Office of the Schools Adjudicator

Template for

Local Authority Report

to

The Schools Adjudicator

from

City of Bristol Local Authority

to be provided by

31 October 2026

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Please email your completed report to: Office of the Schools Adjudicator by 31 October 2026 and earlier if possible

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Introduction

1. Section 88P of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (the Act) requires every local authority to make an annual report to the adjudicator. The Chief Adjudicator then includes a summary of these reports in the annual report to the Secretary of State for Education. The School Admissions Code (the Code) sets out the requirements for reports by local authorities in paragraph 6. Paragraph 3.30 specifies what must be included as a minimum in the report to the adjudicator and makes provision for the local authority to include any other matters. Paragraphs 6 and 3.30 of the Code require that each local authority publish its report locally.

2. **This year's report must cover the 2025/2026 academic year and be submitted to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) by 31 October 2026.**

3. Please note that, in response to feedback on the previous template and in the light of consultation with a group of local authorities, changes have been made to various sections of this year's template.

Guidance on completing the template

4. We have included all the guidance on completing specific parts of the template in this section. There is no requirement for local authorities to include the introduction and the guidance in their published reports, but they are free to do so if they wish.

5. We should be grateful if in completing questions which ask for information about primary and secondary schools and/or pupils, local authorities would follow the approach to classification of schools used in statutory provisions and in the Department for Education Statistical First Release[1] and the Education Middle School (England) Regulations 2002[2].

6. The Code sets out some minimum requirements on the contents of each local authority report stating that each must cover as a minimum "information about how admission arrangements in the area of the local authority serve the interests of looked after children and previously looked after children, children with disabilities and children with special educational needs, including any details of where problems have arisen."

7. The Department for Education's aim through the annual reports from local authorities is to understand how well the admissions system is working nationally, rather than to hold individual local authorities to account. By understanding the effectiveness of the system, including outcomes, the Department hopes to identify areas where the admissions system is working well and areas where it could be improved. With that in mind, when the template asks, "how well does the admission system serve the needs of

[1] Department for Education Statistical First Release
[2] The Education Middle School (England) Regulations 2002

children," the Department appreciates that it is asking local authorities to make a subjective judgement, in the understanding that everyone's experience with the admission system will be different. The Department encourages local authorities in responding to the open questions and spaces for open comments to set out challenges that are proving difficult to overcome.

8. Guidance on specific questions and/or meaning of specific terms in this report:

    a. "in-year admissions": This means admissions (that is children admitted to a school and not applications for places):

        i. to a year group which is not a normal point of entry for the school concerned (for example to Year 2 for a five to eleven primary school); and

        ii. after the end of the statutory waiting list period (31 December) to a year group which is a normal year of admission for the schools concerned (such as Year R and Year 7).

    b. Not applicable means that there were no children falling within the relevant definition.

9. We welcome all comments that local authorities make in the comment boxes and we aim to reflect those comments in the Annual Report, but we ask for the comments to be entered under the right headings. Section 3 invites comment on any other matters not specifically addressed in this template if local authorities wish to do so. The views expressed in previous years also remain a matter of public record.

10. We ask that where possible, you return the template in Word instead of PDF formatting. A number of you have commented on the formatting of the template and we have tried to make it as accessible as possible, but we are aware that some local authorities use different versions of Word.

11. Where questions request a comparison with the previous year, any new local authorities formed as a result of reorganisation should note this on the form.

Information requested

Section 1 - Normal points of admission

A. Co-ordination

Which of the following best describes the level of challenge for your **main admissions round in 25/26 compared to 24/25**?

Year Group	Much less challenging	Less challenging	No change	More challenging	Much more challenging
Reception			x		
Year 7		x			
Other relevant years of entry					

Please give examples to illustrate your answer if you wish:
Less pressure on Year 7 places due to improved alignment between available place and pupil demand across the city.

B. Looked after and previously looked after children

i. How well does the admissions system in your local authority area serve the interests of looked after children at **normal points of admission**?

☐ Not at all ☐ Not well ☒ Well ☐ Very well ☐ Not applicable

ii. How well do the admissions systems in other local authority areas serve the interests of children looked after by your local authority at **normal points of admission**?

☐ Not at all ☐ Not well ☐ Well ☒ Very well ☐ Not applicable

iii. How well does your admissions system serve the interests of children who are looked after by other local authorities but educated in your area **at normal points of admission**?

☐ Not at all ☐ Not well ☐ Well ☒ Very well ☐ Not applicable

iv. How well does the admissions system in your local authority area serve the interests of previously looked after children at **normal points of admission**?

☐ Not at all ☐ Not well ☐ Well ☒ Very well ☐ Not applicable

v. If you wish, please give examples of any good or poor practice or difficulties which exemplify your answers about the admission to schools of looked after and previously looked after children at **normal points of admission**:

We routinely see children in care and previously looked-after children admitted to their schools of parental preference as highest priority in line with the Admissions Code at normal points of admission. This is in line with their priority within the code and reflect the good support and multi-agency working between the admissions team, virtual school and children's social care.

C. Special educational needs and/or disabilities

i. How well served are children with special educational needs and/or disabilities who **have** an education, health and care plan that names a school at **normal points of admission**?

☐ Not at all ☐ Not well ☒ Well ☐ Very well ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any comments you wish to make on the admission of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities at normal points of admission:

Children with an Education, Health and Care Plan do not go through the usual school admissions process. Their placement is agreed through the statutory EHCP process, and the school or setting is named in Section I of the plan. Once a school is named, it must admit the child. Normal oversubscription criteria do not apply.
In Bristol, the SEND Service and School Admissions work together on key stage transfers so that children with EHCPs are identified and their placements planned alongside the wider admissions round. Regular key stage transfer meetings are in place, and work is under way to strengthen the use of data and introduce a clearer dashboard to track consultations, decisions and outstanding placements. This is helping the service identify issues earlier and focus attention on children who may be at risk of not having a suitable placement for September.

Most children with an EHCP are successfully placed at the normal point of transfer. However, the process remains under pressure because the number of children with SEND continues to rise and demand for specialist provision is greater than the number of places currently available. In January 2026, more than 15,900 pupils in Bristol schools were recorded as having SEN, with the number of pupils with an EHC plan increasing by 13.8 per cent compared with January 2025.

The main difficulties arise where a child requires specialist provision, particularly where there is limited local capacity for their age or type of need. These pressures can lead to longer placement searches, multiple consultations and, in some cases, the need for temporary educational arrangements while a suitable place is found. There have also been challenges where schools have responded that they cannot meet a child's needs, including cases where concerns about capacity, the level of support required or the impact on other pupils have been raised.

Bristol is responding through its SEND Education Capital Programme, which plans to deliver 569 additional specialist places by 2030 through a combination of new provision, expansion of special schools and additional resource base places in mainstream schools. Alongside this, the local authority is strengthening sufficiency planning so that decisions about future provision are based on a clearer understanding of children's needs, existing capacity and where the most significant gaps are.

Although there is more to do, particularly for children awaiting specialist provision, the stronger joint working around key stage transfers and the continued expansion of local provision are helping to improve the process and reduce the risk of children reaching a normal point of admission without a clear plan.

Section 2 - In-year admissions

A. Which of the following best describes the overall level of challenge for your in-year admissions in 25/26 compared to 24/25?

Phase	Much less challenging	Less challenging	No change	More challenging	Much more challenging
Primary			x		
Secondary			x		

If you wish, please explain the factors that have changed the level of challenge for your In-Year admissions:

B. Looked after children and previously looked after children

i. How well does the **in-year admission** system serve children who are looked after by your local authority and who are being educated in your area?

☐ Not at all ☐ Not well ☒ Well ☐ Very well ☐ Not applicable

ii. How well does the **in-year admission** systems in other local authority areas serve the interests of your looked after children?

☐ Not at all ☐ Not well ☒ Well ☐ Very well ☐ Not applicable

iii. How well does the **in-year admission** system serve the interests of children who are looked after by other local authorities but educated in your area?

☐ Not at all ☐ Not well ☒ Well ☐ Very well ☐ Not applicable

iv. How well does your **in-year admission** system serve the interests of previously looked after children?

☐ Not at all ☐ Not well ☒ Well ☐ Very well ☐ Not applicable

v. If you wish, please give examples of any good or poor practice or difficulties which support or exemplify your answers about **in-year admissions** for looked after and previously looked after children:

Generally, in-year admissions proceed well for children in care who do not have an EHCP. When children have an EHCP and a consultation is required then the speed of securing an education provision and proceeding with an admission is impacted by the availability of locally available provision and capacity. This continues to disproportionately impact the timelines to secure education provision for an in-year admission for children with an EHCP.

For children with no EHCP, the majority of schools and education providers work closely with the Virtual School and children's social care to progress an admission in the shortest possible timeframe and ensure minimal drift and delay in a child being admitted to school. In a small but significant number of situations there have been delays in schools responding or progressing admissions that have resulted in a child missing education or a school has not offered a place. The Virtual School closely tracks each application process.

C. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities

i. How well served are children with special educational needs and/or disabilities who **have** an education, health and care plan that names a school when they need to be **admitted in-year**?

☐ Not at all well ☐ Not well ☒ Well ☐ Very well ☐ Not applicable

ii. How well served are children with special educational needs and/or disabilities who **do not have** an education, health and care plan when they need to be **admitted in-year**?

☐ Not at all well ☐ Not well ☒ Well ☐ Very well ☐ Do not know

iii. Please give examples of any good or poor practice or difficulties which support or exemplify your answers about **in-year admissions** for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities:

In-year admissions for children with SEND are managed differently depending on whether the child has an Education, Health and Care Plan.

Where a child has an EHCP, the SEND Service leads the placement process. The child's needs, the provision set out in the plan and the views of the child and family are considered when consulting schools and identifying a suitable placement. Where a placement cannot be secured quickly, the case remains under review and the SEND Officer works with the family, schools and other services to consider what education and support can be put in place in the meantime.

Bristol has strengthened its oversight of children awaiting specialist placements. A dedicated SEND Sufficiency Manager supports this work, and an awaiting-

placement dashboard is being introduced to provide a clearer view of each child's current education, placement activity, level of vulnerability and any interim support in place. Children who are missing education, looked after, open to social care, at risk of placement breakdown or approaching a key transition are prioritised for review and escalation.

While a specialist placement is being sought, support may include additional funding for the current setting, outreach, alternative learning provision or education otherwise than at school, depending on the child's individual circumstances. Monthly multi-agency discussions are also used to review children awaiting placements and make sure that those with the greatest level of vulnerability remain visible and have clear next steps.

There is evidence that this more structured approach is improving oversight. The recorded number of children awaiting specialist provision reduced from 273 at the end of March 2026 to 247 at the end of April 2026. This is early evidence and some of the movement reflects the normal annual placement cycle, so the position continues to be monitored closely.

Difficulties remain where there is no suitable specialist place available, where several schools respond that they cannot meet need, or where a placement has broken down and a new setting is required at short notice. Bristol's current gaps are particularly evident for some older children with social, emotional and mental health needs. In these circumstances, finding a placement that can meet the child's needs may take longer and interim education does not always offer the same breadth or stability as a permanent school place.

For children who do not have an EHCP, applications are normally considered through the mainstream in-year admissions process. Schools are expected to consider how the child's needs can be met through ordinarily available provision and the graduated approach. The local authority's inclusion services can offer advice, outreach and support to help schools understand and respond to children's needs.

In practice, children without an EHCP can experience difficulties if their needs are complex, if they have moved between schools, or if information about their needs and previous support is incomplete. Pressures are greater in the secondary phase, where Bristol has a higher proportion of pupils receiving SEN Support than the national average and the gap has been widening. Social, emotional and mental health needs are now the most common primary need among Bristol pupils receiving SEN Support.

Some schools are managing significant levels of need within their existing resources, and concerns about whether a school can meet a child's needs can delay an in-year placement. The local authority continues to work with schools to strengthen inclusive practice, improve the sharing of information and ensure that SEND is not used as a reason to prevent or delay admission.

Overall, the in-year system works well for many children with SEND, but there are clear pressures where needs are complex, specialist capacity is limited or a child

needs a placement urgently. Improving the consistency of school responses, strengthening interim education and increasing local specialist capacity remain important priorities.

D. Fair access protocol

What proportion of the state-funded mainstream schools in your area have said that they agree to the local authority fair access protocol?

Primary

Between 0% and 49% ☐
Between 50% and 74% ☒
Between 75% and 89% ☐
Between 90% and 99% ☐
100% ☐

Secondary

Between 0% and 49% ☐
Between 50% and 74% ☒
Between 75% and 89% ☐
Between 90% and 99% ☐
100% ☐

If you have below 75% for either phase, please explain why:

Bristol City Council undertook a comprehensive review and redrafting of its Fair Access Protocol during 2025/26. As part of this work, the local authority sought formal agreement from admissions authorities rather than solely from delegated school representatives.

Whilst many primary schools continue to actively participate in Fair Access arrangements, a significant number are now academies operating within multi-academy trusts. The process of identifying and securing agreement from the appropriate admissions authority has resulted in a lower proportion of formal signatories than anticipated. This reflects governance and approval processes rather than a lack of engagement with the Protocol itself.

The local authority continues to work with trusts and admissions authorities to secure formal agreement and strengthen accountability within the Fair Access process for the next version of the protocol.

i. How many children were admitted to schools in your area under the fair access protocol between 1 August 2025 and 31 July 2026?

Type of school	Number of Primary aged children admitted	Number of Secondary aged children admitted
Community and voluntary controlled	2	0
Foundation, voluntary aided and academies	6	261
Total	8	261

ii. If you have seen a change in the number of children referred to your Fair Access Protocol between 1 August 2025 and 31 July 2026 compared to the previous academic year please indicate what you consider the key reasons for this change to be?

Bristol experienced a reduction in Fair Access referrals from 445 referrals in 2024/25 to 311 referrals in 2025/26. This reduction is likely attributable to:

- Earlier intervention and inclusion support through the IncludEd Service.
- Improved multi-agency working and transition planning around vulnerable pupils.
- Greater focus on maintaining pupils within their existing school wherever possible.
- Improved oversight of Children Missing Education and vulnerable cohorts.
- Stronger partnership working between schools, trusts and local authority services to prevent placement breakdown.

Despite the reduction in overall referrals, the complexity of cases referred through Fair Access remains high, with significant levels of SEND, attendance, safeguarding and social, emotional and mental health need evident across the cohort.

iii. How well do you consider children referred to the Fair Access Protocol are served in your area?

☐ Not at all well ☐ Not well ☒ Well ☐ Very well ☐ Not applicable

iv. Please provide any comments you wish on the protocol not covered above:

The local authority considers children referred through the Fair Access Protocol to be served well. The majority of referrals result in successful placement through collaborative working between schools, trusts and the local authority. Bristol has continued to strengthen transition planning, admissions accountability and support for vulnerable pupils. However, pressures relating to SEND demand, attendance and wider inclusion challenges continue to impact timescales and placement complexity in some cases.

During 2025/26 Bristol reviewed and refreshed its Fair Access Protocol to ensure alignment with the School Admissions Code and strengthen local accountability arrangements.

Key areas of development have included:

- Clarifying the role of admissions authorities and delegated Fair Access representatives.
- Strengthening escalation processes to support local resolution wherever possible.
- Improving oversight of children at risk of becoming Children Missing Education.
- Increasing focus on inclusion, reintegration and early intervention.
- Strengthening links between Fair Access, safeguarding, attendance and SEND systems.
- Improving consistency of decision-making and transparency across the partnership.

The local authority remains committed to ensuring Fair Access operates as an effective mechanism for securing timely education placements for vulnerable children and young people.

E. Directions to maintained schools to admit children[3]

How many directions did the local authority make between 1 August 2025 and 31 July 2026 to maintained schools for which the local authority is not the admission authority to admit children (including children looked after by the local authority but resident in another area)?

Total number of children	Of which, looked after	Of which, not looked after
1	0	1

[3] It is important that only Directions to maintained schools are included here. Numbers of Directions to academies are already held by the Department.

F. Other points on in-year admissions

i. For the schools for which the local authority co-ordinates in-year applications, in the year between 1 Aug 2025 and 31 July 2026 did you receive

☒ Significantly fewer applications than last year
☐ slightly fewer applications than last year
☐ about the same
☐ slightly more than last year
☐ significantly more than last year

ii. For what proportion of **primary** schools in your area did the local authority co-ordinate in-year admissions during the 2025/2026 academic year

Between 0% and 24% ☐
Between 25% and 49% ☒
Between 50% and 74% ☐
Between 75% and 100% ☐

iii. For what proportion of **secondary** schools in your area did the local authority co-ordinate in-year admissions during the 2025/2026 academic year

Between 0% and 24% ☒
Between 25% and 49% ☐
Between 50% and 74% ☐
Between 75% and 100% ☐

iv. If you wish, please provide any comments about how **well in-year admissions** works for children who are **not** looked after or previously looked after and/or do **not** have SEND:

Applications are normally processed within 10 school days and in line with expected admissions timescales.

v. If you wish, please provide any other comments on the admission of children **in-year** not previously raised (you may wish to include here any comments about cases where it has not proved possible to find places for children):

Section 3 - Other matters

Are there any other matters that the local authority would like to raise that have not been covered by the questions above?

Section 4 – Feedback

We would be grateful if you could provide any feedback on completing this report to inform our practice for 2027.

Thank you for completing this template.

Please return to Office of the Schools Adjudicator by 31 October 2026