

Wokingham Borough school place sufficiency analysis

October 2020

Introduction

This paper looks in depth at mainstream school place needs for the primary and secondary education phases. For each phase it considers the learning from the 2020 admissions round, the near future and the longer-term place sufficiency. Post 16 needs are considered separately to statutory school age provision. It considers the possible impacts of Covid-19 and changes to national planning policy. Finally, although detailed analysis of SEND needs and provision is outside of scope, it briefly sets out the key challenges for the SEND sector.

Summary

The primary phase has sufficient capacity to meet projected needs, albeit there is a need to ensure that additional provision is made available in Key Stage 2, and to ensure that places are available where they are required.

There were sufficient places to meet Reception place need in all planning areas in the 2020 admission round. One new school (Alder Grove CoE School) opened in Shinfield, and all places (and all those in other Shinfield area schools) were allocated on offer day. This undoubtedly reflects the impact of the ongoing build out of the South of the M4 (Shinfield) SDL.

The Borough's decision in 2010 to focus housing development in specific areas (the four SDLs) has led to growing demand for school places around the SDLs.

Meanwhile, other areas (including a number that were previously places of considerable pressure) have seen demand fall away (in line with regional population changes), and have a significant number of surplus places, in Key Stage 1. Earley, for example, has 58 unallocated Reception class places (12% of the area total).

In-year growth has led to there being too few Key Stage 2 places (Years 4 to 6) (albeit capacity exists in schools that have been expanded but have not yet opened classes in the age groups concerned). It is expected that schools will agree to open new classes, with financial support from the Council's Growth Fund.

The national population projections point to falling demand for primary schools, locally and regionally and nationally. However, national planning policy points to an increasing number of homes in the borough (dependent on the result of ongoing consultation). This would inevitably work to increase the number of children, albeit localised around the sites of the new housing developments. This indicates a need to continue to plan for the delivery of new school places in tandem with new housing development.

The secondary sector is seeing the impact of the bulge of primary school children currently in Key Stage 2. Consequently, on offer day 2020, only one school had surplus capacity and one school was allocated 25 pupils on top of its admission number. However, the number of allocations fell between offer day and the start of term, so that three schools have surplus capacity (albeit only 10 places each for two

of the schools). Available evidence indicates that withdrawal of children to the independent sector is the main factor in this reduction.

It is likely that additional Year 7 places will be required in the near future, not least because the only school that is likely to have significant numbers of surplus places, the Forest School, is a single sex boys school. Therefore additional co-educational places could become a priority, even though there are likely to be places at the Forest School.

Additional mid-phase places may be required in the next 7 years, but this is dependent on the number of children moving into the borough. The most problematic year (from the projection) will be 2025/26, when over 400 additional places will be required. However, the projection is not a forecast and there are a number of factors that could have an impact on outcomes. These include the impact of Covid-19 on migration into the borough and possible future changes in the numbers of children living outside the borough admitted to Wokingham Schools. A likely scenario is that additional Year 7 places will be required, but these will be provided in existing school accommodation.

It is expected that additional sixth form places will be required within the next 7 years (possibly as soon as 2022/23). The primary issue here is that Wokingham has two 11 to 16 schools, and in an expected situation where 11 to 16 school capacity is effectively deployed there will be too little capacity to absorb post 16 students from these schools. However, there are a number of ways in which this apparent need could be met, including through existing school offering additional places, local colleges expanding provision and one or both of the 11 to 16 schools opening sixth forms. It will be important to work with local stakeholders to identify the solution that provides the best balance of educational improvement, value for money, student preferences and (from a wider community perspective) helps minimise transport congestion and carbon footprint.

In the SEND sector the primary concern is that there is insufficient local, state sector provision. Two major projects (the expansion of Addington School and the new SEN school in Winnersh) are helping to redress this imbalance.

Primary

September 2020 admissions round (Reception places)

Offer day

This year, on offer day, 2,145 children were offered places in Wokingham Schools. There were 2,358 available places, so there were 213 unfilled places (9% of the available capacity).

All the Wokingham primary school planning areas had unfilled places, but the number of places varied greatly between areas.

The areas with significant numbers of unfilled places (10% and above) were:

- The South East (Wokingham Without and Finchampstead) had 45 places (19%).

- Wokingham Town East had 56 places (18%)
- Earley had 58 places (12%)
- The North had 27 places (10%)

The areas with relatively few unfilled places were:

- The South West (Shinfield, Arborfield, Swallowfield, Barkham) had 10 unfilled places (4%).
- Wokingham Town West (including Winnersh) had 12 unfilled places (3%).
- Woodley had 5 unfilled places (1%).

These are all areas with significant numbers of new homes (albeit the build programme in Woodley is largely complete). The South West included a new school (Alder Grove CoE School, in Shinfield).

Changes to September

By September 2020 the number of allocations had fallen by 18 (less than 1%). The most significant falls was in the North and South West – where (in the North) allocations fell by 10, a 4% decline, increasing the number of unfilled places to 37 (14% of capacity) and in the South West allocations fell by 9, a 3% decline, increasing the number of unfilled places to 19 (7%).

Conclusion

There are sufficient places in all planning areas to meet Reception place needs in 2020. Although the number of unfilled Reception places has increased, in recent years primary school phase cohorts (single year groups) have increased as they have aged. For example, the January 2020 Year 6 of 2,092 children on roll had increased from 1,987 in January 2014, when these children were in Reception classes (an increase of 105 or 5%). This would point to surplus capacity falling to around 5% or 125 places, over the next 7 years, if no action is taken to reduce capacity in the meantime. It is likely that significant growth will occur in areas with significant home building – and these are areas with the lowest levels of surplus capacity. This indicates there may be a need to open additional classes for this cohort in future, even though it is likely there will be sufficient capacity across the borough.

All primary year groups

Near future (up to 7 years)

Evidence indicates there will be continued pressure in areas of housing growth and in older primary cohorts (in particular in the cohorts that are in Years 4, 5 and 6, until these year groups have moved into the secondary sector by 2023/24).

Birth data (until 2018/19, starting school in 2023/24) shows a declining number of births at a borough level in the two years feeding into Reception intakes in 2021 and 2022. This reduction reflects regional and national population trends. However, 1,937 children were born in the borough in 2018/19, effectively equalling the number of child born in each of the three years between September 2009 and August 2012 (the previous peak birth period) (it is too early to know if this change has been seen in other areas). The distribution of these recent births is though very different to the

earlier period. Comparing 2015/16 births (starting school 2020) to 2018/19 births (starting school 2023):

- Strong growth is seen in the South West (increase of 89 births).
- Wokingham Town and Winnersh, and Woodley show moderate growth (increases of 16 and 7).
- The South East and the North show moderate falls (4 and 22 respectively).
- Earley birth numbers fall consistently (by 54, over this period).
- Birth numbers are generally erratic though, with great variance between years. At a borough level, considering births that will feed into Reception intakes over the next three years, births fall by 5%, then 4% before recovering with 12% growth (200 up on the previous year).

Roll projections

Academic year	Year R*	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Total Surplus capacity	%ge surplus Reception places	
2020/21	161	224	147	108	-4	9	68	712	7%	
2021/22	265	116	190	145	75	-15	-11	765	11%	
2022/23	339	220	79	186	114	64	-35	967	14%	
2023/24	77	295	186	73	155	103	45	933	3%	
2024/25	77	29	262	181	40	146	84	818	3%	
2025/26	77	29		-8	255	149	30	158	691	3%
2026/27	77	29		-8	-16	224	140	11	458	3%

Table 1 Derived from the most recent (2020) primary phase roll projection, and shows the balance of need and available places (positive figures are available or surplus places, negative numbers are a shortfall in capacity).

It shows there is likely to be sufficient capacity in the primary sector, but pressures over the next three years in Years 4 to 5. It is important to note though that this based on available places, a number of expanding schools have classrooms that could accommodate new classes to resolve this issue (albeit the places may not be in the best locations to meet mid-phase needs).

While at a borough level (current Key Stage 2 issues aside) there is sufficient capacity, the situation is more varied at a local level. As noted above the growth shown from 2023 onwards reflects a rise in the number of births in 2018/19 and this is focused on development areas (and the South West in particular). The projection uses the last available year's birth data for projections for year groups born from the 2019/20 year onwards, so Reception intakes from 2024/25 onwards do not have a basis in collected data. Although it is likely there would be sufficient places across the borough at this point, they would not all be reasonably accessible to children living in these communities. However, current new school schemes completed and in development, would reasonably be expected to provide sufficient capacity in the two main areas of growth (in the South West planning area and, albeit with less well evidenced need, in the Wokingham Town / Winnersh area). These schemes are:

- Arborfield Garrison SDL – new primary school (30 Reception places / 210 capacity in addition to the 30 Reception places expected to be used by the relocated Farley Hill, with reserve places at the current Farley Hill site)
- Alder Grove CoE Primary (Shinfield) – newly opened primary school (30 Reception places / 210 capacity in addition to the capacity used in 2020)
- Matthews Green Primary - 30 Reception places / 210 capacity

In addition it is likely that capacity will be available within walking distance of some Arborfield SDL homes in Finchampstead. For families in many of these homes two of the Finchampstead schools will be as close as the Coombes CoE school in Arborfield Cross, which has historically been one of two schools serving the garrison area.

Three further SDL new school sites are also likely to be available:

- Arborfield SDL 2nd school (dependent on the completion of infrastructure)
- Spencers Wood (available with notice)
- South Wokingham 2nd school (subject to planning consent and delivery of infrastructure)

These sites are not expected to be required in this time-frame, though.

Longer term

The current (2018 base) Office for National Statistics (ONS) population projection does not point to a need for additional capacity. The numbers of children in the primary education phase are projected to decline for the next decade:

2020 – 13,400 children

2025 – 12,300 children

2030 – 11,300 children

However, these figures do not take account of the impact of all the house building planned and in progress in the borough.

The ONS population projection (through the ONS Household Projection) sits behind a major part of the calculation of housing need (through a national model) in the borough. The ONS Household Projections show an annual increase (average 676 households per year for the 5 years until 2025 and 554 per year for the next 5 years) until the end of the projection period (2043). However, much of the increase is in the number of older households (judged by the age of the Household Reference Person, the replacement for “Head of Household”), with very little increase in the number of household with Reference persons aged up to 55, and significant increase in those with a Reference person aged 55+. This growth reflects households aging, rather than older households migrating into the borough. This helps explains why the overall household projection shows a consistent increase (circa 1% per year), but the number of projected children (in some age ranges, including primary school aged children) can fall. Note that although the number of younger households remains (relatively) constant, additional housing is required (in this part of the calculation of housing need) because there are insufficient homes released by older households to

maintain the current level of younger households moving to or being formed in the borough.

Age of Household Reference Person	2020	2025	2030
25 to 54	33,826	34,352	34,387
55+	31,953	35,156	37,988
Change 25 to 54, 2020 to 2025		525	36
%ge change		2%	0.1%
Change 55+, 2020 to 2025		3,203	2,832
%ge change		10%	8%

Table 2: Figures are the total projected number of households from the ONS 2018 base household projections, grouped by age of Reference Person.

However, homes are currently being built at a rate that greatly exceeds the number required to match the projected growth in the number of households. For 2020/21 and 2021/22 it is expected that over 1,200 homes will be built each year, and the average for the 5 years up to 2025/26 is 794 per year. In part this reflects an additional component for affordability in the national method of calculating housing need and also that developers are building out “banked” consents.

Survey data points to households in new developments having higher numbers of children per home than are seen in established developments. It is a reasonable expectation therefore that housing above the number of homes required to match the rising number of households will lead to additional children above the level in the current projection. Therefore, while house building rates are high, the number of children resident in the borough can be expected to be above the ONS population projection level. These additional arrivals will be reflected in population projections in future years, increasing the future numbers of projected households too.

Moreover, the government is consulting on changes to national planning policy that would enable developers to significantly increase the number of houses to be built in the Borough (to circa 1,600 homes p.a.). This would point to a population growth above the current ONS projections (and above the likely additional population growth, reflecting current actual housebuilding rates). This points to increased numbers of children requiring primary school places, at least in the areas where development takes place.

These proposed changes to national policy are though, subject to the outcome of an ongoing consultation process, which may lead to significant amendments. This council has submitted strong objections to the government proposals, as have other councils and bodies. Longer term place needs and plans can only be understood and developed once the national proposals have been decided on.

Secondary (11 to 16 and 16+)

September 2020 admissions round (Year 7 places)

Offer day

This year, on offer day, 2,134 offers were made for Wokingham Schools. There were 2,173 places available, leaving a balance of 39 places. However, while 8 of the borough's 10 schools were oversubscribed, the Forest and Emmbrook Schools were undersubscribed, and 112 "divert" (children who could not be offered a preferred school) offers were made to these schools. However, because Forest is a single sex boy's school only 71 "divert" offers could be made to that school (leading to 146 allocations against a capacity of 210 places) and 41 "divert" offers were made to the co-educational Emmbrook School, so that school was allocated 25 children on top of its published admission number.

Changes to September

In contrast to the primary allocations, the secondary allocations changed markedly between offer day and September 2020. The number of students allocated to Wokingham schools has fallen by 113 (or 5%), leaving 154 unfilled places (or 7% of capacity). Although there has been churn across all schools, the reduction has led to three schools having surplus capacity, rather than two. Waingels College had 10 unfilled places, creating some capacity for late applicants and mid-phase arrivals in the north of the Borough. In the south, the numbers allocated to Emmbrook and Forest Schools fell by 38 and 66 respectively, leaving the schools with initial rolls of approximately 200 and 80.

A major cause of the fall in numbers (77 children) is parents withdrawing children to independent education after offer day. There are a significant number of children (154) also withdrawn, but where no future education destination is recorded. It is likely these include a number of children who have also been withdrawn to independent education. Against these reductions, the released capacity enabled 42 children living out of borough to be allocated preferred Wokingham school places.

Conclusion

The 154 unfilled places apparently creates a significant cushion against any future growth in the secondary sector. However, 132 of these places are for boys, and the remaining 22 places cannot be reserved for girls. If the number of pupils in this cohort grows it may be necessary to agree additional places (probably with a co-educational school).

The reduction in the number of applicants between offer day and start of the new school year presents a particular challenge to place planning. As can be seen the reduction led to a position where there is a 7% cushion. However, this is largely concentrated in one school, (less than 1.5 miles from one of the other two schools with surplus capacity, (albeit both in a central position in the borough) and there are very few places for girls. As importantly, the reduction only occurs if parents withdraw their children to the independent sector. While the risk that this withdrawal might not occur in future is clearly a vulnerability, the independent sector has been resilient even through past periods of economic challenge, so it is likely this is a low order risk.

All secondary phase year groups (11 to 16 focus)

Near future

Academic year	7	8	9	10	11	Sixth form	%ge Y7 places surplus	%ge NC surplus
2019/20	126	184	281	393	526	210	4%	16%
2020/21	168	79	184	293	400	191	6%	13%
2021/22	45	125	40	187	311	78	0%	10%
2022/23	-46	1	88	43	205	-47	-5%	7%
2023/24	-90	-94	-38	90	63	-162	-7%	4%
2024/25	-59	-139	-135	-35	109	-307	-5%	2%
2025/26	-7	-104	-181	-131	-14	-360	-3%	0%
2026/27	48	-52	-145	-177	-108	-408	0%	0%

Table 3: Surplus (unfilled) places and place deficits by academic year and school year group to 2026/27.

The projections show a shortfall in Year 7 places (peaking in 2023/24) up until 2025/26, with a maximum total deficit of 440 Years 7 to 11 places in 2025/26. From 2026/27 onwards the statutory school age roll numbers begin to fall back indicating that this increase in demand is a bulge, that does not generate a requirement for additional permanent Years 7 to 11 capacity. While the projection shows a deficit in sixth form provision starting in 2022/23, then increasing over this period,

Note here that secondary projections are a guide and a starting point for planning, but have significant limitations that mean they cannot be used as a definitive forecast of future need. Key issues that are likely to lead to a variation from the projections above include:

- a) The projections are “pre-Covid”, so have not taken account of the impact of Covid-19 on the housing market to date. Both new home building and older homes sales were depressed in the first half of the calendar year, and this is likely to have an impact this year on the number of families moving into the borough. Wokingham Borough has historically seen increased numbers of children on school rolls (particularly in primary and early years age groups) because of migration into the borough. Note that in the table above deficits grow as cohorts age (e.g. the Year 8 deficit in 2023/24 is twice the Year 7 deficit in 2022/23). This can only be because of recent roll growth in year, understood to be the result of migration led population growth. If this growth is constrained by Covid-19 in future years, the actual growth (if any) will be less than seen in the recent past.
- b) School capacity measures are imperfect. The formal Net Capacity assessment is only applicable in law to maintained schools, and eight of the borough’s secondary schools are now Academies. As schools complete building works the older assessments become less reliable. The Years 7 to 11 assessment above is based on current school admission numbers. The sixth form capacity assessment is based on two assumptions: that schools with smaller sixth forms could provide larger sixth forms than they currently operate (200 places each), that larger school sixth forms are the greater of the current roll or the sixth form capacity based on the net capacity assessment.

This creates a total 6th form capacity that is 12% greater than the sixth form capacity based on the recorded net capacity assessments (and a total capacity that is 2% greater than the current recorded net capacity).

- c) Projections take account of both children from out of borough going onto the rolls of Wokingham schools and Wokingham children attending out of borough schools. These are not straight swaps. Some reflect long established arrangements (with Bulmershe and Maiden Erlegh Schools serving parts of the Reading area and Edgbarrow School in Bracknell Forest serving part of the Wokingham Without Parish area). Other movements reflect such matters as (a) the popularity of individual schools with communities outside their established school admissions Designated Areas and (b) Wokingham children being allocated selective places at schools in Reading and Slough. Rising demand for places for Wokingham resident children may lead to a falling number of children admitted to Wokingham Schools from outside the borough, particularly where children live outside established school admissions Designated Areas. Conversely, Wokingham children going to out of borough may have different constraints and may continue to be able to

At least initially, Year 7 pressures can be accommodated in existing schools, and probably in their current accommodation. Already, as explained above, over allocation has been used to ensure all “on time” applicants receive an offer, but with the expectation that allocations will fall away before the start of term. Given the numbers of children coming through from the primary sector, it is likely that some of these additional allocations will “stick” and Year 7 rolls at some schools will increase above planned admission numbers. It is expected that these will be schools with rolls below current capacity, so they will be able to absorb additional children without requiring additional capital spend.

Post 16

The table in the section above shows a growing deficit in sixth form places from 2022/23. This is largely due to the combined effect of rising 11 to 16 rolls and the fact that two schools do not have sixth forms. As noted above the underlying projection is not a forecast and outcomes may vary for a variety of reasons. However, the scale of the deficit from 2024/25 indicates there is likely to be a significant challenge from this point onwards.

However, post 16 students are more mobile and have a greater range of alternative provision, compared to children of statutory school age.

Wokingham School sixth forms are generally academic rather than vocational focus, with specific GCSE grades as entry requirements. Therefore, a significant number of students leave school at age sixteen to take vocational courses in nearby colleges (e.g. in Reading and Bracknell). Other students leave schools to take academic courses (A levels) at local sixth form and other colleges (e.g. in Farnborough and Henley, in addition to Reading and Bracknell).

The projection takes account of this movement out of schools, by applying the recent transition rates between Years 11 and 12 (and also Years 12 and 13) to future projected Year 11 (and Year 12) rolls.

The projected shortfall could be resolved in a number of ways:

- Existing Wokingham School sixth forms grow to match demand.
- A Wokingham 11 to 16 school (or both) establishes a sixth form.
- Local colleges increase their capacity.

While the Council has some leverage here (particularly if new accommodation is required at a Wokingham school) but the Colleges are popular, independent and act without reference to this local authority. Schools as Academies can also act independently, but capital funding sources are more limited (with local authorities holding the expansion budgets).

The Council will need to explore options with all partners. Key issues will include:

- How to raise standards – in particular to how to move an increased proportion of Wokingham students onto “Level 3” courses – such as A levels and the new T levels.
- Value for money- how to ensure that post 16 courses can be delivered within post-16 funding limits (and without subsidy from 11 to 16 budget allocations).
- Student preferences.
- Traffic congestion and carbon footprint impacts of students movements.
- Fit with SEND post-16 needs.

Longer term

The current (2018 base) Office for National Statistics (ONS) population projection does not point to a need for additional permanent capacity. The numbers of children in the statutory secondary education phase are projected to increase until 2024, after which they decline to the 2020 level in 2030, and then continue to decline until the end of the projection period (2043) (albeit the rate of decline decreases until the population is effectively steady from 2039):

2020 – 10,684 children

2025 – 11,432 children

2030 – 10,583 children

The number of children in the two post 16 years are expected to follow a similar pattern, albeit with the peak delayed until 2028 (and declining to 3,086 by 2043).

2020 – 4,158 children

2025 – 4,696 children

2030 – 4,628 children

As noted in the primary section in the longer term the rate of housebuilding above the level required to meet “need” is likely to (a) increase the number of resident children over the ONS population projection and (b) lead to an increased “need” figure in future (that part derived from the ONS household projections). The degree of impact will vary according to the number of homes that developers build from the increased total generated by any new formula. What will be crucial will be the actual

number of homes generated by the formula though, as recent experience has been that developers can build and sell at high volumes in the Wokingham area.

SEND

This paper is primarily focused on mainstream need, so only an outline of the position for children and young people with SEND is given. The numbers of children and young people requiring specialist SEND provision will be partly dependent on the overall population trends. However, it has been apparent that the number of children and young people with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPS) has increased at a faster rate than the population as a whole. Much of this increase has though, been in the number of students 18+ with EHCPS (the predecessor Statements of Special Education Need were only issued until age 18). Looking at needs, the number of children and young people with EHCPS for autism and social, emotional and mental health (ASD and SEMH) difficulties has been growing at a significant rate. Most of these children and young people will be educated in mainstream schools and college, but a proportion (about 1/3) will be educated in specialist settings (Resource Bases, Special Schools and specialist post 16 institutions). There is no requirement (or expectation) that the specialist provision places will all be in the borough, or even in a state sector school (although most of Wokingham's EHCPS naming specialist settings, are for the borough's own resource bases and special schools). The critical challenge here is not availability but cost. The Independent Special Schools educate a small proportion of the total number of children with EHCPS, but have a disproportionately large proportion of the total SEND budget, and the cost of transport to these out of borough settings is again, disproportionate to the number of students requiring transport.

Wokingham has been working to increase the supply of local, state sector provision by expanding the Ofsted "Outstanding" Addington Special School in Woodley and partnering with Reading BC and the DfE to create a new ASD / SEM school in Winnersh. Additional provision may be required, following an in depth review of needs.

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