

Admissions consultation

Frequently asked questions: **Last updated 19 December 2016**

This document will be updated with questions that arise from questions asked during the consultation process.

Questions about the proposed arrangements

1) Would the school consider other changes to its admission arrangements such as interviewing applicants or testing their narrative ability?

The Blue Coat School will continue to review its admission arrangements annually to evaluate how well our selection procedure identifies high ability students. This will involve governors who will continue to ask challenging questions about our current arrangements and what advantages or disadvantages other models of selection would bring. In their considerations, governors take into account a wide range of factors such as: how effective each model is, how efficient each model is and the impact each model may have on the welfare of our young applicants. At the present time, the governing body is satisfied that the current model of selection by entrance test provides the best balance of all of these.

2) Has the school considered what it could do to encourage more applications from children from disadvantaged backgrounds?

As part of our support of the priorities of Liverpool Local Authority, The Blue Coat School is committed to increasing the aspirations of children from all backgrounds. We know that many children from disadvantaged backgrounds do not get the chance to apply for a place at The Blue Coat School. Currently, we are carefully considering what we can do to ensure that all children have access to the same positive life-changing opportunities (see question 5).

3) Is it fair to give any form of advantage to children who are eligible for free school meals in the proposed admission arrangements? Do these proposals unfairly disadvantage some children who are not eligible for free school meals?

Under the proposed arrangements, a small proportion of disadvantaged students ($27/180 = 15\%$), would be entitled to a place even if their entrance test score was very slightly less than we would typically see at The Blue Coat School (See question 8). This is because it is recognised that very often, a child who has grown up in a disadvantaged setting may have far greater potential than they are currently able to show compared with others. This may be because they have not had the same opportunities as others to develop their skills and attributes. A very similar rationale is used to support the long accepted need to age weight entrance test scores because older children have a very slight advantage over younger children at the age of 10/11. In the same way, the proposals about disadvantaged children are designed to delicately level the playing field for all children.

4) Are the proposals unfair on children who live in families with low income but are not eligible for free school meals?

The Blue Coat School is keen to support all children from every type of background. Currently, we are not aware of evidence to suggest that children from families with low income who are not eligible for free school meals are not applying for or taking up places at The Blue Coat School. As we look forward, we will continue to review this and we are also confident that our future work to encourage more disadvantaged children to consider applying for a place at The Blue Coat School will also have a positive impact on others.

5) Does the school currently do any outreach work to encourage more applications from children from disadvantaged backgrounds? Is it planning to?

As part of our proposals to encourage more children from disadvantaged backgrounds to consider applying for a place at The Blue Coat School, we are looking at how we might work productively with partners across the local authority. However, it is important that first and foremost, we await the findings of this consultation before establishing any firm plans or commitments.

Questions about entrance test scores

6) What scores do students usually get on the entrance test?

The Blue Coat School entrance test is marked out of 450. Typically, the overall scores of applicants who are typically admitted ranges from about 410 to 330 though this does vary slightly from year to year.

7) What are the typical scores of groups A,B,C etc?

As explained above, these scores do vary slightly from year to year in line with the ability range of applicants. To assist this consultation, it may be helpful to consider the following table which summarises the minimum scores of key groups over recent years:

Group	2016	2015	2014	2013
Top 180 applicants (A)	342+	339+	336+	335+
Applicants who narrowly miss the top 180 (B)	336+	333+	330+	331+
All other applicants (C)	186+	173+	186+	184+

8) Where does 320 sit amongst these scores?

From the table above, you will be able to see that a score of 320 sits slightly below the scores that have guaranteed the applicants a place in recent years. This is in keeping with the point made above in question 3. To assist this consultation, it may be helpful to consider the following table which summarises the year on year difference between the lowest eligible score and 320 and also explains what these differences actually mean in the context of the entrance test:

Group	2016	2015	2014	2013
Group A score range	403 - 342	413 - 339	409 - 336	401 - 335
Difference between lowest group A score and 320	22	19	16	15
What this mean?	A difference of 10 marks in the overall test score is about equivalent to a 1-2 mark difference in each of the English, Mathematics and Non-verbal Reasoning test before age-weighting is applied.			

9) So why 320?

As you can see from the table above, 320 offers a very slight rebalancing of the advantage we think children who are not disadvantaged often have over those that are. We are proud to be a selective school on the basis of ability and we see that a score of 320 is a good indicator of a high ability child. At the same time, we are fully confident that this proposal will not significantly affect the overall range of ability or the positive learning and achievement culture that we will retain at The Blue Coat School.

Questions about current arrangements

10) What proportion of children currently at the school are eligible for free school meals?

Currently, about 7% of children at The Blue Coat School are eligible for free school meals. Across Liverpool Local Authority, about 40% of secondary school children are eligible for free school meals and about 10% of high ability secondary school children are eligible for free school meals. Children who are eligible for free school meals are currently under-represented at The Blue Coat School compared with the local area.

11) The school has increased its pupil admission number to 180 before consulting so why is this consultation taking place?

This consultation is not about an increase in The Blue Coat School's admission number. From 2019, Liverpool Local Authority projects a significant increase in the number of children needing a secondary school place across the city. The Blue Coat School has increased its admission number to 180 from September 2017 onwards in readiness for this increase. We are using this opportunity to consider how we might strengthen our commitment to better social mobility in the local area. It is this aspect that is the focus of our consultation.

12) Over time, how will the school accommodate the extra 150 students (30 per year over 5 years)? Has this been risk assessed?

Though this aspect is not part of our consultation, it is non-the-less helpful to include a transparent response to assist interested parties. In the last 15 months, The Blue Coat School has engaged in a thorough review of how it can use all of its resources to provide the best experience for our students. Our plans to provide the very best curriculum and extra-curricular opportunities for students take account of long term projections about finances, assets, staff and space. In March 2016, we wrote to all of our parents to share the exciting news that The Liverpool Blue Coat School Foundation have generously resolved to hand back the east-wing of the school building for day to day educational purposes from January 2017. Further-more, foundation trustees also approved a huge donation of £1.5 million in support of the necessary redevelopment and renovation to make sure this opportunity gives our students the very best facilities. Following an internal analysis and risk assessment, these arrangements have been submitted and approved by the Department for Education as part of a mandatory significant change request. Through this request, the school was required to explain how this additional space would support the safe education of future projected student numbers. This increase in physical space will not only add more facilities to the school but will also spread the daily footfall of students more evenly across the site. We are extremely excited about these developments and look forward to keeping parents and students updated in the coming months. As we make this transition, we will constantly analyse, evaluate and risk-assess our daily routines so that our practices ensure the highest standards of care, safety and welfare for all students and staff at The Blue Coat School.

Questions about the perceived impact of the proposed arrangements

13) Will the school's student intake change significantly?

As you can see from the response to question 8, The Blue Coat School is proposing arrangements which support social mobility without any significant change to the ability range of students. We are extremely proud of how successful our selection processes are and through these proposals, we seek to gently amend a current imbalance that exists as described in question 3.

14) What new skills will teachers need to support students effectively?

As described in the response to question 13, The Blue Coat School does not anticipate any significant change in the academic ability range of our students if these proposals are approved by governors after this consultation. From current experience, we also know that our day to day culture of mutual support and aspiration has an extremely positive impact on all students including those currently at the school who are eligible for free school meals. We hold this culture extremely dear and fully expect to sustain it because we are able to rely on the observations and skills that we already see in our teachers. However, we are not complacent. Irrespective of the outcome of this consultation, The Blue Coat School recognises that good education is borne out of a detailed knowledge of those we educate and that it is only by responding to the specific needs of those in our care that we can truly ensure they all achieve the best they can. As the world in which we all live changes, so too do the needs of the children we look after. Consequently, we remain attentive to the need for continual staff development that is informed by careful evaluations of what the children in our care need most.