



Buckinghamshire County Council

Report School Organisation Committee

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Title	Update on National Consultation on Admission Arrangements: Update and implications for Buckinghamshire
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Electoral Divisions Affected

Summary

The report sets out the main changes proposed to the School Admissions Framework and identifies issues and implications for the Admissions Authority.

Recommendation

The School Organisation Committee is asked to RECEIVE and NOTE the report and to ADVISE as appropriate on implications for Admissions Authorities

Supporting Information

DfES consulted on School Admissions during the Autumn Term 2001. New regulations and guidance have been expected for some time but, as yet, none have been issued. Nonetheless, as we have been advised, the proposals in the consultation are likely to stand, the opportunity to set out some of the implications is taken at this stage and in this report.

Proposed Changes

Requiring co-ordination of admissions systems and school place allocations by LEAs on a locally agreed basis which allows schools which are their own admission authority to apply their own admission criteria and feed the results into the LEA for allocation purposes.

Common forms, common dates and synchronised timetables, effective mechanisms for sharing of information both about pupils and about the number of places and admission criteria and a willingness for all parties to participate positively and constructively in such new co-ordinated arrangements in themselves may provide some challenges. However, the LEA believes that we are well on the way towards the sort of co-ordinated system recommended and that it should be possible to secure agreement of all parties on the arrangement.

There are implications in terms of the administrative workload for the LEA if it is to have a strengthened role as co-ordinator and clearing house for applications.

Clarifying the law on parental preference in order to resolve any doubts LEAs may have about whether their present or proposed systems apply.

The clarification of what comprises a parental preference is welcomed and the Buckinghamshire interpretation of such preferences where there can be more than one statutory preference held by a parent and that these preferences can be arranged in rank order, is consistent with the new definition and clarification put forward by the DfES. Accordingly, it is felt that there are few if any implications relating to this change.

Making the current voluntary Admissions Forums mandatory with a role to advise all admissions authorities in their area on admissions issues, including the sharing of pupils with challenging behaviour and other vulnerable groups.

Final guidance from the DfES is awaited with interest because there does need to a clarification of the exact function, and perhaps more importantly the powers of the mandatory admissions forum. Will its functions include approval and endorsement of admission proposals, will the forum act as an arbitrator for local disputes and will it have a role in monitoring and then evaluating the effectiveness of admission arrangements and their co-ordination?

There also needs to be a clarification of the relationship of the new mandatory Admissions Forum to School Organisation Committee to the LEA and to other admission authorities.

The changes relating to pupils with challenging behaviour and other vulnerable groups are welcomed and should, along with other measures relating to pupils out of school and their entitlements, greatly strengthen the LEAs hand.

Ceasing to use standard numbers to establish how many pupils a school can take, relying instead on admission numbers set as part of admission arrangements based on the new capacity assessment.

The proposal is welcomed as being generally sensible and has the potential to allow more flexibility and a greater responsiveness to demand. It will also mean that a single figure is used to assess a capacity of the school and match it with demand (in contrast with current arrangements where two figures are used: the standard number which relates to admissions and the more open enrolment (MOE) capacity which relates to the physical capacity of the school). There may however, remain some immediate issues with respect to agreeing the overall capacity of schools under the new arrangements. Currently, school accommodation is being measured by the valuation office but the LEA will have to agree with each and every school the precise usage of the accommodation and from that the overall capacity of the school. This process will be undertaken over the course of the next six months to one year.

Amending legislation so that objections to the Adjudicator can be made by all those who ought to have been consulted on intended admission arrangements rather than just those who actually were; and so that community and voluntary controlled schools can object to the arrangements of local Foundation and Voluntary Aided Schools which affect them.

Possibly a change which is double-edged because while the change will provide controlled and community schools along with parents the right to submit objections to the Adjudicator

are welcomed, it may mean, certainly over the medium term future, that there is a considerable increase in number of objections which could cause a strain on the existing system. As an illustration, under the proposed new arrangements, how many objections would have been received as a result of changes brought about following the consultation on secondary school catchment areas?

Relaxing consultation requirements on Admission Authorities Schools so that, after an initial year in which they all will have to publish intended admission arrangements, they need only publish them every other year if nothing has changed and there were no objections previously.

As a small contribution to reducing the bureaucratic burden on the schools, then this change is to be welcomed. However, it is to be wondered whether the precise arrangements will not in themselves cause further confusion. "Is this the year that we should be consulting or is it next year? Did we have an objection last year and if so, does that mean that we should consult this year" ...

These considerations aside, however, it is felt that overall the package of proposals is likely to enable LEAs and other Admission Authorities greatly to improve the quality of the admissions service provided to pupils, students and parents. Accordingly, the LEA welcomes the changes in the admissions framework and views positively the advantages which should flow from them.

For the information of Members of the School Organisation Committee the consultation on School admissions from the DfES is attached as an annex to this paper.

For further information please contact David Ayres (01296) 383527