

## **REPORT TO LEEDS ADMISSION FORUM**

**DATE: 16 November 2010**

**SUBJECT: Proposed consultation on admission arrangements for the September 2012 round**

### **1 Background**

- 1.1 The local authority is required to consult each year on the Council's admission arrangements and prepare a report for the Executive Board meeting in March / April. The consultation process is prescribed for all admission authorities, including academies, foundation and voluntary-aided schools.
- 1.2 The consultation covers the coordinated scheme, relevant areas as well as the admission policy for community and voluntary controlled schools. All other admission authorities will consult on their admission policies. Education Leeds will publish a public notice advising parents of the consultation and where they can find information, and how they can make their views known.
- 1.3 Legislation was introduced in December 2008 to accompany the School Admissions Code which came into force in February 2009. There were two significant changes relating to the coordinated scheme which required local authorities to fully coordinate all applications for school places. The full coordination came into effect in September 2010.
- 1.4 The admission forum must consider how well existing and proposed admission arrangements serve the interests of children and parents within the area of the local authority. They must also consider the effectiveness of the authority's proposed coordinated arrangements and the means by which admissions processes might be improved as well as how actual admissions related to the admission numbers published.

### **2. Coordinated Scheme – In year**

- 2.1 From September 2010 all in year transfers had to be fully coordinated in line with the published scheme. This means that parents wishing to apply for any school place at any point in time will only contact the local authority. No academy, foundation or aided school will be able to offer places directly to parents but are required to do so through the local authority. The local authority is able to ensure that any parent refused a place in any school is offered their right of appeal.
- 2.2 To be able to handle the additional volume of transfer requests and still ensure that children are allocated a school place in a timely way it is proposed that we consider using in year waiting lists. At present all applications are dealt with as they arrive. It is possible for a place to be allocated to a child on one day from some distance away, but a request arrive the next day for a family living much nearer. On occasions parents apply for a place in a popular school where they have received information from someone at the school about a place becoming available. This can be very unfair for other parents and would be resolved if waiting lists were used.
- 2.3 As with any change there are both positive aspects and potential issues. With applications to

both Reception and year 7 the legislation already compels us to hold a waiting list until 31 December, a full term after the children have started. Each year there are a number of issues that arise where parents elect to remain on the waiting list, their child settles into the allocated school, and is then disrupted part way through the term when a higher preference is offered. Often the place their child previously occupied is offered to another family leaving them with no choice but to change school. The decision to remain on a waiting list is entirely the parents'.

2.4 Despite the potential disruption to the child that can be caused, there are also some good reasons why a waiting list is useful. At present when a parent is refused a place at a school and offered their right of appeal, the application is closed. If there were an option to also be placed on a waiting list this would mean that if a place became available soon afterwards the parent would still be considered for the place. This would be particularly useful where a parent does go on to appeal. Allocations would occur, in oversubscribed schools, whenever we are notified of a vacancy, and would be according to the criteria of the policy, rather than the good fortune of applying at the time of the vacancy. Administratively the coordination would be simpler and more efficient.

2.5 We believe it is appropriate to consult on the holding of in year waiting lists. We would welcome views from the Admission Forum on two matters. Firstly their views on the relative merits or otherwise of in year waiting lists and whether they consider they should be introduced. And secondly if we were to introduce in year waiting lists, how long they should remain open, for example a term, or an academic year. Although we are seeking initial views from Admission Forum we will feedback the outcome of the consultation process for Forum to take an overview of the responses before a recommendation is made to the Executive Board of the Council.

### 3.1 **Coordinated scheme – annual cycle**

3.2 A coordinated scheme has been in place for primary and secondary schools for some time. Each year these are updated to reflect new dates and any changes to legislation. There are no significant changes to the coordinated scheme this year as many changes were introduced last year in line with the legislative changes. The full documents will be forwarded to Admission Forum members along with the consultation document in December.

## 4 **Analysis of socio-economic factors**

4.1 Admission Forum may recall we undertook some analysis of children who had secondary schools as their nearest but were habitually unable to gain a place. The analysis specifically considered whether or not the housing closer to the school, where parents were successful with places, was more expensive than housing further away where the children did not gain places. This was to ensure that economic factors were not affecting the local operation of the admission policy. As an outcome of that analysis Admission Forum gave advice that existing and forthcoming academies, and foundation schools who did not have a faith based policy, must include the 'nearest criteria' within their admission policy. This would ensure that no child was left without a meaningful priority school, and that economic factors were not inhibiting the operation of the policy. DYCA was the only academy at that time and they willingly complied with the advice from Forum, as has each academy and foundation school that has subsequently emerged.

4.2 We have recently undertaken a similar exercise with the oversubscribed primary schools. We looked at all of the schools where the nearest children were not all able to gain a place at the school. The council tax bands were used as a proxy indicator of house price, as well as considering the ACORN data, and we looked at whether the housing close to the school was relatively more expensive than that in the areas where the children were unable to gain a place. There were no schools where this was the case and the conclusion was that there were no further changes necessary to the policy in respect of this matter. We will continue to monitor the situation and will advise the Forum if this changes.

## 5. **Analysis of the sibling priority**

- 5.1 The sibling priority was considered in previous School Admission Codes to be good practice but views have been expressed nationally that have suggested that the sibling link is unfair. The most recent Code still describes the importance of considering the whole family in respect of the sibling link at primary school, but at secondary school there was a subtle shift away from promoting it as good practice. Although we are not proposing the removal of the sibling link we are interested in the views of the Admission Forum about some possible changes to the priority.
- 5.2 In the most recent admission round all children who asked for their nearest secondary school were able to be offered a place, as well as all siblings. There are an increasing number of primary schools where not all nearest children could be offered a place, and as the birth rate increases begin to affect secondary schools in 2013 it is prudent to consider how the sibling factor affects the admission policy.
- 5.3 At present our admission policy for community and voluntary controlled schools gives priority to siblings ahead of those who have the school as their nearest, and then those who have another school as their nearest, according to their distance. This means that siblings will qualify for places from a much greater distance, in some cases, than other children. It occurs when children have gained places from further afield in a lower birth year, or when parents have gained a place at the school and then moved further away. At one primary school this year, nearest children were unable to gain a place, but a sibling living more than 6 miles away was offered a place. This is a matter that leads to parental complaints.
- 5.4 The majority of Catholic schools already operate a policy which differentiates between Catholic siblings and non-Catholic siblings. They have faith based policies and are permitted to draw a distinction between applicants this way. As a consequence there are non-Catholic siblings who are not offered a place at some of the Catholic schools each year. In a number of other local authorities, including Bradford and North Yorkshire, they differentiate between siblings who live in their priority area and those who live elsewhere. Children living within the catchment area are given priority after siblings who live in the area, but before siblings who live outside of the area.
- 5.5 Around a third of applications each year are under the sibling criteria. Many of those siblings have the school they are applying to as their nearest (approx 60%) and would have qualified for a place without the sibling priority. We used the applications in this year's primary round to model an alternative policy and analysed the results. The sibling criteria was altered slightly to give siblings who did not have the school as their nearest priority *after* children who did have the school as the nearest. We then re-ran the whole allocation to see what the effect would be. For schools that were undersubscribed there was no effect. For schools that were oversubscribed but had previously been able to offer all nearest children a place, there was no significant effect. This is the outcome we were anticipating as the change should only significantly affect those schools where the nearest could not all be offered a place.
- 5.6 Of the 19 schools where the nearest could not all be offered places, there were five where there was no net change. This occurred where the siblings who had applied also all had the school as their nearest. However there were 14 schools where the offers made would have been different, varying between one and seven siblings who would not have been offered a place. The analysis is attached as an appendix for you to consider.
- 5.7 The issue is one of fairness. At primary school the children are too young to travel unaccompanied when they start school. There are also the practicalities of childcare and it is therefore fair and reasonable to maintain the sibling criteria to ensure that children can attend school together. However where parents apply to a Catholic school, as non-Catholics, they do so knowing that their younger siblings may not be able to attend the same school. It is important that we consider overall whether it is fairer that our long standing priority for nearest children is as meaningful as we can make it, or whether the sibling link for ALL children is more important. If we consider the example of West End Primary, 3 children who had the school as

their nearest were refused places this year. If siblings who did not have the school as their nearest were given a lower priority, then all nearest children would have been allocated a place, as well as four of the non-nearest siblings. The three siblings turned away would have been allocated places in Guiseley, Yeadon and Pudsey, all of which are closer to where they live.

- 5.8 In secondary school we have the lowest two birth cohorts about to enter year 7 in 2011 and 2012. To change the sibling link at this time would have no net effect to the allocations. However as we move into the higher birth years from 2013 entering year 7 we should consider the same issue. Young people in year 7 are, in most cases, able to travel to school unaccompanied, and the childcare issues are significantly different than for four year olds. The consideration of fairness is balanced differently. There is the ability to consider a change to the policy in a year where there would be only a very slight possibility of it affecting a family, so that parents choosing a school at that time would be aware that their younger siblings in future years may not have an automatic expectation of a place, if they are choosing a school that is not their nearest school. Forum is being asked to consider the effect of the sibling criteria and put forward their views on consulting on a change to the criteria. You are asked to consider primary and secondary as separate issues.

## 6. **Changes to admission numbers**

- 6.1 Due to the increasing birth rate in Leeds there will be a need to expand a number of primary schools in 2011. Discussions are proceeding with most schools in the City about the potential changes in their area and it will be December before a full list of schools will be available. At that time a further report will be sent to members of the Admission Forum identifying the schools. As per the legislation all increases in admission number will be submitted to the unions representing staff at the schools for their views.
- 6.2 Known changes for consultation at present include Middleton St Mary's who are requesting an increase from 50 to 60. They wish to add accommodation themselves to facilitate this increase and the local authority have no objections to their request. Middleton St Phillips are seeking an increase from 25 to 30 which we consider to be wholly appropriate.
- 6.3 Micklefield CE Primary is seeking to reduce their admission number from 30 to 20 as they do not have sufficient accommodation to support the higher number of 30. The births in the area would support the lower number. Corpus Christi Primary are also seeking a reduction from 50 to 45 due to accommodation issues although the birth rate in that area is increasing.
- 6.4 Oulton Primary is receiving a new building through the primary capital programme and will be increasing from 50 to 60 in line with the new accommodation. This is to support increasing births in the area. Richmond Hill Primary has already been through a statutory process to increase its admission number from 60 to 90 in 2012. Again a new building is being delivered on the site.
- 6.5 Wykebeck Primary and Bracken Edge Primary both have admission numbers of 45 and we are seeking to increase these both to 60. There will be a full statutory consultation in respect of these two schools if the Executive Board of the Council give their permission.
- 6.6 Allerton High has requested a small increase from 180 to 185. Having settled into their new building they believe their curriculum delivery model would be better served by admitting 185. The school is extremely popular with parents and the standards are good. The local authority is happy to support their request for an increase and believe it would better serve the community.

## 7 **Conclusion**

- 7.1 The coordinated schemes have been updated to reflect the latest legislation and the requirement for full coordination. It is proposed that we consult on whether or not to hold in year waiting lists from September 2011. Changes will be required to primary school numbers

as outlined above. Any further changes will be brought to the attention of the sub committee for discussion, as well as being forwarded to all members of Forum. We are seeking Admission Forum's views on possible changes to the sibling criteria prior to proceeding to consultation.

## 8 **Recommendation**

### 8.1 That Admission Forum

- Offer their views on holding of in year waiting lists and; if they are to be held, the length of time they consider it is appropriate to hold them.
- Consider the possible changes to the sibling criteria and whether it would be timely for the local authority to consult on such changes to either the primary or secondary applications.
- Consider the currently proposed admission number changes.