



Secondary School Admissions 2017/18: Frequently Asked Questions

The process of applying for secondary places can be stressful and those going through it are often anxious, especially as key deadlines approach. We hope the information below will be helpful in understanding the process.

When are offers made?

The first round of offers for all London state schools takes place each year on March 1. Your local authority will tell you which school your child has been allocated on that day. If you have applied online, you will be notified as to when the system is available for you to view your offer.

Who makes the decisions – the school or the local authority?

The formal offer of a place comes from your local authority. The school sets the admissions policy and confirms which applicants have satisfied the Jewish practice criteria, but plays no part in the selection process. Nor do schools know where parents have put them on their list of preferences.

I know many Jewish schools are oversubscribed. What should I do to maximise my child's chance of a place?

The best and only advice is to list the schools in the order you genuinely want them and then sit tight and remain hopeful. The system allocates places on the basis of the preferences parents put on their Common Application Form.

If you try to play the system, or put a school you don't really want higher up because you think you have a better chance, you do not get any advantage and it simply distorts the process for you and for everyone. This is one of the main reasons for delays and unhappiness in the admissions system. Once your form is submitted, there is nothing further that you can or need to do.

I've heard about several "rounds" of offers. What does that mean?

After offers are made on March 1, there is always some movement. Some families decide to go to private schools, or go abroad, or move house, and this frees up the place they were allocated. This means that this place can be offered to someone who put the school as their first preference but who was allocated their second-choice school, for example. This, in turn, means there is a space at the second-choice school that can be offered to someone who put this school as their first preference but was allocated another school.

As a result, there are often quite a few places that arise after March 1 as all this shuffling happens, Almost a hundred places at JCoSS, JFS and Yavneh were offered after the first round last year. It is also important to note that this year JCoSS is offering a bulge class which means 30 more offers will be made in the first round, which should take off a lot of the admissions pressure. JFS will then wait until after this first round of offers to see if there is demand to justify a further class.

When are the rounds?

Schools tend to make a fresh round of offers every few weeks, if there are places to offer; however, this varies between local authorities. It is quite common for 30 or more places to become available in this way for each school. If the offer you receive is from a school you put lower down your list, your child's name can remain on the waiting list of your first choice of school automatically.

How does the waiting list work?

The schools and their local authorities maintain a waiting list for places that become available after March 1. The first round of offers have to be accepted or rejected by March 15. When the local authorities receive this information, they update each child's status on their system. Each school cross-checks their list of available places with their local authority and then offer places according to the school's admissions policy to those on the waiting list. If your child's name is not selected, it will remain on a school's waiting list into September unless you tell the school otherwise. Schools will usually try to update you from time to time on the status of the waiting list.

If you accept an offer, your child can still remain on the waiting list for a school of a higher preference. So if you accept a place at your third-preference school, you can remain on the waiting list for the first and second preferences. It is advisable to inform both the local authority and the schools that you wish to remain on the waiting list.

Can I change my mind about the order I put schools in?

You can do this via your local authority in certain circumstances, but they may insist on having a concrete reason for the change. It is important to get the list right first time because that – and only that – is what the computer uses to allocate places. If your child is a sibling at one school and you put another school first, but then change your mind and decide you would prefer the sibling's school, you do not have an automatic place but would be offered the first available one.

Why do some people who put a particular secondary school second get places ahead of people who put it first?

The system gives your child a place at the highest school on your list that has a place. If your first-preference school cannot offer a place, the computer automatically treats the next highest school on your list as your first preference, and tries again there. The system is run for all schools and applicants simultaneously so that all applicants have equal chance to be selected within a given criteria. It may seem frustrating and baffling for those who listed a particular school first and don't get places, but it does mean that the school that they are offered is as high up their list as possible.

So there are children who get school A who really want school B and people at school B who really want school A? Surely the schools should talk to each other, match them up and arrange swaps?

Schools are required by law to allocate places according to the list based on the priorities set in their admissions criteria. Therefore just because a parent is rejecting a place in school A and another is rejecting a place in school B, there is no guarantee they will be top of the list of the other school and that the right swaps would happen, indeed, it is very unlikely this would happen.

Is it worth an appeal?

Everyone has the right to appeal against their allocation. The appeal process is designed for cases where you think the system has operated unfairly or where your child's situation is so acute that the school they have been allocated is totally unsuitable for them. It is not designed for cases where you simply don't want the school you have been allocated, or where you disagree with the admissions criteria.

Each case is heard by an independent panel and considered on its merits, but appeals do not succeed where the grounds are simply that you wanted a Jewish school and haven't got one, or that your child is really distressed not to get the school they wanted. The process is professional and humane, but emotionally demanding for parents as well as children. Statistically the proportion of appeals that are upheld is small.



The system seems so inefficient and unfair – isn't there a better way?

The system operated by the local authorities is as efficient and fair as it can be, but that doesn't mean that everyone can get the school they want, or sometimes any of the schools they want. If all the schools on your list are heavily over-subscribed, there is a chance that you will not get any of them. That will *feel* unfair (why has my child not got a place anywhere when all her friends have?) but that doesn't mean it actually *is* unfair. It may be bitterly disappointing and unpleasant, but that is not quite the same thing.

It's clear there aren't enough places at Jewish schools. Can't one of the schools expand?

There probably are enough places at Jewish schools at the moment, but they are not perfectly distributed in line with the demand. PaJeS is looking at ways to improve the situation, which might include extra places at some schools. We are commissioning extensive research to inform this discussion.

Whitefield School in Barnet has offered to organise some Jewish provision to Jewish students but we expect there will be sufficient capacity within the Jewish system through the extra places offered at JCoSS and JFS, coupled with the possibility of places at Kantor King Solomon.

However though it may take some time and patience from parents we would expect that there should be sufficient places to offer all parents that genuinely want a Jewish education a place for their children.