

# **Consultation on the reorganisation of secondary school catchment areas from September 2018 – Frequently Asked Questions**

## **Where can I find out about all these proposed changes?**

View information about the possible changes to our secondary school admissions system that we are asking for residents' view on: <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/2018-admissions>

## **Who has come up with all these proposed changes?**

The proposals have been put together by a working party of headteachers, governors and councillors from all parties at the request of the council's cross-party school organisation working group.

The proposals aim to ensure that as many as possible of a range of criteria are met. These criteria are that any proposed new catchment areas should:

- 'catch' all children resident in them
- provide schools with a social mix of children from all backgrounds
- be fair, transparent and easy to understand
- offer parents a preference
- be practicable options which are supported by the public transport network
- ensure that all schools can be successful and viable.

## **Why do you have to change the current system?**

The need for change has been triggered by two key factors. One is rising demand for school places at secondary level, and the other is the University of Brighton's proposal to create a new secondary free school in the eastern central area of the city.

Our current system uses a combination of catchment areas and a range of published admissions priorities to determine how places are allocated.

However, as of September 2018 the projected rise in the number of secondary age pupils means that in some catchment areas there will be too many pupils for the places available.

Because of the new school, simply tweaking the current catchment areas is not a viable option.

Our methods for predicting future demand for secondary school places were the subject of an independent review recently. This found our predictions to be more than 98% accurate.

### **Where is the new school going to be?**

The University of Brighton has been given government approval to create a new secondary free school for Brighton and Hove.

The school will be for students aged 11 to 16 years and will offer 180 places each year. It will be sited in Brighton, and will open in September 2018.

The council is working closely with the university on this development, and in particular on helping it find a site for the school. The university will make an announcement on this as soon as it is able to do so.

Government rules mean that new schools have to be either academies or free schools. Councils cannot create new schools. Academies and free schools are independent of the council.

### **Why don't you wait until we know more about the new school?**

Government rules state that any decisions on changing the admissions system as of September 2018 need to be made by 15 March 2017.

To meet this deadline we will need to carry out a formal consultation process in the autumn giving specific, concrete details of what we are proposing.

We want to engage with residents now in order to get their views on some of the basic principles that they want us to take into account when we put together specific proposals in the autumn.

### **What if the new school can't open in time for September 2018?**

Every effort will be made to ensure that the new school is ready for occupation in September 2018 however if this is not possible temporary solutions will be sought that allow the school to function without undue effect on the pupils. This may include the use of temporary buildings or the temporary relocation of the school to another suitable site such as another school. This option has been used successfully with both the opening of the King's School and The Bilingual Primary School.

### **Which schools does all this apply to?**

The proposals relate to the city's community secondary schools and academies. These are: Blatchington Mill; Brighton Aldridge Community Academy; Dorothy Stringer; Hove Park; Longhill; Patcham High; Portslade Aldridge Community Academy; and Varndean.

It also includes the proposed University of Brighton secondary free school as the university has indicated that they intend to be part of the council's admissions system.

### **Are the church schools included?**

No. As faith schools, Cardinal Newman and the King's School are independent of the council with regards to school admissions and they set their own city wide admissions priorities.

## **What's all this about catchment areas, lotteries, random allocation and home to school distance?**

The current system uses catchment areas with random allocation as the 'tie-break' for oversubscribed schools. Some people use the word 'lottery' instead of random allocation.

Either way, under this system everyone in the catchment area has exactly the same chance of getting a place once higher priorities such as looked after children, exceptional needs and sibling links have been applied.

Find out about our current system, including examples of how it might affect you:

<https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/children-and-education/secondary-admissions-booklet/decide-which-schools-you-prefer>

The current system was introduced in 2008 because at the time it was felt to be more fair to more people than using home to school distance as the 'tie-break'.

As part of our engagement exercise we are asking residents to give their views on whether to keep random allocation as the 'tie-break' for oversubscribed schools, or to use home to school distance instead. The use of home to school distance would be within the priority system including catchment areas, not instead of them. No decision has been made on this.

## **Where can I find the new catchment area proposals?**

View the 3 proposed catchment area map options: <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/2018-admissions>

## **Which catchment area is my house in on your maps?**

We would like to make it clear that the catchment area maps we have published are suggestions in order to help get a public debate started.

They are not intended as concrete proposals or a street-by-street guide.

They have been suggested on the basis that each proposed area has enough spaces for the pupils who live in them.

We want people's views on whether they think an admissions system based on one school, two schools or three schools per catchment area is the fairest way to run a city-wide admissions system.

Each option can be seen as having advantages and disadvantages.

Based on the feedback we get from this engagement exercise we intend to publish firm proposals in the autumn that will show catchment area boundaries on a street-by-street basis. These proposals will be the subject of a formal consultation exercise in the autumn.

**Why can't my child automatically go to the nearest school – so that they can walk to school and not have to travel across the city?**

Government rules on parental choice mean that we cannot simply allocate places at their nearest school to everyone.

We understand that many parents want their children to be able to go to a nearby school. One of the three catchment area options that we are asking for your views on would give each school its own catchment area.

**Why can't I have a choice of schools for my child?**

We know from recent research done for us by the University of Brighton that many parents would like more choice with regards to secondary school applications.

Two of the three catchment area options we are asking for your views on would give a choice of more than one school within each catchment area.

**I live in the east of the city, if my child has to take two buses to get to Varndean will you pay for that?**

The current national rules on home to school transport mean that children who are obliged to travel more than three miles to their allocated community secondary school can have their transport paid for by the council.

However, the government is currently reviewing these rules. It is not possible for us to guarantee at this stage that the current rules will still apply in September 2018.

**Why should free school meals children get priority?**

No decision has been made on this. The proposal for the current oversubscription criteria to be amended to give children eligible for free school meals a higher priority is, at this stage, simply a suggestion that we want residents' views on.

Closing the gap in achievement between children from disadvantaged families and those who aren't is one of the top priorities of this council and indeed of the government.

Eligibility for free school meals is the most accepted and recognised national indicator of deprivation. We have to follow government rules on school admissions. These rules allow for the possibility of giving priority to children receiving free school meals.

### **I just want my child to be able to go to a good school**

The Council's aspiration is for all schools to be successful schools. The attainment of young people in Brighton and Hove at age 7, 11 and 16 is well above the national average.

By law no admissions system can use the perceived qualities of different schools as a factor in how school places are allocated.

The council's legal duty is to ensure that there are enough school places across the city as a whole to be able to offer a place to any local families who request one.

We will also have a duty to ensure that any new admissions system is as fair as possible to as many people as possible on a city-wide basis, and is easy to understand.

No admissions system can make 100% of parents happy. This year more than 80% of parents were allocated their first preference school and more than 95% were offered one of their preferred schools. This is roughly in line with similar urban authorities nationally and a good deal better than many areas of London.

We would want this level of success to continue in whatever new system we decide upon.

### **Are you keeping the sibling link?**

In our current system, at secondary level the sibling link only applies within catchment area. The plan is for the same to apply in future.

As a transitional measure the siblings of children already at a secondary school prior to September 2018 will be given priority, even if they are not in the new catchment area of that school.

Siblings of children starting in September 2018 and onwards will only have priority if they are in the catchment area of the school in question.

**We have three children. My eldest child is currently at Patcham High. He is due to leave the school in July 2019. Our second child is due to start secondary school in 2018. Will my second child get priority for Patcham through the sibling link, even if we end up outside the new catchment area?**

Yes, under these circumstances your second child would get priority because your first child started at the school before September 2018 and will still be there. As a transitional measure the siblings of children already at a secondary school prior to September 2018 will be given priority, even if they are not in the new catchment area of that school.

**Our third child is due to start secondary school in 2020. Will my third children get priority for Patcham High as well even if we end up outside the new catchment area?**

No, under these circumstances your third child would not get priority unless you are in the new catchment area. Your first child – who started there before 2018 – will have left the school before your third child would be due to start. Your second child starts at the school in September 2018. As of September 2018, siblings will only have priority if they are in the new catchment area of the school in question.

If you do not feel the information we have given about the sibling link has given you the answers you need to your specific circumstances please contact our school admissions team direct by emailing [schooladmissions@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:schooladmissions@brighton-hove.gov.uk) or by phoning them on 01273 293653.

**Will I still have to give three preferences?**

Please remember that each of your preferences will be considered equally and separately. Listing second and third preferences will not affect your chance of being offered your first preference. We will offer you the highest ranked school we can.

You don't have to give three preferences now and you won't have to in future – but we strongly recommend that you do so.

This is because if you only give one preference, and are not offered a place at that school, you will be offered a place at the nearest school with an available place after everyone else's three preferences have been considered.

This may mean that by the time we look at allocating a place for your child, your local school may be full and your child may have to travel some distance to get to school.

**Who can I talk to about this?**

We will be holding a series of public information events at venues around the city during March, April and early May as part of our engagement programme.

Council staff will be on hand at these events to answer questions and give out factual information. However, they will not be able to give opinions about the pros and cons of any specific proposal.

View the events: <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/2018-admissions>

You can if you wish also contact your local councillors about these proposals.

### **Where and when can I vote on my favourite option?**

The process for agreeing the council's secondary admissions arrangements does not involve a public vote. The engagement exercise we are now starting will lead to a formal public consultation process in the autumn. Councillors have to take residents' views into account before voting on any possible changes to the current system.

Give us your views on our proposals for possible ways of changing the council's secondary school admissions system please: [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/admissions-consultation](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/admissions-consultation)

This preliminary round of public engagement runs from Monday 14 March until Sunday 24 April. This will in turn pave the way for a formal consultation process in the autumn.

### **When are you going to make a decision about all this?**

Government rules state that any decisions on changing the admissions system as of September 2018 need to be made by 15 March 2017.

To meet this deadline we will need to carry out a formal consultation process in the autumn giving specific, concrete details of what we are proposing.

We're running this engagement exercise starting in March because we want to get residents' views on some of the basic principles that they want us to take into account when we put together specific proposals in the autumn.

### **How do I apply for a secondary school place for my child?**

Information on applying for a secondary school place: <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/children-and-education/school-admissions/contact-school-admissions-team>