

School Admissions Team

**Protocol for selection of a school for a
Temporary Increase to the school's admission
number prior to the commencement of the
2020 Transfer Procedure**

Introduction and Background

1. Area Planning is the process of strategic planning of education provision that supports the implementation of the Department's "*Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable schools*". The Area Planning process is about determining the future needs of an area, comparing this with what already exists to identify gaps and over-provision and planning to address these.
2. The Department's Open Enrolment Policy provides the framework within which the process of school admissions operates. The policy allows for temporary increases in a school's admissions or enrolment numbers to cater for short-term demographic pressures through the Temporary Variation (TV) process. TV requests are submitted by schools that are oversubscribed and wish to increase their admissions and/or enrolment numbers through the admission of additional children who are next in line for a place on the school's rank order of applicants. TV requests consider the availability of alternative schools within the same sector within a reasonable travelling distance of the children's home address. For clarification, sectors are defined as denominational (maintained post-primary schools and denominational grammar schools), non-denominational (controlled post-primary schools and non-denominational grammar schools), Integrated (controlled integrated post-primary and grant maintained integrated post-primary schools), and Irish Medium.
3. In 2018, 313 children remained unplaced at the conclusion of the 2018 transfer process. (This procedure is for children who do not have a statement of special

educational needs. 'Statemented' children are placed through a different process.) This was a significant increase in the numbers over previous years when the expected number of unplaced children fell in the range 100-150. While a significant number of places remained available (3,189), these were not always in the areas where demand was highest. This was as the result, to a large extent, of a growth of the cohort transferring of 952 over the level in 2017.

4. The Department analysed anticipated demand for Transfer 2019 to forecast the geographic locations and sectors where there may be oversubscription in 2019. This allowed the area, sectors and schools where additional places would in all likelihood be required in 2019 to be identified. As a result an additional 413 Year 8 places for a one-year only basis were provided in advance of the commencement of the Transfer Procedure to 20 schools, in areas of particular pressure in 2019. This was in order to allow the TV process to operate effectively and ensure the admissions process concluded on Friday 31 May 2019. At the end of the process a total of 226 children remained unplaced, this is despite an increase in the cohort transferring of over 1,250. The Department and the Education Authority (EA) worked very closely to monitor the process and the Department approved over 700 TVs, meaning over 1,150 additional Year 8 places were provided across Northern Ireland for September 2019 admission.
5. This was a one year exercise and admissions numbers will now revert to their usual approved levels for 2020. Looking ahead to this and future years' transfer processes, using figures from the 2018/19 primary school census data (excluding statemented pupils), the pressures faced over recent years are expected to continue.

Issues

6. Article 16 of the Education (NI) Order (as amended) provides for schools to set their own admissions criteria. The admissions criteria set by schools are used to establish which children to admit in the event of a school being oversubscribed with applications. It is the sole responsibility of Boards of Governors of post-primary schools to set the criteria they wish to prioritise to select children for admission up to the school's approved admissions number.
7. As stated in paragraph two, the TV process exists to cater for short-term demographic pressures and the Department notes that while TVs are approved during the admissions process this puts additional pressure on the EA to ensure all application preferences are processed by the conclusion of the admissions process.
8. Every time a TV is approved during the process this can have a knock-on effect on other schools with children placed at those schools at lower preference recalled to the higher preference school. This leads to forms being recalled from other schools. Therefore in oversubscribed areas where a number of schools seek and receive TV approvals, this effect is magnified with a large number of application forms moving between schools, generating further TV requests.
9. Schools are not under any obligation to apply for an increase to their approved numbers to admit more children during or after the conclusion of the process.
10. The Department is currently undertaking work to identify the anticipated geographic locations and sectors where there may be oversubscription using

2018/19 school census data and data from the 2019 transfer process. This work is being supported by Land & Property Services (NI Mapping).

11. Given the time lag between identifying educational need, publishing Development Proposals and subsequent consideration by the Department, it is critical that the Department considers open and transparent ways in which temporary additional places are provided to ensure that the number of unplaced children is minimised and the admissions process concludes on time.

12. The Department is of the view that additional temporary places need to be built into the system prior to the commencement of the 2020 and 2021 post primary admissions processes to deal with increased cohort size. The Department recognises that this exercise will not create enough space for all the additional children transferring in areas where there is oversubscription and TV approvals will still be required to operate during and after the conclusion of the admission process to facilitate the placement of children.

13. The purpose of this protocol is to set out a process to be used to rank schools (based on a criteria based score and accommodation requirements, considering cost and delivery timescales) for consideration of a temporary increase to their admissions number in advance of the transfer process commencing. (It is important to note this exercise does not consider the transfer from Junior High Schools to Senior Schools in the Dickson Plan area and a separate exercise will be undertaken to identify if additional places are required here.)

Application Process

14. The process for application will be by invitation to schools that consider they draw the majority of their pupils from an identified geographic location where there may be oversubscription in Year 8 admissions for September 2020 and 2021 (as outlined in the 'Planning for Transfer 2020' letter). Such schools are invited by the Department to submit an application if they wish to be considered for a temporary increase to their admissions number for either one or two years. Schools have the option to submit an application for one or two years and the Department will consider their application and rank schools against the protocol set out in paragraphs 22 to 31 below. The Department is aware that a number of schools have either completed, or are in the process of, pre-publication consultation regarding proposals to increase admissions and enrolment numbers, however the outcome of these proposals are unknown at this time and the Department has to plan to ensure there are sufficient Year 8 places available within the system prior to the commencement of the Transfer process.
15. The process will only be open to schools already vested within the schools estate.
16. An application may be submitted by the Principal of the post primary school as long as the Board of Governors or Trustees are content with the application¹.
17. In determining the schools to be considered for a temporary increase to their Year 8 admission number, the Department will prioritise places at schools where no capital expenditure will be required, ensuring Value for Money for the public purse. The overall objective is to ensure the Department provides sufficient

¹ The Principal of the school submitting an application will confirm the Board of Governors or Trustees are content with the application by completing section 5 of the application form.

places across Northern Ireland to allow the admissions process to conclude successfully and the TV procedure to operate effectively; thereby maximising the number of children placed during the procedure and minimising the stress caused to families by having to seek a school place at the conclusion of the process - in June or over the summer period. Within the process there is no distinction made between grammar places as opposed to non-grammar school places and the Department will consider available places within sectors.

18. In order to secure the required number of places in an area / sector the Department may consider lower ranked schools over higher ranked schools. This situation may arise when a higher ranked school has stipulated a minimum number of additional pupils it can accept due, for example, to timetabling arrangements and practical class sizes etc. and as a result the Department may consider lower ranked schools to ensure there is not an oversupply of Year 8 places which could indirectly impact on Year 8 admissions in other schools in the area.

19. Applicants should note that if schools have the same score and are applying for the same number of pupils the Department will decide on the individual school's rank order in the prioritised lists based on the proportion of children attending the school who reside in an area of identified pressure, with the school with the higher proportion being selected.

20. An assessment panel will be established within the Department (consisting of members of School Admissions Team and Estate Operations Team) to consider the schools against the set assessment criteria and scoring matrix set out in this document. This group will report to the Director of Area Planning, Admissions and

Shared Campuses and will make recommendations to the Minister/Permanent Secretary for consideration as to which temporary increases to Year 8 admissions numbers should be approved. The Department will publish the outcome of the application process showing the number of temporary additional places provided and the successful schools.

21. Schools may still apply for TVs whether or not they receive additional places as part of this exercise.

Stage 1 Assessment – Gateway Checks

22. All applications received will be subject to the following Gateway checks (Stage 1 assessment):

- a) A Development Proposal has not been published or approved by the Department for the closure of the school or a reduction in numbers in the school.
- b) The school can accommodate additional Year 8 pupils with no additional accommodation required².
- c) Over 50 percent of the school's Year 8 admission must reside in one of the seven areas where the school's sector may be oversubscribed in Year 8 admissions for September 2020 - as outlined in the 'Planning for Transfer 2020' letter referenced in paragraph 14 above. (The Department will utilise Year 8 pupil residence data from the 2018/19 school census.)

23. If the application received from the school passes the three Gateway checks stated above then the application will proceed to detailed assessment (Stage 2) as defined below³.

24. At this stage the quantum of increases being sought is still being determined. However this will be finalised prior to the assessment of application forms.

² If after this protocol has been applied and there remains oversubscription the Department may consider, in exceptional circumstances, capital expenditure to provide additional accommodation. This will be dependent on cost and delivery timescales etc.

³ Or in exceptional circumstances the Department may approach schools if insufficient applications are received from schools.

25. The Department realises that given other considerations, such as practical class size limits, a school may have a preference for the number of additional children it could take and a number it would not wish to take. A school may feel it can admit a maximum of 20 additional children, but would not wish to accept less than 10 additional children. This should be specified on the application. Similarly if a school requires capital works to admit a certain number of additional children, but can admit a lower number without capital works, this should be specified. With the application form, schools have the option of applying for a one year temporary increase or a two year temporary increase to their admissions number.

Stage 2 (a) Assessment – Scoring

26. The scoring weights applied to each of the criteria are given below. A total of **50** points are available.

Assessment Criterion 1 – Preferences – Total marks available (15)

Rationale – Parental preference will be considered in reviewing the total preference applications submitted to the school over the last three years using EA data. Note for September 2019 entry this will be measured against approved admissions number but not taking into account the additional places awarded in last year's exercise.

Scoring	0 or 5 points per year, up to a maximum of 15 points	A score of 5 points is awarded to schools that have been oversubscribed for each year in the last three years at the conclusion of the process; or 0 points in each year where this is not the case.
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Assessment Criterion 2 – Temporary increase to Year 8 admissions number – Total marks available (15)

Rationale – Additional marks will be awarded to schools who have not had a temporary increase to their admissions number in each of the last three years

using Departmental TV data. This criterion is intended to mitigate the situation whereby temporary increases allow one school to continue to grow at the expense of neighbouring schools of the same sector.

Scoring	0 or 5 points per year, up to a maximum of 15 points	A score of 5 points is awarded to schools that have not received a temporary increase to their approved admissions number for each year in the last three years; or 0 points in each year where this is not the case.
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Assessment Criterion 3 – Social Considerations – Total marks available (10)

Rationale – Additional weight will be given to schools where pupils are more impacted by social issues. The indicators selected to identify these schools are the number of pupils identified as having a statement (SEN Stage 5) and the level of free school meals (FSM) provision within mainstream provision in the school. The scoring for FSM and SEN provision will be calculated after the applications have been submitted and reviewed. The lowest and highest will be determined and given a minimum and maximum respective score and then relative points per/SEN and per/FSM between the minimum and maximum scores will be calculated and awarded to each application. The Department will utilise data from the 2018/19 school census.

Scoring	0 to a maximum of 5 points (SEN)	<p>The lowest and highest will be determined from applications submitted.</p> <p>The relative points per/SEN between the minimum and maximum scores will be calculated and awarded appropriately to each application.</p>
	0 to a maximum of 5 points (FSM)	<p>The lowest and highest will be determined from applications submitted.</p> <p>The relative points per/FSM between the minimum and maximum scores will be calculated and awarded appropriately to each application.</p>

Assessment Criterion 4 – School 2020 Admission Criteria – Total marks (10)

Rationale – Under open enrolment, admissions are a matter for individual schools’ Boards of Governors. Admissions criteria are used to decide which pupils should be admitted if there are more applicants than places. The criteria are not subject to the Department’s approval but the Department provides recommended and not recommended criteria that schools should use for admissions. Boards of Governors are required by law to “have regard” to these recommendations when drawing up their admissions criteria. The Department will be provided with schools’ finalised admissions criteria from the EA.

Scoring	10	A score of 10 points is awarded to schools that do not use “not recommended admission criteria” as referenced in circular 2016/15 paragraph 9.15 in their admissions criteria for September 2020 entry; or 0 points where this is not the case.
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Stage 2(b) Accommodation Consideration

27. As highlighted in paragraph 17 the Department will prioritise additional Year 8 places at schools where no such capital expenditure is required as the education budget is under considerable pressure. Stage 2 (b) will only be considered if there are insufficient additional Year 8 places to meet demand in identified areas / sectors.

28. The list for Stage 2 (b) will be compiled based on the estimated cost to the Department⁴.

29. The Department will use a tie breaker to rank schools in the event that schools within an identified area / sector have the same estimated cost. The tie breaker will consist of determining scores from Stage 2 (a).

⁴ The cost to the Department is considered as actual expenditure to be incurred by the Department e.g. capital project taken forward by a Voluntary Grammar Category B school the Department will incur no capital cost whereas if a capital project is 100 percent funded by the Department the Department will incur all costs. The estimated costs will be provided by the EA initially via a desk exercise and a site visit if required.

Stage 3 – Prioritised Lists

30. Following application of this scoring process, prioritised lists for consideration of a one year or two years temporary increase to a school's admissions number (Stage 2 (a) and Stage 2 (b)) will be produced for each identified geographic location where there may be oversubscription in Year 8 admissions. However, if there are insufficient applications and there remains a shortfall in particular geographic locations the Department may approach schools directly⁵. The Department notes that schools that require capital expenditure will be reviewed on a case by case basis and that these projects would have to demonstrate value for money and would be subject to business case approval.
31. If applications incur capital expenditure these will be reviewed by the EA to determine estimated cost and delivery timescales. Prioritised lists will be revised accordingly.

⁵ If there are insufficient applications the Department may approach schools directly to determine if they are able to accept additional Year 8 pupils.

Stage 4 - Recommendation

32. The Director of Area Planning, Admissions and Shared Campuses will review the prioritised lists produced by the assessment panel and will present same to the Minister/Permanent Secretary for approval.

33. Once the Minister/Permanent Secretary has reviewed and approved the proposed temporary increases, the individual schools will be notified by the School Admissions Team of the temporary increase to their Year 8 Admissions number. The EA Post-primary Admissions Team will be notified of the schools and the associated temporary increases to the Year 8 admissions number. Unsuccessful schools will also be notified by the School Admissions Team. As stated in paragraph 20 the Department will publish the outcome of the application process showing the number of temporary additional places and the successful schools.

34. Where schools require capital expenditure (accommodation and/or reconfiguration of accommodation) these projects will be subject to business case approval and will be taken forward by the EA apart from voluntary grammar category "B" schools. Programme governance and control structures will be established for the works emerging.

Annex 1

**APPLICATION FORM FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPAL OF A POST PRIMARY
SCHOOL FOR CONSIDERATION OF A TEMPORARY INCREASE TO THEIR
YEAR 8 ADMISSIONS NUMBER**

Attached separately.