



Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School

Admission Appeals Statement January 2021

Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical school is a selective boys school in Rochester. It became an Academy in 2011.

Section 1: Year 6 to 7 Secondary Transfer Admission

How many pupils does the school admit?

The school has historically had a PAN (admissions number) of 168 for each year group from Year 7 to Year 11. This is chosen by the school and is the maximum number of pupils in each year the school believes it can accommodate given the resources it has. This works out at six forms of entry each containing 28 pupils.

For 2016 entry the school decided to voluntarily admit over this number to 186. We were eventually allocated 197 by an Independent Appeal Panel.

In accordance with the School Admission Code paragraph 1.4 *'If, at any time following determination of the PAN, an admission authority decides that it is able to admit above its PAN, it must notify the local authority in good time to allow the local authority to deliver its co-ordination responsibilities effectively'*.

For 2017 and 2018 entry the school again decided to admit over PAN to 203. For 2019 entry, the PAN was changed to 203, as was the case for 2020 entry.

Why have you admitted a higher number for 2020?

We have done this because, firstly, we recognise that the school has successfully accommodated more than 180 in Year 7 for many years. Secondly, we anticipated that changes locally may cause a higher demand for places than usual. In fact, the number of first preferences for 2020 entry has been the highest ever. We also recognised that, given the decisions of the Appeal Panel in the last few years, we would probably have had to admit another high number so felt it prudent to be pro-active in planning for that likely outcome.

For these reasons, we wished to minimise the number of families that were required to go through the appeal process. By telling Medway Council that we could accept more students in time for National Offer Day on March 1st, we helped 23 families avoid the anxiety and uncertainty of appeals.

However, the school cannot go on expanding if we wish to preserve that which makes us what we are.

203 was chosen because this corresponds to seven teaching classes of 29.

In September 2019 we created a new 7th House form group, called Tower.

Are more students than the PAN ever admitted?

The current year groups at the school (as at January 2021) are as follows:

Year 7 – 216 (admitted September 2020, PAN 203)

Year 8 – 216 (admitted September 2019, one-off PAN 203)

Year 9 – 205 (admitted September 2018, one-off PAN 203)

Year 10 – 216 (admitted September 2017, one-off PAN 203)

Year 11 – 195 (admitted September 2016, one-off PAN 186)

Current sub-total =1048

Year 12 – 206 (admitted September 2015)

Year 13 – 177 (admitted September 2014)

Total on roll: **1431** Net capacity:1392 The Indicated Admission Number (IAN) is 196.

The school started the academic year 2020-21 with **69** more students in the school than we ended 2019-20 with.

The figures here show that the school is over PAN in 5 year groups (different procedures apply to the Sixth Form).

This has arisen because the school has been directed to admit more than the admission number of pupils in those year groups by the admissions appeals process that took place in the relevant years.

Why does the school consider itself to be full at 203 pupils for September 2020?

Classrooms

203 students will be organised into seven House form groups, each of 29. The school will become a seven-form entry school, with six well-established Houses and one new one.

Due to the age and layout of the school, a number of classrooms are too small to accommodate a class of pupils.

From September 2019, following building works, we have 72 classrooms. 2 English rooms cannot hold more than 30. 3 Music Rooms cannot hold more than 28. 5 ICT suits cannot take over 28. Our 'language laboratory' has room only for 29.

Additional pupils over 203 will therefore mean that some classes will be unable to timetabled in these rooms, or if they are, sharing of desk space and equipment will be required. We suggest that this causes prejudice/disadvantage to existing pupils.

For example, a cohort of 210 (7 classes of 30) would mean that, for their music lessons, 4 students per class (28 in total) would have to share composing software equipment, to the detriment of their learning and progress.

Lunchtimes

Following an expansion scheme, in September 2019 the Lunch Hall has seating for around 340 pupils at lunchtime, only 1/3 of our Year 7-11 pupils. Already many children eat their lunch on picnic tables because the dining hall is too crowded. Queues are long and some pupils obtain food with only minutes left to eat it. We have chosen not to operate a staggered lunch hour because it would be disruptive to learning to have some children in class while others were 'playing'.

Additional pupils over 203 would therefore squeeze already limited lunch capacity, to the detriment of existing pupils.

Attendance and in-year leavers

The 'Churn' rate for the school is very low with very few students from years 7-11 leaving once joined, giving a stability rate well above the national average. In addition, the attendance rate is high with an average of 97% attendance in years 7-11.

The effect of this is that any additional pupils over 203 will not be absorbed by absence or moving on.

Break times

The playground space is fully used and occupied during break and lunchtime, with little scope for putting additional youngsters in this limited space.

SEN pupils

Many pupils have a SEN, the majority of whom are physically disabled (PD) or have autistic spectrum disorder (ASD).

Year 7 – 20 pupils

Year 8 – 15 SEN pupils

Year 9 – 17 SEN

Year 10 – 18 SEN (including a wheelchair user)

Year 11 – 19 SEN

More pupils in school create busy corridor areas which impede mobility and affect the visibility of a PD pupil travelling on a scooter or with a frame. Many SEN pupils have LSA support in the classroom.

Additional equipment and an extra adult in the room currently leave little space for further pupils in the class.

Class sizes

Additional pupils that increase class size reduce the attention that can be paid to individuals. We have set our PAN at 203 because we believe that a class of 29 is the optimum size.

A typical piece of Year 7 classwork or homework may take a teacher 6 minutes per pupil to properly assess. A class of 29 books will therefore take 2.9 hours to mark. An extra 4 pupils in the class will add 24 minutes to the marking time. This will either result in the teacher setting and marking work less frequently, or allocating less time per pupil, both to the detriment of existing pupils.

If you can create a seventh teaching set, why not an eighth?

In order to accommodate a larger Year 7 cohort in a sensible, timely and considered manner, we have planned over many months the changes necessary to accommodate 203 pupils in seven House form groups.

We cannot create an eighth teaching class because:

- An eighth class will cost £53,000 directly in staffing, equipment and resources. This is only partly offset by the additional money received for each pupil, which comes a year in arrears in any case. In a time of large reductions in education funding to schools, we do not have this money.
- We will need to find additional teachers in 12 out of 18 subjects, including Mathematics and Science. This is incredibly difficult at this stage, especially as we would only need a few periods of each subject.
- We would need to employ additional pastoral staff to help manage the welfare of this larger year group.

- As the year group is taught Games during the same period during the day, and we have six PE staff, would need to employ another qualified PE teacher to teach the set. As with the other teaching appointments, we wouldn't require full-time staff, which creates additional problems.
- We have seven Houses and our House system is a fundamental part of the culture and ethos of the school. We are seeking to retain this by introducing a 7th House. We cannot divide eight teaching groups into seven Houses, so this would see the death of our House system.
- The lack of playground space and dining space would be more acute.

It is our extremely strong assertion that an eighth class would have a significant effect on the finances, pupil progress, ethos and pastoral care that allows the school to perform as it does. An additional class, on top of what we have planned for, would not allow the school to achieve to the standard that it currently performs at.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. 30 is considered to be the typical class size, so why have you not set your PAN at 210?

Because classes of 30 cannot be properly taught some of our specialist subjects like computing, music and languages.

2. Can't you just buy more computers or musical instruments?

It's not an equipment issue but a space one.

3. Current Year 7 has 217 pupils, so you must be ok with that?

We have seven teaching classes of 31 in Year 7. While they are well accommodated in general classrooms, this is not so for specialist subjects, where capacity constraints exist.

4. Why are all the year groups over PAN?

Appeals Panels each year have decided that, for a number of families, the case for admission outweighs the school's case for being full.

5. Surely adding 1 or 2 more pupils to a cohort of 203 doesn't make much difference to the education provided?

Even if additional pupils can be accommodated physically in classrooms, we hold the view that larger classes get a less good experience than smaller ones. Pupils in larger classes get less teacher time in a lesson, their work is marked more hastily or less frequently, they get less opportunity to contribute in a lesson, and in some subjects they share space or equipment, all to the detriment of the educational experience. We judge the optimum size to be 29. Each additional pupil reduces this optimization.

6. Why do you think this?

Year 9 in 2018/19 provides a good comparison. 194 pupils taught in 6 House groups of 32 or 33. At the end of Term 3, the average grade per pupil per subject was a 4- (4.39). In the previous year, with a cohort of 186 and classes of 31, it was 5. With a broadly similar ability level, the smaller cohort with smaller class sizes did better. A cohort with just 8 more pupils and classes of 1 or 2 more children did less well academically.

Conclusion

It is our contention that the school is full and that admitting pupils in year groups already above their PAN would prejudice the education, safety and well-being of all pupils both now and in the future.

Section 2: In-Year Casual Admissions

There are more students in each year group than the relevant PAN. Therefore, admission to these cohorts is via an appeal panel.

In September 2019, the school became a 7-form entry institution following the introduction of Tower House. This new House was also added to Years 8-13.

In Years 7-9 (Key Stage 3) students are taught in 7 classes.

In Years 10-11 (Key Stage 4) students are registered in 7 classes but taught in a number of GCSE class groups.

The school regards itself as full in each year group 7-11 for the following reasons:

- The problem of classroom sizes mentioned earlier is also relevant here. Where we have teaching classes of 29 or more (mostly in Years 7-9), they cannot be accommodated in specialist rooms (music, ICT, languages) which creates timetabling limitations or the sharing of equipment, to the detriment of existing pupils.
- An extra 4 pupils in a class of 29 will generally add 24 minutes to the marking time for a class of books. This will either result in the teacher setting and marking work less frequently, or allocating less time per pupil, both to the detriment of existing pupils.

- We have set our PAN at 203 because we believe classes of 29 are optimal. See FAQ questions 5 and 6 above.
- Lunch time and leisure space are at a premium. The Hall can only seat 1/3 of our pupils at lunchtime. Additional pupils will exacerbate this problem for existing youngsters.
- A relatively high proportion of students have a SEN, a few in each teaching class. Room for an LSA is required, making classroom size more acute.