Policy and Procedure:	Primary School Admission
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PRIMARY SCHOOL ADMISSION - POLICY STATEMENT

Placing in School Guidelines

In considering placing requests the Council takes into account the following:

- the design capacity of the school and the accommodation resources at the school
- the appropriate normal maximum class size as defined in the Conditions of Service for Teaching Staff which form part of the Council's contract of employment with an individual teacher.
- the need to maintain quality education provision within existing resources

If the preferred school has more applications than places, the following will be considered:

- those pupils living within the catchment area of the requested school will have priority over those pupils living out with that catchment area
- in the case of pupils living out-with the catchment area of the requested school, pupils resident within West Lothian will have priority over those pupils living out-with West Lothian
- in the case of a Roman Catholic school where applications from those living within the catchment area exceed the number of places available, priority will be given to those pupils who have been baptised into the Roman Catholic Church.
- special medical and/or physical needs
- special educational needs
- brother or sister continuing to attend the school requested
- education course available only at the school requested
- nearness of home to school by non-hazardous walking route
- length of attendance at an associated primary school (Infant to Primary School Transfer and S1 requests)
- information provided by parent or guardian

The above are not in any priority order. It should be noted that the Council has discretion to admit a pupil to any school in special circumstances as determined by the Council.

PRIMARY SCHOOL ADMISSION - PROCEDURE

1 BACKGROUND

1.1 Catchment areas

West Lothian is divided into catchment areas for primary and secondary schools. Each school is either denominational (linked to a particular religion) or non- denominational (not linked to any particular religion).

Each home address has a catchment denominational school and a catchment non-denominational school, for both primary and secondary education. Although the Council aims to provide enough places for all children in the catchment area at a catchment school, living within a catchment area does not guarantee a child a place at a catchment school.

1.2 Associated schools

Each Primary school is associated with a number of other primary schools and a secondary school to form a cluster. The catchment area of the secondary school is made up of the catchment areas of the associated primary schools. There are ten non-denominational clusters of associated schools and three denominational clusters of associated schools in West Lothian, one cluster for each secondary school. Children in attendance at a primary school will be given priority for admission to the associated secondary school. Although the Council aims to provide enough places for all children attending primary schools to transfer to the associated secondary school, attendance at a primary school does not guarantee a child a place at the associated secondary school.

1.3 Denominational schools

All the denominational schools in West Lothian are Roman Catholic. Baptised Roman Catholic children will be given priority for admission to Roman Catholic schools. Parents who want their child to be admitted to a Roman Catholic school should notify the Council if their child is a baptised Roman Catholic, is being baptised or is being prepared for first communion. Evidence of this must be supplied. Usually this will be a certificate of baptism. Although the Council aims to provide enough places for all baptised Roman Catholic children to attend a Roman Catholic primary school, baptism does not guarantee a child a place at a particular Roman Catholic primary school.

1.4 Choice of school

Parents can request a school other than one of their catchment schools. This is known as a ‘placing request’. Parents can request that their child go to any primary school in West Lothian regardless of their religion. The council must grant these ‘placing requests’ unless there is a legal reason not to.

1.5 Oversubscribed schools

Schools in West Lothian may be oversubscribed, including at the P1 stage. That means these schools receive more applications than there are places available. Places are limited by factors including the availability of accommodation, the cost of extending accommodation, and the cost of employing additional staff. For this reason, it is not always possible to offer parents their first choice of school.

1.6 Reserved places

The council will reserve places for children moving into each school's catchment area during the school year, if there are places available after all catchment children have been admitted. The Council will aim to reserve two places in each year group at primary schools with eight classes or less, and three places in each year group at primary schools with nine classes or more.

The Council can change the number of places reserved due to particular circumstances. For example, if an unusually large number of houses are planned or being built in a particular catchment area, additional places may be reserved at all stages in that school.

1.7 Infant School

Dechmont Infant School is the only Infant School in West Lothian. Children in attendance at Dechmont Infant School must move to another primary school after the end of the P3 stage. Pupils in attendance at Dechmont Infant School will receive further information about this transfer. The normal transfer arrangement is for pupils to move to Kirkhill Primary School for the P4-7 stages. Although the Council aims to provide enough places for children in attendance at Dechmont Infant School to attend Kirkhill Primary School, attendance at Dechmont Infant School does not guarantee a child a place at Kirkhill Primary School.

2 THE APPLICATION PROCEDURE

2.1 Age ranges for starting primary or infant school

The Council, by statute, must offer to educate children of school age. Children are of primary school age if they reach five years of age before 1 March in their first year of primary school. The school year starts each August.

All parents/carers in Scotland have the legal right to defer their child's entry to primary school if they are not yet 5 years old at the beginning of the school year. All children whose entry to Primary 1 is deferred will automatically be entitled to an additional year of funded Early Learning and Childcare.

Further information can be found in the ***Additional Year of Early Learning & Childcare - Policy and Procedure.***

The Council does not have to educate children who are not of school age. Parents may apply for early admission to a primary school. Further information is included in the ***Early Admission to Primary School - Policy and Procedure.***

2.2 Applying for a place in a primary or infant school (before the school year starts)

A letter will be issued through West Lothian Council, to a parent/carer of all children who reside within the West Lothian Council boundary and attend a West Lothian early learning & childcare establishment or partner providers in their pre-school year, in November or December advising parents that their child is eligible to complete an application for P1 for the next August intake. Parents must fill in and submit the application form which is available on-line and a link is provided within the letter or they can request the application pack in paper format from Pupil Placement. Please do not complete any earlier than this as it will not be processed.

West Lothian children who are not attending West Lothian Council early learning &

childcare establishments can complete the on-line from or request a primary school application pack from Pupil Placement, or from any primary school or early learning & childcare establishment. Pupil Placement may contact the parents of any children that the Council knows about in November or December prior to the August intake their child becomes eligible to inform them that application forms are now being accepted.

Non west Lothian children attending a West Lothian nursery will not be issued a letter, however once the process has begun parents can submit the application form which is available on-line or they can request the application pack in paper format from Pupil Placement. Notification that applications are now being accepted is posted in the West Lothian Courier and on West Lothian Council social media platforms.

Parents should include all the information that they think is important in the application form. Information is treated confidentially. Parents should not wait until they find out that they have been refused their first choice school before providing all relevant information.

Application forms should be submitted on-line or returned to Pupil Placement at the address on the form by 31 December. If parents do not return an application form for a place at primary school by 15 March, the Council will assume that the child will not attend a place at a West Lothian primary school, and no place will be allocated by the School Placement Panel. Application forms and additional information received after this date will be considered, but places will be limited as placement decisions will have been made by the School Placement Panel. Placement decisions may be made any time after 15 March. Return of forms by 31 December is important to enable the Council to see the overall pattern of applications and plan accordingly.

Pupil Placement will always send parents an acknowledgement letter once they receive the P1 application, or any additional information. If a letter is not received within 4 weeks (for any letters issued in this process please ensure you check junk/spam folder in-case issued by e-mail), parents should contact Pupil Placement.

If the chosen school is not a catchment school, parents will be informed in the acknowledgement letter from Pupil Placement of the Scottish Government booklet called ‘Choosing a School – A Guide for Parents’. This booklet is also available from the Scottish Government website, although Pupil Placement can provide a paper copy on request. This booklet is also available in several languages.

The application form allows parent to make three choices of school. The second and third choices will be considered if the first choice school cannot be granted. Only the first choice will be treated as a ‘placing request’.

2.3 Places in P1 to P7

Applications during the school year

Primary schools deal with all applications for places in P1 to P7 during the school year. To apply, parents should complete the on-line form (pupil placement will forward to the 1st choice school for their consideration) or ask the head teacher of the chosen school for an application form, fill it in, and return it for the Head Teacher to consider.

Applications during the school holidays

Pupil Placement will receive all applications for places in P1 to P7 during school holidays. To apply, parents should complete the on-line form or ask Pupil Placement for an application form, fill it in, and return it to Pupil Placement, who will pass the form to the chosen school at the start of the next term.

2.4 Application procedure – general information

Multiple applications

If more than one application for a child is received, only the most recent will be considered.

Children moving within and into West Lothian

Parents may plan to move into West Lothian or within West Lothian, and the distance to the chosen school may be such that they cannot reasonably ensure that their children can attend the school from their current address. In these circumstances it is not possible to request that a place is kept for them at the chosen school until the child is in a position to attend. Places cannot usually be kept for longer than two weeks (not including school holidays).

Proof of address, age and baptism.

Pupil placement may ask for proof of address, but will ask for a copy of the birth certificate (if not already provided for ELC application) and will ask for certificate of baptism to be submitted (if applying for Roman Catholic school). In the case of applications made to the chosen primary school, the school may ask for proof of address, or for a copy of the birth certificate or certificate of baptism to be taken to the school.

Change of circumstances

If a child's circumstances change (for example, their address) after submitting the application form, parents must inform Pupil Placement in writing as soon as possible. If the application has been made to the chosen school, the school must be informed in writing as soon as possible.

Withdrawal of place

Once a child has been offered a place, the offer will not be withdrawn unless false information has been provided, or information is deliberately withheld.

3 THE DECISION MAKING PROCEDURE

3.1 Decisions for P1

If there are enough places at the chosen school, all applications will be granted by the School Placement Panel. The School Placement Panel is made up of senior officers of the Council.

If there are more applications for P1 than there are places available at a school, the School Placement Panel will allocate the available places. The School Placement Panel may grant some applications and ask for further information to allow it to consider others at a later date. Parents will not be invited to attend the School Placement Panel.

The School Placement Panel will take account of all the information provided in the application form. **Parents should include all the information that they think is important in the application form.**

The School Placement Panel will use the placing in schools guidelines to make placement decisions. These guidelines have been agreed by the Education Executive.

The Council has discretion to admit a pupil to any school in special circumstances as determined by the Council. The factors in the guidelines are not in priority order, but when making its decision the School Placement Panel will decide how to prioritise these factors, taking account of all information provided by applicants, and the overall pattern of applications across West Lothian.

Pupil Placement will send parents a letter with the decision by the end of April.

3.2 Decisions for P1 after the School Placement Panel has met

Applications for P1 places received after the School Placement Panel has met will be decided using the delegated authority of the Head of Service (Education). Pupil Placement will send parents a letter with the decision.

3.3 Decisions for P1 after the term has started and for P2 to P7

Applications for places in P1 after the term has started and for other year groups, will be decided by the Head Teacher. The school will send parents a letter with the decision.

3.4 Decisions during school holidays

Applications for places during school holidays will be decided by the Head Teacher at the start of term. The chosen school will send parents a letter with the decision.

4 IF A PLACE IS REFUSED

4.1 Grounds of Refusal

If the council refuses an application to a primary school, it must give a reason why, that complies with education law. This is the legal 'ground of refusal'. The main reasons, or 'grounds of refusal', are:-

- Admitting the child would require the employment of an additional teacher
- Admitting the child would require spending a lot of money, for example on providing an additional classroom.
- Admitting the child would be seriously detrimental to other pupils' education.
- Admitting the child would require the Council to employ an additional teacher or form an additional class at a future stage.
- Admitting the child would prevent the council reserving a place at the school for a child likely to move into the catchment area of the school.
- Admitting the child would mean that the capacity of the school would be exceeded in terms of pupil numbers.

4.2 Alternative Placement

If the council refuses an application to a primary school, a place will normally be offered at an alternative school. This may be the second or third choice school, or a catchment school. Only the first choice will be treated as a 'placing request'.

4.3 Waiting lists

A waiting list will be formed for each primary school where applications have been refused, and all children refused will be placed on the waiting list. A child can only be on the waiting list of the first-choice school. All waiting lists are prioritised in line with the placing in schools guidelines and decisions made by the School Placement Panel. A child's position in a waiting list can change, for example due to a change of address, or following baptism. A child can move down the waiting list as well as up, for example if someone with a higher priority applies. The length of time a child has been on a waiting list does not give any priority.

Pupil Placement will manage the waiting lists for P1 admissions until the second week of the autumn school term. The Head Teacher of each school will manage waiting lists after this time.

Waiting lists will last for a maximum of one school session. If you want your child to remain on a waiting list for the next school session, you must contact the school. The school may contact you during the session to ask if you want to remain on the waiting list.

Pupil Placement or the primary school will contact parents if a place becomes available.

4.4 Right of Appeal

If the council refuses an application to a primary school there is a right of appeal. The right of appeal only applies to the first choice school. Appeals are heard by the West Lothian (Placing in Schools) Appeals Committee. This committee is independent of West Lothian Council. The letter informing parents of refusal of their application will explain how to make an appeal.

The West Lothian (Placing in Schools) Appeals Committee hears cases, considers written and oral evidence and makes decisions. This is a formal legal process.

Parents then have the right to appeal to a Sheriff Court if the Appeals Committee does not decide in their favour.

Parents can appeal to the West Lothian (Placing in Schools) Appeal Committee if:-

- they do not receive a decision on an application for P1 by 30 April, when the application was submitted before 15 March, or

- they do not receive a decision on an application for P1 submitted after 15 March, or an application for any other stage, within two months of receipt of the application.

5. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

5.1 Schools and school handbooks

Details of primary schools in West Lothian can be found in the ***Primary School Admission – Guidance Note***.

Handbooks which give useful information about a school are available for each primary school. This includes details of breakfast clubs and after school clubs where these are provided. Information is available on the school website. Parents/carers having difficulty accessing this information should contact the school.

5.2 School transport

Parents are responsible for getting their children to and from school. The council will arrange suitable transport free of charge if:

- a pupil at a catchment school does not have a suitable walking route from home to school or lives more than 1.5 miles away from the school by a suitable walking route; or
- the council asks a pupil to go to a non-catchment school and the pupil lives out-with the above distance. (This could happen if a place is not available for the pupil at a catchment primary school.)

The council will not provide transport if parents choose to send their child to a non-catchment school.

More information can be found on the School Transport section of the West Lothian Council website. www.westlothian.gov.uk/schooltransport

5.3 Children who need additional support for learning

West Lothian Education Service is committed to meeting the needs of all learners through the careful planning and monitoring of learning progress. It is recognised that the needs of the majority of West Lothian's children and young people will be met as a result of the delivery of high quality teaching and learning through the Curriculum for Excellence.

For those children and young people who require additional support in order to fulfil their learning potential, a Continuum of Support framework is in place in West Lothian to ensure that their needs are understood and supported effectively.

As detailed in the 'Presumption to provide education in a mainstream setting' guidance from the Scottish Government, the educational needs of the majority of pupils with additional support needs can be met within a mainstream setting unless there are exceptional circumstances. All parents are asked to enroll in the first instance within their catchment mainstream school. The school will facilitate a child's planning meeting to support the completion of an Assessment of Need and a robust plan developed and implemented for the young person to attend and be supported within their catchment school. Following a period of assessment if further consideration is required for an alternative provision through the referral pathways of the West Lothian Continuum of Support framework this will be progressed in discussion with the council's Education Support Service.

If you intend to make a parental placing request please contact the council's Education Placement Group for further information – EducationPlacementGroup@westlothian.gov.uk

5.4 Looked after children

In line with legislation, the Council has additional responsibilities for children who are ‘looked after’. A child is ‘looked after’ if the child is cared for, either at home or away from home, as a result of the decision of a court or a children’s hearing, or as a result of a voluntary agreement between the parent and the Council’s Social Work Department.

5.5 Customer satisfaction

The Council welcomes and values the views of parents on the service received. If parents have any views on the service they should contact Pupil Placement. Each school year, Pupil Placement may also ask a few parents to fill in a short questionnaire on their service.