

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHRONICLE: LONDON FACES BIGGEST SHORTAGE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES

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## London faces biggest shortage of primary school places

8 April, 2015 | By Fiona Parker

### London boroughs face the largest imbalance of primary school pupils to places, new figures show.

Research conducted by the Local Government Association found that eight out of the 10 local authorities forecast to have the biggest shortage of primary school places in proportion to pupils over the next five years, are based in the capital.

The figures reveal that although nationally councils have created more than 300,000 primary school places since May 2010, two in five could still have fewer places than pupils by September 2016. This is expected to increase to more than half in 2017-18 and to three in five in 2018-19.

Newham and Harrow LBCs are among the borough's facing the greatest gaps, with predictions of 27% and 23% more pupils than places in 2018-19 respectively. These forecasted imbalances are the second and third largest in the country. City of London Corporation has the largest imbalance with twice as many pupils as places forecast. However, the authority is forecast to have just 418 pupils.

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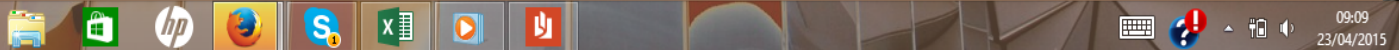
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Chris Spencer, Harrow's corporate director for children & families, said: "Harrow is spending £100m right now at 23 schools, to provide almost 5,000 brand new places. That's more than 160 new classes.

"Even then, to keep up with demand, the council still needs to create yet another 2,500 places by 2018 – which shows the sheer scale of the challenge.

"This is a long-term problem that needs long-term solutions, and with local authority budgets falling all around the country, the next government must have the vision to give councils the power and the funding to invest, innovate and educate future generations."

With 34,690 primary pupils recorded this year in Newham, the council is currently tasked with providing more primary school places than any other local authority in London. However, with only 32,906 places set to be provided, the borough is already facing a gap of 1,784 children this September.

A Newham spokesperson said: "Newham has already invested in a multi-million pound expansion programme to create an additional 10,000 primary school places which equates to 45 -50 forms of entry. This is being achieved by expanding existing schools or building new schools."

Outside the capital, Reading BC and Peterborough City Council were also among the 10 local authorities expected to struggle to accommodate pupils.

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The LGA say that the crisis can only be solved by granting more powers to local authorities, including the power to open new schools and the right to compel academies to expand if there is a demand.

David Simmonds (Con), chairman of the LGA's children and young people board, said: "Councils and schools have been doing everything they can to provide school places, in some cases going to extraordinary lengths by expanding schools where possible through additional classes or new buildings.

"However, if councils are not given powers to open new schools we could see extreme measures taken, such as converting music rooms into classrooms and putting portable buildings on their playgrounds, which will compromise the quality of education children receive."

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