



Buckinghamshire County Council

Report to Overview and Scrutiny

AGENDA ITEM: 6

Committee	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date	15 September 2005
Title	2005 Admissions Review
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A. Introduction and summary

In 2005 major changes were put in place at both secondary and primary transfer ages. The outcomes were broadly as expected and were beneficial for the majority of Buckinghamshire families, with the vast majority of parents being able to secure a place at a catchment area school if they wanted one. However, there have been concerns raised by some parents, that in some areas it was not possible to offer a place at the catchment school. Due to the long lead in timelines for decision-making in admissions, the admission rules for the 2006 intake have already been consulted upon and determined by the Cabinet Member for Schools. The consultation process for the 2007 admissions rules commences later in 2005.

B. General Statistics:

In Buckinghamshire there are two admissions phases – Primary (including junior transfer and infant admission to infant and combined schools), and Secondary. Each transfer group's admissions are co-ordinated by the County Council. This is a legislative requirement for secondary transfers and from 2006 it will be a legislative requirement for primary admissions, although following consultation, the County Council decided to implement all the changes during 2005.

A summary of the position on each allocation day is attached as Appendix 1. Since then the situation has changed over time as a result of

- Children accepting / rejecting places offered
- Further places being offered at out county schools
- Children arriving in the county and moving away from the area
- Transfer appeals decisions

C. Background information

1. Following the Education Act 2002 Buckinghamshire County Council undertook a major review of admissions policies and procedures and consulted with parents about some changes to admissions arrangements and catchment areas for secondary schools. These were used for the 2005 admissions round and this admission round is coming to a close at the end of September.
2. The changes implemented for 2005 were as follows:
 - At secondary transfer there was a co-ordinated process with other neighbouring LEAs
 - At both primary and secondary transfer there was a co-ordinated allocation process within the county
 - The introduction of a national offer date (1 March) for secondary transfers
 - The use of an 'equal preference' allocation process instead of a 'first preference allocation process.
 - New secondary school catchments were implemented
 - New admission rules were used:
 - a) at junior and rising five transfer they included a 'feeder link' rule
 - b) for grammar school admission distance rather than verbal reasoning test (VRT) score was used as the 'tie-breaker' rule
 - The use of the better of two, rather than the average of the best two of three VRTs
 - Discontinuing the review stage and the scheduling of selection appeals in advance of the allocation.

D. Impact of the changes to the qualification process

3. Changes to the method of achieving qualification have not impacted on the allocation across the board. However, it has been noted that there were changes in the numbers of boys and girls qualifying in different areas and a comparison with last year is included as Appendix 2. The test provider, NFER (National Foundation for Educational Research) has confirmed that there is no evidence to suggest that the change to the method of achieving a qualification benefited either boys or girls. In their view there are consistently variations in the relative performance levels of different groups of testers, i.e. year on year it is not possible to predict whether boys or girls will perform better. As can be seen from the summary statistics, the overall qualification rate this year is 1% greater than last year.
4. The review process was phased out following legal advice and NFER research indicated that it would be possible to achieve a similar number of qualifiers using the best of two tests as through the average of the best two of three, through a standardisation process. It was anticipated that there would be approximately the same number of qualifiers through the testing process in 2005 as in 2004 at the end of the review process. This year, however, there was a larger than expected number of selection appeals (almost 1000). These were heard during January and increased the qualified cohort by nearly 400. In the past the appeals have added only approximately 200 extra qualifiers. As a result there is currently a review of the information provided for appeal panels, including the training of presenters, panel members and clerks.

5. Appendix 2 does show some particular variations in the qualification rates for boys in the Wycombe area. This appears to have impacted on the overall allocation process initially within the catchment area for the Royal Grammar School since boys living farther away from the Royal Grammar School were unable to secure places. This removed flexibility at Dr Challoner's Grammar School for boys for those living in the shared catchment area. Some boys in Denham and Gerrards Cross were not able to gain access.

E. Impact of the changes to the grammar school allocation process (including catchment changes)

6. The impact of the changes has been fundamental to the way that admissions are managed in the county. The legislative change triggered the requirement to move to an equal preference scheme in order to satisfy the new requirements whilst retaining selection processes. Other changes were brought in to make the admissions process more predictable for parents so that they could express their preferences with more confidence. In most areas this is the case, except where catchment pressures have led to a small number of parents not being offered their catchment area grammar or upper school. What could not be predicted, however, was a change in the pattern of parental preference as a result of this required combination of changes.
7. Overall, the authority has provided sufficient places to accommodate all Buckinghamshire resident grammar school qualified children, and, in the main they have been able to access their catchment schools even where they are very popular. As of 1 September, there are 64 spare places in grammar school, and these are located across the county in 5 schools. All are, however, in girls' schools and co-educational schools. One of the duties placed upon admissions authorities is to ensure that it makes efficient use of educational resources, and does not maintain a significant number of surplus places. The number of surplus places in Buckinghamshire demonstrates that the County Council is meeting this requirement.
8. Appendix 3 summarised the position of the remaining children who were not allocated to their catchment preference grammar school. Excluding children whose parents have declined alternative offers who are, for example, joining independent schools, they total 22 boys and 36 girls. In many of these cases (especially with regard to the girls) the alternative school offered is also a catchment school, and in some cases the school is also listed as not able to take all of their catchment children. Overall, in all but 12 cases, the school offered has also been listed as a preference by the parents.

E. Impact of the changes to the upper school allocation process (including catchment changes)

9. Upper school children were, in most cases, offered their catchment upper school highest preference if that is what they wished. Overall, only Mandeville School could not initially offer to all the on-time applicant catchment children.
10. A detailed analysis of the final position is not yet available, since some families moving into Buckinghamshire in late August are in the process of being allocated places. However, to date, all but 94 upper school children have been offered a school that featured somewhere amongst their preferences.
11. Overall, the authority has provided sufficient upper school places to accommodate all Buckinghamshire resident children, and, in the main they

have been able to access their catchment schools even where they are very popular. As of 1 September, there are 40 spare places in upper schools, and these are located across the county in 4 schools.

Possible Changes

12. In order to address the disadvantage experienced by children whose parents apply late, strategies have been put in place for 2006 to try to reduce the number of late applications.
13. The high number of appeals this year may have been a result of including an appeal form in the letters to all parents notifying them of their child's VRT scores. This appears to have raised unrealistic expectations for many that an appeal was likely to be successful, particularly since schools were not asked to provide a form of order of suitability. For admissions in 2006, following consultation, an order of suitability will be provided by schools.
14. For 2007 it would be possible to review catchment areas, where particular pressure was experienced this year and/or next year. This might include providing each Buckinghamshire resident with a single upper and grammar catchment area school to reduce the number of shared catchment areas. It would be important to model the impact of any changes.
15. For admissions in 2007/2008 it would be possible to prioritise admissions to the nearest catchment area school. This would, however, require public consultation within those areas currently being served by two schools' catchment areas. This will, however, require new software and this may not be available immediately.

Recommendation

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to consider this report and to comment on its content.

Background Papers

Admissions Forum Report , 9 June

APPENDIX 1

ALLOCATION STATISTICS FOR ON-TIME APPLICATIONS 2005 (allocations made in first round).

Phase	Primary – Rising 5 admissions	Primary – Junior admissions	Secondary Admissions
Total on-time applications received	4846	1803	6258 Buckinghamshire resident applications plus 2074 out of county applications. (8332 total)
Number who were allocated their first preference	4518	1612	4782 residents asking for a Buckinghamshire school place were offered their highest preference for which they qualified*
% allocated first preference	93.25%	89.41%	76.41% of all applications got their highest Buckinghamshire preference school for which they were qualified* 96% of grammar qualified resident children got their first preference where this was a catchment area school 97% of upper qualified resident children got their highest preference upper school where this was a catchment area school
Number allocated a preference for a Buckinghamshire school	4805	1682	5242 includes 2122 offered grammar schools (all applicants)
% allocated a preference	99.15%	93.29%	97% of residents who asked for a Buckinghamshire school were offered it.
Number of Buckinghamshire school places (excluding places created by transfer appeal)	6213	2138	5821 (of which 2093 are at grammar schools)

* figures as of 11 March - excluding children whose parents did not apply on time , or who wanted a non-Buckinghamshire maintained school

APPENDIX 2

BOYS

Area	2004 Registered	2004 Qualified	2004 % qualified	2005 Registered	2005 Qualified	2005 % qualified
Aylesbury	897	157	18%	938	199	21%
Chiltern and South Bucks	731	203	28%	747	192	26%
Wycombe	808	178	22%	899	241	27%
Partner AV	18	7	39%	27	13	48%
Partner CSB	147	89	61%	156	97	62%
Partner Wyc	15	10	67%	20	10	50%
Partner Out	321	94	29%	339	159	47%
Out (indep/maint)	748	310	41%	704	293	42%
TOTAL (exc special & unknown school)	3691	1048	28%	3843	1212	32%

GIRLS

Area	2004 Registered	2004 Qualified	2004 % qualified	2005 Registered	2005 Qualified	2005 % qualified
Aylesbury	919	182	20%	865	155	18%
Chiltern and South Bucks	718	215	30%	776	227	29%
Wycombe	859	190	22%	776	165	21%
Partner AV	17	5	29%	20	7	35%
Partner CSB	135	77	57%	149	92	62%
Partner Wyc	50	32	64%	36	23	64%
Partner Out	265	84	32%	271	97	36%
Out (indep/maint)	684	289	42%	668	252	38%
TOTAL (exc special & unknown school)	3648	1074	29%	3572	1022	29%

TOTAL

Area	2004 Registered	2004 Qualified	2004 % qualified	2005 Registered	2005 Qualified	2005 % qualified
Aylesbury	1816	339	19%	1803	354	20%
Chiltern and South Bucks	1449	418	29%	1523	419	28%
Wycombe	1667	368	22%	1675	406	24%
Partner AV	35	12	34%	47	20	43%
Partner CSB	282	166	59%	305	189	62%
Partner Wyc	65	42	65%	56	33	59%
Partner Out	586	178	30%	610	256	42%
Out (indep/maint)	1432	599	42%	1372	545	40%
TOTAL (exc special & unknown school)	7339	2122	29%	7415	2234	30%

APPENDIX 3

Preference Catchment School	Number of catchment children not accommodated	Destinations of catchment children not given catchment first preference
Dr Challoner's Grammar School	21	9 - Chesham High School <5 - John Hampden Grammar School 8 - Declined offered School and going elsewhere <5 - Waiting for a preference – declined other offer
Royal Grammar School	14	<5 - Dr Challoner's Grammar School <5 - John Hampden Grammar School <5 - Declined offered School and going elsewhere <5 - Waiting for a preference – declined other offer
Dr Challoner's High School	17	<5 - Chesham High School <5 - Aylesbury High School <5 - Beaconsfield High School 10 - Declined offered School and going elsewhere
Beaconsfield High School	37	7 - Burnham Grammar School 16 -Wycombe High School <5 - Dr Challoner's High School 8 - Declined offered School and going elsewhere <5 - Out county school <5 - Waiting for a preference – declined other offer <5 – Declined alternative grammar school offered prefer upper allocation.

Above details are as at 23 August 2005.

NB – in some cases above, the allocated school was a lower ranked preference and may also be an alternative catchment school. In some cases the school itself appears on the list

Where the number is less than 5 we have not given it in detail to ensure individuals cannot be identified.