

Report of Admissions Team, School Access Service, Children's Services

Report to Leeds Admissions Forum

Date: 15th June May 2011

Subject: Update by the Admissions Team on the Fair Access Panels and the admission of children during the academic year 2010/11.

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Does the report contain information which has been identified as confidential or exempt?

Yes (if exempt, please see the public interest test in section 4)
Relevant section of the report:
In accordance with Access to Information Procedure Rule:

No, this report does not contain information identified as confidential or exempt.

Is the decision eligible for call-in? **Yes** **No – exempt** **Not applicable**

Background

The Fair Access Panels (Secondary) continue to sit on a monthly basis to consider parental preferences. There have not been any directions to schools this academic year and all young people who have been discussed at Panel, who do not have a school place, have been offered one.

The Fair Access Panels for Primary schools continue to sit as and when required and the Fair Access Officer procures, wherever possible, a resolution without a Panel.

Schools continue to develop stronger relationships both within and outside of their own Wedges. This has enabled them to offer more 'managed moves' for young people, for a variety of reasons who may benefit from a 'fresh start' or because they believe that a change of school is the answer to an issue they are experiencing.

The Panels continue to operate with the uncertainty that exists with regards to long term funding. The Area Inclusion Partnership's (AIP) have been funded for a further 12 months which has allowed the Panels to find funds to support some of the placements made through Panel e.g. Yr11 alternative provision. However, there are concerns as to how they will operate effectively after this time and how a move to 3 areas will affect their ability to continue to be cohesive and inclusive. Although Behaviour Partnerships are no longer enshrined in legislation schools appear to embrace the model and the relationships that have been fostered to continue to move forward, especially in light of the new Academies that are appearing in Leeds.

We still await the publication of the Schools Admissions Code which may have an impact on Fair Access and the way that Leeds implements this across the City. However, until the release of the Code we are unable to see how it may impact on the Admission Team or any of the work they currently do.

We are currently working with School Organisation to resolve the current issues around shortage of places by trying to arrive at local agreements as to how to accommodate the numbers of young people who are moving into areas where places do not currently exist. This is currently being dealt with by the Panels on a case by case basis under the category 'shortage of spaces'. This category has seen one of the biggest increases in recent months, this category is used when the Local Authority are unable to offer a school place, within the statutory guidelines on walking distance, to someone who doesn't have one. This ensures that an offer of a school place is made without the need to attend an appeal hearing. We continue to work with colleagues to plan for future shortages around the City.

Capacity to operate current scheme

The Admission Team are currently severely stretched, as the number of In Year Applications increase the number of Fair Access cases also increases. The manpower that is required currently to service all 5 Fair Access Panels places pressure on the team and significant impact on the other statutory work of the service.

Currently an officer is responsible for each Panel. They are responsible for identifying cases, sourcing background on the case, the administration to the list of cases (or log), writing to parents with the decisions, updating the children's records and photocopying the applications forms for the Panel meeting. They are also responsible for collating the information regarding number of children on roll at each school into a format for the meeting as well as entering the decision into the monitoring and reporting spreadsheet. for the Panel and for reporting to other forums. They may also be required to referred cases back to CME, travellers etc for further chase up or to make further contact with previous school and families.

In addition to this the Fair Access officer is responsible for the allocation of all Primary cases and ensuring that the appropriate information is sent to schools as well as maintaining the monitoring and reporting spreadsheet to ensure 'fair' allocation across the primary sector and overseeing that staff process the applications in addition to the secondary Panels that they are individually responsible for. The officer is also responsible for arranging and attending any primary Fair Access Panels required and chairing them if required.

The Fair Access Manager is responsible for overseeing the Fair Access Protocol across the City and attend all Fair Access Secondary Panels, chairing them in the absence of the Chair and ensuring that the protocol and Code of Practice are adhered to. The manager is also responsible for arranging multi agency meeting for Looked After cases or particularly complex cases that may require further discussion and information and attending these meetings.

The number of officer hours involved in the current format of the Panels' and in particular the Secondary Panels is, with the current number of staff and the increase in transfers and Fair Access cases, not viable in the medium to long term.

Conclusion

A consultation will be undertaken, by the Admissions Team with the schools, through the Fair Access Panels to streamline the administration and identify the level of support provided by the Admissions Team in the administration of the Panels.