

Wiltshire School Places Strategy 2023 - 2027 Briefing Note No. 23-06

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Introduction

Wiltshire's current School Place Strategy 2017 – 2022 now needs to be replaced with a new version for 2023 – 2027. A draft has therefore been written which has today been placed on the Council's website and circulated to stakeholders. Comments on the strategy can be made until 31st March 2023. A final version will then be presented to Cabinet for approval, taking into account the comments received. The full School Places Strategy 2023 - 2027 can be viewed here - [Education strategies and policies - Wiltshire Council](#) .

What is the School Places Strategy?

The School Places Strategy pulls together the information required to form a strategic view of the need for mainstream school places across Wiltshire. It provides a summary analysis of current provision, identifies gaps and over-provision and sets out how the LA intends to address these. Specifically, the strategy provides a revised and updated policy framework for considering the following:

- statutory proposals, (opening, closing and defining the size and organisation of schools);
- planning and commissioning new school provision;
- supporting the development of school organisation change including informal and formal school partnership arrangements which support school to school improvement and make efficient use of resources.

To be effective, the commissioning process must begin with a thorough understanding of the needs and aspirations of the local community. It requires the strategic planning of services based on an analysis of need, a set of policies and principles by which decisions will be made and well-defined processes for the implementation of proposals. Together these components make up the key requirements of a good commissioning process and provide a structure for this strategy. The strategy therefore sets out:

- demographic trends in Wiltshire including a summary of new major house building planned in Wiltshire;
- details of current school provision;

- an analysis of the impact of demographic changes on current provision – surplus places/deficit of places. The data is used by the Local Authority and its partners to inform decision making;
- emerging proposals for future provision of places for children and young people in Wiltshire.;
- guiding policies and principles upon which decisions will be informed;
- details of the Council's strategy for capital investment in schools to secure a place for every child;

Who is the Strategy for?

The strategy is intended to help key stakeholders and partners in the Local Authority, schools, Academy Trusts, governors, parents, diocese, local communities, businesses, and other providers of education, to understand what school places are needed in Wiltshire, now, and in the future, and how they will be provided.

Paragraph 94 of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) states that it is important that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities, and that local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. This includes local planning authorities giving great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools when preparing plans and making decisions on planning applications.

The Strategy is split into several sections as briefly explained below:

A) The Wiltshire Context

This section summarises the Wiltshire geographical and population context, plus the current school education providers.

B) Legislation

This section summarises the key national legislation and local policies affecting school organisation, including statutory duties and the regulations that need to be followed when making significant changes to schools, opening new schools or closing maintained schools.

C) Policies and Principles to the provision of school places

This section sets out the Wiltshire Council policies and principles for the provision of school places. This includes the preferred size and locations for new schools and the Council's approach to supporting small and rural schools. It also includes the triggers to reviewing school organisation, steps that can be taken to reduce surplus places and the circumstances in which school closures may be considered.

D) Influencing Factors

This section considers the key factors likely to have the greatest influence on managing school places across the county over the next 5 years including the birth rate, housing development, migration and the presence of the Armed Services in Wiltshire. In line with national trends there has been an overall drop in the birth rate in the last few years across Wiltshire as a whole. In summary:

The pressure on primary school places from 2009 was significant, but now the lower birth rate is beginning to feed into primary schools. The oldest children from the peak years are now progressing into secondary education.

Primary school numbers by year group as at January 2022

Year Group	Rec	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Number of pupils	5130	5448	5338	5504	5434	5565	5712

This table shows the larger cohorts are currently in the older age ranges in primary schools and therefore these larger numbers are now feeding into secondary schools. Primary schools are therefore losing larger cohorts and admitting smaller cohorts into reception, meaning that the overall numbers in primary schools will decline.

Secondary school numbers by year group as at January 2022

Year Group	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13
Number of pupils	5480	5239	5295	5104	4937	2452	2306

Numbers in secondary schools have already begun to increase and will continue to do over the next few years. Although these tables give the overall picture in the county there will be significant variations between areas of the local authority with, for instance, a greater decline in primary numbers in the rural areas. Factors such as armed forces movement and the rate and scale of local housing developments are also key.

E) Detailed community area assessments

In this section, each community area is considered separately. The planning of school places in Wiltshire is based on the geographical areas defined by the secondary school catchments and feeder schools aligned to them.

The School Places Strategy considers each geographical area separately, providing information on the schools in the area, local birth rate, projected pupil numbers, current and proposed new housing and the implications of this data on primary and secondary provision. Where projects are deemed necessary to ensure sufficient school places, these projects are also listed.

F) Implementation Plan

The final section of the strategy summarises the projects that are deemed necessary to ensure a sufficient supply of places, separated into those that are required in the short, medium and long term.

A full copy of the School Places Strategy can be seen here: [Education strategies and policies - Wiltshire Council](#) .