

Cabinet

19 December 2023

School Admission Arrangements 2025/26: Proposed Co-Ordinated Admission Schemes

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Tracy Coombs, Portfolio Holder for Education
Report from: Celia Buxton, Assistant Director Education and SEND
Author: Paul Clarke, Strategic Head of Education – Planning and Access

Summary

Each year the Local Authority is required to publish admission schemes and arrangements for primary and secondary schools. If changes are made from the previous year, the Local Authority must undertake a consultation.

The schemes set out how the Local Authority will co-ordinate the processing of applications to schools. The arrangements also set out the relevant entry arrangements (oversubscription criteria and published admission numbers) for Community and Voluntary Controlled primary, infant and junior schools.

Academies, Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools undertake their own consultation on entry arrangements but must co-ordinate with the Local Authority schemes.

This report details the proposed changes to the primary and secondary admission schemes and seeks approval to proceed to Cabinet.

1. Recommendations

1.1. The Cabinet is asked to note the outcome of the consultation in section 8 of this report, agree the amendments to the admissions arrangements for 2025 in section 5 of the report and to approve the admissions schemes for 2025, as set out at appendices 1 and 2 of the report.

2. Suggested reasons for decision

2.1. Approving the proposed admissions schemes would ensure that the Council meets its statutory duty to comply with admissions legislation. The proposed changes will provide a fairer means of assessment for grammar school and will give more Medway children the opportunity to attend a Medway grammar school.

3. Budget and policy framework

- 3.1. Medway's school admission arrangements are consistent with the requirements of the School Admissions Code, which is issued under Section 84 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (SSFA 1998). There are no specific budgetary implications.
- 3.2. As the admission authority for Medway's Community and Voluntary Controlled schools the Local Authority is responsible for ensuring that its admission arrangements are lawful.
- 3.3. The aim of our admission arrangements is to ensure that the transition for children and their families is as smooth as possible, which supports the Council's priority of supporting Medway's people to realise their potential.

4. Background

- 4.1. This report and appendices 1 & 2 provide details of the proposed schemes for primary and secondary admissions in September 2025/26.
- 4.2. The School Admissions Code 2021 states that consultation must take place between 1 October and 31 January each year and last for a minimum of six weeks.
- 4.3. Medway Council consulted between 2 October and 10 November 2023.
- 4.4. This was to enable the consultation to have finished prior to presentation of the proposed schemes and consultation responses for determination by Cabinet on 19 December 2023.
- 4.5. The proposed co-ordinated admission schemes ensure that there is a clear and fair methodology for allocation of school places in Medway.

5. Options

5.1. *Secondary Admissions – co-ordinated scheme and admission arrangements*

5.1.1. The proposed changes are:

- Revision of dates to fit the 2025/26 admission timeline
- Medway Test registration window brought forward to open mid-May and close mid-June
- Information about admission of children outside their normal age group added
- Removal of Medway Test academic review process
- Medway Test grammar assessment cut-off percentage increased from 23%:
 - To 25% if grammar schools remain the same as they are (this is dependent upon the removal of the Medway Test academic review process which is meant to review up to 2% of children as grammar but recently has not)

- To 26% if Chatham Grammar, Fort Pitt Grammar and Holcombe Grammar Schools convert to co-educational for September 2025 (this is dependent upon the removal of the Medway Test academic review process which is meant to review up to 2% of children as grammar but recently has not)
- Medway Test papers to change to the following, which includes the removal of the Writing Test:

English Test
 Mathematics Test
 Reasoning Test

5.2. *Primary Admissions – co-ordinated scheme and admission arrangements*

5.2.1. The proposed changes are:

- the revision of dates to fit the 2025/26 admission timeline.

5.3. Appendix 1 provides details of the Local Authority’s proposed co-ordinated admissions schemes for primary admissions 2025.

5.4. Appendix 2 to the report provides details of the Local Authority’s proposed co-ordinated admissions schemes for secondary admissions 2025.

6. Advice and analysis

6.1. A summary of the consultation responses will be provided to Cabinet for consideration.

6.2. It is not envisaged that the proposed co-ordinated admissions schemes and admissions arrangements would have any adverse effect on any of the protected characteristic groups.

7. Risk management

7.1

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Own admission authority schools can change their admission arrangements (including their published admission number) by undertaking their own consultations	Own admission authority schools are permitted to change their arrangements through the annual consultation process	Medway Council can respond and/or object to the consultations of own admission authorities	D3

For risk rating, please refer to the following table (please **retain** table in final report):

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor

8. Consultation

- 8.1. We consulted all Medway schools, other local authorities, diocesan authorities and families in the area. The consultation was published on the Medway Council website for the duration of the consultation period. The consultation invited responses from the public.
- 8.2. The consultation period opened 2 October 2023 and closed 10 November 2023 (6 weeks) in accordance with the requirements of the School Admissions Code 2021 to consult for a minimum of 6 weeks.
- 8.3. Medway Council received four responses. One person was in favour of the changes, three were in favour of some changes but not others.

Concerns raised by some respondents include (officer responses are italicised):

- One Medway resident wanted to keep the academic review as their daughter narrowly missed the cut-off score to be assessed as grammar.

By removing the academic review, designed to assess a further 2% as grammar, and instead increasing the cut-off by 2% the test will assess the next highest scoring children as grammar. Therefore those who previously would have missed out narrowly in the test would be assessed as grammar in future.

- Increasing the grammar cohort to 26% if the academic review is removed and three grammar schools becoming co-educational.

If we remove the academic review which has been designed to account for an additional 2% of the Medway cohort to be assessed as grammar, we feel it would only be fair to increase the % assessed as grammar through the test from 23% to 25%.

If the three schools convert to co-educational there are two options as to how we address the change in position.

One is to leave the cut-off score as 23%/25% of the Medway cohort and have places left over for more children who live outside of Medway, usually between 150-200.

The other is to increase the cut-off score slightly to give more Medway pupils the opportunity to attend a local grammar school.

- One respondent felt the proposed changes would mean some Medway residents who were assessed as grammar would be left without a grammar school place.

There are currently 1093 places available in Medway grammar schools. Based on 2024 admission data, if 26% of the cohort was assessed as grammar that would have amounted to approximately 947 children. We believe this leaves enough of a buffer to account for cohort size changes, children who live outside but close to Medway and those outside of Medway with sibling links at our grammar schools.

- If the registration window is brought forward, it may reduce the opportunity for those moving into the area to register.

The registration window would be shifted so that it opens earlier but closes two weeks earlier than it previously would have. Families do not have to live in Medway to register for the test so families who are expecting to move to Medway could still register before they arrive.

One of the main reasons for bringing the window forward is that the number of special arrangements requests that schools need to submit for children with special educational needs is increasing. This involves careful consideration and collection of supporting evidence by the schools. We are unable to extend the deadline for these requests as it would not allow the panel enough time to consider them properly and make decisions prior to the test. By bringing the registration window forward, it gives schools and families more time to gather information and submit requests. We believe this is a positive change for children who have special educational needs and wish to sit the test.

- Verbal reasoning is not weighted as much as English and Mathematics.

Upon reviewing Medway Test procedures internally and with grammar schools, this was the favoured method primarily because English and Mathematics are core parts of the curriculum but Verbal Reasoning is not.

- There is no mechanism for those who move into the area late to sit the Medway Test.

Whilst applicants are permitted to apply for a grammar school place at any time, there is no legal right to sit an entrance test for point of entry admissions if the deadline has been missed. Those who move to the area late and apply for a grammar school have the right of appeal for any school they name on their application that does not offer them a place. Furthermore, grammar schools complete their own assessments with applicants after term 2 of Year 7.

8.4. The changes respondents were in favour of include:

- One respondent was in favour of all proposed changes to the Medway Test
- Changes in the total % of the cohort being assessed as grammar if three grammar schools become co-educational.
- Removing the academic review (2)
- The replacement of the Writing Test with the English Test

8.5. Prior to this consultation, Medway Council discussed the proposed changes to the Medway Test, academic review and grammar assessment cut-off percentage with representatives from our primary and grammar schools, the overall response was in favour of the proposed changes.

9. Climate change implications

9.1. Officers do not anticipate the admissions process outlined in the proposed scheme will have a negative impact on climate change.

9.2. In recent years, over 99% of admissions applications are submitted online and all applications are processed electronically. Other than the < 1% of applications received in hard copy, the admissions process is paperless.

10. Financial implications

10.1. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

11. Legal implications

11.1. In accordance with the requirements of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998, Local Authorities are required to consult each year with the governing bodies of the schools for whom it is the admission authority (i.e. Community and Voluntary Controlled schools) on the proposed admission arrangements for the following year. In addition, local authorities are required to consult with other admission authority schools (Academies, Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools), other local authorities and other relevant parties (e.g. diocesan boards). Similarly, own admission authority schools have a duty to consult on their proposed arrangements with the local authority and other parties.

11.2. The School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012 sets out the procedure for Determining Admission Arrangements, which includes the manner of consultation, matters to which consultation is to relate and the timescale for consultation. All consultations must be completed by 31 January of the academic year prior to that being consulted on (i.e. 31 January 2023 for 2024 admissions).

11.3. Local authorities have an important role to monitor the arrangements of all schools for compliance with the School Admissions Code. Each local authority is required to report to the Schools Adjudicator on the fairness and legality of

the admissions arrangements for all schools in our area. The Schools Adjudicator has a wider remit as the independent enforcer of fair access to schools.

- 11.4. The proposed arrangements require all schools to admit children with Educational, Health and Care Plans (EHCP's) or Statements of Special Educational Needs, which name that particular school.
- 11.5. Medway Council and Schools must comply with obligations in regard to equalities under the Equality Act 2010, to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by this Act. It must advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people. This involves removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people, including taking steps to meet the needs of people who have a "protected characteristic" in the terms of this Act (protected characteristics for these purposes are: disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation). It must encourage people from protected groups to participate in public life and other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.
- 11.6. An admission authority must not discriminate on the grounds of disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; or sexual orientation, against a person in the arrangements and decisions it makes as to who is offered admission as a pupil.
- 11.7. The Equality Act 2010 contains limited exceptions to the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion or belief and sex. Schools designated by the Secretary of State as having a religious character are exempt from some aspects of the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief and this means they can make a decision about whether or not to admit a child as a pupil on the basis of religion or belief. Single-sex schools are lawfully permitted to discriminate on the grounds of sex in their admission arrangements.
- 11.8. Admission authorities are also subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty and therefore must have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations in relation to persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 11.9. The Human Rights Act 1998 confers a right of access to education. This right does not extend to securing a place at a particular school. Admission authorities, however, do need to consider parents' reasons for expressing a preference when they make admission decisions, though this may not necessarily result in the allocation of a place.

Lead officer contact

Paul Clarke, Strategic Head of Education; Planning and Access
01634 331031, paul.clarke@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Primary Admissions Scheme 2025-26

Appendix 2 - Secondary Admissions Scheme 2025-26

Appendix 3 – Diversity Impact Assessment

Background papers

None