



**BEDFORD**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL



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# 5 Year Plan for Mainstream School Places

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2026 - 2030

*Children's Services*

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## Executive Summary

This plan for school places has been produced by Bedford Borough Council (referred to as BBC) to inform schools and the community, academy trusts and Diocesan boards, the Department for Education, housing developers and other stakeholders, as well as elected members of the Council, about the expected demand for school and early years places including those required by children with special educational needs and disabilities. It identifies areas where new places may be required, or where there may be surplus places, providing a context for proposals which may be brought forward, whether by the Council or Multi Academy Trusts (MATs), for changes to school organisation in Bedford.

BBC has a **statutory duty to ensure sufficient school places** for children aged between 4 and 16 years old under Section 14 of the Education Act 1996<sup>1</sup> and Section 68 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006<sup>2</sup>. It is responsible for all children and young people in the Borough in mainstream education and those aged 0-25 years old who have special educational needs and disabilities<sup>3</sup>. It also coordinates the planning and delivery of early years places<sup>4</sup>. BBC has a duty under Section 10 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 to promote effective participation in education and training of 16- and 17-year-olds in their area<sup>5</sup>, thus, post-16 and sixth form provision are also considered when deciding solutions to ensure **efficient and sustainable choices** are made for capital investment. This plan sets out key data in relation to all these areas and looks ahead to expected future demand.

The Office for National Statistics estimated population of Bedford in 2024 was 194,976 usual residents, a rise of 1.8% since 2023. This meant that Bedford's rate of population change placed it among the **20 percent fastest growing local authority districts** in England and Wales. In the period from mid-2021 to mid-2024, the population estimate of Bedford increased by 4.9%<sup>6</sup>. Bedford Borough is growing due to both new housing and migration into the area, and so a clear plan is required to deliver mainstream education infrastructure to support this growth.

Compared with England and Wales as a whole, Bedford has a slightly higher proportion of people aged 0 to 15 years (20.3% compared with 18.3% for England and Wales)<sup>7</sup>. Incoming families are often young, so the plan also makes reference to areas where additional early years provision may be required, although this should be viewed alongside the early years sufficiency strategy.

In addition, the proportion of children in Bedford Borough with special educational needs and disabilities is growing year on year, in common with other local authority areas<sup>8</sup>, so we need to ensure we have the capacity to meet their needs whether in mainstream or special schools.

1. Education Act 1996, c. 56, s. 14. [Legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

2. Education and Inspections Act 2006, s. 68. [Legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

3. Children and Families Act 2014, c. 6, s. 42. [Legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

4. Childcare Act 2006, s.6 and 7. [Legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

5. Education and Skills Act 2008, c. 21, s. 10. [Legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

6. Office for National Statistics (2025, July 30) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2024. Office for National Statistics. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesforenglandandwales/mid2024#comparing-admin-based-and-mid-year-population-estimates>.

7. Office for National Statistics (2025, July 30) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2024. Office for National Statistics. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesforenglandandwales/mid2024#comparing-admin-based-and-mid-year-population-estimates>.

8. Department for Education (2025, June 12) Special educational needs in England. GOV.UK. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2024-25>.

The purpose of this plan is to set out:

- **The demand for early years, mainstream and special school places in the next 5 years.**
- **Solutions in the pipeline that will meet the forecast demand for school places.**
- **Options to address medium to long term forecast demand for school places.**

This plan will be updated annually to factor in new forecasts, the capital budget setting cycle, and potential options and solutions that have been identified since the previous version.

This plan is based on forecasts and data produced during the 2024/25 academic year as part of the DfE's annual School Capacity Data (SCAP) return.

In summer term 2025 there were 28,767 children and young people from Reception to Year 11 – the statutory school age range – made up of 16,432 in the primary age range and 12,335 in the secondary age range in Bedford. There was a total of 2270 children and young people with an education health and care plan (EHCP) for a range of different special educational needs and disabilities (accurate as of 21st July 2025).

The forecasts in this plan suggest that the total number on roll by the 2030/31 academic year will be 16,244 primary age pupils and 12,794 secondary age pupils which is a decrease of 188 primary age pupils and an increase of 459 secondary age pupils compared to the academic year 2024/25.

While the overall capacity of the schools in the Borough may exceed the forecast number on roll, not all the capacity is in the right place, and some additional capacity is still required to ensure there is appropriate local school provision within a reasonable distance of pupils' home addresses.

An additional 660 permanent primary school places (Willow Grove Primary School, Wixams) and an additional 712 secondary school places (Wixams Academy, Bedford Academy and Lincroft Academy) are being added to the school system over the plan period. This plan suggests further actions which may be taken to address a surplus or deficit of school places over the next 5 years.



## Statutory Duty and Available Funding

### Statutory Duty and Available Funding

BBC has statutory obligations to promote parental choice, diversity, high standards, the fulfilment of every child's educational potential and fair access to educational opportunity.

To ensure sufficient school places for children aged between 4 and 16 years old, school organisation changes are commissioned in response to forecast data that predicts the demand for school places. These school organisation changes include building new schools, expanding existing schools, closing schools, or reducing the intake at schools.

For the purposes of planning school places, BBC organises schools by planning areas, or planning groups, which comprise primary and secondary schools. The Wootton planning area is the exception to this, comprising upper, middle and lower schools. This planning area will also be organised as a two-tier education system by September 2027.

Planning groups are groups of schools, defined by geography and admission patterns, wherein a sufficiency of places across the group will generally ensure every child can access a local school place, even if some schools are oversubscribed. Planning groups provide the basis for the annual School Capacity Data (SCAP) return, which is sent to the Department for Education (DfE) each summer, and which determines the level of 'Basic Need' funding BBC is allocated from central government to pay for additional school places. Basic Need funding is the main source of funding for the capital programme.

BBC uses a mixture of funding sources to finance additional school places, all of which need to be coordinated through the Council's Capital Programme. Funding sources available include

- Basic Need grant from central government based on forecast numbers.
- Section 106 or Community Infrastructure Levy contributions from housing developers.
- Capital receipts from the sale of education assets which are no longer required.
- Free School funding from the Department for Education.
- Individual contributions from schools and multi academy trusts.

New school places need to be funded through these means as BBC has no other grants or funds dedicated to providing school places. A plan for ensuring sufficient school places is required to enable capital (and revenue) financing to be secured and spent effectively. Bedford Borough Council is responsible for ensuring there are enough school places in the Borough to meet the needs of its children. It can do this by investing in maintained schools or academies.

The Council is also responsible for ensuring maintained schools are in a good state of repair (condition) and are suitable for the use to which they are put (suitability). The Council is not responsible for the condition and suitability of academies: this rests with their Academy Trusts as a core part of the Trusts obligations under their funding agreements with the Department for Education.

Bedford Borough Council has an in-house team which manages the delivery of capital projects as identified in this plan. BBC also commissions project management resources to ensure that school building projects are delivered to a high standard and at good value, ensuring the best outcome from the investment of public funds.

There are several different types of school, each of which has its own powers and responsibilities in respect of admissions and its building:

**Maintained schools** are the direct responsibility of the local authority, which owns their site and buildings and is their admissions authority. These include **community schools and voluntary controlled schools**.

**Voluntary aided schools** are their own admissions authorities, and they are generally responsible for their own buildings. **Foundation schools** have similar powers.

**Academies and free schools** are funded through a funding agreement with the Secretary of State for Education. They set their own admissions policies and have considerable freedom within the terms of their funding agreement. Sometimes they own their site and buildings outright, but more often they are on a 125-year lease from the Council.

Bedford Borough Council is the coordinating admissions authority for all state-funded schools in Bedford. This means it receives and processes admission applications, applying the admissions policy of each school.

If new places are required in an area, Bedford Borough Council can invest in either maintained schools or academies to expand those schools.



## Forecasting Methodology

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To ensure there will be an appropriate number of school places in the future, Bedford Borough Council produces annual forecasts at planning group level. Reception year forecasts are calculated using birth data, which is obtained from the NHS Trust; historical trends in admissions; number on roll information from the annual School Census; and the number of places offered each September. A probability matrix is used to create the forecasts at individual school and planning group level. The same method is used to forecast pupil numbers at middle, secondary and upper schools but using actual pupil numbers rather than birth data.

The number of additional pupils likely to need school places due to new housing is then incorporated into the forecasts; though it must be recognised that market conditions, and thereby delivery rates, can change. Despite the potential for forecasts to be skewed by changeable housing data, it is important that the plan anticipates the potential increase in households in an area so BBC can meet its statutory duty to facilitate sufficient school places. The impacts of Brexit, COVID-19 and prevailing economic conditions continue to affect housing delivery and therefore pupil numbers.

The likely demand for additional places at local schools created by new housing is calculated using information from the Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire planning teams. The planning teams provide “housing trajectories” which the education teams then use to give an estimate of the numbers of additional school age children who will need a school place as a result of the housing. Pupil number forecasts are amended to incorporate these figures and the effect of housing taking place over a number of years is modelled by cumulatively increasing the size of pupil cohorts as they move through schools.

If these forecasts indicate insufficient places being available, BBC works with schools in the planning group to decide how and where to add more capacity. If falling rolls are forecasted, the Council can make proposals for removing surplus places to ensure schools remain viable.

Falling rolls are becoming more noticeable in the primary phase within some planning areas and are predominantly due to falling birth rates. This is mitigated by significant housing growth within development areas of Bedford Borough. Some schools in rural areas, where there is no or limited new residential development, may find their pupil numbers will fall.

## Factors that influence Planning for School Places

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A multitude of factors influence strategic thinking and solutions outlined in this plan. These are kept under regular review and include:

- Fluctuation in forecast pupil numbers.
- Phasing and timing of housing developments and the availability of sites for new school provision (services, access, infrastructure).
- Changing patterns of growth including in-year migration.
- Parents choosing schools outside of Bedford Borough and parents outside of Bedford Borough choosing Bedford schools.
- Changes to schools’ admissions arrangements.
- Schools adjusting their Published Admission Numbers or capacities.
- Project viability.
- Home-to-school transport.

The phasing and timelines for potential new housing developments are closely monitored. The school place planning officers regularly meet with Bedford Borough Council planning officers to consider the impact of proposed new developments. Plans are progressed with developers to ensure that new school provision can be provided at the earliest viable opportunity where there is insufficient capacity within existing schools to accommodate pupils from the initial phases of housing development.

When new schools are needed, their delivery is dependent on confirmation of the housing build rate by the developer, planning permissions and the time scale for completion of necessary infrastructure to serve the new school, including services and access. The quality of the environment around the school site is essential, as a new school cannot open in the middle of a building site with no safe walking and cycling routes.

The demand for school places will vary depending on the number of school-age children living in the new homes. Larger homes such as family-sized dwellings typically accommodate more school-age children than smaller homes, such as flats. Additionally, evidence shows that new housing tends to attract more young families and therefore increases the demand for school places.

The school place planning team liaises with its counterparts in all the neighbouring areas, particularly Central Bedfordshire Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, Milton Keynes City Council and North and West Northamptonshire Councils. Parents have a right to seek a place in a school in another local authority area and they will be offered one if they meet the admissions criteria. This works in both directions; Bedford children sometimes attend schools outside the Borough, and children from outside sometimes attend Bedford schools.

The home-to-school transport budget comprises of a minimal grant contribution from the Department for Education (the extended rights to home to school transport grant for families on a low income) and significant contributions from the Council's general fund. This budget is under constant pressure. When considering the strategic need for additional school places in an area, the transport implications are key to determining the locations of solutions, and thereby the cost / benefit of those solutions. Where solutions do not address need locally and transport must be provided, BBC is obliged to meet the cost of the transport in perpetuity.

Other policies and priorities also impact the decisions on how, when and where to provide or remove school places. A major consideration is the quality of education at the schools under consideration for expansion and the potential impact that expansion could have on schools' operations. Others include active travel, carbon reduction and net-zero, sustainable growth and infrastructure.

## Areas of Growth and Additional Places Planned

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In Bedford Borough in September 2025 there were 54 primary schools, 12 secondary schools, 1 lower school, 1 middle school and 1 upper school. The total capacity, as submitted for SCAP 2025, was 18,650 primary places (YR to Y6) and 12,379 secondary places (Y7 to Y11). In summer 2025 there were 16,432 primary pupils and 12,335 secondary pupils on roll at Bedford Borough schools.

The forecasts in this plan suggest that the total number on roll by 2030/31 academic year will be 16,244 primary pupils (a decrease of 188) and 12,794 secondary pupils (an increase of 459).

In common with most of the country, the number of births has fallen in the Borough over the last few years. The decline in birth rates is lower than the national average but it has resulted in smaller reception year intakes than previously. Any increase at primary level is caused by in-year migration and additional pupils moving into new housing. Some primary schools may experience falling rolls as the number of children in their locality decreases.

The increase at secondary level is caused by the anticipated new housing and by larger year groups transferring from primary schools. In time, the number of primary to secondary transfers will decline. For now, the challenge in the secondary phase is to respond to rising numbers.

We have continued to see a rise in the number of in-year admissions due to families moving into Bedford Borough from other areas of the UK and abroad. Bedford Borough is currently able to accommodate this growth in primary provision, however the increase of secondary in-year applications is causing significant pressure across most year groups.

We are further concerned about the implications relating to VAT and independent schools, having already experienced a number of enquiries for in-year moves. In the school census (state-funded schools) and School-level Annual School Census (independent schools) of January 2025, Bedford Borough schools registered a total of 36,334 pupils with 4,396 pupils (12.1%) being recorded as attending independent schools; this is almost twice the national average of 6.4%<sup>9</sup>. Whilst not all of these pupils will be Bedford Borough residents, the Institute of Fiscal Studies predicts between 3 – 7% of pupils leaving independent schools due to fee increases<sup>10</sup>. This range could be between 132 – 308 additional children in our school system. We must also account for those children who would have previously left the state system to join the independent sector; again, this could be as high as an additional 300 children. Whilst we could accommodate additional numbers in primary schools, we would simply not have capacity within our secondary schools without additional capital works taking place to increase capacity.

The actual need for places is greater than the BBC-wide figures above suggest, as the **available capacity is not all in the right areas or year groups**. The National Audit Office report 'Capital Funding for New School Places' (2013) refers to a **minimum 5% surplus** that the Department for Education (DfE) assumes in its planning as necessary to support operational flexibility and enable the exercise of parental preference.

9. Department for Education (2025, June 5; updated September 25), *Schools, pupils and their characteristics*. GOV.UK. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2024-25>.

10. Sibieta, Luke (2023, July 11) *Tax, private school fees and state school spending*. <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/tax-private-school-fees-and-state-school-spending>.

For school management reasons, the number of pupils that can be admitted each September varies, and overall capacity cannot simply be divided by the number of year groups to calculate the number of pupils that can be admitted each year. When planning school places, it is prudent to focus on the Published Admission Number of schools in each area and the number of pupils in each corresponding admission year.

When comparing the anticipated number of children requiring school places with the schools' existing capacities it is likely that the following planning area will need additional places:

- West secondary.
- South primary and secondary.
- East secondary.

Although the plan looks ahead five years, it is renewed annually to reflect new data such as updated numbers on roll, school organisation changes including new schools, expansions, amalgamations, changes in age range, etc., as well as the impact of proposed new housing developments.



## Forecasts and Plans

The forecast tables in this section show for each future academic year whether there is predicted to be a deficit or surplus of places in each of the planning groups, at primary and secondary level. This is shown in two complementary ways.

For each group the places available for Reception or Year 7 are shown, as well as the total capacity across all year groups based on the school PAN, as they will be from the 2026/27 academic year.

The forecast and predicted deficit/surplus is shown for the normal point of entry to the school, which is Reception at primary level and Year 7 at secondary, as well as for the total capacity.

These forecasts take into account projects planned to increase capacity, which are described in the commentary for each group. Predicted deficits in an academic year are highlighted in red.

For the Wootton planning group, the figures are shown as if two-tier, while the schools currently operate a three-tier system of lower, middle and upper schools. Reorganisation of this planning group from a three-tier to a two-tier system in line with the other schools across Bedford is planned to commence in phases from September 2025.

### Primary

#### Total across Bedford Borough

##### Reception (YR) places available:

Bedford Borough	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast YR	2053	2072	2068	2083	2094
Capacity	2705	2705	2705	2705	2705
Surplus/deficit of places	652	633	637	622	611
Surplus/deficit % of places	24.1%	23.4%	23.6%	23.0%	22.6%

*This number of reception (YR) places is based on the sum of PANs for all schools in the borough.*

*The total forecast is the sum of the base forecast and new housing pupil yield. To allow some flexibility of parental preference, it is recommended to aim for a surplus of 5%.*

##### Total capacity:

Bedford Borough	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast YR - Y6	16371	16276	16232	16255	16282
Capacity	18675	18635	18715	18740	18825
Surplus/deficit of places	2304	2359	2483	2485	2543
Surplus/deficit % of places	12.3%	12.7%	13.3%	13.3%	13.5%

*The total capacity is the number of places available based on the sum of PANs for all schools in the borough multiplied by the number of year groups. In primary, this is reception to Y6.*

## Commentary

- Overall, the birth rate is declining in Bedford Borough with a 7% decrease in the rate of live births over the past 10 years. Nationally the decrease in live births over the same period is 14%.
- In Bedford there is significant new housing planned, offsetting lower birth rates with inward migration as new developments are occupied.
- The Office for National Statistics project that the primary age population of Bedford will gradually decrease over the coming years, which is reflected in the total primary school pupil forecasts<sup>11</sup>.
- Some primary schools are already looking ahead as to how best to utilise surplus capacity (primarily in Reception) and are opting to open or expand early years provision to meet the increased demand for childcare places due to the expanded entitlements of working parents.
- Importantly, although the forecasts indicate sufficiency of primary school places within the borough over the next 5 years, it must be noted that not all of the available places are in suitable locations to meet the demand of the local population. For example, surplus capacity may exist, however, this may be at a school which exceeds the statutory walking distance from a child's home address or in a location without safe walking and cycle routes.

## South Bedford

- Cauldwell Primary School (PAN 60)
- Cotton End Primary School (PAN 60)
- Elstow Primary School (PAN 60)
- King's Oak Primary School (PAN 120)
- Shackleton Primary School (PAN 60)
- Shortstow Primary School (PAN 60)



*N.B. Each school is at the centre of a 2-mile radius circle indicating the likely area served. It does not indicate the catchment of the school.*

11. Office for National Statistics (2022) Population projections for local authorities by single year of age and sex, England. Office for National Statistics. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/localauthoritiesinenglandz1>.

**Reception (YR) places available: 420**

South Bedford	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast YR	391	378	374	386	375
Capacity	420	420	420	420	420
Surplus/deficit of places	29	42	46	34	45
Surplus/deficit % of places	7%	10%	11%	8%	11%

*This number of reception (YR) places is based on the sum of PANs for all schools in the planning area. The total forecast is the sum of the base forecast and new housing pupil yield. To allow some flexibility of parental preference, it is recommended to aim for a surplus of 5%.*

**Total capacity: 2940**

South Bedford	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast YR - Y6	2849	2856	2900	2983	2981
Capacity	2970	2940	2940	2940	2940
Surplus/deficit of places	121	84	40	-43	-41
Surplus/deficit % of places	4%	3%	1%	-1%	-1%

*The total capacity is the number of places available based on the schools' PAN multiplied by the number of year groups. In primary, this is reception to Year 6.*

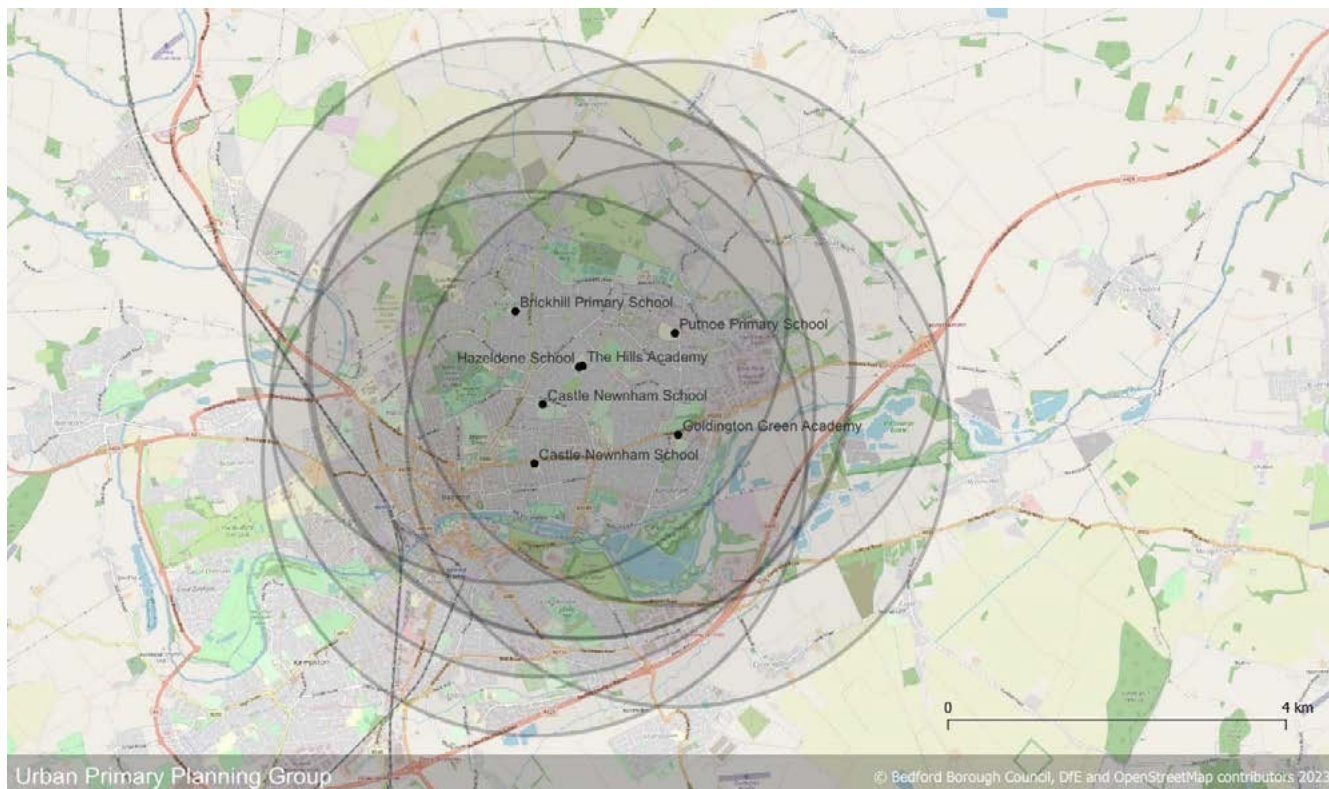
**Commentary**

- Shackleton Primary School accepted an additional 30 pupils in two consecutive years, who will have left the school in July 2027, accounting for the capacity values being higher in 2026/27 than in average years.
- Challenges to sufficient school capacity in the primary phase in South Bedford are likely to start in 2029/30 and become more pronounced thereafter.
- Cotton End Forest School has the capacity to accommodate a PAN of 90 pupils and so will be able to accept additional students to reduce this shortfall, however, this will be dependent upon schools being within statutory walking distances from pupils' homes and the numbers of pupils in each year group.

### Urban Bedford

- Brickhill Primary School (PAN 30)
- Castle Newnham Primary School (PAN 90)\*
- Goldington Green Primary School (PAN 90)
- Hazeldene Primary School (PAN 60)
- Putnoe Primary School (PAN 90)
- The Hills Primary School (PAN 60)

\* Castle Newnham is one primary school with one admission number. It operates from two campuses; YR to Y4 are based on the south site on Goldington Road and Y5 to Y6 on the north site on Polhill Avenue.



N.B. Each school is at the centre of a 2-mile radius circle indicating the likely area served. It does not indicate the catchment of the school.

#### Reception places available: 420

Urban Bedford	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast YR	324	289	325	312	312
Capacity	420	420	420	420	420
Surplus/deficit of places	96	131	95	108	108
Surplus/deficit % of places	23%	31%	23%	26%	26%

#### Total capacity: 2880

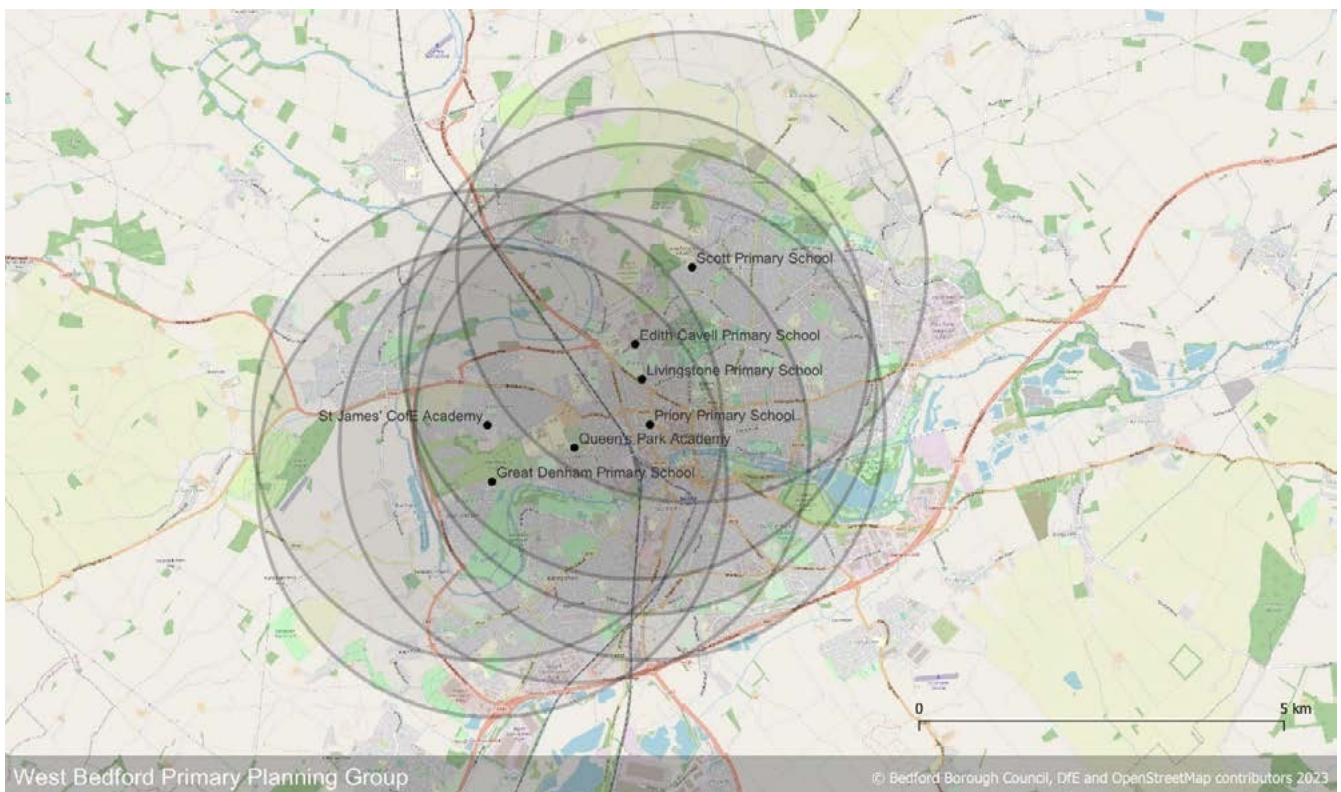
Urban Bedford	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast YR - Y6	2541	2432	2385	2308	2257
Capacity	2880	2880	2880	2880	2910
Surplus/deficit of places	339	448	495	572	653
Surplus/deficit % of places	12%	16%	17%	20%	22%

## Commentary

- Some schools in this planning group are operating below their capacity. This reduces surplus spaces in the system and allows the schools to operate more efficiently.
- Goldington Green Academy, for example, capped numbers of pupils in two year groups to 60 places, thereby reducing surplus places in the system and accounting for the difference in capacities between 2026/27 and 2030/31.
- A meeting of the schools within this planning area would be helpful to review PANs and whether any school may wish to reduce their PAN.
- Developments in and around the town centre are likely to generate pupils via inward migration which may fill some of this surplus capacity across all year groups.

## West Bedford

- Edith Cavell Primary School (PAN 45)
- Great Denham Primary School (PAN 90)
- Livingstone Primary School (PAN 60)
- Priory Primary School (PAN 26)
- Queens Park Academy (PAN 60)
- Scott Primary School (PAN 60)
- St James' CE Primary School (PAN 30)
- Westfield Primary School (PAN 60)



*N.B. Each school is at the centre of a 2-mile radius circle indicating the likely area served. It does not indicate the catchment of the school.*

**Reception places available: 431**

West Bedford	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast YR	383	380	405	393	394
Capacity	431	431	431	431	431
Surplus/deficit of places	48	51	26	38	37
Surplus/deficit % of places	11%	12%	6%	9%	9%

**Total capacity: 3017**

West Bedford	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast YR - Y6	2814	2801	2847	2855	2852
Capacity	2927	2957	2987	2987	3017
Surplus/deficit of places	113	156	140	132	165
Surplus/deficit % of places	4%	5%	5%	4%	5%

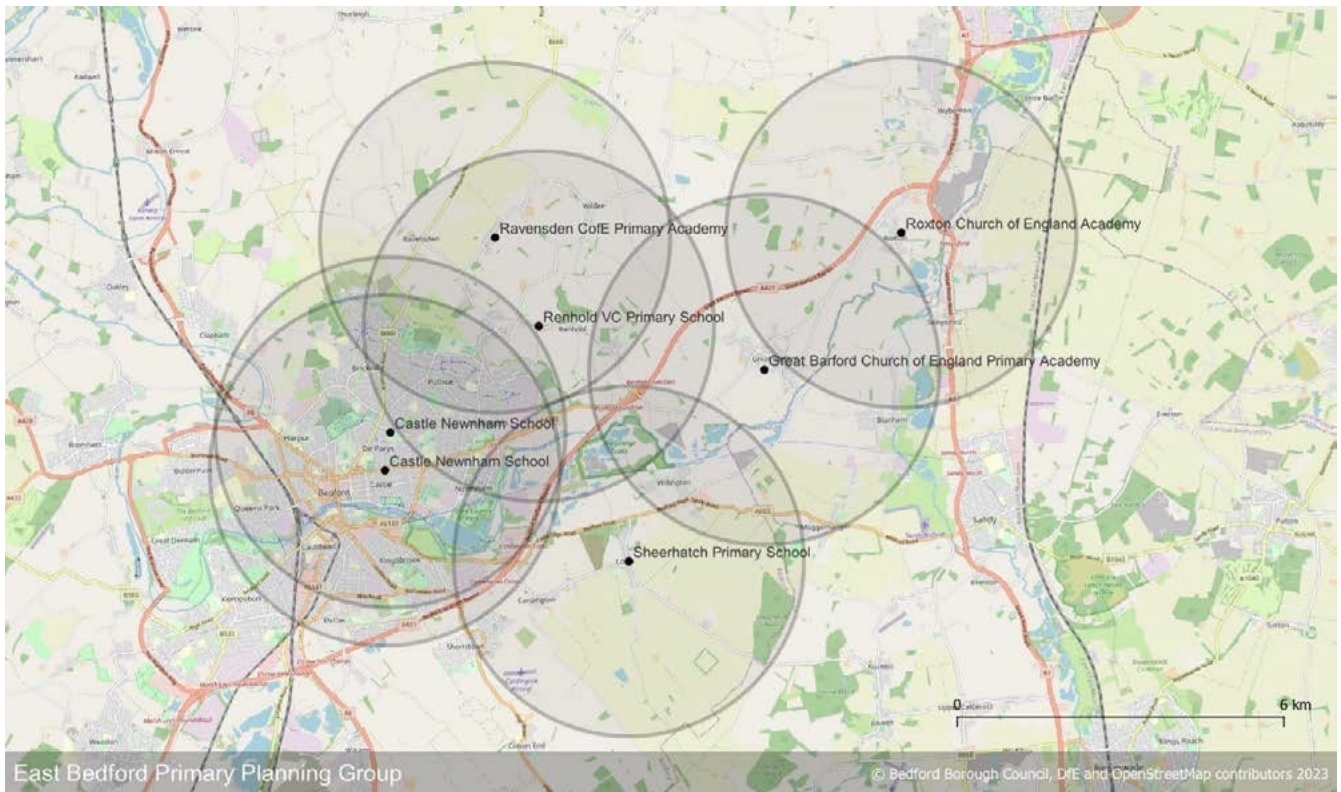
**Commentary**

- Some schools in this planning area are operating slightly below their capacity which reduces surplus places in the system and allows the schools to operate more efficiently.
- Westfield Primary School, for example, have capped numbers of pupils in several year groups, thereby reducing surplus places in the system and accounting for the difference in capacities over the plan period.
- The West Bedford planning area is operating at or below the minimum 5% surplus capacity recommended by the DfE.
- Multiple residential developments in Biddenham, building out circa. 900 homes by 2032/33, will utilise any surplus places in West Bedford primary schools.

**East Bedford**

- Great Barford CE Primary Academy (PAN 30)
- Ravensden CE Primary School (PAN 15)
- Renhold VC Primary School (PAN 30)
- Roxton VA CE Academy (PAN 15)
- Sheerhatch Primary School (Cople campus)\* (PAN 30)
- Sheerhatch Primary School (Willington campus)\*
- Wilden CE VA Primary School (PAN 12)

\* Sheerhatch is one primary school with one admission number. It operates from two campuses; juniors are based on the Cople campus and infants on the Willington campus.



*N.B. Each school is at the centre of a 2-mile radius circle indicating the likely area served. It does not indicate the catchment of the school.*

**Reception places available: 132**

East Bedford	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast YR	66	74	73	77	89
Capacity	132	132	132	132	132
Surplus/deficit of places	66	58	59	55	43
Surplus/deficit % of places	50%	44%	45%	42%	33%

**Total capacity: 924**

East Bedford	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast YR - Y6	640	631	619	625	702
Capacity	924	924	924	924	924
Surplus/deficit of places	284	293	305	299	222
Surplus/deficit % of places	31%	32%	33%	32%	24%

**Commentary**

- Some schools in this planning area are operating below their capacity.
- Residential developments will fill some of the surplus capacity in time.



North Bedford	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast YR - Y6	2616	2600	2569	2619	2605
Capacity	3360	3360	3360	3360	3360
Surplus/deficit of places	744	760	791	741	755
Surplus/deficit % of places	22%	23%	24%	22%	22%

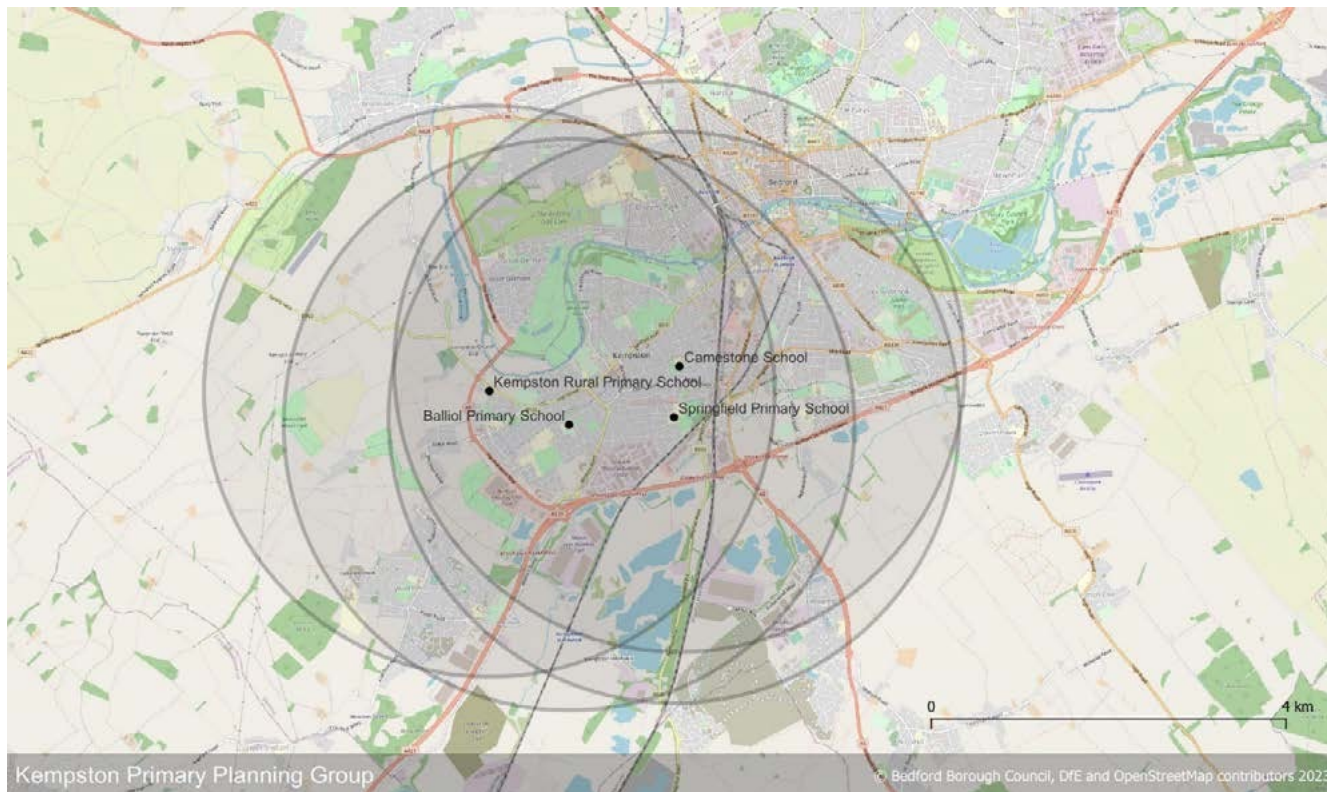
### Commentary

- The northern part of the North Bedford planning area is very rural and many of the schools in this area are small. Towards the south of the area the schools are generally larger.
- A large housing development of circa 500 homes near Clapham will add to demand for places in the area.
- A large housing development of circa 500 homes near Sharnbrook will add to demand for places in the area. Previous plans to increase capacity to accommodate the growth from this new development are under review; this additional capacity should only be created when there is a clear and real demand for school places so as to avoid negatively impacting other local schools.
- Several housing developments in and around Bromham will add to demand for places in the area. There has been an increase in speculative planning applications for this locality. This will be monitored closely to determine whether additional capacity may be required.
- There is lots of surplus capacity within the North Bedford schools, however, not all of this is in the areas where it is needed. Many of the smaller schools serve rural communities and primary schools with surplus capacity are further away from pupils' homes than the maximum statutory walking distance permitted.



## Kempston

- Balliol Primary School (PAN 52)
- Bedford Road Primary Academy (PAN 60)
- Camestone Primary School (PAN 60)
- Kempston Rural Primary School (PAN 60)
- Springfield Primary School (PAN 60)



*N.B. Each school is at the centre of a 2-mile radius circle indicating the likely area served. It does not indicate the catchment of the school.*

### Reception places available: 292

Kempston	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast YR	208	242	236	235	238
Capacity	292	292	292	292	292
Surplus/deficit of places	84	50	56	57	54
Surplus/deficit % of places	29%	17%	19%	20%	18%

### Total capacity: 2044

Kempston	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast YR - Y6	1824	1790	1750	1725	1694
Capacity	2014	2014	2014	2014	2014
Surplus/deficit of places	190	224	264	289	320
Surplus/deficit % of places	9%	11%	13%	14%	16%

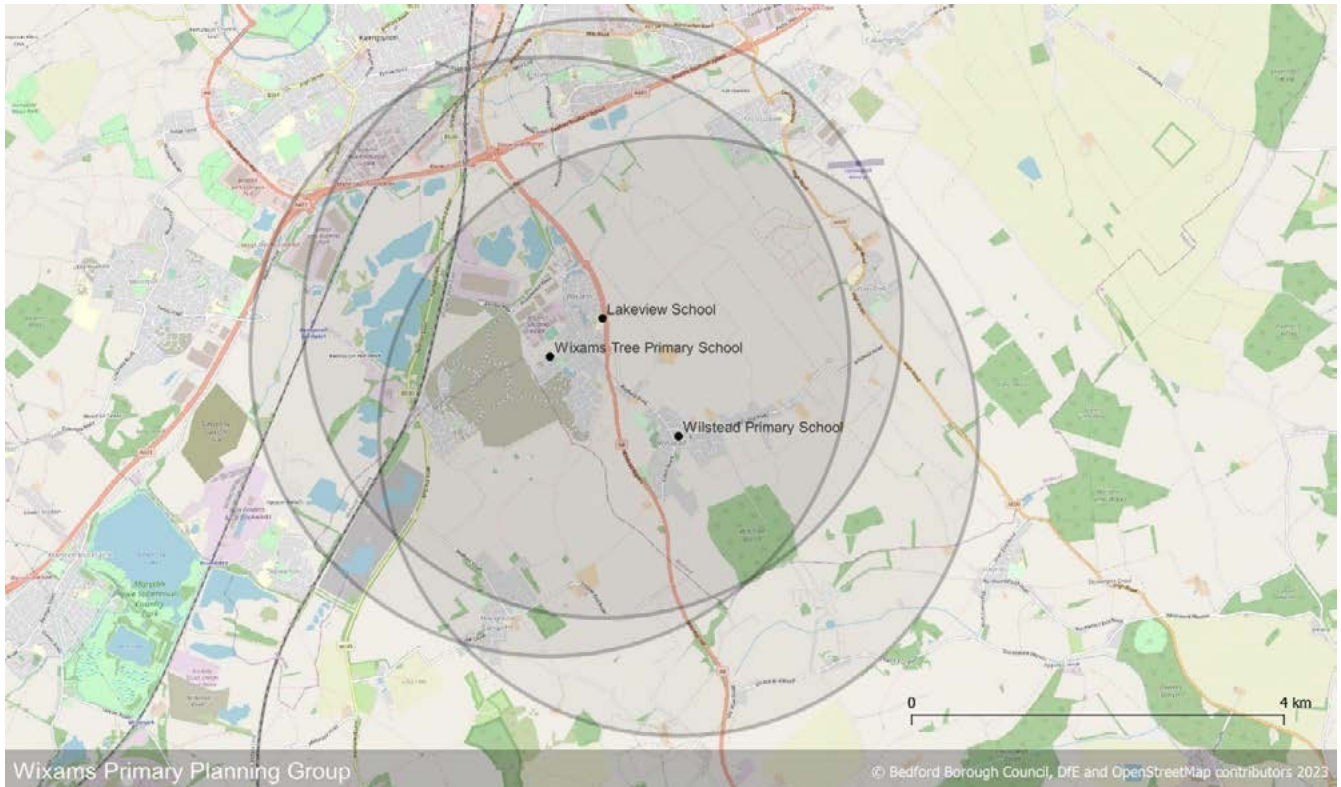
### Commentary

- Some schools in this planning group are operating below their capacity. This reduces surplus spaces in the system and allows the schools to operate more efficiently.
- Springfield Primary School, for example, capped the number of Y1 pupils to 30 places.

## Wixams

- Lakeview School (PAN 60)
- Wilstead Primary School (PAN 30)
- Willow Grove Primary School (PAN 25)\*
- Wixams Tree Primary School (PAN 90)

\* The new Willow Grove Primary free school serving Wixams opened in September 2024. Its admissions number will be 25 initially, increasing to 120 as Wixams is built out over coming years.



N.B. Each school is at the centre of a 2-mile radius circle indicating the likely area served. It does not indicate the catchment of the school.

### Reception places available: 230

Wixams	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast YR	167	165	167	164	172
Capacity	230	230	230	230	230
Surplus/deficit of places	63	65	63	66	58
Surplus/deficit % of places	28%	28%	28%	29%	25%

### Total capacity: 1410 rising to 1560

Wixams	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32
Forecast YR - Y6	1450	1561	1631	1657	1700	1718
Capacity	1470	1590	1650	1680	1710	1740
Surplus/deficit of places	20	29	19	23	10	22
Surplus/deficit % of places	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%

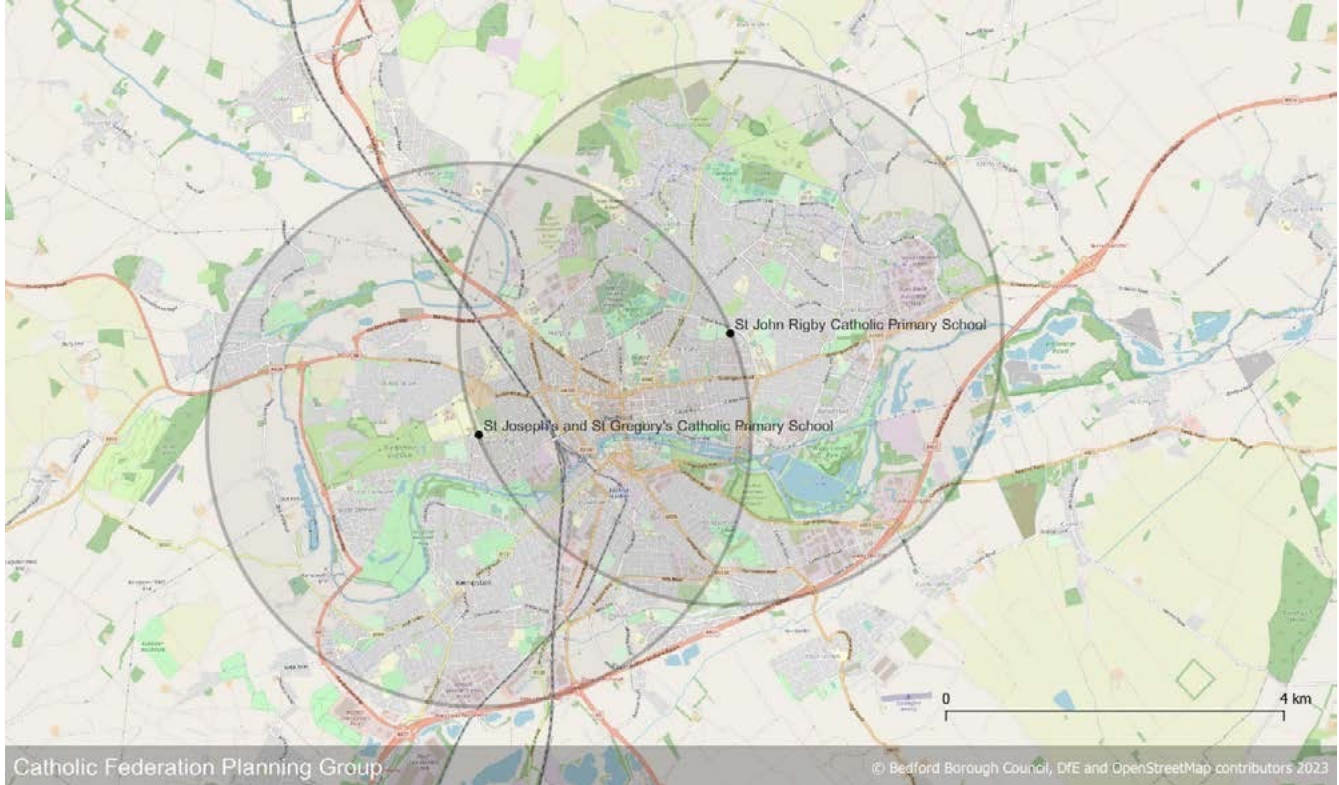
## Commentary

- A one form entry expansion of Wixams Tree Primary Academy provided an additional 30 Reception places in 2023 and 210 additional places overall.
- Willow Grove Primary School opened in September 2024 which initially added a further 25 Reception, Y1 & 2 places but which could increase to 120 Reception places and 840 school places overall based on a phased opening programme.
- The timeline of increasing available pupil places will predominantly be determined by the build rate of houses within the Wixams villages and additional residential development sites in Central Bedfordshire which are also coming forward.
- The sites in Central Bedfordshire are expected to provide their own education provision in time, however, initially education needs arising from these sites may be met through the new Willow Grove Primary School.
- Unforeseen factors such as the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and higher than expected rates of inflation have impacted construction time scales such that pupils have not been generated by the residential development as quickly as anticipated in previous years.
- In addition, the announcement that Universal Studios will be building an entertainment complex close to Wixams may have, as yet unknown, impacts on demand for pupil places at primary schools within Wixams and Wilstead.
- Thus, although the forecasts indicate deficits in pupil places over the plan period, we anticipate that the number of pupils in the planning area can easily be accommodated within the built capacity of the Wixams primary schools. Caution is being taken with regard to the phased opening of additional capacity, such that excessive surplus capacity is avoided as this is financially detrimental to schools. Pupil numbers will be closely monitored and BBC will work with schools to agree the best course of action to meet the demand for pupil places.



### Catholic Federation

- St John Rigby Catholic Primary School (PAN 60)
- St Francis of Assisi Catholic Primary School (PAN 60) (Formerly St Joseph's and St Gregory's)



*N.B. Each school is at the centre of a 2-mile radius circle indicating the likely area served. It does not indicate the catchment of the school.*

#### Reception places available: 120

Catholic Federation	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast YR	62	65	62	63	63
Capacity	120	120	120	120	120
Surplus/deficit of places	58	55	58	57	57
Surplus/deficit % of places	48%	46%	48%	47%	47%

#### Total capacity: 840

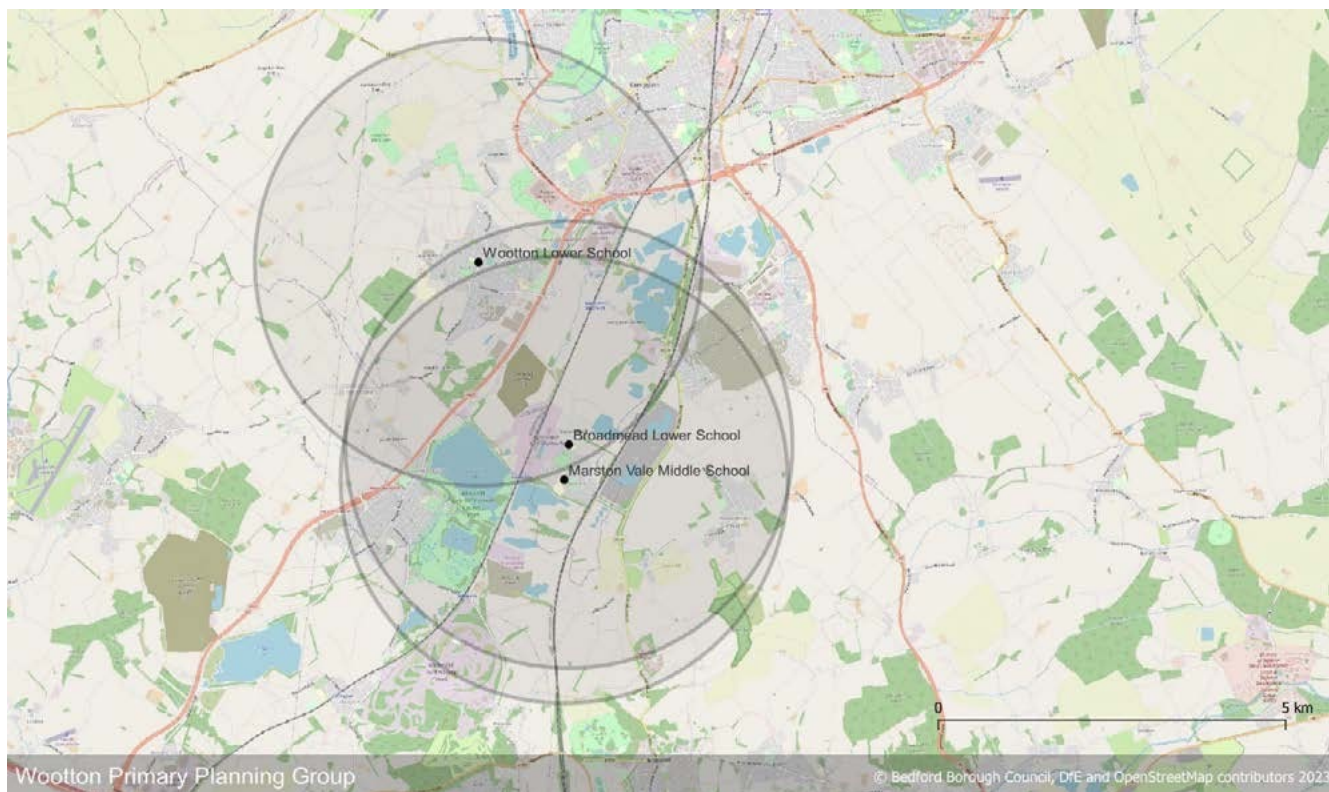
Catholic Federation	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast YR - Y6	523	486	453	437	431
Capacity	840	840	840	840	840
Surplus/deficit of places	317	354	387	403	409
Surplus/deficit % of places	38%	42%	46%	48%	49%

#### Commentary

- Decreasing numbers of applications for the two schools in this planning area may necessitate a review of PAN.
- These schools may be able to admit pupils who are unable to secure a place at nearby schools as the local population grows.

### Wootton

- Broadmead Lower School – entry point YR (PAN 60)
- Wootton Primary School – entry point YR (PAN 120)
- Marston Vale Middle School - entry point Y5 (PAN 150)



N.B. Each school is at the centre of a 2-mile radius circle indicating the likely area served. It does not indicate the catchment of the school.

#### Reception places available: 180

Wootton	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast YR	149	156	122	136	139
Capacity	180	180	180	180	180
Surplus/deficit of places	31	24	58	44	41
Surplus/deficit % of places	17%	13%	32%	24%	23%

#### Year 5 places available: 180

#### Total capacity: 1350 reducing to 1260

Wootton	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast YR - Y6	1113	1118	1078	1047	1061
Capacity	1350	1260	1260	1260	1260
Surplus/deficit of places	237	142	182	213	199
Surplus/deficit % of places	18%	11%	14%	17%	16%

## Commentary

- While displayed as primary and secondary, this planning group currently operates a three-tier system, due to be reorganised to a two-tier system in phases from 2025.
- Wootton Lower School has increased its age range, becoming a primary school, and children from this school will likely transfer at Y7 to Wootton Academy (formerly Wootton Upper School).
- Broadmead Lower School and Marston Vale Middle School will become Stewartby Primary School (PAN 60), opening in September 2027.
- Many pupils cross the border with Central Bedfordshire in both directions.
- Linked proposals for reorganisation to a two-tier school system are planned in the neighbouring Cranfield area in Central Bedfordshire.
- Some schools in the area are not yet operating at their intended final capacity.
- Pupil numbers will be impacted by the timelines of the Central Bedfordshire school reorganisation and the numbers of pupils still attending schools across the border in both directions.
- In time, we anticipate that local children will attend Wootton Primary School or Stewartby Primary School and transfer at Y7 to Wootton Academy for their secondary education.



## Secondary

### Total across Bedford Borough

Year 7 places available: 2478 increasing to 2628

Bedford Borough	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast Y7	2289	2433	2428	2356	2353
Capacity	2478	2628	2628	2628	2628
Surplus/deficit of places	189	195	200	272	275
Surplus/deficit % of places	7.6%	7.4%	7.6%	10.4%	10.5%

This number of Y7 places is based on the sum of PANs for all schools in the borough.

The total forecast is the sum of the base forecast and new housing pupil yield. To allow some flexibility of parental preference, it is recommended by the DfE to aim for a surplus of 5%.

Total capacity: 12518 increasing to 13230

Bedford Borough	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast Y7 - Y11	12185	12482	12690	12761	12822
Capacity	12518	12807	13020	13140	13230
Surplus/deficit of places	333	325	330	379	408
Surplus/deficit % of places	2.7%	2.5%	2.5%	2.9%	3.1%

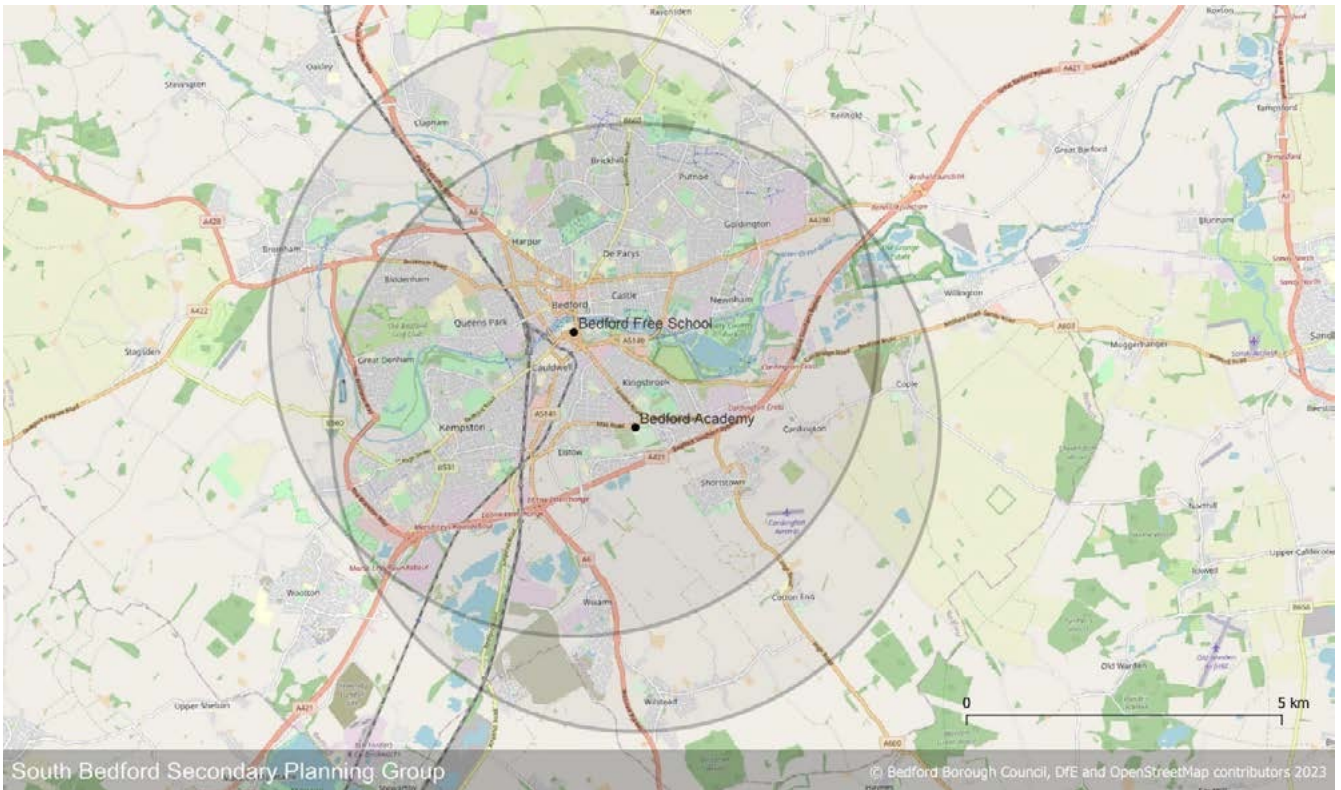
The total capacity is the number of places available based on the sum of PANs for all schools in the borough multiplied by the number of year groups. In secondary, this is Y7 to Y11.

### Commentary

- Importantly, although the forecasts indicate sufficiency of secondary school places within the borough over the next 5 years, the overall surplus is lower than the DfE's recommended 5% surplus to enable operational flexibility.
- It must be noted that not all of the available places are in suitable locations to meet the demand of the local population. For example, surplus capacity may exist, however, this may be at a school which exceeds the statutory walking distance from a child's home address or in a location without safe walking and cycle routes.
- In addition, pressures for school places exist in individual year groups within some planning areas. Hence, surplus capacity in one year group within a planning area does not offset a shortfall of places in a different year group.
- The increasing volume of in-year applications is contributing further to this pressure for secondary school places.
- Whilst works have been undertaken to create additional capacity within areas of significant housing development there continues to be a forecast shortfall of places.

**South Bedford**

- Bedford Academy (PAN 224 increasing to 300)
- Bedford Free School (PAN 100)



*N.B. Each school is at the centre of a 3-mile radius circle indicating the likely area served. It does not indicate the catchment of the school.*

**Year 7 places available: 400**

South Bedford	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
<b>Forecast Y7</b>	382	394	405	385	390
<b>Capacity</b>	400	400	400	400	400
<b>Surplus/deficit of places</b>	18	6	-5	15	10
<b>Surplus/deficit % of places</b>	4%	2%	-1%	4%	2%

*This number of Y7 places is based on the sum of PANs for all schools in the planning area. The total forecast is the sum of the base forecast and new housing pupil yield. To allow some flexibility of parental preference, it is recommended by the DfE to aim for a surplus of 5%.*

**Total capacity: 1834 increasing to 2000**

South Bedford	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
<b>Forecast Y7 - Y11</b>	1863	1934	1997	2029	2064
<b>Capacity</b>	1834	1910	1970	2000	2000
<b>Surplus/deficit of places</b>	-29	-24	-27	-29	-64
<b>Surplus/deficit % of places</b>	-2%	-1%	-1%	-1%	-3%

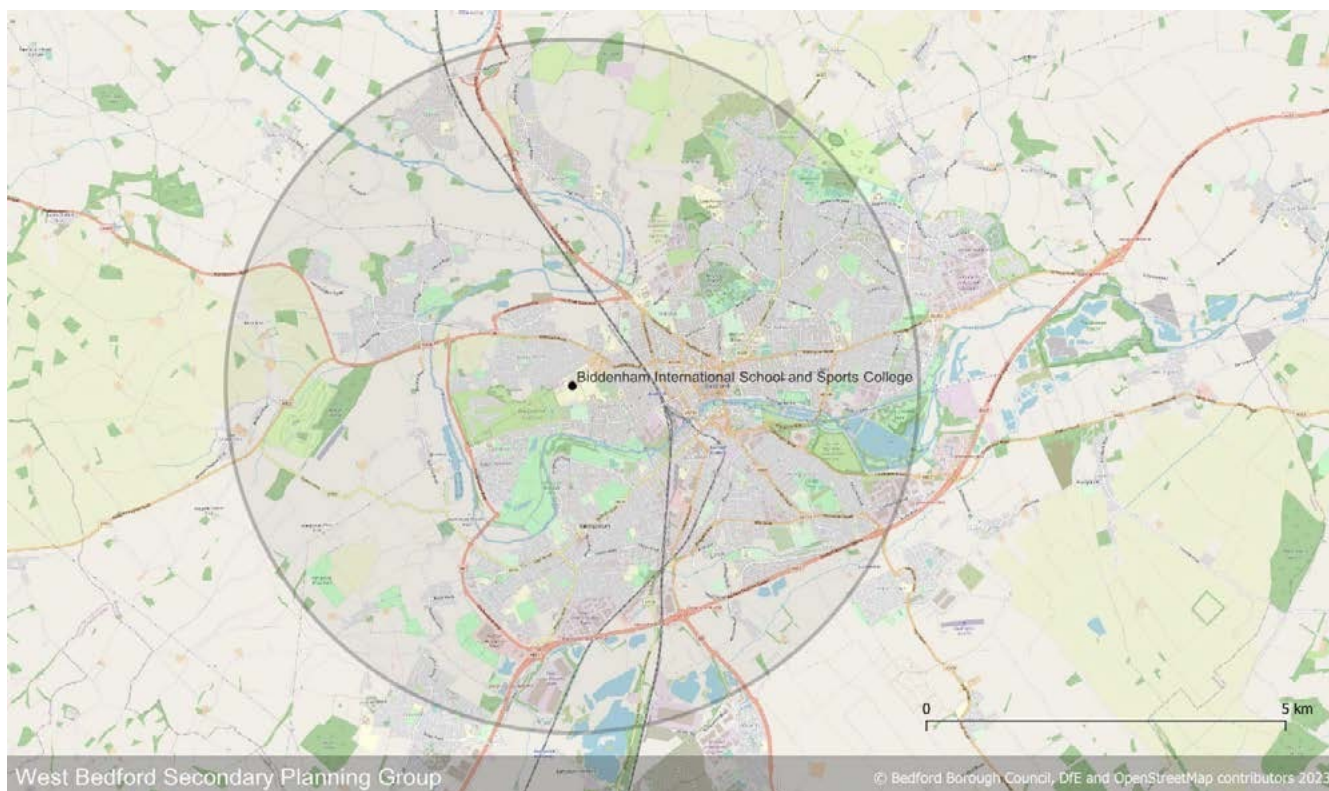
*The total capacity is the number of places available based on the schools PAN multiplied by the number of year groups. In secondary, this is Y7 to 11.*

### Commentary

- Bedford Academy PAN is 224, however they took a ‘bulge’ Y7 intake of 270, to support oversubscription for 2023/24 and did so again in 2024/25.
- Expansion at Bedford Academy provided an additional 1FE of Y7 places in 2025/26, bringing the Y7 capacity to 300 places.
- Following a review of admissions patterns (to be completed) consideration will be given to timing for increasing the school capacity to 10FE in each year group.

### West Bedford

- Biddenham International School & Sports College (PAN 240)



*N.B. Each school is at the centre of a 3-mile radius circle indicating the likely area served. It does not indicate the catchment of the school.*

### Year 7 places available: 240

West Bedford	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast Y7	255	267	257	250	249
Capacity	240	240	240	240	240
Surplus/deficit of places	-15	-27	-17	-10	-9
Surplus/deficit % of places	-6%	-11%	-7%	-4%	-4%

**Total capacity: 1200**

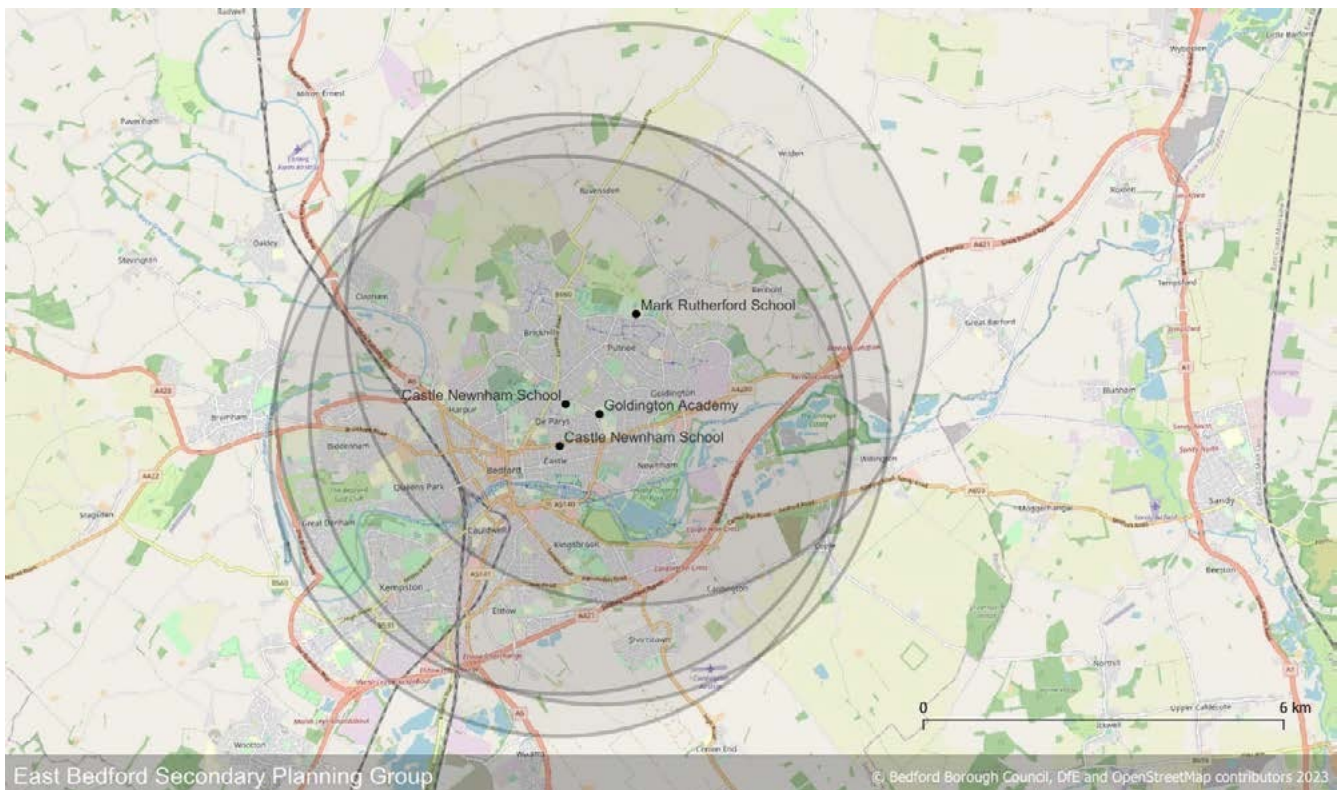
West Bedford	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast Y7 - Y11	1271	1309	1329	1324	1310
Capacity	1200	1200	1200	1200	1200
Surplus/deficit of places	-71	-109	-129	-124	-110
Surplus/deficit % of places	-6%	-9%	-11%	-10%	-9%

**Commentary**

- An expansion of the school increased its capacity in 2023/24, enabling it to admit 240 pupils into Y7.
- Following a review of capacity and admissions patterns (to be completed), further expansion may be required.
- A new Free School was proposed to be allocated to Bedford Borough which would be located within the West Bedford planning area, however, the free school programme has been under review by the DfE since the Labour Party were elected in July 2024.

**East Bedford**

- Castle Newnham School (PAN 150)
- Goldington Academy (PAN 168)
- Mark Rutherford School (PAN 200)



*N.B. Each school is at the centre of a 3-mile radius circle indicating the likely area served. It does not indicate the catchment of the school.*

**Year 7 places available: 518**

East Bedford	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast Y7	524	534	519	528	507
Capacity	518	518	518	518	518
Surplus/deficit of places	-6	-16	-1	-12	11
Surplus/deficit % of places	-1%	-3%	0%	-2%	2%

**Total capacity: 2590**

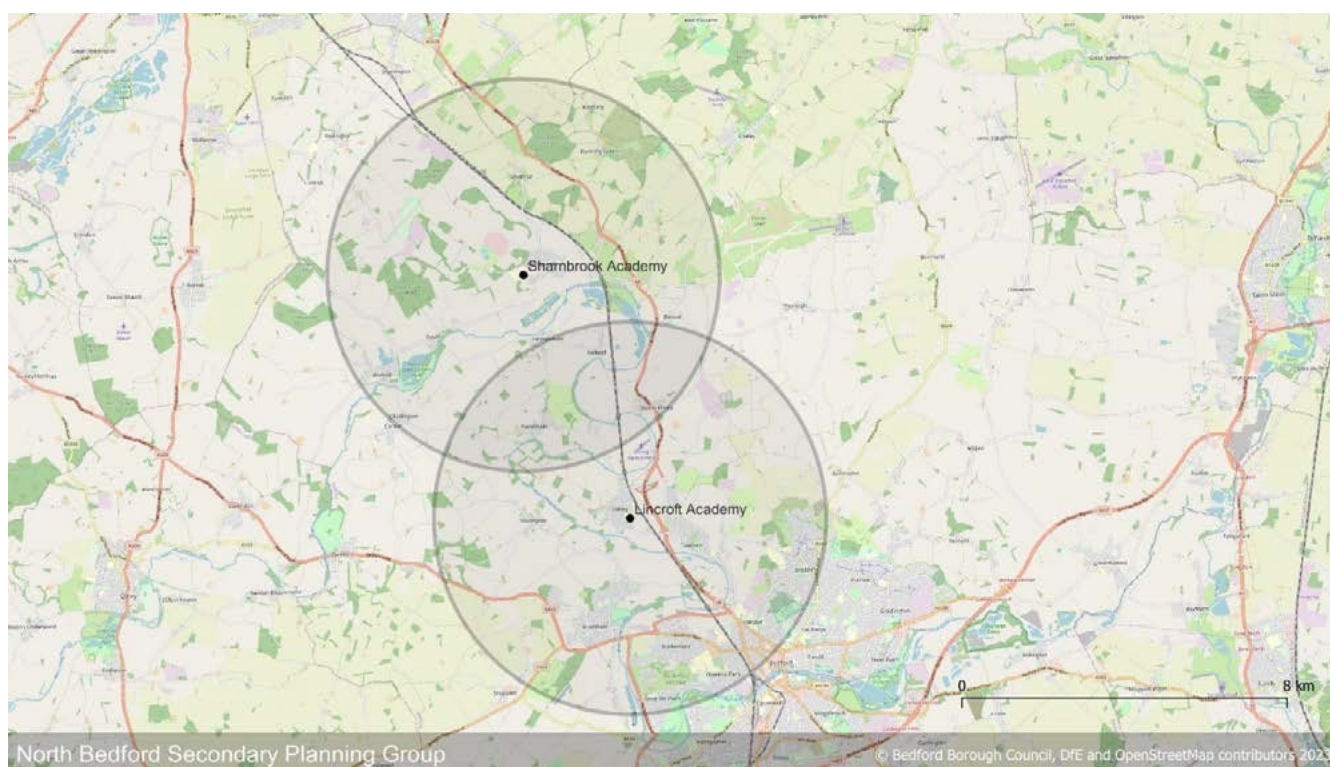
East Bedford	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast Y7 - Y11	2742	2730	2711	2694	2682
Capacity	2590	2590	2590	2590	2590
Surplus/deficit of places	-152	-140	-121	-104	-92
Surplus/deficit % of places	-6%	-5%	-5%	-4%	-4%

**Commentary**

- Currently no actions planned.
- Mark Rutherford has admitted over PAN in recent years within its existing accommodation; a recent capacity assessment indicates sufficient capacity in the buildings to continue to do so.
- Goldington Academy has also admitted over PAN in recent years to support oversubscription from local children.

**North Bedford**

- Lincroft Academy (PAN 210 increasing to 240)
- Sharnbrook Academy (PAN 270)



*N.B. Each school is at the centre of a 3-mile radius circle indicating the likely area served. It does not indicate the catchment of the school.*

**Year 7 places available: 480 increasing to 510**

North Bedford	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast Y7	420	468	476	427	428
Capacity	480	510	510	510	510
Surplus/deficit of places	60	42	34	83	82
Surplus/deficit % of places	13%	8%	7%	16%	16%

**Total capacity: 2400 increasing to 2520**

North Bedford	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast Y7 - Y11	2214	2248	2321	2323	2321
Capacity	2400	2430	2460	2490	2520
Surplus/deficit of places	186	182	139	167	199
Surplus/deficit % of places	8%	7%	6%	7%	8%

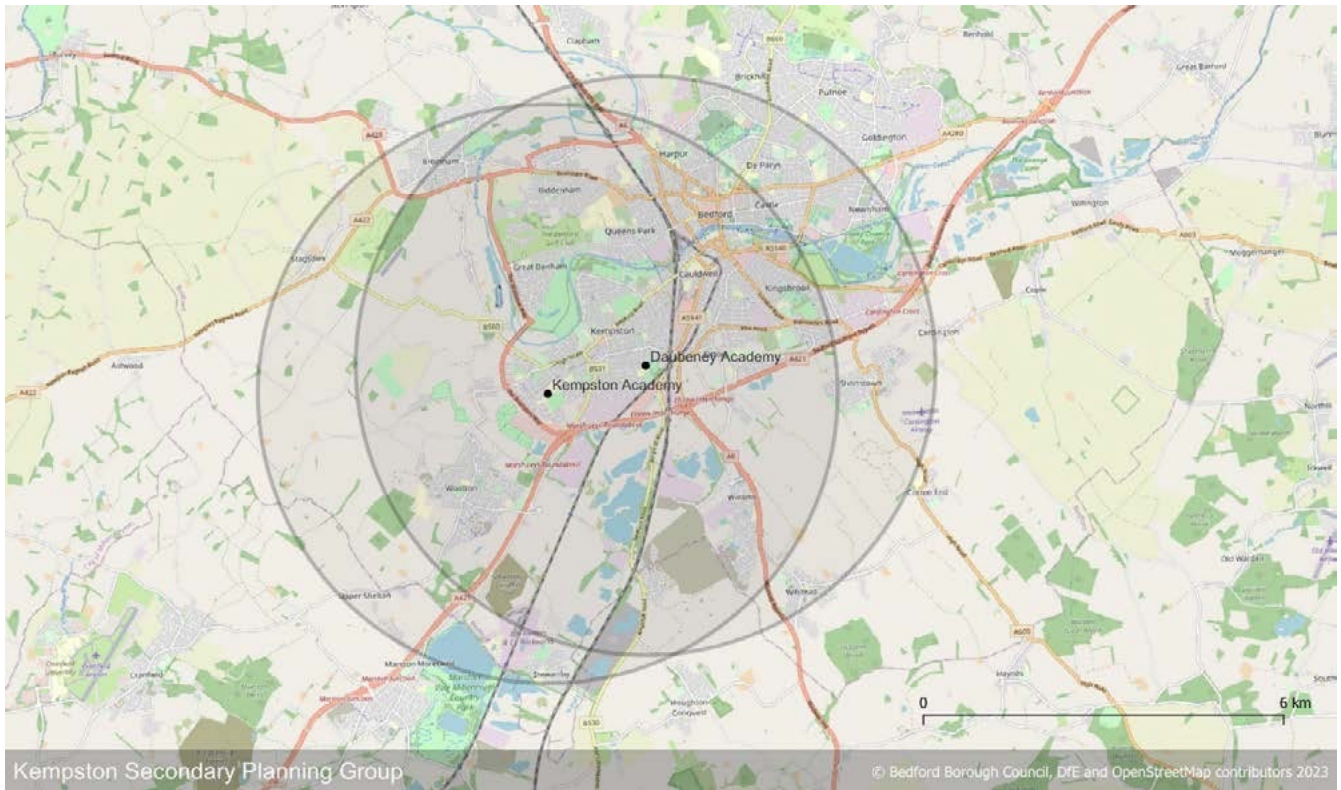
**Commentary**

- There is a proposed development of 500 homes in Clapham which is anticipated to increase demand for secondary school places at Lincroft Academy.
- Works are underway to increase capacity at Lincroft by 1FE, increasing its PAN to 240 with the additional places available from September 2027.
- Forecasts identify that additional school places are required to support residential development at Bromham and Clapham.
- A large number of pupils currently at schools in this planning group are from out-of-Borough, particularly North Northamptonshire, although the trend of pupils travelling across the border to access secondary education is declining.



## Kempston

- Daubeney Academy (PAN 120)
- Kempston Academy (PAN 180)



*N.B. Each school is at the centre of a 3-mile radius circle indicating the likely area served. It does not indicate the catchment of the school.*

### Year 7 places available: 300

Kempston	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast Y7	227	248	267	250	257
Capacity	300	300	300	300	300
Surplus/deficit of places	73	52	33	50	43
Surplus/deficit % of places	24%	17%	11%	17%	14%

### Total capacity: 1500

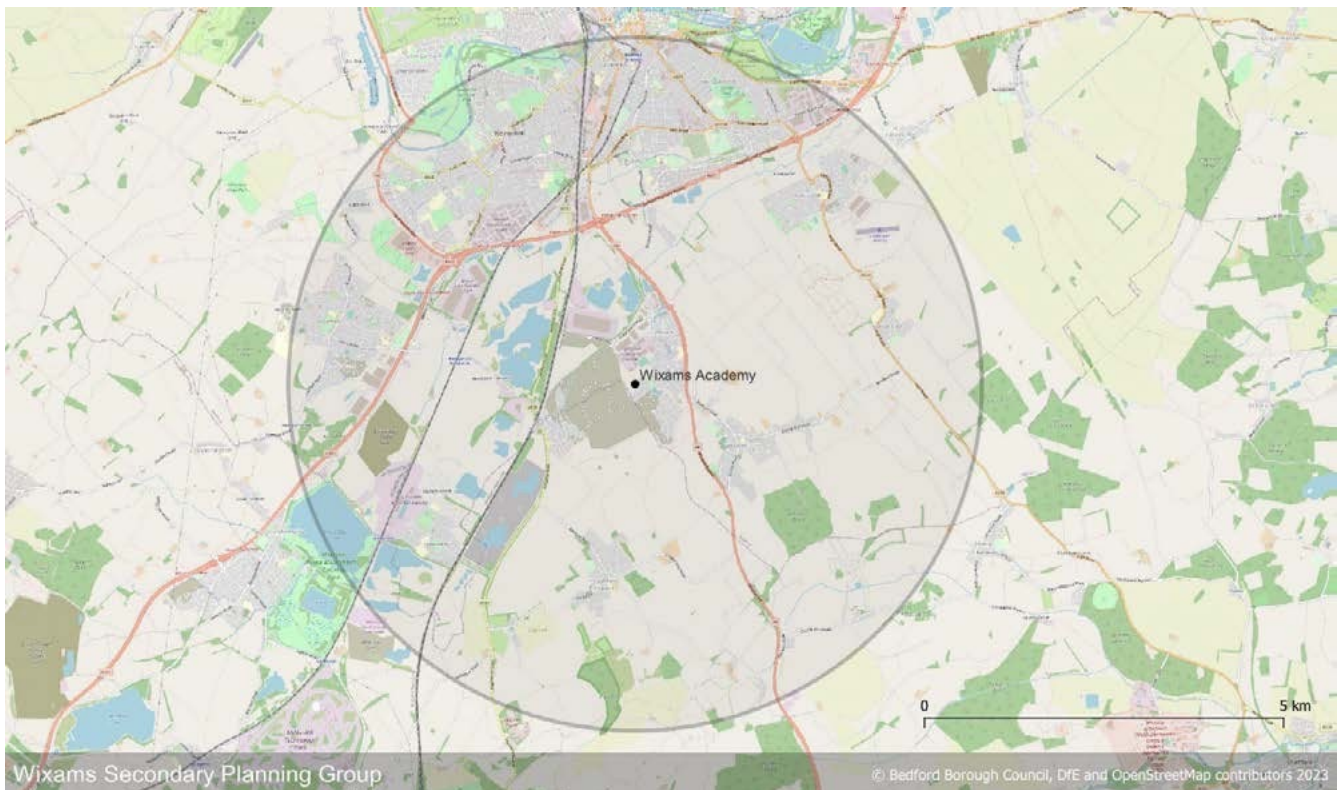
Kempston	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast Y7 - Y11	1294	1282	1283	1304	1300
Capacity	1500	1500	1500	1500	1500
Surplus/deficit of places	206	218	217	196	200
Surplus/deficit % of places	14%	15%	14%	13%	13%

## Commentary

- Available capacity in these schools has historically mitigated some of the deficits in secondary provision in neighbouring areas.
- In 2023/24 there was a consultation to close Daubeney Secondary and merge with Kempston Academy. Bedford Borough Council agreed to provide some capital funding to enable Daubeney to improve its facilities and remain open as the merging of the two schools would have removed any additional capacity within the Kempston planning area.
- Kempston Academy has the capacity to increase to 210 per year group which will help to mitigate the growing demand within nearby planning area.

## Wixams

- Wixams Academy (PAN 210 rising to 300)



*N.B. Each school is at the centre of a 3-mile radius circle indicating the likely area served. It does not indicate the catchment of the school.*

### Year 7 places available: 240

Wixams	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast Y7	213	221	216	229	243
Capacity	240	240	240	240	240
Surplus/deficit of places	27	19	24	11	-3
Surplus/deficit % of places	11%	8%	10%	5%	-1%

**Total capacity: 1080 rising to 1320**

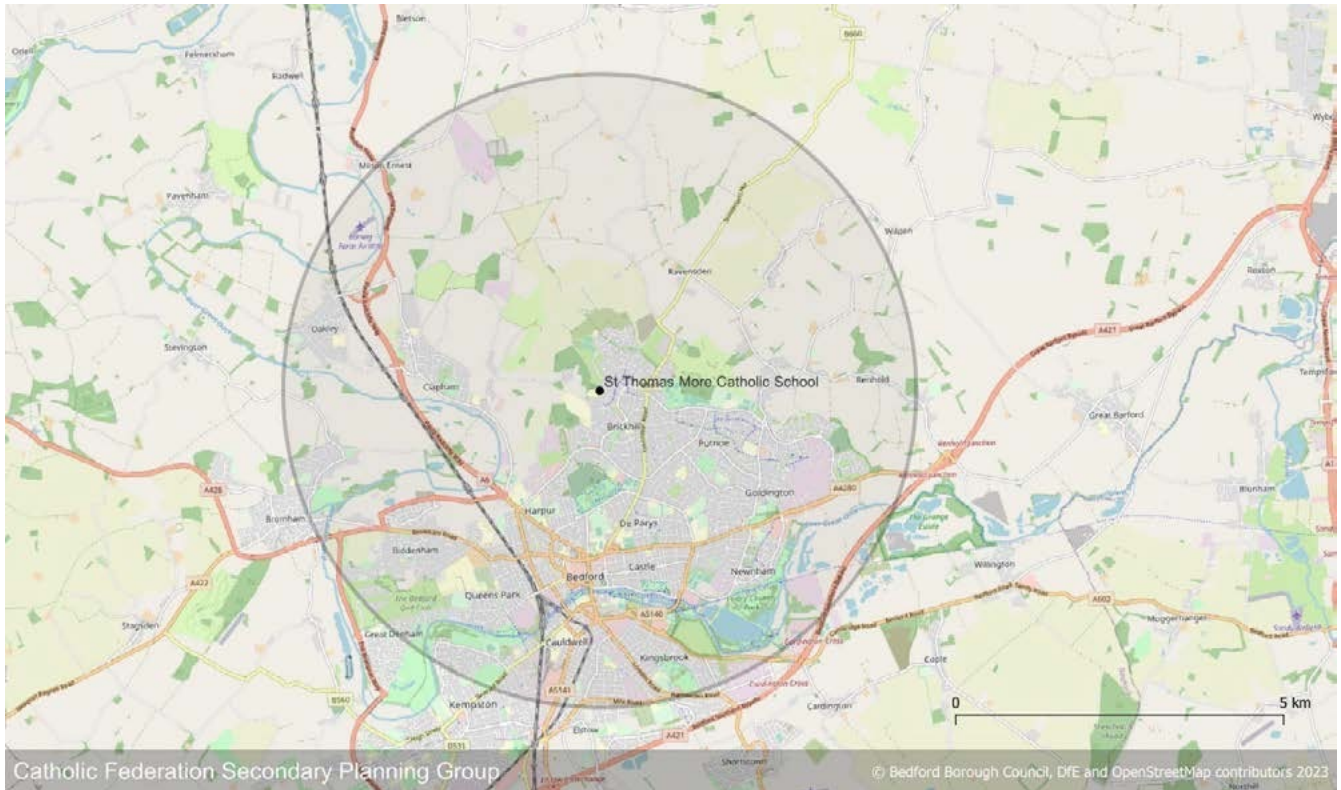
<b>Wixams</b>	<b>2026/27</b>	<b>2027/28</b>	<b>2028/29</b>	<b>2029/30</b>	<b>2030/31</b>
<b>Forecast Y7 - Y11</b>	1062	1148	1189	1233	1290
<b>Capacity</b>	1080	1170	1200	1260	1320
<b>Surplus/deficit of places</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Surplus/deficit % of places</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>2%</b>

**Commentary**

- In response to continued housing development a 6FE expansion was implemented, increasing the PAN and capacity of the school in 2023/24 and again in 2024/25.
- The school is planned to grow from the bottom up, eventually offering 300 places per year group. This timing of opening additional classes will be dependent upon an annual review of applications and admissions data.
- Pupils continue to access the school from out of area, particularly from Central Bedfordshire. Over time the proportion of local children attending the secondary school is likely to increase as further new housing is developed.
- Unforeseen factors such as the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and higher than expected rates of inflation have impacted construction time scales such that pupils have not been generated by the residential development as quickly as anticipated in previous years.
- In addition, the announcement that Universal Studios will be building an entertainment complex close to Wixams may have, as yet unknown, impacts on demand for pupil places at Wixams Academy.
- Overall, we anticipate that the number of pupils in the planning area can easily be accommodated within the built capacity of the Wixams Academy. Caution is being taken with regard to the phased opening of additional capacity, such that excessive surplus capacity is avoided as this is financially detrimental to schools. Pupil numbers will be closely monitored and BBC will work with the school to agree the best course of action to meet the demand for pupil places.

## Catholic Federation

- St Thomas More Catholic School (PAN 150)



*N.B. Each school is at the centre of a 3-mile radius circle indicating the likely area served. It does not indicate the catchment of the school.*

### Year 7 places available: 150

Catholic Federation	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast Y7	137	145	143	133	127
Capacity	150	150	150	150	150
Surplus/deficit of places	13	5	7	17	23
Surplus/deficit % of places	9%	3%	5%	12%	15%

### Total capacity: 750

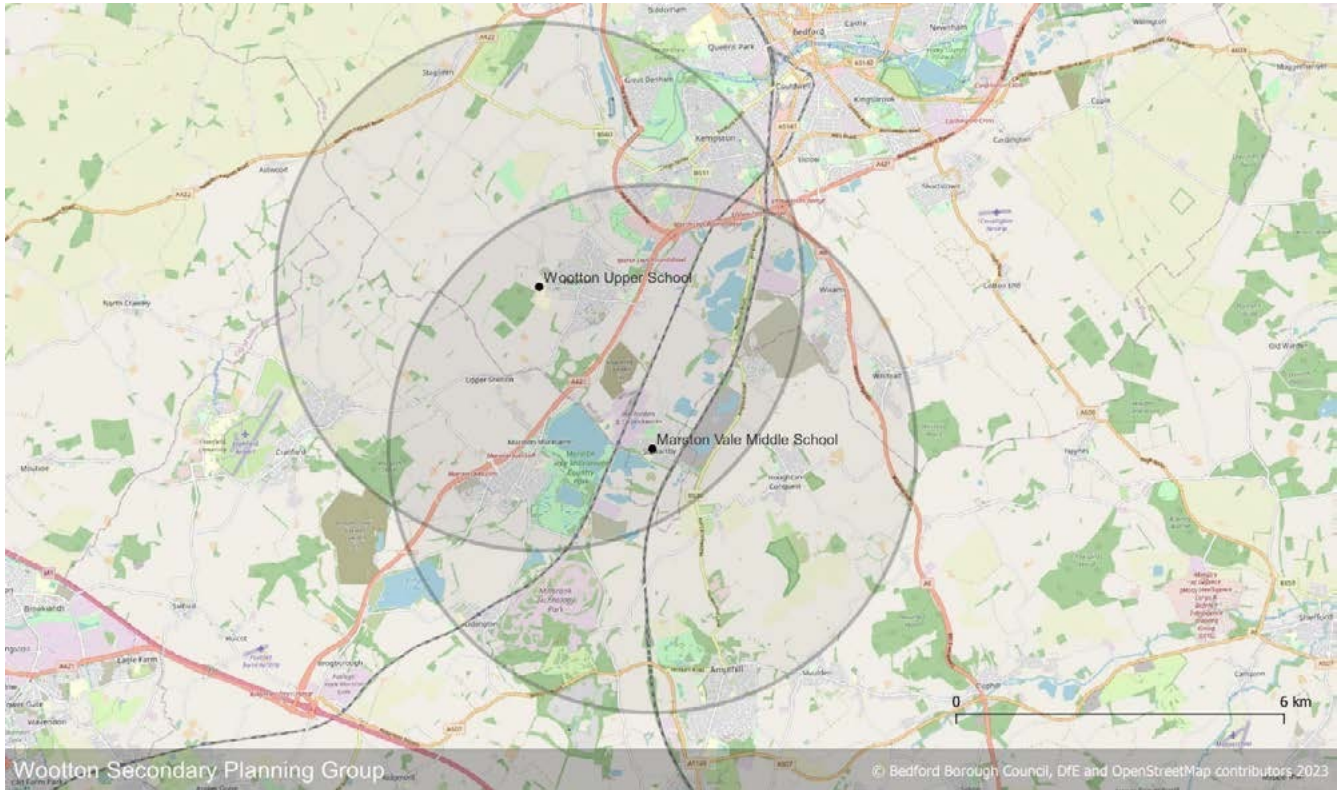
Catholic Federation	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast Y7 - Y11	716	712	723	706	689
Capacity	750	750	750	750	750
Surplus/deficit of places	34	38	27	44	61
Surplus/deficit % of places	5%	5%	4%	6%	8%

### Commentary

- Currently no actions planned.
- St Thomas More Catholic School has in the past admitted students as the next nearest school when Mark Rutherford School has been oversubscribed.
- St Thomas More is also located to the north of Biddenham School’s catchment, therefore the surplus capacity can also help address any shortfall of places in the West Bedford secondary planning area.

**Wootton**

- Wootton Academy (formerly Wootton Upper School) – entry points Y7 to Y9 (PAN 150 to 297)



N.B. Each school is at the centre of a 3-mile radius circle indicating the likely area served. It does not indicate the catchment of the school.

**Year 7 places available: 150 rising to 270 (upon change to ‘two-tier system’)**

Wootton	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast Y7	131	157	147	153	152
Capacity	150	270	270	270	270
Surplus/deficit of places	19	113	123	117	118
Surplus/deficit % of places	13%	42%	46%	43%	44%

**Total capacity: 1164 rising to 1350**

Wootton	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Forecast Y7 - Y11	1022	1119	1137	1148	1168
Capacity	1164	1257	1350	1350	1350
Surplus/deficit of places	142	138	213	202	182
Surplus/deficit % of places	12%	11%	16%	15%	14%

## Commentary

- While displayed as primary and secondary, this planning group currently operates a three-tier system, due to be reorganised to a two-tier system from September 2026. These plans have been developed with Central Bedfordshire Council and the schools and academies in the area.
- The capacity shown is based on the planned phased changes to PAN during the transition period.
- Marston Vale will cease to be a middle school, and instead will become the primary school for Stewartby and the surrounding area. Wootton Upper School will become a secondary school, Wootton Academy, ultimately admitting pupils at Y7 rather than Y9.
- As part of the transition, pupils in Y6 to Y8 at Marston Vale Middle School in 2025/26 will leave at the end of the academic year and transfer Wootton Academy in September 2026 to start Y7 to Y9, respectively.
- Holywell Middle School in Cranfield, Central Bedfordshire, will become a secondary school with proposals to take its first Y9 cohort in September 2026.
- The likely effect is that in time Wootton Academy would mainly serve Bedford children and 3FE of those Central Bedfordshire children closest to the border, while Holywell Secondary would mainly serve children living in the Cranfield area.
- The opening of Y7 classes may be phased and will be determined based upon an annual review of applications and admissions data.
- The need for additional places will be heavily impacted by the timing of the reorganisation to a two-tier school system in Central Bedfordshire and the numbers of pupils still attending schools across the border in both directions.



## Planned Projects and Exploring Options

To ensure that plans for expansion of school capacity can be effectively implemented, a process of viability assessments of potential projects is undertaken to ensure that best value can be achieved.

At times of falling rolls the Council can make proposals for removing surplus places to ensure schools remain viable. Falling rolls are starting to be seen in the primary phase across multiple planning areas. The impact of falling rolls, due to falling birth rates, is mitigated by significant housing growth within development areas of Bedford Borough. Some schools in rural areas, where there is no or limited new residential development, are forecast to find their numbers decreasing.

### Primary Schools

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1. Merge/reduce PAN/combine year groups to reduce surplus capacity in North Bedford schools.
2. Great Barford Primary School – increase to 2FE to support 500 houses in the Great Barford Neighbourhood Development Plan.

### Secondary Schools

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Existing programme of work for 2027/28:

- a. Expansion of Lincroft Academy to 240 PAN.

Possible options for 2027/28 and beyond:

1. Bedford Free School expansion:
  - a. The central location of this school will support growth from both the South and West of Bedford Borough. Section 106 contributions from developers will be used towards the expansion of Bedford Free School.
2. New free school within the West Bedford planning area:
  - a. If this is not forthcoming then we will need to revisit whether there is capacity within Biddenham School for further expansion, however the schools governing body have indicated that they are not keen to expand beyond the current PAN.

## Special Educational Needs and / or Disabilities (SEND)

Bedford Borough Council is responsible for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) who live in the Borough. Wherever possible, pupils with special educational needs are educated within mainstream schools. The benefits of this approach include maximising the opportunity for children and young people to be included within their local community, often minimises journey time to school and enables pupils to spend more time with their peers and families.

Some children are placed in schools outside Bedford Borough at their parents' request. This can be in a maintained or academy special school or, in some cases, at an independent or non-maintained special school. There may also be children living outside Bedford Borough who have been placed in a Bedford Borough school by their home local authority.

There are various levels of SEND. The level that is of particular interest in this plan is that of children with an education, health and care plan (EHCP). This is produced following a multi-disciplinary professional assessment including parents, where children's needs require additional resources that cannot be met within the normal budget of a mainstream school.

The categories of SEND used by the DfE are:

- **Cognition and learning:** includes children who learn at a slower pace than their peers, and those with specific learning difficulties (SpLD), moderate learning difficulties (MLD), severe learning difficulties (SLD), profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD).
- **Communication and interaction:** includes speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and autistic spectrum condition (ASC).
- **Social, emotional, and mental health:** includes children who may be withdrawn or isolated, as well as those displaying challenging behaviours.
- **Sensory and/or physical needs:** includes children with a disability that prevents or hinders them from making full use of general educational facilities e.g. hearing impairment (HI), visual impairment (VI), multisensory impairment (MSI) and/or physical difficulties (PD)<sup>12</sup>.

Individual children often have needs that cut across all these areas and their needs may change over time. The most common type of need for those with an EHCP in Bedford Borough is autism spectrum condition, whereas for those with SEN support (SEN without an EHCP) this is social, emotional and mental health<sup>13</sup>. There have also been noticeable increases nationally in the number of children and young people with speech, language and communication needs and social, emotional and mental health needs<sup>14</sup>.

Sometimes an EHCP will result in additional local authority funded support in a mainstream school. Other times, it may result in a place in a special school. Some mainstream schools have resourced units designed and funded to meet the needs of children with a particular need, such as autism or sensory impairment.

12. Department for Education and Department of Health (2015, January) *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years*. Page 85, paragraph 5.32.

13. Department for Education (2025, June 12) *Special educational needs in England*. GOV.UK. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2024-25>.

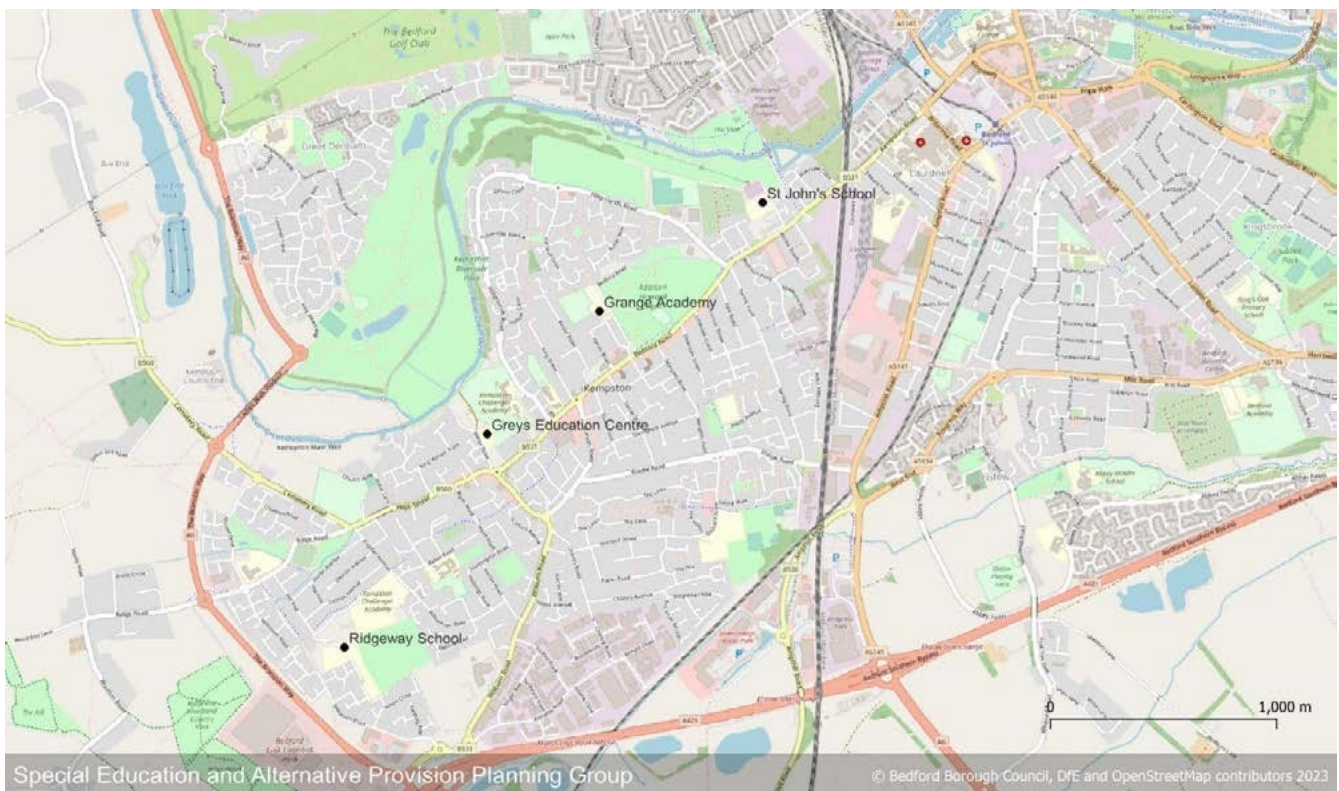
14. Department for Education (2025, June 12) *Special educational needs in England*. GOV.UK. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2024-25>.

Over the past decade, the number of children with SEND requiring EHCPs has increased in Bedford Borough and across the country. Over 1.7 million pupils in England have special educational needs. This has increased by 93,700 since 2024 and includes both those children with an EHCP and those with SEND support<sup>15</sup>. There are now 482,640 pupils in England with an EHCP, an increase of 11.1% from 2024 (DfE, June 2025). Pupils with an EHCP now comprise 5.3% of pupils in the country (up from 4.8% in 2024 and 4.3% in 2023)<sup>16</sup>.

Within Bedford Borough schools, in the summer of 2025 there were 1576 pupils with EHCPs, forming 5.5% of the whole school population. There are currently 2308 EHCP's in total for children and young people aged 0-25 in Bedford Borough. Analysis of data shows that of the 2094 YR to Y14 pupils with EHCPs, 27.6% attend special schools, an increase from 24.3% in autumn 2024. 63.9% of the 2094 YR to Y14 pupils with EHCPs attend colleges, mainstream schools and academies or specialist units located within them. BBC will endeavour to continue making progress in enabling children and young people who require specialist provision to be educated within the mainstream sector wherever possible, and in the most appropriate settings.

The majority of Bedford children with SEND access their learning in a mainstream school. However, there are a significant number of children whose special needs cannot be wholly met in a mainstream setting. In such circumstance these pupils may be educated in one of our four special schools, our six enhanced resource bases at other schools outside of Bedford Borough or in one of our alternative provision settings.

- Grange Academy
- Rivertree Free School
- Ridgeway School
- St John's School



15. Department for Education (2025, June 12) Special educational needs in England. GOV.UK. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2024-25>.

16. Department for Education (2025, June 12) Special educational needs in England. GOV.UK. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2024-25>.

Based on national and local trends, we expect that in future years the number of pupils requiring access to specialist provision may increase. Increasing the capacity of special needs facilities requires a much greater scale of investment per pupil place than for mainstream education, due to its specialist nature. However, such investment, although sizeable, can lead to a significant reduction in revenue expenditure

by reducing the requirement to fund high-cost placements in the independent school sector. Reducing these revenue costs and ensuring value for money has continues to be an ongoing priority for BBC.

To this end, capital works were undertaken to deliver a new special free school, Rivertree Free School in Kempston, run by the Bedford Inclusive Learning & Training Trust (BILTT). This new special school opened in February 2025 to serve 200 pupils aged 2 to 19 years old.

Pupils attending this new school will predominantly have profound, multiple, or complex learning difficulties, autism or communication challenges.



## Alternative Provision

Alternative provision is commissioned by schools or local authorities when pupils are not able to access mainstream education provision. This may be due to a child being permanently excluded, at risk of exclusion or due to complex medical, social or emotional needs. It is vital that the educational needs of the pupil are met in the most suitable setting to enable continuity of support and prevent disadvantage to the learner.

Greys Education Centre (run by BILTT) offers primary (Bromham campus) and secondary provision (Kempston campus) for permanently excluded pupils and hospital education. The HIVE is based at the Bromham campus for primary children with an EHCP who have SEMH needs.

The Virtual School is an additional service for children and young people in public care and in need of a social worker, providing support to improve their educational achievements and raise aspiration. The Virtual School is responsible for Bedford's children in care educated locally or out of authority, as well as those in care to other authorities placed in Bedford.

BBC is committed to developing the work of the behaviour partnerships, in the belief that alternative provision is most successful when provided in local settings and will therefore explore ways that we might build upon current arrangements. This will include working with those schools that might wish to establish their own alternative provision arrangements on site.



## Early Years

Early years provision refers to all provision for children below school age. Children reach statutory school age the term after their fifth birthday. In Bedford they usually start school in Reception in the September before their fifth birthday.

Early years provision includes:

- Childminders – these are usually people who look after children in their own home.
- Day nurseries – these are usually commercial services run from dedicated premises.
- Nursery classes in schools – these are run by schools, although applications for a reception place still need to be made for children in nursery classes.
- Pre-schools – these are usually run by voluntary associations of parents and others. They may use community halls or have premises on a school site. Sometimes a school governing body may also run a pre-school.
- Maintained nursery schools – these are schools specifically dedicated to education for 2- to 5-year-olds.

Local authorities are required to ensure there is sufficiency of early years places, although a large proportion of these are provided in the private, independent and voluntary sector. The local authority is responsible for distributing funding for early years places for eligible families.

New legislation has changed the entitlements for parents and carers to access government funded childcare. The changes that have been introduced up to and including September 2025 are listed below:

- All parents of children aged three to four can access the universal 15 hours of government funded childcare per week.
- Eligible working parents of three- to four-year-olds can access 30 hours of government funded childcare per week.
- From September 2025, eligible working parents of 9-month to 3-year-olds can access 30 hours of government funded childcare per week.
- In addition, families of 2-year-olds receiving additional support (FRAS) can access 15 hours funded early education per week.

The primary purpose of the latter entitlement (FRAS) is to support children's outcomes, and this remains a key priority for the DfE and Bedford Borough Council. Evidence demonstrates that early education has a positive impact on disadvantaged children's educational outcomes, and it is imperative that we do all we can to continue supporting improved outcomes for disadvantaged children. The National Audit Office (NAO) has recommended that the DfE should monitor the impact of the eligible working parents' entitlements on disadvantaged children's access to early education, and the impact on children with SEND<sup>17</sup>.

17. Department for Education (2025, October 20) Early years data collection for the 2025 to 2026 financial year. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-funding-termly-data-collection-in-2025-to-2026/early-years-data-collection-for-the-2025-to-2026-financial-year>.

When surveyed in 2024, a large proportion (45%) of parents/carers in the Borough said they would like to increase the number of hours they were using childcare for and were keen to take up the extended funded entitlements to support them with work.

Within the Borough, demand for childcare places remains high. 65.2% of places for 2-year-olds of families receiving additional support were taken up in 2024/25, equaling the uptake rate nationally. Furthermore, 92.2% of 3-year-olds and 98.8% of 4-year-olds accessed their universal entitlement in 2024/25, exceeding the national uptake rates<sup>18</sup>. 83% of eligible 1-year-olds and 90% of eligible 2-year-olds have taken up funded places in autumn 2025 (as of 24th September with validation of codes ongoing)<sup>19</sup>.

Demand for places is expected to increase the most in South Bedford. Future demand for funded childcare places will particularly have to be monitored in the Wixams and Wilstead locality, where there is still set to be more construction of new dwellings throughout the remainder of the decade.

Another consideration is the provision of wraparound childcare within the Borough. Wraparound childcare is childcare before a school day and/or after a school day covering the period of 8am-6pm, not requiring parents to pick up their children and drop them off at another location. This is mainly delivered by local primary schools but does not include school-delivered clubs (e.g. football club). Many primary schools in the Borough have experienced an increase in demand for wraparound childcare, particularly for the 'breakfast club' offer, with further increases expected.

86% of respondents to the autumn 2025 parent and carer survey stated that they use formal childcare provision. Over half of respondents (58%) stated that they use term-time only provision; however, 52% of this group said they would prefer to access year-round care. 8% of parents/carers travel over 5 miles to access childcare that matches their requirements. The most important factors when selecting a childcare provider were the quality of provision, affordability, distance from home and the option of extended hours.

Challenges are faced in meeting the existing and forecast increased demand for early years provision with childcare providers/settings citing ongoing issues concerning the recruitment and retention of staff as the key obstacle. Some surveyed primary schools in the Borough also expressed concerns regarding financial viability due to additional staffing costs, fluctuating demand and lack of suitable space within the school.

Several applications were made for the DfE school-based nursery capital grant in autumn 2024, to address the latter concern. Westfield Primary School successfully secured funding to refurbish space within the school building to open a 20-place pre-school, with works currently underway. Interest has also been registered by a number of other schools for the autumn 2025 funding round.

18. Department for Education (2025, July 31) Funded early education and childcare. GOV.UK. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/funded-early-education-and-childcare/2025>.

19. Department for Education (2025, September 24) Expansion to early childcare entitlements: eligibility codes issued and validated. GOV.UK. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/expansion-to-early-childcare-entitlements-eligibility-codes-issued-and-validated/2025-september>.

## Post-16

The LA has the duty to encourage, enable and assist young people to participate in education or training. It therefore has the responsibility to secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people in the Borough who are over compulsory school age but under 19 or aged 19 to 25 and for whom an education, health and care plan (EHCP) is maintained. The Council works with schools and colleges to ensure a strategic overview of provision and needs.

The government policy Raising the Participation Age (RPA), states that young people who left year 11 from summer 2014 onwards must remain in some form of education or training until 18 years old<sup>20</sup>. This is to help young people fulfil their potential, regardless of their background or life circumstances. The statutory school leaving age has not changed. Young people will be able to leave school after year 11 and choose the post-16 option that is best for them.

The available options include:

- Full-time education – such as school or college.
- An apprenticeship or traineeship.
- Part-time education or training - as well as being employed, self-employed or volunteering for 20 hours or more a week.

Some secondary schools in Bedford Borough have post-16 provision, whilst others cater for up to 16 years and the normal pathway from these schools is to attend sixth form at another school or at a sixth form college if students wish to remain in full-time education.

Large primary school cohorts are moving into secondary schools, therefore the demand for post-16 places is expected to increase as the secondary sector grows. However, the projected reduction in the primary age population of Bedford<sup>21</sup> will feed through to the post-16 sector in time.

Forecasts indicate that school-based sixth form provision across the Borough is sufficient to meet the expected demand until 2031/32. It is likely that there will be sufficient places to meet the demand in 2031/32 as we are starting to observe changes in pupil preference for colleges rather than school sixth forms.

Bedford Borough	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32
<b>Forecast Y12</b>	756	802	832	860	897	941
<b>Capacity</b>	935	935	935	935	935	935
<b>Surplus/deficit</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>-6</b>
<b>Surplus/deficit %</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>-1%</b>

Bedford Borough	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32
<b>Forecast Y13</b>	682	728	775	809	839	887
<b>Capacity</b>	820	845	845	845	870	870
<b>Surplus/deficit</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>-17</b>
<b>Surplus/deficit %</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>-2%</b>

20. Department for Education (2008) Raising the participation age. The Education and Skills Act.

21. Office for National Statistics (2022) Population projections for local authorities by single year of age and sex, England. Office for National Statistics. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/localauthoritiesinenglandz1>.

It must be noted that the table above does not include all pupils accessing post-16 provision; it only shows those pupils accessing post-16 provision in a Bedford Borough secondary school. Kimberley STEM College offers an additional 350 - 400 places per year group, with additional places available at Bedford College and Bedford Sixth Form (part of the Bedford College Group) and various providers within the independent sector.

Population projections from The Office for National Statistics indicate that the bulge population currently observed moving into the secondary phase will have completed the post-16 phase by 2034, after which the populations of Bedford residents in each single year of age decrease. The demand for post-16 provision is expected to decrease as the population of 16- to 19-year-olds decreases.



## Notes

## Finding out more

If you would like further information about us and our services, please telephone, email or write to us at our address below.

Për Informacion

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