



DECISION OF COUNCILLOR ELFAN AP REES

THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING, HIGHWAYS, ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING.

WITH ADVICE FROM
THE DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT

DECISION NO 17/18 DE 109

SUBJECT: Home to School Travel Assistance Policy

Background:

The Integrated Transport Unit was established at the end of January 2017 as a new approach to managing the council's transport services, providing a better transport service, to better manage demand, and to achieve significant efficiency savings. The unit includes Home to School Transport, Public Transport and Fleet Services.

The Home to School Transport Policy Working Group was originally set up by the CYPS School Organisation Steering Group to consider North Somerset Council's home to school transport policies and costs, both now and into the future. This encompassed mainstream, special educational needs (SEN), and post-16 education. Members were keen to emphasise that the responsibility for ensuring that children were educated remained that of the parents, and the provision of home to school transport was a consequence of this parental obligation.

The Working Group's investigation sought to take into account the demographic, financial and institutional pressures that have the potential to increase demand and cost. These include:

- Increasing number of school age population;
- Increasing numbers of pupils with SEN;
- Changes in school place provision to include bodies other than local education authorities as providing those places, such as academies and free schools. We would hope they are central to the area they would cover, but increased specialisation in provision for both mainstream and SEN may mean that distances to be travelled to increase. Academies and free schools do not have to consider the costs of pupils getting to school;
- As schools, often in Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), seek to maximise pupil numbers, they will be seeking children from wider areas of the county. This pattern may be reflected also for post-16 delivery;

- Transport costs are likely to increase for a number of reasons, including: increase in fuel prices; pressures on operators to provide lower emission vehicles will increase; with potentially increasing SEN pupil transport numbers they will be more complex in terms of vehicle types and personnel; and projected increases in wage costs.

The working group considered evidence from relevant officers, and also met with representatives from iMPower, the consultants engaged by North Somerset Council's Corporate Management Team (CMT) to review our home to school transport policies and procedures. The conclusions are that:

1. Current policies, though fit for purpose now, need review to meet future challenges;
2. Staff team are very skilled and pro-active in delivering at as low a cost as possible, but again need policy guidance to further manage the budget;
3. Behaviours and expectations from users, providers of transport and education services and officers across the council need to be managed better.

The Home to School Travel Assistance Policy includes the following recommendations from the working group:

- The policy reflects the current parameters of living beyond two or three miles from school, dependent on age, and are set nationally. They are there as part of the process of ensuring attendance for school children, and do not in any way prescribe how this transport function is delivered.
- All requests for assistance should only be considered for the closest relevant school to the child's home, be it primary, secondary or specialist. Parents should be made aware of this in any school place application system and it may not match their choice or that of the school or Multi Academy Trust (MAT). This may also mean that the closest school is in another council's area
- All post-16 transport should be chargeable against a published standard concessionary charging structure. (this includes Post 16 at college or a special school)
- Travel training to be considered for appropriate children
- A network of meeting points for pick-up points be established which are checked for safety and accessibility
- Personal budgets for transport of qualifying children. This should be properly clarified and publicised.
- Any parents with mobility vehicles for their children with SEN should be expected to provide transport to school in those vehicles, with the Council funding the fuel and running costs of those journeys. Unless it is more economically efficient to include them on transport already running

Appendix 1 – Home to School Travel Assistance Policy

DECISION:

To publish the Home to School Travel Assistance Policy from September 2017, and this will take effect from September 2018 for parents to make decisions about their child's school or college placements with a clear understanding of travel assistance.

Reasons:

To provide an up to date Policy which will give a clearer understanding of the statutory requirements for home to school travel, and the range of options that may be available as travel assistance.

It enables the Integrated Transport Unit to further consider more efficient ways of providing travel assistance

Other Alternatives Considered:

None.

If the Home to School Travel Assistance Policy was not updated the Integrated Transport Unit would not be able to explore more efficient ways of providing travel assistance.

Risk Assessment:

The Integrated Transport Unit will still be providing the statutory requirements of home to school travel assistance, but it will be provided in a range of ways which will be a change to current expectations of travel.

We will need to provide training and awareness of this policy, both for North Somerset Council and education staff, to maximise opportunities to encourage parents and carers make their own travel provision prior to approaching the council.

This is a needs led budget because it is difficult to plan for children moving in and around North Somerset, and how many of those also have additional complex needs requiring a very specific school placement. There is an increasing school population as well as large numbers of houses being built in the area.

When the Council considers new specialist placement provision or proposed school expansion, consideration should be given to the financial impact across all budget areas. Funding may be allocated to complete the new provision for example, but people must also consider the potential impact on other budgets particularly where it is an adverse effect and evaluate this as part of the whole project.

Financial Implications:

This decision will not impact on the current budget or financial position. It is expected to help deliver the future year MTFP savings already committed by Integrated Transport Unit.

Implications for Future Years:

(State any further financial implications in the future years and how they are to be funded).

There should be continuing opportunities to make savings as we explore travel options further, whilst also taking into account that the growing school population.

Signed..... The Executive Member for Strategic Planning,
Highways, Economic Development and Housing

Dated.....

Confirmation of Advice Given

Signed.....Director of Development & Environment

Dated.....

Home to School Travel Assistance

September 2017





Home to School Travel Assistance

September 2017

1 Introduction

Parents and/or carers are legally responsible for their children's attendance at school and for their travel to and from school. Parents and carers are asked to think about how their child will get to school when applying for a school place. The journey to and from school will form a significant part of the school day and travel should therefore be considered carefully.

Whilst the legal responsibility for ensuring that children attend school is with parents/carers, North Somerset Council also has a duty to support parents/carers by providing Travel Assistance in certain circumstances.

This Policy Statement sets out how the council will provide supported Travel Assistance for those children that qualify against set criteria. Our policies are based on the statutory guidance produced by the Department for Education in July 2014, which can be viewed in full at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-to-school-travel-and-transport-guidance>

This Policy Statement includes information on three key criteria of eligibility that must be met in order to qualify for Travel Assistance from the Council. It also provides details of what type of Travel Assistance may be offered to those that are eligible. An A-Z of our policies and methodologies for how we manage our home to school transport service is also included.

This Policy Statement will be reviewed annually and published prior to the start of the academic year in September each year.

2. Eligibility for free Travel Assistance

The following criteria will be used to determine eligibility for Home to School Travel Assistance. All three criteria must be met in order to qualify.

Criteria 1: *Children have to be of Statutory School Age (see definition in A-Z)*

Criteria 2: *The school attended is the Nearest Appropriate School with a place available (see definition in A-Z)*

Criteria 3: *The distance between home and school measured by the shortest available safe route is over the Statutory Walking Distance (see definition in A-Z)*

Home to School Travel Assistance

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3. Type of Travel Assistance to be provided

The council is in no way obliged to offer any particular type of Travel Assistance. Following confirmation of eligibility, each child's transport requirements will be assessed and the council will determine the type of Travel Assistance to be offered. An offer of eligible Travel Assistance will be made in writing to parents or carers. There is no obligation on the parent or carer to accept the offer.

The council has a general duty of responsibility, as directed by Government, to promote the use of sustainable means of travel wherever possible. Sustainable and active travel choices, such as walking, cycling and using public transport services, can have health benefits for children and families, as well as contributing towards the reduction in congestion and associated improvements in air quality, to which children are particularly vulnerable.

Subject to eligibility, examples of the type of Travel Assistance that will be offered by the council include:

- a bus ticket
- a rail ticket
- entitlement to travel on a private hire coach or minibus
- entitlement to travel in a taxi or other form of private hire vehicle
- reimbursement for parents/carers mileage at a rate set by the council
- a Personal Travel budget (PTB) for parents/carers

Each offer made will be assessed and determined using the council's judgement of Reasonable Cost (see definition). The council may decide to not offer certain types of Travel Assistance where the cost to the public purse would be unreasonable and another valid type of Travel Assistance would be available.

Parents or carers should contact the council if they consider that an offer has been made in error. However, the council will not normally enter into negotiations regarding the offer made or make any alternative offer if the first offer is declined.

Should parents or carers wish to appeal against the offer made for eligible Travel Assistance, or the decision to refuse an application for Travel Assistance, the council has an established Appeals Process (see definition) in place.



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4. A-Z of our home to school transport service

Accompaniment

In assessing whether a route is a Safe Route to School (see definition), the general expectation is that a child will be accompanied by a parent or carer where necessary, unless it can be demonstrated that it would be unreasonable to expect the parent or carer to do so for reasons of equality.

For SEND children, the council will refer to the child's Education Healthcare Plan or Statement of Special Educational Needs in determining whether a child can reasonably be expected to walk within the Statutory Walking Distance (see definition), accompanied where necessary.

Appeals Process

Parents and/or carers can appeal against the offer made for eligible Travel Assistance, or the refusal to provide Travel Assistance for their child.

The first step is to put an appeal in writing, together with any supporting evidence to the Integrated Transport Unit Manager (see Contacts). A senior officer who has not been involved in the original application will then determine whether Travel Assistance can be agreed.

Should the parent or carer consider the outcome of the first step be unsatisfactory, the second step in the Appeals Process is for the case to be put forward to the Transport Appeal Panel for consideration. Panel meetings are held monthly and are made up of representatives from the SEND team, Education Welfare team, School Admissions team, the Integrated Transport Unit and a local elected Councillor.

Behaviour

We recognise that poor behaviour on school transport can result in a wide range of problems, including endangering the safety of other passengers and road users. The council works closely with the transport providers and with schools to address incidents of unacceptable behaviour.

The council retains the right to suspend or withdraw Travel Assistance as a result of unacceptable behaviour on our transport services.



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Contacts

Our postal address is Integrated Transport Unit, Town Hall, Walliscote Grove Road, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1UJ. Our telephone number is 01934 634715. Our e-mail address is schooltransport@n-somerset.gov.uk

We are based at the Castlewood offices in Clevedon.

Other useful contacts are listed below:

School Admissions Team – 01275 884078

Sustainable Travel and Road Safety Team – 01934 426910

National Rail enquiries – <http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/>

First Group (customer services) – 0345 6020121

Home Address

Eligible Travel Assistance will only be provided to and from the child's Home Address. Travel Assistance will only be provided for North Somerset residents with a valid North Somerset address.

The Home Address is where the child spends the majority of their time with a person who has parental responsibility and/or is the main carer. This will be the address that was used in the school admissions and application process.

Correctly defining the Home Address is important, as our assessment of eligibility for Travel Assistance and the type of transport to be offered will be determined by the Home Address.

There will only be one Home Address used for the purpose of Travel Assistance. Where children have more than one home address, parents/carers will need to identify which single Home Address is to be used for the purpose of the home to school transport service.

Parents and/or carers should notify the council if there is a change in Home Address. This may affect the child's eligibility for free Travel Assistance.

Independent Travel Training

For SEND children that are eligible for Travel Assistance, our Independent Travel Training programme will be used where appropriate to increase the child's ability and confidence to travel independently. This will not affect the child's eligibility for Travel Assistance, but is designed to support the child in accessing different types of transport and developing independent travel skills.



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Journey Times

Journey times can vary and will also be influenced by day to day traffic conditions.

We follow the best practice guidance set out by Government and we seek to ensure that journeys are limited to 45 minutes for children of primary school age and a maximum of 75 minutes for children of secondary school age.

Journey times may be increased above these best practice targets where there are special circumstances, including where there has been an analysis of Reasonable Cost (see definition) for the provision of the transport.

The journey time best practice targets are only valid for journeys that are contained within the council's area. For journey requirements outside of North Somerset, journey times are likely to be higher and will be bespoke for that journey.

Low Income Families

There is an additional entitlement to Travel Assistance for children from Low Income Families. For the purpose of home to school Travel Assistance, this will include:

- *children entitled to free school meals (due to the benefits the family receive); and/or*
- *parents/carers who receive the maximum level of Working Tax Credit*

For Low Income Families, free Travel Assistance will be provided where:

- *For children aged 8-10, the Nearest Appropriate School is over two miles from the Home Address to the nearest school entrance; or*
- *For children aged 11-16, the school is between two and six miles from the Home Address to the nearest school entrance, and is one of the nearest three Nearest Appropriate Schools; or*
- *The school is between 2 and 25 miles from the Home Address to the nearest school entrance, and is the Nearest Appropriate School preferred on the grounds of religion or faith. The application must have been made under the faith based criteria*

Distances will be measured in the same way as the Statutory Walking Distance, except for longer distances which will be by road routes only.

To be eligible for Travel Assistance on the grounds of being a Low Income Family, parents or carers will need to apply annually. If Travel Assistance is provided on grounds of low income this will be for the whole of the school academic year. It is the parent or carer's responsibility to reapply each school year if they still meet the criteria as set out above.



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Nearest Appropriate School

Travel Assistance for eligible applicants will normally only be provided to the child's Nearest Appropriate School. For secondary schools, this will be determined by considering the Home Address (see definition) and the council's determined areas for home to school transport to local secondary schools.

If a child is allocated a place at a school that is not the Nearest Appropriate School as a result of parental preference, Travel Assistance will not be provided. Where schools share part of a geographical area (for example Clevedon and Nailsea), Travel Assistance may only be provided to the nearest of the two schools.

For SEND children, the policy on Nearest Appropriate School remains applicable, but we will also use any information that is contained within the child's Education Health Care Plan or Statement of Special Educational Needs to determine the Nearest Appropriate School.

Passenger Assistants

The council will provide a Passenger Assistant as part of the Travel Assistance for SEND children where this is considered necessary. Passenger Assistants will support individual or groups of passengers on our home to school transport services.

Passenger Assistants are normally provided only for those children who require continual care and supervision, for example children with severe disabilities or for those with complex social or communication difficulties.

Pick-up Points

For children travelling on home to school services arranged by the council, we will determine the appropriate pick-up and drop-off points. These will often be public bus stops or central locations within residential areas.

It is the parent or carer's responsibility to ensure that the child is at the pick-up point and ready to travel at the designated pick-up time to ensure that the child does not miss their service.

For SEND children, the pick-up and drop-off points may be adjusted and will be managed carefully, in line with any specific requirements set out within the Education Healthcare Plan or Statement of Special Educational Needs. The Home Address (see definition) will only be used as the pick-up or drop-off point in exceptional circumstances, based on the individual requirements of the child.



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Post-16 Travel Assistance

The council only provides Travel Assistance for children of Statutory School Age (see definition). The Statutory School Age has not been altered by the new requirements to participate in education or training up to 18 years of age.

The council has a duty to consider the travel requirements and the needs of SEN children who attend Post-16 education. This duty is set out in the statutory guidance for local authorities produced by the Department for Education in February 2014, which is available in full at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-transport-to-education-and-training>

The overall intention of the Government's policy is to:

- *Ensure that learners of sixth form age are able to access the education and training of their choice: and*
- *Ensure that, if support for access is required, this will be assessed and provided where necessary.*

In conjunction with the Government policy, there is no direct obligation for local authorities to provide Travel Assistance for Post-16 education.

The council will look to support Post-16 SEN students with their travel as far as possible within the financial and legislative frameworks. This support may include:

- *Working with bus and rail operators to ensure that suitable services are available to meet the needs of Post-16 students*
- *Working with Sixth Form Schools, Colleges and other Post-16 establishments to support their ability to cater for the travel demands of Post-16 SEND students*
- *Providing travel assistance for Post-16 SEND students that would otherwise be unable to access education AND where the school or college are unable to assist*

Reasonable Cost

The council will decide on the type of Travel Assistance to be offered and the cost to the council's public budget must not be unreasonable.

The assessment of reasonableness will be made by the council. This will take into account the average costs of providing transport per pupil and analysing any costs that are significantly above average.



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Reassessment

Eligibility for Travel Assistance will be reassessed in certain circumstances, including when there is a change in Home Address (see definition), school attended, change in the availability of public routes, or any other relevant change in circumstances.

You will need to inform us if you have, or are planning to, change address or school as this may affect your child's entitlement to Travel Assistance.

Risk Assessments

A Risk Assessment will normally be undertaken where Travel Assistance is provided to SEND children with complex or additional needs. The Risk Assessment will determine whether any specific measures need to be provided as part of the transport service.

Safe Route to School

Travel Assistance to eligible pupils/students will be made available on those occasions where there is not a Safe Route to School within the Statutory Walking Distance (see definition) but where the other two key criteria are met.

A Safe Route to School is defined as the availability of a route between the Home Address (see definition) and the nearest school entrance that does not feature a significant or particular hazard or danger. For example, needing to walk along narrow or winding lanes with no pedestrian provision or refuge from traffic would not be considered as a Safe Route to School.

The decision on whether a route is classified as a Safe Route to School is made by the council.

In determining a Safe Route to School, parents and carers are reminded of our Accompaniment (see definition) policy. A route may be classified as safe based on an expectation that children will be accompanied by an adult as necessary.

School Times

Travel Assistance is only made available for the normal start and finish times of schools. Travel Assistance will only be offered in conjunction with a confirmed placement at a school, and will only be provided for the purpose of attending school.

Travel Assistance will not be provided for any other part-time arrangements at schools, or in relation to any other before-school or after-school activities.



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Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Children with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) or Statement of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities will have the same entitlement to Travel Assistance as any other child and will be assessed for eligibility using the same three key criteria.

In addition to the three key criteria, the council will also review the child's EHCP or Statement to assess whether the child has any additional requirements that would affect their ability to access education. For example, this could be a consideration of a reduction in the Statutory Walking Distance (see definition) for children that have mobility or other issues that make it difficult for them to walk long distances.

It is important for the parents or carers to ensure that any important information relating to the child's requirements, such as the most appropriate school for meeting the child's SEND requirements, or any specific issues relating to transport, are included within their documentation.

The council will liaise closely with parents and carers of SEND children to support the child as far as possible with any identified requirements that the child may have whilst on a vehicle.

Statutory School Age

One of the three key criteria for qualifying for Travel Assistance is for children to be of Statutory School Age, which is 5 to 16 years of age.

The Statutory School Age has not been altered by the new requirements to participate in education or training up to 18 years of age. The council has no obligation to offer Travel Assistance for Post-16 Education (see definition).

Children aged under 5 years of age but attending a reception class full time will exceptionally be provided with Travel Assistance, provided that the other key criteria are all met.

Statutory Walking Distance

The Statutory Walking Distance is up to two miles for children up to the age of eight, and up to three miles for children aged eight and above.

The walking distance will be measured as the shortest route between the child's Home Address (see definition) and the nearest school entrance along which a child, accompanied as necessary, may walk safely. It is not necessarily the shortest distance by road. The route may include footpaths, bridleways, and other pathways, as well as recognised roads.



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Vacant Seat Payment Scheme

The council operates a Vacant Seat Payment Scheme, which makes available any vacant seats within our transport services to those children that may wish to make use of the service but do not qualify for subsidised Travel Assistance.

The charge for the Vacant Seat Payment Scheme is included within the council's published Fees and Charges which is available to view at <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/fees-and-charges.pdf> The charge is reviewed each year and is therefore subject to change.

Vacant seats are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. Parents/carers will be billed the annual amount but a payment plan may be available over 8 months. The seat allocation may be withdrawn if payments are not made. If money is owed from the previous school year, an application may not be considered until this is paid.

A vacant seat can be withdrawn at two weeks' notice if the seat is required for another child that is eligible for eligible Travel Assistance, or if the seat is no longer available for any other operational reason.

Application forms for our Vacant Seat Payment Scheme will not be available until 1st August each year for travel in September. The short application period is due to the need to plan and implement travel arrangements for children entitled to Travel Assistance in the first instance.

For more details of the scheme please see the North Somerset website <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/my-services/schools-learning/financial-support-for-pupils/home-to-school-transport/vacants-seats-payment-scheme/>

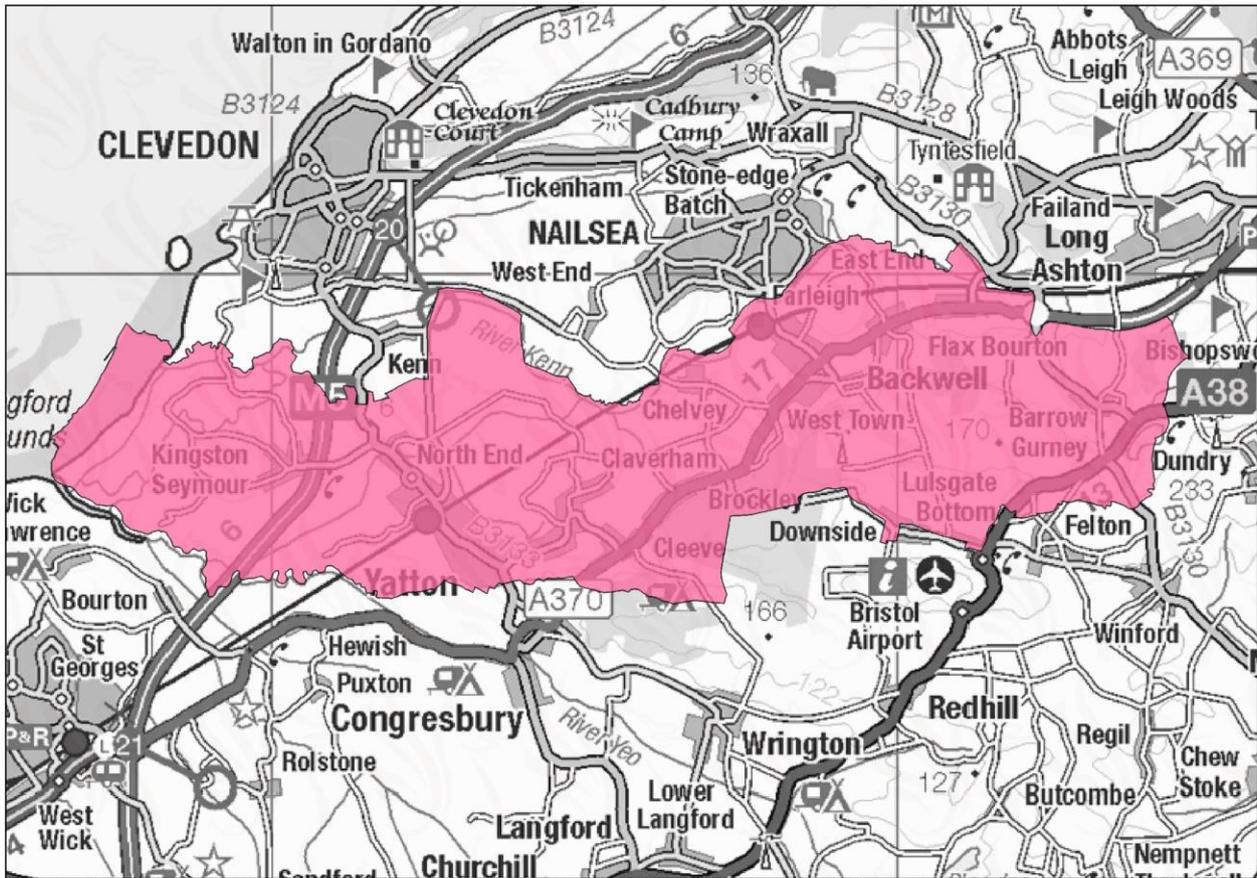
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Appendix 1: Home to School Transport Determined Areas for Secondary Schools

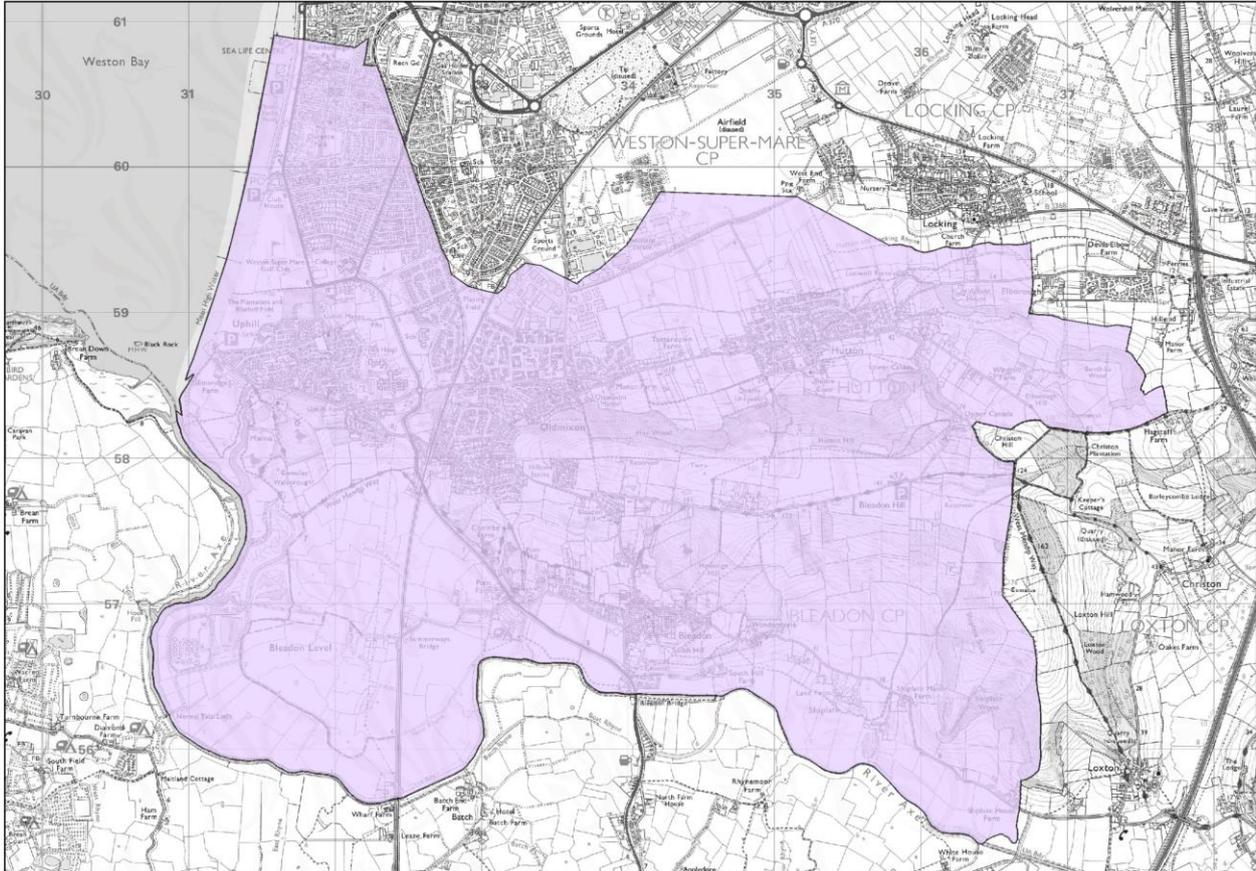
1. Backwell School



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2. Broadoak Mathematics and Computing College



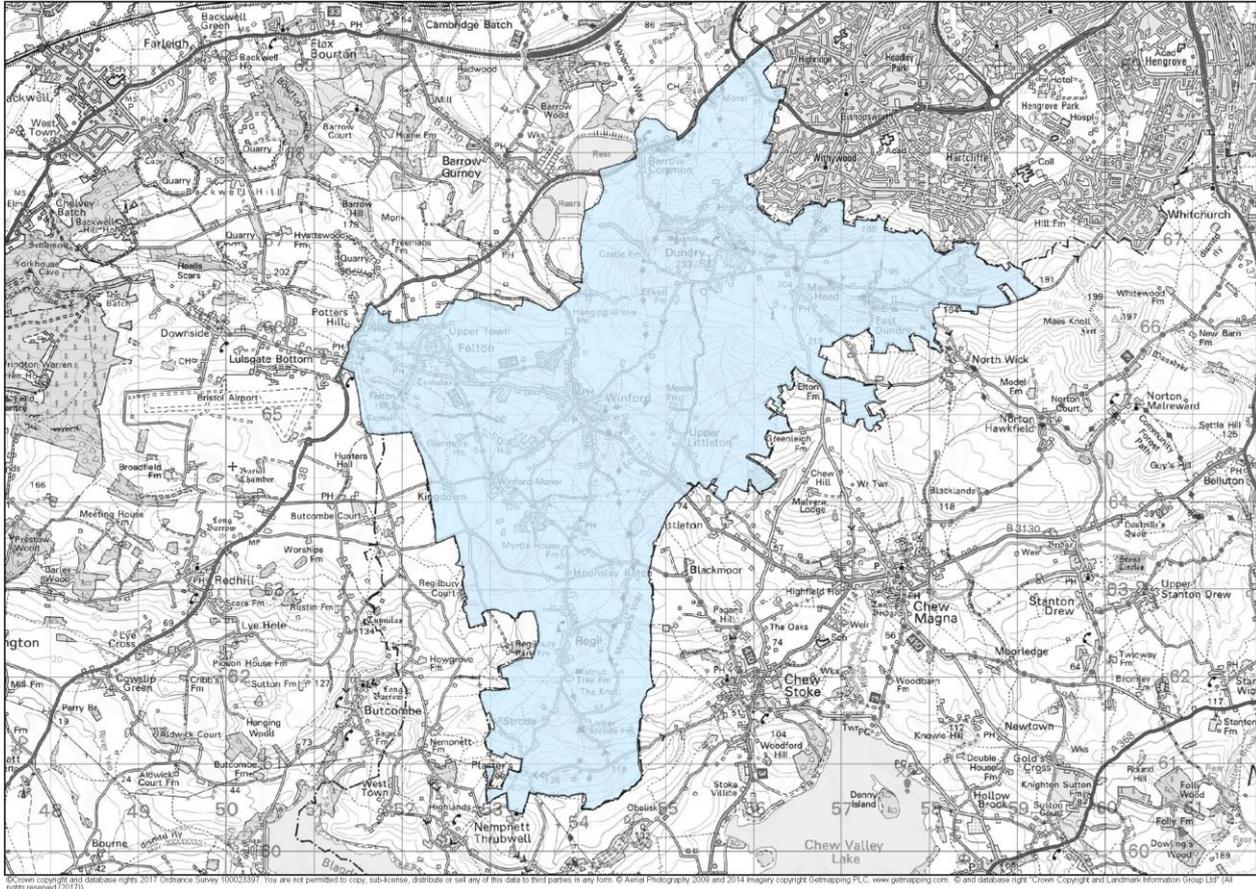
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3. Chew Valley School



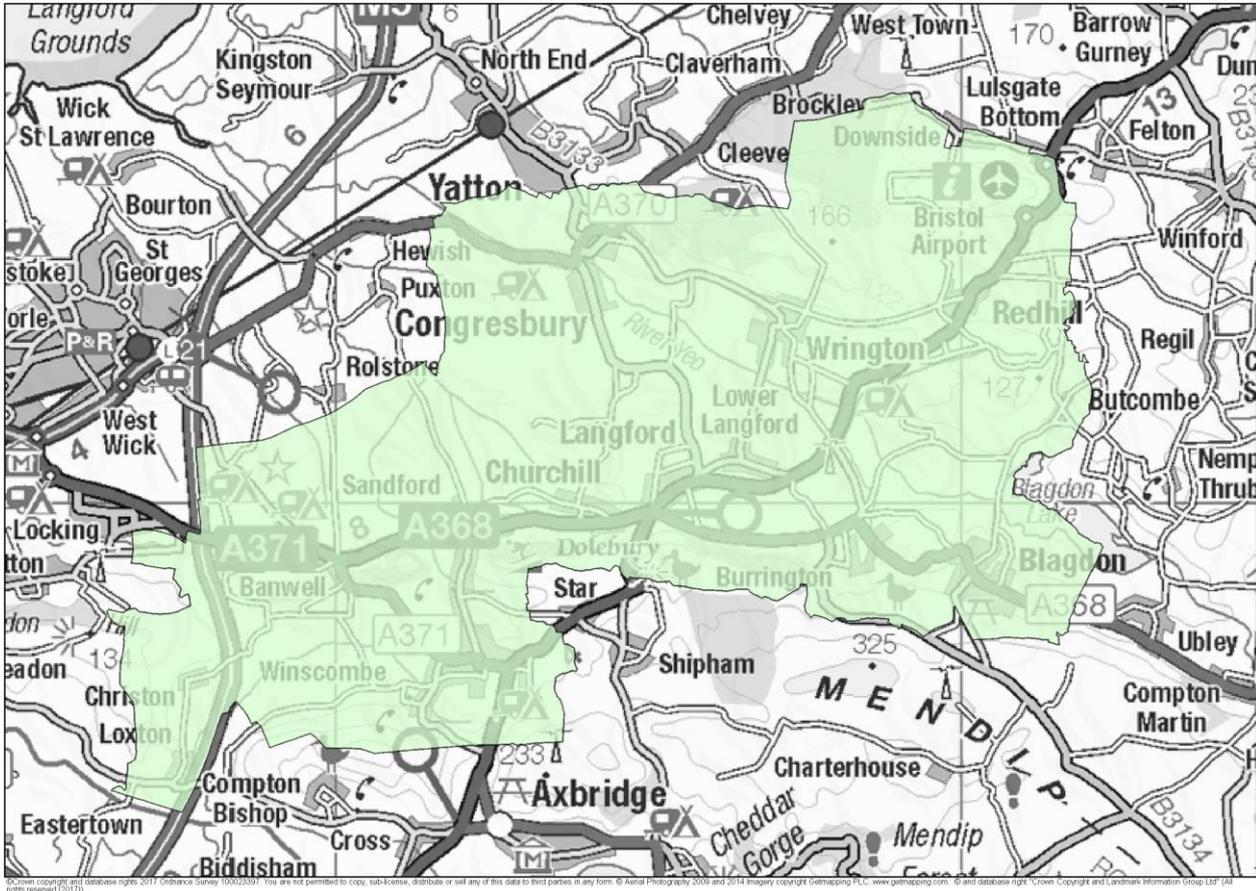
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4. Churchill Academy



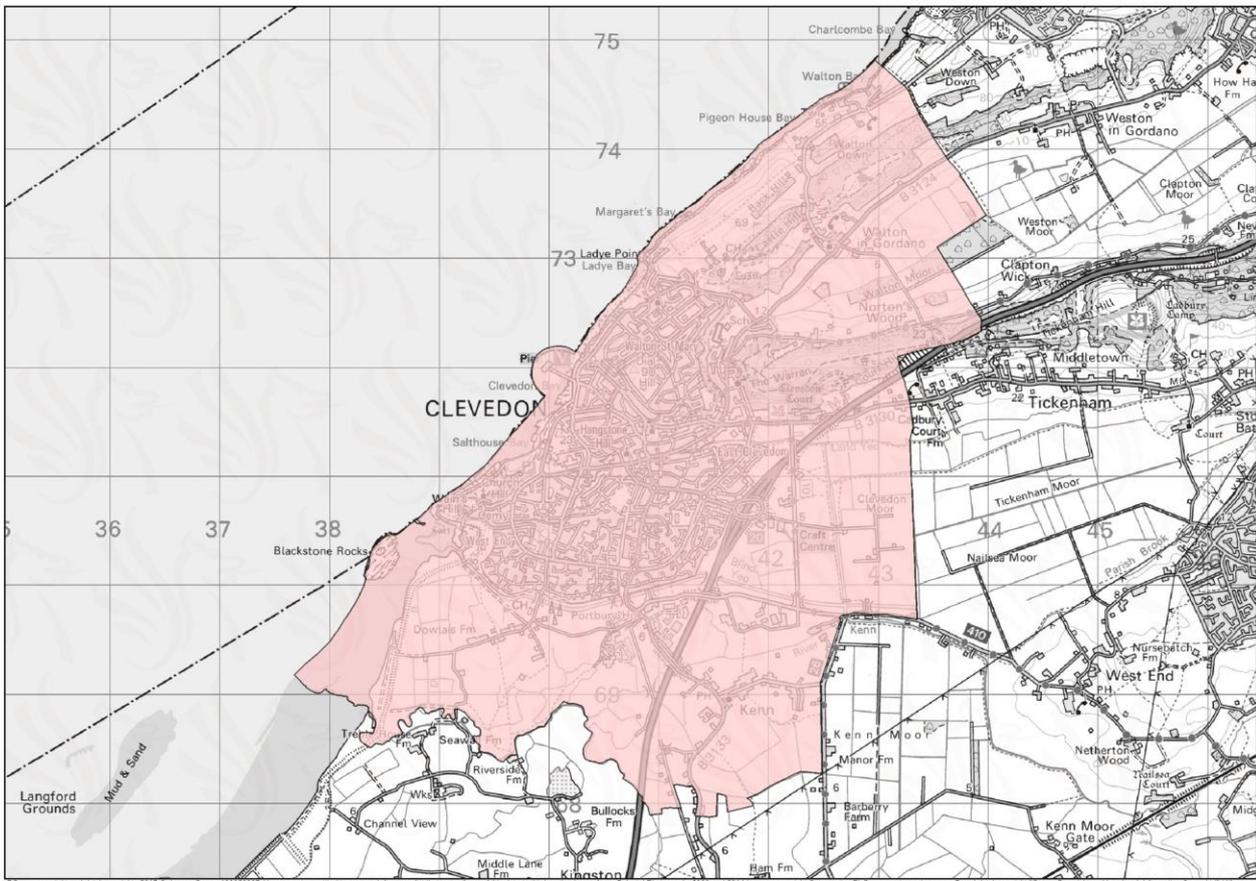
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5. Clevedon School



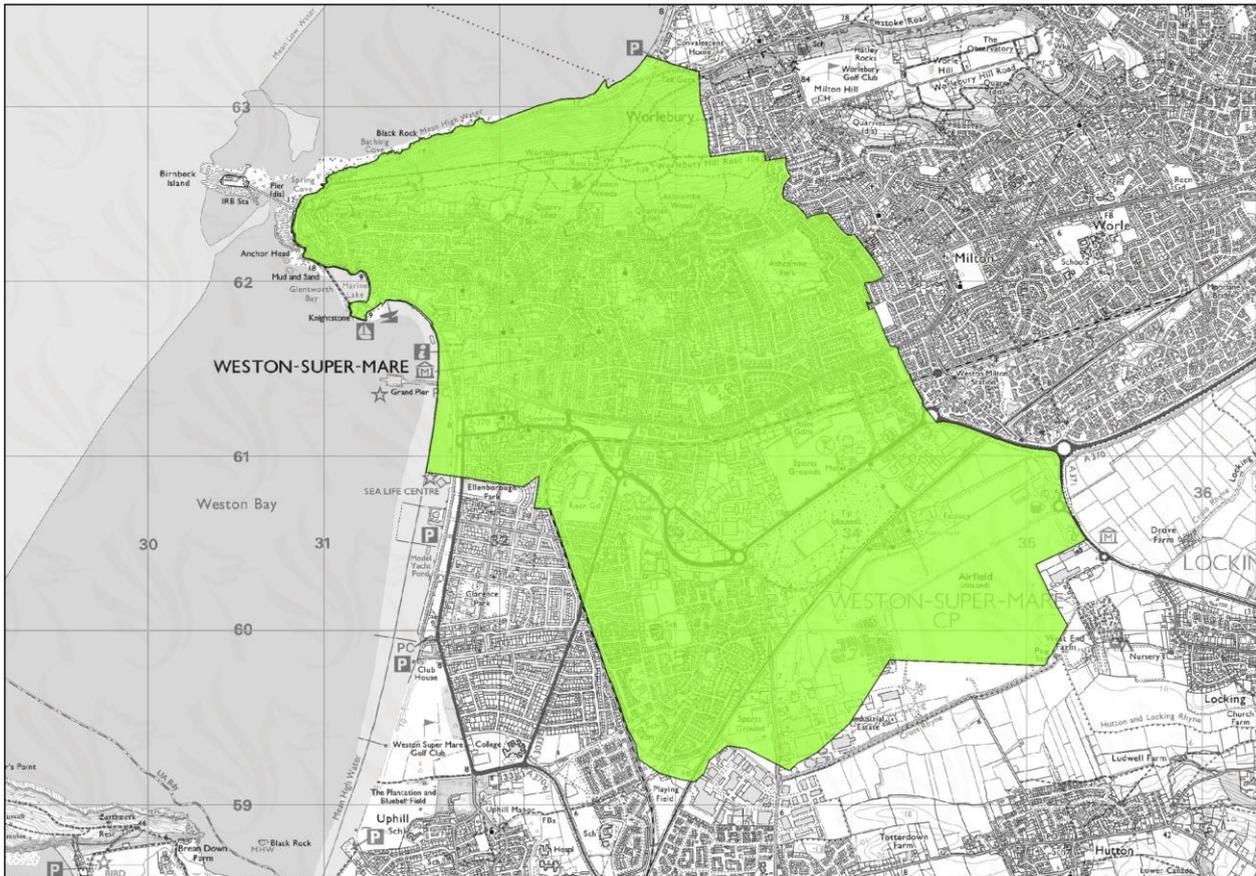
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7. Hans Price Academy

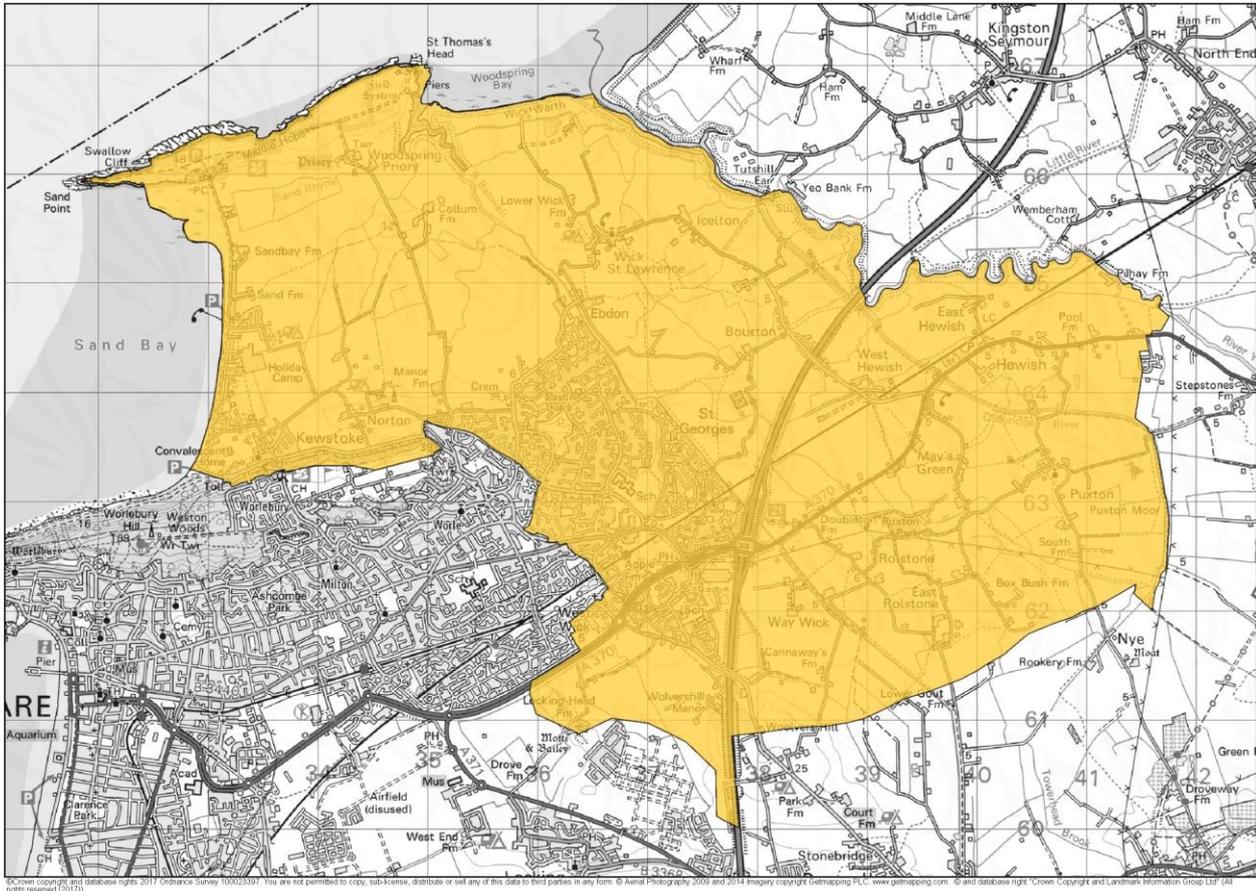


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9. Priory Community School

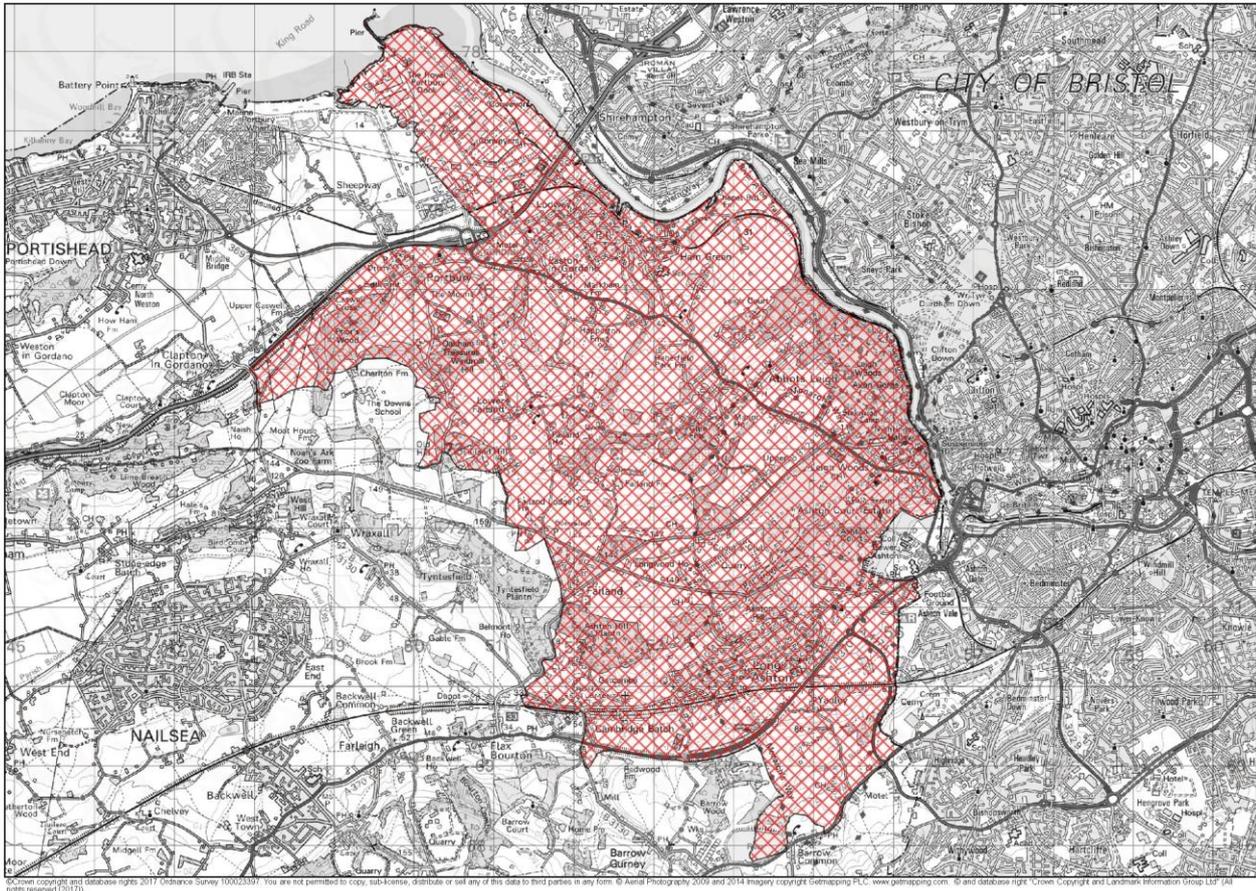


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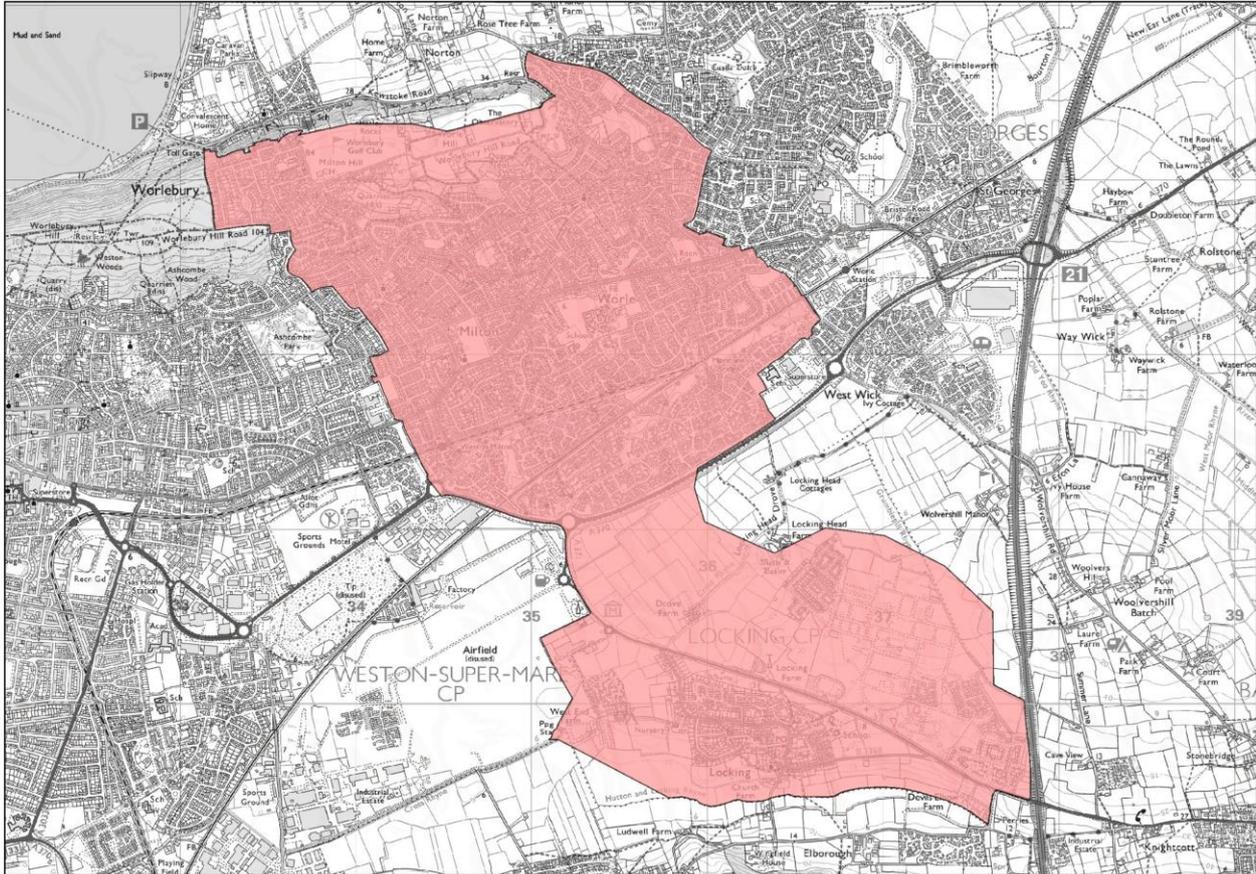
10. St Katherine's School



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11. Worle Community School



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