

Report of: Director of Children's Services

Report to: Executive Board

Date: 18 November 2015

Subject: Outcome of school admissions arrangements 2015



Are specific electoral Wards affected?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):		
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?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number:		
Appendix number:		

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 2015.
- 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 83% of parents were offered their first preference school (84% last year) and 95% were offered one of their top three (96% last year). There were 7962 places allocated, compared to 7541 last year.
- Primary applications must be submitted by 15 January each year and offers are made on 16 April. In Leeds 85% (85% last year) were offered their first preference with 93% (94% last year) offered one of their top three preferences. There were 9854 places allocated, compared to 9774 last year.
- This year has seen the Temple Learning Academy (free school) open, taking primary children in 2015 and secondary ages from 2016, and a new sixth form free school, the Elliott Hudson academy open. The opening of this sixth form provision has coincided with Swallow Hill academy, Farnley Academy, Morley Academy and Bruntcliffe Academy closing their sixth forms.

- A government consultation is expected imminently 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

That Executive Board note:

- Numbers of applications for both phases of education, the percentage of successful first preferences for secondary admissions was 83% and for Reception admissions was 85%.
- The percentage of parents receiving one of their top three preferences was 95% for secondary and 93% for primary.
- The percentage of parents getting none of their preferences and made an alternative offer instead was 4.5% in secondary (3.2% last year) and 5.5% in primary (5% last year)
- The expected contents of the government consultation on changes to the admissions code for 2016.
- The officer responsible for this work is the Admissions and Family Information Service lead.

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 2015. The rising birth rate has been impacting on entry to Reception particularly since 2009 and on entry to year 7 in 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

- 2.2 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 7962 secondary places and 9854 primary places were offered.
- 2.3 These applications are in the context of a rapidly rising birth rate over the last decade which has become more volatile and is particularly affecting entry to Reception. The birth cohort that entered primary this year was smaller than in 2014 by 200 children, however we received 80 more applications than in 2014. This necessitated a number of short notice bulge cohorts to be put in place to meet the need for places that may not be required in future Reception intakes.
- 2.4 The number of children due to start year 7 this year began to increase significantly in some areas of the city, and 400 more places were allocated than in 2014. A number of secondary schools chose to admit additional pupils, including those who had closed their sixth forms to coincide with the opening of the Elliott Hudson Free School, resulting in an additional 296 places being available on offer day, above the published admission limits.
- 2.5 The Ruth Gorse Academy, which opened last year continues to operate from its temporary site in Morley, and is well subscribed. As it anticipates the move into its new permanent accommodation in September 2016 it will begin to admit to its higher admission number, thereby creating more places in the inner south of the City.

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 7962 offers were made for secondary places in Leeds schools. Of these 83% were given their first preference, 95% one of their first 3 preferences, and 4.5% or 357 could not be offered any of their 5 preferences. For primary, 9854 offers were made, with 85% getting their first preference, 93% getting one of their first three preferences, and 5.5% or 550 who could not be offered any of their 5 preferences.

- 3.2 The proportion of first preferences achieved at secondary is 0.5% lower than the national average, and at primary is 2.7% lower. Leeds has the highest proportion regionally of children at both phases who are allocated a preferred school within the local authority, and is at least 2% higher than the national average. As the number of school rated good or outstanding increases in Leeds we could expect to see that continue.
- 3.3 There was some localised pressure in some areas of the City for primary places for September 2015, and this was widely reported in the Roundhay area in particular. On the offer day in April 86 parents in this area were not offered one of their preferred schools, however 66 were still offered a school place within a two mile walking distance. Discussions took place with local schools and additional classes were agreed. By July this figure had fallen to 9 children where they did not have a preferred school, only one of which was over 2 miles away. The increase in demand for reception places in September 2015 was greater than expected leading to additional places being agreed after the offer day.
- 3.4 We continue to support families to apply on time, and encourage online applications which have the benefit of speed and certainty of receipt for parents. We use email reminders to support parents who have not completed the application process online 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). Appropriate council Twitter accounts are being used to remind parents of the approaching deadlines and media releases raise further awareness. 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.
- 3.5 Several secondary schools have continued to take in pupils above their published admission number. The Admissions Code makes provision for this and recommends that schools wishing to take extra pupils should indicate their intention to do so before offer day so that places can be allocated in line with the Admission policy. Those schools who have wished to take extra have complied with this and the process has worked well. It has resulted in 296 extra places being available on offer day.
- 3.6 To deal with the increasing demand for primary places, 472 additional places were established for entry in September 2015. These comprised 60 places in the new Temple Learning Academy (free school), and 135 further places as a result of permanent expansions. There were also 187 places provided as 'bulge cohorts' where the increase was not part of a permanent change. The birth rate due to enter Reception in 2015 was approximately 200 less than those entering in September 2014, however there were 80 more applications than the previous year. In response to this demand for around 300 more places than expected a further 90 places were agreed across three schools in the most affected area.
- 3.7 By the first week of September 2015 10,021 offers had been made for children to enter reception class. Between April 16th, offer day, and the first week in September there had been an additional 437 requests for places, only 95 of which

were connected with a house move taking place. Some parents over the same period let us know they no longer required a school place in Leeds leaving a net increase of 167 more children than on offer day.

3.8 Discussions with schools are well underway across the City to ensure that there will be sufficient places for entry in September 2016. This will be the largest birth cohort due to enter primary school in Leeds, with numbers falling for entry in September 2017. An additional 225 Reception places have already been agreed with schools at the time of writing this report, with good progress being made towards the total level of anticipated need.

3.9 Despite the increasing number of children requiring reception places the number of appeals for a Reception place has fallen this year. The following table shows data for the last three years of Reception appeals. As they are governed by the Infant Class Size legislation, to successfully appeal parents must meet certain criteria set out in the School Admissions Appeal Code and we have updated our appeal form this year to reflect this, making it easier for parents to understand their likelihood of success.

Appeals

Primary

16 th April – 1 st October	Rec 2013/14	Rec 2014/15	Rec 2015/16
Appeals lodged with LCC*	1067	1095	730
Appeals heard *	434 (40.6% of those lodged)	569 (52% of those lodged)	352 (48% of those lodged)
Appeals granted*	62 (14% of those heard)	38 (6.6% of those heard)	40 (11% of those heard)
Appeals not granted*	372 (86% of those heard)	531 (93% of those heard)	312 (88.6% of those heard)
Number of offers made	9355	9774	9854
1st Preferences met	7949 (85%)	8270 (85%)	8383 (85%)
Placements (no pref met)	467 (5%)	468 (5%)	550 (5.5%)

3.10 For secondary the number of appeals logged has remained at a similar level to last year for Year 7 appeals however the numbers granted have fallen significantly. A relatively low level of appeals being granted, at either primary or secondary, is one indicator that the policy is fair and reasonable, and appeals are the most appropriate way for exceptional circumstances to be considered. We are grateful to the appeal panel members for the significant amount of time and effort they give to the process as volunteers.

Secondary

1 st March – 9 th October	High 2013/14	High 2014/15	High 2015/16
Appeals lodged with LCC*	547	427	443

Appeals heard *	241 (44% of those lodged)	215 (50% of those lodged)	208 (46% of those lodged)
Appeals granted*	58 (24% of those heard)	54 (25% of those heard)	29 (14% of those heard)
Appeals not granted*	183 (76% of those heard)	161 (75% of those heard)	179 (86% of those heard)

- 3.11 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 six 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. 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. The Board's attention was drawn to this last year.
- 3.12 In response to the current landscape where only 15% of secondary schools are covered by the Local Authority admission policy it is timely to consult on a simple change that will provide a degree of stability and control when other Own Admitting Authority schools and academies choose to make changes to their policies. We will consult this autumn on setting catchment areas for the remaining community secondary schools. These catchment areas will very simply be set as enclosing the existing area defined by 'nearest school'. This will leave parents and schools unaffected by the change, but will mean that the areas will not automatically change in response to changes around them. The choice to change will be there. We will consult with all Own Admitting Authority schools about making a similar change to their policies. Details of this appear in the consultation that is currently being undertaken.
- 3.13 Whilst it is proposed to only change the arrangements for secondary schools, and not primary schools at this time some work has been undertaken to consider the effectiveness of the current policy. There has been much reporting in the local press over the summer about areas of the city where parents feel disadvantaged, and without a reasonable choice of school places. Of the 222 primary schools in Leeds only 30 were so oversubscribed that they were unable to offer places to all of the 'nearest' children who applied.
- 3.14 We have consulted previously on amending the sibling priority, and do not intend to consult on any changes to this for the foreseeable future. Some modelling has taken place on simple alternatives to the current policy. For example removing the criteria of 'nearest' and after the sibling criteria using simple distance from the school. The results showed that whilst successful first preferences went up slightly the number of children who did not receive any of their preferences also went up by a small amount. Full details are contained in the consultation material currently available.
- 3.15 Also considered was continuing to have the nearest priority, but within that group allocating places randomly rather than by distance from the school. This would only apply to those schools where not all nearest children could be allocated a

place (last year that would have been 25 out of 238 schools). When we allocate by distance it is always parents furthest from their priority school that potentially miss out on a place. By allocating randomly this would always vary. The consultation is asking parents, and all other stakeholders, whether they would wish the local authority to consider such a policy further. There is no immediate proposal to change.

- 3.16 The Admission policy offers a high priority to a small number of children where they have exceptional medical or special educational needs or disabilities. The significant change of legislation that moved from Statements of SEN to Education, Health and Care plans makes it timely to consider whether priority 1b is still appropriately worded. Parents have at times been unclear as to when this might apply and consultation is also considering making this clearer when circumstances are likely to meet this criteria.

3.17 Consultation on School Admissions Code

- 3.18 In an open letter from Nick Gibb on 8 September there was a clear intention by central government to consult on changes to the School Admissions Code. Most commonly, consultation on this Code takes place in Autumn with a new Code coming into effect in February. To date the consultation has not yet been announced and we await further details.

- 3.19 The open letter was referring to summer born children being permitted to defer entry to Reception for a full year. At present parents of summer born children (those born between 1 April and 31 August) may request deferral and their individual circumstances are taken into account. In Leeds the number of parents requesting deferral for a full year is around a dozen with about half being granted on the basis of being in the best interests of the child. The letter advised that full consultation would take place however local authorities were urged to consider implementing the change immediately.

- 3.20 As Admission Authorities are bound in law to adhere to the Code, until it is re-written it would be inappropriate to implement any change prior to new legislation. We are continuing to consider each case on its merits with the best interests of the child at the centre of any decision. Once consultation is brought forward the local authority will consider its response, however it will be important that a deadline by which parents must submit such a request is given in the Code. This should be no later than the deadline for applying for places as the potential for significant disruption to the school place planning function will create significant difficulties. Planning for the number of school places required takes place well in advance of this.

- 3.21 This year sees the implementation of the new timeframe for consultation and determination of admission arrangements introduced by the 2014 Code. As such members will note the reduced consultation period from 8 weeks down to 6 weeks, and that a paper to determine the admission arrangements will be earlier in spring term than previously, most likely in February.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.1 Consultation on any proposed changes to the Admission policy for entry in September 2017 is underway as required by current regulations. Information is 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 Best Council Plan

4.3.1 The admissions policy and arrangements continues to ensure children receive fair and consistent treatment, and have reasonable access to local schools. In doing so it supports the council's obsession with improving attendance, contributing to good educational outcomes for children. These are important factors in the drive to become a child friendly city.

4.3.2 A key objective within the Best Council Plan 2015-2020 is to build a child friendly city. The delivery of pupil places through the Admissions Arrangements is one of the most baseline entitlements of a Child Friendly City. A good quality school place contributes to the achievement of targets within the Childrens and young People's Plan such as our obsession to 'improve behaviour, attendance and achievement'.

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 2015 at their meeting in March 2014. Admission arrangements at that time 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 The report is subject to call in.

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. The volume of appeals, particularly for Reception has reduced and all statutory deadlines were able to be met.

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 priority and consultation is currently underway.

6 Recommendations

That Executive Board note:

- Numbers of applications for both phases of education, the percentage of successful first preferences for secondary admissions was 83% and for Reception admissions was 85%.
- The percentage of parents receiving one of their top three preferences was 95% for secondary and 93% for primary.
- The percentage of parents getting none of their preferences and made an alternative offer instead was 4.5% in secondary (3.2% last year) and 5.5% in primary (5% last year)
- The expected contents of the government consultation on changes to the admissions code for 2016.
- The officer responsible for this work is the Admissions and Family Information Service lead.

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.