

Response to questions raised at Schools Forum on 17 March 2021

1. A formal response regarding why we have found ourselves in this position with admissions, the week before the national offer day, when a primary bulge has been noted by Piers Brunning in the last academic year and this.

The exact number of places required cannot be known until shortly before offer day. When the position was known we contacted a number of schools and reached agreement with them to secure additional offers. This is distinct from the total number of places we expect to require by September, as we reasonably expect the total number of allocations to reduce, as they normally do. As we move away from our Covid 19 focus, we expect to get back into a business as usual mode, with our normal focus on multi-year strategies and delivery plans.

2. For transparency, an explanation of the decision making around as to which schools and why were requested to take additional students when not all schools were full.

The only school that was not full was the Forest School. Our problem was finding places for girls, and the Forest School could not assist here.

3. Please can the LA confirm that they met their statutory deadline of EHCP placement, if not, please can the LA confirm that all EHCP in year 6 have now been placed for September 2021?

According to our phased transfer tracker spreadsheet we have 15 primary school children we have been unable to name a setting and finalised EHCPs for these pupils naming a “type” to meet statutory deadline – 15th Feb 2021. The officers are actively working to secure a placement for September 2021 as they continue with searches and consulting with settings. It is important to note that the most common reason for placement having not been secured yet for most of these children is because it has been determined by the LA or recommendations from existing settings that specialist support is required at secondary. When this occurs the LA has to follow due process in considering the change of type in Section I of the EHCP which has caused delay. In addition there is a growing increase in parents wanting a more specialist setting for children where needs have been met in mainstream up until now. The team report that there have also been concerns where a number of mainstream schools are consulted, responses come back stating that they cannot meet needs and yet we have been able to secure a placement in a mainstream.

4. It is critical that schools understand the population data in order to financially plan, as we know financial planning impacts everything. Without the regular consultation of an Admissions group there has been a general lack of information and therefore lack of working in partnership. Please can the LA provide the Primary admissions data as soon as possible in order to support schools budget planning going forward and assure that the sharing of data will be one of its tops priorities going forward.

While the 2020 projections can be shared, we recommend waiting for the 2021 projections and the secondary strategy. The 2021 projections take account of the 2021 roll data (reflecting the impact of the year of Covid) and the strategy will look at wider factors, including likely housing growth.

5. Sadly, the local media seem to be inferring that Academies are to blame for the current admission issues. Obviously the LA are not responsible for media coverage however, please can schools be reassured that Elected Members have been brief accurately.

Some of the issues that have been raised are not matters that we have a direct say in, particularly where these relate to admissions to schools and admissions policies. This is a matter of national policy and it is inevitable that public discussion will reflect the division in responsibilities. We have been clear with Elected Members, that whilst the LA administers the arrangements on behalf of many Wokingham Academies, these arrangements/policies are not of themselves the cause of the challenges experienced on National Offer Day.

6. Please can the LA explain why Wokingham choose to delay the sharing of names and contact details of students immediately after National Offer Day.

Unfortunately, the technology we currently use, with its limited functionality and capacity within the team, does not allow this to happen sooner than the prescribed timelines or twice within a month. We are currently looking into some different software which could potentially resolve this issue, and should this be implemented, we will contact all schools to let them know how to navigate and utilise the new system