



Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services

AGENDA ITEM: 8

Title: Secondary School Admission Arrangements

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Summary

This report provides the outcome of modelling which has been carried out on a possible amendment to the current secondary school admission arrangements

Recommendation

Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services are asked to comment on the report.

A. Background

1. New catchment areas and admission arrangements were introduced for new entrants to secondary schools in September 2005. This followed widespread consultation and the changes were intended where possible to:
 - Provide local schools for local children
 - Provide greater clarity to parents at the time of application about their chances of securing a place at a particular school.
2. The new catchment areas reflected historical patterns of applications from communities to secondary schools.
3. The new arrangements prioritised children who had qualified for a grammar school place on the basis of distance rather than VRT (verbal reasoning test score). This reflected the principle of providing local schools for local children and the fact that all children who qualified for a grammar place were equally qualified. There was not a perception of some children being 'more qualified' than others.

4. At the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 15 September 2005 the Committee agreed that modelling should take place on an amendment to the admission arrangements, to assess the impact of prioritising children to their nearest catchment area school. In addition, it was agreed that officers should assess the impact of reducing the number of catchment area schools for each household.

B. Issues arising from the last admission process

1. It had been anticipated, on the basis of previous calculations, that children would be able to secure places at a catchment area school, despite the fact that this was the bulge year starting at secondary school. It should be noted that there is never a guarantee that this will happen, which is why there are oversubscription criteria for catchment area children.
2. In the event, in a handful of areas, children were unable to secure places at their catchment area school(s). This was true in particular in Stone for children wanting places at Mandeville Upper School, and in Denham and Gerrards Cross for boys wanting places at either Dr Challoner's Grammar School or the Royal Grammar School.
3. Under the current admission arrangements, where there is particular pressure on a particular school from within a shared catchment area, children living furthest from the school can only secure a place, once those living nearer have been allocated one. A child living close to two schools has priority to both schools ahead of a child living on the edge of the catchment area. This does not seem equitable. It would be possible to address this inequality by giving a child priority to his or her nearest catchment area school.
4. Concern was expressed that children living on the edge of a catchment area were disadvantaged by the rule giving priority by distance rather than by VRT. It is true that prioritising VRT would enable children with high scores and living on the edge of the catchment area to secure a place at their preferred catchment area school. It would not, however, help qualified children with lower scores, whilst children would still need to be prioritised by distance where the scores remained the same. Parents would not, therefore, be able to assess the likelihood of securing a place at a particular school at the time of application.
5. On the whole, the arrangements worked very well, with most parents gaining a place at a preferred school. We have, therefore, looked at ways of increasing the number of children able to secure a place at a catchment area school. It should, however, be noted that one child's gain in terms of a place at a popular school, is another child's loss, since the number of available places does not increase.

C. Modelling

1. The modelling of possible changes to admission arrangements has made use of the data from applications and allocations for places in September 2005, and has assumed that preferences would remain the same with different admission arrangements.
2. It should be noted that there can be no guarantee that preferences would remain the same if different admission arrangements were in place, nor that the pattern of parental preferences will remain unaltered year on year even if the admission arrangements were not to change.
3. Owing to the fact that modelling is a very time consuming process and cannot be generated by the Council's existing admissions software, it was decided to look at five catchment areas, each of which are common to two schools:
 - Dr Challoner's High School (DCH) and Beaconsfield High School (BHS) - Area 10 (Girls)
 - Chesham High School (CHS) and Dr Challoner's High School (DCH) - Area 5 (Girls) on the guide to parents
 - Chesham High School (CHS) and Dr Challoner's Grammar School (DCG) - Area 5 (Boys)
 - Royal Grammar School (RGS) and John Hampden Grammar School (JHG) - Area 6 (Boys)
 - Dr Challoner's Grammar School (DCG) and Royal Grammar School (RGS) - Area 11 (Boys)
4. An analysis of these areas was carried out to assess the impact of using closest school in these areas to prioritise school admissions. The following pupils were excluded from the analysis:
 - pupils who declined the offer of a place or have not yet received an offer as at 11th March 2005
 - pupils with siblings, because they receive a higher priority than pupils without siblings and therefore would not be affected by using a closest school approach.
5. Table 1 below shows the number of pupils who were unable to secure either of the catchment area schools for which they had a preference.

Table 1: Area 11 (Boys) and Area 10 (Girls)

First Preference School (catchment school)	No. pupils not allocated either catchment school	Schools Allocated (out-catchment)
Area 11 (Boys)		
Dr Challoner's Grammar School	11	CHS (4); BGS (3); JHG (4)

Royal Grammar School	3	CHS (1); JHG (2)
Total Boys	14	

Area 10 (Girls)

Dr Challoner's High School	2	WHS (1) BGS (1)
Beaconsfield High School	3	BGS (3)
Total Girls	5	

Note: BGS = Burnham Grammar School WHS = Wycombe High School

Table 2 below shows the number of pupils who were allocated their first preference catchment area school which was not their nearest catchment area school.

Table 2: Areas 5 and 6

<u>School Allocated</u>	No. pupils closer to alternative catchment school	Second Preference (for information)
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Area 5 (Boys)

Dr Challoner's Grammar School	36	CHS (30) RGS (2) AGS (2) No Pref (2)
Chesham High School	14	DCG (11) No Pref (3)

Area 6 (Boys)

Royal Grammar School	32	JHG (27) DCG (2) SWB (1) No Pref (2)
John Hampden Grammar School	30*	RGS (22) DCG (2) No Pref (6)

Area 5 (Girls)

Dr Challoner's High School	25	CHS (19) BHS (2) AHS (1) No Pref (3)
Chesham High School	20	DCH (17) BHS (2) No Pref (2)

Note: SWB = Sir William Borlase's Grammar School; AHS = Aylesbury High School

* Figure includes one pupil who was allocated JHG but was closer and had a first preference for the alternative catchment school (RGS).

6. If closest school is used to prioritise admissions in common catchment areas then:

- In Area 6 one of the 32 pupils allocated Royal Grammar School (for whom not the closest) would have been offered John Hampden Grammar School instead to accommodate the one pupil who was not allocated RGS as his closest catchment school.
- 14 of the 36 pupils allocated Dr Challoner's Grammar (for whom not the closest) would have been offered Chesham High School instead to accommodate the boys who live in Area 11 and were not allocated a place at

one of their catchment schools.

- Five of the 25 pupils allocated Dr Challoner's High (for whom not the closest) would have been offered Chesham High School instead to accommodate the girls who live in Area 10 and were not allocated a place at one of their catchment schools.
 - All pupils closer to Dr Challoner's Grammar and Dr Challoner's High who gave Chesham High School as their first preference would still have been offered a place.
 - Chesham High would have admitted up to 19 more pupils from the catchment area, which would have been at the expense of up to 19 of the 27 pupils who were admitted from out of county.
7. Appendix 1 contains preference and allocation maps for (i) Dr Challoner's High School (ii) Dr Challoner's Grammar (iii) Chesham High School (Boys and Girls) (iv) Royal Grammar School (v) John Hampden Grammar School (vi) Beaconsfield High School
 8. Appendix 2 contains maps showing what would have happened if parental preference had remained the same but the admission rules had changed to using closing catchment school in the 5 areas.
 9. Owing to the available time, and owing to the fact that the modelling referred to above appeared to be productive, it has not been possible to model the impact of reducing the number of catchment area options. From some initial work, it is felt that a reduction in catchment area options might reduce the possibility of some Buckinghamshire children from securing a place at a Buckinghamshire school.

Resource implications

Where the County Council decides to consult more widely than statutory consultees, then there is an additional cost involved.

Legal implications

Each year, the County Council is required to consult schools and neighbouring admission authorities about its proposed admission arrangements. This consultation must take place in January and February.