

TCAT



THE CHALLENGE ACADEMY TRUST

ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS CONSULTATION

07 December 2023 – 31 January 2024

This is the formal consultation document 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 is consulting on the unified policy for the Trust's Warrington academies.

The consultation is open between 7 December 2023 to 31 January 2024 on admission arrangements for the Trust's academies.

This 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

Have your say

We would like to hear what you think about the proposed admission arrangements and oversubscription criteria for these academies.

If you have any comments, queries or concerns about the school admission arrangements, please email admissions@tcat.uk.com

Any comments or queries can also be sent to academy trusts direct via their general enquiries form but please include the words 'Admissions Consultation' in the subject header.

Feedback provided through the admission consultation will be treated confidentially and will be considered by the Trust Board in deciding the final arrangements

Consultation Timeline

Consultation opens	7 December 2023
Consultation closes	31 January 2024
Review by Trust board	By 9 February 2024
Final determination	By 28 February 2024

Element 1: Common Unified Policy

The aim of this policy is to provide a common format for Admissions Arrangements for all Trust academies within the Warrington Local Authority area.

Element 2: Academy Published Admission Numbers (PAN)

Each academy has a Published Admission Number (PAN) which refers to the maximum number of pupils who can be admitted at the first year of entry - Reception for primary schools, Year 3 for junior schools and Year 7 for secondary schools.

The majority of the academies' Published Admission Numbers remain the same. However, changes are proposed for Broomfields with a reduction in PAN from 90 to 72 in Year 3, for Penketh with an increase in PAN from 180 to 220 for Year 7, and for Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School from 165 to 175 for Year 7.

The rationale for the change for each academy is explained below.

<i>School</i>	Year of Entry	Current PAN	Proposed PAN
<i>Appleton Thorn Primary School</i>	Reception	30	30
<i>Great Sankey Primary School</i>	Reception	45	45
<i>Meadowside Community Nursery and Primary School</i>	Reception	30	30
<i>Penketh South Primary School</i>	Reception	30	30
<i>Broomfields Junior School</i>	Year 3	90	72
<i>Beamont Collegiate Academy (BCA)</i>	Year 7	180	180
<i>Bridgewater High School</i>	Year 7	360	360
<i>Padgate Academy</i>	Year 7	150	150
<i>Penketh High School</i>	Year 7	180	220
<i>Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School</i>	Year 7	165	175

Element 3: Over-Subscription Criteria

The over-subscription criteria for the academies is proposed to include children of staff working at the academies:

- criteria 5 for primary and junior schools
- criteria 4 for all secondary schools

Proposed change: The oversubscription criteria is expanded to include children of staff working at the academy.

Element 4: Partner Primaries

Two secondary schools in the Trust (Beamont Collegiate Academy and Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School) have already nominated partner primaries whereby the pupils attending those partner primaries are considered preferentially in the oversubscription criteria.

Nominating partner primaries is highly beneficial to all involved as it enables effective transition arrangements, supporting local schools and their pupils.

Bridgewater High School also used to have nominated partner primaries which were disbanded in the early 2010s and wishes to re-introduce them to take advantage of the closer ties this brings. The consultation proposes the re-introduction of partner primaries for Bridgewater High School.

Element 5: Faith Criteria for Sir Thomas Boteler High School

This consultation proposes simplifying the faith criteria used in determining admissions for Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School.

This section of the consultation gives further detail to the proposed arrangements for schools where significant changes are being proposed.

Specific Academy: Bridgewater High School

The Admissions Arrangements being consulted on here re-introduce designated partner primaries, giving preference as part of oversubscription criteria 5, to the pupils attending the following schools:

Appleton Thorn Primary School
Broomfields Junior School (linked to Cobbs Infant School)
Grappenhall Heys Primary School
St Matthew's CofE Primary School
St Thomas' C of E Primary School
Stockton Heath Primary School

Proposed change: Pupils attending the primary schools above have preference as part of over-subscription 5 for entry to Bridgewater High School

Specific Academy: Penketh High School

Penketh High School originally had a PAN of 240 until 2020 when the PAN was reduced to 180 as a consequence of declining pupil numbers. There is a rising demand for school places in the area alongside the increasing popularity of the academy. The DfE is also providing investment into the academy by the DfE as part of the School Rebuilding Programme. Increasing the PAN to 220 will support the increased demand in the local area. The capital investment will enable a further increase to 240 once it is in place in the future.

Proposed change: The Trust proposed to increase the PAN 220.

Specific Academy: Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School

There are two proposed changes for Sir Thomas Boteler High School.

Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School's PAN has previously been set at 165. The local area has seen an increase in demand for school places and the academy has benefited from an increase in popularity. It has admitted over PAN for the last two years.

The oversubscription criteria for Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School includes faith criteria to prioritise children who have (or whose parent(s)/carer(s) have) a strong and dedicated commitment to the life and worship of a Christian Church. Current faith arrangements and oversubscription criteria are complex as there are three sets of faith criteria. The new policy retains the important faith criteria while simplifying the policy.

Proposed change: Warrington Borough Council has asked the academy to increase PAN to 175 and has provided some capital investment to the academy to support this increase in the PAN.

Proposed change: To reduce the number of faith criteria used in determining over-subscription from 3 criteria to 1 as follows:

“Children who have (or whose parent(s)/carer(s) have) a strong and dedicated commitment to the life and worship of a Christian Church, that is a member of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (their website is <http://www.ctbi.org.uk/>), shown by regular worship (preferably for at least two years), and where possible to be confirmed by the local minister on the application form.”

Specific Academy: Broomfields Junior School

Unfortunately, a significant surplus of school places has been created in the local area which means not all of the 90 places normally available at The Cobbs Infant and Nursery School and Broomfields Junior School are required. As a result, Warrington Borough Council has proposed to reduce the Pupil Admission Number at The Cobbs Infant and Nursery School to 60 in Reception for the 2024 academic year. Warrington Borough Council have also gone to consultation to reduce the PAN to 60 in Reception for the September 2025 intake. Pupil numbers at The Cobbs Infant and Nursery School have a direct impact upon pupil numbers that feed into Broomfields Junior School. Whilst the Trust and Broomfields Junior School Local Governing Body would ideally want to retain the current three-form structure and a PAN of 90, the reduced need has meant that a number of options have had to be considered to maintain the school’s high standard of education and keep Broomfields financially viable.

Pupils at Broomfields Junior School historically have transferred from The Cobbs Infant and Nursery School to Broomfields Junior School when pupils complete Year 2 at the end of Key Stage One. Current pupil numbers across the year groups in Broomfields and at Cobbs Infant School are shown below:

Current Pupil Numbers – September 2023		
Cobbs Infant School	Reception	54
	Year 1	72
	Year 2	73
Broomfields Junior School	Year 3	85
	Year 4	90
	Year 5	90
	Year 6	85

Why are pupil numbers reducing at Broomfields?

Pupil numbers at The Cobbs Infant and Nursery School have been affected considerably by developments in the local area and they have also been affected by a predicted long-term decline in the birth rate.

Specifically prior to the pandemic, Warrington Borough Council estimated that, due to long-term house building developments in the south of Warrington, an expansion of pupil places would be required. As of September 2023, Grappenhall Heys Primary School's PAN was increased from 30 to 60. Unfortunately, the expected increase in pupil numbers in the area has not materialised, leading to an oversupply of spaces, which alongside the drop in the local birth rate, has contributed to the lower numbers at The Cobbs Infant and Nursery School.

Broomfields, prior to moving into The Challenge Academy Trust, had experienced challenging financial constraints due to poor government funding. The school, supported by the Trust, has worked hard to bring the school into a healthy financial position. However, the declining pupil numbers, as demonstrated in this paper, will now lead to a significant reduction in funding and the Trust and Broomfields are therefore forced to take action to protect the excellent quality of education that it delivers to its pupil body.

The table below demonstrates the forecasted pupil numbers and the financial impact of low year group numbers:

Forecast Pupil Numbers					
		Sept 2023	Sept 2024	Sept 2025	Sept 2026
Broomfields Junior School	Year 3	85	73	72	54
	Year 4	90	85	73	71
	Year 5	90	90	85	73
	Year 6	85	90	90	85
Total pupils		350	338	319	283
No. of pupils from being full		-10	-22	-41	-77
Funding shortfall @£4,405 per pupil		- £39,645	- £96,910	- £180,605	- £339,185

The slightly lower numbers in September 2023 along with the significantly lower numbers in September 2024 will cause a funding shortfall of £136,555, which both the Trust and Broomfields plan to absorb even though it will cause resource restrictions.

However, the further predicted loss of funding from September 2025 is so great that actions are required to ensure that Broomfields returns to sustainability and to safeguard the delivery of education to its pupils.

The savings required mean that the academy has to make structural changes to both staffing and class structures including the number of classes in each year group from September 2025.

Retaining a three-form entry for those year groups with significantly lower numbers than the Pupil Admissions Number (PAN) is financially unsustainable.

What options have the Trust and Broomfields considered?

The Trust and Broomfields have considered the implications of all the options available to them including:

1. Do nothing - retain 3 classes in all year groups with a PAN of 90
2. Moving to large classes in Y3 of September 2025, reducing the PAN to 72 in 2025-26 to match the expected pupil numbers from Cobbs with the intention of reducing the PAN in September 2026 to 60 in accordance with the 54 in this year group currently.
3. Moving to mixed year group classes in Year 3 and Year 4 of September 2025 then reducing PAN for September 2026 to 60
4. Reducing the PAN at Broomfields to 60 in 2025-26

This table demonstrates the profile of classes for each option in September 2025.

September 2025 – Year group profile					
	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Total classes
Option 1	3 classes of 23 (ave.)	3 classes of 24 (ave)	3 classes of 29 (ave)	3 classes of 30	12
Option 2	2 classes of 36 with additional support (ave)	3 classes of 24 (ave)	3 classes of 29 (ave)	3 classes of 30	11
Option 3	2 classes of 30 (max.)	2 classes of (30 max)	3 classes of 29 (ave)	3 classes of 30	11
	1 class of 24 mixed age				
Option 4	2 classes of 30	3 classes of 24 (ave)	3 classes of 29 (ave)	3 classes of 30	11

The impact of each option on pupils, parents and staff have been considered and is summarised in the table below:

Option	Summary	Impact
1	Retain 3 classes – stay as is	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financially unviable with a funding shortfall of approx. £340k by 2027/2028 Significantly restricts any kind of spending on additional resources including classroom resources, enrichment opportunities, teacher CPD, school improvement activities and curriculum development for all children at Broomfields Children able to remain in existing classes All pupils get a place at Broomfields
2	Large classes in Y3 alongside reducing the PAN to 72	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All current pupils in Year 1 get a place at Broomfields Careful planning and organisation of teaching staff will need to be in place to ensure quality of provision is maintained, for example, further support staff to reduce class sizes during lessons Creative use of classroom spaces in year group hub Children in Y2 classes will be carefully organised from three to two classes before entering Broomfields, with friendships and needs of pupils taken into consideration. For subsequent years, Broomfields will be able to return to the usual class sizes. Potential parental dissatisfaction
3	Mixed year group class in Y3 and Y4 (September 2025)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 class will be a mixed year group, meaning significant teaching adaptations and curriculum re-organisation will be required for two year groups, given the complex organisation and management of a mixed year group class Incur possible further costs due to new curriculum planning Staff will need to adapt to teaching mixed age classes Children will need to move classes between Year 2 and Year 3 – first year of Broomfields as well as potential further movement within Broomfields Potential parental dissatisfaction All pupils get a place at Broomfields Approx 24 (minimum) pupils placed in a mixed-age class
4	Reduce PAN to 60 in Sept 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All parents will have to re-apply for a place at Broomfields 12 pupils (currently) will not get a place and will need to be assigned to other primaries Parental dissatisfaction Current curriculum and teaching and learning structures will be able to be retained.

Option Analysis

- Option 1 would be detrimental to the quality of the school provision, affecting outcomes and experiences for all children in the school and does not allow the school to meet its budget responsibilities.
- Option 2 enables a greater opportunity for financial stability. It may require some physical adaptations to space. Quality teaching and learning and positive outcomes and experiences

can be maintained with careful management and appropriate staffing support to create smaller groups to work in during lesson time. This is supported by the evidence provided by the Education Endowment Foundation whose research has demonstrated that large classes do not affect the quality of teaching and learning. There would be some disruption to pupils as the classes are merged for that year group, but previous experience of doing this has actually been beneficial for the pupils. For subsequent years, Broomfields will be able to return to the usual class sizes.

- Option 3 enables financial stability and allows all pupils to remain at the school, but would require significant planning for the teaching and the adaptation of the curriculum for mixed age-group class in particular, incurring additional costs. It also significantly disrupts pupil friendship groups as the class structure inherited from Cobbs would have to be changed across two year groups.
- Option 4 enables financial stability and retains the curriculum and teaching structures currently in place, but, not all children would be offered a place at Broomfields. The affected pupils would have to be placed in an alternative local school.

Recommendation

The Trust and Broomfields have come to the conclusion that Option 2 is the preferred solution, as it enables **all pupils in the current Y1 at The Cobbs Infant and Nursery School to transition to Broomfields Junior School in September 2025**. It should also enable required financial savings to be made to keep the school financially viable.

The PAN will be reduced to 72 for the current Year 1 at Cobbs to protect the class size when these pupils commence at Broomfields Junior School in September 2025.

Proposed change:

The PAN is reduced to 72 for September 2025, with the school moving to create two large classes with additional staffing