

Bristol Schools Forum
School Places

Date of meeting:	Tuesday 29 th March 2022
Time of meeting:	5.00 pm
Venue:	Virtual Meeting

1. Purpose of report

1.1 To update Schools Forum on school place planning across Bristol.

2. Recommendation

2.1 That Schools Forum note the contents of this report.

3. Summary

3.1 The city continues to experience rising in demand for secondary school places. A significant amount of work has already been undertaken to ensure all pupils continue to be offered a school place. Delays to the delivery of a new free school means further temporary places are required for September 2022 and possibly 2023.

3.2 Offers of places at secondary schools were made on 1st March 2022. 4,549 places were offered in Bristol schools, with 93% receiving an offer of a school named as a preference and 77% receiving an offer for their 1st preference school.

3.3 Numbers of pupils requiring a place in Reception continues to fall, offers of places for Reception in September will be made on 19th April.

3.4 Although good progress is being made, providing suitable and sufficient Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) places remains a major challenge.

3.5 The increased numbers of pupils entering secondary schools will begin to impact on demand for post-16 places.

3.6 A 10 Year Strategy is currently being developed to cover all areas of provision though the continuing uncertainty around secondary places makes this aspect more complicated.

4. Context

4.1 Bristol has previously seen a dramatic rise in primary school pupil numbers. Reception admissions peaked in 2016 and since then numbers have continued to fall, mainly due to falling birth rates.

4.2 These higher primary school numbers have been impacting on secondary schools for a number of years. Many schools have already been expanded and other schools are taking more pupils than their Published Admissions Number (PAN). Taking more pupils than the

capacity is not sustainable in the longer term, without significant capital investment.

- 4.3 The planned development of a secondary free school at Temple Quarter continues to experience serious delays and will not be opening in temporary accommodation for September 2022. The school is part of a wider planning application which was subject to a Public Inquiry. A decision from the Secretary of State is expected in early May and there remains a possibility that the application may not achieve consent.
- 4.4 The DfE has previously confirmed that it can only pursue opening the new school in temporary accommodation once there is certainty of delivery for the permanent scheme and planning permission has been secured. If planning is granted soon, the earliest any temporary accommodation could be available is September 2023, this would slip to 2024 with any further delays.
- 4.5 The Oasis Academy South Bristol is planned to open on a temporary site in September 2023, with the new build school on Daventry Road due for completion the following year. This will provide up to 6 additional forms of entry (180 places per year).
- 4.6 It should be noted that the current economic conditions around the construction industry generally mean that project costs and timescales are being significantly affected. Prices have risen considerably and many projects are experiencing delays due to the impacts of COVID and Brexit. The current rise in energy prices and war in Ukraine will have an additional impact.
- 4.7 Although BCC is not the responsible body for the development or opening of new free schools, it does retain the statutory duty to provide sufficient school places and continuing to offer all pupils places has been very challenging. Academy Trusts and individual schools have played a major role in supporting the LA by agreeing to admit additional pupils to meet the shortfall caused by delays to the free school projects.
- 4.8 Having already admitted over PAN for a number of years and/or already being at capacity there has been a need to make capital investments in a number of schools. These projects have focussed on ensuring there is sufficient space for both learning, particularly specialist spaces such as science, and other activities such as dining to minimise the impact on the pupils' experience.
- 4.9 In January, Cabinet approved £6m for capital projects to support admissions in September 2022. It should be noted that the price rises and workforce availability issues mentioned above will also have an impact on these projects.
- 4.10 A number of the schools where additional places are required to meet the shortfall caused by delays to the Temple Quarter project are PFI schools. The financial model is complex and there are significant revenue costs as well as legal processes to complete for these schools to accommodate pupils in excess of the PFI contract figure. These factors are already affecting the timescales for delivery of the planned capital projects.
- 4.11 Although sufficient spaces have been created to offer all pupils a place at secondary school transfer there is very little space within secondary schools across the city. There are whole areas of the city without places in some year groups. This has impacted on the in-year admissions with an increase in school appeals and placements through 'Fair Access' arrangements, putting these systems under increasing strain. There will be very few available places in any year groups for pupils moving into the city or requiring a change of school.

Where pupils are offered places in schools that are not preferences and/or are some distance from home can affect behaviour and attendance. This can then result in increasing demand for SEND and Alternative Learning Provision.

4.12 Following a peak in 2016, numbers requiring places at primary schools continue to fall and places will need to be managed to avoid large numbers of empty places. Willow Park School was opened in September 2021 to replace St Michael's and St George C of E Primary Schools, reducing excess capacity in the city centre. St Pius X Schools was closed in August 2021, reducing places in the south of the city.

4.13 Additionally, a number of schools have already reduced their PAN and others are considering this. Officers continue to work with schools to manage the places. The places are not removed permanently but makes it easier for the schools to plan staffing levels with more certainty. Alternative uses of any empty space needs to be considered, including for SEND provision, id appropriate.

4.14 There are no indications that the falling birth rate will rise in the foreseeable future and the delivery of new homes, particularly in south Bristol, has been slower than anticipated and is not yet impacting on demand for primary school places.

4.15 Pupil projections are prepared annually for the DFE School Capacity Survey. These projections are used to allocate capital funding ('Basic Need') and also contribute towards decisions to approve the opening of new 'Free Schools'. Basic Need allocations are likely to remain for single years, making long term capital finance planning very difficult. The allocations relate purely to mainstream places and there is no direct equivalent source of capital funding for SEND provision.

4.16 Birth rates are the main factor used in the pupil projection, with factors such as the effect of new housing and historical trends of gain/loss as pupils move through the school years being incorporated. The projections also take account of net 'loss' of pupils to schools in neighbouring local authority areas and the numbers of pupils opting for independent schools.

4.17 Year 7 pupil projections and capacities within PANs are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Year 7 pupil forecasts and capacity 2021 - 2025

Year	2021 Oct Census and Projections	Year 7 Capacity
2021/22	4,421	4,269
2022/23	4,612	4,276
2023/24	4,672	4,276
2024/25	4,684	4,276
2025/26	4,527	4,276

Oasis Temple Quarter and South Bristol not included.

4.18 Actual numbers in Year 7 in October were lower than those previously forecast. This is at least partly due to the availability of places restricting the numbers starting at schools. This will also mean that when projections are revised in the summer, they are likely to be slightly lower than those shown above.

4.19 Demand for secondary places is projected to start to fall after 2024, in line with primary school numbers. Demand in north continues to be in excess of places for some time. If both new free

schools (Oasis Academy Temple Quarter and Oasis Academy South Bristol) are opened it is unlikely that further additional secondary places will be required in east and south in the medium to longer term.

4.20 Planning for secondary school place requirements is carried out using 3 geographical Planning Areas. Primary forecasts use 14 areas, each made up of a number of council wards. To ensure comparability with other LAs these areas comply with DfE guidance and can only be changed with the Department's permission. Pupil projections for each area are included in **Appendices 1 and 2**.

4.21 Reception pupil projections and capacities within PANs are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Reception Year pupil forecasts and capacity 2021 - 2025

Year	2021 Oct Census and Projections	Reception Capacity
2021/22	4,943	5,746
2022/23	4,989	5,596
2023/24	4,798	5,536
2024/25	4,612	5,536
2024/25	4,480	5,536

4.22 Reception admissions peaked in 2016 when 5,581 children started school. Although there is variation some years (there was a small increase in applications for 2020 for instance) the long term forecasts indicate that, without a change to birth rates, demand will continue to fall.

4.23 There has also been a rise in demand for specialist provision with a large increase in the number of Education and Health Care Plans. The rise is significantly above that which would be expected from the rise in the general school population. Existing specialist provision across the city is at or very close to capacity and will require substantial capital investment.

4.24 In the October 2022 Census there were 1,211 pupils in Bristol special schools, compared to 1,119 in October 2021.

4.25 Significant progress has been made to increase SEND provision. The majority of these new places will be available from September 2022 onwards.

4.26 There is no direct 'Basic Need' capital grant funding for SEND places. The DfE have announced further capital for SEND places. It is not yet known how this will be distributed. Previous funding has been allocated based on overall pupil numbers with every LA receiving a relatively small amount rather than a bidding system to target funding.

4.27 Demand for places post-16 is forecast to rise in line with secondary school numbers. The current Year 11 has approximately 3,666 pupils, compared to around 4,421 for Year 7. The current projection only takes account of pupils registered in school sixth forms in Bristol and does not include pupils attending CLF post-16 provision, City of Bristol College or St Brendan's College. The projections below may be higher than actual numbers as place availability in the more popular provisions is restricted and students unable to gain a place choose to attend a college provision rather than smaller school sixth forms.

4.28 Projections for School Post-16 are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 2: School Sixth Form pupil forecasts and capacity 2021 - 2025

Year	2021 Oct Census and Projections	Year 12 & 13 Capacity
2021/22	2,876	2,700
2022/23	3,048	2,700
2023/24	3,302	2,700
2024/25	3,381	2,700
2024/25	3,430	2,700

4.29 Post-16 numbers vary considerably with many sixth forms operating well above the notional capacity, with more flexibility of timetabling and others well below capacity.

4.30 Trinity Academy will have a sixth form in future and plans for Oasis Academy Temple Quarter also include sixth form provision. Although there is more flexibility with accommodating post-16 pupils, some additional capacity will eventually be needed.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There will continue to be a requirement for the Growth Fund for the foreseeable future. Most primary schools have now completed their growth and do not require further funding but the funding requirement for additional secondary school places is rising. Delays or variations to actual pupil demand will affect the funding required.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Primary School Pupil Forecasts

Appendix 2: Secondary School Pupil Forecasts