

Lambeth School Organisation Plan 2026-2030

What is it?

This plan sets out a clear, evidence-based approach for maintaining the right number of good school places in Lambeth. It explains what has worked, what has changed, and how we will manage future school organisation in a measured, transparent way.

Lambeth schools have faced the combined impact of a one-third drop in primary-age children and over £40 million removed from local school budgets under national funding reforms introduced by the 2010-15 coalition government. This Plan builds on the responsible, borough-wide strategy that Lambeth Council has led to protect quality and fairness despite those national constraints.

Review of Place Planning Strategy 2022-25

The 2022-2025 strategy focused on reducing primary-school over-capacity caused by falling births and earlier expansion, following an unprecedented period of demand. That strategy looked to reduce the oversupply through strategic PAN reductions (including half forms of entry where workable) and school amalgamations.

Between 2021/22 and 2024/25 more than 500 surplus places were removed stabilising pupil numbers in some areas. A small number of reductions were deferred to protect stability. Two proposals were not implemented following national adjudication, clarifying aspects of the statutory process now embedded in this Plan. Successful mergers such as St Bede's & St Bernadette's and Kings Avenue & Glenbrook show that managed reorganisations can deliver good outcomes for children.

This update to the plan clarifies that half forms of entry will no longer be considered unless proven to be financially viable. School amalgamations will only be looked at where they meet the strict amalgamation criteria, such as a change of age range or enlargement of capacity in the remaining school (as the successful amalgamation of St Bede's and St Bernadette's did) or school's themselves propose it. Noting the decision of the OSA to reject the proposed amalgamation of Holy Trinity and Fenstanton schools, all proposed amalgamations must ensure they are within scope of the relevant statutory framework.

Context

The new Lambeth School Organisation Plan 2026-2030 sits as a key element in delivering the Lambeth Education and Learning Strategy 2024-2030, which has a clear shared vision to deliver 'Excellent and Inclusive Education for Everyone from Birth to Adulthood'. To help achieve this vision, there are 9 key priorities, of which 'Efficient Schools' is Priority number 3.

To deliver this effectively, the Lambeth Education and Learning Strategy highlights the delivery of a new School Organisation Plan as a key deliverable, and contribution to the following three key targets:

- 100% Good and Outstanding Schools and Early Years Settings (or equivalent in the new Framework)
- Less than 10% surplus of school places
- No schools carrying licenced deficits

Falling birth rates and population shifts continue to reduce local demand. At the same time, schools face national funding rules that reward growth and penalise inner-city areas. Lambeth will keep pressing for a funding formula based on need, not just numbers.

This impacts on our school population and the number of places we need to plan. An oversupply of places at a school can lead to financial and organisational inefficiency. This can be challenging for individual schools to manage, meaning our young people do not get the level of education they deserve.

At the same time, we know changing teachers, friendship groups, and travel arrangements can be deeply unsettling. We will continue to listen to children's voices and balance our statutory responsibilities for the management of school places with their rights not only to a quality education, but a community where they feel they belong.

Effective School Place Planning is essential to ensure we have efficient, high-quality places to meet demand in Lambeth in a way that works for schools and families. The Lambeth School Organisation Plan will ensure that we provide sufficient school places for our children and young people, across a wide range of schools (size, type, location, specialist need), whilst being transparent and clear with how we make decisions.

Pupil Numbers and Financial Pressures

Falling rolls now affect every phase of mainstream education in Lambeth. The challenge is to manage this change in a way that protects educational standards and community confidence.

Maintained Nursery Schools

The number of children attending the five maintained nursery schools that make up the Lambeth Nursery Schools Federation has dropped steadily as the number of nursery aged children has decreased. In recent years, the five schools had as many as 407.9 (full-time equivalent) children in Spring 2020, compared to a current figure of 227 (a 44 per cent reduction). Like primary and secondary schools, maintained nursery school funding is based on pupil numbers - so fewer children mean less funding for that school.

Maintained nursery schools are treated the same as any other maintained school in terms of organisational changes, statutory processes and decision making. Any changes will be evidence-led, focused on quality and sufficiency for families, and aligned with our wider early-years strategy.

Primary

In Lambeth Primary Schools at the end of the 2024/25 School year there were over 4,300 vacancies across Reception to Year 6, and 429 vacancies in Reception, against a Published Admissions Number (PAN) of 2,780, which equates to an over-supply of Reception places of 15%. Despite these pressures, successful mergers have demonstrated that strategic, well-managed reorganisations can deliver both educational and financial improvement.

The DfE funding model is most suitable for primary schools with at least 2 Form Entry (FE) pupils, but 1 FE schools can usually balance their budgets if they are full, financially controlled, and free from extenuating circumstances. Lambeth schools face a key financial

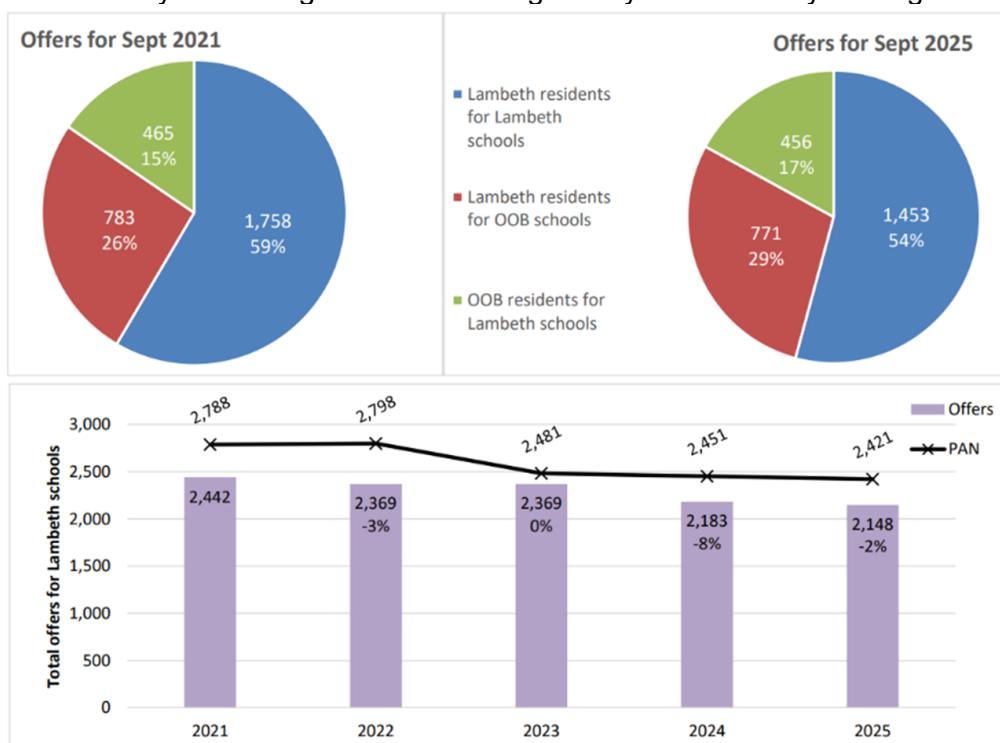
challenge: classes running under capacity. For instance, a school with more than 15 but fewer than 30 pupils in a class has the same staffing structure and premises costs but receives less income (distributed per pupil, the average in Lambeth primary schools for 25/26 is £7,560). Some costs vary directly with pupil numbers (learning resources, catering), while others do not (staffing, premises costs, energy). Therefore, it is crucial to consider whether a primary school PAN of less than 30 is financially practical in Inner London. The key to financial success is a class size of 30, with stable and predictable pupil numbers, enabling schools to plan and adjust staffing and contracts accordingly.

Secondary

In Lambeth Secondary Schools, the oversupply of places in Year 7 is currently just over 10% at National Offer Day, with 20-100 in-year admissions made each year.

Lambeth is a net-exporter of pupils transferring from Year 6 to Year 7, and almost 30% of Lambeth children are offered out of borough secondary on National Offer Day, despite all Lambeth Secondary schools being graded Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. It should be noted that this is partially offset by the fact that Lambeth also imports 17% of its Year 7 cohort from neighbouring boroughs.

There has been a reduction in applications for Year 7 places from 2020 onwards as the lower number of primary cohorts start transferring to secondary schools. This is likely to carry on reducing for the next 8-9 years unless fewer children seek places in out of borough schools, as such it is important to keep working with all our secondary school partners to ascertain when any school organisational changes may be necessary moving forwards.



Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

The proportion of Lambeth residents aged 0 to 25 with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is now at 3.49%, this is below the England average, but slightly higher than the statistical neighbour average. Lambeth's resident EHCP cohort is slightly smaller than in the previous year, though the proportion of school pupils with EHCPs has continued to grow. The most common primary need for SEND pupils is still speech, language, and communication needs, followed by autistic spectrum disorder.

Broader impact of falling rolls

Falling rolls threaten school finances and curriculum breadth. Lambeth has confronted this openly, balancing parental choice with financial realism, combining transparent consultation with borough-wide planning.

At the end of the 2024/25 School year there were 23 Lambeth schools in cumulative deficit, with total deficits of £8.7m. Schools' projections are that 47 schools will have an in-year deficit in 2025/26 and that the overall balance across all schools will move to a £11.2m deficit by the end of 2027/28, a £21.0m reduction from 2024/25.

Managing the Supply of School Places

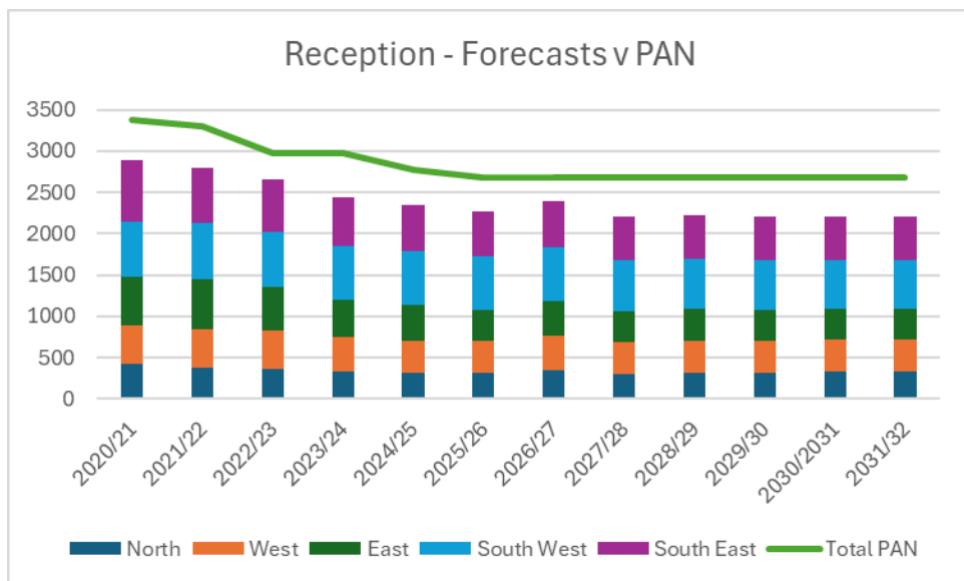
Our priorities are to sustain maintained nursery provision, balance primary capacity, retain more secondary pupils locally, and expand SEND places closer to home.

Maintained Nursery Schools

Collectively the 5 Lambeth maintained nursery schools have seen a 44% fall in pupil numbers over the last 5 years and financially have a collective cumulative deficit position of £2.4m at the end of 2024/25. We are working with the Lambeth Nursery School Federation to identify how best to provide a strong and sustainable Maintained Nursery School offer in Lambeth.

Primary

Current forecasting for Reception pupils in Lambeth over the next 7 years predicts a slower reduction in demand than seen over the last 10 years, stabilising around 2,200 children each year, against a current PAN for 2025/26 of 2,675.



Reception Forecasts by Planning Area, including percentage oversupply of total places.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32
North	421	382	358	330	315	309	351	295	318	320	326	327
West	473	463	470	416	393	390	406	385	390	387	389	389
East	580	595	528	457	433	379	419	380	376	373	372	370
South West	675	688	667	642	641	642	662	621	608	600	599	593

South East	734	663	628	591	569	543	556	529	529	526	527	524
Total Forecast	2883	2791	2651	2436	2351	2263	2394	2210	2221	2206	2213	2203
Total PAN	3385	3300	2975	2975	2780	2675	2645	2645	2645	2645	2645	2645
Oversupply	502	509	324	539	429	412	251	435	424	439	432	442
Oversupply %	17.4	18.2	12.2	22.1	18.2	18.2	10.5	19.7	19.1	19.9	19.5	20.1

As can be seen above, over the past 5 years, Lambeth schools have collectively achieved PAN reductions of over 500 Reception places. However, without further action then the oversupply of Reception places from 2027/28 will be circa 20% - double the target outlined in the Lambeth Education and Learning Strategy 2024-2030. Collectively we need to take decisive action to tackle the oversupply of Primary School places before more schools are detrimentally affected.

It is important to ensure that effective support and challenge is provided to schools that are being impacted by the oversupply of places to ensure that they are provided with appropriate expertise, guidance, and an opportunity to find solutions that will help mitigate falling rolls. We will use the following criteria to help identify those schools most in need of support.

- National Offer Day data (1st preferences, total preferences, LA allocations)
- Vacancy data (Entry point, whole school)
- Finance data (Finance scorecard)
- Educational attainment data (Key Stage/Exam results, Ofsted grading)
- Lambeth Pupil Place Planning Scorecard

To ensure our support is targeted effectively, schools identified will be divided into two categories: Priority and Monitored.

Priority schools will have a 'Team Around the School' (TAtS) to support them in becoming a school of choice and financially stable. The TAtS will include professionals from finance, human resources, communications, school place planning, admissions, and school improvement, as identified by the school's School Improvement Partner. Depending on the school type (community, foundation, voluntary aided), the TAtS may also include relevant stakeholders from other responsible bodies.

Monitored schools will have their first meeting with the School Organisation Lead to better understand their local context. They will share broader data and identify areas for consideration and improvement to be included in a focussed action plan.

Secondary

The current oversupply of Secondary school places is close to the target of 10%, however the number of Lambeth children seeking secondary school provision outside of Lambeth is increasing. This will continue to be monitored to ensure that the oversupply isn't increasing, however in the meantime, working together with the Lambeth Secondary Headteachers Group we are looking to reverse the trend at secondary through an ambitious communication action plan that will re-brand our Secondary Schools and enhance the reputation of education overall in Lambeth so that parents and carers make active choices to educate their children in Lambeth.

SEND

Despite a slight decline in new EHCP's in 2024 – 2025, demand for SEND continues in Lambeth. Our [SEND and Alternative Provision 2025-2030 Strategy](#) is committing to increasing SEND places in borough to enable children and young people to attend schools in their community and reduce costs of SEND transport and expensive independent settings.

As part of our School Organisation Plan, we will consider how best to utilise space in our schools for SEND Resource Base and future satellite schools for our current maintained Special Schools. We will consider undertaking a 4th wave of High Needs Block Capital Allocation / New Resource Base applications depending on available funding.

Considerations for School Organisational Changes

PAN Reduction

To date, Lambeth schools have successfully reduced the oversupply of places via PAN reductions in schools that are not full. Whilst this is still a clear opportunity for any future reductions needed in Secondary schools, the opportunity to do so in the primary sector is reducing. We need to be careful that we don't end up with a primary sector that is full of 1FE schools that if numbers continue to fall become structurally unviable. However, where there are larger schools, then PAN reductions should still be considered as an initial option, not least because of the speed of which such a change can be made via admissions allocation capping, in-year variance applications to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) or via the Determined Admissions Arrangement process.

Collaboration

It is important to consider all options available to support a school that is struggling to fill places. Federations and partnerships remain important tools for sharing expertise and reducing costs. The Council will support collaboration where it strengthens schools' long-term sustainability. In its simplest form, collaboration can be very ad-hoc and needs-led with minimal changes to how a school operates.

Making the best use of Educational Assets

The educational estate must be utilised for the benefit and betterment of our children and young people. Where space is under-used, the Council will prioritise educational or community reuse – such as SEND resources bases or early-years provision – before considering commercial or housing options.

Decision making

Decisions on school organisation changes will be based on transparent evidence, including pupil numbers, demand forecasts, parental preference, educational outcomes, finance, school condition, income generation, and equality impact. The Council will weigh the effect on local communities and related services before reaching any conclusion.

Where forecasting suggests no increase in demand for places in the medium-long term (5-10 years), all other options have been exhausted, and schools have become financially unviable, then the potential closure of those schools should be considered, alongside the other strategic uses for those sites. Otherwise, as well as struggling to provide a high-quality balanced curriculum, these schools will risk having a detrimental impact on the sustainability of other local schools.

All decisions will continue to balance educational excellence, community stability, and financial stewardship. Lambeth Council will not act out of short-term expediency, but to protect Lambeth's diverse school system for the long term.

Governance

School organisation work will be overseen by Lambeth's strengthened governance arrangements, bringing together councillors, school leaders, and diocesan partners. This ensures that decisions are informed, transparent and consistent with statutory guidance.