



**Below is a themed summary of responses provided in the October 2024 engagement exercise into school admission arrangements**

**Analysis of Q7 - Please give your views on how a change in school admissions arrangements could impact different communities in the city?**

### **Key Themes**

#### **1. Community Cohesion and Social Networks**

Community cohesion emerges as one of the strongest concerns in the responses. Residents emphasise that schools serve as crucial supports for community life, fostering relationships that extend far beyond the classroom. There is significant worry that changing catchment areas would fragment established communities, particularly disrupting the transition from primary to secondary school where existing friendship groups provide important emotional support.

Many responses highlight how local schools create intergenerational community bonds, with families building support networks through school connections. There's a strong belief that these community ties contribute positively to children's development and wellbeing. The proposed changes are seen as potentially undermining these established social structures.

#### **Supporting quotes:**

1. "Schools are a key part of a local community. If the school has less local children, you lose the support of the community."
2. "Children need to be able to attend a school where they will have community around them, their parents and carers close, and therefore social and emotional support."
3. "Having a dedicated school for your area creates a position of loyalty and common goals for the community. The community have the same goal to ensure the best out of their school"
4. "This will sever local ties to community and lower pupil engagement and attendance generally."
5. "Our community group have the same concerns that when it gets to secondary school choices that to give our children the best chance we may have to move away."

#### **2. Travel and Transport Concerns**

Transport emerges as a major practical and safety concern. . Parents express significant worries about young children having to make long journeys across the city, particularly during winter months when it's dark. The environmental impact of increased traffic and pollution is frequently mentioned, along with concerns about the city's infrastructure capacity to handle additional school commutes.

The financial burden of transport costs on families is a recurring concern, especially for those not eligible for free transport. Many responses highlight how longer commutes would impact children's ability to participate in extra-curricular activities and affect family schedules, particularly for working parents.

Supporting quotes:

1. "Making children travel long distances to school in areas they are not familiar with increases anxiety, decreases attendance and academic performance."
2. "Traffic gridlock, living near a school I.e. 100 yards but you are outside the catchment. Areas should overlap for 1 mile"
3. "The bus system does not serve the community and this needs to change before anything else does."
4. "This would mean an extra cost as free school travel does not exist in the city, to the best of my knowledge."
5. "Children on a 45 minute unfamiliar walk to Blatchington Mill or 1hr walk to Hove Park. Option B results in either Dorothy Stringer or Longhill, a 2 hour walk or a 1hr journey on two different buses."

### **3. Impact on Vulnerable Students**

The responses show deep concern about the disproportionate impact on vulnerable students, particularly those with SEND, anxiety, or other additional needs. Many parents emphasise that these students often require consistency and familiarity in their environment to thrive. There's significant worry that longer journeys and unfamiliar environments would create additional barriers to their education.

Parents of SEND children express particular concern that their specific needs haven't been adequately considered in the proposals. Many highlight how changes could affect children who may not have formal diagnoses or EHCPs but still require additional support. The potential disruption to established support networks and routines is seen as being distressing for these vulnerable students.

Supporting quotes:

1. "My child has autism and we believe it is imperative that he has the ability to travel to school where he has an older sibling."
2. "Children with SEND (with and without EHCPs) would be particularly affected by these proposals. Either due to journey type and time - any child who has sensory processing difficulties would find long journeys extremely dysregulating which would have a negative effect on learning and outcomes. Children with SEND who have social communication difficulties would find it very challenging to have friendship groups broken up."
3. "SEND children have been missed out on this whole discussion. Please slow down this process, delaying the changes by a year, to make sure that you're considering all disadvantaged groups."
4. "Children with protected characteristics should be prioritised with school choice, allowing them to find the right school, not forcing them to go for a choice of one school based on which side of a particular road they live on."
5. "Unlike in other neighbouring counties, there are very few options for SEND children from all social groups to access suitable education and thrive. The Hive is currently massively oversubscribed and parents need to fight to get the right education for their children... Unfortunately, Longhill is far from meeting the needs of SEND children."

### **4. School Improvement Alternative**

A significant number of responses suggest that rather than changing catchment areas, the focus should be on improving struggling schools. There's a strong feeling that redistributing students doesn't address the fundamental issues causing some schools to underperform. Many are suggesting increased funding, better resources, and targeted support for schools in challenging circumstances.

Responses frequently reference successful examples of school improvement in other areas, particularly London, where schools with high FSM percentages achieve excellent results. There's a clear call for investment in school quality rather than what many see as a "social engineering" approach through catchment changes.

Supporting quotes:

1. "The solution is to improve all schools, not forcing children who currently live near one of the better schools to have to travel long distances to attend one of the poorly performing schools."
2. "Invest in the education standards of the schools and stop gambling with children's education."
3. "How come they are schools in London with FSM rates of over 60% that are deemed excellent?? That just tells me BHCC are completely out of control and are not doing a good job with education."
4. "You should be giving greater support to those schools in less affluent areas. Using the free school meals percentage is a blunt tool which doesn't address the problem."
5. "Rather than changing admission arrangements, the council should prioritise allocating more resources to schools requiring improvement."

## **5. Student Wellbeing**

Mental health and overall wellbeing emerge as concerns in the responses. Parents frequently state that the proposed changes could negatively impact students' mental health through increased stress, isolation from friendship groups, and exhaustion from long commutes. There's particular concern about the impact on the current Year 5 cohort, who experienced significant disruption during COVID-19 and are seen as especially vulnerable.

Many highlight the connection between wellbeing and academic success, noting how tiredness from early starts and long journeys could affect learning outcomes. The importance of considering the holistic impact of any changes on children's wellbeing is mentioned, including maintaining established support networks and friendships for emotional stability, especially during the challenging transition to secondary school.

Supporting quotes:

1. "Children moving from Primary school to Secondary school under the council's proposal would risk being moved away from all of their friends, which will divide communities and prove harmful to children and their development."
2. "This cohort of children started school in September 2019, a few months before schools were closed due to the COVID pandemic. They have therefore already had their education severely disrupted."
3. "Not getting enough sleep, being tired and falling asleep in class, not being able to take part in extra curricular activities, not being set up to be good learners for the day."
4. "Anxiety is rife in our children post-covid and you risk exacerbating this."
5. "Children feel safe and nurtured in the communities they have grown up in, and their schools are the very fabric of their communities."

## **6. Process and Evidence Concerns**

There is criticism of the consultation process and the perceived lack of supporting evidence for the proposed changes. Many express concern about the speed of the process and question whether adequate impact assessments have been conducted. There are frequent appeals to wait for the results of recent FSM priority changes before implementing further modifications.

The quality and accessibility of the consultation materials, particularly the maps, receive significant criticism. Many responses highlight the need for more comprehensive data analysis and evidence-based decision-making, with a need for greater transparency about the expected outcomes of the proposed changes.

### **Supporting quotes:**

1. "The consultation has been rushed through without proper consultation with the local community... Please consider the below potential negative impacts of these proposals on issues including loss of sense of community."
2. "You have not provided enough information to comment. Please take the time to gather proper data on this before asking parents their views."
3. "This engagement exercise has been ill conceived, and the local communities have provided responses to demonstrate why. Listen to the community!"
4. "Wait for FSM data from the last change in admissions arrangements (Sept 2025) in order to evaluate what impact this has had."
5. "The approach taken for this consultation is also highly offensive to the people of Brighton. No evidence, unclear maps, poor advertisement of the consultation, rushed, misinformation and generally extraordinarily poorly managed."

## **7. Equity and Access**

The responses reveal complex and sometimes conflicting views about educational equity. Many acknowledge the need to address educational inequality in the city, but there's significant debate about whether the proposed catchment changes are the right solution. Some respondents support the goal of creating more socially mixed schools, while others argue that the proposals could create new forms of disadvantage.

A recurring concern is the impact on families who don't qualify for FSM but still struggle financially. Many highlight that the current FSM priority system already provides mechanisms for addressing inequality, and question whether catchment changes would bring additional benefits. Many are asking for a more nuanced approach to addressing educational inequality that considers multiple factors beyond FSM status.

### **Supporting quotes:**

1. "Those living in lower economic status areas are being given no choice of schools- limiting and uninclusive. Currently, if you live in a poor area you go to a poorly performing school and the circle continues. More flexibility and choice is necessary for school children to thrive."
2. "Why does everything have to be for children on free school meals, there are parents that can't get free school meals but are on low wages. These families are the ones that suffer."
3. "The current system traps those in the east of the city in a cycle of poor education. Changing the secondary school offering will give children across the city an opportunity for equal education. Just two examples of this are, those children in the West have access to

better secondary schools and the GP surgeries are less overrun, there are more quality community services. The impact of this is that the aspirations of children is higher."

4. "The current system allows some children only one choice which I believe is wrong. Brighton suffers from not having a secondary in every area. Those with the most money tend to buy in the catchment for 'better' schools and this from disadvantaged areas do not have same opportunities. We need to break educational inequality in the city."

5. "Currently children from East Brighton have no choice when it comes to secondary schools, and are forced to send their children to the only school in their catchment area, both of which require improvement according to their ofsted reports. Parents living in the more affluent areas of Hanover and Fiveways have a choice of better performing schools. This segregation does not appear to be fair and does not feel right in a progressive and diverse city like Brighton."

## **8. Practical Family Impact**

There are practical implications for families regarding logistics and financial impact, and many responses highlight the challenges for working parents managing different school locations, especially those with multiple children. There are concerns about the impact on family schedules, childcare arrangements, and work commitments.

Housing market implications are frequently mentioned, with concerns about property values and the ability of families to remain in their current communities. Many responses indicate that families might leave Brighton altogether if the changes are implemented, potentially affecting school populations further.

### Supporting quotes:

1. "We have a younger child just starting Balfour and always assumed we would have the eldest at DS or Vardean who would then collect the youngest and allow us to full time work and contribute to society."

2. "This will sever local ties to community and lower pupil engagement and attendance generally. This engagement exercise has been ill conceived and the local communities have provided responses to demonstrate why."

3. "Families whose children are not entitled to free school meals or have an echo plan who live a walkable distance to some secondary schools will be further disadvantaged by the proposed changes."

4. "You are just moving the problem from one area to another. All you are doing to turning families against each other and for that you should be ashamed."

5. "We live very close to two good secondary schools and feel very much part of this community. If he should be sent to a school 5 miles away, he would have to leave extremely early, sometimes in the dark and commute up to 3 hours a day."

## **9. Alternative Approaches Suggested**

The consultation responses include several alternative approaches to addressing educational inequality in the city. These suggestions generally advocate for a more comprehensive, systemic approach rather than focusing solely on catchment areas.

Respondents have proposed:

- improving underperforming schools through targeted investment,
- providing additional resources, and
- support for teaching quality and leadership.

There are suggestions for exploring alternative school models, including smaller school sizes, specialised schools, and upper/lower school splits.

Transportation and infrastructure solutions feature prominently, highlighting a need for improved school bus services and free transport for secondary students.

Many responses mention that a phased implementation approach is taken, waiting to see the impact of FSM priority changes before making further modifications. Different admission criteria approaches are suggested, including distance-based criteria similar to primary schools and points-based systems incorporating multiple factors.

Community-led solutions feature strongly in the responses, with calls for citizen assemblies and greater consultation with affected communities. There are also suggestions for housing and planning solutions to address underlying geographical inequalities, and proposals for enhanced cross-school collaboration and resource sharing.

1. Smaller schools are a good thing. Could there be a way for different schools to specialise in different things? Perhaps a school which is great for SEN & a school that is great for sciences & a school that is great for the arts & then children who are strong in these areas can also have a place regardless of where they live.
2. There needs to be citizen assembly type approach which represents different views and allows debate to take place before tabling options.
3. To me, the issue there is about town planning and the concentration of housing, rather than the school specifically. The council needs to try and create more balanced neighbourhoods.
4. I would allocate pupils on a distance based model in order to reduce the average distance travelled to school and maximise the amount of children who walk to school and all the health benefits that would entail, whilst at the same time setting aside quotas of places prioritised for children with SEND and also children in receipt of FSM (or if you can come up with a better way of identifying families that live in relative poverty then I would be all-ears).
5. Sharing of best practices between schools has a greater impact on learner achievement than tinkering with catchment areas.