Office of the Schools Adjudicator

Template for

Local Authority Report

to

The Schools Adjudicator

from

Sefton Local Authority

to be provided by

31 October 2026

Report Cleared by: **Name Nadine Carroll**

Job Title Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education)

Telephone number 07971623249

Email: Nadine.carroll@sefton.gov.uk

Date submitted: **29th October 2026**

By: **Name Louise Veney**

Job Title Service Manager for Inclusion, Admissions and Sufficiency.

Telephone number 0151 934 2347

Email: louise.veney@sefton.gov.uk

Website: Office of the Schools Adjudicator

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

Contents

Introduction

Guidance on completing the template

Section 1 - Normal points of admission 5

A. Co-ordination 5

B. Looked after and previously looked after children 5

C. Special educational needs and/or disabilities 6

Section 2 - In-year admissions 7

A. Overall level of challenge for your in-year admissions 7

B. Looked after children and previously looked after children 7

C. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities 8

D. Fair access protocol 9

E. Directions to maintained schools to admit children 10

F. Other points on in-year admissions 10

Section 3 - Other matters 13

Section 4 - Feedback 13

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			√		
Year 7		√			
Other relevant years of entry					

Please give examples to illustrate your answer if you wish:
Reception Admissions
Reception outcomes showed very little difference compared to last year. The national trend of a falling birth rate is also evident within Sefton and in one specific planning area. Importantly, all children were successfully accommodated in schools within their local area.

Year 7 Admissions
The number of applications for Year 7 decreased by 5%, thereby increasing the number that could be offered their 1st preference school. The number of children who could not be offered any of their preferred schools also decreased compared to the previous year.

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**:

The Admissions Team works closely with the Virtual School in Sefton to ensure that all cared-for children have submitted applications. Regular checks are carried out to confirm the relevant care status, and the team also liaises with the social care system to identify students who have applied as previously looked-after.

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:

The Admissions Team works closely with the SEN Team and has a process in place to identify children who have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). The team can then either ensure they are placed appropriately in their named school or remove them from the transfer group so they can be placed by the SEN Team in specialist provision.

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				√	
Secondary				√	

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

A shortage of school places in certain areas and year groups. Despite this, the Admissions Team can successfully place children due to the effectiveness of Sefton Fair Access Panel, which ensures that placements are managed equitably and in line with the protocol. However, this shortage has contributed to an increase in the number of appeals, as families seek placements in oversubscribed schools.

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:

Sefton has a dedicated officer who manages all in-year admissions for cared-for children requiring a school place within the borough. The process in place ensures that all relevant information is shared among professionals involved, so that the young person receives the best possible start at their new school. Multi-agency meetings are held via Teams to confirm that the appropriate provision is being applied for, and a robust transition meeting is arranged to support a successful admission.

The Virtual School has expressed concern that there is often drift and delay for Sefton children trying to access school places in other local authorities, particularly when the child has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). There doesn't appear to be any improvement since last year.

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:

Applications for pupils moving into the area who are identified as having an EHCP are passed to the SEN Team for processing. These applications are monitored through the Monitoring and Placement Panel. Decisions regarding where to admit the pupil and which school to name on the plan are made by the SEN Team, not the Admissions Team.

The number of children seeking a new school place in-year, who have complex SEN difficulties but do not have an EHCP, is increasing. If a school place is not secured quickly, these applications are referred to the Fair Access Panel for placement.

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:

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	29	N/A
Foundation, voluntary aided and academies	43	106
Total	72	106

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?

Primary – this figure has increased and this is mainly for the reason of shortage of places in specific areas.

Secondary - the number of referrals to the Fair Access Panel has slightly decreased compared to last year. However, the primary reason for referrals remains as shortage of available school places in specific areas.

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

Once children are allocated places via the Protocol, schools are generally very good at admitting them as quickly as possible.

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
Nil		

F. Other points on in-year admissions

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

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:

Children moving into the area are admitted quickly, transfers from schools to schools can sometimes take a little longer.

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):

Due to a shortage of school places in certain areas, referrals to Sefton's Fair Access Panel continue to be made on a regular basis. The panel plays a vital role in ensuring equitable access to education for pupils who are unable to secure a place through the standard admissions process. Importantly, there is no resistance from Sefton schools when asked to admit pupils over their Published Admission Number (PAN) following a referral from the panel. This collaborative approach helps maintain placement stability and supports inclusive practice across the borough.

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?

The number of requests for admission outside of the normal age group for the Reception cohort has showed another small increase for 2026. This marks the sixth consecutive year of year-on-year growth. The volume of requests received is now more than double what it was in 2021, indicating a significant upward trend. This continued rise reflects growing parental interest in deferred or delayed entry, often based on individual child SEN or delayed development & sometimes other circumstances.

Section 4 - Feedback

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

The report is straightforward and easy to complete, with clear sections and guidance that support efficient and accurate data entry.

Thank you for completing this template.

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