

Secondary School Provision in Warrington

Section 1 Introductory Notes

Terminology

Throughout this document we use the term 'schools'. This applies to schools of all status in the authority, including maintained schools, academies and faith schools.

The number of places available for entry at Year Seven is set by a formal number called the Published Admissions Number (PAN). A school must set the PAN formally within their Admissions Policy. The school can instruct Admissions to 'exceed' the PAN to allocate additional places and this informal change to PAN does not require consultation.

Acronyms also include the Department for Education which will be referred to as DfE and the Regional Schools Commissioner which will be referred to as RSC.

Forecast

We take an evidence-based approach to forecasting the need for school places to produce 5-year pupil projections for planning areas. This includes forecasting the Year Seven intakes each year.

For secondary schools, forecasts are constructed using the latest primary school population and allocating to secondary school areas based on historic transition rates from primary to secondary. We also consider migration (pupils moving into Warrington and moving out of Warrington) and the potential impact from new housing development.

More details on this can be found in the [School Organisation Strategy](#) on page 29/30.

Academies

Since many of the secondary schools are academies, we must collaborate closely with academy trusts, the DfE and the RSC.

Some proposals involve significant changes to academies and will require each academy to conduct its own consultation and seek approval from the RSC. Warrington will support these applications.

Additionally, all school proposals are subject to cabinet¹ approval for any necessary expenditure and must obtain required permissions, such as planning consent, for expansion projects.

¹ Cabinet approval is required in accordance with Warrington Borough Council's Constitution. Cabinet is made up of elected council members.

Section 2: Increasing demand for Secondary School Places

Why has the population of secondary schools increased?

As well as a high birth rate until 2019, from 2021 the movement of families from overseas into Warrington increased exponentially. At the same time the number and size of housing developments across Warrington increased.

Over the last few years, the PAN at almost every secondary school in Warrington has increased to take into account the higher demand. In addition, schools have taken in pupils above their PAN, but more places are needed.

When the PAN has been raised each year, this means that the overall population of children in the school has also increased. This has led to school populations swelling.

Why do we need surplus places in secondary schools?

We need vacancies or 'surplus places' at our schools to allow the admissions system to operate effectively. Having a level of surplus across our schools provides flexibility, allowing movement into, out of, and around Warrington and helps us to meet parental preference.

High levels of in-year movement (movement into Warrington and between schools in Warrington) is a trend which, although slowing slightly, is still high. With a relatively small number of secondary education providers most who are full, there is currently a low level of surplus and an increased surplus is needed to allow in-year movement.

What happens when there is a lack of surplus places?

When there is low availability of places, this creates issues for families moving within the borough or who are new to the area. Children are offered 'a next nearest place' which is often some distance from the family's address resulting in longer travel times to get to school. School buildings would also be at risk of becoming overcrowded and managing school admissions becomes more complex.

Year Seven Entry in September 2026

For September 2026, a total of 2,755 places are available for Year Seven admissions across the following schools:

Area	Schools (PAN)	Total PAN
West	Great Sankey High (375), Penketh High (220), St Gregory's Catholic High (240)	835
Central	Beamont Collegiate Academy (180), Cardinal Newman Catholic High (165), Padgate Academy (150), Sir Thomas Boteler C of E High (175)	670
East	King's Leadership Academy (150), Culcheth High (240), Birchwood Community High (200)	590
South	Bridgewater High (360), Lymm High (300)	660
Total	All Schools	2,755

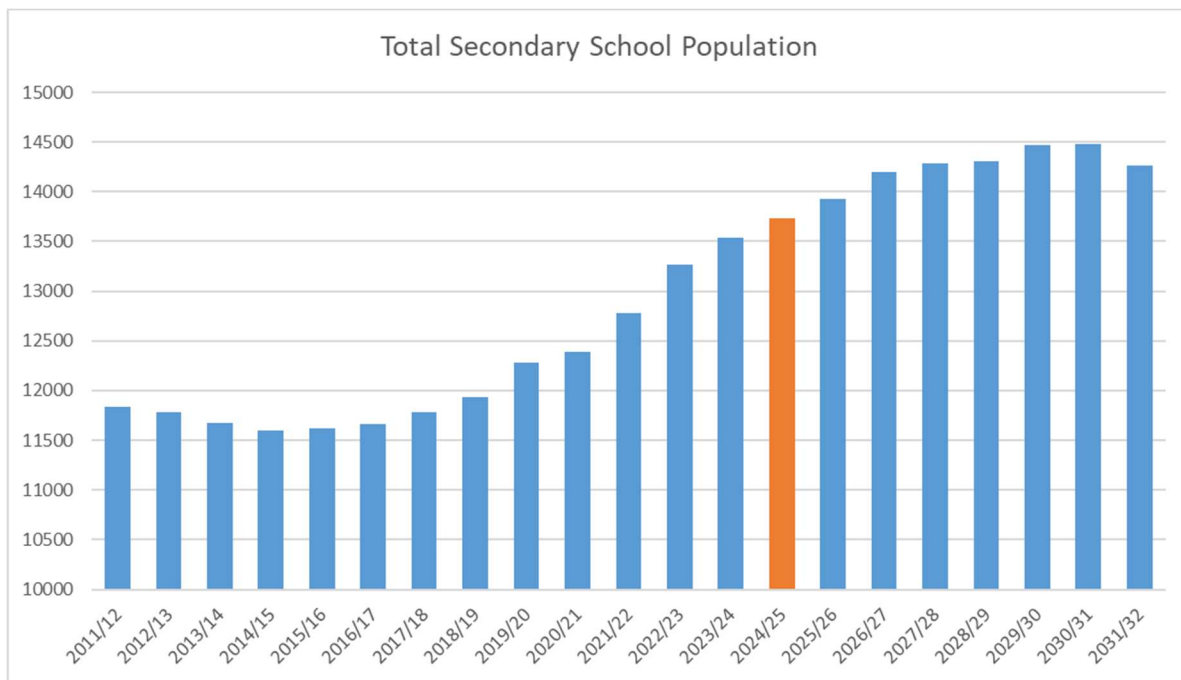
Warrington has been closely monitoring a particularly large year group as it progresses through primary school, with numbers increasing each year due to inward migration and new housing developments. This cohort, which has just completed Year Four in summer 2024, is now the largest in Warrington and may continue to grow further with additional migration before entering secondary school in September 2026.

As of the end of the 2023/24 academic year, there are 2,725 pupils in Year Four. This cohort has the potential to increase to 2,876 pupils by the time they reach Year Seven in 2026, driven by ongoing migration. With only 2,755 places currently available, this results in a projected shortfall of 120 places for the 2026 entry.

What do we expect to happen to the secondary school population?

Please note that we only include schools that accept pupils in Years Seven to Eleven in this information (excluding UTC Warrington). Local education providers should also recognise the implications that these higher cohort sizes have for post-16 education, as they move through the education sector.

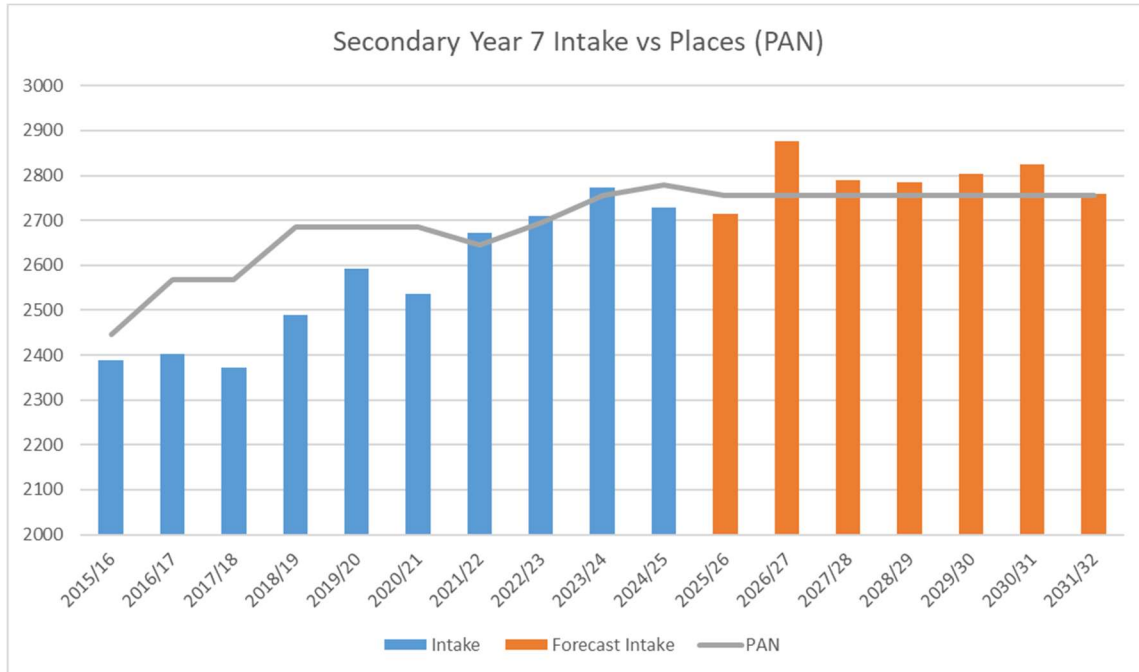
This table shows the total secondary school population numbers from 2011/12, and then expected numbers from 2024/25 until 2031/32:



It shows that the overall secondary school population has risen by over 2100 pupils since 2015/16. Over the next seven years, we expect another 800 pupils into the overall population. At the moment, this is as far ahead as we can forecast.

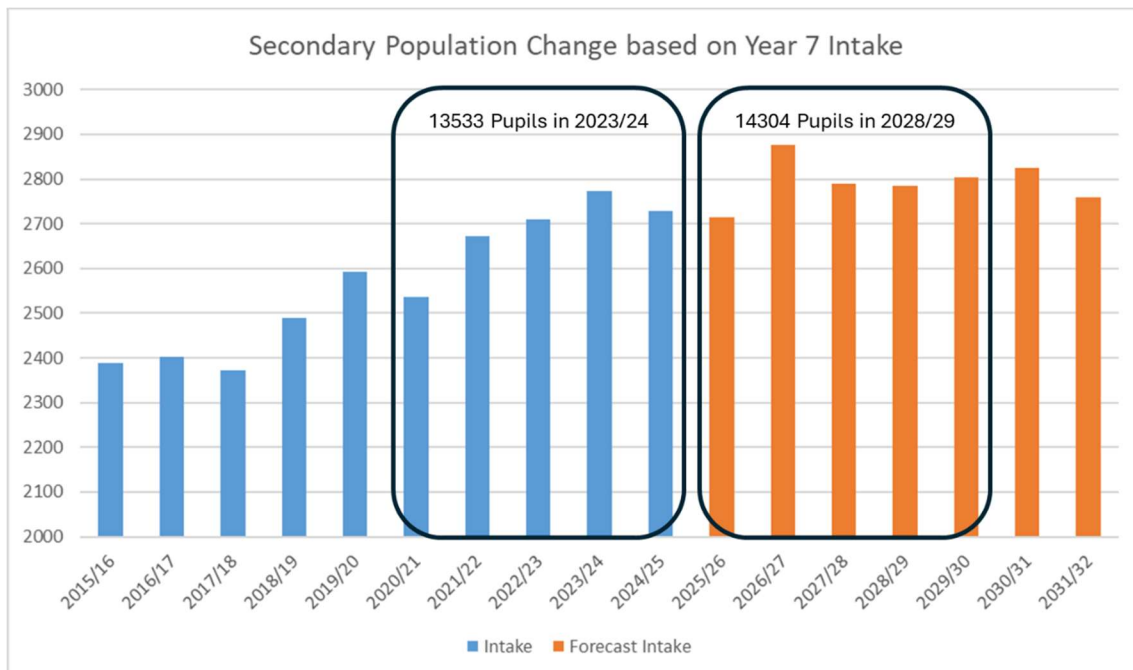
Why will the population swell?

The following graph shows the size of Year Seven intakes across Warrington since 2015/16 and the intakes expected in the next seven years, against the places currently available (PAN). 2026 is the peak year showing demand ahead of the current places available, but high demand continues through to 2031:



The graph shows that, although numbers will fluctuate, the Year Seven intake will remain high for the foreseeable future. The 2026 intake is of particular concern across Warrington.

When smaller cohorts leave in Year Eleven they are being replaced by a larger Year Seven intake. This means that the overall population increases. The next chart shows the effect of changing cohort sizes leading to rising overall secondary school population:



Although the Year Seven cohort is large, the four preceding intakes are much smaller. The overall population in 2023/24 is indicated by adding up the size of each cohort.

In contrast, these five cohorts are all substantially bigger. Adding up the size of the 2028/29 cohorts shows that the population is much bigger.

An area-based analysis has shown that forecast demand will be high across all four regions, with the forecast shortfall of 120 places distributed as follows:

- 25 places in the West area
- 50 places in the Central area
- 30 places in the East area
- 15 places in the South area

Section 3: Proposals at Secondary Schools

Principle 2 of the [School Organisation Strategy](#) is to support the expansion of local popular and successful schools where there is a clear need for new places, or create new schools where there is sufficient demand.

Warrington Borough Council has been collaborating with various academy trusts and schools to develop several proposals aimed at increasing the number of places available by 2026. All of these proposals are outlined below, but they remain subject to final agreement with schools, cabinet approval and financial authorisation:

Bruche Primary Academy – In partnership with Warrington Primary Academy Trust, we have developed a proposal to transform Bruche Primary Academy into an all-through school, offering education from age 2 to 16. This plan would create 300 secondary school places on-site, with 60 places available per year starting in 2026, serving East area demand.

This proposal would increase the number of secondary school providers in Warrington from 12 to 13 at the Year Seven entry level. A new secondary school building, to be constructed on the site of the former infant block, is expected to open in time for September 2026, pending necessary permissions.

Great Sankey High School – In partnership with Omega Multi-Academy Trust we are scoping the possibility of a medium-term increase in Year Seven intake from 375 to 435 students from 2026 or 2027, returning to 375 entry after the peak demand in the West area subsides.

This proposal if it progresses, would involve construction of a new block providing additional classrooms alongside improvements to existing facilities. Temporary classrooms may be needed for one year during construction.

Padgate Academy – In partnership with The Challenge Academy Trust, we propose to temporarily exceed PAN from 150 to 180 for one year in 2026 to meet Central area demand. This informal change does not require additional consultation.

Lymm High School – In partnership with the Academy, we propose to temporarily exceed PAN from 300 to 315 for one year in 2026. This informal change does not require additional consultation. It addresses the peak demand from partner primary schools in the South area.

If these schemes proceed as planned for 2026, the total number of places on offer will increase from 2,755 to 2,920, adequately meeting the forecasted demand and including surplus places across schools to support in-year demand for places.

New PAN if all expansions proceed:

Area	Schools (PAN)	Total PAN
West	Great Sankey High (435), Penketh High (220), St Gregory's Catholic High (240)	895
Central	Beamont Collegiate Academy (180), Cardinal Newman Catholic High (165), Padgate Academy (180 for 2026 only), Sir Thomas Boteler C of E High (175)	700
East	King's Leadership Academy (150), Culcheth High (240), Birchwood Community High (200), Bruche All-through Academy (60)	650
South	Bridgewater High (360), Lymm High (315 for 2026 only)	675
Total	All Schools	2,920

Cardinal Newman Catholic High School – The school have worked positively with the council to accommodate additional in-year admissions; there is a possibility of a small rise in intake for 2026 but we are in early discussions with the school and no additional numbers are included at this time beyond the set PAN of 165. Any informal change would not require consultation.

Culcheth High School – Due to the forecast rise in demand for 2026, catchments may shrink potentially affecting Croft village. Therefore, we propose an adjustment to the admission criteria to improve access for Croft village residents. We propose no change to PAN. Any changes will be included in the annual consultation on Warrington’s [Determined Admission Arrangements](#).

Securing permanent expansions alongside temporary expansions for 2026, secures investment in secondary schools to provide much needed surplus in the school system allowing for better placement of in-year applications and future pupil movement.

Section 4: Other Schools

All schools were reviewed, but only the four listed plus Culcheth and Cardinal Newman are in scope for 2026. Here is a summary of other schools in Warrington:

- **Penketh High School:** Part of the DfE Schools Rebuilding Programme, with completion not expected until 2027. The PAN may increase from 220 to 240 upon completion.
- **St Gregory's Catholic High School:** Already expanded and now at maximum capacity on a restricted site with no further expansion planned.
- **Beamont Collegiate Academy:** At maximum capacity on a restricted site with no expansion planned.
- **Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School:** PAN has already been increased from 165 to 175, included in the current 2,755 places.
- **King's Leadership Academy:** Recently formally set PAN at 150; no expansion considered at this time.
- **Birchwood Community High School:** PAN raised from 170 to 200 since 2022; no further changes planned.
- **Bridgewater High School:** Expanded to 360 places in 2023; no further expansion planned.