

**Merton School Places
Planning Strategy
2023-2028**
(subject to annual review)

Updated September 2023

Introduction and summary of position

Merton Council started adopting a more formal School Places Strategy document from Autumn 2021 and now updates it on an annual basis. This document is therefore an update of the 2022 plan with updated forecasting information. The general position has not changed significantly since last year except the forecast reduction in numbers has been relatively accurate and shows no sign of reversing in the medium term and in some cases requires more urgent action. This is therefore primarily an update of information and some change in emphasis rather than any proposed change in strategy.

This revised plan sets out the existing supply and demand for school places, and projections based on the annual review in summer 2023. After a commentary on the basis of projections it has three sections: primary school, secondary school, and specialist provision.

The next formal review will be in summer 2024 as part of the timetable for the council's annual school places ("SCAP") return to the Department for Education.

A summary of the position on supply and demand of school places is as follows:

Primary school places

From the mid-2000s there was a rising demand for primary school places, requiring an extensive expansion programme. However, since around 2016 the position has changed significantly in Merton, in London, and generally throughout the country, in there being a significant fall in the primary school age population and therefore demand for primary school places.

Reception year numbers plateaued in 2022/23 after six consecutive year of falls, but the school census figure for 2023/24 will show a further fall and more falls are expected from 2024/25. The extent of the further fall is dependent on the forecast model used. As the lower numbers flow to all year groups, the total primary school roll by the GLA forecast model is 14,242 in 2026/27 and 13,767 in 2027/28, nearly 3,000 less than the 2017/18 peak. Our 'pupil retention' modelling suggests it will be 13,741 in 2026/27 and 13,293 in 2029/30, some 3,500 less than the 2017/18 peak, with further falls thereafter.

The council has already facilitated the reduction in the published admission number by 13 forms of entry from 2016 to the present 2023/24 reception year entry. However, based on the GLA forecast, if there are no reductions the Year R surplus will be 20% by 2026/27, and 26% based on our pupil retention model.

This document sets out the strategy for managing the surplus places.

Secondary school places

The significantly increased pupil numbers reached secondary age through the 2010s and the Year 7 roll has since broadly plateaued following the significant increase up to September 2018, when the council facilitated the opening of the Free School Harris Academy Wimbledon for September 2018 to enable sufficient places.

In 2022/23 we operated below the recommended minimum surplus level of 5% in Year 7 and this is also expected in 2023/24.

Whilst Merton applicant numbers have reduced in the last couple of years, overall Year 7 numbers have held due to increased numbers in neighbouring boroughs and an increase in retention of home residents in our schools. However, the lower numbers flowing through primary schools combined with predicted reductions in neighbouring boroughs will reach Year 7 by September (2024 or 2025) and so there is concern there will be surplus places and a need to eventually reduce the capacity of some schools.

The level of demand continues to be dependent on the pupil retention from Year 6, as there is extensive cross border movement.

The significantly higher pupil numbers reach 6th form age from this September (2023) and there will be significantly increased demand.

Special School provision

There has been a more than doubling increase in the number of EHCPs over the last 7 years, from 1075 in January 2016 to 2485 in January 2023 (SEN2 count).

The council has been active in implementing special school expansion in recent years. However, this has not been sufficient keep up with the increase in demand and the council still places more children with EHCPs to independent sector provision than most councils. As part of the High Needs 'safety valve' intervention programme agreed with the DfE in early 2022 a series of new expansions are being implemented over the next 5 years, including the proposal for a new Special Free School.

Background

In Merton there are the following state funded schools:

- 27 Community primary schools all with a nursery
- 11 Voluntary Aided primary schools, all with a nursery
- 6 Primary school Academies (including a Free School)
- 3 Community/Voluntary Controlled secondary schools, all with sixth forms
- 2 Voluntary Aided secondary schools, both with sixth forms
- 4 Secondary school Academies (including a Free School)
- 3 Special Schools
- 1 Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) including specialist medical service

Overall aims

Merton in its role as the Local Authority seeks:

- To provide the highest standards of education and ensure all our schools are good or outstanding;
- Results for attainment and progress which compare with the best in London;
- To ensure that all children and young people enjoy learning opportunities, feel rewarded by their experience and achieve their full potential;
- Provision which contributes to the broader well-being of children and families
- Provision which is a positive choice for families

Providing sufficient, good quality school places is a key part of this role.

Definition of capacity

The DfE prescribe a number of measures for measuring surplus places:

- Net capacity is the physical capacity measure of a school. For maintained schools this is based on a prescribed method for calculating the accommodation available, and so reducing the admission number will not reduce the net capacity unless there is a specific alternative use of spare classrooms e.g. a special needs additional resourced provision. For Academy Schools it will be prescribed in the school funding agreement so it could be that in reality a school has some spare physical space.
- The 'capacity in year group' will reflect admission number changes and will specify the level of surplus that schools are operating to based on their admission numbers.

The first measure is therefore a good means for measuring efficiency of buildings, but the second measure reflects shorter term measures that the council can facilitate to assist the efficient operations of schools and managing the school budget. By concentrating on Reception year we can see how the trend of higher or lower numbers will flow through the rest of the school.

Level of surplus places

Deciding an appropriate level of surplus places is a balance between choice and efficiency. Surplus places across schools provide more choice of school places, but since schools are largely funded based on numbers on roll, surplus places have a negative impact on the school budget, and therefore potentially teaching and learning. Key Stage 1 primary school classes cannot be in classes of more than 30 pupils yet it is difficult to balance a budget when classes are substantially smaller than 30. With a high number of surplus places primary schools are more likely to have year group numbers that are not possible to manage in a traditional 1-form/2-form/3-form entry classes of 30 structure.

In the late 1990s the Audit Commission recommended that a surplus of 5-10% would enable the appropriate balance of choice and to economically provide sufficient school places, and this is still considered a reasonable estimate of best practice. Since the Merton Council area is a compact area with its schools relatively close together and any surplus can be disproportionately placed in a small number of schools, a surplus of 5% is considered an ideal at reception year, with a tolerance for slightly less at the peak of demand. Since there is a net loss of pupils after reception year the surplus across the year groups would be higher.

Basis of school roll projections

The council use the service of the Greater London Authority (GLA) demography team of pupil projections, based on the Borough Preferred Option population projections

The GLA school roll projection model creates a roll projection for each school based on the GLA population projections of the wards where its pupils live. For each ward of residence in London, National Curriculum (NC) year (R to 11) and sex, the proportion of children of the corresponding age attending each mainstream state school is calculated. These proportions are carried forward as the pupils age through the school in the years being projected.

For new pupils entering a school in future years, for example at reception, proportions are calculated as averages over the latest years of actuals, with 4 being the standard number of years used (2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022). The same approach is used at years 7 and 12, even if the school is an all through school, as it is assumed that there will be significant changes in the cohort at this point.

The rolled forward and calculated new intake proportions for future years are then applied to the population projections to give projections of the number of children on roll by school by age and sex. Due to lower retention rates, sixth form projections are calculated using a survival ratio as the cohort ages through sixth form. School level projections are then aggregated to planning areas (in the case of primary schools) and borough totals.

The Council checks the GLA forecasts against school admissions intelligence for the following academic year, and also against a simple pupil retention model, which calculates retention percentages on the last 3 years based on a 3:2:1 ratio, with published and forecast live births used as the source data to forecast reception year.

While last year the GLA forecasts did not seem to reflect the full changes in migration patterns there has been an adjustment this year and so the GLA forecasts for primary age

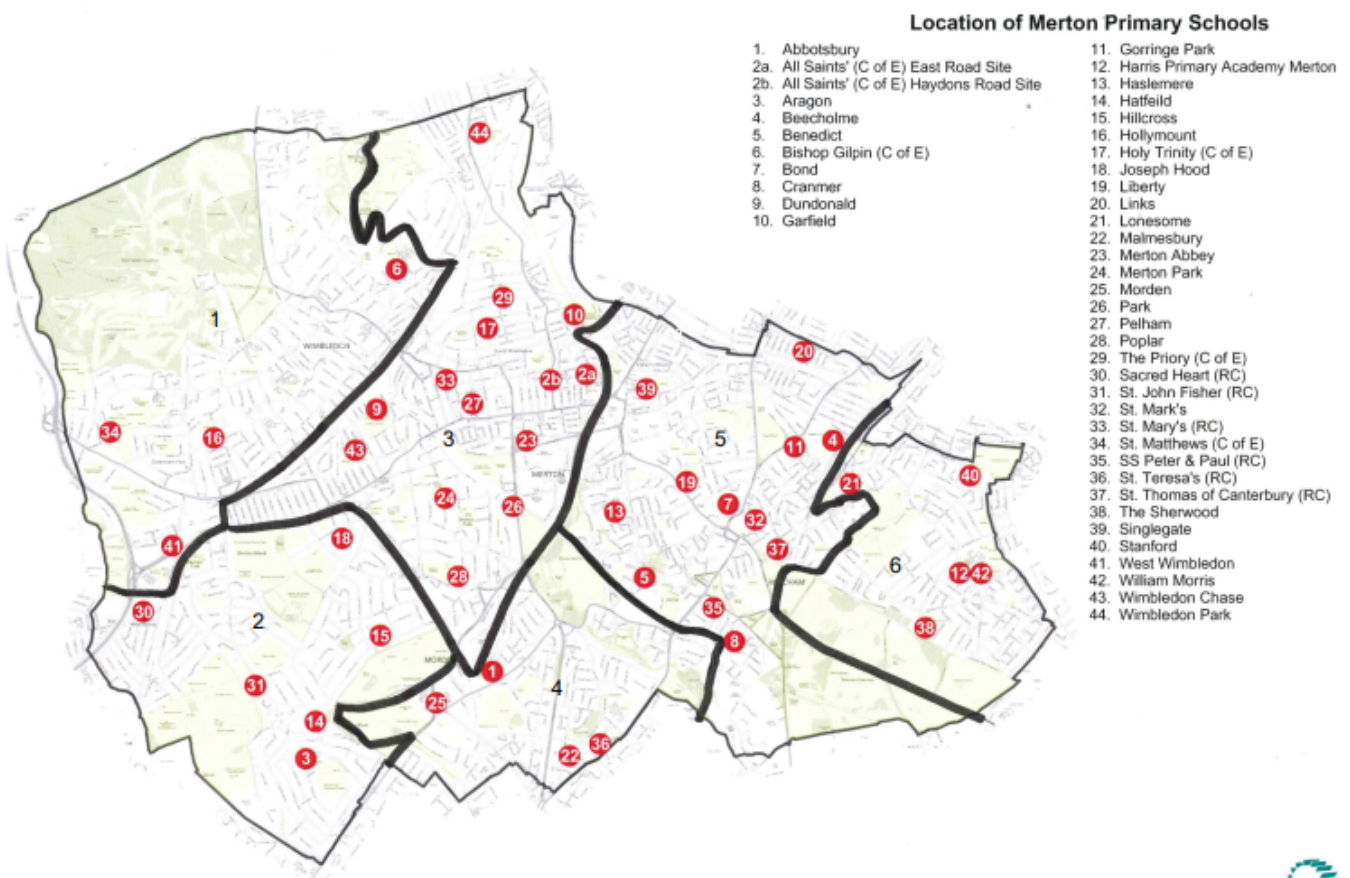
are for a greater fall than last year. However, they are still higher than Merton's simple pupil retention model that does not take into account 'child yield' from additional housing.

Primary schools

Place planning areas

For the purposes of school places planning Merton has 6 primary school place planning areas, which are groups of wards. However, there are few natural barriers preventing easy travel across the planning areas so when making decisions on school expansion and reductions it is necessary to look beyond individual planning areas.

MAP OF MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS WITH PLANNING AREAS



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Note – the planning areas have changed moderately to be consistent with new ward boundaries but schools are all still in the same planning area – map currently being updated

Rise and fall in demand

1.1 From 2008 to 2015 the council experienced an exceptional increase in demand for primary school places, which required a substantial expansion programme that expanded more than twenty schools. In 2017/18 there were more pupils in Merton primary schools for more than a generation – a rise of 4,367 pupils from 12,683 to 17,050 on roll (35% increase) compared to 11 years previously.

1.2 However, in 2016/17 there started to be a drop in demand for reception year places which is flowing through primary schools, and the fall in demand in reception year demand has continued to 2021/22. This fall was not forecast at London or national level prior to 2016, and seems to have been highly influenced by changing migration patterns as a result of the Brexit referendum and then Brexit itself.

1.3 The table below shows this exceptional rise and now fall in the primary school roll by year group.

MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOL ROLL 2007/08 TO 2022/23 (JANUARY CENSUS)

Acad emic year	200 7/08	200 8/09	200 9/10	201 0/11	201 1/12	201 2/13	201 3/14	201 4/15	201 5/16	201 6/17	201 7/18	201 8/19	201 9/20	202 0/21	202 1/22	202 2/23
Recep tion	193 7	214 0	222 9	228 5	265 1	259 9	254 7	262 7	262 8	252 4	243 7	230 5	237 0	227 9	218 9	219 2
Year 1	188 5	192 9	214 8	222 8	231 3	261 2	257 7	253 2	259 1	259 5	246 5	239 2	225 0	228 3	220 1	219 0
Year 2	181 6	188 5	192 1	211 5	222 7	228 4	255 7	255 4	250 9	253 5	252 9	242 0	232 2	220 4	223 1	220 0
Year 3	180 1	183 5	185 9	190 5	209 3	219 7	222 4	250 2	248 6	245 5	246 3	245 0	233 8	223 7	211 0	218 9
Year 4	178 1	177 3	183 3	183 0	190 1	208 2	214 9	220 9	245 8	241 9	238 5	241 7	241 4	224 1	215 6	211 0
Year 5	178 9	177 8	174 2	183 2	181 7	188 8	202 8	210 9	215 6	240 7	239 3	233 9	237 4	231 1	218 5	214 7
Year 6	179 4	176 2	175 6	172 5	183 7	181 7	184 8	202 4	208 1	211 3	237 8	236 3	227 0	231 1	227 4	216 8
Prima ry Total	128 03	131 02	134 88	139 20	148 39	154 79	159 30	165 57	169 09	170 48	170 50	166 86	163 38	158 66	153 46	151 96

Current position

Current level of surplus places in primary school

The table below provides by school and planning area:

- The total roll (January 2023 school census for the statutory school years R to 6)
- The Net capacity
- The surplus and surplus percentage
- The current reception year admission number (those in red have reduced)
- The reception roll
- The reception year surplus and surplus percentage

This shows that against net capacity there were 20.2% surplus places in spring 2023. However, because admission numbers have been reduced the percentage was only 11.4% for reception year against admission number.

Despite the overall surplus in each planning area there are still some heavily oversubscribed primary schools in Merton, with six community schools still offering to less than 600 metres on offer day.

MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND PLANNING AREA – SURPLUS AGAINST NET CAPACITY AND AGAINST RECEPTION YEAR ADMISSION NUMBER 2022/23

	Total roll (excl. nurs)	Net capacity	Surplus	Surplus %	R admission No.	R roll	Surplus R	Surplus R %
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PA1: Hollymount , West Wimbledon, St Matthew's CofE, Bishop Gilpin CofE.

Total PA1	1270	1490	220	14.8%	180	174	6	3.3%
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PA2:Hatfeild, Joseph Hood, Hillcross, Aragon, Sacred Heart RC, St John Fisher RC, Hatfeild

Total PA2	2431	2928	497	17.0%	390	371	19	4.9%
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PA3: Dundonald, Garfield, Merton Abbey, Merton Park, Park, Pelham, Poplar, Wimbledon Park, Wimbledon Chase, All Saints' CofE, Holy Trinity CofE, St Mary's RC, The Priory CofE

Total PA3	4663	5648	985	17.4%	765	700	65	8.5%
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PA4: Morden, Abbotsbury, Malmesbury, St Teresa's RC

Total PA4	1375	1431	56	3.9%	210	202	8	3.8%
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PA5: Beecholme, Bond, Benedict, Links, Haslemere, St Mark's Primary, Singlegate, Cranmer, Gorringe Park, Liberty, St. Peter and Paul RC, St Thomas of Canterbury RC

Total PA5	3976	5652	1676	30.0%	660	539	121	18.3%
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PA6: Harris Primary Academy Merton, Stanford, Lonesome, The Sherwood, William Morris

Total PA6	1481	1890	409	21.6%	270	206	64	23.7%
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Total all borough	15196	19039	3843	20.2%	2475	2192	283	11.4%
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Actions to date to reduce surplus places (by planning area)

The recent fall in the primary school roll, especially at a time of financial constraint, has the potential to cause budget issues for a number of primary schools so some schools have reduced their admission numbers by a multiple of 30, to ensure that they have largely full classes. Because the increase in demand was catered for by expansion of existing schools, with the exception of one Free School, schools are of a larger size so are more equipped to deal with the reduction in demand than previously.

The following 13 schools have reduced their admission number over the last 7 years:

MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS THAT HAVE REDUCED THEIR ADMISSION NUMBER SINCE 2015

	2015 PAN*	2023 PAN	
West Wimbledon	60	30	Schools Adjudicator agreed Dec 2020 (ARP in spare space)
Hillcross	90	60	Included in School Admission arrangements from 2020
Merton Abbey	60	30	Included in School Admission arrangements from 2019
Park	60	30	Officially changed for new provider
The Priory C of E	60	30	Schools Adjudicator agreed to 45 in Jan 2021 then to 30 in Jan 2022
Benedict	60	30	Unofficial cap in 2019 and 2020. Officially changed for new provider

Cranmer	90	60	Included in School Admission arrangements from 2022 (ARP in spare space)
Gorringer Park	90	60	Included in School Admission arrangements from 2019
Liberty	90	60	Included in School Admission arrangements from 2020
St Thomas of Canterbury	90	60	Included in School Admission arrangements from 2021
Stanford	60	30	Permanent change to school capacity with ARP
Bond	60	30	Schools Adjudicator agreed Jan 2021
SS Peter and Paul	60	30	Schools Adjudicator agreed Jan 2021
Total	930	540	Total reduction of 390 Year R places (13FE)

Note - PAN is "published admission number"

Merton forecasts submitted to DfE in July 2023

Primary school projection figures and projected surplus

The primary school projections provided in the council's SCAP (annual school capacity survey) return to the DfE in July 2023 were as follows:

MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS – WHOLE BOROUGH SCAP FORECASTS JULY 2023

Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2022/23 (actual)	2192	2190	2200	2189	2110	2147	2168	15196
2023/24	2128	2151	2146	2159	2176	2087	2149	14996
2024/25	2068	2090	2104	2109	2142	2155	2085	14753
2025/26	1964	2035	2048	2065	2094	2116	2155	14477
2026/27	1962	1940	1992	2009	2048	2072	2111	14134
2027/28	1900	1935	1897	1957	1993	2023	2062	13767

Taking the borough as a whole, the implications of these projections on surplus places in future years is as follows:

MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS – FUTURE SURPLUS PLACES BASED ON OFFICIAL SCAP PROJECTIONS AND NO CHANGE

Year actual and forecast	Total roll	Net capacity	Surplus	Surplus %	R admission No.	R roll	Surplus R	Surplus R %
2022/23 (actual)	15196	19039	3843	20.2%	2475	2192	283	11.4%
2023/24	14996	19039	4043	21.2%	2430	2128	302	12.4%
2024/25	14753	19039	4286	22.5%	2430	2068	362	14.9%
2025/26	14477	19039	4562	24.0%	2430	1964	466	19.2%
2026/27	14134	19039	4905	25.8%	2430	1962	468	19.3%
2027/28	13767	19039	5272	27.7%	2430	1900	530	21.8%

Therefore without further action (some of which will be apparent in 2023 with opening of ARPs in spare space and so reducing the official net capacity) there will be 28% surplus of physical space and 22% against Reception year admission number.

However, our pupil retention model based purely on retention from live births up to 2022 and forecast live births thereafter suggests a reception roll of only 1788 by 2026/27 and 1786 in 2027/28, suggesting further action may be required. Whilst accepting the forecast nature of the figures, the indicated loss of over 400 reception pupils from 2022/23 to 2026/27 highlights the need for action to future proof our primary schools. The likely uneven nature of any reductions should also be considered. Current trends would indicate that schools in the east of the borough are likely to experience a far greater reduction than those based in the west.

MERTON PUPIL RETENTION PROJECTIONS SEPTEMBER 2023

	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2022/23 (actual)	2192	2190	2200	2189	2110	2147	2168	15196
2023/24	2128	2150	2151	2129	2139	2066	2112	14875
2024/25	2019	2090	2128	2086	2094	2104	2042	14563
2025/26	1923	1985	2071	2066	2054	2061	2080	14240
2026/27	1788	1889	1965	2009	2032	2021	2037	13741
2027/28	1786	1757	1871	1907	1977	2000	1997	13293

The pupil projections by planning area in the SCAP return are as follows:

MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS – FORECASTS BY PLANNING AREA JULY 2023

PLANNING AREA 1

Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2022/23 (actual)	174	181	177	184	190	189	175	1270
2023/24	170	169	183	175	183	187	185	1252
2024/25	160	167	169	181	176	182	181	1216
2025/26	161	158	168	167	181	172	177	1184
2026/27	163	159	160	167	166	179	168	1162
2027/28	157	160	159	159	167	163	175	1140

PLANNING AREA 2

Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2022/23	371	380	331	355	326	323	345	2431
2023/24	348	364	377	326	359	324	321	2419
2024/25	330	343	359	371	327	356	320	2406
2025/26	319	325	340	352	373	325	351	2385
2026/27	305	314	322	333	353	369	318	2314
2027/28	294	301	311	316	334	347	362	2265

PLANNING AREA 3

Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2022/23	700	699	693	666	634	661	610	4663
2023/24	678	684	679	677	657	622	648	4645
2024/25	661	664	663	667	667	644	609	4575
2025/26	627	649	645	650	660	654	633	4518
2026/27	635	619	631	632	641	648	644	4450
2027/28	619	625	601	619	623	629	634	4350

PLANNING AREA 4

Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2022/23	202	174	198	201	196	196	208	1375
2023/24	189	198	173	196	201	198	201	1356
2024/25	180	186	197	171	196	204	203	1337
2025/26	167	179	186	195	171	198	208	1304
2026/27	166	166	178	183	194	174	203	1264
2027/28	162	165	166	176	183	196	177	1225

PLANNING AREA 5

Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2022/23	539	542	582	563	561	572	617	3976
2023/24	540	527	525	570	556	552	580	3850
2024/25	546	527	513	513	562	548	559	3768
2025/26	513	532	511	502	504	553	556	3671
2026/27	519	502	514	501	496	497	557	3586
2027/28	502	508	486	504	494	490	502	3486

PLANNING AREA 6

Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2022/23	206	214	219	220	203	206	213	1481
2023/24	203	209	209	215	220	204	214	1474
2024/25	191	203	203	206	214	221	213	1451
2025/26	177	192	198	199	205	214	230	1415
2026/27	174	180	187	193	198	205	221	1358
2027/28	166	176	174	183	192	198	212	1301

There is therefore a need to manage the falling demand for school places to ensure that schools can continue to improve and manage a balanced budget. The broad strategy agreed in autumn 2021, is now slightly more robust to challenge maintained schools that cannot meet a balanced budget:

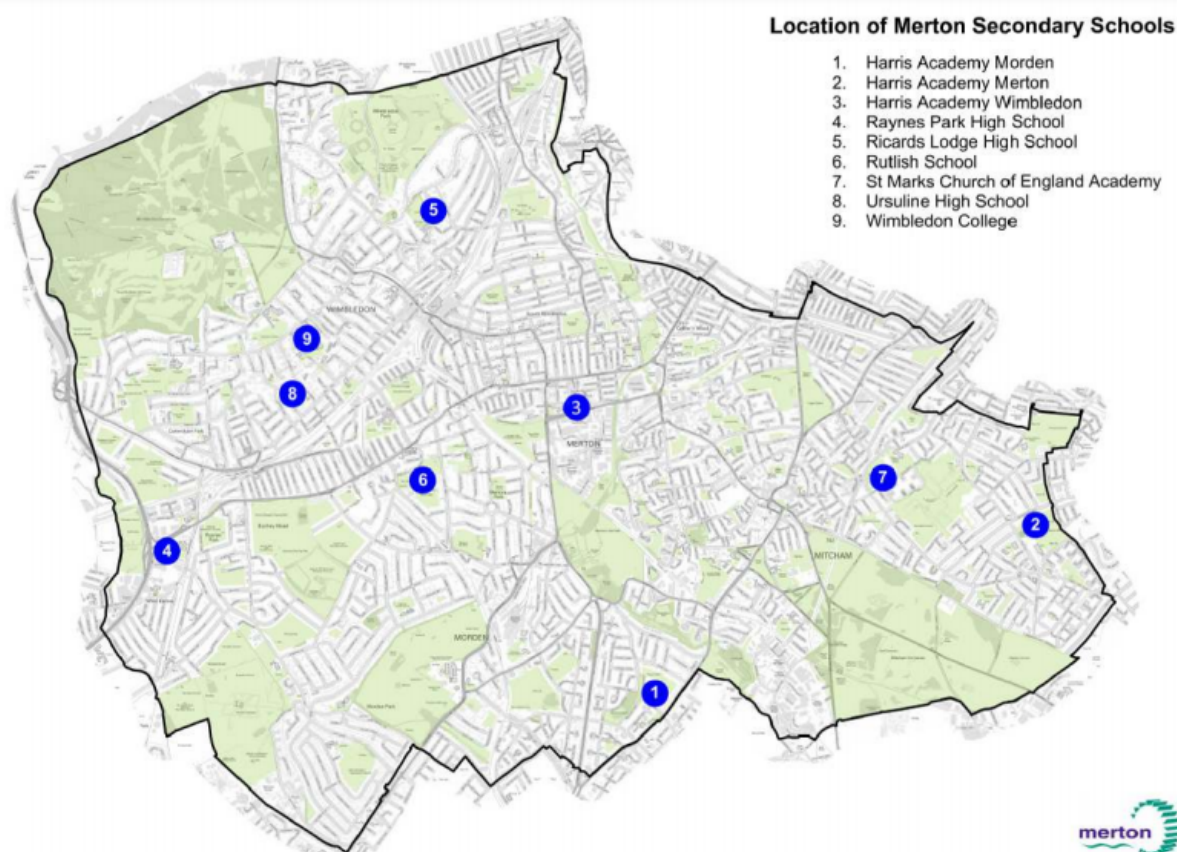
- Continue to encourage schools to reduce admissions numbers to multiples of 30 for education efficiency when practical to do so
- Encourage schools to work in cluster areas with the council to agree reductions in admission numbers at an area level
- Consider use of compatible alternative uses for space where appropriate such as primary age SEND Additional Resourced Provision when it can be agreed with schools
- Where appropriate consider alternative models to operate schools for school improvement and to manage a balanced budget e.g. hard and soft federations
- When a maintained school, the council has ultimate financial responsibility for the school. When the school cannot meet a robust forecast in-year balanced budget position the council may (in the case of Community Schools) enforce a reduction if it is financially advantageous to do so, and (in the Case of Voluntary Aided Schools) consider others levers to enforce the admission authority school to apply for a reduction.
- No plans to close schools unless absolutely necessary, as per the statutory guidance. This would be where standards are poor without a viable strategy for school improvement, the school is not viable financially after all options have been exhausted, and that there are places elsewhere for children that would be displaced, and pupil forecasts do not suggest an increase in demand, The council will also be wary that once land is lost for schools it may not be possible to get it back for any future increase in demand that cannot be foreseen.
- The council has no statutory power to propose the closure of an Academy school and does not have the financial responsibility for any budget deficit. The council seeks to work in partnership with Academy schools. Were an Academy or Free School to elect to close, the council would need to review its maintained school capacity in light of any revised capacity within the local area.

Secondary schools

Secondary school places planning is undertaken on a borough wide context, but local factors are considered when major school planning decisions are made e.g. the new Harris Academy Wimbledon secondary school was facilitated to be in the South Wimbledon area to meet a gap in school provision in this area.

A map of the mainstream state funded secondary schools in Merton is below:

MAP OF MERTON SECONDARY SCHOOLS



General issues for provision of secondary school places in Merton

Years 7-11 (age 11-16)

The pattern of demand for Merton secondary schools is very different to primary schools, with families willing to travel much greater distances and parental preference patterns being more significant.

For many years more Merton resident children have travelled to out of the borough state schools for their secondary schooling than the other way around. Since the movement in the primary sector is relatively minor and more children attend independent schools from Year 7, there is a significant net reduction in pupils in Merton state funded schools from Year 6 to year 7.

Standards in Merton secondary schools have risen significantly over the last 10 years, and the DfE figures from 2017 to the last exam based publication in 2019 showed that they

were consistently in the top 10 in the country for progress from primary school to the end of Key Stage 4 (GCSE year). All Merton secondary schools (maintained and academy) are at least 'good' in Ofsted terms, with five judged to be outstanding.

As shown in the table below, the Year 6 to Year 7 transfer rate fell from circa 88% in the 2000s to 75% in the mid-2010, and the council therefore reduced its previous secondary school expansion plans to only 8 forms of entry (FE – 1 FE is a year group of 30 pupils) – 2FE through the expansion of Harris Academy Merton and 6 FE through Harris Academy Wimbledon.

Over the last 4 years it has recovered with a figure of 80% for 2021/21 and a further increase to 82.1% in 2022/23. Taking the position for the last three years and admissions allocation information into account, a figure of around 85% is expected for 2023/24.

YEAR 6 TO YEAR 7 TRANSFER PERCENTAGE ON MERTON SCHOOLS 2010/11 TO 2022/23

	2010 /11	2011 /12	2012 /13	2013 /14	2014 /15	2015 /16	2016 /17	2017 /18	2018 /19	2019 /20	2020 /21	2021 /22	2022 /23
	85.5 %	84.5 %	79.2 %	80.6 %	80.7 %	78.0 %	74.8 %	74.3 %	74.9 %	79.5 %	79.4 %	80.0 %	82.1 %

Rise in demand

The significant increased pupil numbers has reached secondary age over the last few years and the Year 7 roll has broadly plateaued following the significant increase to September 2018 when the council facilitated the opening of the Free School Harris Academy Wimbledon for September 2018 and which moved to its permanent site in autumn 2020.

However, the lower numbers flowing through primary school will reach Year 7 from this September (2023) and so there is concern there will be surplus places and a need to reduce the capacity of some schools

The level of demand continues to be dependent on the pupil retention from Year 6. A slower rate of decline in neighbouring boroughs is also helping to hold Year 7 numbers up at the present time. Those neighbours are predicting reductions in coming years so this is only a temporary situation.

MERTON SCHOOLS SECONDARY SCHOOL ROLL 2010/11 TO 2022/23

Academic year	2010/ 11	2011/ 12	2012/ 13	2013/ 14	2014/ 15	2015/ 16	2016/ 17	2017/ 18	2018/ 19	2019/ 20	2020/ 21	2021/ 22	2022/ 23
Year 7	1502	1457	1454	1465	1492	1578	1556	1569	1782	1878	1803	1848	1866
Year 8	1547	1516	1450	1459	1462	1482	1553	1547	1593	1767	1854	1795	1864
Year 9	1618	1573	1508	1440	1450	1451	1477	1564	1587	1583	1722	1811	1801
Year 10	1551	1630	1571	1503	1446	1454	1419	1460	1573	1534	1557	1713	1811
Year 11	1540	1548	1590	1532	1497	1416	1403	1383	1497	1518	1508	1530	1677
Year 12	606	609	699	856	805	754	239	774	716	724	814	849	795
Year 13	298	398	455	499	657	632	585	616	700	643	665	727	759
Secondary Year 7 - 11	7758	7724	7573	7399	7347	7381	7408	7523	8032	8280	8444	8697	9019
Secondary Year 12+	904	1007	1154	1355	1462	1386	824	1390	1416	1367	1479	1576	1554
Secondary Total	8662	8731	8727	8754	8809	8767	8232	8913	9448	9647	9923	10273	10573
Year 6/7 Transfer Rate (%)	85.5 %	84.5 %	79.2 %	80.6 %	80.7 %	78.0 %	74.8 %	74.3 %	74.9 %	79.5 %	79.4 %	80.0 %	82.1 %

Current level of surplus places in secondary school

The table below provides:

- The total roll (January 2023 school census)
- The Net capacity
- The surplus and surplus percentage
- The current Year 7 admission number
- The Year 7 roll
- The Year 7 surplus and surplus percentage

This shows that against net capacity there were 3.2% surplus places in spring 2023, and 2.3% in Year 7 against published admission number. Based on draft October 2023 census figures we expect the Year 7 surplus to be less than 3% in 2023/24. These numbers are therefore below the 5% that is considered the ideal level.

MERTON SECONDARY SCHOOLS – SURPLUS AGAINST NET CAPACITY AND AGAINST YEAR 7 ADMISSION NUMBER 2022/23

2022/23	Total roll	Net capacity	Surplu s	Surplu s %	Year 7 admission No.	Year 7 roll	Surplu s Yr 7	Surplu s Yr 7 %
Total all 9 secondary schools*	10573	10918	345	3.2%	1909	1866	43	2.3%

*The 9 secondary schools are Harris Academy Morden, Harris Academy Wimbledon, Ricards Lodge High School, Raynes Park High School, Rutlish School, Wimbledon College, Ursuline High School Wimbledon, Harris Academy Merton, St Mark's Church of England Academy

Secondary school projection figures and projected surplus

The introduction section of this strategy describes the basis of the council using the GLA projections. The GLA projections show that the number of pupils entering year 7 will start to fall from 2023/24 only moderately, by the equivalent of 3-4 forms of entry within the next five years.

MERTON SECONDARY SCHOOLS – OFFICIAL SCAP JULY 2023

Forecasts	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Total 7-11	Total 12-13
2022/23	1866	1864	1801	1811	1677	795	759	9019	1554
2023/24	1860	1857	1863	1804	1840	895	723	9224	1618
2024/25	1796	1846	1852	1859	1837	954	810	9190	1764
2025/26	1767	1782	1839	1846	1888	988	864	9122	1852
2026/27	1736	1752	1774	1835	1875	994	894	8972	1888
2027/28	1744	1723	1745	1771	1862	985	900	8845	1885
2028/29	1663	1729	1718	1741	1799	978	893	8650	1871
2029/30	1627	1651	1723	1715	1766	949	884	8482	1833

However, given the much lower numbers flowing through Merton primary schools there is the concern that the GLA model is projecting significantly more pupils than there will be. Merton also runs a simple 'pupil retention model' which projects pupil retention percentage from the previous 3 years on a 3:2:1 ratio, therefore giving more weighting to the most recent year. Based on the Year 6 to Year 7 transfer being 85%, this projection shows that Year 7 numbers will fall sharply from 2024/25, such that by 2029/30 the fall will be equivalent to nearly 7 forms of entry (FE) less than at present.

A detail not considered in the pupil projections is the increase in migration from Hong Kong. This has been more pronounced in the neighbouring Kingston and Sutton but continues to increase demand for places in all year groups in Merton. An increase in demand has also been noted for students arriving from Ukraine. Whilst the current predictions are for Year 7 numbers to reduce in coming years, the requirement for in year capacity in secondary schools remains acute across most London boroughs. In 2022/23, Merton was required to use growth funding to provide additional capacity in Year 8. Further growth fund spending may be required in 2023/24 in order to ensure sufficient capacity across all year groups for Merton residents.

MERTON PUPIL RETENTION PROJECTIONS SEPTEMBER 2023

85% Pupil retention projections	7	8	9	10	11	Total 7-11	12	13	Total whole school
2023/24	1860	1866	1864	1801	1811	9202	900	714	10816
2024/25	1765	1860	1866	1864	1801	9156	970	806	10932
2025/26	1716	1765	1860	1866	1864	9071	960	869	10900
2026/27	1751	1716	1765	1860	1866	8957	996	861	10815
2027/28	1711	1751	1716	1765	1860	8803	997	893	10693
2028/29	1679	1711	1751	1716	1765	8622	994	894	10509
2029/30	1661	1679	1711	1751	1716	8518	943	891	10352

While the proposed new secondary Free School in Sutton was cancelled in summer 2021, with only the special school element remaining, there remains concern regarding the proposed opening of a new Voluntary Aided school in Kingston (Norbiton area) that is relatively close to the west of Merton. In June 2021 this was approved to open by Kingston Council but a planning application is yet to be submitted and it is not expected to open until at least September 2025.

Based on a fall in demand of 10FE, there would be opportunities for schools to reduce admission numbers, with the possibility of Additionally Resourced Provision (reserved provision for pupils with SEND) provided in the spare space.

Any strategy of reducing admissions numbers should be considered as a pan borough process. Simply reducing the admissions numbers of undersubscribed schools will not achieve the required change and would put those undersubscribed schools at further financial risk.

Post 16

The figures in the above secondary school section shows the forecast increase in post-16 numbers. Capacity is being increased by Harris Academy Wimbledon opening its 6th form from September 2023. Ricards Lodge was successful in a DfE bid to increase its 6th form physical capacity but Rutlish School was not successful in a similar bid. The supply compared to demand will need to be monitored as the higher numbers from years 7-11 flow through to post-16.

Specialist school provision

LB Merton caters for pupils with SEND (Special Educational needs and disabilities) through mainstream schools, specialist provision within mainstream schools (“additional resourced provision”), special schools, and use of independent provision. For children with an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan which replaced SEN statements) there are three maintained special schools; in addition three primary and three secondary schools provide specialist provision for pupils with ASD (autistic spectrum disorders) and SCLN (Speech, language and communication needs. There is also a Pupil Referral Unit (SMART centre) which operates under the same management as Melrose, our special school for pupils with SEMH (Social, emotional and mental health).

When there is not a suitable placement for a child with an EHCP within the state funded sector the council is financially responsible for commissioning suitable specialist placements within the Independent sector.

The growth in demand for SEND placements is a national issue, and the problem is significant in Merton. The growth in EHCPs and the specialist placements by school type over the past 6 years is shown in the table below, with the proportions by percentage shown overleaf .

NUMBER OF MERTON RESIDENT EHCPs JANUARY 2016 TO JANUARY 2023 AND SCHOOL PLACEMENT TYPE (SEN 2 RETURNS)

	Jan 2016 Total EHCPs *	Jan 2017 Total EHCPs *	Jan 2018 Total EHCPs *	Jan 2019 Total EHCPs*	Jan 2020 Total EHCPs	Jan 2021 Total EHCPs	Jan 2022 Total EHCPs	Jan 2023 Total EHCPs
Mainstream School (inc. Academies)	422	461	526	584	682	816	832	851
ARP (Additional Resourced Provision)	110	111	116	125	125	133	160	153
State Funded Special School	358	388	416	440	474	520	550	613
Independent/Non-Maintained Provision)	132	153	176	228	305	367	393	310
Post 16 College and traineeships	25	93	183	212	194	268	340	291
Post 16 Specialist	10	25	44	37	40	44	46	34
Other (including Early years, alternative education, NEET and hospital schools)	18	11	57	86	108	104	146	233
Total	1075	1242	1518	1712	1928	2252	2467	2485

* Included statements up to 2019

There has therefore been more than doubling in the number of EHCPs in the years from 2016 to 2023.

The council has been active in implementing special school expansion in recent years, increasing the number of special school placements from 358 to 520. The number of ARP places capacity in 2016 was 101 and by 2020 it had risen to 150. This has been through a new site for Perseid School in the early 2010s and then over the past five years further expansion of Perseid School, Additional Resourced Provision (ARP) at Hatfeild and Stanford Primary Schools, the expansion of Cricket Green School, the expansion of Melrose School including the provision of a primary department.

However, as shown by the EHCP placement data, this has not been sufficient keep up with the increase in EHCPs and the council still places more children with EHCPs to independent sector provision than most councils. The budget allocation from the DfE has not kept up with the growing expenditure in Merton and so the council has a significant and growing deficit in its Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs block.

In autumn 2021 the DfE invited Merton to participate in the second round of their ‘safety valve’ intervention programme with the aim of agreeing a package of reform to the high needs system that will bring the DSG deficit under control. As part of this the council has agreed a range of actions and this includes a significant increase in the number of local special school places, with additional capital funding provided. This includes the opening of a new special school approved for pre-opening by the Secretary of State. As of Autumn 2023 there is a selection process for a new provider expected to be chosen in early 2024 and opening of the school for September 2026.

The table overleaf summarises the expansions completed for September 2022 and planned over the next five years:

School	Additional places	
Melrose School/Whatley Avenue	*110	Project for 80 places completed autumn 2022
West Wimbledon Primary School	24	First phase completed for September 2022, second phase completed for September 2023
Hatfeild Primary School	10	Completed for September 2022
Cranmer Primary School	24	First phase completed for September 2022, second phase completed for September 2023
TBC	12	On hold pending review of demand
TBC Raynes Park High School	24	On hold pending a review of role of secondary school ARPs
TBC	24	On hold pending a review of role of secondary school ARPs
TBC Ricards Lodge	14	On hold pending a review of role of secondary school ARPs
TBC Rutlish	14	On hold pending a review of role of secondary school ARPs
Perseid School (SLD/PMLD)	28	Design work progressing
New Free School	120	Competition for an approved provider commenced summer 2023 for appointment in early 2024. Aim for school to open for September 2026
	404	

Notes:

* 80 places delivered initially; expected to increase with possible 6th form