



Policy: Primary School Admission – Policy and Procedure

Author: Andrew Sneddon
Service: Pupil Placement

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1 BACKGROUND

1.1 Catchment areas

1.1.1 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).

1.1.2 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

1.2.1 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 nine non-denominational clusters of associated schools and two 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

1.3.1 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

1.4.1 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

1.5.1 A number of schools in West Lothian are often 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

1.6.1 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.

1.6.2 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

1.7.1 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.

1.8 Childcare

1.8.1 Wraparound care is available at selected locations. A charge is made for wraparound care. For further information, please see the ***Wraparound Care Admission – Policy and Procedures***. A list of establishments where wraparound care is available is included in the ***Primary School and Wraparound Admission – Guidance Note*** which is updated each year.

1.8.2 Further information on Childcare is available from the Scottish Family Information Service.

2 THE APPLICATION PROCEDURE

2.1 Age ranges for starting primary or infant school

2.1.1 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.

2.1.2 Parents of children born between the first day of term in August and the end of February may decide to defer a child's entry into primary school until the start of the school session following the child's fifth birthday. Children born in January and February whose parents choose to defer entry into primary school will be given an additional year of pre-school education, including funded pre-school education at partner providers. Children born between the first day of term in August and 31 December have no automatic right to an additional year of pre-school education.

2.1.3 Further information can be found in the ***Additional Year of Pre-School and School Education - Policy and Procedure***.

2.1.4 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 ***Appendix 2***.

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

2.2.1 A primary school application pack will be available from West Lothian Council pre-school establishments and partner providers in November or December. Parents must fill in and return the application form which is in the application pack. Parents will be contacted by letter to inform them that application packs are available.

2.2.2 West Lothian children who are not attending West Lothian Council pre-school establishments can request a primary school application pack from Pupil Placement, or from any primary school or pre-school establishment. Pupil Placement contact the parents of any children that the Council knows about to inform them that application packs are available.

2.2.3 **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.

2.2.4 Application forms should be 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.

2.2.5 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 5 working days, parents should contact Pupil Placement.

2.2.6 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.

2.2.7 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'.

2.2.8 The application form allows parents to apply for a school place and wraparound care on one form. There is a separate wraparound care application pack available if parents decide to apply for wraparound care after the primary school admission form is submitted.

2.3 Places in P1 to P7

2.3.1 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 ask the head teacher of the chosen school for an application form, fill it in, and return it to the chosen school.

2.3.2 Applications during the school holidays

Pupil Placement will receive all applications for places in P1 to P7 during school holidays. To apply, parents should 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

2.4.1 Multiple applications

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

2.4.2 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).

2.4.3 Proof of address, age and baptism.

Pupil placement may ask for proof of address, or for a copy of the birth certificate or certificate of baptism to be submitted. 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 taken to the school.

2.4.4 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.

2.4.5 **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

3.1.1 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.

3.1.2 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.

3.1.3 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.**

3.1.4 The School Placement Panel will use the placing in schools guidelines set out in appendix 1 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.

3.1.4 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.

3.5 Decisions for Wraparound Care

Applications for wraparound care will be decided using the delegated authority of the Head of Service (Education). Pupil Placement 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

4.3.1 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.

4.3.2 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.

4.3.3 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.

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

4.4 Right of Appeal

4.4.1 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.

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

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

4.4.4. 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

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

5.1.2 Handbooks which give useful information about a school are available from each primary school. This includes details of breakfast clubs and after school clubs where these are provided. The Head Teacher will supply a copy on request.

5.2 School transport

5.2.1 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 outwith the above distance. (This could happen if a place is not available for the pupil at a catchment primary school.)

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

5.2.3 More information, including a booklet called 'School Transport – A Guide for Parents and Pupils' can be obtained from the Public Transport Team.

5.3 Children who need additional support for learning

In line with legislation, the Council has a policy of including children who need additional support for learning in mainstream schools. More information on additional support for learning can be obtained from the Principal Support Officer - Additional Learning Needs.

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 at the address below. Each school year, Pupil Placement may also ask a few parents to fill in a short questionnaire on their service.

Appendix 1

Placing in schools - 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 outwith that catchment area
- in the case of pupils living outwith the catchment area of the requested school, pupils resident within West Lothian will have priority over those pupils living outwith 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.

Appendix 2

Early Admission to Primary School

1 Policy on early admission to primary school

The Council does not have to educate children who are not of school age, but parents may apply for early admission to a primary school. Before a place is granted, all other ways of providing suitable education will be considered. A place will only be granted if there is evidence that refusal of the application could harm a child's education in the long-term.

2 Pre-school education

Pre-school education is delivered in terms of the Curriculum for Excellence, a single curriculum for ages 3-18. The early level of Curriculum for Excellence includes both pre-school and Primary 1 improving the transition from pre-school to primary. The aim of the Curriculum for Excellence is that all children in pre-school and primary school experience stimulating, effective learning in ways that are appropriate to their needs to enable them to develop as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

3 Possible effects of early admission

Refusal to grant a place early is not likely to harm a child's education in the long term. Pre-school education will be tailored to the needs of the individual child, whether they are more, or less advanced than others of their age. In fact, early admission may itself harm a child's educational development. The child may be too young to cope socially and become frustrated or lose confidence.

4 Applying for early admission

When applying for early admission, reasons and supporting evidence that refusal of the application could harm a child's education in the long-term must be given. It is not enough simply to show that a child might cope with early admission, is 'ready' for primary school, or just misses the entry date. Parents may provide expert written evidence to support their case. The Council does not provide assessments of children for this purpose.

5. Who takes the decision to grant or refuse an application for admission?

The School Placement Panel considers all requests for early admission. It takes into account all information supplied to support the application. The School Placement Panel will consider:-

- Whether a pre-school establishment would meet the needs of the child.
- Whether the child has exceptional qualities, for example the child is significantly more advanced than other children of the same age in social interaction and/or intellectual ability, which makes him or her different from other children of the same age.
- Whether not being placed in primary school would harm the child's educational development in the long term.

6. Reasons for refusing applications for admission

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 reason normally given is that the education is not suited to the age, ability or aptitude of the child. There is no right of appeal against refusal of early admission.