

Southampton City Council's Fair School Admissions Pledge Action Plan

Completed on behalf of the city and the following schools:

Bitterne Park School

Cantell School

Oasis Academy Lord's Hill

Oasis Academy Mayfield

Oasis Academy Sholing

Regents Park Community College

Saint George Catholic College

St Anne's Catholic School

St Mark's CE All-Through School

Upper Shirley High School

Woodlands Community College

Background, Strengths & Areas for Development

The schools who have been involved in the Pledge for Southampton City Council are a mix of Academies, Foundation/Community Trust, Voluntary Aided and Voluntary Controlled schools. At the time of writing, three schools are Ofsted-rated Outstanding, five as Good and three as Requires Improvement. Despite the relatively small geographical area that encompasses the Southampton City Council boundary, there are extremes of socio-economic background within the city. This includes an area where a single road separates an area where residents in the lowest 10% of deprivation from one where residents are in the highest 10% of deprivation.

Significant matters to admission into the schools in Southampton are as follows:

- St Anne's Catholic School is a single-sex school, admitting only girls into the secondary phase. They are a Catholic Faith School, however do not oversubscribe within their Baptised Catholic criterion and routinely admit significant numbers of girls with other or no faith. St Anne's further admit up to 10% of their PAN (20 girls) for pupils who show an aptitude for music.
- Saint George Catholic College is a Voluntary Aided Catholic Faith School. They have for the last five years oversubscribed within their Baptised Catholic criterion. Any pupils admitted outside of this criterion are done so via Fair Access or successful Independent Appeals and are small in number.
- Bitterne Park School admits up to the 10% of it's PAN (36 pupils) for pupils who show an aptitude for performing arts.
- St Mark's All-Through School recently expanded from a Primary to an All-Through School, starting to admit a Year 7 intake in September 2022. While they are a Voluntary Aided Church of England Faith School, admissions under their Church of England criterion are minimal.

- Starting with admissions in September 2022, no secondary school in Southampton City Council's boundary operates a catchment area. This decision was taken in recognition of the catchment areas no longer representing the communities they served and the fact that several academy schools had already removed their catchments, creating a mixed landscape. The decision to remove catchments was also made to help safeguard pupils having access to their local school.

Over the past three years, an average of 94% of on-time Year 7 applicants have been offered a school of preference. Over the past three years, an average of 86% of on-time Year 7 applicants have been offered their first preference. While this number suggests that an overwhelming majority of applicants are going to the schools they wish to attend, we are aware that this only takes into account on-time applicants, which do not make the full picture of admissions in Southampton.

The majority of the schools involved in the Pledge admit broadly the same levels of FSM as is found in the areas from which they draw their intake. The outliers to this statement are: Oasis Academy Lord's Hill (higher than averages); St Anne's Catholic School (lower than averages); and Saint George Catholic College (lower than averages).

What is promising to see is the number of Good or Outstanding schools admitting FSM pupils at a similar rate to that reflected in the areas from which they admit. The broadness of admission for all schools should also be noted in this observation. For example, while Cantell school has become more popular over the past ten years, and is situated in an area that could draw a more affluent intake, it has retained an appropriate intake of FSM pupils. Upper Shirley High School, a Good Academy school, located in an area in the 10th decile of deprivation and admitting from a narrower field than some other schools (the average distance of last child admitted for on-time mainround applications for the last three years is 0.899 miles), still manages to admit a level of FSM pupils in line with the area of its intake.

Looking at the average IDACI scores for pupils within each of the schools, we see that this largely mirrors what would be expected based on the geographical areas in which they sit. This is largely the case for the census disadvantaged measure compared to the Local Authority average and the geography of the schools. The outliers to this that could be seen as less reflective are Saint George Catholic College and St Anne's Catholic School. It should also be noted in relation to Saint George Catholic College that the radius for admission is very large, encompassing areas in neighbouring authorities that would not otherwise be placed within Southampton's boundary, due to a preference in certain families to attend a Faith School at

a greater distance. As such, not all pupils in the areas reflected by the admission of one pupil would be looking to be admitted to Saint George Catholic College or other Southampton schools, but at schools in their own area. This does not negate the fact that unmet preference for Saint George Catholic School in Southampton residents is proportionally high.

Southampton remains an incredibly turbulent city, home to two universities, a large hospital and a port. This sees families arriving throughout the academic year from out of area and overseas, as well as seeing not insignificant internal movement. This has an impact both on in-year admission, but also late mainround admission. The very nature of such admissions mean that families may be less likely to access a school of preference. While only so much can be done to address the turbulence (as places cannot be 'held back' in anticipation of later arrivals), we have strengthened our Fair Access Processes to manage in-year arrivals to deficit year groups in a way that both hopes to meet as much parental preference as possible, while ensuring even distribution of pupils. Late applicants for mainround admission are managed through the Coordinated Scheme. Any deficits are addressed through conversation with schools and, generally speaking, schools with lower levels of deprivation or FSM are willing to admit further pupils over number to address any potential imbalances.

Outside of the turbulence noted above, we do still receive late applications for pupils resident in Southampton and attending Southampton schools. While this number is small, and has been reducing over the past few years, it remains significant and we would like this figure to be at zero. We are aware of certain communities in the city being more at risk of making late applications, or not fully understanding the processes. We are also further aware that as a diverse city, many of our families do not speak English, or do so as a secondary language, and that certain areas of the city see low levels of adult literacy. There is also a mistrust for formal government processes in certain communities, especially those who have fled persecution in other countries.

Ongoing plans to tackle parental understanding and engagement have so far incorporated actions such as the support of the Southampton City Council Admissions Team at school Open Evenings and Admissions events, and staff trained in the applications process offering support and IT access at the Council's 'Gateway' public service point. Last academic year saw the launch of Year 6 Information Mornings hosted in local primary schools where parents were invited in to receive information from School Admissions and have access to IT to complete applications. An event specifically tailored to parents of Year 5 and Year 6 pupils on the SEND Register was also hosted centrally, and attended by secondary schools, to reassure families of the offer of support at

all schools and allow them to ask specific questions of schools, the SEND service and School Admissions.

As part of our work towards the Pledge, we have spoken with schools who operate ability banding as part of their admissions criteria. There is a good rationale to such criteria, ensuring a mixed ability intake to schools. However, given the context of Southampton, we consider that such a process for our schools would perhaps create more disadvantage than it solves. At present, our secondary schools generally admit a broad range of ability. Where we see more notable differences in outcomes is in our schools who admit fewer, or less reflective levels of, FSM pupils, who have higher P8 scores. It remains true, in all schools, that there is a gap between the P8 scores of disadvantaged pupils from all pupils. This matter is best addressed through curriculum work and school improvement, though a case remains to be made that if all schools admitted more reflective levels of FSM that support may be less diluted in schools admitting higher than reflective levels of FSM. The missed opportunity for pupils who arrive late, who are unfamiliar with processes, who come to the city during times of trauma and general parental misunderstanding or disengagement would at present outweigh any potential benefit that schools would achieve through ability banding.

We are constantly reviewing our policy documents and attempting to streamline these to not overload families with information when they are making school applications. However in doing so, we are aware that we may have removed explanations on the assumption of understanding that is not guaranteed. Our work undertaken for the Pledge shows that there is more work we can do here to make our policies more accessible (for example, the Southampton City Council Admissions Policy, on which the majority of school policies in the area are based, has a Flesch Reading Ease score of 43.4). We also work closely with the Southampton City Council Web Team to ensure timely updates to our website but have identified that, especially if work is undertaken to policies, further changes could be made to aid access. We also note that while we often use dyslexia-friendly fonts in school-facing communications, this has not followed through to policy documents.

We also recognise that the outcome of school applications can be confusing to parents due to a lack of understanding of the complexities of the process. In 2020 we began work with the PLEAD Project, a collaboration between the University of Southampton and Kings College London, to look at automated decision making, how this could be improved and how decisions could be better communicated. As part of this project, an ideal offer letter was drawn up, that would explain the category a pupil was sorted into for each preference school and directly relate this to the information of how schools oversubscribed, to walk the applicant through the journey of their offer.

Unfortunately, the project did not progress into the development of product stage, and it has been cost prohibitive for us to develop this alone.

In December 2023, a bulk consultation of admissions policies was led by Southampton City Council, to both bring timelines for review into cohesion for ease of reference, and in an attempt to bring further parity to the policies of schools under various Local Authority, Academy, Foundation and Community Trust oversight. To this end, the policies of Southampton City Council (including St Mark's All-Through School as relevant here), the Reach Cooperative Trust (including Bitterne Park School and Woodlands Community College), the Aspire Community Trust (including Cantell School), The Southampton Cooperative Learning Trust (including Regents Park Community College) and Saint George Catholic College were all opened to consultation. Southampton City Council consulted to add a criterion for 'children of staff', to mirror such criteria at other Trust schools. The Trusts noted above then consulted to adopt this criterion, and the Service Premium criterion that the Local Authority had adopted for admission starting 2023. These changes were all agreed and so the majority of secondary school policies for admission in September 2025 will be either the same or incredibly similar.

We note that, while the majority of schools within the Southampton boundary use a walking distance measurement for the purposes of admission, several of our Academy schools use straight line distance. This causes some disparity, or at least removes a direct comparative, when establishing the nearest school for a pupil, especially when they have not secured a school of preference.

In the past couple of years, Southampton has seen a change to the general pattern of Independent Appeals. While in previous years these were weighted heavily towards mainround appeals with minimal in-year appeals, we are now seeing greatly reduced mainround appeals and significantly increased in-year appeals. This suggests a greater level of satisfaction with mainround offers, which determine the main bulk of intake for a school, but demonstrates the increased pressures for in-year arrivals where parity is harder to ensure by its very nature.

Within Southampton, there are a significant number of young people open to Youth Justice Services. The safeguarding of these pupils, and the desire to 'curb the spread' of such activities has been a key element to considerations of pupils under the Fair Access Protocol over the last couple of years.

As part of their offer to families, all schools in the Pledge have facilities to help families manage costs associated with school. This includes second-hand uniform shops and subsidising of certain activities. In response to the Cost of

Living Crisis, many schools have further expanded their support to families to include offers such as on-site foodbanks and warm spaces.

We are aware that as the Cost of Living Crisis continues, many more families are facing economic challenge and we recognise that at times it can be hard for families to accept help. To this end, Southampton have worked to deliver an 'automatic enrolment' for FSM that families can choose to opt out of, rather than requiring them to apply. This is designed both to recognise that pride has stopped many families from applying and that many families may not realise their eligibility. While this may increase overall FSM figures across the city, it will more importantly mean more support is available to families and schools. We have used our data to assess the pupils currently in our system who qualify for FSM but are not claiming, and have identified funding to be accessed at circa £2million.

In response to a rising demand for Mental Health services that cannot be met at speed by external services, many schools are also providing Mental Health support to pupils through the use of either formal Mental Health Nurses, or by training staff as Mental Health First Aiders.

Overall Objective of Action Plan

In light of the information gathered as part of our work on this Pledge, and through our usual work with schools and families, we are pleased to see that, in the main, on-time mainround applicants receive a school of preference, if not a first preference, and that this leads to intakes that broadly reflect the levels of deprivation and disadvantage in the areas in which these pupils live. We are also pleased to see that barriers to school for lower income families are being tackled in practical and proactive ways by schools, especially those existing in more deprived areas who have sought to address the holistic needs of families during the Cost of Living Crisis. We are also pleased to see the commitment of schools to addressing space deficits at mainround and in-year points when the level of turbulence causes unexpected bulges and a need to place pupils quickly and proportionately into schools. This commitment is only further demonstrated in the collaborative and dedicated way that the schools approach the application of the Fair Access Protocol and their duties around the most vulnerable pupils, including pupils who are Looked After, or have previously been Looked After. We are pleased to see that the work undertaken to engage families in the admissions process, and simplify this as much as possible, is beginning to 'bed in' and see fewer mainround late applications and appeals, and that work on making admissions policies as equitable and useful to a school's local community as possible has seen increased satisfaction with mainround offers.

However, we still feel our biggest area to improve is our ability to empower all of our families to be able to 'make the most' of their applications, and feel confident in their understanding of the processes. This priority makes up the bulk of our Action Plan, especially in light of the guidance to ensure this captures work we can undertake at speed to impact the families who will be applying this autumn.

We are also mindful of holding longer-term targets to address some of the other elements of improvement identified and have detailed these at the end of our Action Plan.

Strategy 1: To make the admissions process as accessible as possible		
What	Who & When	Success Criteria
Re-write of policies to make these more widely accessible, with a reading age of 11, and offer practical explanations and definitions in one place.	SCC Admissions Manager to undertake this work in the summer. Schools to update policies on website at the start of Autumn Term.	Increased numbers of on-time applications. Increased number of applications using all preferences in an informed way.
Re-write of the general advice and guidance pages on the SCC website to make these more accessible and web-friendly.	SCC Admissions Manager in collaboration with SCC Web Team over the summer. Schools will also be asked to ensure their websites are as clear to navigate as possible.	Increased percentages of met preferences. Reduced calls to customer services seeking explanation of processes/policies. Reduced appeals, or a reduction in parental understanding only coming after the presentation of appeal cases.
Continuation and expansion of the offer to primary schools for Year 6 'information mornings' hosted by School Admissions at the schools.	SCC Senior Admissions Officers in collaboration with primary schools. Offer made in summer term, to be actioned in September (10 primary schools have already signed up as of the offer being made on 26 th June).	Fewer responses to offers that express confusion rather than dissatisfaction.
Further translation of the 'Guide to the UK Education System' document into more languages.	SCC Admissions Officer and SCC Inclusion Service.	
Strategy 2: To engage more families of wider backgrounds and communities in the admissions process and empower their choices.		
What	Who & When	Success Criteria
Continuation of presence of School Admissions at secondary school Open Evenings to offer advice to families on process.	SCC Admissions Manager and Senior Admissions Officers, in collaboration with secondary schools in the Autumn Term.	Increased numbers of on-time applications. Increased percentages of met preferences.

<p>The scheduling of Open Evenings will be completed with a mind to allow parents to access as many of these events in their local area as possible, to gain a fuller picture of their potential schools.</p>	<p>Schools in the Summer Term. This has been completed and appropriate changes made by schools where needed.</p>	<p>Increased number of applications using all preferences in an informed way. Reduced parental dissatisfaction in offers, demonstrated by reduced appeals.</p>
<p>The offer of Year 6 Admissions 'coffee mornings' to be extended out to faith and community centres.</p>	<p>SCC Admissions Manager and Senior Admissions Officers, in collaboration with the SCC Stronger Communities Team. To be offered in the Summer Term and delivered in the Autumn Term</p>	<p>Reduced reports that certain communities feel discriminated by processes (while we can prove this isn't the case, we want families to <i>feel</i> this reality). Reduced reports that parents are concerned about non-preferred schools meeting their child's needs.</p>
<p>Offers of information sharing and training sessions to made to faith and community centres to allow for upskilling of these centres.</p>	<p>SCC Admissions Manager and Senior Admissions Officers, in collaboration with the SCC Stronger Communities Team. This work has already begun and will continue into the Summer and Autumn Terms.</p>	<p>Appeal Panel make-up to be more representative of the diverse communities within Southampton.</p>
<p>A proactive recruitment drive for Independent Appeal Panel Members in underrepresented demographics.</p>	<p>SCC Admissions Manager in collaboration with SCC Democratic Services and the SCC Stronger Communities Team. To be undertaken over the summer and into the Autumn Term.</p>	
<p>A centralised event for parents of Year 5/6 SEND children to access information and guidance and speak to schools will be hosted.</p>	<p>SCC SEND Strategic Lead and SCC Admissions Manager to lead, with support from their teams and the schools. To be planned for the Autumn Term.</p>	

Strategy 3: To use the admissions process as effectively as possible as part of our dedication to rising to the specific challenges of Southampton.

What	Who & When	Success Criteria
To undertake a full review of our Fair Access Protocol, processes and documents to absorb learning since the last review.	SCC Admissions Manager will lead in liaison with all schools, Youth Justice Service and SCC Inclusion Service.	Young people will be quickly and proportionately placed at schools, with this following through into being on-roll swiftly and engaging in learning.
To agree the full scope of vulnerable and medical/social criteria in use at schools to ensure parity and communicate this to relevant professionals.	SCC Admissions Manager in liaison with schools, beginning in the Summer Term. This will then be communicated to medical and social care professionals, as well as the Youth Justice Service.	Decisions on school placement for vulnerable young people will be made collaboratively and be engaged with as they represent the best outcome for the individual.
School place offer letters to be rewritten to signpost parents more clearly to School Travel Support, and the support available at schools.	SCC Admissions Manager to undertake over the summer.	Young people and their families will feel confident in placements and in plans for their schooling that support Youth Justice involvement and a removal from networks that pose risk to them.
Schools to ensure active promotion of their work to address Cost of Living difficulties in their transition information, presentations to primary schools and at Open Evenings.	Schools to begin implementing in the summer term and into the Autumn Term events.	The number of families receiving support for travel, uniform and other schooling expenses will be reflective of the known level of need.

Longer-Term Actions to Explore

The impact of Southampton's opt-out approach to FSM will be analysed to see the impact this has on the general offer for such pupils and its impact on outcomes.

The improvement of schools will be supported by the development of comprehensive school improvement plans in individual Trusts and school groups. This will be further supported by a strong and supportive Schools Monitoring process in the Local Authority. A focus of this work will be closing the gap between disadvantaged and all learners.

The SCC Admissions Manager will open a dialogue with Trusts and schools in the Autumn Term about the possibility of those schools using direct-line distance to consult on making the change to walking distance, to offer more parity in placement considerations.

The SCC Admissions Manager will open a dialogue with Saint George Catholic College about the possibility of the school having a priority for Pupil Premium within its Baptised Catholic criterion. We recognise this will not be the school's absolute right to agree upon and so will also open this dialogue with the Diocese of Portsmouth. This will also include asking again for the desegregation of (Previously/)Looked After Children of, and not of, the Faith at both Saint George Catholic College and St Anne's Catholic School, as well as the relevant primary schools affected.

I confirm that the actions identified on this plan will be completed to the best of our ability by the deadlines identified.

Signed: *Zoe Snow*

Zoe Snow, Southampton City Council Admissions & School Place Planning Manager
On behalf of Southampton City Council and the partner Pledge schools

Dated: 26th June 2024

Date of plan: June 2024