

**CABINET  
6 FEBRUARY 2024**

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**SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS 2025/26**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member -  
Councillor Nick Wallis, Children and Young People Portfolio**

**Responsible Director -  
James Stroyan, Group Director of People**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek Members' approval for the Local Authority's admission arrangements for the 2025/2026 academic year for maintained schools in the Borough.

**Summary**

2. In line with the School Admissions Code 2021, an Admission Authority is required to annually determine the admission arrangements used to allocate places for schools for which it is the admission authority by 28 February in the determination year - **Appendix A**.

**Recommendation**

3. It is recommended that Members approve the admission arrangements for the two maintained primary schools in Darlington for entry in 2025-2026 and for the administration of in-year applications thereafter.

**Reasons**

4. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons; all admission authorities are under a statutory duty to determine admission arrangements for schools for which it is the admission authority every academic year.

**James Stroyan  
Group Director of People**

## Background Papers

School Admissions Code of Practice – Issued September 2021

Melanie Dickinson: Extension 5908

S17 Crime and Disorder	Not relevant to this report
Health and Wellbeing	Offering a school place to meet parental preference and close to a child's address enhances safeguarding and provides security for the child.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	Not relevant to this report
Diversity	Parents have a wide choice of schools to match the diverse needs of a pluralistic community.
Wards Affected	The admission criteria affects children living in all wards across Darlington
Groups Affected	Parents, Pupils, Schools, Neighbouring Authorities, other Admission Authorities.
Budget and Policy Framework	'This decision does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework'.
Key Decision	This is a key decision as it affects more than one ward in Darlington.
Urgent Decision	For the purposes of call in this matter does not represent an urgent decision.
Council Plan	
Efficiency	The Admissions Policy and management of school places ensure that the Local Authority complies with statutory guidance on Surplus Places. This enables parents to have a choice in a school place but ensures resources are not wasted and school budgets are not overcommitted.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	Looked After Children are the highest priority in the oversubscription criteria, however this report does not impact on Care Leavers

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

5. The Local Authority acts as a 'clearing house' for all applications for a place at a school in Darlington at the normal point of entry (September). This is part of a co-ordinated scheme. Co-ordination also includes the offering of places to children who are resident in Darlington but have stated a preference for a school in another LA area.
6. The Local Authority acting in its capacity as an admission authority will make a single offer of a school place each academic year, to parents\* who have expressed a preference for their child to be admitted to a maintained school within Darlington. Although all applications will be considered on an equal weighting basis, should a child be eligible for a place at more than one school, parents are requested to rank their order of preference on the 'Primary School Application Form 2025/26' in order that only one offer will be made. The admissions oversubscription criteria will be applied should the school be oversubscribed. The equal preference system operates to give parents choice in their selection of schools, allocating their highest ranked preference wherever possible. Where a maintained school is not oversubscribed parents who have applied will be offered a place for their child.

### Legal Implications

7. As an Admission Authority, Darlington Local Authority must determine its admission arrangements each academic year and would be in breach of its statutory duty in accordance with the School Admissions Code, issued in September 2021.
8. The Authority would be in breach of its statutory duty if it did not co-ordinate the application process for all schools within its authority in accordance with the School Admissions Code, issued in September 2021.

### Consultation

9. All Admission Authorities are required to consult on their admission arrangements at least once every 7 years. Consultation must take place between 1 October and 31 January of the school year before the arrangements are to take place and must last for a minimum of 6 weeks. This consultation period allows parents, other schools, religious authorities and the local community to raise any concerns about the proposed admission arrangements. In line with the requirements, Darlington Local Authority consults with the appropriate bodies within the timescales.
10. Every seven years Local Authorities must consult on a co-ordinated scheme. Consultation must take place if there is a substantial change before that time. Each year all Local Authorities are required to formulate and publish on their website a co-ordinated scheme for all publicly funded school within its area by 1 January in the relevant determination year.

### Outcome of Consultation

11. Consultation was not required as Darlington LA last consulted on a scheme in 2022.

## ADMISSIONS POLICY

Darlington Local Authority is the admissions authority for the following community schools:

- (a) Harrowgate Hill Primary – 60 Published Admission Number (PAN)
- (b) Red Hall Primary – 30 PAN
- (c) Whinfield Primary\* – 60 PAN

\*Whinfield Primary is due to join the Education Village Academy Trust in 2024.

### Admission at the Normal Point of Entry

Darlington Borough Council, as the Admissions Authority for community and voluntary controlled schools will consider all preferences for the schools, against the relevant oversubscription criteria as set out below. In determining admissions, priority will be given to those applications where the Primary School Application (PSA) is received by the published deadline. Applications received after the deadline ('late' applications) will then be considered.

### Admissions Oversubscription Criteria

If there are more applications than the number of places available in a particular school, then the school is deemed to be oversubscribed. When stating a preference, parents are entitled to state a reason for doing so. However, the only criteria used to allocate places are those detailed below.

After the admission of children with special educational needs where a school is named on the EHCP, and where the number of applicants is greater than the published admission number, applications will be considered against the criteria set out below, in the following order:

- Priority 1      Looked After, Previously Looked After Children & Internationally Adopted previously Looked After Children**  
Looked after children and previously looked after but immediately after becoming looked after became subject to adoption, a child arrangement order or special guardianship order. Children who appear to Darlington Local Authority to have been in state care outside of England and ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted (see note 1 & 2)
  
- Priority 2      Medical Reasons**  
Children with exceptional medical factors directly relating to school placement. Applications under this criterion should be supported by written evidence from a professional practitioner (see note 3)
  
- Priority 3      Family Links**  
Children who have a brother or sister already attending the school and are expected to be on roll at that school at the time of admission (see note 4).

**Priority 4 Rural**

Children living within the Rural Wards of the Borough of Darlington who have been unsuccessful in obtaining a place at one of their preferred schools AND for whom the nearest alternative school would otherwise be more than two miles from their home will be given priority over other children for places at the correlating primary school (A copy of the maps and corresponding rural wards list is available in the Guide for Parents and on the Council's website).

**Priority 5 Distance (Urban Wards of Darlington Borough Council)**

Children who live nearest the preferred school measured from the front door of the home address (including flats) (see note 5) to the main school gate (determined by the LA), by the shortest walking route. This will be based on the home address of the child (see note 6)

**Notes**

**1. Looked after children**

- (a) A looked after child is a child who is (a) in the care of a Local Authority, or (b) being provided with accommodation by a Local Authority in the exercise of their Social Services functions (see the definition in Section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989).
- (b) An adoption order is an order made under Section 46 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.
- (c) A child arrangement order is an order outlining the arrangements as to the person with whom the child is to live under Section 8 of the Children Act 1989.
- (d) A special guardianship order is an order appointing one or more individuals to be a child's special guardian or guardians (Section 14A Children Act 1989).
- (e) A previously looked after child is a child who immediately moved on from that status after becoming subject to an adoption, child arrangement order or special guardianship order.

**State Care Outside of England**

- 2. Children who have been looked after outside of England by a public authority, a religious organisation or another provider of care whose sole purpose is to benefit society. The care may have been provided in orphanages or other settings.

**Medical Criterion**

- 3. If a parent states a preference for any of the 3 maintained schools and indicate their reason for doing so is 'medical', then they are required to send a supporting letter from a professional practitioner. The supporting evidence should set out the particular reasons why the school in question is the most suitable school and the difficulties it would cause if their child had to travel to another school. Permission from parents must be given to share this information.

## **Family Links**

4. Children have a family link if:
  - (a) They are half or full brother or sister;
  - (b) They are adoptive brother or sister;
  - (c) They are a foster brother or sister;
  - (d) Their carers' are married/co-habiting and children live together in the same household;
  - (e) They are children of the same household (e.g. carers have special guardianship/child arrangements order).

## **Measurements**

5. For applications which require a measurement to be undertaken to apply the oversubscription criteria or to determine a tie-break situation, the Local Authority will measure the distance using a Geographical Information System (GIS) this ensures consistency for all measurements. The measurement will take the shortest walking route judged to be safe (\*lighting at regular intervals and paved/tarmacked). However, for some applications the authority recognises that the shortest route may not be a safe\* route to walk in its entirety but may be a combination of both the shortest safest\* walking route and a road route which will determine the basis of the measurement. The Local Authority accepts there may be exceptions and will treat each case on its merits.

## **Home Address**

6. The home address is used when applying under criteria 4 and 5 of the admissions policy. This means that when a parent states their school preference's they must give the home address at the time of application. Parents must not give the address of childminders or other family members who may share in the care of their child. For parents who may have more than one property, reference should only be made to the property in which they and the child(ren) mainly reside (Monday to Friday).

Similarly, where parents are separated and the child lives for periods with both, then the home address will be where the child mainly resides Monday to Friday or where a court has determined it should be. If the main address has changed temporarily, for example where a parent resides with extended family during a period of sickness or takes up temporary accommodation due to building works/renovation, then the home address remains that at which the parent was resident before the period of temporary residence began. However, if the property has been sold (exchanged contracts) and the family have moved into temporary accommodation, then parents will be required to provide evidence of their situation and a decision will be made based upon the evidence provided.

### **Tie-Break**

7. In the event of a tie-break in any criteria, distance will be the deciding factor. The Authority will carry out a thorough investigation, which may involve an Officer walking the route using a *pedometer* as distance will be the deciding factor.

### **Multiple Births**

8. For multiple births where only 1 place remains, infant classes will be allowed to exceed the statutory limit where the 31st child is a twin or from multiple births. The 'excepted' pupil will be allowed for the time in Key Stage 1 or until the class numbers fall back to current class size limit.

### **Consideration of late applications**

If a parent believes that there are exceptional/individual circumstances which prevented submission of an application form by the stated deadline, e.g. families who have moved into the area after the closing date or if they are a single parent and have been ill for some time or have been dealing with the death of a close relative, then they must provide clear evidence for the LA. The Authority will then consider each application on an individual basis subject to verification. If the Authority decides that the reason given is unacceptable then the application will be considered after the applications received by the deadline and the decision of the LA will be final. These applications will be considered up to and including the stated deadline in January in the Guide for Parents. Further applications received after the January date will only be considered once the process for allocating places has been applied to those applications received by the deadline.

### **Offer Day**

Darlington Borough Council will inform parents of the offer of a school place on 16 April of the year of entry (or the next working day to this date).

### **Appeals Process**

Darlington Local Authority will issue appeal papers, if requested, to a parent who has been unsuccessful in their application to gain a place at their preferred maintained school(s) as stated on the application form.

### **Waiting Lists**

Darlington Local Authority as the Admission Authority for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools will always maintain a waiting list. A child's position on a waiting list(s) will be determined by the oversubscription criteria. If a parent wishes for their child's name to be added to a waiting list for any of the maintained schools that they stated a preference for, then they must complete the 'options' form attached to the refusal/offer letter issued in April of the relevant year of entry. Names can be added to a waiting list at any time. When pupil numbers fall below the published admission number, children will be admitted from the waiting list in accordance with the oversubscription criteria.

The Local Authority does not consider the length of time a child's name has been on the waiting list, nor whether the application was received by the closing date or thereafter. Vacancies often arise at short notice and those on the waiting list should be prepared to accept a place as soon as it occurs. Places will not be held for later consideration. After the point of entry in September, normal transfers/in-year admission arrangements will operate.

### **Admission of Children outside of their normal age group and deferred entry**

If a parent seeks a place in a year group outside of their normal age group, they should complete an application form and attach a covering letter along with any accompanying documentation that details the circumstances behind their request, for example if their child has missed a significant amount of time due to ill health or they believe their child to be gifted and talented.

This should be forwarded to the School Admissions Manager, Education Division, Town Hall, Darlington, DL1 5QT who will then contact the head teacher of the school/s concerned and ask for their views. Once a decision has been made the LA will write to the parent(s) informing them of the decision and setting out the reasons for such.

Parents of summer born children can also make a request to apply for their child to start school in the next academic year after they reach five and should follow the same process but should start the process in the September of the year prior to the year of entry.

### **Admission of children below compulsory school age**

Schools within Darlington Local Authority have a single point of entry in September each year for pupils starting school in Reception. However, children may attend part-time or parents can defer the date their child is admitted until later in the school year but not beyond the point at which they reach compulsory school age and not beyond the academic year of entry.

### **In-Year Applications Forms**

Families who move into the area who require a place(s) at a Darlington school must contact the Schools Admissions Section at the Town Hall. Parents will be sent an In-year Application Form (IYAF) and directed to the Council's website for a copy of the Guide for Parents (paper copies are also available on request). Should a place be available at a school requested by a parent, a meeting with the Head Teacher must take place before a start date is agreed.

Should however a parent request a place at a maintained school that has no places available, then they will be informed about the appeals process and the availability of alternative school places within the Borough of Darlington.