

Consultation on school admission arrangements for the 2026 – 2027 academic year

Wokingham Borough Council is seeking your views on proposed changes to the admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools in Wokingham for the school year 2026 – 2027

This consultation will run from 18th November 2024 until 7th January 2024

Background

The School Admissions Code (2021), published by the Department for Education, requires all admission authorities to consult on their admission arrangements if they are seeking to make changes from the previous year. Consultation must take place for a minimum of 6 weeks between 1 October and 31 January. The final arrangements must be determined by 28 February 2025.

The admission arrangements include an admission policy for each phase of school, the published admission number (PAN) and link to the catchment areas for each community and voluntary controlled school. Other documents include Wokingham's relevant area and Wokingham Council's co-ordinated scheme for main round admissions.

Consultation

Wokingham Borough Council, as the admission authority for all community and voluntary controlled schools in its administrative area, is proposing the following changes to the admission arrangements for 2026/2027:

Published Admission Numbers (PANS)

A primary school's PAN (published admission number) is the number of school places that must be offered in Reception each year. PAN's must be included in a school's admission arrangements and is set by the admission authority for the school.

It is proposed that there will be a reduction to the PANs for the following community and voluntary controlled schools:

School	Current PAN	Proposed PAN
Radstock Primary School	45	30
Robert Piggott CofE Infant	45	30
The Colleton Primary School	45	30
Gorse Ride Infant School	45	30
Gorse Ride Junior School	45	32
Bearwood Primary School	45	30
Winnersh Primary School	60	30
Walter Infant School	90	60

PAN reductions are implemented following engagement with the council and the completion of the statutory consultation process. This reduces the number of children the school are legally required to admit at the point of entry (Reception) in future years.

The full list of proposed PANS for 2026/27 for all community and voluntary controlled schools in Wokingham are available here (insert link)

The reasons for making these changes are:

There is a significant over-supply of primary school places in Wokingham, which follows a national decline in the birth rate in the last decade, and an even steeper decline in the birth rate locally. It is noteworthy that the reduction in pupil numbers isn't evenly distributed across the Borough and its schools. In some areas, the fall in birth rates has been counterbalanced by substantial housebuilding, whilst in other areas the relative demographics of house-ownership surrounding a certain school can mean that it has experienced a significant reduction in applications, whilst its closest neighbouring school has no such issues.

These demographic changes have a major impact on school operations, as funding received is per child, not per class. The reduction in school places demand in Wokingham has affected some schools' ability to manage class sizes and effective pupil-to-teacher ratios. Therefore, when the number of children applying to a school changes, a school needs to review its admissions numbers. By doing this in advance, schools can plan their future resources. The Council's strategy is to proactively work in partnership with those schools in Wokingham that are experiencing reduced applications to see how they can be supported to stabilise their pupil numbers or to consider whether there may be alternative delivery models available. This is typically achieved through a PAN change.

Wokingham Borough Council has therefore been working with all primary schools over the course of 2024 to determine where adjustments can most readily be made. The first stage of this process involves proposed PAN reductions at the 8 community and voluntary controlled schools above. A number of own admissions authorities in Wokingham are also consulting on proposed PAN reductions, although these form part of distinct consultation exercises / decision-making processes and should be responded to separately.

By reducing published admissions numbers, these proposals will allow the schools in question to organise in a more structurally viable way and enable them to achieve financial viability, which will in turn, directly support the quality of education at the school.

Admission policies

There are minor changes to the wording/phrasing of published school admission arrangements which were required to be written in line with guidance from the Department for Education. Changes were also made for clarification, defining key terminology and the changing dates for the admissions process.

Who do we consult with?

We will be seeking the views of the following groups:

- Wokingham School Admissions Forum (or alternative body if adopted)
- All Wokingham Borough maintained community and voluntary controlled primary and secondary schools
- All own admission authority schools within the Wokingham Borough
- All neighbouring Local Education Authorities
- Diocesan Authorities
- Relevant parents
- Other persons in the relevant area who in the opinion of the admission authority have an interest in the proposed arrangements

What happens after the consultation closes?

All responses received by **30th December 2024** will be considered and presented to the Executive Member for Education who will decide whether to proceed with the proposed changes as well as determining the admission arrangements for all community and voluntary controlled schools. All admission authorities must agree the admission arrangements that are most suitable according to the local circumstances.

Determining admission arrangements 2026-2027

Admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools must be agreed (determined) by Wokingham Borough Council by **28 February 2025**

Publication of determined arrangements 2026-2027

Once Wokingham Borough Council has determined their admission arrangements, they will be available on the public website for the whole offer year (the academic year in which offers for places are made). Local authorities must publish on their website **by 15 March 2025**.