



Report

Date: 17 January 2024

To: the Chair and Members of the
CABINET

Report Title: **SCHOOL ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS FOR 2025/2026 ACADEMIC YEAR**

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision
Councillor Lani-Mae Ball, Cabinet Member for Early Help, Education, Skills and Young People	All	Yes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report outlines the requirements for the adoption of schemes for Co-ordinating the Admission Arrangements for Primary and Secondary Schools and the approval of the Admission Arrangements for Community Schools in the 2025/2026 School Year.
2. The co-ordinated admission arrangements for the year of entry to all types of mainstream schools are a statutory responsibility of the Council and must be determined annually.
3. Separately, each admission authority is required to set its own admission arrangements. The various bodies, responsible for admission to schools in Doncaster, are summarised below:

Type of School	Community Schools	Church Schools	Free Schools	Academies	Total
Responsible Body	City of Doncaster Council	Governing Body	Trust	Trust	
Infant Schools	3	0	0	6	9
Junior Schools	1	0	0	6	7
Primary Schools	17	6	0	59	82
Secondary Schools	0	0	3	17	20
TOTAL	21	6	3	88	118

EXEMPT REPORT

4. There are no exemptions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. The Mayor and members of Cabinet is asked to approve the following admission

arrangements for the 2025/2026 school year:

- Community School Admission Arrangements (paragraphs 13 to 14 below).
- Community School Nursery Admission Arrangements (paragraphs 13 to 14 below).
- Primary Co-ordinated Admission Arrangements (paragraphs 15 to 18 below).
- Secondary Co-ordinated Admission Arrangements (paragraphs 15 to 18 below).

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

6. The Co-ordinated Arrangements noted above are intended to provide an equal opportunity for all parents to apply for school places at the same time through a process co-ordinated by the Council.
7. The School and Nursery Admission Arrangements set out the process by which applications by parents for community schools are considered and ensure that they are administered consistently and in a fair and equitable manner.

BACKGROUND

8. The Council has a duty under Section 86 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 to make arrangements for enabling the parents of children in its area to express a preference for a maintained school and to give reasons for that preference.
9. By 1 January in the relevant determination year the Council is required to formulate schemes for co-ordinating the admission arrangements for all maintained schools and academies in the City and to seek the agreement of other admission authorities to the co-ordinated admission arrangements. These are intended to make school admissions easier, more transparent, and less stressful for parents. They require parents to rank preferences on a single common application form which they must submit to their home council. Parents will then receive a single offer of a school place for their child from the Council on a designated day.
10. By 28 February each year the Council is required to determine the admission arrangements that will apply to schools for which it is the admission authority i.e., community schools. This has been brought forward from previous years by the Department for Education to allow more time for any necessary objections to be lodged with the School Adjudicator.
11. In drawing up its arrangements the Council has to have regard to relevant legislation, the School Admissions Code (the Code) and guidance from the Department for Education. These contain a number of mandatory requirements which all admission authorities are required to follow and those requirements have been taken into account in the proposed arrangements.
12. The Private, Voluntary or Independent sector make their own arrangements for places within the City for 3 and 4 year old early years places. However, the Council has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient accessible and affordable places for children across a range of provision types and provides support and guidance as necessary.

Admission Arrangements 2025/2026

13. The Council is required to set arrangements for admission to community schools. Community schools are maintained schools for which the Council employs the school's staff, is responsible for the school's admissions and owns the school's estate. This represents 21

of the 118 mainstream schools in Doncaster. The arrangements are determined in relation to the Code and relevant regulations published by the Department for Education. The only changes proposed relate to changes to admission numbers for schools as a result of building modifications.

14. Whilst the Council is not responsible for setting the arrangements for academies, voluntary aided or free schools it undertakes an important role to ensure that they are as compliant with any changes required of them and that they adhere to the guidance set within the Code. The Council holds those schools to account and robustly challenges non-compliance, initially through the school's governance structure and when necessary, by requesting support from the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Secretary of State.

Co-ordinated Admission Arrangements 2025/2026

15. The Co-ordinated Admission Arrangements for the normal year of entry remain unchanged; parents will continue to apply to their home local authority from which they will receive their decisions.
16. Applications at each phase of education; nursery, primary and secondary are all available digitally through the Council's website. For the initial round of year of entry school applications, the Council continues to receive a high percentage of online applications. For September 2023, the online rates for all applications have been sustained at 99%. The benefit to parent/carers is the ability for them to receive their decisions by email on national offer day (3 March 2025 for secondary schools and 16 April 2025 for primary schools). Paper applications are available for parents on the Council's website and this will remain the case until the Council is satisfied that all parents will have equal access to the admission process.
17. Co-ordination remains an important arrangement between schools and local authorities in terms of safeguarding and good working relations. A key component of this is the identification of potential applicants from data held by Health and schools through appropriate data sharing agreements which contribute significantly to the success of the process.
18. The success of the arrangements can be seen in increases in each of the last three years where a consistently high rate of pupil preference has been met. Most recently, where parents have applied by the national closing dates for September 2023, offer rates for any preference made by parents stood at 96% (secondary) and 98% (primary). This success is replicated for first preferences which were consistently high 87% (secondary) and 96% (primary). In three of these areas our outcomes exceed national outcomes and are equal to national in the fourth.

Publication of Information for Parents

19. The Council is required to publish information for parents detailing the arrangements for admission to schools and local University Technology Colleges by 12 September each year. In addition, the Council is required to write to parents of prospective pupils of Technology Colleges directly to explain the appropriate admission arrangements and makes reference to the Doncaster University Technology College.
20. The admissions and co-ordination arrangements are included as part of a wider Learning Provision Organisation Strategy, integrating education settings place planning, admissions arrangements/co-ordination and capital developments into one area.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Admission Arrangements

21. The Council is required to set arrangements for admission to community schools. It must include in its arrangements, information on the order in which places will be offered when a year group is oversubscribed. These are usually referred to as the admission criteria.
22. In Doncaster, each school serves a local community, usually referred to as the 'catchment area'. This reflects the philosophy that 'efficient education' is particularly fostered by closely associating a secondary school and a group of linked primary schools, in a pyramid. In this way, each school becomes part of the provision for a community and the education of the community's children benefits greatly from the association of its schools.
23. The admission criteria for admission to community schools and community school nurseries reflect the requirement to give first priority to children in care. The next criterion gives priority to those who live within a particular catchment area. The remaining school admission criteria also recognise the importance of children attending the same school as siblings and a school which is linked to their present school in the pyramid structure. In circumstances where a place is only available in any of the criterion for one child from a multiple birth i.e., twins, the Council has undertaken to offer each child a place together.

Co-ordinated Admission Arrangements

24. The Council is required to determine arrangements which co-ordinate the admission process to all schools and academies for the year of entry. They must allow for parents to express up to three preferences and require them to apply to their own local authority. These must be considered equally and the eligibility for places will be determined using each school's admission criteria.
25. A pupil will be offered a single place which is the highest ranked school for which they are eligible. Where no place is available the child will be offered an alternative place.
26. The volume of year of entry applications continues to rise. The last two years were as follows:

Year of Entry Admissions		Number of Appeals	Appeals Allowed
2022/23	10780	145	15%
2023/24	11124	167	28%

27. Although the mandatory requirement to co-ordinate in year was removed from September 2013 it is proposed that the Council reaffirms its commitment to continue to co-ordinate the admission arrangements during the school year and to seek the agreement of other admission authorities to continue to do so. This is best illustrated when we consider the volume of in-year applications which have continued to increase year on year. The last two full years being as follows:

In Year Transfer Requests		Number of Appeals	Appeals Allowed
2021/22	5370	109	28%
2022/23	6390	214	30%

28. The Council's co-ordination includes the appeal process. As the volume of applications has increased so have the number of appeals. The last two full years below show a 29% increase in the number of appeals heard and this is projected to continue to increase in 2023/24.

Number of Admission Appeals Heard	
2021/22	252
2022/23	353

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

Community School and Nursery Admission Arrangements






29. The Council must ensure that its arrangements take into account the relevant regulations and comply with the mandatory provisions of the Code. They include guidelines in setting oversubscription criteria which ensure that the arrangements are fair to all children and their families and promote social equity. They must also be consistent with the co-ordinated arrangements for the area.
30. The proposed arrangements are based upon those currently in place and have been subjected to the required consultation. The admission criteria and the retention of Catchment areas, which gives the majority of children in the City priority though not a guarantee to an individual school, have been reaffirmed annually. To date, this principle has also been adopted by the majority of those schools which have become academies and so determine their own arrangements.
31. The admission arrangements contain details of the admission number for each school. These are reviewed annually and where necessary are revised to take into account changes in the net capacity assessment and variations in the number of pupils expected.


Co-ordinated Admission Arrangements - Primary and Secondary

32. Minor changes have been made to the relevant dates currently in place. These dates are within statutory timescales and have been agreed with the majority of our neighbouring authorities.
33. The mandatory requirement to co-ordinate in-year applications was removed for admission from September 2013. However, the Council, in agreement with schools, has previously determined that this should continue and this position is reaffirmed in the proposed arrangements. Continuing to co-ordinate in-year admissions strengthens the Council's safeguarding role by continuing to monitor the movement of pupils and manage the Children Missing Education database. To do otherwise would rely on schools notifying the Council of applications it receives and their outcomes. It would also mean parents would have to contend with differing arrangements at each school.
34. The Council experiences a large number of in-year applications, the majority of which are due to changes of address, both into and around the City.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES


35. The main impact of the proposals set out in this report on the Council's key priorities are set out below:

Great 8 Priority	Positive Overall	Mix of Positive & Negative	Trade-offs to consider – Negative overall	Neutral or No implications
 Tackling Climate Change	✓			
<p>Comments:</p> <p>The provision of a local place for every pupil through a co-ordinated admissions system with all schools working together minimises the need to extensive journeys across the City.</p>				
 Developing the skills to thrive in life and in work	✓			
<p>Comments:</p> <p>Our vision is for learning that prepares all children, young people and adults for a life that is fulfilling;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every child has life-changing learning experiences within and beyond school; • Many more great teachers work in Doncaster Schools that are good or better; • Providing learning experiences which prepare young people for the world of work. • Raise the awareness of parents to diverse opportunities and provision including City wide access to provision at Doncaster University Technology College and XP Schools. 				
 Making Doncaster the best place to do business and create good jobs	✓			
<p>This report does not directly cover this area.</p>				
 Building opportunities for healthier, happier and longer lives for all	✓			
<p>Comments:</p> <p>Learning outcomes and health outcomes are intrinsically linked. Evidence shows that education, training and employment are key socio-economic factors in determining health status (Marmot, 2010). The admission arrangements described should be mindful of the impact on ease of access to education and in particular for those families who suffer disadvantage. Programmes that aim to improve attendance and reduce the gap in educational attainment are likely to impact positively on reducing long-term health inequalities in Doncaster.</p>				
 Creating safer, stronger, greener and cleaner communities where everyone belongs	✓			
<p>This report does not directly cover this area.</p>				


 Nurturing a child and family-friendly City	✓			
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Comments:
 The Arrangements, co-ordinated by the Council, encourage local schools to work together to support pupils by;

- Supporting ease of access for all residents to school places;
- Prioritising places for local pupils and their siblings;
- Supporting pupils' attendance at school and reducing risk for students out of school;
- Raising education standards and aspirations of young people;
- Improving services for Children, Young People and their families.

 Building Transport and digital connections fit for the future	✓			
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This report does not directly cover this area.

 Promoting the City and its cultural, sporting, and heritage opportunities	✓			
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This report does not directly cover this area.

Fair & Inclusive	✓			
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Comments:
 The arrangements are designed to not discriminate on the grounds of disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; or sexual orientation, against a person and the decisions taken as to who is offered admission as a pupil. In accordance with the Code, the arrangements and admission criteria are reasonable, clear, objective, procedurally fair, and comply with all relevant legislation, including equalities legislation. The Council ensures that the arrangements do not disadvantage unfairly, either directly or indirectly, a child from a particular social or racial group, or a child with a disability or special educational needs.

Special provision has also been made within the In Year Fair Access protocol to prioritise applications for service personnel and crown servants in the line with the requirements of the Code and the Service Forces Covenant. The arrangements also include provision for applications from service personnel and crown servants moving to Doncaster will be considered one term in advance of a change of address in accordance with the guidance from the Department for Education providing that the application is accompanied by an official letter that declares a relocation date and a Unit postal address or quartering area address.

In addition to the ability to allocate school places through In year Fair Access protocol as above, this would also apply to children of families, or who are, Gypsies, Roma, Travellers, refugees, and asylum seekers where they have been unable to secure a place through the normal in year admission process.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS (Author HMP Date 26/9/23)

36. Section 88C of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, as amended, requires, before the beginning of each school year, the admission authority for a maintained school in England to determine the admission arrangements which are to apply for that year.
37. The School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012, as amended, state that every admission authority must determine their admission arrangements on or before 28 February in the determination year. The Statutory Guidance contained in the School Admissions Code (September 2021) at paragraph 1.45 provides consultation is only need if changes are proposed subject to the requirement that admission authorities must consult on their admission arrangements at least once every 7 years.
38. The Regulations also require a local authority to formulate, in relation to each academic year, a qualifying scheme in relation to each primary and secondary school in their area. The local authority must formulate a qualifying scheme by 1 January in the relevant determination year and must inform the Secretary of State on or before 28 February in the relevant determination year whether they have secured the adoption of a qualifying scheme or not. The School Information (England) Regulations 2008 require that local authorities publish a composite prospectus for parents by 12 September each year which contains the admissions arrangements. An amendment has been published to the regulations which came into force on 14 February 2017. This requires local authorities to include details of local University Technology Colleges (UTCs) in the prospectus and to write to parents of prospective pupils to confirm the appropriate admission arrangements to UTCs.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS (Author Initials JO Date 27/09/2023)

39. This report refers to the schemes for admission arrangements to schools but has no effect on either the total number of pupils admitted or on the resources required to administer these admissions.
40. As such there are no financial implications rising directly from this report.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS (JC Date 25/09/2023)

41. There are no HR implications arising from this report.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS (Author Initials PW Date 26/09/23)

42. There are no specific technology implications arising from this report. The Synergy Schools Admissions Management solution supports the admission arrangements outlined in this report, with parents encouraged to make their applications online via the Parent Portal.

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

43. If the arrangements fail to comply with the regulations and the Code, they may be subject to challenge from parents through objections to Schools Adjudicator or the Local Government Ombudsman. This may have a detrimental impact on other pupils in a school or a financial impact on the Council or schools.
44. If schools do not wish to take part in the in-year co-ordination process the Council will put in place appropriate processes and safeguards to monitor the movement of pupils.

CONSULTATION

45. The following stakeholders were consulted in accordance with the appropriate regulations and have been informed that the draft arrangements have been placed on the Council's website: -

Community schools
Public and interested parties
Free Schools

Voluntary Aided Schools
Neighbouring local authorities
Academies

46. Following approval of the determined admission arrangements the Council will publish a copy of those arrangements on its website. An appropriate person or parents may object to the arrangements by writing to the Schools Adjudicator by 15 May 2024.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

47. The following background papers are available: -

- Draft Community Schools Admission Policy 2025/26 - www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/schools/admission-arrangements
- Draft Community Schools Nursery Admission Policy 2025/26 - www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/schools/admission-arrangements
- Draft Qualifying Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme for Primary Schools in Doncaster 2025/26 - www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/schools/admission-arrangements
- Draft Qualifying Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme for Secondary Schools in Doncaster 2025/26 - www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/schools/admission-arrangements
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – Due Regard Statement (Appendix 1)
- Department for Education - School Admissions Code - www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-code--2
- Department for Education - School Admissions Appeal Code - www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-appeals-code
- The School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012 – www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/8/made
- The School Admissions (Admissions Appeals Arrangements) Regulations 2012 - www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/9/pdfs/ukxi_20120009_en.pdf
- The School Admissions (Infant Class Size) England Regulations 2012 - www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/10/pdfs/ukxi_20120010_en.pdf
- The School Information (England) Regulations 2008 - www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2008/3093/pdfs/ukxi_20083093_en.pdf
- Cabinet Report 10 December 2008 - Discretionary Transport Efficiency Savings
- The Education (Relevant Areas for Consultation on Admission Arrangements) Regulations 1999 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1999/125/contents/made>

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

“The Code”	The School Admissions Code
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