



THE CHALLENGE ACADEMY TRUST

ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS CONSULTATION RESPONSE

8th February 2024

This is the response to the formal consultation for the admission arrangements of the academies of The Challenge Academy Trust comprising:

Beamont Collegiate Academy
Bridgewater High School
Padgate Academy
Penketh High School
Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School
Broomfields Junior School
Appleton Thorn Primary School
Great Sankey Primary School
Meadowside Community Primary and Nursery School
Penketh South Primary School

Overview

The Trust came into existence in 2017 and has grown to include 11 academies within the Warrington area – 5 primary academies, 5 secondary academies and Priestley College whose admissions guidance as a Sixth Form College sits outside of these statutory arrangements.

The Trust is the Admissions Authority for the primary and secondary academies within the Trust. The Trust and its academies have developed a policy which ensures all academies within the Trust have a unified approach to admissions whilst ensuring the individual character of each academy is maintained.

All state-funded schools have a set of admissions rules, published admission number and oversubscription criteria to help them process school applications consistently, transparently and fairly in accordance with the 2021 School Admissions Code. The Trust consulted on the unified policy for the Trust's Warrington academies between 7 December 2023 to 31 January 2024 on admission arrangements for the Trust's academies.

Following an early response to the document from the Headteacher and Chair of Governors at St. Monica's Catholic Primary School, the consultation and proposed arrangements were amended to include Monica's Catholic Primary School as a partner primary for Bridgewater High School. The consultation was therefore amended and re-issued for the period from 19th December 2023 to 31st January 2024.

This consultation specifically relates to the following academies in Warrington for whom The Challenge Academy Trust is the Admissions Authority:

- Beamont Collegiate Academy
- Bridgewater High School
- Padgate Academy
- Penketh High School
- Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School
- Appleton Thorn Primary School
- Broomfields Junior School
- Great Sankey Primary School
- Meadowside County Primary and Nursery School
- Penketh South Primary School

The consultation was widely published through:

- Academy individual websites
- The Trust's website
- Direct emails to all schools and academies in the local area
- Direct emails to Warrington Local Authority
- For the Broomfields proposals, direct to all parents of children in Year 1 at Cobbs Infant School. Cobbs Infant School were asked to circulate the information on behalf of the Trust but were unable to do this and instead provided a list of parental emails for Broomfields to use having first asked for permission to share this information.
- Direct emails to adjoining neighbouring local authorities' admissions departments
- Direct emails to the body/person representing the religion or religious denomination in the case of schools designated with a religious character

Responses to the proposals were invited by email either via the specific academy or directly by emailing admissions@tcat.uk.com

This document presents the feedback received for each element of the consultation presented to the Trust board on 8th February 2024 to be taken into consideration in the Trust Board determining the final Admissions Arrangements for the Trust academies.

Consultation Timeline

Consultation opened	7 December 2023 re-issued 19 December 2023
Consultation closed	31 January 2024
Reviewed by Trust board	8 February 2024
Final determination	By 28 February 2024

Summary of Proposed Changes

Element 1	Common unified policy for all Warrington academies in the Trust
Element 2	Changes to Academy Published Admission Numbers (PAN) Specifically a) Broomfields Junior School reducing from 90 to 72 for 2025-2026 as a consequence of reducing numbers in Cobbs Infant School with the proposal being to introduce 2 large classes of 36 in this year group. b) Penketh High School increasing from 180 to 220 for 2025-2026 c) Sir Thomas Boteler C of E High School increasing from 165 to 175 in 2025-2026
Element 3	Inclusion of children of staff working at the academies at criteria 5 for primary and junior schools and criteria 4 for all secondary schools
Element 4	Introduction of partner primaries for Bridgewater High School to include: Appleton Thorn Primary School Broomfields Junior School (linked to Cobbs Infant School) Grappenhall Heys Primary School St Matthew's CofE Primary School St Monica's Catholic Primary School St Thomas' C of E Primary School Stockton Heath Primary School
Element 5	Simplification of the faith criteria used in determining admissions for Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School.

Summary of Consultation Responses

Responses to the consultation were received throughout the consultation period. 32 responses representing 70 respondents in total were received as listed below:

Element	Description	No. responses received		
		Parents	Warrington LA	Other Stakeholders
Element 1	Common unified policy for all Warrington academies in the Trust	0	0	0
Element 2 a)	Changes to Academy Published Admission Numbers (PAN) Broomfields Junior School reducing from 90 to 72 for 2025-2026	31 respondents 1 collective response from 38 respondents	0	1
Element 2 b)	Changes to Academy Published Admission Numbers (PAN) Penketh High School increasing from 180 to 220 for 2025-2026	0	0	0
Element 2 c)	Changes to Academy Published Admission Numbers (PAN) Sir Thomas Boteler C of E High School increasing from 165 to 175 in 2025-2026	0	0	0
Element 3	Inclusion of children of staff working at the academies at criteria 5 for primary and junior schools and criteria 4 for all secondary schools	0	0	0
Element 4	Introduction of partner primaries for Bridgewater High School	1	0	4
Element 5	Simplification of the faith criteria used in determining admissions for Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School.	0	0	2
TOTAL		32 (70)	0	7

Feedback Analysis

The table summarised the types of feedback received for each element in the consultation

Element	Description	Feedback
Element 1	Common unified policy for all Warrington academies in the Trust	No responses received
Element 2 a)	Changes to Academy Published Admission Numbers (PAN) Broomfields Junior School reducing from 90 to 72 for 2025-2026	Concerns raised over the impact on the quality of education that will be delivered to the children in the affected year group including the impact of larger class sizes and the impact on the provision for pupils with SEND needs
		Concerns raised over the impact on staff and student wellbeing of larger class sizes
		Concerns over the physical limitation of classrooms, space and related Health and Safety provision
		Concerns over the lack of transparency over the effect on finances and the school budget
		Request for information on the adaptations that will be put into place to mitigate the effect of larger class sizes
		Concerns over the LA forecasting and the effect of the changes to the Grappenhall Heys PAN effectively leading to over-provision in the area.
		Proposal for the school to look at reducing TA and support staff to enable 3 classes to be maintained in the affected year.
		Concerns raised that parental expectations that class structures would be maintained from Cobbs through to Broomfields, will not be supported under these arrangements and the associated reputational effect.
		Concerns raised over the consultation process itself including timing and provision of information to parents of the affected children
Element 2 b)	Changes to Academy Published Admission Numbers (PAN) Penketh High School increasing from 180 to 220 for 2025-2026	No responses received

Element	Description	Feedback
Element 2 c)	Changes to Academy Published Admission Numbers (PAN) Sir Thomas Boteler C of E High School increasing from 165 to 175 in 2025-2026	No responses received
Element 3	Inclusion of children of staff working at the academies at criteria 5 for primary and junior schools and criteria 4 for all secondary schools	No responses received
Element 4	Introduction of partner primaries for Bridgewater High School	Initial response received from Governors and senior leadership at St. Monica's Catholic Primary School requesting that the primary be added as a partner. The consultation was amended in response and further responses then received from the Diocese of Shrewsbury, a local high school and the governing body objecting to the inclusion of St. Monica's Catholic Primary School on faith grounds.
Element 5	Simplification of the faith criteria used in determining admissions for Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School.	2 responses to the consultation from the Dioceses of Liverpool and Chester proposing amendments to the wording of criteria 3.

Response to Feedback

Element 2a - Changes to Academy Published Admission Numbers (PAN) Broomfields Junior School reducing from 90 to 72 for 2025-2026

A significant amount of feedback has been received in relation to this section of the consultation. The responses to the issues raised are below.

Quality of education

A number of responses raised concerns that the larger class sizes throughout their time at Broomfields would have a negative impact on learning and the children's development and would mean that the provision of education proposed will be significantly inferior and have an impact on the provision for pupils with SEND needs. Some responses also questioned the validity of the EEF research quoted.

Response

The school will ensure that the provision for these children, including those with Special Educational Needs, remains equitable to all other children within Broomfields and they will have access to all areas of the wide, rich curriculum that is currently in place at the school.

The EEF has found that reducing class sizes has a small positive impact of +2 months on average, however it is a low-impact approach with a very high cost based on very limited evidence. It is important to also note that the gains from smaller class sizes are likely to come from the increased flexibility for organising learners and the quality and quantity of feedback the children receive. Smaller classes only impact upon learning if the reduced numbers allow teachers to teach differently. The teaching and learning approach at Broomfields supports a positive approach to such teaching strategies regardless of size in which teachers have been trained, using the latest research, to effectively plan, deliver and give feedback effectively. The curriculum is designed for all and adaptations are planned accordingly to support this. It is also suggested that smaller class sizes may be a more effective approach during the early stages of primary school.

Regarding the validity of the EEF research, it is important to note that the EEF guidance reports summarise the best available research evidence on a particular aspect of teaching and learning and present actional recommendations for practice. The EEF has a rigorous evaluation process and uses independent evaluators to ensure the validity of research. It is also important to note that the results of any research may not be applicable to all contexts. Therefore, it is important to consider the specific context of Broomfields Junior School when evaluating the applicability of the EEF research findings.

Staff and student wellbeing

Responses identified the potential impact of class sizes on student wellbeing including the potential impact on pupils with additional needs and the possibility of these needs being overlooked.

Response

Children's wellbeing is at the forefront of the work carried out at Broomfields both across the curriculum as well as in the wider holistic activities on offer to all.

The Headteacher will review all pastoral support processes including the careful organisation of staff responsibilities, the use of the year group hub, small group work and where appropriate, group withdrawal and teaching assistant support to work with the children.

The Trust and school are committed to supporting staff and children's well-being throughout this process. There will be a full programme of communication and support to enable concerns and issues to be raised and responded to. The Headteacher will also monitor any effect on staff workload or well-being to enable mitigations to be put into effect to support with the current workload strategy and commitments already established.

The trust and school recognise that this situation will remain for the four years of education for this year group and will ensure that the pastoral and curriculum systems remain adapted to provide support throughout their time at the school. Systems already in place will support this and leaders will work closely with this information to ensure that the children are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve their potential as well as experience the vast number of activities and wider opportunities available to the children of Broomfields.

Physical limitations

Concerns have been raised that the physical provision at Broomfields Junior School is unsuitable to support larger class sizes and could pose Health and Safety risks.

Response

The school and Trust are in the process of reviewing the provision and have reserved capital grant funding to enable any adaptations required to be made to the space. An architect has been engaged to support this work. The Trust and school are confident that adaptations will be able to be made before the children arrive in September 2025. This will enable the full curriculum to be delivered to this year group as in all other year groups.

It is worth confirming that the capital grant funding that has been identified can only be used to support building improvement works and cannot be used under the terms of the DfE grant conditions to support revenue costs such as staffing costs.

Prior to the children arriving in the school, all Health and Safety arrangements and risk assessment will be reviewed as is the usual practice. The Trust employs an independent Health and Safety advisor to carry out annual audits at all academies and to advise whenever significant changes occur, and this process will be carried out prior to the children's arrival at the school.

Finances and the school budget

Some responses raised concerns on the lack of clarity, transparency and credibility in the financial information provided including concerns around accuracy.

Response

The information provided focused on the funding shortfall rather the school budget. In response to the funding shortfall, this has been calculated with regard to the current school's capacity of 90 per year group. It measured the gap between the number of pupils attending the school and the income that the school would receive if all year groups were full at the PAN of 90.

The Trust's forecast budget calculations for Broomfields Junior School for the two scenarios – remaining at 3 form entry and reducing to two forms from 2025-2026 - are shown below for transparency.

Remain 3 Form Entry					
	23/24	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
Funding per pupil	1,614,094	1,623,370	1,563,074	1,474,948	1,307,973
Other funding	360,434	360,434	340,113	301,609	274,871
	1,974,528	1,983,804	1,903,187	1,776,557	1,582,844
Staff Costs	1,491,230	1,491,230	1,491,230	1,491,230	1,491,230
Other Costs	449,968	449,968	449,968	449,968	449,968
In Year Surplus/Deficit	33,330	42,606	-38,011	-164,641	-358,354
Reserves Brought Forward	174,929	208,259	250,865	212,854	48,213
Reserves Carried Forward	208,259	250,865	212,854	48,213	-310,141

2 Form Entry from 1st September 2025					
	23/24	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
Funding per pupil	1,614,094	1,623,370	1,563,074	1,423,928	1,284,782
Other funding	360,434	360,434	328,348	296,262	269,523
	1,974,528	1,983,804	1,891,422	1,720,190	1,554,305
Staff Costs	1,491,230	1,491,230	1,402,574	1,313,918	1,225,262
Other Costs	449,968	449,968	449,968	449,968	449,968
Redundancy Costs		15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000
In Year Surplus/Deficit	33,330	27,606	23,880	-58,696	-135,925
Reserves Brought Forward	174,929	208,259	235,865	259,745	201,049
Reserves Carried Forward	208,259	235,865	259,745	201,049	65,124

If the school remains at 3 form entry, it can be seen that a significant deficit develops, school reserves have to be used to support the three-form structure and this still results in a large deficit in 2027/28.

Reducing to 2 form entry in September 2025 still in results in financial pressures which will need to be addressed but enables the school to use its reserves to continue to deliver quality education whilst providing time for the remaining budgetary pressures to be reviewed and plans developed to support the ongoing pressures.

Some responses identified the low numbers in the current year 2 and noted that this year group is unaffected by any proposed changes. Admissions consultations are held two years prior to entry under the Admissions Code. Therefore, the conditions for entry for Year 2 were set in 2022-2023 and can only be amended by submitting an application to the Schools Adjudicator which should only be done in wholly exceptional circumstances. Therefore the conditions for entry to Broomfields for the 2024-25 school year was set in February 2023 and cannot be changed.

Some responses questioned if Trust reserves could be used to support the school. It is important to note that the central trust does not hold reserves. Each academy in the Trust receives its own budget settlement and reserves are held at school level. Therefore, support over and above Broomfields Junior School's own reserves would result in that funding being taken away from another academy within the Trust.

Some responses also questioned why the move from three to two classes could not take place in 2026/27 with the current reception year group. The financial information above demonstrates the severe impact on the school's financial situation if the change is not made in 2025/26.

Proposed adaptations to school and curriculum

Some consultation responses focused on understanding how the school will adapt the premises and the curriculum to suit the larger class sizes in the affected year group.

Response

As described above, any physical adaptations required will be identified and implemented to support the children's education and learning. For the curriculum design, the Headteacher will review all curriculum delivery methods including the careful organisation of teaching staff timetables, the use of the year group hub, small group work and appropriate group withdrawal and teaching assistant support.

Effect of LA forecasting and changes to the Grappenhall Heys PAN

Concerns were raised as to how the lower class numbers arose and the failure of the Trust and school to adequately prepare for the lower pupil numbers coming through from Cobbs Infant School.

Response

Forecasting pupil numbers is generally acknowledged as a difficult process. Unfortunately, the Trust and school are reliant on the forecasts from Warrington Borough Council (WBC) which is statutorily responsible for school place planning across the borough including in the Trust's academies. The forecasting process has been made more difficult in Warrington due to a number of contradictory factors including predicted dropping birthrates, the effect of immigration into the area and the unpredictable nature of house building.

Some responses specifically mention the expansion of pupil places at Grappenhall Heys. WBC was responsible for the expansion of Grappenhall Heys Primary School. At the time of their consultation, the Trust and school raised concerns with the school and WBC around the timing of the expansion and whether the predicted increase in pupil numbers from housebuilding would materialise. At that time, it was suggested by WBC that Grappenhall Heys physical capacity would be increased but that the school's PAN would not increase until there was an increase in demand. Unfortunately, this did not happen and the subsequent increase in PAN has undoubtedly affected Cobbs Infant School and Broomfields Junior School.

WBC are the Admitting Authority for Grappenhall Heys Primary School and the Trust and school can only react to the effects of the decision which has resulted in this consultation and these proposals. Further communications regarding this matter should be addressed to schooladmissions@warrington.gov.uk

Proposal to reduce TA and support staff

A small number of responses asked if it would be possible to enable 3 classes to be maintained in the affected year group and reduce Teaching Assistant and support staff.

Response

Parents and stakeholders will be aware that Broomfields Junior School has previously had financial issues and has worked hard to ensure quality of provision while reducing costs. As a result, support staff structures have already been reviewed and are an efficient and effective resource. Further reductions in this area would be very difficult and would not generate the savings required.

Class structures

Some responses have identified the impact on class structures with the move from 3 classes in this year group at Cobbs Infant School being merged into two classes.

Response

The school is committed to working with the staff at Cobbs Infant School and parents to make every effort to maintain friendship groups and taking consideration needs of pupils. This work will start ahead of the transfer as part of transition arrangements.

Effect of increasing numbers within the current Year 1 at Cobbs

Some responses raised the issue of the numbers in Year 1 at Cobbs and the possible effect of the school increasing numbers in this year group prior to the move to Broomfields Junior School.

The PAN for 2024-25 has been set at 72 as this was the number of pupils in this year group at Cobbs on 1st December 2023. The proposed admissions arrangements also introduces over-subscription criteria to ensure that all 72 children in the year group as of 1st December 2023 will be offered a place at Broomfields before those joining after this date. The PAN is reduced to 72 to enable the school to legally refuse admissions over and above this number thus preventing the class sizes to increase further.

Some respondents noted that the proposed over-subscription criteria includes siblings as higher priority to those who were in attendance at Cobbs as at 1st December. The Trust acknowledges this issue and proposes to change the current criteria 4 to criteria 2. This will change the over-subscription criteria as follows:

1. Child in Care (looked after children) and previously looked after children including those previously in state care outside of England*.
2. Children who attend Cobbs Infant School. For the admissions year 2025-26
 - pupils on roll as at 1st December 2023 will be considered first
 - children admitted after 1st December 2023 will be considered second
3. Siblings (pupils with elder brothers or sisters already attending the preferred academy and expected to continue at the academy in the following school year). This includes full, half or step-brothers and sisters and foster brothers and sisters who are living at the same address as part of the same family unit)
4. Pupils for whom advice from a medical practitioner or psychologist has been provided by the parents/carers at the time of application in support of admission to a particular academy, which, in the Admission Authority's view, justifies admission to the preferred academy. The Admissions Authority if it is considered appropriate, will seek the views of the school medical officer or educational psychologist in the event of parents requesting admission on medical or psychological grounds.
5. Children of staff where the member of staff has been employed by the relevant academy for two or more years at the time at which the application for admission to the academy is made, and/or the member of staff is recruited to fill a vacant post for which there is a demonstrable skill shortage.
6. Pupils living nearest to the academy measured as a direct distance from the child's permanent place of residence to the academy measured using a geographical Information address point system based on the local and property gazetteer. This measures straight line (direct) distances from the address point of the permanent place of residence to the address point of the academy.

Consultation process

Some respondents questioned the validity of the consultation process.

Response

The consultation was run in accordance with the Admissions Code 2021 [School admissions code 2021 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/91221/school_admissions_code_2021.pdf) for a period of 56 days from 7th December – 31st January. The consultation period therefore exceeded the minimum statutory consultation of 42 days. The consultation was published to all Trust and academy websites for the whole period and was sent direct to the required organisations as listed in the code and above on page 2.

The school and Trust considered carefully how to contact parents of the children directly affected given that the parental details are only held by the current school which is Cobbs Infant School. Cobbs Infant School was initially asked to circulate the information direct to Year 1 parents but did not feel able to do this. Cobbs Infant School agreed to seek consent to pass the parental email addresses to Broomfields Junior School. This was done but, it seems that consent was not received from all parents. Therefore, Cobbs Infant School passed a list of email addresses to Broomfields which may not have been complete. It also later transpired that some email addresses were incorrect. The Trust regrets that this impacted on the effectiveness of the communication. However, this was outside of the Trust's and school's control.

As a result, there were requests to extend the consultation period but unfortunately the Admissions Code does not allow this.

Parental feedback included requests for a parental meeting. This was not planned in the consultation process. However, the Trust and school understand parental concerns and will look to hold parental meetings as necessary once the admission arrangements are determined to share plans on the additional provisions being made for this year group.

Element 4 – Inclusion of St Monica's Catholic Primary School as a Partner Primary for Bridgewater High School

The Trust responded to initial requests to include St. Monica's Catholic Primary School as a partner primary in the consultation for Bridgewater High School and then noted subsequent requests to remove the school from the list. The Trust Board has agreed to remove St Monica's Catholic Primary School from the list of partner primary schools to Bridgewater High School.

Element 5 - Simplification of the faith criteria used in determining admissions for Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School

Following the responses to the consultation from the Dioceses of Liverpool and Chester proposing amendments to the wording of criteria 3, the proposed wording has been adopted and will be included in the final version of the Admission Arrangements.

Conclusion

Trustees and Trust and school leaders believe there has been a fair and open consultation in accordance with the requirements of the [School admissions code 2021](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/90122/school-admissions-code-2021.pdf) ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/90122/school-admissions-code-2021.pdf))

Having considered the feedback and queries gathered throughout the consultation process, The Challenge Academy Trust approves:

- The establishment of the common unified Admission Arrangements for all Warrington academies within the Trust
- The oversubscription criteria are expanded to include children of staff working at each academy.
- Pupils attending the following school have preference as part of over-subscription 5 for entry to Bridgewater High School
 - o Appleton Thorn Primary School
 - o Broomfields Junior School (linked to Cobbs Infant School)
 - o Grappenhall Heys Primary School
 - o St Matthew's CofE Primary School
 - o St Thomas' C of E Primary School
 - o Stockton Heath Primary School
- The PAN at Penketh High School increases to 220 for September 2025
- The PAN at Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England high School increased to 175 for September 2025
- The faith criteria for Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School are revised to include the following wording:

"Children or whose parent/s worship in a Christian church. 'Parental worshipping' is taken to mean attendance at a minimum of 2 public worship services per month for at least 2 years prior to the date of application.

A Christian church means any church which is designated under the Ecumenical Relations Measure nationally by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York or locally by the diocesan bishop, or is a member of Churches Together in England, or the Evangelical Alliance, or a partner church of Affinity.

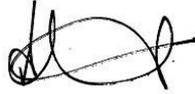
In the event that during the period specified for attendance at worship the church has been closed for public worship and has not provided alternative premises for that worship, the requirements of these admissions arrangements in relation to attendance will only apply to the period when the church or alternative premises have been available for public worship.

Parents/Carers must complete a separate application form to meet these criteria and this must be signed by a Vicar, Rector or Minister of the church."
- The PAN at Broomfields Junior School reduces to 72 for September 2025, with the school moving to create two large classes with additional staffing. The Trust Board sincerely regret the need for these proposed changes and have reviewed all options.

All possible options have been considered. Consultation responses did not identify any alternative solutions.

The option adopted ensures all children currently at Cobbs Infant School in Year 1 can transfer to Broomfields Junior School. However, parental concerns are recognised, and all efforts will be made to ensure that the children's education and quality of the teaching and learning are not affected.

Signed



Andrew Moorcroft, Chief Executive Officer



Howard Platt, Chair of the Trust Board

Date:

9 February, 2024