

NEWS RELEASE



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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Wokingham borough council consulting on secondary school places strategy

The council is inviting parents, schools and other interested parties for their views on secondary school provision in the borough to 2031.

The council has identified some key issues to be addressed in its new strategy, including:

- The number of Year 7 places required is increasing, reflecting higher numbers of children coming through from primary schools because of rising birth rates in the years leading up to 2012/13. It is expected that the demand for Year 7 places will begin to reduce after 2023/24.
- The increase in housing in the area, as mandated by the [National Planning Policy Framework](#), has meant more families are moving to the area with children requiring school places, particularly near the borough's new major development sites.
- The Office for National Statistics (ONS) predicts that the 11 to 16 year old population will peak in 2024 and 2025 and then decline, almost to the current size, across the next decade.

The additional school places required will be provided over the next ten years, by utilising unused capacity in schools, expanding existing schools and (if necessary) opening new schools.

Few Wokingham schools can provide additional places without investment in new buildings or other changes. Therefore, while utilising unused buildings could be a short-term solution, it is likely that this capacity will be required in the future so would need to be considered as part of a wider investment plan.

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School expansion depends on an agreement with their managing trust (all bar one are now academies), and the school sites being sufficiently large to accommodate new buildings, and car parking, while maintaining sufficient PE space .

Opening a new school would require a large site, which is unlikely to be found in established residential areas, and significant financial investment. As such, this would need to be planned as part of the council's strategic housing development, which will be set in its [local plan](#). Another school will only be required if continued high levels of housing development leads to a sustained increase in the 11 to 16 population or growth is achieved in new communities that cannot make use of existing capacity in a sustainable way.

The consultation seeks to gather views from parents, schools and key stakeholders on the council's analysis of secondary school places and comments on potential solutions.

Cllr Graham Howe, executive member for children's services, said: "There is a need to increase the number of places available in secondary schools, both on a short-term basis to ensure the next intake are catered for, as well as in the longer term.

"Wokingham borough has long been hailed as one of the best places to live and raise a family in the UK, so understandably people want to come and raise their families here, and we need the capacity in our schools to support that.

"Please take time to read through the consultation document and submit your response to the council so we can shape the next generation of secondary places in the borough."

The consultation documents and survey can be found on [the council's consultation webpage](#).

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Further information:

1. More from Cllr Graham Howe at graham.howe@wokingham.gov.uk