

A: The council are proposing to retain the "compelling medical or other exceptional reasons to attend the school" admission criterion which will give priority to pupils whose needs can only be met at a particular school. To qualify under this criterion there needs to be clear independent supporting evidence to demonstrate this is the case. However, having a diagnosis such as Autism would not in itself be an exceptional reason automatically.

Your child may also get help with transport if they can't walk to school because of special educational needs and disabilities or mobility problems or where there is no safe walking route. This would be assessed by the Home to School Transport Team on an individual case by case basis.

This assistance could include:

- a bus pass
- a group of children travelling together by bus often with a Vehicle Passenger Assistant
- a taxi or minibus transport from a set meeting point
- a taxi or minibus transport from the home address registered with the school, to and from school

Details of the Council's current Home to School Transport policy is available [here](#).

Q: I live in a dual catchment area and my child can only apply under proposed priority 7 'In catchment area'. What are the chances of my child being offered a catchment area school?

A: If there are not enough places to be offered to all children who have applied for a place under priority 7, the Council will use random allocation to determine who receives a place. The final outcome depends on the number of available places and total applications received.

As with the current published arrangements, living in a catchment area does not guarantee a school place. Children that meet criteria 1, 2 and 3 get the highest priority and can be expected to receive a place. Children who get free school meals and live in a school's catchment area get priority for places above all other remaining children but only up to a certain number of places (30% of the school's PAN).

If your child qualifies for but is not offered a place under any of the above criteria your child would have a chance of being allocated a place under the in-catchment area criterion, priority 7.

We understand the families are keen to understand the likelihood of gaining a place based on forecast data. However, the council does not, and cannot, publish a percentage chance of a family gaining a place at a specific school, or catchment area schools, based on their admission priority. This is the case today with existing arrangements.

Each year how parents state their preference affects how places are allocated. We can only assume how families may use the new admission priorities and we don't know how the applications to King's School and Cardinal Newman Catholic School, who do not have catchment areas, will affect the places in schools with catchment areas.

Each year about 130-140 secondary school places can change after the allocation day because places are not taken up, families get a new place through the reallocation pool and some families are successful when appealing to an independent panel about the place they have been given. This also makes estimating who will get what place difficult to calculate.

Families should be aware that if you are unhappy with the school place offered on National Offer Day you may be able to secure a place in another school before your child starts school in September. If you want to keep the place you are offered on National Offer Day there will be instructions as to how you confirm that you accept that place and that place will not be lost.

Q: Do schools have to agree to have their published admission number (PAN) reduced?

A: The proposed PAN reductions have been discussed with headteachers and governing bodies. We have invited them to respond to the formal consultation. The council is responsible for setting the PAN for community schools. However, these schools can object to the national Schools Adjudicator if the PAN set for them is lower than they would wish. There is a strong presumption in favour of an increase to the PAN to which the Schools Adjudicator must have regard when considering any such objection.

Q: Why aren't any Church Voluntary Aided schools, Free schools or Academies included in the proposals?

A: The council can only set the admission arrangements and PANs for community schools. Voluntary Aided (Church), Free schools and Academies are responsible for setting their own admission arrangements and PANs although we work positively with them on this issue.

Q: Will my child get free transport if they are allocated a school place under the free school meals criteria?

A: Children who get free school meals will also get a bus pass to secondary school if they attend one of their 3 closest secondary schools. The school must be over 2 miles but less than 6 miles from your home address to qualify. This is measured by a walking route. This is under the current transport policy, which the council is reviewing in the new year.

You can [use our interactive map to find your 3 closest secondary schools and their distance from your address.](#)

Q: Will my child get free transport if they are allocated a school place at a school outside my catchment area?

A: Children will get a bus pass to secondary school if the school they are given is more than 3 miles from their home address and there isn't a closer school with places available. However this does not apply if you have chosen to attend a school further away and could have attended a school under 3 miles from your address.

Children who get free school meals will also get a bus pass to secondary school if they attend one of their 3 closest secondary schools. The school must be over 2 miles but less than 6 miles from your home address to qualify. This is measured by a walking route.

You can [use our interactive map to find your 3 closest secondary schools and the distance from your address.](#)

Q: My child is eligible for free school meals, but I don't live in the catchment area of my favourite school. What happens if there are more free school meals pupils applying than the city average?

A: A random allocation tiebreak is used to decide which pupils with the same criteria are offered the available places when there are more applicants than spaces. Free school meals pupils living in the catchment area are allocated first but only up to a certain number of places (30% of the school's PAN). If this number of allocations is less than 30% of the school's PAN, pupils who are eligible for free school meals and live outside the catchment area are given any remaining places available for free school meals pupils.

If your child has not been offered a place under the free school meals priority to a particular school you have applied for and you live in the catchment area for BACA,

PACA, Longhill High or Patcham High schools your child will also be considered under Priority 6. The random allocation tie break would be used to offer up to 20% of the school's places under this criterion.

If your child is not offered a place under any of the above criteria your child would then also have a chance of being allocated a place under the priority 8 for all other children.

Q: If I live in the Central Hove, or Central Brighton Catchment, and I don't get a place at one of the catchment schools - which school would I be offered a place at?

A: Parents will be able to express up to 4 preferences for different schools. The council operates an equal preference system which means that all 4 of your preferences are considered equally. However, the order/ranking of your preferences is still important because if it is possible to offer a place at more than one of the preferences on your list, a place will be allocated at the school you have ranked the highest.

If none of your preferences can be allocated, you will receive a place at the closest school to your home that has available spaces

Q: What are the "compelling medical or other exceptional circumstances" that would be considered in the admissions criteria?

A: To qualify under the compelling medical or other exceptional circumstance admission criterion there would need to be independent supporting information that demonstrates an exceptional and compelling reason as to why your child's needs can only be met at your preferred school rather than any other school.

Q: If my family do not live in walking distance of a school, or if we are allocated a school that is not in walking distance, but my child has Special Educational Needs or Disabilities that make public transport difficult or traumatic, what support would be available?

A: Your child may get help with transport if they can't walk to school because of special educational needs and disabilities or mobility problems. This would be assessed by the [Home to School Transport Team](#) on an individual case by case basis.

This assistance could include:

- a bus pass
- a group of children travelling together by bus often with a Vehicle Passenger Assistant
- a taxi or minibus transport from a set meeting point
- a taxi or minibus transport from the home address registered with the school, to and from school

Q: Is it true that families in the Whitehawk area have been moved into the DS/Varndean Catchment, but now have less chance of getting in (if they are not receiving FSM) than families from outside of catchment?

A: This is not necessarily the case and the council will be considering how to minimise that risk, based on further data modelling taking place in January 2025. Any person's chance of getting a particular school is dependent on the way parents/carers make their preferences and also what may happen after National Offer Day. Not everyone who is offered a place in March starts at that school in September, they may move away, decide to educate their child a different way or successfully appeal for another school place.

Q: Are the numbers you've published in your Cabinet papers accurate? I hear that they are not.

A: All published numbers are based on the best available data and projections at the time of publication and the set of planning assumptions made were published with the paper. However, school place planning involves many variables that can change over time. The Council will look to update its own modelling in January and will describe how this is developing as part of the consultation and decision-making process. The Council knows that families want as much information as possible to inform how they reply to the consultation.

Q: What are my chances of my child getting into a school in my catchment in these proposals?

A: The likelihood depends on factors like total applications and places allocated under higher priority criteria. The Council does not guarantee a place in any school including the school(s) serving catchment area.

Q: Is this proposal the same as the "citywide lottery" model that was abandoned years ago? How does it differ?

A: The Department for Education's School Admissions Code does not permit the use of a citywide lottery, and this has not been proposed by the Council in the past. However, the Council continues to consider that using a random allocation tie break is the fairest way to distinguish between pupils within the same admission priority – where there are more applicants than places.

Q: Is the Open Admissions (or 'Marginal Ballots') Model only intended for distance-based catchment models?

A: The concept of using marginal ballots has been considered by the Sutton Trust as a way of improving equality in schools and unlocking the potential of disadvantaged young people. Some of their research considers adding a ballot into existing admission arrangements. Home to school distance is most commonly used as a tie break by schools and local authorities nationally. Introducing an element of random allocation to a school's intake in the form of marginal ballots for pupils living outside a school's catchment area is seen to increase fairness in their admission arrangements.

Brighton and Hove already use random allocation as the principal tie break so with this as the starting point introducing an open admission criterion is seen as a way of adding a further element of equity into the admission priorities for community schools in the city.

Q: Why are you changing the school admission arrangements and not focusing on school improvement to make all schools equitable?

A: The council works on both school improvement and admissions arrangements. Changes to school admissions aim to create more equitable access to school places across the city, while ongoing work continues to support high standards in all schools.

Q: Do children from outside of Brighton & Hove get allocated places?

A: Children from outside the city can apply for places in Brighton & Hove schools through their home local authority and will be considered for places according to the school's oversubscription criteria. In the same way a number of children every year who live in Brighton & Hove are allocated places in schools outside the city. We think that the effect of any applications from outside of the city will not have a significant impact on the allocation of places to children living in the city.

It has been the case and continues to be the case that our arrangements allow for anyone to apply. There are current and proposed priorities that restrict this. These are ones that refer to which catchment areas people live in - eg the proposed open admission priority and the existing 'in catchment area' one and the existing sibling link priority and the FSM priority for in area.

Q: If there are already more than 30% of children on FSM within the catchment area, what does that mean for how priorities 4 and 5 will work?

A: If there are already more than 30% of children eligible for FSM within a catchment area, the school will still only allocate 30% of its Published Admission Number (PAN) up to the FSM priority criteria.

Q: What does good look like for the council, if these proposals are implemented?

A: Based on the council's stated objectives, successful implementation of these proposals would create a school system where all pupils have access to great education, with reduced barriers to success for disadvantaged pupils and the number of available places aligns to the number of children needing a school place.

The proposals aim to:

- maintain all ten current school sites as viable institutions while reducing unfilled places from 11% to 6.6% across the city.
- ensure schools have sustainable pupil numbers allowing them to offer broad curriculums, alongside a more mixed intake that creates better outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
- maintain a geographical spread of schools, enabling more families to access their preferred schools through the new open admissions priority and increased preference options

- creating a genuine alliance of city schools working in partnership and taking collective responsibility for all children's education.

Q: If I get my older child into a school using Open Admissions in September 2026, will that create a sibling link for my younger child?

A: No this will not create a sibling link for your younger child as the sibling link only applies to children who live within the school's catchment area (except where we are providing transitional protection to a sibling link where we have changed the catchment area).

Q: What does the relevant area mean in your consultation survey?

A: The "relevant area" is the geographical area that schools must consult within when they want to change their admission arrangements. For Brighton and Hove schools, this is simply defined as everywhere within the city boundary, and the council is proposing to keep this definition for 2026/27 admissions rather than expanding or reducing it.

Q: Why haven't you published a consultation paper?

A: The full details of proposals are provided in the Cabinet papers however further information is available on the YourVoice portal including the slides being used in the consultation meeting and a summary version of the proposals. The consultation survey also includes a summary description of what is being proposed at each question.

Q: Why are you proposing a reduction in PAN at schools that are popular?

A: The council is proposing to reduce PANs at a number of schools because all schools need to match their capacity to the city's decreasing student population. Schools are funded per pupil, and having too many unfilled places across the city (currently projected at 281 places or 11% in September 2026) makes it difficult for schools to operate efficiently and maintain a broad curriculum. Reducing PANs at these schools, as part of a city-wide strategy, ensures that the council aims to protect the financial viability of all schools so that they can continue to offer a high-quality education.

Q: Why are you ignoring expert advice to wait and see how this September 2025 FSM applications work before making further changes?

A: We hear and understand the calls for us to wait however as we have to set admission arrangements 18 months in advance of them being used we feel it is important to move further on these issues now. During the consultation period timeline we are able to look at the early data from the 2025 FSM applications so we will be able to take that understanding into account when decisions are being made in February.

Q: Why haven't you done impact assessments?

The full papers that went to cabinet last week are available for viewing. Appendix 8 contained an impact analysis as does some of the body of the main report. Appendices 2-4 contains detail around the data. [Brighton & Hove City Council - Agenda item - School Admission Arrangements 2026-27](#)

This information combined presents a summary of the understood impact of the proposals. This will be expanded upon further when a report is presented to decision makers in February.

Q: Are you going to provide easier to understand versions of the proposals?

A: We have uploaded a shorter summary of the proposals to the YourVoice portal, under the Background information tab.

Q: Why is the open Admission priority being proposed to be before the one for in catchment-area children with no siblings or FSM. This feels unfair.

A: The rationale for the proposed 'open admissions' priority going above 'children in catchment area with no higher priority' is that if it sat below it, it would not be any different from the proposed priority 8 'any other children' and therefore not increasing opportunities for those living in a single school catchment areas - which is what we are looking to explore in this consultation process.

Q: What happens if I don't get a place at a school in my catchment area?

A: If a child is not able to gain a place at a catchment area school, where they go will depend on a number of circumstances. Mainly it will depend on other preferences expressed. However if no preference can be met - they will be offered a place at the nearest available school with a space.

Q: Why is the consultation being held over such a difficult time of year for families?

A: The timescale for conducting the consultation for arrangements for Sept 2026/27 are dictated by the School Admissions Code. This is always the time of year where we have to conduct our annual school admission consultation.

Q: My child's year group was the most affected by the Covid pandemic. Why are you affecting this cohort in particular?

A: We understand the unique pressures that year group may be facing and our city schools have worked hard to support that cohort of children. Because we have proposed changes to school admission arrangements nearly two years ahead of when they come into effect we do not feel we can continue to wait further years to address some of the pressing issues in the city.

Q: Isn't this proposal just option B in disguise and worse?

A: Options A, B and C were illustrative models presented during the engagement exercise in October. The exercise was a way of gathering a range of views on potential changes to school admission arrangements. All views were read and considered. The proposal in this consultation period is different from Option B in several ways which include fewer changes to catchment area boundaries and now introducing an open admission category that applies to those living in catchment areas with only one school in it. We understand that people in catchment areas are concerned about the potential for their child not gaining a catchment area place and that is where the council is continuing to model data that it holds during the consultation period so that impact is further understood.

Q: Children in Kemptown attending either Queen’s Park School or St Mark’s school have both received an education that, according to OFSTED, “Requires Improvement”. Under the new proposals, many more of these children look likely to attend secondary schools that also “Require Improvement”. Why should our children’s entire educational journeys be a lower standard than elsewhere in the city?

A: Ofsted inspections deliver a report on a school at a moment in time. It is possible that any pupil’s educational journey includes attending a school where there is a judgment of requires improvement, taking account recent changes to school inspections. The potential impact of any change needs to be carefully considered and this will be looked at more closely during the consultation.

It is not possible to accurately forecast the probability of what school a child living in these areas will be allocated in September 2026.

Q: Will email responses to the consultation be counted too?

A: Yes, any emails received to schoolorganisation@brighton-hove.gov.uk will be considered as a consultation response. We do ask people, where possible, to respond via the Your Voice portal.

Q: Will you be seeking views from children?

A: Yes, we are working with youth groups in the city to consider ways of ensuring their views can be heard during the consultation. We also have a wealth of feedback and views from children and young people already in the city about what is important to them about going to school, being at school and other areas of their lives. For example, the Safe and Well at School Survey and the recently developed Principles of Belonging.

Q: Will submissions from Governing Bodies of schools be published after this consultation? Do you have buy-in from DS/V for these proposals?

A: The Governing Board of any school in the city could choose to make their response to a consultation publicly available if they wanted to do so. The Council does not intend to publish each and every response and any summary will not identify individuals or groups making the response. Consultation responses from organisations are considered to be confidential.

We have been in dialogue with secondary schools leading up to the engagement exercise earlier this year and have remained in dialogue with them.

Q: Will videos be available of the online meetings that parents couldn’t attend?

A: Yes – videos will be available in the event page on the YourVoice portal after the meeting. The video for the meeting on the 12th December is already uploaded: [Project: Secondary school admission arrangements public ... | Brighton & Hove City Council](#)

Amendment: Tuesday 24th December – additional questions

Q: Is it true that the longest journeys children would need to make under these proposals would be much longer than the longest within catchment journeys under the current admissions arrangements?

A: It is currently the case that if a child is directed (i.e. given a school which was not a preference) to a school, that journey may be longer than any they may have made within their catchment area. Additionally, families already make choices about sending their children to schools further away than their catchment area schools.

Q: Why is the Council seeking to reduce the number of places in the Stringer/Varndean catchment area at the same time as increasing the number of students through the boundary change?

A: We are proposing a number of PAN reductions across different city areas because of the need to address the falling pupils issue. In relation to central Brighton, we are only proposing a PAN reduction at Dorothy Stringer School, from 330 to 300. We understand that people may be concerned that doing it alongside other proposed changes in admission arrangements could have a greater impact. However, exploring PAN reductions are a routine discussion within Brighton & Hove and often features annually as part of our consulted arrangements.

Q: We know that there is a significant problem with increased mental health issues and anxiety for children. How does the Council see forcing children to attend a school far from their community, and breaking up their friendship groups as a way to tackle this issue?

A: All children have structured and planned secondary school transition support. Under our current arrangements there are children (who by choice or otherwise) go to schools outside of their home community and attend schools without members of their friendship groups. All schools, primary and secondary phase, have access to mental health support should it be needed outside of normal health and other community arrangements. Further details can be found here: [Schools Mental Health Service](#).

Q: Is there a risk of longer travel leading to even higher absence rates and worse attainment as a direct result? Might longer journeys make attendance for SEND children more difficult?

A: The council has a statutory duty to provide transport assistance in certain circumstances, which is given above and is committed to delivering this. The government guidance says "Taking account of children's needs - Local authorities must ensure that the travel arrangements they make take account of the needs of the child concerned... The arrangements should enable the child to travel in reasonable safety and comfort, and without undue stress, strain or difficulty, so that wherever possible they arrive at school ready to learn."

Q: Where do we currently understand with assurance that our city's public transport will be able to cope with changes and ensure all children are delivered to school on time?

A: We routinely work with bus providers on our arrangements and anticipated changes in pupil movements across the city. This includes reviewing the arrangements for some council supported bus routes. The proposed changes to school admission arrangements do not apply until September 2026, providing time to work with transport providers on necessary arrangements.

Q: Are you consulting with children and young people?

A: We have a lot of information from children and young people already about their experiences and views, for example the city's Safe and Well at School Survey and the recent work with children on their sense of belonging in the city schools. A number of years ago we conducted a focussed consultation with school aged children on their views about school allocation. We believe this feedback remains relevant for informing our consultation. We are currently working with existing city youth work providers about working with young people to collect their views as part of this consultation process. The Youth Council sits on the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee which met in October to consider this topic and will be meeting again in January 2025. That is an official route through which the city's young people can share their views.

Q: Will all schools be communicating about the consultation

A: All schools have been informed directly about the consultation and will be asked to communicate this with their school communities early in the new year.

Q: How are you engaging with head teachers, specifically primary heads? How are you engaging with teachers? How many teachers 'on the ground' you have spoken to?

A: Officers and members speak regularly with school representatives and the issues covered by this topic have been discussed many times. Primary Headteachers have been briefed on the consultation proposals and have had opportunities to discuss with officers. This is the same for secondary leaders and this work will continue into the new year. Schools and Governing Boards can respond to the consultation.

Q: Why isn't the catchment area for BACA proposed to change given their projected FSM quota is over 60%?

A: The council is not the admission authority for BACA, or any academy or Church aided schools in the city. The school and / or the academy trust is able to submit their views on the consultation and these will be taken into consideration. The proposals could lead to the proportion of FSM children attending the school changing in September 2026.

Q: Is it possible that FSM children in catchment area will be among those displaced?

A: Yes, under the proposed arrangements it is possible that some children will not be able to gain a place at their catchment area school. FSM eligible children within catchment area are given a higher priority of admission so it is anticipated this risk would be minimised, but it is possible with random allocation being the tie break applied.

Q: Are the council concerned that this proposal could lead to more schools looking to change to Academy status?

A: The council's position is that we want to work with city schools to ensure they wish to remain as maintained LA schools, believing this to be better for the children, staff and communities within the city. A decision to consider a move to academy status is for a Governing Board to determine. These proposed changes to school admission arrangements are proposed to address a city-wide issue and we continue to listen to and work with individual schools on their responses to the proposals.

Q: When is this going back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee?

A: This item will feature substantially on the committee scheduled for 14th January 2025. The full agenda should be published on the 6th January 2025 and members of the public will have until the 8th January to make any submissions via the democratic services team at the council.

Amendment: Monday 20th January 2025 – additional question

Q: How are you calculating the Free School Meals (FSMs) percentage?

A: The proposal is that for the September 2026 admission we will include the count of children who are eligible for FSMs under priorities 1-3, before we allocate places under priorities 4 and 5. This means that during priorities 4 or 5 if we reach the 30%, we will stop allocating from those priority groups (4 & 5) at that point.

Any children in priorities 6, 7 or 8 who are eligible for FSMs may still be allocated a place, under random allocation, which is used as the tie break for those priorities.

The proposed priorities are weighted towards giving eligible children with FSMs a higher priority, therefore we would expect the numbers of FSMs children still remaining in priorities 6, 7 or 8 for an oversubscribed school to be reduced, as they firstly would have been considered under priorities 4 or 5.