Mercenfeld Primary School

DfE Number: 2069 **Status:** Academy Convertor

Planning Area: Markfield Stanton Thornton Primary (Planning Area 855 0260), Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council — 3 primary schools, all academies

Admission Number (AN): Official admission number: 50

Temporary PAN: 30

School capacity if based on the official PAN: 350

School capacity as reported on GIAS: 324

School capacity as reported by the LA: 210

Commentary

Leicestershire County Council's(LCC) school place strategy 2026 – 2031 indicates that the 8550260 (Markfield, Stanton Thornton Primary) planning area, in which Mercenfeld is located, is one of three schools, and has a capacity of 469 places.

The LA's strategy document indicates that the number of pupils in the planning area is expected to exceed capacity in the coming years – Rising to a deficit of 90 pupils by 2030.

In 2023, the LA agreed a temporary reduction of PAN at Mercenfeld from 50 to 30 with the expectation that Mercenfeld will increase its PAN should there be insufficient school places locally.

The school's admission history is turbulent; however, it has since 2014 admitted below its 50-place capacity.

Although the LA is forecasting an increase in housing, this is by no means certain.

In the event MER accepted 50 pupils into each year group the school does not have the physical space to accommodate these pupils.

In addition to the above LCC's forecast for a gradual increase of PAN risks the school being required to accept under-subscribed classes which trigger severe financial penalties under statutory infant class size rules. This is significant risk to the MER and could be avoided by LCC if adjoining area capacity were taken into account.

The trust is therefore seeking to safeguard the curriculum provision and educational quality for existing and future pupils by consulting on a permanent PAN reduction to 30.

Justification for a PAN reduction

The trust acknowledges that the LA has a sufficiency duty; however, it (the trust) also has a duty to review the available capacity and secure the educational provision and financial stability of the school. The current temporary arrangement prevents the school having certainty about the future and risks the school having both insufficient physical capacity to accommodate 50 pupils in each year group as well as being subject to severe financial penalties as a result of the infant class size rules.

The school has a number of justifications:

a. The school does not have the physical capacity to accommodate 2 classes in each year. A PAN of 50 would require 2 classes (The school has 11 classrooms and 2 classes in each year would require 14 classes).
b. The school does not have the capacity to run mixed and age-based classes as this would require 12 classes 3 classes in each year mixed group, R&1, 2&3, 4&5 (1 extra class in R,1,2 due to the infant class size rule) -2 classes in Yr6.
c. A PAN of 50 is financially unsustainable and would result in pupils at Mercenfeld being disadvantaged, as the school would be required to run high staffing costs which would impact on curriculum resources and other provision.
d. In KS2 where the infant class-size rule does not apply, the school is unable to accommodate classes of 33 / 34 pupils. The school's class rooms are incompatible with large classes and would impact on pupil support as additional adults and wheel chairs would not be able to negotiate these spaces.
e. The school currently has 2 mobile units, housing 4 classes in total. These mobiles have 2 pupil toilets and a disabled toilet between 60 pupils. Increased class-sizes would take the provision outside of the recommended ratios.
f. All pupils currently enter the school site via a single gate, shared with cars, taxis etc. Increasing the number of pupils and parents accessing via this gate presents safety risks in addition to the relationship challenges with the local community which arise from additional traffic.
g. A PAN of 50 in Reception would require additional staffing due to the school's physical orientation. This additional staffing would be required to allow pupils access to free play.

The school currently has solutions for all of the indicated challenges. An increase in pupils of 67% beyond its current intake would exacerbate all of these challenges and impact negatively on pupils who already have a school place.

In addition to the above the school is mindful of the LA's forecast pattern for 2026 – 2030.

- If LA forecasts are accurate irregular size classes would be required and place a heavy financial burden on the school. This in turn will translate to impacts on curriculum provision.
    - The LA predicts an increase in number from 239 in 2025/26 to 299 (29/30)
    - Whilst a gradual increase in KS2 is partially achievable, the LA's predictions suggest that in KS1 and Early years in particular the school will be expected to operate financially unsustainable classes of above 30 but less than 50. This financial burden on schools impacts on curriculum delivery and provision for pupils.

Local demand

The trust is mindful that there is considerable uncertainty in respect of future pupil numbers.

Nationally, the number of primary-aged pupils is falling. Whilst this is not the predicted case in this planning area, infant class size restrictions and financially unsustainable year groups of 50 will result in the school experiencing significant financial hardship.

The LA's pupil planning relies entirely on additional capacity being accommodated at Mercenfeld, with no consideration for other local development needs. Table 20 shows that in 2027/2028, where there is an increase in pupil numbers in the area, the other 2 schools in the area have places available.

Whilst Mercenfeld would wish to support pupils accessing school from its local area, this cannot be at the detriment of pupils or because transporting pupils to other schools in or outside the planning area is costly for the LA.

The issues relevant to this request are:

- It is unclear whether Stanton under Bardon Community Primary School has Section 106 funding allocated to it to build a permanent new classroom. Should additional capacity exist this has not been accommodated within LCC's projections.
- The LA's sufficiency planning can be shown to be more severe than reality - Table 23
- There is sufficient capacity in adjoining area's and LCC have already noted that this could be utilised.

Given all of the above, the trust maintains that formalisation of the PAN for MER is both necessary and not in conflict with the LA's duty to secure sufficient school places.

Markfield Stanton Thornton planning area

School	AN	Cap	25/26	26/27	27/28	28/29	29/30
Mercenfeld Primary School	30	210	239	245	263	279	299
Stanton Under Bardon Community Primary School	17	119	95	107	102	110	108
Thornton Primary School	20	140	131	127	137	149	152
Total	**67**	**469**	**465**	**479**	**502**	**538**	**559**
Spare capacity			**4**	**-10**	**-33**	**-69**	**-90**

Table 20: Source LCC data planning sheets

LCC's strategy projections indicate that the planning area is expected to exceed capacity in the coming years.

- Mercenfeld Primary School: births are above average levels; significant new housing expected; high in-catchment attendance (88% NOR from in catchment); 81% catchment retention.
- Stanton Under Bardon Community Primary School: births at or above average levels; no new housing expected; 57% NOR from out of catchment; 81% catchment retention.
- Thornton Primary School: most births at above-average levels; moderate new housing expected; 57% NOR from out of catchment (a large number from the Dove Bank planning area, 855 0024); 77% catchment retention; forecast deficit of places rising to 24% over the course of the forecast.

Of particular note from the bullet points above are the NOR(Number of pupils on roll) from out of catchment for Stanton under Bardon and Thornton Primary School. These schools have 57% of pupils from out of catchment – This equates to more than 130 places overall and more than covers the 60 place increase Mercenfeld is predicted to accommodate.

Adjoining planning areas

As with other schools, LCC's planning strategy indicates that there will be capacity in adjoining planning areas. In this case LCC's planning documentation notes that Thornton Primary Schools catchment could be pushed back to Dove Bank (855 0024 area).

Year	Forecast	Capacity	Surplus places	Surplus %	Occupancy
25/26	989	1,171	182	15.5%	84.5%
26/27	1,003	1,171	168	14.3%	85.7%
27/28	1,002	1,171	169	14.4%	85.6%
28/29	1,040	1,171	131	11.2%	88.8%
29/30	1,037	1,171	134	11.4%	88.6%

Table 21: Data for planning area 855 0024 – Surplus places

The 855 0024 area, in which Dove Bank is located has 1171 reported capacity with between 134 and 182 spare places each year over the period. Dove bank alone is predicted to have between 56 and 65 spare places over this period.

Forecast data	AN	Cap	25/26	26/27	27/28	28/29	29/30
Dove Bank Primary School	30	210	154	150	145	153	148
Ellistown Community Primary School	30	210	214	258	302	352	372
Heather Primary School	18	126	113	115	114	116	115
Ibstock Junior School	60	355	301	301	295	270	260
St Denys Church of England Infant School, Ibstock	60	270	207	179	146	149	142
Total	**198**	**1,171**	**989**	**1,003**	**1,002**	**1,040**	**1,037**

Table 22: Data for planning area 855 0024 – Pupil numbers

Mercenfeld Primary School - Pupil numbers over time (school-level)

Year	25/26	26/27	27/28	28/29	29/30
Pupils on roll	239	245	263	279	299
Available spaces against estimate	3	-4	-7	-13	-17
Actual number of pupils	235	216			
Number of pupils admitted in reception	30	31			
Available spaces against school trend	4	29			

Table 23: School level admissions data v's forecasts

Whilst LA predictions are necessary to support place planning, they rarely predict parental preference wholly accurately.

In 2025/26 and 2026/27, MER was predicted to have a total school population of 239 and 245 respectively. In reality, the school had a population of 235 and 216, between 4 and 29 pupils less than the short-term forecast predicted.

Admissions history

Since 2015/2016 MER has consistently made offers below 50 places. Since 2020 the schools offer pattern is has been more in line with its 30 place temporary PAN. There is no evidence to suggest despite the LA's predictions that this pattern of need will change in near future.

This demonstrates the potential variation which can exist around predictions.

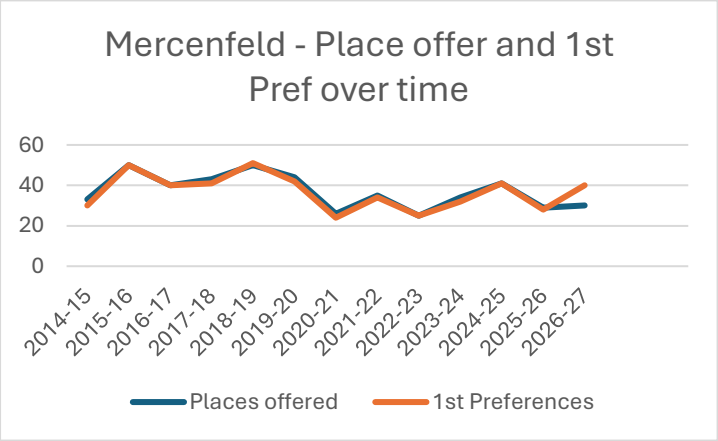


Fig 4: Mercenfeld admissions over time Source: School atlas

Impact and Equalities assessment

The trust has considered the equalities impact of this proposal, including for pupils with SEND, disadvantaged families and other protected groups, and does not consider that a PAN of 30 at MER will disproportionately affect access for any such group.

This is because:

- Children with an EHCP can be admitted above the infant class-size restriction. This allows MER to admit young people into reception, Year 1 and Year 2 without requiring additional classes over and above a PAN of 30.
- There are sufficient places, both in the planning area and adjoining areas to ensure that all pupils are able to access a school place, regardless of race, religious, socio-economic status or disability.
- The school has a current temporary PAN of 30 which is suitable for its current community need