



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:**  
**3 JUNE 2025**

**SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING AND ADMISSIONS**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**

**Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on the processes and work around school admissions and school organisation, the issues arising and anticipated trends.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. The Education Act 1996 places a statutory duty on local authorities to:
  - (a) Ensure a sufficient supply of school places with a view to securing diversity of provision and increasing opportunities for parental choice;
  - (b) Exercise its education functions with a view to promoting high standards;
3. The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (SSFA 1998) outlines through the associated School Admissions Code the statutory responsibilities on local authorities in terms of admissions and appeals.
4. On 7 November 2023, the Committee noted an update on the admissions service, including a full performance breakdown of the year's outcomes, service improvements and a consultation on the Council's Admissions Policy.
5. On 7 February 2025, the Cabinet approved a reduction to admissions numbers in two primary schools, two junior schools and one infant school. Leicestershire's School Admissions Policy and associated co-ordinated schemes were also reviewed and amended following a public consultation.

**Background**

6. Local authorities have a legal obligation under Section 14 of the Education Act 1996 to ensure that sufficient school places are available to provide primary and secondary education for children within the area. Effective school place planning is a fundamental element of the Local Authority's role as strategic commissioner of good school places across all phases and types of statutory education.
7. When planning for school places, local authorities must consider factors such as:

- Forecast pupil numbers;
- School capacity;
- Impact of housing growth;
- The need to promote diversity and increase parental choice.

8. To meet their statutory duty, local authorities can consider:

- Expanding existing schools;
- Building new schools;
- Working with maintained schools and academy trusts to ensure sufficient places;
- Reducing capacity through a reduction in published admission numbers or closure;
- Consider alternative solutions such as transporting children and reorganising existing schools.

9. The School Organisation Service delivers school places by following a three-step process to deliver places where needed:

- a) Analysis of the need for school places using a range of information to identify the number and location of places required;
- b) Working with internal and external stakeholders to develop the best possible solution to provide high quality school places;
- c) Commissioning providers to deliver additional school places.

10. The School Organisation Service provides support and advice to all education providers in Leicestershire, including maintained schools and Multi Academy Trusts (MATs), on matters related to the planning of school places. The School Organisation Service also works with second tier councils and housing developers to ensure that provision is made for additional school places in new developments and with several other Council services including property, legal, finance, growth and highways.

11. The School Organisation and Admissions services share information to achieve the right mix of school places in the right place and at the right time. This strength of this work is demonstrated in the number of children achieving a place at one of their preferred schools.

12. Since 2023, the improvement journey in School Admissions has been significant with a data-driven approach now embedded, resources allocated according to demand and the Synergy IT system now being embedded.

13. The Local Authority consulted on its Admissions Policy and associated co-ordinated schemes to increase the number of parental school preferences from three to five for entry autumn 2025. This was predicated on giving parents improved choice and diversity, whilst also allowing parents to maximise their opportunities of securing a school of their preference.

14. In 2023/24, the consultation sought to reduce the admission number at several schools in response to continued low births and infant class size compliance and, in

some instances, in response to deficit budgets. In 2024/25 there was again a proposal to reduce admissions numbers at five primary schools from entry 2026.

### Admissions phase transfer

15. School places are not automatically allocated in England, even when children are attending an attached pre-school or feeder school or have older siblings already attending. Parents or carers must apply for a school place.
16. The Local authority's statutory responsibilities are for the following phased rounds:
  - i) First time Admissions (FTA) – this is when children aged 4+ apply for a place in the Early Years Foundation Stage, **National Offer Date 16<sup>th</sup> April** (or next working day);
  - ii) Infant to Junior Transfers, **National Offer Date 16<sup>th</sup> April** (or next working day);
  - iii) Year 7 Secondary Transfers, **National Offer Date 1<sup>st</sup> March** (or next working day)

### Phase transfer preference allocations

#### 17. First Time Admissions

Year	2022	2023	2024	2025
<b>Preferred school:</b>	97.9%	98.9%	99.4%	<b>99.5%</b>
<b>Total applications</b>	7410	7169	7012	<b>7141</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> preference</b>	92.9%	94.2%	94.8%	<b>95.07%</b>
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> preference</b>	4.06%	3.7%	3.6%	<b>3.71%</b>
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> preference</b>	0.97%	1%	0.8%	<b>0.63%</b>
<b>4<sup>th</sup> preference</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	<b>0.08%</b>
<b>5<sup>th</sup> preference</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	<b>0.03%</b>
<b>Auto allocated</b>	2%	0.9%	0.9%	<b>0.48%</b>

*Table 1. Percentage of Successful First Time Admissions*

#### 18. Infant to Junior School Transfer

Year	Pupils Allocated	Pupils Refused	Total	Pupils Awarded First Preference
<b>2022</b>	435	0	435	100%
<b>2023</b>	423	1	424	99.76%
<b>2024</b>	421	0	421	100%
<b>2025`</b>	403	0	403	100%

*Table 2. Percentage of Successful Infant to Junior School Admissions*

## 19. Secondary Transfer

Year	2022	2023	2024	2025
<b>Preferred school</b>	92.8%	97.6%	98.2%	<b>98.3%</b>
<b>Total applications</b>	7918	7748	7640	<b>8261</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> preference</b>	84.7%	90.6%	91.1%	<b>90.96%</b>
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> preference</b>	6.5%	5.6%	5.8%	<b>5.87%</b>
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> preference</b>	1.6%	1.4%	1.4%	<b>1.28%</b>
<b>4<sup>th</sup> preference</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	<b>0.19%</b>
<b>5<sup>th</sup> preference</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	<b>0.01%</b>
<b>Auto allocated</b>	N/A	2.4%	1.8%	<b>1.69%</b>

*Table 3. Percentage of Successful Secondary Admissions*

### **Mid-term (in year) admissions**

20. Applications to other year groups not part of the phased rounds do not form part of the statutory obligation on the Local Authority to deliver. However, Leicestershire continues to offer a co-ordinated scheme on a traded basis to support parents seeking a school place outside the normal admissions round or part-way through an academic year.
21. Most schools in Leicestershire co-ordinate their admissions processes through the Local Authority which provides a 24/7 online application system, information for families, an all year round service that ensures parents' rights are upheld, and, where applicable, access to the appeals process.
22. This offers a seamless process for parents in securing a school place. For the Local Authority it ensures early identification of children who are refused a school place and allows it to make the parent aware of where vacancies exist at other local schools. The mid-term co-ordination scheme also plays a vital role in ensuring Children Missing Education (CME) are identified and supported back into education.

	2022	2023	2024
% completed in 15-day target	15%	67%	68.5%

*Table 4. Percentage of Mid-term Admissions Processed in 15 Days.*

23. At least two thirds of mid-term transfer applications are processed within 15 days in line with the School Admissions Code and the Admissions service is continually working to improve this figure. The reasons why those that are not processed within this timescale are understood for each case and are usually a result of either waiting for responses from parents or schools or the outcomes of the Fair Access Protocol.

### **Independent schools**

24. In July 2024 there were 12 independent schools located in Leicestershire; two of these schools designated as primary, three as secondary schools and the remaining seven as all through (4-18). In total, the 12 schools had a registered capacity of 7,005 places, with 5,945 pupils registered on roll. The Local Authority does not hold records of independent school placements and the children attending may or may not live within Leicestershire. Conversely, children resident in Leicestershire may attend independent provision in other areas.
25. Parents of children who leave independent schools and wish to take a place at a state-funded school are required to apply for a place, either through phase transfer or the mid-term process. To date, the number of children going through this process has not been high. All children have successfully gained places, although not always at their preferred schools. Other inflationary factors such as increased energy costs, employment costs and the application of business rates also make this market challenging to operate within. One independent school in Leicestershire and another in a neighbouring area have announced closure with effect from the end of the 2024/2025 school year. Both schools have Leicestershire children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) among their pupils (11 in total).

### **The context of Leicestershire schools**

26. Currently, 72% of schools in Leicestershire are academies. A summary of the 282 schools and academies can be seen below:

	<b><i>Maintained Schools</i></b>	<b><i>Academy Schools</i></b>
<b>Primary</b>	75	153
<b>Secondary</b>	0	46
<b>SEND</b>	3	5
<b>Total:</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>204</b>

*Table 5. Proportion of Schools and Academies in Leicestershire*

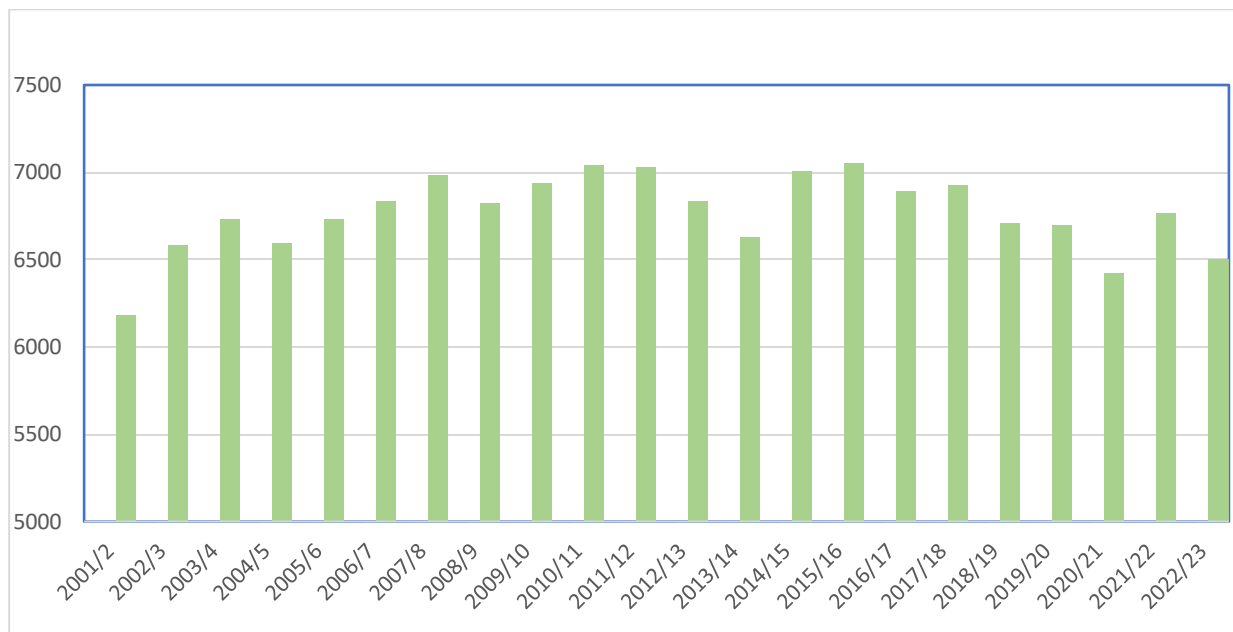
27. The number of schools converting to academy status has reduced in recent years. In 2024, five schools joined a Multi Academy Trust (MAT). In April 2025, four schools were undergoing this process.
28. In 2024, five Stand Alone Trusts (SATs) joined a MAT. In April 2025, four SATs were progressing with joining a MAT.

### **Pupil Forecasts**

29. Pupil forecasts identify future need and are used by the School Organisation Service to determine the quantity of additional school places needed. Forecasts are updated on an annual basis and include birth rate data from the Office of National Statistics, housing gains from developments that have secured planning permission and historical trends such as movement between school catchments.

30. There is a high level of accuracy in forecasting pupil numbers. The combined forecast for 2024 First Time Admissions and Junior National Curriculum Year 7 transfers was within 2% of the actual totals. This is important for schools' planning and in securing appropriate section 106 contributions from developers to create new school places.
31. The School Capacity (SCAP) return is submitted to the DfE on an annual basis. The forecasts submitted will determine the amount of Basic Need monies that the authority receives from the DfE to provide any additional pupil places required and which are not covered by section 106 monies received from developers. In 2024 this included SEND data for the first time.

### **Birth Rates**



*Figure 1. Live Births in Leicestershire, Office for National Statistics*

32. From 2007 to 2013 the birth rate increased to around 7,000 per year and has since returned to a more typical number, despite population growth. The larger cohorts, which have also increased as a result of inward migration, are now progressing through secondary schools and Post 16.
33. Smaller cohorts in the lower primary school year groups are presenting challenges around sustainable pupil numbers for some primary schools and academies, especially those in rural areas where birth rates are particularly low with no increase in numbers forecast. As school funding is predicated on pupil numbers and is largely spent on staffing, which has become more expensive, this presents some challenges for the Council in respect of maintained schools and for MATs in respect of academies.

### Primary school capacity

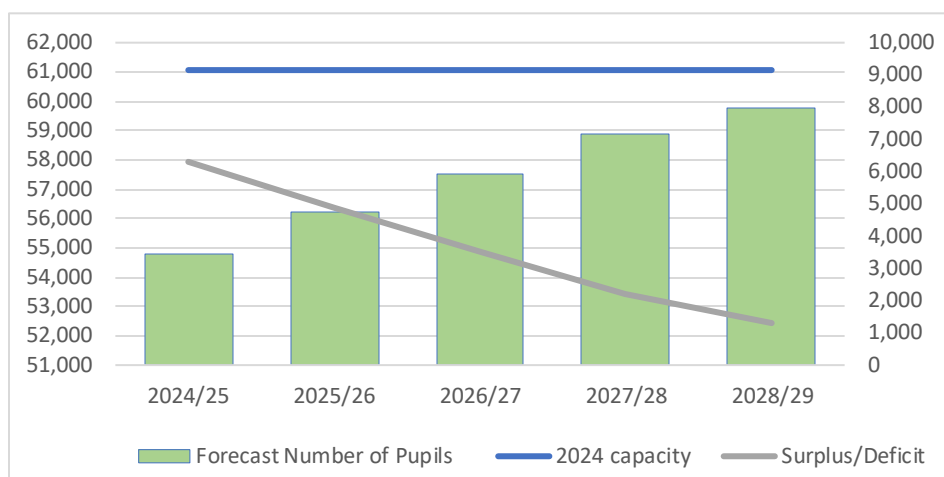


Figure 2. 2024 Primary DfE SCAP Forecast (Leicestershire)

34. The effect on primary school occupancy is inconsistent. Some schools in popular areas are oversubscribed, whereas some small primary schools in rural areas are significantly below capacity. Some maintained schools and academies have consulted to reduce their Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN) and/or reorganised classes to reduce staffing costs.

### Secondary school capacity

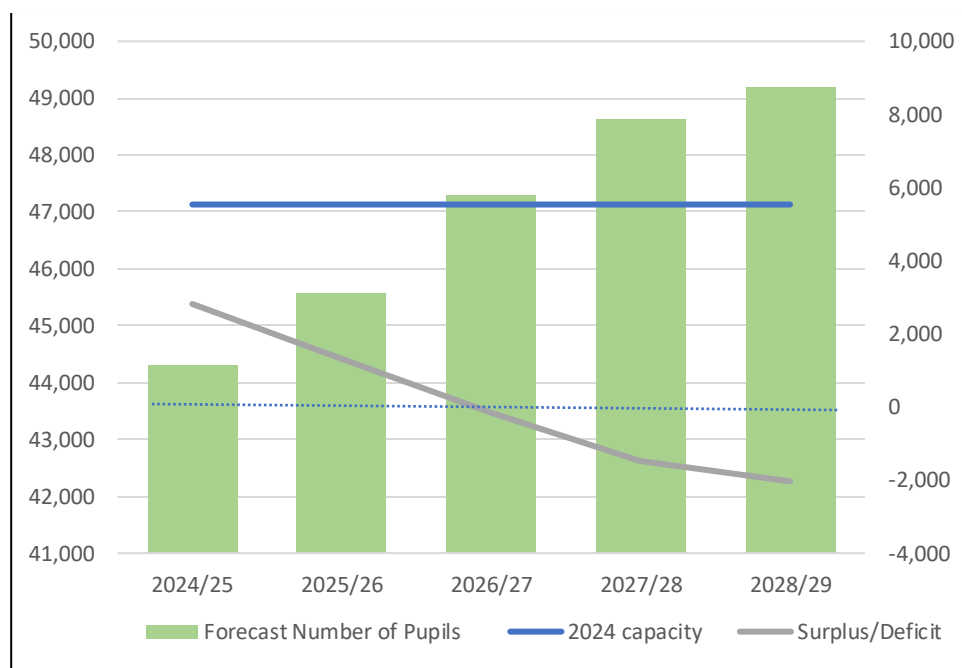
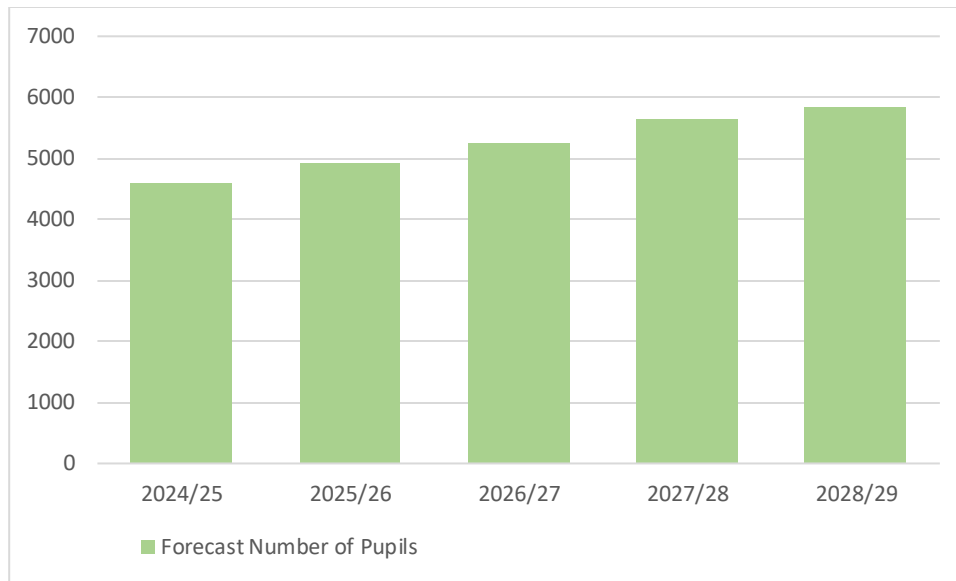


Figure 3. 2024 Secondary DfE SCAP Forecast (Leicestershire)

35. The graph shows a continued need to increase the number of places in secondary schools as a result of a combination of year groups with higher birth rates and inward migration including significant housing growth. A number of schemes to enlarge secondary schools are planned or in progress.

36. Although there is currently sufficient secondary places within the County, these are not evenly distributed which means that it can sometimes be challenging to find local places for mid-term applications.

### **Post 16 demand**



*Figure 4. Forecast Pupils in School Sixth Forms and Sixth Form Colleges (Leicestershire)*

37. The high demand at secondary is flowing through to Post 16. All Leicestershire school-based Post 16 providers are showing an increase in their forecast numbers with housing gains in some areas. At Post 16 students are more likely to attend provision that is not local, including FE colleges outside Leicestershire. A review of Leicestershire Post 16 provision is being undertaken.

### **DfE capital funding**

38. The Council receives Basic Need funding for the provision of additional mainstream school places. Allocations for the next two years are:
- 2026/27: £1,153,746
  - 2027/28: £731,805
39. In addition to delivering additional school places funding is also being used to meet maintained school safeguarding needs and adaptations through the Schools Access Initiative (SAI) to enable children with a disability to be able to attend their local school.

### **Section 106 funding**

40. Developer contributions or planning obligations are secured through legal deeds called S106 agreements or unilateral undertakings. Planning obligations contribute towards sustainable communities by enabling development to take place and mitigate the impacts of development to help make it acceptable in planning terms, including ensuring sufficient school places are available. Details of contributions secured are published in the County Council's Infrastructure Funding Statement



(IFS): <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/developer-contributions>.

41. The contributions received are allocated to projects that will either deliver new school places or allow for enhancements to be made to existing schools. Each Section 106 agreement specifies how funding can be used.
42. Rising costs, particularly within the construction sector, present significant challenges in the delivery of school schemes within the original Section 106 contribution funding agreed prior to recent cost increases.
43. Leicestershire's Planning Obligation Policy (LPOP) is currently under review and is likely to be adopted later this year following consultation this summer. The education section has been reviewed in line with the Department for Education's 2022 Securing Developer Contributions for Education guidance. The guidance reflects much of Leicestershire's current practice that we provided information on during the DfE consultation for the guidance. A significant change is that available capacity will not be discounted in schools at the point a statutory planning consultation response is submitted so a full claim for the pupils yielded by the development will be made. Historically some potential contributions were not received as a result of this.. Under the new policy, the available capacity will be assessed just prior to the housing development starting and then any available capacity will be discounted at that point. This mechanism will allow a more accurate and timelier request for funding to be made.
44. Some previous new school sites provided in signed Section 106 agreements have presented challenges to build on resulting in high abnormal construction costs. Land and building specifications have been revised and full due diligence is now undertaken to fully understand the quality of any site proposed. If high abnormal costs still result the cost will be passed on to the housing developer to meet.

### **Background papers**

45. Update on Admissions Service, Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 7 November 2023:  
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=7194&Ver=4>
46. Leicestershire's Policy on Admissions to Mainstream Schools: Determination of Admission Arrangements, Cabinet, 7 February 2025:  
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=7873&Ver=4>
47. School Admissions Code 2021:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-code--2>
48. Leicestershire's School Admissions Policy and associated co-ordinated schemes:  
<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/education-and-children/schools-colleges-and-academies/school-admissions/school-policies>

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

49. A copy of this report will be circulated to all members of the County Council.

**Equality Implications**

50. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken in respect of the changes of the Admissions Policy. No further equality implications have been identified.

**Human Rights Implications**

51. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

**Appendix**

Capital Programme

**Officer(s) to Contact**

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