

Annual Report of Leeds Admission Forum

Academic year 2007/2008

DRAFT

Background

Section 85A (1A) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (as inserted by section 41 (3) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006) provides admission forums with an important power to produce an annual report on schools admissions. The admission forum report should provide an objective analysis of the degree to which local admission arrangements support fair access. The forum has until the end of December to submit the report to the local authority, its schools and the Schools Commissioner at the DCSF.

Summary

The admission policy for community and voluntary controlled schools in Leeds is based on sibling priority and nearest school. It is an equal preference system so that parents can be as aspirational as they wish with their higher preferences, but are encouraged to include their nearest school as a safety net. This system has worked well for a number of years. The Aided and foundation schools, and academies in Leeds have admission policies which comply with the School Admission Code. The Fair Access Protocol is operating well, with all schools admitting pupils where required, and working in partnership with each other.

There are no significant barriers to access to the schools.

Issues

The number and percentage of 1st, 2nd and 3rd preferences met and factors affecting preferences.

Appendix 1 contains the data tables at individual school level for primary and secondary schools. We are currently experiencing declining numbers entering secondary school in Leeds with half of the schools oversubscribed with first preferences and half undersubscribed. When places were allocated in March all but eight secondary schools were full to their admission number.

Roundhay remains the most significant consistently oversubscribed school, where nearest priority children are regularly unable to gain a place. The admission policy for entry in September 2009 has been changed to include DYCA as a nearest school. Previously the 'nearest' area for Roundhay was artificially large as many of the children actually live closer to DYCA. This change should ensure that the majority of Roundhay 'nearest' children should have a realistic chance of obtaining a place at the school and that children nearest to DYCA are aware of, and have priority for the school. Next year's report will comment on whether this has addressed the situation.

The work of the Choice Adviser is targeted towards secondary applications and has been very successful. Around 300 parents do not submit a preference form on time each year and these have been reduced to single figures before places are allocated on 1 March. The Choice Advice service go on to offer support for families through the appeal process where required.

Of the 218 primary schools 56 were oversubscribed for entry in September 2008. This compares to 51 oversubscribed the year before. The birth rate entering primary schools has been increasing and looks set to continue to increase for the next few years. 20 of the schools were oversubscribed by more than 25% of their admission number, however these are spread across the City. The situation is being monitored to ensure that alternative local schools are available.

While the percentage of preferences met remains fairly steady at secondary level, there has been a reduction in successful preferences for entry to primary school. Leeds has operated an equal preference system for many years and parents are aware that they are able to be aspirational with their first preference. During this period of increasing births this is leading to parents who are applying for more distant schools, being gradually squeezed out by increasing numbers of local parents. The local authority do not discourage this behaviour but strive to ensure that parents are realistic with at least one of their preferences.

The number of appeals made within the area.

The most recent data available at a national and regional level regarding appeals is for the academic year 06/07.

Primary:

Percentage of appeals heard of the total applications for places 06/07

National 2% Regional 2.7% Leeds 3%

This has continued to rise and for the most recent annual round stands at 4.3%. This may be in part due to the increasing birth rate in the City.

Percentage of successful appeals 06/07

National 32.2% Regional 36.6% Leeds 20.5%

These figures include both class size and non-class size appeals. Education Leeds has been particularly successful at defending Primary appeals and has the lowest percentage of appeals granted in the Yorkshire and Humber region. In this most recent admission round, whilst the number of appeals has increased the percentage successful has fallen to 3.7%. Leeds has, wherever possible, organised admission numbers in primary school around the class size legislation which contributes significantly to the ability to defend appeals.

Secondary:

Percentage of appeals heard of the total applications for places 06/07

National 5.7% Regional 7.4% Leeds 16.7%

There has been a significant reduction in the number of secondary appeals heard since 06/07 with only 4.2% in the most recent 08 round. The declining birth rate is currently affecting intakes into secondary school, resulting in fewer appeals. The percentage of successful first preferences has not significantly altered during this time, and the reduction in appeals may be as a result of improving standards in many of our secondary schools.

Percentage of successful appeals 06/07

National 35.3% Regional 40.5% Leeds 35.9%

We have seen a significant reduction in the number of successful appeals during the most recent admission rounds with only 22.2 % successful this year. This has followed a programme of improvements in the statements of case produced at appeals.

There is a large pool of appeal panel members in Leeds, and regular training takes place. On rare occasions decisions are made that may indicate a need to update and review training. An appraisal process for panel members is being considered to cover such matters. However, it should be noted that the appeal process in Leeds has been reviewed by the Office of the Schools Adjudicator and has been found to be very successful with examples of best practice. Only a very small number of admission authorities do not choose to use the LEA centrally provided appeals service in Leeds.

Information on the ethnic and social mix of pupils attending schools and factors that might affect this.

The majority of schools, both primary and secondary, are reflective of the community they serve both in the social and ethnic mix. Only a few secondary schools have a smaller percentage of children on free school meals than live in the area in which the school is situated. In the main these are faith schools. There are a number of schools where the percentage of children on FSM is higher than in the community, perhaps indicating that more affluent families are choosing schools further afield.

The majority of secondary schools are very reflective of their local community in respect of ethnicity. Allerton Grange High and Parklands Girls High both attract a higher proportion of Pakistani and Kashmiri Pakistani pupils than live in their immediate area. Lawnswood seems to particularly attract children of Black African and Black Caribbean heritage. There is no evidence to suggest that a family's ethnicity or social background affects their ability to gain admission to any particular school.

How well admission arrangements serve the interests of looked after children

All admission policies in Leeds give looked after children the highest priority in their oversubscription criteria. All looked after children requiring places during the year are managed under the Fair Access Protocol where places are offered quickly and appropriately.

How well admission arrangements serve the interests of children with SEN

All schools in Leeds admit pupils where the school is named in their statement of SEN. Leeds has relatively few statements and the funding arrangements are set up to follow the pupil. The majority of children with SEN are educated successfully in mainstream schools. Some schools have specialist resourced provision, whilst others have partnership arrangements with the SILCs.

Young people who have a statement of SEN are provided with their appropriate priority for admission to a school. Young people on school action plus are included within the Fair Access Protocol, to ensure that their needs can be adequately met and schools do not find themselves with a disproportionate number of pupils with high levels of need.

All schools have been alerted to the need for Accessibility Plans and Disability Equality Schemes through the intranet, mailouts and a conference held during summer term 2007. The Local Authority provide guidance for schools and a template for a Disability Equality Scheme. The existence of an Accessibility Plan is a requirement for schools to access local authority funding for building improvements related to disability. Schools must also show they have these plans if they are seeking validation for the Inclusion Chartermark. Around 100 schools have already been validated for the Inclusion Chartermark and the local authority have a target to engage all schools over the next few years.

How well the local fair access protocol has worked and how many children have been admitted to each school under the protocol

The local authority have not held records of primary pupils admitted to schools under the fair access protocol during the last twelve months. The primary schools in Leeds take all pupils in very quickly and it is rare that a fair access panel needs to be called. There have been a small number of instances where this has been required and a school place has then been offered. As the pupils are generally admitted as speedily as any other pupil it has not been a priority to record the data.

The table at appendix 1 shows the number of pupils that were admitted through the fair access protocol in secondary schools last year. Only one school is not recorded as having admitted any pupils through the protocol. Menston St Mary's is in the far north west of the City. The figures show that all schools in the north west of the City, particularly the outer north west have taken fewer pupils through the protocol. This is largely due to the demographics of the area, and balancing the transport needs of pupils.

The protocol has been working well and does provide for pupils of all ages. Leeds has approximately 5,000 in year transfers each year, the majority of which follow a change of address either within or into the City. It would be impractical to deal with all transfers through the protocol, and so the protocol has been designed to consider those pupils that schools have the greatest issues with when they are inducted. This is not always linked to behaviour,

but generally to the amount of resource required to successfully induct those young people into school.

The same panels that meet to discuss pupils covered by the fair access protocol also consider alternative provision and reintegration from pupil referral units at the same meetings. This ensures that schools are considering all challenging pupils and alternatives to mainstream provision together.

The degree to which schools and the local authority are meeting their infant class size duties

Schools are aware of their duties to comply with the class size legislation. The majority of infant and primary schools in the City have admission numbers that allow them to be defended at appeal under the class size ruling. Generally the appeal panels understand that there is very limited discretion available to them in these circumstances. The combination of these factors allows us to ensure that there are very few breaches of the class size of 30.

Occasionally rural schools are called upon to admit above their admission number where there is no other school available within a reasonable distance. The funding formula does ensure that should a school still have the additional children then sufficient funding is available to ensure that there can be one teacher per 30 children in reception, years one and two.

Other information relevant to whether admission arrangements are fair and promote parental choice and fair access

All admission policies in Leeds are written in accordance with the Schools Admission Code. They all offer the highest priority to looked after children, and ensure that children with a statement of SEN naming the school are admitted. The supplementary information forms ask only for the information required to operate the admission policy. All policies and supplementary information forms are made available on Education Leeds website for parents.

The composite prospectus receives the Plain English Campaign kitemark and contains all required information. This is made available from 1 August each year when the online application system opens, and is available in hard copy from the first week in September along with the paper copies of the common preference form. Admission officers attend the majority of secondary school information events to offer advice and guidance to parents on how to apply. Maps are provided showing parents how far away children got into the school from in the previous year.

Over 20% of parents applied on line last year with approximately 30% using the service this year. There are links from the site to the school websites, OFSTED and a range of other advisory websites. The Choice Adviser has ensured that every parent who has not submitted a preference for secondary school by the deadline is offered support to make an application.

There is no significant evidence to suggest that uniform costs are prohibiting parents applying for particular schools. There are two schools whose local population have a much higher percentage of families in receipt of free school meals than those on roll. The DYCA is a relatively new school, having only been open for two years. It has been built in a different community to that served by the previous two schools it replaced. There will inevitably be a transition period where children continue to travel to the school from outside of the local area. The situation will be monitored as we would expect to see the school become more reflective of the local community. Abbey Grange Church of England School is the only CE school serving the City. As such it seeks to draw in pupils from parishes across the City and is unlikely to reflect its local area.

The local authority will be contacting those schools with high uniform prices to work with the governing bodies to reduce any potential barriers to access. There are some examples of excellent practice, for instance South Leeds High, who have a very low uniform cost and provide all new year 7 pupils with a free school polo shirt and sweatshirt when they start. The majority of schools situated in areas where the level of FSM is high, have kept their uniform costs to a minimum. It is very positive to note that the Catholic secondary school in the area with high FSM also has the lowest cost uniform of the Aided schools.

Only a small number of schools ask for a contribution to the school fund, and prices for music lessons and trips vary greatly. It has been difficult to obtain an average price for a school trip as schools vary greatly in the range of trips they offer. One school with language college status offers trips to China and South Africa as well as the usual, much less costly trips to France and Germany, and offer parents practical payment options.

Some schools do not offer music lessons, many offer them for free, whilst the most expensive is a school charging £165 per year. Again the local authority will be contacting the governing bodies of schools to discuss with them the charges they levy.

Conclusion

The evidence suggests that schools are generally reflective of their local area, and that fair access is being achieved. All of the necessary information that parents need to apply for school places is available through the local authority website. The website is easy to use and the information has the Plain English Campaign kitemark. The local authority works with the schools to provide better access for disabled children, and all schools appropriately admit children who have a statement of SEN naming their school.

Looked After Children are the highest priority in all admission policies, and any movement during the school year is facilitated by the Fair Access Protocol. There is no evidence to suggest that ethnicity or social factors are providing a barrier to access. The majority of schools have a greater proportion of children on roll with FSM than live in their local areas. This will

be indicative of some wealthier parents choosing to send their children to schools out of the local authority or to private schools.

Recommendations

Admissions Forum recommend that the local authority:

1. Contact all governing bodies of schools with uniform or music fee charges more than 10% above the City average to secure a reduction in costs or ensure a suitable scheme is available for less well off parents.
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