



**Merton School Places
Planning Strategy
2021-2026
(subject to annual review)**

Draft 21 September 2021

Introduction

This plan sets out the existing supply and demand for school places, and projections based on the annual review in summer 2021. After an analysis of the basis of projections it has three sections: primary school, secondary school, and specialist provision.

Current school provision in Merton

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 (2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021). 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. This has shown the GLA forecasts to be higher than expected for 2021/22 year R and 7 based on admissions intelligence, and higher across the board in future years, with GLA forecast primary school rolls some 10% higher by 2025/26 compared to the simple retention model.

It therefore appears that there are impacts due to Covid-19, at least in the short term, which are not properly accounted for in the GLA projection models. To ensure a more accurate forecast, for 2021/22 Year R and Year 7 we have therefore used our best estimate based on school admissions intelligence in July 2021, and continued this suppressed GLA forecast for the cohort. We have also done a similar suppression for the 2022/23 Year R entry and the cohort as it flows through the school.

The pupil retention model does not take into account additional housing so it was decided to use the GLA forecast figures for all other forecasts including Year R and 7 cohort from 2023/24 but there is some concern that these may be forecasting too many pupils. All models forecast a fall in roll and the position will be closely monitored.

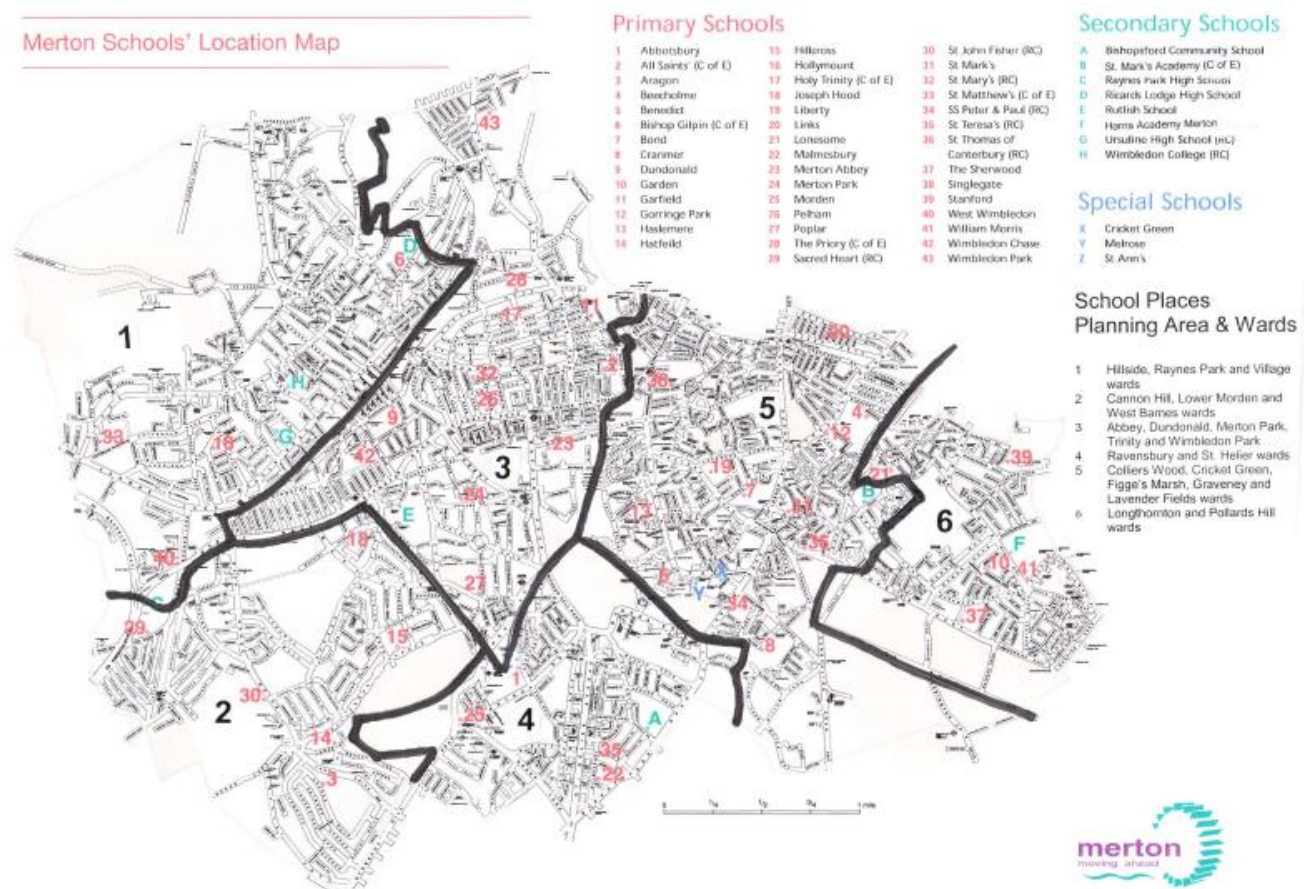
In summary, for 2021/22 and 2022/23 Year R and for 2021/22 Year 7 cohorts, intelligence from school admissions application information up to 23 July 2021 has been used, but otherwise the GLA projections were used as the council's official forecasts submitted to the DfE.

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 SCHOOLS AND PRIMARY SCHOOL PLANNING AREAS



Note – map doesn't include Harris Academy Wimbledon or The Park - to be added

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 2020/21. 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 There is an expected fall in 2021/22 that is far higher than was projected in any forecasting models and seems to be highly influenced by the implementation of Brexit and Covid factors, with families moving away from the area. Across London there was a fall of 6.7% in school admissions reception year offer day allocation for September 2021 compared to 2020; Merton was higher than average at 9.1%.

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

MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOL ROLL 2006/07 TO 2020/21 (JANUARY CENSUS)

Academic year	2006 /07	2007 /08	2008 /09	2009 /10	2010 /11	2011 /12	2012 /13	2013 /14	2014 /15	2015 /16	2016 /17	2017 /18	2018 /19	2019 /20	2020 /21
Reception	1879	1937	2140	2229	2285	2651	2599	2547	2627	2628	2524	2437	2305	2370	2279
Year 1	1845	1885	1929	2148	2228	2313	2612	2577	2532	2591	2595	2465	2392	2250	2283
Year 2	1839	1816	1885	1921	2115	2227	2284	2557	2554	2509	2535	2529	2420	2322	2204
Year 3	1794	1801	1835	1859	1905	2093	2197	2224	2502	2486	2455	2463	2450	2338	2237
Year 4	1794	1781	1773	1833	1830	1901	2082	2149	2209	2458	2419	2385	2417	2414	2241
Year 5	1840	1789	1778	1742	1832	1817	1888	2028	2109	2156	2407	2393	2339	2374	2311
Year 6	1692	1794	1762	1756	1725	1837	1817	1848	2024	2081	2113	2378	2363	2270	2311
Primary Total	12683	12803	13102	13488	13920	14839	15479	15930	16557	16909	17048	17050	16686	16338	15866

Current position

Current level of surplus places in primary school

The table below provides by school and planning area:

- The total roll (January 2021 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 16.7% surplus places in spring 2021. However, because admission numbers have been reduced the percentage was only 10.6% 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 about six schools still offering to less than 600 places on offer day.

MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND PLANNING AREA – SURPLUS AGAINST NET CAPACITY AND AGAINST RECEPTION YEAR ADMISSION NUMBER 2020/21

School Name	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	1386	1490	104	7.0%	210	188	22	10.5%
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PA2:Hatfeild, Joseph Hood, Hillcross, Aragon, Sacred Heart RC, St John Fisher RC

Total PA2	2389	2928	539	18.4%	390	339	51	13.1%
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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	4790	5648	858	15.2%	780	717	63	8.1%
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PA4: Morden, Abbotsbury, Malmesbury, St Teresa's RC

Total PA4	1365	1431	66	4.6%	210	201	9	4.3%
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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	4357	5652	1295	22.9%	690	621	69	10.0%
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PA6: Harris Primary Academy Merton, Stanford, Lonesome, The Sherwood, William Morris

Total PA6	1579	1890	311	16.5%	270	213	57	21.1%
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Total all borough	15866	19039	3173	16.7%	2550	2279	271	10.6%
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Actions to date to reduce surplus places (by planning area)

The recent fall in the primary school roll 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, in most cases 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 11 schools have reduced their admission number over the last 5 years:

MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS THAT HAVE REDUCED THEIR ADMISSION NUMBER SINCE 2015

	2015 PAN*	2021 PAN/WITH CAP	
West Wimbledon	60	30	Schools Adjudicator agreed Dec 2020
Hillcross	90	60	Unofficial cap from 2018. Official from 2020
Merton Abbey	60	30	Official change from 2019
Park	60	30	Officially changed for new provider
The Priory C of E	60	45	Schools Adjudicator agreed Jan 2021
Benedict	60	30	Unofficial cap in 2019 and 2020. Officially changed for new provider
Cranmer	90	60	Unofficial cap for 2021
Gorringe Park	90	60	Official published from 2019

Liberty	90	60	Unofficial cap from 2017. Official from 2020
St Thomas of Canterbury	90	60	Unofficial cap from 2018 on (VA school), made official by 2021
Stanford	60	30	Permanent change to school capacity with ARP
Total	810	495	Total reduction of 315 places (10.5 FE)

Note - PAN is "published admission number"

Merton forecasts submitted July 2021

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 2021 were as follows:

MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS – WHOLE BOROUGH FORECASTS JULY 2021

Academic year	Primary whole borough							
	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2020/21 (actual)	2279	2283	2204	2237	2241	2311	2311	15866
2021/22	2260	2235	2249	2169	2207	2214	2282	15616
2022/23	2289	2239	2219	2234	2157	2194	2201	15533
2023/24	2175	2260	2223	2202	2224	2141	2180	15405
2024/25	2144	2144	2243	2206	2191	2210	2126	15264
2025/26	2082	2108	2132	2222	2195	2176	2193	15108

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 PROJECTIONS AND NO CHANGE

Year actual and forecast	Total roll	Net capacity	Surplu s	Surplu s %	R admission No.	R roll	Surplus R	Surplus R %
2020/21 (actual)	15866	19039	3173	16.7%	2550	2279	271	10.6%
2021/22	15616	19039	3423	18.0%	2475	2260	215	8.7%
2022/23	15533	19039	3506	18.4%	2475	2289	186	7.5%
2023/24	15405	19039	3634	19.1%	2475	2175	300	12.1%
2024/25	15264	19039	3775	19.8%	2475	2144	331	13.4%
2025/26	15108	19039	3931	20.6%	2475	2082	393	15.9%

On the basis that 5% is considered the ideal level of surplus school places, then by 2025/26 the total admission numbers would need to reduce by 285 to 2190 to match supply, thus reducing schools by a further 9.5 forms of entry.

However, our pupil retention model suggests a reception roll of only 1885 by 2025/26, suggesting the reduction would need to be 16 forms of entry to be at the ideal 5%. The pupil retention model takes into account the expected Covid related fall in reception roll in September 2021 which has been influenced by Covid.

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

MERTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS – FORECASTS BY PLANNING AREA JULY 2021

Academic year	Primary PA1						
Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6
2020/21 (actual)							
2021/22	175	188	188	197	198	193	190
2022/23	160	176	189	186	197	199	189
2023/24	170	161	175	187	187	198	195
2024/25	176	171	161	173	187	187	194
2025/26	171	177	171	159	173	188	183

Academic year	Primary PA2						
Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6
2021/22	332	336	349	321	326	331	354
2022/23	330	330	334	349	318	325	333
2023/24	334	327	327	332	346	316	327
2024/25	309	332	323	326	330	345	318
2025/26	297	307	329	320	323	328	345

Academic year	Primary PA3						
Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6
2021/22	692	694	702	677	674	651	657
2022/23	679	676	684	692	667	666	646
2023/24	642	662	666	674	681	657	659
2024/25	625	624	653	656	666	672	652
2025/26	611	607	617	642	646	656	666

Academic year	Primary PA4						
Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6
2021/22	186	193	196	183	191	197	194
2022/23	191	180	195	193	184	190	199
2023/24	185	183	182	192	194	184	191
2024/25	181	178	185	179	194	194	185
2025/26	176	174	181	182	181	193	195

Academic year	Primary PA5						
Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6
2021/22	584	611	598	565	605	620	662
2022/23	616	583	607	592	563	599	613
2023/24	633	611	581	599	590	558	592
2024/25	633	626	608	575	596	587	549
2025/26	618	627	625	600	573	591	579

Academic year	Primary PA6						
Forecasts	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6
2021/22	202	212	215	225	214	219	225
2022/23	215	204	211	222	228	214	220
2023/24	212	216	202	216	226	229	214
2024/25	219	212	212	208	219	225	230
2025/26	209	218	209	218	211	219	225

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 is as follows:

- 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
- No plans to close schools

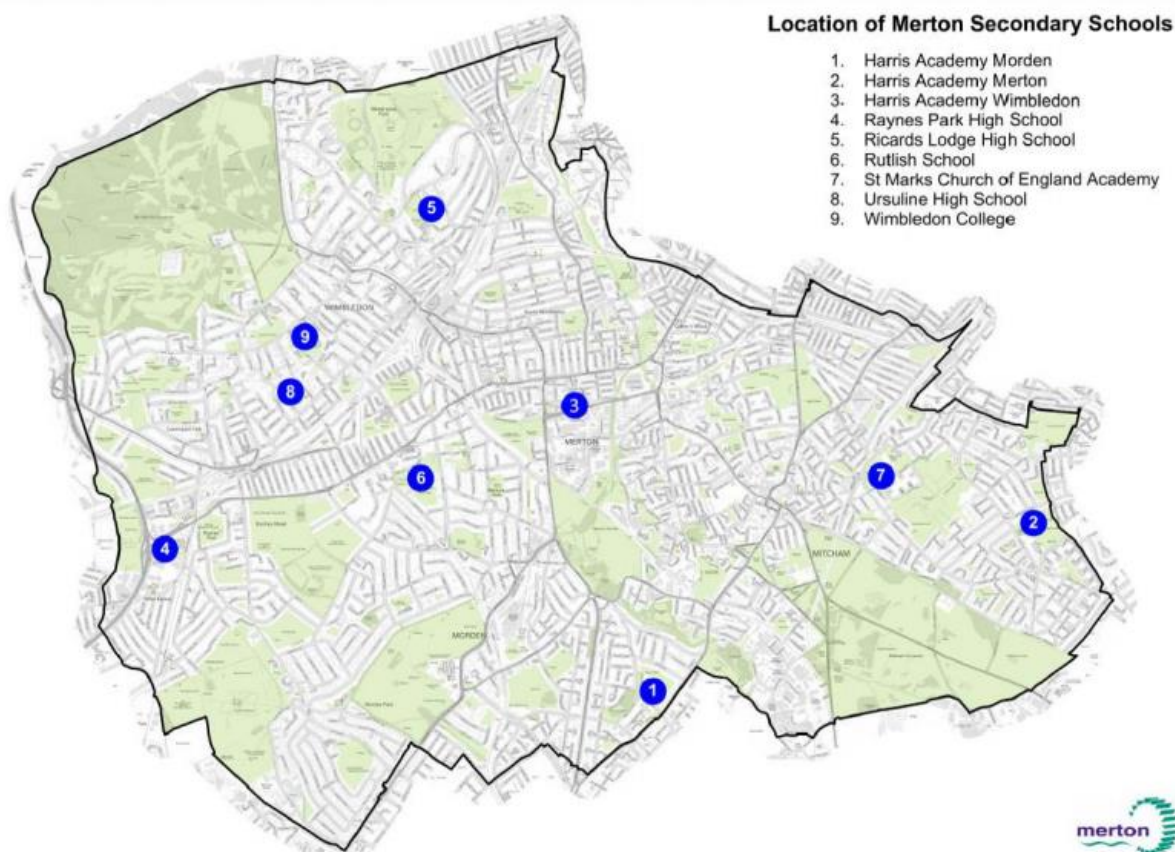
The strategy will be developed further in consultation with schools.

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

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 Merton more Merton resident children have travelled 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 over 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 2 years it has recovered to just below 80%.

YEAR 6 TO YEAR 7 TRANSFER PERCENTAGE ON MERTON SCHOOLS 2008/09 TO 2020/21

2008 /09	2009 /10	2010 /11	2011 /12	2012 /13	2013 /14	2014 /15	2015 /16	2016 /17	2017 /18	2018 /19	2019 /20	2020 /21
88.2 %	87.6 %	85.5 %	84.5 %	79.2 %	80.6 %	80.7 %	78.0 %	74.8 %	74.3 %	74.9 %	79.5 %	79.4 %

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 within the next 2-3 years 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.

MERTON SCHOOLS SECONDARY SCHOOL ROLL 2008/09 TO 2020/21

Academic year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Year 7	1583	1544	1502	1457	1454	1465	1492	1578	1556	1569	1782	1878	1803
Year 8	1536	1608	1547	1516	1450	1459	1462	1482	1553	1547	1593	1767	1854
Year 9	1544	1556	1618	1573	1508	1440	1450	1451	1477	1564	1587	1583	1722
Year 10	1589	1573	1551	1630	1571	1503	1446	1454	1419	1460	1573	1534	1557
Year 11	1566	1576	1540	1548	1590	1532	1497	1416	1403	1383	1497	1518	1508
Year 12	369	412	606	609	699	856	805	754	239	774	716	724	814
Year 13	316	309	298	398	455	499	657	632	585	616	700	643	665
Secondary Year 7 - 11	7818	7857	7758	7724	7573	7399	7347	7381	7408	7523	8032	8280	8444
Secondary Year 12+	685	721	904	1007	1154	1355	1462	1386	824	1390	1416	1367	1479
Secondary Total	8503	8578	8662	8731	8727	8754	8809	8767	8232	8913	9448	9647	9923
Year 6/7 Transfer Rate (%)	88.2 %	87.6 %	85.5 %	84.5 %	79.2 %	80.6 %	80.7 %	78.0 %	74.8 %	74.3 %	74.9 %	79.5 %	79.4 %

Current level of surplus places in secondary school

The table below provides by school and planning area:

- The total roll (January 2021 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 6.3% surplus places in spring 2021, and 5.9% in year 7 against published admission number. These numbers are therefore a close match to the 5% ideal level, though it should be recognised that most of the surplus is in two schools and therefore brings challenges to these schools.

MERTON SECONDARY SCHOOLS – SURPLUS AGAINST NET CAPACITY AND AGAINST YEAR 7 ADMISSION NUMBER 2020/21

2020/21	Total roll	Net capacity	Surplus	Surplus %	Year 7 admission No.	Year 7 roll	Surplus Yr 7	Surplus Yr 7 %
Total all 9 secondary schools*	9923	11284	712	6.3%	1909	1803	106	5.9%

*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 2-3 forms of entry

MERTON SECONDARY SCHOOLS – OFFICIAL JULY 2021 (GLA FORECASTS FROM 2022/23)

GLA projections – Merton secondary schools	7	8	9	10	11	Total 7-11	12	13	Total whole school
2020/21	1803	1854	1722	1557	1508	8444	814	665	9923
2021/22	1810	1786	1846	1706	1555	8703	830	736	10269
2022/23	1814	1803	1787	1841	1709	8954	850	751	10555
2023/24	1790	1804	1801	1779	1844	9018	915	769	10702
2024/25	1769	1780	1801	1788	1782	8920	925	828	10673
2025/26	1705	1757	1779	1789	1790	8820	926	838	10584
2026/27	1724	1694	1754	1764	1792	8728	931	838	10497
2027/28	1725	1712	1693	1739	1769	8638	938	844	10420

However, given the much lower numbers flowing through Merton primary schools there is the concern that the GLA 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 79%, this projection shows that year 7 numbers will fall sharply from 2023/24, such that by 2025/26 the fall will be equivalent to 9 forms of entry (FE) less than at present.

PUPIL RETENTION PROJECTIONS JULY 2021

79% Pupil retention projections	7	8	9	10	11	Total 7-11	12	13	Total whole school
2020/21	1803	1854	1722	1557	1508	8444	814	665	9923
2021/22	1810	1803	1854	1722	1557	8746	778	740	10264
2022/23	1777	1810	1803	1854	1722	8966	805	708	10479
2023/24	1667	1777	1810	1803	1854	8911	895	734	10540
2024/25	1612	1667	1777	1810	1803	8669	961	815	10445
2025/26	1529	1612	1667	1777	1810	8395	935	875	10206
2026/27	1546	1529	1612	1667	1777	8131	939	852	9922
2027/28	1499	1546	1529	1612	1667	7853	922	855	9630

In this context there has been some concern regarding the impact of a proposed second new Free School in Sutton some 700 metres from the boundary, and there is also concern regarding the proposed opening of a new Voluntary Aided school in Kingston that is also close to the Merton border. After successful lobbying, initially by Merton Council and Merton schools and followed by Sutton schools, in early September 2021 it was confirmed that the mainstream Sutton Free School will not be progressed.

Based on a fall in demand of 9FE, 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.

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.

NUMBER OF MERTON RESIDENT EHCPs JANUARY 2016 TO JANUARY 2021 AND SCHOOL PLACEMENT TYPE (SEN 2 RETURNS)

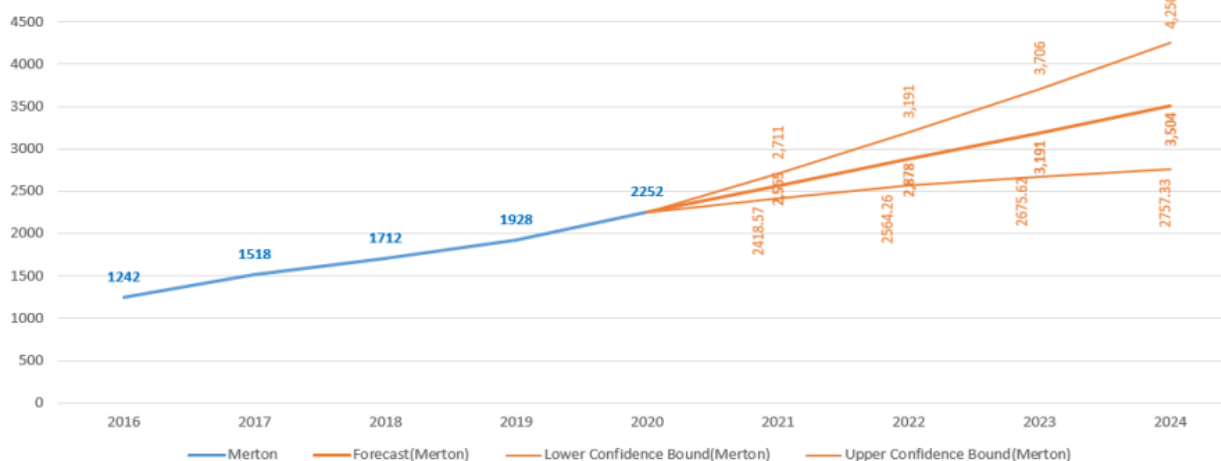
TABLE 4 - EHCP's and type of Provision	Jan 2016 Total Statements and EHCPs		Jan 2017 Total Statements and EHCPs		Jan 2018 Total Statements and EHCPs		Jan 2019 Total Statements and EHCPs		Jan 2020 Total Statements and EHCPs		Jan 2021 Total Statements and EHCPs	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Early Years (incl. Private & Voluntary Settings)	0	0%	1	0%	7	0%	7	0%	7	0%	8	0%
Mainstream Schools (incl. Academies, Free and Independent)	422	39%	461	37%	526	35%	584	34%	707	37%	816	36%
Additional Resourced Provision	110	10%	111	9%	116	8%	125	7%	125	6%	133	6%
State Funded Special Schools	358	33%	388	31%	416	27%	440	26%	474	25%	520	23%
Independent Special Schools	132	12%	153	12%	176	12%	228	13%	280	15%	367	16%
Post 16 College and traineeships	25	2%	93	7%	183	12%	212	12%	199	10%	268	12%
Post 16 Specialist	10	1%	25	2%	44	3%	37	2%	35	2%	44	2%
Alternative Education (incl. EOTAS, Hospital Schools and EHE)	15	1%	10	1%	22	1%	28	2%	61	3%	37	2%
No placement (including NEET)	3	0%	0	0%	28	2%	51	3%	40	2%	59	3%
Total	1075	100%	1242	100%	1518	100%	1712	100%	1928	100%	2252	100%
Change over previous year				16%		22%		13%		11%		17%

There has therefore been more than doubling in the number of EHCPs in the 5 years from 2016 to 2021.

The implications of the trend increase in EHCPs over the forthcoming years, shown in the graph below, is of significant concern.

INCREASE IN EHCPs 2016 TO 2021 AND IMPLICATIONS OF FUTURE TREND

Projection for Merton Children and Young People with a Statement or EHC Plan



Based on the historic trend, a basic forecast shows the number of Children and Young People with EHCPs in Merton could reach up 4,250 by 2025 (an 89% increase from January 2021).

The council has been active in implementing special school expansion in recent years, 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 Hatfield and Stanford Primary Schools, the expansion of Cricket Green School, the expansion of Melrose School including the provision of a primary department, and the recently agreed expansion into Whatley Avenue that will provide more places for ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) children.

<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s41566/Cabinet%206%20Sep%2021%20Melrose%20Whatley%20Av.pdf>

We have therefore increased the number of special school placements from 358 to 520 and the Whatley Avenue project will add a further 80 additional places. The number of ARP places capacity in 2016 was 101 and by 2020 it had risen to 150.

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.

The DfE has recently 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.

Over the autumn, the DfE's team will work closely with the council to challenge and support the development of the DSG management plan through detailed discussions. During this process, the local authority will be working towards submitting a proposal to the department setting out:

- How the authority will go about reaching an in-year balance on the DSG, and the timeframe for achieving this;
- How the authority will itself reduce the historic cumulative deficit, and what support might be required from the department to eliminate the deficit in full.

Final proposals will be submitted to the department in early December. The negotiation teams will assess the proposals and determine whether they secure the sustainability of the authority's high needs systems and spending appropriately and quickly, and whether any request for support represents value for taxpayer money.

The final decision on whether to enter into an agreement with any authority lies with the Secretary of State. If the authority's proposals are agreed to by the Secretary of State, they will form the basis of a published agreement. The agreement will require the authority to implement reforms to the agreed timetable, alongside maintaining an agreed savings profile. It will also set out additional funding which the department will release to support the reduction of your cumulative deficit and any potential resources required from LBM.

As part of this overall strategy, the council will consider the need for further specialist places. While it is likely that further expansion projects will be implemented to prevent more expensive further independent sector placements that are generally out of borough, it needs to be part of the overall strategy to reduce spend. The actual and projected fall in demand for primary school places, and the projected fall in demand for secondary school places offers the opportunity to deliver additional specialist spaces for a lower capital cost and make best use of buildings.

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