Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School

Admission Appeals Statement 2026/27

Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical school is a selective boys school in Rochester.

Section 1: Year 6 to 7 Secondary Transfer Admission

How many pupils does the school admit?

The school has, since 2019, had a PAN (admissions number) of 203 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 seven forms of entry each containing 29 pupils.

203, organised into seven classes of 29, represents the optimum class size based on our facilities and our views on how education is best delivered.

Are more students than the PAN ever admitted?

The current year groups at the school (as at September 2026) are as follows:

Year 7 – 218 (admitted September 2026, PAN 203)

Year 8 – 247 (one-off bulge year, admitted September 2025, PAN 203)

Year 9 – 214 (admitted September 2024, PAN 203)

Year 10 – 214 (admitted September 2023, PAN 203)

Year 11 – 213 (admitted September 2022, PAN 203)

Current sub-total =1106

Year 12 – 238 (admitted September 2021 plus new entrants in September 2026)

Year 13 – 221 (admitted September 2020)

Total on roll: **1565**

The figures here show that the school is over PAN in all 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.

It has therefore become clear that successive appeals panels consider that the school can accommodate 217, or 7 classes of 31.

Why does the school consider itself to be full at 203 pupils for September 2025?

Classrooms

203 students will be organised into seven House form groups, each of 29. The school has become a seven-form entry school, with six well-established Houses and one newer 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. Our 3 Music Rooms are not big enough to facilitate more than 30 students using our composing software, in one room there is only space for 20 composition devices. Our Design Technology rooms are designed to teach a maximum of 16 students (we deliver Design Technology in half class groups for health and safety purposes).

Additional pupils over 203 will therefore mean that some classes will be unable to be 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, when students are timetabled for music lessons up to 10 students per class have to share composing software equipment, to the detriment of their learning and progress.

Lunchtimes

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.

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 96% 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. Year 7 occupies our all-weather pitch at lunchtime.

SEN pupils

Many pupils have a SEN, the majority of whom are physically disabled (PD) or have autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). 7.1% of our school roll are designated as SEN Support (National Average 19.6%) . 0.64% have an EHCP (national average is 5.3%).

Year 7 – 21 SEN - including 2 EHCP

Year 8 – 24 SEN, including 1 EHCP

Year 9 – 12 SEN - 0 EHCP

Year 10 – 16 SEN, including 3 EHCP

Year 11 – 14 SEN, including 1 EHCP

Year 12 – 15 SEN, 2 EHCP

Year 13 – 10 SEN, including 0 EHCP

Total = 112 SEN, including 9 EHCP

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 (for instance) 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.

Why did the school admit a one-off bulge Year 7 group in September 2025?

Our PAN of 203 corresponds to 7 classes of 29. We agreed with Medway Council to accept a one-off bulge Year group of an additional 30 students. These children are accommodated in an eighth teaching class.

We recognise that Appeals panels over the years have decided that the school can teach class sizes of 31 rather than 29, so we eventually accepted an additional 15 students via Appeal to give us a total Year group size of 248 (8 classes of 31).

We agreed with Medway to take a one-off additional class as a result of: the change in the Medway test and the increase in the pass rate; our educational duty to the children of Medway; the timescale (we agreed in November and had adequate planning time); the additional per pupil funding with extra capital support.

Why has the school not done this in previous years?

This was the first time we have been approached, so we assume up to now Medway Council had sufficient boys selective school places. More importantly, the school does not wish to become an eight form entry school because of the lack of capacity and our views on the benefits of the ‘small school’ model, and the dangers of inefficiencies of scale.

How can we accommodate an extra class of 30 pupils?

With nearly 10 months of planning undertaken, we have been able to make appropriate arrangements: most crucially, we have planned for sufficient teaching by employing 3 additional staff; we have been able to identify sufficient available classrooms per lesson to house the class but not always in the departmental area e.g. the eighth Year 7 class will do their Maths lesson in a History room; Year 7 will have a split lunch; at break times Year 7 will use refurbished tennis courts; we have employed additional student services capacity.

What are the drawbacks?

The eighth class will not fit symmetrically into our 7 Houses; the class will be taught in non-specialist rooms, absent of subject specific displays and resources to help learning; many teaching staff will not be able to occupy their rooms during their non-teaching periods, with workload and welfare consequences; a split lunch will be logistically challenging; crowded corridors and doorway bottlenecks will become more frequent.

Why can we not admit classes of 32?

While we are accustomed to classes of 31, we are vehemently opposed to class sizes above this. Apart from the inadequate size of some of our rooms, we think teaching classes of 32+ is educationally very damaging. Additional students put downward pressure on marking frequency and questioning effectiveness, two critical ways of ensuring learning and progress.

We have experience of this. Year 9 in 2018/19 provides a good comparison. 194 pupils were 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.

If you can create an eighth teaching set in Year 7, why not a ninth?

We cannot create a ninth teaching class because:

- A ninth class will cost nearly £70,000 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, we 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 cannot divide nine 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 a ninth 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 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 by some of our specialist subjects like computing and music.

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 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 optimisation.

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, 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.

Section 3: Sixth Form Admissions Appeals

In order to gain entry to the Sixth Form the minimum academic requirements are:

5 GCSE grades of at least grade 5, including English Language and Mathematics, grade 6 in the subject to be studied at A level (other specific course requirements exist) and an average point score of 5.5. To study 4 A Levels an average point score of 8 is required.

The Planned Admission Number for Year 12 is 217.

Priority will be given to existing students transferring from Year 11.

Following the admission of internal students who have transferred from Year 11, all remaining places will be allocated to students who have met the entry requirements for the sixth form and for their particular courses of study.

The number of additional places available for students being admitted to the school for the first time is 30. This may be exceeded if the number of internal applicants and Year 13 numbers allow.

Where there are more learners seeking places than the number of places available, the over-subscription criteria will be applied in the order set out below to rank pupils until the overall figure for the year group is reached.

Children whose statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) or Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan names the school will be admitted.

- Looked after children (children in public care) and previously looked after children and children previously in Care outside of England – Children who appear to Medway Council to have been in state care outside of England and ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted. A child is regarded as having been in state care in a place outside of England if they were accommodated by a public authority, a religious organisation or any other provider of care whose sole purpose is to benefit society.
- Children who at the time of application have a brother or sister (including children living as siblings in the same family unit) on the roll of the school at the time of the sibling's admission.
- Children who at the time of application have a parent who is a member of staff at the school (where the member of staff has been employed for three years or more at the time at which the application for admission is made and/or where the member of staff is recruited to fill a vacant post for which there is a demonstrable skill shortage).
- Nearness of children's homes.

Why do we have academic admission criteria?

The School Admission Code para 6.2 allows schools/admission authorities to set academic admission criteria for sixth forms, which we have done. These criteria help ensure students enrol on the most appropriate courses, and have a realistic chance of completing them. These criteria are well known and widely publicised.

Why does the school consider itself to be full in Year 12 at 217 students?

Our nominal PAN for Year 12 is 217 but we have voluntarily exceeded this. The oversubscription criteria was applied to determine which students could be admitted.

We are unable to admit additional students to Year 12 due to fullness in A level courses of study.