

## 3. Secondary school preferences

### 3.1 Application deadline

Parents should make an application for their child's secondary school place to the Local Authority in which they live – their 'home LA'. They can do this online or, if they do not have internet access, on a paper form.

The deadline for applications to be made by the parents of children who live in Buckinghamshire will depend on the method they use. Details of the online and paper application deadlines are on the timeline.

### 3.2 Online applications

Last year 97% of Buckinghamshire parents who applied on time, applied online for secondary school places.

Please encourage parents to apply online at [buckinghamshire.gov.uk](http://buckinghamshire.gov.uk). It is safe, secure and means they will hear about their school place allocation earlier than any other method.

### 3.3 Managing paper applications handed to the school office

**For Buckinghamshire LA primary schools** - where the parents of Buckinghamshire children have completed a paper form, they have been asked to return this to us via the primary school, together with any supporting information, a recent utility bill and a stamped, self-addressed postcard or envelope if they would like us to acknowledge receipt of their form. We are not able to return utility bills.

Where parents hand forms to you close to the deadline, it is particularly important that you complete the 'Date received' box on the form when you receive it, as this is the evidence we will accept to show it was returned by the deadline.

The Preference Monitoring Sheet will enable you to record when you receive paper application forms in schools and when you forward them to us. Please send any application forms to us regularly. Each return should be accompanied by a copy of the monitoring sheet. **Do not wait until the deadline.** A copy of a blank preference monitoring sheet is available in the Resource Pack on SchoolsWeb.

**For all other schools** – If parents have completed a paper form, this must be returned directly to the Admissions & Transport Team, by the deadline given in the timeline and on the web.

Where parents submit an online application, they **must not** submit a paper form as well.

### **3.4 Strategies to ensure on-time applications are made**

As we expect that most parents will be applying online, we will update you on the applications received from your pupils before the deadline, to enable you to chase any parents who have yet to apply.

Hopefully this year the testing timeline will not have to be delayed. However it is always good practice to encourage parents to list both upper/all ability and grammar schools on their preferences. Parents should also strongly consider including a preference for their catchment/nearest school. Parents often expect to be given a local upper of grammar school that they have not listed as a preference if they cannot have their preferences and this is not always possible.

**The expression of timely preferences is a vital part of the allocation process and your support in securing preferences from parents is a practical way of demonstrating that 'every child matters'.**

### **3.5 Order of preferences**

Parents are advised to rank schools in their true order of preference. As they will not have the opportunity to know the outcome of the Secondary Transfer Test before the preference deadline, this means that if a parent hopes their child will qualify for grammar school, they **MUST** include grammar schools on their application.

Parents should also include upper/all-ability school preferences on their application as well as those for schools in other areas, again in their true order of preference.

We are concerned that each year several parents do not include their nearest/catchment school(s) on their applications. It is really important that if you are aware of a parent in this situation that you recommend they add their local school(s) to their application. For example, there have been instances of children living in Wendover not being offered a place at a preferred school or John Colet School because parents did not include it when expressing their preferences. John Colet School was added as a preference for a later allocation round but as it was already full it was not possible to offer a place. This scenario happens across the county in all areas and leads to families finding themselves in difficult situations. More information is available on the website.

**PLEASE NOTE – School transport will be offered in accordance with the School Transport Policy, which is available on our website – [buckinghamshire.gov.uk/school-transport](http://buckinghamshire.gov.uk/school-transport)**

**Relatively few new Year 7s are eligible for free school transport.** Generally, free transport will only be provided if a child will be attending their nearest school, and that school is further than 3 miles from home or where (less than this distance) it has been established it is an unsafe route to walk to the nearest school. If a child has been allocated a non-preference school, it is unlikely that they will be eligible for free transport unless they expressed a preference for the nearest school.

**We suggest parents use our ‘Free School Transport Checker’ available via the ‘Find my child a school place’ service on our website before submitting their application – [buckinghamshire.gov.uk/find-a-school-place](http://buckinghamshire.gov.uk/find-a-school-place)**

### **3.6 Reasons for preference**

Parents can include reasons for preference on their application. If applying in writing, they should return this information with their form and not later in the process. This may include written supporting evidence from a third party. Parents who apply online should also send this information to us by the deadline via our Contact Us Form - [buckinghamshire.gov.uk/contactadmissions](http://buckinghamshire.gov.uk/contactadmissions)

### **3.7 Exceptional medical or social applications**

Children with exceptional medical or social reasons for wishing to attend a particular school which has a priority rule for exceptional medical and social applicants should supply written evidence - from a doctor, social worker, Education Welfare Officer or other appropriate person. The evidence must clearly demonstrate why the preferred school is the **only** school that can meet that child’s needs in a way that no other school can. The evidence should also state what difficulties would be caused if the child was unable to attend the preferred school.

Only those applications that have appropriate third-party support will be considered under the ‘exceptional’ rules (not all schools have these rules). Independent information provided later about exceptional medical or social circumstances, which were not known about at the time the original application was made, will be considered from that point of the process.

### **3.8 Supplementary forms**

Supplementary forms for those schools both in and out of county that use them should be sent to the particular school by the deadline. In all cases parents should check where the supplementary form must be sent (this is usually the school). It is a parent’s responsibility to determine if a supplementary form is necessary.

### **3.9 Looked After Children and other priority groups in the admission rules**

Families applying under the 'Looked After Child' rule are asked to provide evidence to support their circumstances as are those families who apply under one of the following rules (where used):

- Entitlement to Free School Meals
- Pupil Premium
- Child of a member of staff (as described in the Admissions Code)
- Sibling of a former pupil
- Child with a sibling at a linked school

### **3.10 Evidence of residence**

Parents have been asked to provide a current utility bill (gas or electric but not water) to prove their residence. This should be a copy of a bill that shows usage and is no more than three months old; the parent should ensure that it is clearly labelled with their child's name and date of birth. You should not feel obliged to copy evidence for parents. We will not be able to return originals.

Alternatively, parents may prefer to send us a scanned copy of a bill, together with the child's details via our address evidence form - [buckinghamshire.gov.uk/address-evidence](https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/address-evidence).