



Report of: Head of Service – School Access

Meeting: Admissions Forum

Date of meeting: 15 June 2011

SUBJECT: Admissions Customer Service Satisfaction

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

The School Admissions Code requires the local Admission Forum to review the comprehensiveness, effectiveness within the local context, and accessibility of the advice and guidance for parents by the local authority, both through the composite prospectus and Choice Advice. This report is to provide information on customer feedback performance indicators.

2.0 Background Information

In Leeds we have provided a summary booklet sent out to all parents to guide them through the admission process and to signpost them to further information. This is in addition to making available the composite prospectus. Both are provided in hard copy and on the website. Our website provides further links to useful information including school websites, Ofsted etc. Offer letters include advice on how to contact the Advisory Centre for Education (a national charity who support parents who wish to appeal).

Each year we provide parents with a questionnaire seeking feedback from them on the service they receive, and on how useful they have found the information that we provide.

In addition the public facing telephony has been transferred to Leeds City Council's contact centre as part of the Customer First strategy. The transfer took place in December 2010 and this report provides information of the success of this initiative.

3.0 Main Issues

Online applications

The DCSF, now DfE, had previously set an ambitious target of 80% of parents applying for secondary school places online. Last year 44% of parents who applied on time used the online service. Further applications were received after the deadline, but for technical reasons, only paper applications are accepted once the deadline has passed. This year 71.5% of parents applying for secondary places used the online service. Although this fell a little short of the government target, the national average was 66% and the local Yorkshire and Humberside average was only 42.3%. These figures show Leeds performs well both locally and nationally in the online service it offers to parents.

There were 69% of parents applying for primary places that chose to do so online. Data is not collected nationally for primary applications so we are unable to provide a comparison with other local authorities. During the application rounds for both primary and secondary school places, that equates to almost 11,000 parents applying online. Many more use the website for information.

As yet we are not able to offer the facility to apply online for in year transfer applications, although the forms and guidance are all available to download from the website.

Feedback from questionnaire

Each year we provide a questionnaire inviting feedback from parents on the quality of the information we publish and on the customer service they have received if they have had reason to contact the team. This year 503 chose to complete some, or all, of the questionnaire and return it to us. There was both a paper version and an online interactive version. Although only 30% of parents applied using a paper preference form, 84% of those returning a questionnaire said that they had applied on a paper form. The questionnaires were returned prior to the transfer of telephony to the contact centre and are reflective of communication directly with the Admissions Team.

Summary table of responses

Question	Good or excellent	Poor
How would you rate the information in the summary guide?	86%	1%
How would you rate the information in the full guide for parents?	87%	0.4%
How would you rate the explanation of the admission process?	85%	0.6%
If you applied online, how would you rate the online application system?	74%	13%
If you used the website how easy did you find the information you wanted?	71%	11%
If you contacted the team by telephone or email how would you rate the promptness of the response?	88%	2.3%
If you contacted the team by telephone or visited how would you rate the staff in terms of being professional, polite and helpful?	92%	0
If you contacted the team by telephone or visited how would you rate the information we gave you?	94%	0.5%
Overall, how would you rate the quality of information and service?	89%	0.8%

In rating the overall quality of the information and service only 3 parents rated the service as poor. The comments from those three primarily related to the website or online system, which also represented the lowest levels of satisfaction in the survey. However, only 81 of the 11,000 parents using the online application system returned a questionnaire with their views on the information and service. From the written comments it is clear that the school search facility is not as user friendly as people would like, and although there is a warning to tell parents they need to complete a supplementary information form for a church Aided school, they took a little time to find where they were on the website. We will look at how we can improve these two areas.

Questionnaires were returned from parents of all ethnicities with the exception of Other Kashmiri, which allowed us to compare how accessible the information we provide is to all representatives of the community in Leeds. The only negative comments received about the use of language, and how easy the information was to understand, came from parents of White British background. Indeed the most critical remarks were from a parent who stated that they were highly educated with English as their first language. The very positive ratings relating to when parents have engaged directly with the team are excellent and we will continue to ensure that during the application period parents have as much opportunity as possible to seek advice directly, through open evenings and information sessions.

Contact Centre transfer

In December 2010, as part of the Council's customer first strategy we transferred the public telephony from the Admissions Team to the Contact Centre. Significant work went into the preparation for this transfer, with Customer Service Officers who would be working at the Contact Centre given opportunity to spend time in the Admissions Team understanding the back office work, before the transfer of calls. Experienced officers from Admissions spent time at the Contact Centre during the first few weeks of transfer to offer advice and guidance on calls to refine the processes.

Prior to the transfer the Admissions team used to answer on average 65% of the 100,000 calls received each year. At peak times, in March and September, this answer rate would fall to below 50%. Since transferring the telephony the performance standards are significantly improved as shown below. Education transferred its switchboard number as well as the admissions calls and you can see from the table the way that is broken down each month

Month	Calls Offered	Calls Answered	% Calls Answered	Avg Answer Speed	Switchboard	Admissions
Dec	1781	1704	95.68%	0:23	45%	55%
Jan	3851	3669	95.27%	0:38	49%	51%
Feb	2698	2612	96.81%	0:24	48%	52%
March	2003	1956	97.65%	0:14	7%	93%
April	2046	1977	96.63%	0:33	21%	79%

During the busiest months an additional option is added to the line to deal with queries relating to the annual cycle allocations. Together the two tables show the total number of calls.

Month	Calls Offered	Calls Answered	% Calls Answered	Avg Answer Speed
March	3229	3197	99.01%	0:13
April	2465	2436	98.82%	0:19
May	1207	1049	86.91%	2:31

It is not only the call answer rates that are important, but also whether the query the parent had could be answered in full, and the service they felt they had received. The targets that were set were to achieve a 90% or greater answer rate with 80% or more of calls being resolved at the point of first contact. A system was put in place when the calls were transferred for the Contact Centre staff to send queries that could not be resolved back into the Admissions team for us to call the parent back.

Month	Enquiries sent to Work Queue*	As a % of Calls Answered
Dec	322	19%
Jan	624	17%
Feb	392	14%
Mar	814	16%
April	524	12%

As you can see even in the first month of handling the calls these targets have been met. Enquiries that sent to Work Queue are picked up by Admissions officers who arrange a call back to the parent within 48 hours. To achieve an early indication of how parents perceived the service a customer satisfaction survey was carried out in February.

Customer Satisfaction Survey Results (From February 2011)

- Overall customer satisfaction 98.8%
- Treated with respect 99.6%
- Is this the first time you have contacted us? 69.5%
- Acceptable wait time 93.9%
- Enquiry resolved today 77.5%
- Next steps clearly explained 98.3%

All of the evidence and feedback to date is that the transfer of the admissions calls to the Contact Centre has been successful, achieved its aims, and is delivering a more favourable customer experience. The relationship between the Contact Centre staff and the Admissions Officers is a positive one. When the team are producing information to be sent to parents this is shared in advance with our partners who have been able to provide valuable feedback about the wording of letters, for example, with the shared goal of 'right first time' in our interactions with our customers.

4.0 Conclusions

Performance in relation to telephony standards are significantly improved, providing parents with better access to the service. Parental engagement with the team on the phone, face to face, and by email is reported to be mainly good or excellent. The guides for parents that we produce continue to be well received and offer a good explanation of the application process. With so many parents now choosing to use our online services we clearly need to focus on ensuring that our web based communications are as clear and easy to use as they can be. As we move over from the Education Leeds website and integrate into the Leeds City Council website we will take the opportunity to refresh the way we present information to parents.