

Children's and Education Services Directorate



Meeting Title	CYP Scrutiny Committee
Report Title	Provisions for Children Without a School Place / Fair Access
Meeting Date	13 th November 2024

Corporate Director(s)/Director(s):	Jill Colbert, Corporate Director for Children and Education, Nick Lee, Director of Education
Portfolio Holder(s):	Cllr Cheryl Barnard
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Summary of issues:
<p>The number of children being considered through Fair Access has increased drastically over the past 12 months due to a lack of capacity across many city schools and an increased rate of migration in to the city.</p> <p>The majority of secondary schools are full in all year groups, resulting in almost every secondary aged child who moves in to the city being placed through the Fair Access process instead of the normal admission process. A large number of primary schools are also full, especially in certain areas of the city and in certain year groups, which has led to the establishment of primary Fair Access panels from September 2024.</p>
Action Required:
<p>1. The Committee is asked to make any comments or recommendations in regards to the information presented at the meeting.</p>

1. Background

- 1.1 The School Admissions Code states that all Local Authority's must have a Fair Access Protocol in order to place children who have been unable to secure education provision through the normal admission process, or who are deemed 'hard to place'.
- 1.2 Nottingham City has had a Fair Access process in place for 20 years, and have successfully placed children into schools during that time.
- 1.3 For secondary aged children, the Council runs a panel whereby all secondary schools have a representative and cases are placed via the panel process. These meetings are held every three weeks and approximately 40 children are placed through this panel at each meeting.
- 1.4 For primary aged children, the LA use to broker places with schools directly as there was not the same level of demand but this is no longer sufficient and four primary Fair Access panels have been established. These meet less frequently than the secondary panels due to demand.

2. Current Position

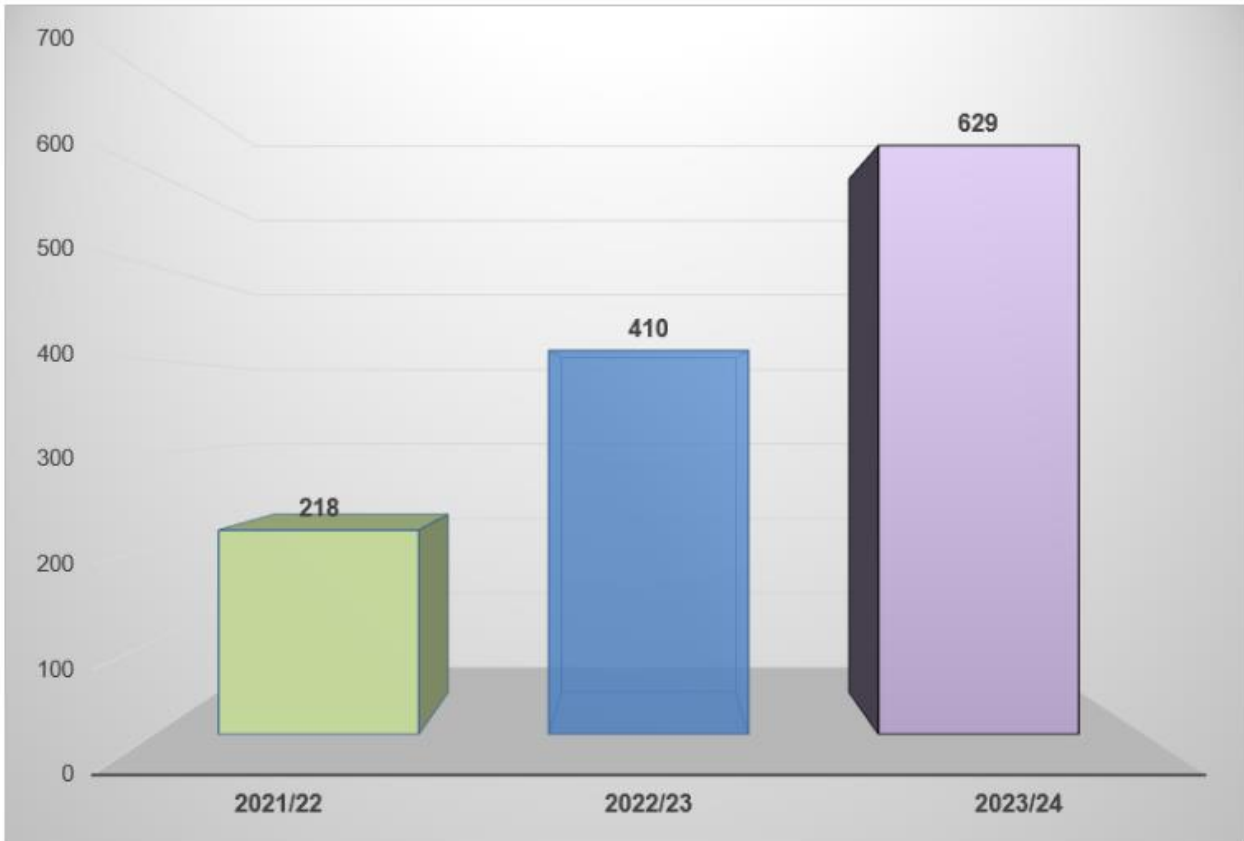
- 2.1 When an application is unsuccessful through the normal in-year admission process, the cases are picked up via the Local Authority's without a school place process and then ultimately through the Fair Access Process if a place cannot be secured.
- 2.2 When an application meets consideration through the Fair Access process, the Local Authority must offer suitable education provision within 20 school days.
- 2.3 The Local Authority has a dedicated budget for Fair Access, to allow schools to put into place any support that is required to ensure a successful admission. This could include things such as paying for uniform when the family are suffering financial hardship, paying for a TA to support, or funding support through services such as Behaviour Support Team.
- 2.4 Last academic year saw the highest number of children considered under our Fair Access Process. The main reason for this was a large increase in inward migration to Nottingham City from other parts of the world, such as Africa, Pakistan and India
- 2.5 Due to an increase in the number of children needing to be placed through Fair Access, the Local Authority had to consult on changes to the Fair Access Protocol. This included a change from brokering cases for primary aged children directly with schools, to a panel based system similar to the secondary model. The first panel was held in September and received positive feedback from schools and other services
- 2.6 The Local Authority also saw a drastic rise in schools bringing cases to be considered for a supported transfer. The main reasons were due to the child being at risk of permanent exclusion.
- 2.7 Schools are pushing back on the Local Authority regarding placing children in Year 11, especially when the child has challenging behaviour or returning from Elective Home Education. The LA does not operate an EOTAS roll (Educated other than at School) and therefore children need to be placed on a mainstream school roll.
- 2.8 In addition, primary schools are often more constrained with regards to classroom sizes, and many have already agreed to go over PAN in order to support children through Fair Access. In areas such as Sneinton, there is a real concern over capacity, especially with families being moved into temporary accommodation in the area due to their refugee asylum seeker status.
- 2.9 The Local Authority has had several meetings with the DFE regarding capacity issues and a potential to not be able to place children through Fair Access with little or no solutions forthcoming
- 2.10 Appendix 1 provides some data around Fair Access.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 If current rates of children moving into the city remain, more children will be required to be placed through the Fair Access Process. With many schools already admitting over their admission number to accommodate, there is a real risk of the Local Authority not being able to place children within a reasonable walking distance.
- 3.2 As a consequence, we could be failing in our duty to provide education provision, or have to incur significant transport costs for children/families who are being placed out of area.

Appendix 1 – overview of Fair Access in Nottingham

Number of cases bought through secondary Fair Access in 2023/24:



Breakdown of type of case considered through secondary Fair Access in 2023/24:

