

Leeds Education Innovation Lab

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The problem

OpenData on Leeds Data Mill shows that last year about 910 appeals were made over school places in Leeds. 125 (<14%) were successful. Further to this we heard that the service responsible for school place allocations receives around 400-500 FOI requests per year asking for information that may either avoid or support a later appeal.

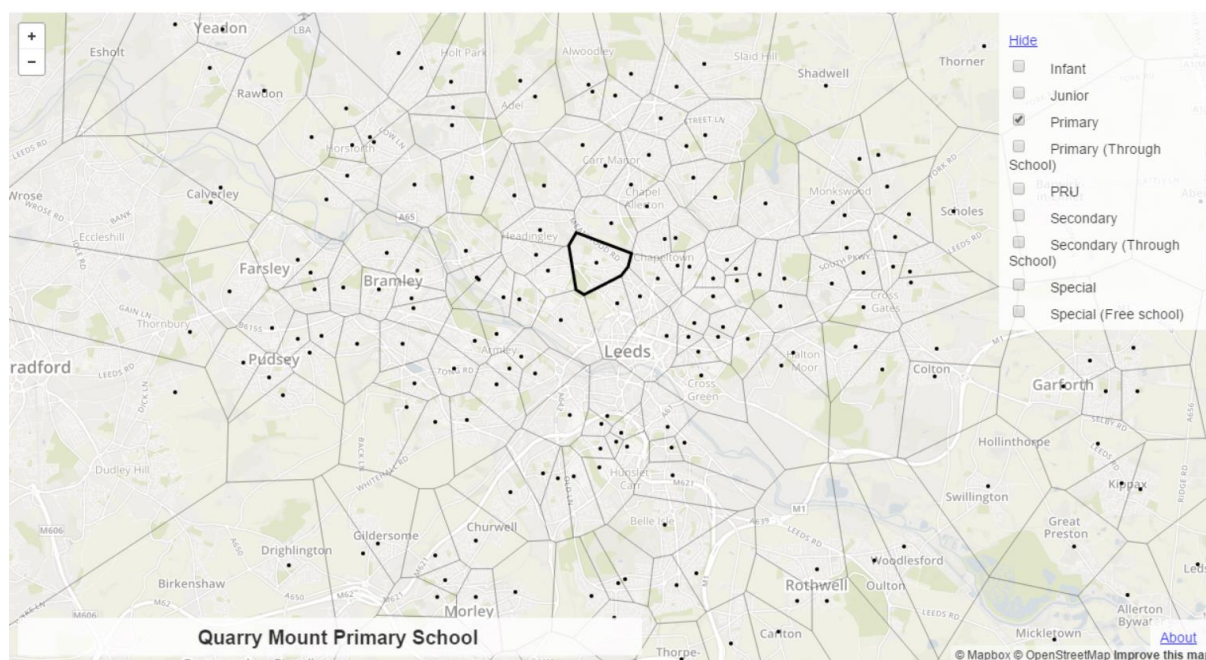
There are few more emotional issues that Leeds Council deals with than allocating school places. There are probably none with more myths in circulation over how the system works. Even though most¹ of the system is a simple application of 5 sensible priorities defined in the [Leeds Admissions Policy](#) - it is understandable that many parents struggle to understand the results.

My hope is that by better explaining how decisions are made, by providing a **customised graphical explanation a pupil's allocation decision**, we can reduce the FOI workload and increase parental satisfaction with the school allocation process in Leeds.

The technical solution

Using existing data on school type and location we can create a nearest-school map without requiring complex data such as shapefiles. This is live now at tomforth.co.uk/leedsschools. There are some errors.

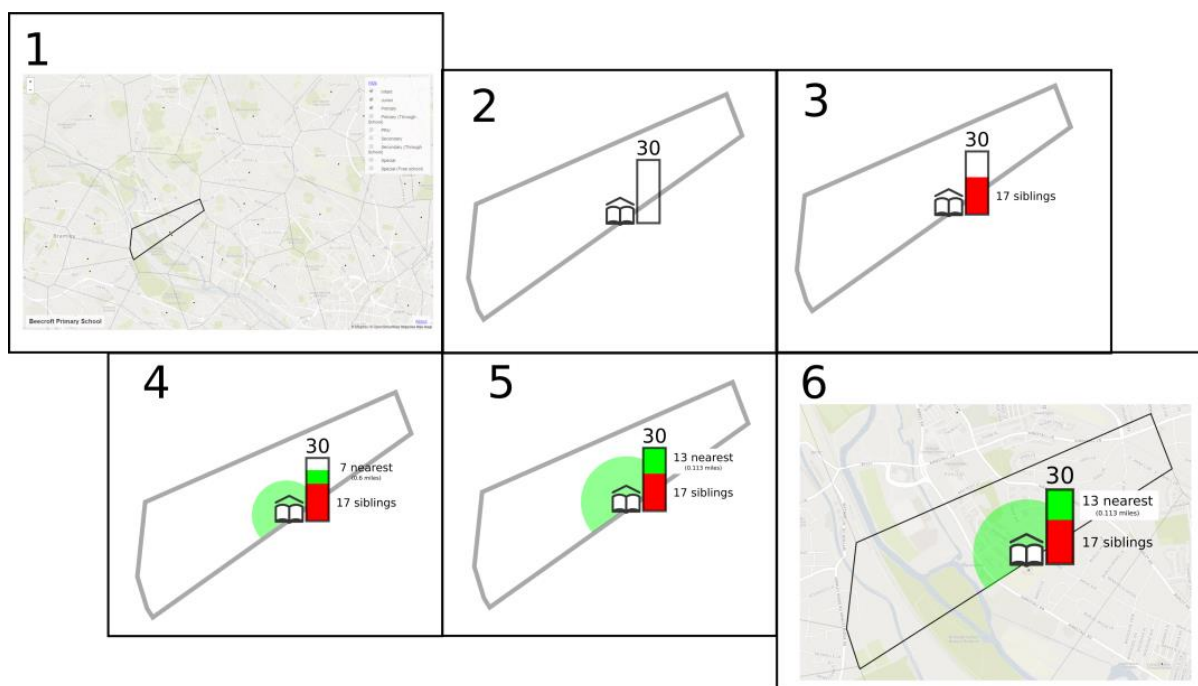
Leeds Data Mill Innovation Lab - Nearest school prototype



¹ Leaving aside faith schools, free schools, and some academies — all of which set their own admissions criteria.

I now want to build an animation that I have already prototyped. This would mean that when a school is clicked on the most recent school allocations data was displayed as an animation with 6 keyframes.

1. The nearest school polygon is highlighted.
2. The school is placed within the nearest school polygon. A bar next to it shows the number of places.
3. The number of places allocated to pupils with priorities 1, 2, and 3 (siblings) is added to bar, showing the school filling up.
4. A circle representing the **nearest-school radius of admission** would start to grow.
5. As this circle (constrained by the nearest school polygon) grows, the school will fill up.
6. When the school is full up the final “catchment area” for that years admissions is shown and explained.



The Need

The twitter reaction to working on this didn't surprise the education allocations team at all but it has really surprised me. People with experience of the system do not understand how it works.

These people are easy to engage and complaints and it should be possible to substantially reduce the number of appeals and FOI requests from them.



In addition to providing a web tool for parents to understand an admissions decision I imagine a number of further uses.

1. Explaining the current allocations system to parents before they make admissions. This would help dispel common myths about how the system works and help parents make more sensible choices.
2. Helping the allocations team to reply more quickly to FOI requests.
3. Assisting appeals panels in explaining their decision to appellants.
4. Adding information to decision letters so that parents can understand and accept the decision more easily.

I have drafted a letter as described in point 4 and include it on the next page.

Explaining your Primary School Allocation

Dear Parent,

Thank you for applying for a school place through the Leeds Primary School allocation system.

Unfortunately we have not been able to allocate your child a place at your first choice school of Beecroft Primary. We are happy to offer your child a place at your second choice of Spring Bank Primary.

We try and offer parents as much choice as possible but in some cases we are unable to meet their first choices. Below is a brief explanation of how we made our decision in line with the Leeds allocations guidelines. The weblink will provide a more detailed explanation and give you the chance to appeal our decision if you think we have made a mistake.

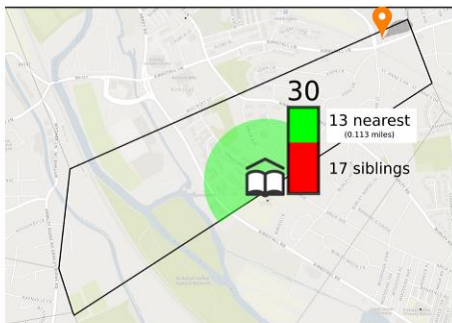
Thomas Forth

The Leeds Primary School allocations team

How we made our decision

bit.ly/example for more explanation

Why we can't offer your child a place at Beecroft Primary



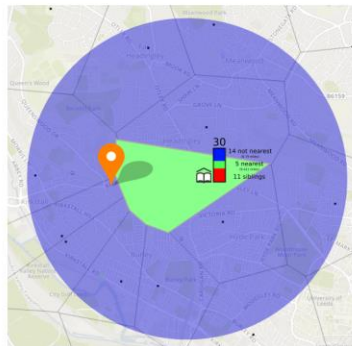
Beecroft Primary is your nearest school and was your first choice school.

Of the 30 places available, 17 were filled by pupils with siblings who already attend the school.

The 13 remaining places were filled by pupils whose nearest school is also Beecroft Primary but who live closer to it than you.

Unfortunately we cannot offer your child a place at Beecroft Primary School.

Why we are offering your child a place at Spring Bank Primary



Spring Bank Primary is not your nearest school. It was your second choice school.

Of the 30 places available, 11 were filled by pupils with siblings who already attend the school.

5 further places were filled by pupils whose nearest school is Spring Bank Primary.

The remaining 14 places were filled by pupils whose nearest school is not Spring Bank Primary but who live nearby. This includes your child.