

CABINET

4 APRIL 2023

SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING STRATEGY UPDATE: PRINCIPLES ON SELECTION

Portfolio Holders: Councillor Mrs Josie Iles, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services
(Lead Member)

Councillor Martin Potter, Portfolio Holder for Education and Schools

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Summary

This report outlines a proposed extension to the School Place Planning Principles set within the School Place Planning Strategy 2022-27 to include principles to cover the selective sector and the selection process in more detail.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1. Medway Council has a statutory duty to provide sufficient school places. The School Place Planning Strategy describes the principles, methods, and challenges of this duty. The proposed principles will help meet the Council Plan Priority of 'Supporting Medway's people to realise their potential', and the outcome of 'All children achieving their potential in schools'.
- 1.2. As Cabinet were the decision makers on the School Place Planning Strategy, it will fall to Cabinet to approve the addition to the principles.

2. Background

- 2.1. Medway has twenty secondary schools, six of which are selective. Selective schools take an average of 29% of the total year 7 cohort. Currently, there are two boys' schools, three girl's schools and one co-educational.
- 2.2. Following a consultation and subject to a decision by the Regional Schools Director in Spring 2023, from September 2024 three of the single gender schools will move to co-education.
- 2.3. There are a number of pupils at Medway selective schools who come from outside the authority. On average six percent come from within 2 miles of the authority boundary. A further 15% come from more than 2 miles away. The

proposals to change three schools to co-educational will result in a reduction in the number of more distant out of area pupils able to acquire a place at a Medway Grammar School.

3. Analysis and advice

3.1. Having a set of underpinning principles for selection will help guide decision making on selective schools. The following principles are proposed to be added to the School Place Planning Strategy 2022-27 at section 3.6:

- 3.1.1. An inclusive selective education is an integral part of the wider education system in Medway. All pupils in Medway have the right to apply for and sit the Medway test and have access to a Medway selective school if they pass.
- 3.1.2. Establish and maintain provision that meets parental preference and ensure an appropriate balance of places between selective and non-selective schools. It is expected currently that approximately 25% of the Medway secondary aged pupil cohort attend selective education.
- 3.1.3. Increasing the number of Medway pupils attending a selective school in Medway, thereby reducing places being filled by out of area pupils, provides Medway pupils with greater opportunity to attend their school of choice. To achieve this the percentage of Medway pupils who pass the test will increase to a maximum of 28% from the current maximum of 25%, to make best use of available places. Officers will plan for a minimum provision of 25% selective places.
- 3.1.4. Inclusive selective education is available for all pupils based on their academic ability. Medway will work with selective schools to broaden the range of pupils who access selective education and increase opportunity for pupils from all backgrounds to fulfil their potential including pupils from lower economic backgrounds or those with SEND.
- 3.1.5. To increase accessibility to selective schools for pupils with an EHCP through the establishment of Resourced Provisions within the selective sector. Currently 0.3% of selective schools' pupils have an EHCP, compared to 2.2% of non-selective pupils.
- 3.1.6. To support the appropriate expansion of grammar schools to meet demand, including the establishment of provision to the west of the River Medway where currently no selective provision exists but from where demand is increasing, and is expected to do so with the advent of further housing in the Hoo, Peninsula and Strood areas. Currently, 1,261 Medway pupils travel from west of the river to attend a selective school. While officers will initially plan for a maximum 28% pass rate to utilise available places, neither this nor the 25% minimum rate will be maintainable without a new grammar provision due to the forecast population growth, particularly in the peninsula area with the Hoo development framework proposals.
- 3.1.7. To update the Medway Test process to maintain a fair and modern process reflecting the current education and social arena. This will

include making the test registration process more transparent and user friendly, ensuring the special arrangements process is fair and meets pupils needs as well as the inclusion of a Non-Verbal Reasoning element to the test itself, to broaden the range of subjects to provide an opportunity for a comprehensive range of abilities to do well in the test.

3.2. Officers will work with the grammar school headteachers to design the test into one that continues to be fair, relevant and reflects the curriculum today, this may result in further changes to the test which will be consulted upon through the admissions process.

3.3. Indicative timeline

CADMT (Children and Adults Directorate Management Team)	30th January 2023
Informal consultation on the principles	2 weeks
CMT (Corporate Management Team)	8 February 2023
Cabinet	4 April 2023

4. Climate change implications

4.1. No climate change implications arise directly from this report. However, by ensuring the location and type of school places match demand across Medway, it will provide more opportunity for pupils to access a local grammar school and therefore it is expected that there would be a reduction in car journeys across Medway which will reduce impacts upon air quality.

4.2. Pupils are encouraged by schools to walk or cycle to school, and this becomes more achievable if the provision is local.

5. Risk management

5.1. There are no risks resulting directly from this report, however the following would be assessed as risks should recommendations from individual proposals flowing from this report not be implemented.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
The Council's statutory duty to provide sufficient good quality school places	If insufficient school places are made available to meet demand, the Council would be failing to meet its obligations.	Implement proposals to enhance the decision framework of the School Place Planning Strategy to assist in the provision of sufficient good quality places in the areas of demand.	C1
That insufficient funding is available to fund proposals to provide sufficient places	Basic need funding is limited, and the extent of the emerging need may mean that unless additional funding can be sourced, projects to provide places may not be able to be implemented, which could mean that the council fails to meet its statutory obligation.	Explore options to fund projects including bidding for funding initiatives. Look at cost effective ways to supply places. Utilise section 106 funding to create new and improved school places. Support Grammar schools to bid for funding under the Selective Schools expansion Fund (SSEF)	B1
That the level of forecast pupils fails to materialise	Should the expected numbers of pupils fail to materialise, then any funding committed could have been better spent elsewhere.	Continue to monitor births, migration and housing developments and accuracy of forecasting.	D3

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very high	1 Catastrophic (Showstopper)
B High	2 Critical
C Significant	3 Marginal
D Low	4 Negligible
E Very low	
F Almost impossible	

6. Consultation

- 6.1. There is no statutory requirement to have a School Place Planning Strategy, or to have selective policy principles. Therefore, there is no statutory requirement to consult on the principles. However, it is proposed to informally consult with Medway secondary schools for two weeks prior to CMT. This will give schools an opportunity to comment on the principles and any amendments made before they are added to the School Place Planning Strategy.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1. There are no financial implications directly resulting from this report.
- 7.2. Should any additional grammar school places be required in the future due to increased demand, these would be funded through the Children and Adults' Capital Programme.

- 7.3. Where appropriate, developer contributions will be sought from new housing schemes to assist with the provision of school places.
 - 7.4. The Council will support the schools in bidding for a grant from the Selective Schools Expansion Fund (SSEF), which may assist in funding any capital works. However, at this time it is unclear whether any future opportunities to bid through this route will be made available by central government.
 - 7.5. Occasionally, additional funding sources and initiatives become available such as free school waves or targeted basic need initiatives. Where possible the Council will seek to make use of those opportunities to reduce the demands upon the limited funding currently available.
8. Legal implications
- 8.1. All Medway selective schools are academies. Where a change is proposed at an academy it falls to the academy trust to ensure appropriate statutory consultation is undertaken. In such circumstances the Regional Schools Director is the decision maker on the proposals.
9. Recommendation
- 9.1. Cabinet is asked to approve the principles as set out in sections 3.1.1 to 3.1.7 of the report and authorise their addition to the School Place Planning Strategy.
10. Suggested reasons for decision
- 10.1. By approving the recommendations in section 9 of the report, the Cabinet will be ensuring that the Council meets its statutory duty to ensure sufficient good quality school places are available.

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Appendices

None

Background papers

School Place Planning Strategy 2022-27
<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=63361>