

Report of Director of Children's Services

Report to Executive Board

Date: 11th October 2014

Subject: Information on the annual admissions round for September 2014 entry and upcoming consultation for 2016 policy.



Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

This report informs Executive Board of the statistical information on this year's admissions round, ie for entry to reception and Year 7 in September 2014.

There are national closing dates to submit applications and for making offers. Secondary applications must be submitted by 31 October and offers are made on 1 March. In Leeds 84% of parents were offered their first preference school (the same as last year) and 95% were offered one of their top three (94% last year). There were 7541 places allocated, compared to 7707 last year.

Primary applications must be submitted by 15 January each year and offers are made on 16 April. In Leeds 85% (84% last year) were offered their first preference with 94% (same as last year) offered one of their top three preferences. There were 9774 places allocated, compared to 9355 last year.

This year has seen a new secondary Free School, a new primary academy and a new primary foundation school open. Combined with continued conversions of community schools to Academy and Foundation status the local authority is now the admitting authority for less than half of all schools. There is currently a government consultation underway on changes to the Admissions Code which is the legal framework for setting policies and managing admissions. The report outlines some of the potential implications for the authority in managing this

evolving situation as we move forward, and highlights some issues for consideration in the next round of consultation.

Recommendations

1. That Executive Board note:

- numbers of applications for both phases of education, the percentage of successful first preferences for secondary admissions was 86% (up from 84% last year) and for Reception admissions was 85% (same as last year).
- The percentage of parents receiving one of their top three preferences was 96% for secondary and 94% for primary, compared to 94% for each last year.
- The percentage of parents getting none of their preferences and made an alternative offer instead was 3.2% in secondary (6.5% last year) and 5% in primary (same as last year)
- The contents of the government consultation on changes to the admissions code for 2016.
- Work with key partners to provide a package of measures to support families to ensure their applications are made appropriately and in a timely fashion.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report provides statistical information on the annual admissions round for entry to Reception and year 7 for September 2014. The rising birth rate has been impacting on entry to Reception particularly since 2009 and the impact on entry to year 7 is now affecting some areas of the City. The report further considers the potential effect of the latest government consultation on changes to the admissions code, and potential for changes within the Leeds City Council admissions policy.

2 Background information

- 2.1 The local authority is required to coordinate all applications for schools and academies in the normal admission round, which refers mainly to applications for entry into Reception and year 7, but also includes year 3 where we have junior schools, and will effect year 10 for future UTCs. This year 7541 secondary places and 9774 primary places were offered.
- 2.2 These applications are in the context of a rapidly rising birth rate over the last decade which has become more volatile which will begin to affect entry to Reception over the next few years. The cohort that entered primary this year was the largest so far for Leeds at 10,200. This necessitated a number of bulge cohorts to be put in place to meet the need for places that may not be required in future Reception intakes, whilst longer term options continue to be evaluated. 442 places were added in 22 schools.
- 2.3 The number of children due to start year 7 this year began to increase significantly in some areas of the city, although net movement into and out of the city, and into private education, meant demand for places did not rise. A number of secondary schools chose to admit additional pupils, and a new Free School opened, creating an extra 230 places in total. The majority of these places were in the south of the city where pressure for places was occurring this year.
- 2.4 Last year Executive Board noted the impact of new schools and schools converting to foundation and academy status on the co-ordination of admissions policies throughout the city. The new Free School, The Ruth Gorse Academy, has included a nearest criteria, as with community schools, in its admission policy, but the Co-operative Academy now uses a feeder school priority, before siblings, and only using distance as a tie-breaker. This has resulted in a significant change to the pattern of who receives priority for which school as their nearest.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 Local authorities are required to make offers on 1st March each year to children starting secondary school in year 7, and on 16th April to children starting primary school in reception. Offers are coordinated by each local authority, so that only one offer is received. This year 7541 offers were made for secondary places in Leeds schools. Of these 6483 or 86% were given their first preference, 7262 or 96% one of their first three preferences, and 3.2% or 242 could not be offered any of their 5 preferences. For primary, 9774 offers were made, with 85% or

8270 getting their first preference, 9167 or 94% getting on of their first three preferences, and 5% or 468 could not be offered any of their preferences.

- 3.2 We continue to support families to apply on time, and encourage on line application which has the benefit of speed and certainty of receipt for parents. We use email reminders to support parents who have not completed the application process on line but have created accounts and added preferences, and we chase non-applicants through primary schools (for secondary applications) and early years settings (for primary applications). This year we have identified further work that can be done, and different timings which will be implemented in the coming round to further assist parents. It is however impossible for the admissions service to know the whereabouts or plans of all families, and it does remain the responsibility of parents to apply on time. Late applications will result in one of the remaining places being offered after all other preferences have been considered.
- 3.3 Two new Free Schools opened this year, the Ruth Gorse Academy and SPT alternative provision. The Ruth Gorse Academy opened on temporary premises in Morley this year, but has secured permanent premises in the city centre for 2016. It took 95 children this year, and plans to rise to 195 in 2015 and 240 in 2016.
- 3.4 To deal with the increasing demand for primary places, 442 additional places were established in bulge cohorts across 22 schools. These were created to deal with a spike in the birth rate, and in the expectation that permanent increases in those areas over and above those already in progress were not generally needed. The period of volatility in the birth rate for cohorts entering primary school in the coming years means that it is not always clear that a permanent increase is sustainable yet, with the timing of many changes dependent on the timing of proposed new housing developments.
- 3.5 In secondary schools a total of 135 extra places were created by schools choosing to admit above their admission number. These are not permanent changes until supported by the determination of admission arrangements, but the code allows schools to take extras if they wish. A further 95 new permanent year 7 places were created by the opening of the Ruth Gorse Academy, a new Free School to be based permanently in the city centre from 2016, but in Morley until then.
- 3.6 Whilst this year the bulge cohorts allowed local children access to schools within reasonable distances, it is also true that some children will have been admitted from further away than is common for that school. This in turn may influence the patterns of future admissions in later years due to the priority for siblings in the admissions policy, which is above the priority for nearest school.
- 3.7 Approximately five years ago the authority considered a change to the admissions policy for community and voluntary controlled schools which split this priority so that those children living closest to the school had priority over siblings living further away. The priorities after SEN and Looked After Children proposed were; siblings and the school is the nearest, then non siblings and the school is nearest, then siblings and the school is not nearest, and finally non siblings and not the nearest school.

- 3.8 At the time views were divided between primary and secondary school admissions. For secondary admissions views were fairly evenly split between those in favour of change and those against. For primary school admissions there were a significant majority in favour of retaining the sibling priority in its current form, however it would be sensible to review this in the context of the impact of bulge cohorts.
- 3.9 The volume of in year requests for transfers has dropped this year, from 5473 to 4539 in primary and from 1899 to 1546 in secondary. It is possible that there is some change to recording levels due to the removal of co-ordination and individual schools now receiving applications directly, however there has been a strenuous education campaign to ensure all approaches are reported to the authority in line with the admissions code. All instances of families being turned away from schools that we have been notified of have been followed up, and we believe the impact to have been one of delay rather than of not capturing that request.
- 3.10 There has been a marked increase in the number of appeals lodged for the Reception round, with 1020 appeals logged in total throughout the whole of Reception 13/14 and 1095 logged so far on the Reception 14/15 round. Although there has been an increase in the number of schools converting to own admitting authority status, most of the primaries in particular continue to buy the appeals service from the authority and so we continue to capture their data. Despite the extra number of appeals logged the number of successful appeals has fallen, 57 children granted appeals at this stage in 2013 and only 29 appeals granted this year so far.
- 3.11 For secondary the number of appeals logged has remained stable at around 400 for Year 7 appeals and the numbers granted remain stable at around 50.
- 3.12 The Leeds Admission policy has for many years given parents a priority for their 'nearest' school based on a straight line distance. There are now only five community secondary schools and approximately half of all primary schools are community or voluntary controlled. Whilst most schools who have changed status have continued to include the nearest criteria within their own admission policy, a small number do not.
- 3.13 This priority automatically adjusts when new schools are created or when new policies are used. When a school no longer uses the 'nearest' criteria this has an impact on the way local families are affected. Most significantly, the Co-operative Academy now uses a feeder school priority, before siblings, and only uses distance as a tie-breaker. They do not presently include 'nearest'. This has resulted in almost a thousand children no longer receiving priority for that school, and instead receiving priority for the next nearest school who does include 'nearest'. This will mean that many more families will receive priority for Roundhay school, for example, but will not be able to be offered a place there due to the very high numbers. This is likely to lead to a great deal of disappointment from families in the area. As the Co-operative Academy had recently tended to have vacancies on offer day, this has not resulted in children being disadvantaged to date.

- 3.14 Consideration will need to be given to how to manage admissions fairly and effectively as schools take control over their own admission arrangements and the rising cohort sizes. The current local authority policy using nearest and straight line distance has been effective for many years, and allows for clarity and objectivity for parents. There is a need to consider the continued effectiveness and whether alternative priorities or use of catchment areas is an option for consideration for future use.

Consultation on School Admissions Code

- 3.15 Central government have recently consulted on changes to the admissions code which could have an impact in Leeds. Details of those changes are outlined in the following paragraphs.
- 3.16 The first proposal was to allow admitting authorities to prioritise the admission of children from disadvantaged backgrounds by allowing them to prioritise children who receive the pupil premium. Issues to consider in implementing this would include the potential impact on parental perception of the school, budgetary implications and how the information necessary to assess an application for the pupil premium would be carried out for a child not in an EY setting.
- 3.17 Separately there was a proposal to allow schools to prioritise children who are in receipt of Early Years pupil premium attending the school nursery. In some areas numbers of children in a school nursery who attract EY premium may exceed the number of reception places available.
- 3.18 There were some detailed changes proposed to bring the timetable for consultation on admissions policies forward. The stated aim is to allow more time for the adjudicator to review objections to policies and ensure policies are compliant, so that places are allocated in accordance with compliant policies when the round opens. Consultation on policies would come forward from November - February to October – January, and the minimum consultation period would be reduced from 8 to 6 weeks. Policies would need to be determined by 28 February. The proposals would mean that in 2016 Executive Board would receive the paper to determine the admissions arrangements on community and VC schools in February rather than March.
- 3.19 The consultation included proposed changes to clarify the arrangements regarding summer born children seeking to defer entry. The local authority already has a process in place to make these decisions, and ensure that cases are considered individually in line with current guidance and the proposed new code.
- 3.20 The final area of consultation concerned in year admissions. The stated intent was to clarify matters, retaining the option for local authorities not to co-ordinate in year admissions, reinforcing that parents may apply directly to own admitting authority schools, and clarifying that parents must apply to community and VC schools through the local authority.
- 3.21 When the requirement to co-ordinate was removed two years ago, Leeds moved to a system of in year applications being made directly through schools. This provides a clear and simple process for all schools, which is consistent for

parents. It mirrors real life behaviour – most parents enquire first at a local school rather than the local authority when seeking to move schools. It can also be faster, as for any own admitting authority schools the LA has to pass the application back to them for a decision. The system does not require parents to know whether a school is an academy, foundation, aided or community when they wish to apply. The local authority is notified of every application and its outcome.

- 3.22 The local authority will continue to promote this simple process for parents, whilst making clear that parents may approach the local authority directly for a place in a community primary school. The local authority continues to be the admitting authority for community and voluntary controlled schools and to make the decisions on offers.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 Consultation on any proposed changes to the Admission policy for entry in September 2016 will take place later in the year, beginning no sooner than 1 November and concluding before 1 March as required by current regulations. Information will be hosted on the Council website and sent out to elected members, head teachers and chairs of governors as well as a range of other interested parties.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 This report is for information only and therefore does not have any implications for equality. Screening form attached at appendix 1.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 The Admission policy for Leeds community and voluntary controlled schools is fully compliant with the School Admissions Code and has been made available to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator for checking through the city council's website. Looked After Children are the highest priority in the policy.
- 4.3.2 In line with the council's commitment to being a child friendly city the report outlines areas which will be considered to ensure all children continue to be able able to access good local school provision quickly, supporting good outcomes through supporting attendance.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 Whilst the published guide for parents applying for the normal admission round remains a statutory document and must be printed, maximum use of the website is used to provide a wider range of information for parents to support their application for school. Continued use of the online application process by 70% of parents provides a secure means of applying whilst reducing the administrative requirement to manually input written requests.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 Executive Board determined the admission policy in operation for entry in September 2014 at their meeting in April 2013. Admission arrangements must be determined by 15 April each year in accordance with School Admissions Arrangements Regulations (amended in 2012).
- 4.5.2 This report provides information on the outcome of the admission arrangements in place. All requirements for the coordination of the admission process have been carried out in line with all relevant legislation and the criteria of the policy for community and voluntary controlled schools. The local authority received copies of all admission arrangements from own admitting authority schools and academies which were checked and found to be compliant with the regulations.
- 4.5.3 A greater number of infant class size appeals have been granted this year than previously. Almost all children who are granted an appeal will go on to be taught in a class of more than 30 per qualified teacher. Under the current legislation this will remain the case throughout their time in key stage 1 as schools are no longer required to take qualifying measures after the first year.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 This paper is for information only and there is no risk management requirement. The risk around managing sufficiency of school places is managed through the city's corporate risk register.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The number of applications for school places is rising however the percentage of successful first preferences is remaining stable or even improving. The volume of appeals, particularly for Reception, is proving challenging to be heard within the statutory deadlines, and has increased. The volume of in year transfer requests has fallen.
- 5.2 Changes in the admissions policies of own admitting authority schools mean that consideration may need to be given to changing the current straight line distance and nearest school and recommendations will be brought forward in the March paper to Executive Board on determination of admissions arrangements.

6 Recommendations

That Executive Board note:

- numbers of applications for both phases of education, the percentage of successful first preferences for secondary admissions was 86% (up from 84% last year) and for Reception admissions was 85% (same as last year).
- The percentage of parents receiving one of their top three preferences was 96% for secondary and 94% for primary, compared to 94% for each last year.

- The percentage of parents getting none of their preferences and made an alternative offer instead was 3.2% in secondary (6.5% last year) and 5% in primary (same as last year)
- The contents of the government consultation on changes to the admissions code for 2016.
- Work with key partners to provide a package of measures to support families to ensure their applications are made appropriately and in a timely fashion.

7 Background documents¹

7.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.