

REPORT TITLE: Decline of the cohort of children in primary schools in Kirklees

Meeting:	Children’s Scrutiny Panel
Date:	28 April 2025
Cabinet Member (if applicable)	Cllr Amanda Pinnock & Cllr Viv Kendrick
Key Decision Eligible for Call In	No N/A
Purpose of Report To highlight the challenges in the school system with the declining cohorts of children	
Recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That this report is noted • That Children’s Scrutiny consider how they might help raise awareness of opportunities to ensure a more sustainable school system. Reasons for Recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sustainable schools system provides the foundation for efficient and effective education services which support the best possible start in life for children, helping them aspire and achieve. 	
Resource Implications: Not directly applicable	
Date signed off by <u>Executive Director</u> & name	Tom Brailsford 11 April 2025
Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance?	Shared for information 11 April 2025
Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning (Monitoring Officer)?	Shared for information 11 April 2025

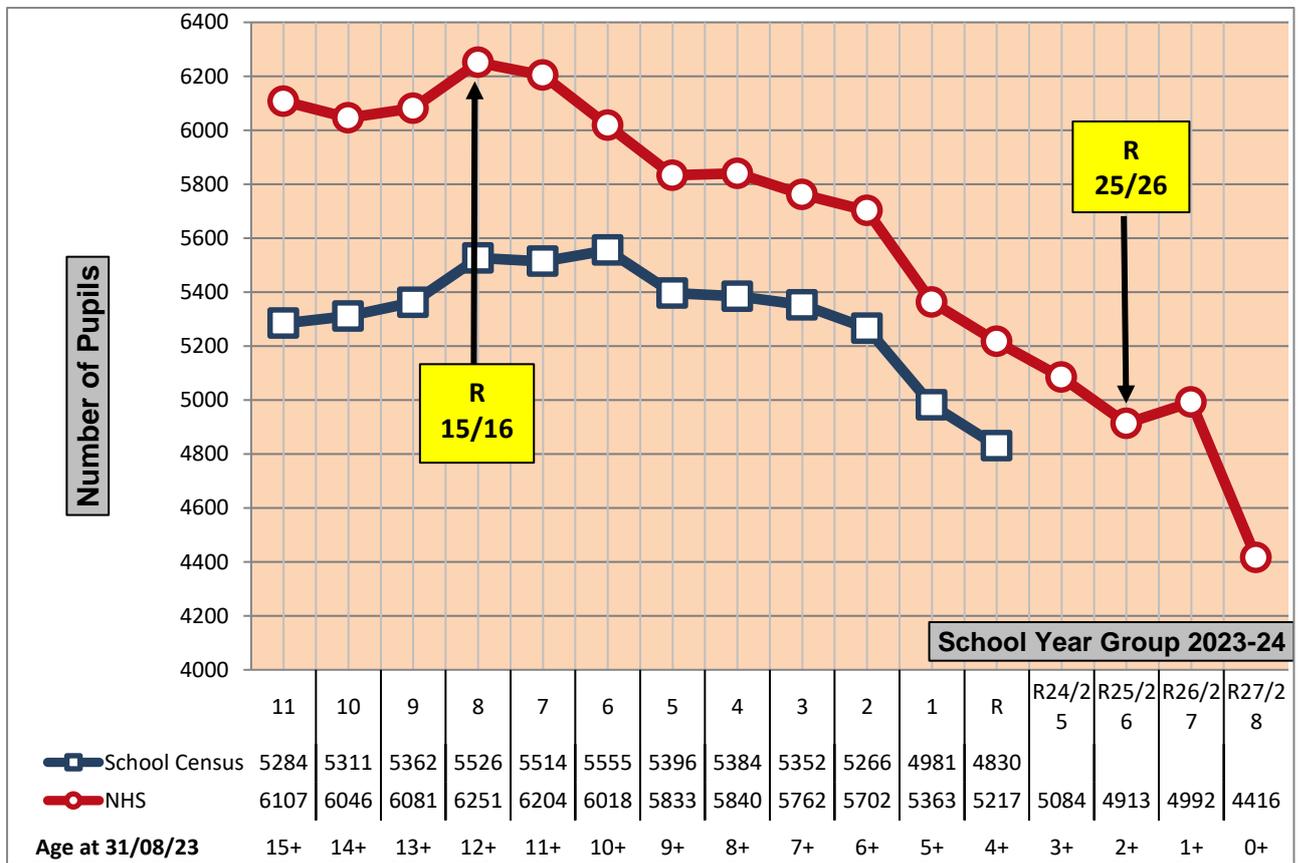
Electoral wards affected: All
Ward councillors consulted: No
Public or private: Public
Has GDPR been considered? Yes

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The size of the cohort of children entering reception classes has been declining for the last 10 years and further decline is expected.
- 1.2 With school funding being linked to pupil numbers, this has been creating financial pressures for some primary schools.
- 1.3 An approach to reducing available school places by taking opportunities to reduce Published Admission Numbers (PAN) has had some success but there remain some areas of Kirklees where significant surplus places still exist and the possibility of future school closures cannot be ruled out.

2. Information required to take a decision

2.1 The size of the cohort of children entering the school system at (R)eception age has been declining since a population peak in 2015/16. This decline is illustrated on the following graph by the red line which tracks the child population living in Kirklees based on NHS GP registrations.



- 2.2 In the majority of Kirklees house building alone will not be sufficient to reverse the population decline. Even in areas with large scale strategic house building sites they take many years to build.
- 2.3 The vast majority of funding a school receives by the national funding formula is predicated upon the numbers of children on their roll each year at October school census. Therefore, reducing numbers of children in schools means less money in the school system.

- 2.4 The most popular schools can have a degree of protection from population reduction but with greater choice available to parents this can in turn have a greater financial impact on schools which are less popular.
- 2.5 Another important factor is that the population decline is not evenly spread across Kirklees. A snapshot of this can be seen in appendix 1 with more detailed information being available in School Place Planning Documents.
- 2.6 Since 2020 there has been work underway to highlight this issue with school leaders and explore ways of reducing the risk of surplus places. The most obvious method is, where appropriate, to take opportunities to reduce the Published Admission Number (PAN) of some schools.
- 2.7 With the cost of staff accounting for more than 80% of the costs at most schools there is a clear incentive to look for cost effective staffing models. Theoretically, the most cost effective models in a primary school is where there is one class teacher to 30 pupils. Below 30 and there is less income per teacher and numbers above 30 can require the operation of two classes and the cost of an additional teacher. Of course, it is not all about the most cost effective model as there are educational outcomes considerations too.
- 2.8 This theoretical model is why many schools have a PAN of 30, 60 or 90 (ie multiples of 30). It is also why there can be an advantage to move to one of these models.
- 2.9 Some smaller schools have successfully found more creative solutions to help ensure they have cost effective staffing models such as mixed age teaching. It should be noted however, that PAN reduction is not a suitable option for every school.
- 2.10 By reducing their PAN, some schools have been able to plan their staffing models with more certainty. Once implemented there is also an opportunity to consider repurposing any spare space it provides such as for Additionally Resourced Provision, a special school satellite or school based nursery provision.
- 2.11 It does however take time to reduce a PAN. In compliance with the national School Admission Code there must be a consultation in the Autumn followed by a determination of new admission arrangements by the following February. There is then an 18 month period before the new arrangements take effect. It is a further 7 years for the change to work all the way through a primary school or linked infant and junior schools.
- 2.12 It must be the admission authority which undertakes the admission consultation and determination of admission arrangements. For Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools this is the local authority. For Academies, Foundation Trust and Voluntary Aided Schools, they are their own admission authority. This means the local authority must work in collaboration with a number of different organisations to effect change.
- 2.13 Between 2020 and 2026 there have been decisions made to reduce 456 places by PAN reduction which is the equivalent to a 7.7% reduction of places (2026 is relevant as future decisions have already been made for this period). The majority of this reduction is in the final 3 year period (see Appendix 2). Over the same period the size of the reception cohort has reduced by 8.2%.

2.14 Whilst there have been some successes over the last 5 years there are some areas in Kirklees where there remains significant levels of surplus places and no movement in reducing local PANs. Notably:

Holme Valley	26.1% surplus places
Skelmanthorpe and Denby Dale	26.0% surplus places

In both cases, further population decline is also expected

Note: the geographic areas referred here and in appendix 1 are Primary School Planning Areas which have been agreed with the Department for Education (further explanation is available in the School Place Planning Document)

- 2.15 There has been some reduction in PANs in Colne Valley, but levels of surplus remain high at 19.5% with further population decline expected.
- 2.16 To enable parental preference and to account for fluctuations in the population a surplus of between 5% and 10% of school places is considered healthy. Although there are other factors to consider such as strategic development sites with significant planned house building and existing pupil movement patterns.
- 2.17 Without action in areas with significant surplus and no mitigating factors, there is a real risk that continued pressure on school budgets could lead to the need to close some schools.
- 2.18 School closures hard to reverse should the population increase again in the longer term future. PANs on the other hand can be increased quite quickly to respond to any increase in local demand.
- 2.19 The focus of this report is clearly the primary school phase. The peak in population experienced in the primary phase has recently been experienced in the cohorts of children entering the secondary school phase at Year 7. Whilst a decline has started, the level of demand for places remains high. The dynamics for secondary schools are different, for example the scale of each school, however the impact of the population decline will still require careful monitoring. This is undertaken in annual School Place Planning Documents.

3. Implications for the Council

3.1 Council Plan

A financially stable school system which offers choice for parents is key to delivering efficient and effective education services which support the best possible start in life for children. This underpins the opportunity for children to aspire and achieve their ambitions through education and beyond. To achieve this the council must work with partners such as schools, Trusts and Dioceses, in a place based approach.

3.2 Financial Implications

There is limited direct impact on council core budgets as the revenue funding for schools comes from the ring fenced Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). However, measures within the DSG are supporting schools with challenges balancing their budgets and it could be argued that these resources might best be used for other purposes.

3.3 Legal Implications

All actions are being taken within legal framework of school finance regulations and School Admissions Code.

3.4 Climate Change and Air Quality

Having choices for parents is positive but this needs to be balanced with the financial sustainability of the local school system and with environmental sustainability pressures.

Whilst it is recognised that parental preference allows applications to be made for any school, Kirklees Council gives priority to school admission applications for local schools, where they are more likely to be able to walk or cycle to their preferred school. If we are unable to offer a place to the parent's preferred school because the school has reached its published admission number with applicants of a higher priority in the oversubscription criteria for the school, Kirklees Council aims to offer an alternative school place within a reasonable distance.

Choosing a school within walking distance of the family home has great health and wellbeing benefits for children and parents/carers and would contribute to the reduction of pollution and CO2 emissions, a focus of the key long-term priorities for the Council in tackling the Climate Emergency in Kirklees. It improves air quality and works towards achieving the Net Zero and Climate Ready Kirklees vision by 2038.

Not all own admission authorities take the same approach to oversubscription.

3.5 Other (eg Risk, Integrated Impact Assessment or Human Resources)

There can be HR implications when a school reduces its PAN but school numbers reduce over time and there is plenty of time to plan ahead. The HR implications of a school closure are more drastic.

4. Consultation

Each PAN reduction has followed due process in terms of the consultation requirements in the School Admissions Code.

5. Engagement

There has been engagement with the Education and Learning Partnership Board along with its subcommittee for Places Access and Inclusion about surplus school places and the actions that can be taken. There has also been targeted engagement with Head Teachers and Multi-Academy Trusts where surplus places are present and there are opportunities to reduce PANs. In addition, financial considerations across the school system is part of the annual programme of work undertaken by Schools Forum.

6. Options

6.1 Options considered

- A. No action
- B. Reducing school places by taking opportunities to reduce PANs
- C. Reducing school places by school closures

6.2 **Reasons for recommended option**

Taking no action is not a viable option for a sustainable local school system. Reducing school places by taking opportunities to reduce PANs avoids the need for resource intensive and unpopular school closures which are then hard to reverse.

7. **Next steps and timelines**

Summer Term 2025 – Continued engagement with the school system about opportunities to reduce PANs including some targeted work with school governors in the areas of concern listed above.

Autumn Term 2025 – Support the consultation process for further PAN reductions

Continuous – monitoring of the viability of schools with low and falling pupil numbers

8. **Contact officer**

Martin Wilby – Head of Education Places and Access
Martin.wilby@kirklees.gov.uk

9. **Background Papers and History of Decisions**

School Place Planning reports:

<https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/schools/school-organisation-and-planning.aspx>

School Admission Code:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60ebfeb08fa8f50c76838685/School_admissions_code_2021.pdf

10. **Appendices**

1 - Extract from the School Place Planning Document 2024 – Primary Places

2 - Illustration of PAN reduction decisions in the last 3 years

11. **Service Director responsible**

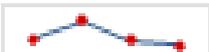
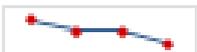
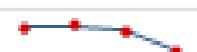
Jo-Anne Sanders Service Director – Learning and Early Support.
Jo-Anne.Sanders@kirklees.gov.uk

Appendix 1 – Extract from the School Place Planning Document 2024

Primary Demand 2024/25 to 2026/27 at Planning Area Level

The following table provides a summary of the key evidence and conclusion referred to in Appendix A, plus an additional column to indicate the proportion of unused places.

PA No.	Planning area name	Trend in no. of children living in this PA per year group towards 2027	Percentage of unused Reception places within the planning area *	Actions required?
1	Batley	Decline with fluctuations 	12.5% (with the effect of agreed PAN changes, surplus will reduce to 6.4%)	The number of places in this planning area is sufficient to meet local demand.
2	Batley Birstall	Slight decline with fluctuations 	14.1%	The number of places in this planning area is sufficient to meet local demand.
3	Batley East	Broadly static 	22.1%	The number of places is sufficient to meet local demand at this time. However, it is important that the impact of housing development on demand for school places remains under constant review.
4	Birkenshaw & Gomersal	Decline with fluctuations 	14.7%	Continued monitoring of the level of surplus places in this planning area is required and the opportunities that may exist to address this.
5	Cleckheaton	Decline with fluctuations 	11.3% (with the effect of agreed PAN changes, surplus will reduce to 5.1%)	The number of places in this planning area is sufficient to meet local demand.
6	Colne Valley	Decline with fluctuations 	25.5% (with the effect of agreed PAN changes, surplus will reduce to 19.5%)	Engagement with the local school system about the level of surplus places in this planning area and opportunities that may exist has not resulted in a significant reduction in the surplus. Further action to raise the profile of this issue with school leaders, governors and Multi-Academy Trusts is required.

PA No.	Planning area name	Trend in no. of children living in this PA per year group towards 2027	Percentage of unused Reception places within the planning area *	Actions required?
7	Dewsbury East	Slight decline with fluctuations 	3.8%	The number of places is sufficient to meet local demand at this time. However, it is important that the impact of housing development on demand for school places remains under constant review.
8	Dewsbury South	Broadly static with fluctuations 	27.3% (with the effect of agreed PAN changes, surplus will reduce to 12.5%)	The number of places is sufficient to meet local demand at this time. However, it is important that the impact of housing development on demand for school places remains under constant review.
9	Dewsbury West	Decline with fluctuations 	15.4%	The number of places in this planning area is sufficient to meet local demand.
10	Golcar	Decline 	21.4% (with the effect of agreed PAN changes, surplus would reduce to 12.9%)	Continued monitoring of the level of surplus places in this planning area is required and the opportunities that may exist to address this.
11	Heckmondwike	Decline with fluctuations 	13.3%	Continued monitoring of the level of surplus places in this planning area is required and the opportunities that may exist to address this.
12	Holme Valley	Decline 	26.1%	Engagement with the local school system about the level of surplus places in this planning area and opportunities that may exist has not resulted in any reduction in the surplus. Further action to raise the profile of this issue with school leaders, governors and Multi-Academy Trusts is required.
13	Honley & Meltham	Decline with fluctuations 	12.8% (with the effect of agreed PAN changes, surplus would reduce to 10.8%)	The number of places in this planning area is sufficient to meet local demand.

PA No.	Planning area name	Trend in no. of children living in this PA per year group towards 2027	Percentage of unused Reception places within the planning area *	Actions required?
14	Huddersfield North	Decline with fluctuations 	1.4%	The number of places is sufficient to meet local demand at this time. However, it is important that the impact of housing development on demand for school places remains under constant review.
15	Huddersfield North West	Broadly static with fluctuations 	0.2%	The number of places in this planning area is sufficient to meet local demand.
16	Huddersfield South East	Decline with fluctuations 	15.8% (with the effect of agreed PAN changes, surplus would reduce to 14.3%)	Continued monitoring of the level of surplus places in this planning area is required and the opportunities that may exist to address this.
17	Huddersfield South West	Broadly static with fluctuations 	13.2% (with the effect of agreed PAN changes, surplus will reduce to 9.6%)	The number of places in this planning area is sufficient to meet local demand.
18	Kirkheaton, Lepton & Grange Moor	Slight decline with fluctuations 	13.3% (the effect of agreed PAN changes will remove this surplus**)	Taking account of the longstanding inward migration of children from outside the area, the number of places available in this planning area is sufficient to meet local demand.
19	Liversedge	Decline with fluctuations 	9.7%	The number of places in this planning area is sufficient to meet local demand.
20	Mirfield	Slight decline with fluctuations 	19.4% (with the effect of agreed PAN changes, surplus will reduce to 6.3%)	The number of places in this planning area is sufficient to meet local demand.

PA No.	Planning area name	Trend in no. of children living in this PA per year group towards 2027	Percentage of unused Reception places within the planning area *	Actions required?
21	Newsome	Slight decline with fluctuations 	12.2%	Continued monitoring of the level of surplus places in this planning area is required and the opportunities that may exist to address this.
22	Shelley	Slight decline 	11.5%	Continued monitoring of the level of surplus places in this planning area is required and the opportunities that may exist to address this.
23	Skelmanthorpe and Denby Dale	Slight decline 	26.0%	Engagement with the local school system about the level of surplus places in this planning area and opportunities that may exist has not resulted in any reduction in the surplus. Further action to raise the profile of this issue with school leaders, governors and Multi-Academy Trusts is required.

*The percentage of unused places has been calculated by taking an average of the numbers on roll in Reception and Year 1 in each planning area (Jan 2024 school census) and comparing this to the number of Reception places available in each planning area (PAN 2024/25).

**In accordance with the calculation method used, which is based on numbers on roll, this planning area appears to show a deficit. This is a feature of significant pupil movement into this planning area from neighbouring planning areas and not a cause for concern about availability of places for local children.

Appendix 2 - Illustration of PAN reduction decisions in the last 3 years

Agreed PAN reductions for 2024/25			
PA	PA name	School	Change in number of places
1	Batley	Manorfield I & N	↓30
8	Dewsbury South	Overthorpe CofE Academy	↓12
9	Dewsbury West	Westmoor Primary School	↑15
11	Heckmondwike	Millbridge, a SHARE Primary Academy	↓2
14	Huddersfield North	Birkby I & N School	↓30
16	Huddersfield South East	Netherhall St James CE (VC) I & N School	↓35
16	Huddersfield South East	Netherhall Learning Campus Junior School	↓15
17	Huddersfield South West	Oak CE (VC) Primary School	↓60
22	Shelley	Shelley First School	↓4

Agreed PAN reductions for 2025/26			
PA	PA name	School	Change in number of places
1	Batley	Purlwell I & N	↓30
8	Dewsbury South	Savile Town CE (VC) I & N	↓30
17	Huddersfield South West	Luck Lane, A SHARE Academy	↓15
20	Mirfield	Old Bank Academy	↓10

Agreed PAN reductions for 2026/27			
PA	PA name	School	Change in number of places
5	Cleckheaton	Heaton Avenue, a SHARE Academy	↓15
6	Colne Valley	Linthwaite Clough J I & EY School	↓15
8	Dewsbury South	Pentland I & N School	↓19
10	Golcar	Woodside Green, a SHARE Academy	↓20
13	Honley & Meltham	Honley CE (VC) J I & N School	↓6
16	Huddersfield South East	St Joseph's Catholic Academy (Hudds)	↓5
18	Kirkheaton, Lepton & Grange Moor	Kirkheaton Primary School	↓30
20	Mirfield	Crossley Fields J & I school	↓29

NB Y3 PAN reductions are also proposed in the Batley PA - Hyrstmount Junior (90 to 60) and Staindiffe CE (VC) Junior (90 to 60) and the Huddersfield South East PA - NLC Junior School (75 to 55)