

Applying for a Secondary School Place: Common Myths

Parents of Year 6 children living in Halton can apply for a secondary school place for their child from the September of their Year 6 attendance, with the deadline being 31st October.

Moving up to secondary school can be a very emotive topic and there are many incorrect messages (myths) that circulate playgrounds, social media sites, parent forums and coffee shops each year. Below are some examples of the most frequent, but the key message is to read the Admission to Secondary School Booklet which is released on the local authority's website each year. You can also contact your local School Admissions Team if you have any questions or concerns. In Halton the easiest way to do this is to email schooladmissions@halton.gov.uk with your query.

If you only make one preference on your application, you will be allocated that school

MYTH Parents who do so could be seriously disadvantaging themselves by not using all of their three permitted preferences. By only making one preference, if your child is not offered a place at that school they will be offered a place at the nearest school with a vacancy, once all other preferences have been considered. This can result in you being offered a place at a school that is some distance from your home or one that you feel is not appropriate for your child, so the best advice is to use all of your available preferences.

Places will be offered to children whose parents have chosen the school as first preference

MYTH The 'first preference first' system has not been lawful for many years now and admission authorities must consider all preferences equally for their school against their published oversubscriptions criteria. With applications being coordinated by the local authority, schools are also not provided with this information, ensuring that the equal preference system is operated. Ranking preferences is simply your way of letting the local authority know the order in which you would like to be offered a place, should one be available for your child in all of your preferred schools.

If your child has a sibling at the school you don't need to apply as they will automatically get a place

MYTH Although most schools have the attendance of a sibling at the school as a high priority within their oversubscription criteria (or as a tie-breaker within the criteria), there is no guarantee that this will secure you a place in the school. In some cases, especially where faith schools are concerned, other criteria such as belonging to a certain faith or living within a certain parish can take higher priority within the school's admissions oversubscription criteria, and the school may oversubscribe within these criteria areas.

I'm moving so there's no point in applying until that has been finalised

MYTH You can update your address at any time with your home local authority or with the local authority you have moved to if you have applied for a place there. Whilst there will be a cut-off date to supply address changes by for most local authorities (as an address will have to be used for the purpose of allocating a place), you can update your address at any point and if you've been unsuccessful in gaining a place at a school this could have a significant impact on your waiting list position for the school.

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I can use my relative or friend's address to apply for a school place

MYTH The local authority and the admission authorities for our secondary schools conduct several checks on the application address provided and frequently receive information regarding potentially fraudulent or misleading applications. Proof of residency will be requested where necessary and where an application is discovered to have been submitted using a fraudulent or deliberately misleading application address, your application may be withdrawn by the admission authority for each school. If this is done after the allocation of places there may be very limited places still available across the local area.

All of the children living on our street go to the school so I'll definitely get a place

MYTH Each of these children will have gone through the same process when they applied for a place at the school and their applications will have been considered against the school's oversubscription criteria at that time. Variables such as what criteria the child's application was assigned, the size of that child's year group, Ofsted inspection report releases, school performance tables and many other factors have an impact on parental preference each year and schools are not always oversubscribed or as heavily oversubscribed from one year to the next.

The earlier I apply the better the chance I have of my child being offered first preference

MYTH All applications are treated equally and where a school has more preferences than places available the applications are considered against the published oversubscription criteria for that school and ranked accordingly. **The most important message here is to apply before the deadline for applications to be received, being 31st October for secondary school admissions.** Late applications received after this deadline will be considered after all of the on-time applications have been considered, being late can damage your chances of being offered a place at your preferred school.

There is no point in applying for my preferred school as it is always oversubscribed

MYTH Whilst it's important to do some research when considering your preferences with regards to the likelihood of being offered a place, there are no guarantees that preferences will remain the same from one year to another. Although it's difficult, try to weigh up whether you will be more disappointed that you have missed out on a place that you could have been offered, against using one of your preferences and not being offered a place. Being refused a school place also entitles you to the right of appeal to an Independent School Admissions Appeals Panel, which you can't be offered if you haven't made a formal application to the school.

I can only apply for places at schools in my local area

MYTH You will make your application to the local authority in which your child lives but this in no way limits you to applying only to schools in that area. It will be important to speak to your preferred schools, if they are not within your home local authority, about their admissions requirements, but you must make your preference for those schools on your home local authority application system or form. If you are applying online and are having trouble finding a school please contact your local School Admissions Team and they will either assist you with finding it, or will add it to the online application system to enable you to select it as a preference.

Website: www.halton.gov.uk/schooladmissions

Email: schooladmissions@halton.gov.uk