

The Buckinghamshire Schools Admission Forum  
c/o Ms. Rebecca Goss  
Buckinghamshire County Council  
County Hall  
Walton Street  
Aylesbury  
Bucks. HP20 1UA

6 June, 2005

Dear Chairman and Members of The Admission Forum,

We understand that at your meeting on Thursday 9 June one of the items you will be discussing is issues relating to the Sep 2005 grammar school admissions process. We are a group of parents from the Gerrards Cross/Denham area and we feel you should be fully aware of the strength of feeling within our community and our respective primary schools regarding these issues. This is demonstrated by over 800 signatures in a recent petition to the LEA presented by Dominic Grieve MP and Cllr. Peter Hardy. We are also concerned that the LEA's proposed solution, namely the introduction of a third grammar school into our catchment area from Sep 2006, does not appear to address the root causes of the problem. We would therefore be most grateful if you could give careful consideration to the case that we have made below.

We are approaching the Admission Forum because we believe you are best-placed to engage the LEA on these issues, since you must be consulted by the LEA and your rôle is to "consider existing and proposed admission arrangements... assess how well they serve the interests of local parents and children collectively, and try to promote agreement on admission issues... consider how admission processes might be improved...consider how effective these arrangements would be and advise the LEA accordingly..." (School Admissions Code of Practice (SACP)).

#### The Objective

We respectfully request that the Admission Forum lodge an objection with the Adjudicator to overturn the decision by the LEA of 11 Apr 2005 to add a third grammar school, Burnham Grammar School (BGS), as a catchment school for our area. Our reasoning is detailed below.

#### The Issue

We believe that this decision is potentially unconstitutional in that the consultation process does not appear to have followed the SACP. Our assertion is that, during the timeframe laid down in the SACP, the required bodies were not consulted, and therefore there was no opportunity for their feedback to be considered and taken on board. Neither our respective schools and their Governors nor the Admission Forum were consulted about this catchment change. Consequently it follows that the decision was implemented without due process and should be set aside.

#### The Background

- (1) The Sep 2005 allocation process resulted in a significant number of children at our respective schools not being allocated places in any of our four catchment grammar schools because, on the face of, it they fell foul of the distance rule;
- (2) At the time of the 2003 consultation the LEA led parents, schools, Governors and the Admission Forum to believe that the distance rule would not have any detrimental effect: "If the proposals for secondary school catchment areas were agreed, we would not expect this rule to affect children who live in the catchment area of the school. This

is because, normally, all children who live in the catchment area should be able to attend the school if they have expressed a preference for it"- LEA (Appendix 1);

- (3) It did have an effect for two main reasons: first, due to a change in the appeals process, we understand that a higher number of appeals than usual were successful this year; secondly, as per the LEA's policy, successful appellants were treated equally with children who passed first time. This meant that many children in our area who passed first time were penalised by distance in favour of successful appellants who live closer to the catchment school. In prior years successful appellants were granted a nominal 121 VRT score, so they were considered for grammar school places behind those who passed first time and scored more than 121. With the move to the distance criterion, rather than VRT score, as the tie-breaker in the case of over-subscription the Sep 2005 allocations have been distorted giving an unreasonable advantage to successful appellants and an opposite unreasonable disadvantage to in-area children who passed first time but live further away from their catchment grammar schools;
- (4) The "Admissions Consultation For 2006 Intake" dated 19 Jan 2005 (see Appendix 2) which was sent out to all schools and statutory consultees by Paul Holmes (Group Manager, School Organisation) maintained that "All the secondary school catchments remain unchanged for 2006". This consultation would have been completed by 1 Mar as per the SACP deadline;
- (5) Subsequent to this consultation and deadline, on 29 Mar 2005 Nick Powley (Head of Policy, Planning and Performance (Schools)) recommended in Cabinet Member Report No. S06.05 (see Appendix 3) that a decision be taken to add BGS to our catchment area. Even though Mr. Powley acknowledged that "it is too soon to assess fully the impact of the major changes put in place for the 2005 procedure" he went on to recommend the inclusion of BGS into our catchment;
- (6) The Cabinet Member for Schools (Marion Clayton) subsequently took this decision and this was published on 11 Apr 2005 (see Appendix 4);
- (7) It should be noted that the introduction of a third school into our catchment is a breach of the LEA's own principle that "Each pupil could have access to a maximum of 2 catchment area schools." (see Appendix 5).

### Conclusion

Instead of conducting a thorough review to ascertain the feasible solutions to the aforementioned problems suffered this year in our area, the LEA appears simply to have changed our catchment areas by adding BGS. It appears that they did this without the proper, statutory consultation of our schools, their Governors and the Admission Forum, and at a point in time at which they recognised it was too soon to have assessed fully the impact of the Sep 2005 changes.

We are concerned about the potential implications this action has on the way in which admissions arrangements are made in the future. We urge you therefore to take action to have it overturned with a request by the LEA to the Adjudicator for an in-year variation to the Sep 2006 intake admissions arrangements.

Assuming that this is successful we would look for a thorough review of the admissions process as it pertains to the specific problems that have affected our children. This would include, inter alia, a review of the appeals process and a review of how successful appellants are treated vs. children who pass first time. We are aware that several solutions have been proposed within the LEA and by parents that would allow our children to attend the current four catchment schools without the need for a catchment change in our area. One such

possible solution would be the re-instatement of Chesham High School as a second catchment school into the Chalfont St. Peter/Seer Green area (area 7 on the boys map in Appendix 6) which we believe would alleviate the pressure from our area for places at the two Dr Challoner's schools. Another solution, known to be supported by Paul Holmes, would be to run the allocation process once for the original VRT passers and then immediately afterwards for the successful appellants. This latter suggestion would still allow children to get the benefit of a pass via an appeal, without penalising those children who passed first time but who live further away from their chosen catchment area school.

A change of catchment area could have a major impact on our community in general and our respective schools in particular. Consequently should a catchment change prove necessary then it needs to be achieved with proper consultation. This group of parents is amenable to working with the Admission Forum and the LEA to resolve these issues.

We look forward to hearing from you in due course, and if in the meantime we can provide any further information please do not hesitate to contact any of the undersigned.

Yours faithfully,

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|-------|--|-------|--|
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