Office of the Schools Adjudicator

Template for

Local Authority Report

to

The Schools Adjudicator

from

Suffolk County Council Local Authority

to be provided by

31 October 2026

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

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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			X		
Year 7			X		
Other relevant years of entry					

Please give examples to illustrate your answer if you wish:

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**:

Admission at the normal point of entry continues to be a strength in Suffolk with looked after and previously looked after children prioritised for places in accordance with the School Admissions Code.

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 majority of children and young people with an Education, Health and Care plan (EHC plan) naming a school at the expected points of entry are well served, transitioning to the named setting within their EHC plan. Suffolk's number of phase transfers completed within expected timescales continued to improve in the 2025/2026 school year.

The SEND Capital programme and SEND Sufficiency planning has resulted in more local specialist placements being available for the 2025/2026 school year, including unit places attached to mainstream settings.

We continue to work with mainstream settings to ensure they understand the statutory duties in respect of the consultation and admissions process.

The Specialist Education Services support mainstream settings with transition planning and focussed visits for Section F provision. The LA challenges mainstream settings where appropriate to do so, however, some cases where discussions have taken place between the school and a family, the family has lost confidence in the school's ability to meet their child's needs. The family will then request an alternative, or specialist placement and in some cases, they pursue this through the SEND Tribunal process.

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				x	
Secondary				x	

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

We do not co-ordinate in-year admissions in Suffolk which reduces our visibility of all children in the county and the LA is reliant on many individual admission authorities notifying us of the outcome of every application within a timely manner. This raises safeguarding concerns for children who do not have a local school place.

Primary schools are continuing to experience organisational and budgetary pressures as the pupil population falls. Some schools are having to make difficult financial and organisational decisions such as moving from single-year-group teaching to mixed-year-group classes or reducing the number of classes, which can, in turn, put pressure on the availability of places for in-year admissions.

Some of the secondary schools across the county are operating below their original Published Admission Number (PAN) for the intake year in Years 8–11, either because smaller cohorts have been staffed accordingly or because schools wish to reduce numbers after admitting above PAN. This means there are limited or no in-year places in some localities, with a reliance on the Fair Access Protocol and pressure on school travel. There continues to be difficulty in placing children in Year 11, especially during the spring and summer terms.

The cumulative effect of individual admission authorities' organisational decisions can leave the LA unable to identify a local in-year place, even where the area appears to have sufficient physical capacity.

There has been an increase in the number of in-year admissions refused under paragraph 3.10 of the School Admissions Code where the admission authority believes the child has challenging behaviour. Particularly for those seeking to return to mainstream education following a period of Elective Home Education.

There is scope for inconsistent interpretation of the threshold for refusal under 3.10 and the evidence required to demonstrate, as required in paragraph 3.11, 'a particularly high proportion of either children with challenging behaviour or previously permanently excluded pupils on roll compared to other local schools.' This creates uncertainty for families, schools and the LA.

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:

Suffolk County Council co-ordinates in-year admissions only for community and voluntary controlled schools.

Challenges arise when some admission authorities do not respond promptly to applications. If an admission authority neither offers nor refuses a place, the LA may be unaware that an application has been submitted and cannot provide support. In several cases, carers and adopters have abandoned the application and applied to another school. This can affect any applicant, but for looked after and previously looked after children, the experience of rejection and delay can have profound consequences.

When an admission authority in Suffolk refuses a place to a looked after or previously looked after child, the Virtual School Head checks that the applicants have made an informed choice and have sound reasons for selecting the school. Other possible schools are also considered. If the chosen school is appropriate and the alternatives are not viable, the LA uses its established relationships with schools to resolve the outcome at a local level. On some occasions the LA will write to the admission authority to give notice of its intention to seek a direction under the statutory guidance. In the majority of cases where steps have been

taken by the LA, the admission authority has promptly admitted the child without further action being needed.

Where a looked after or previously looked after child moves to another LA area and is refused a school place there, the Virtual School Head follows the same process of checking the reasons for the application and exploring alternatives. If the chosen school remains appropriate and no viable alternative is identified, the LA will again seek to the resolve the outcome through relational practice. On some occasions the Virtual School Head will write to the admissions authority to give notice of the intention to seek a direction under the statutory guidance. In most cases where steps have been taken by the LA, the admission authority has then promptly admitted the child without further action being needed.

These processes delay in-year admissions for vulnerable children. We avoid prolonged discussions and seek to resolve cases as quickly as possible.

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:

The LA has continued to strengthen the advice and guidance to mainstream schools and ease of access to specialist education services offered by the LA through open referrals to services, regular SEN Co-ordinator (SENCo) Forums and a daily SENCo Helpline. The LA also provides additional SEND funding for children and young people at SEN Support or with an EHC plan through the High Needs Block Funding. Children are served well where schools use the range of services and support available to them and access additional funding to further enhance provision.

Children and young people with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) as their primary need continue to concern settings and some admissions have been delayed while further discussions with the LA and families are sought. The Education Access Team, a team dedicated to the LAs statutory duties in relation to permanent exclusions, continues to work alongside Statutory SEND Services to

support the most appropriate next steps in the interim and the identification of suitable provision. Securing a mainstream placement for those who have SEND and have been permanently excluded remains a significant challenge. Suffolk is consistent in its application of the Fair Access Protocol where this applies and will use the local Inclusion Pathway that will gather information on specific cases and challenge schools directly.

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:

The 100% figures shown above for state-funded mainstream schools in our area includes schools that did not respond to the last consultation. The consultation and accompanying letter advised schools that a nil return would be considered as their agreement. The last changes made to the protocol were made to meet statutory requirements of the current School Admissions Code.

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		*3
Foundation, voluntary aided and academies		*23
Total		*26

* School admission cases only.

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?

The number of children referred to the Fair Access Protocol has increased from the 2024/2025 school year to the 2025/2026 school year. There are more children seeking to return to a mainstream school following a short period of Elective Home Education and being refused on 3.10 of the School Admissions Code. There has been an increase in the number of children referred and admitted under 3.17(l) of the Fair Access Protocol due to limited in-year places in secondary schools.

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:

The Fair Access Protocol (FAP) works effectively across most of the county. However, in some areas we continue to face resistance from admission authorities to accepting pupils through the protocol. This causes delays and puts pressure on our ability to secure placements promptly and within the required 20 school days. In some of these cases, we are also seeing an increase in schools requesting support from Alternative Provisions to help children reintegrate into school.

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
0	0	0

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

F. Other points on in-year admissions

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:

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):

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?

A key concern is the difference between the successful co-ordination of admissions at normal points of entry and the difficulties experienced by some children seeking a place in-year. Local shortages of available places, differing interpretations of admission requirements and delays between identifying a school and securing admission can leave children without timely access to education. Suffolk would welcome clearer national expectations on in-year capacity planning, the evidence supporting 3.10 refusals and the prompt implementation of Fair Access placements.

Section 4 - Feedback

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

Thank you for completing this template.

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