



Buckinghamshire County Council

Report School Organisation Committee

Date	9 April 2003
Title	Summary of the key points in the consultation by the DfES on proposed changes to School Organisation Plans and on changes to the regulations and guidance for School Organisation Committees
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Electoral Divisions Affected

All

Summary

To update the School Organisation Committee by providing a summary of the key points in the consultation by the DfES on proposed changes to School Organisation Plans and on changes to the regulations and guidance for School Organisation Committees.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to note the proposed changes to School Organisation Plans and to the regulations as they affect the role of School Organisation Committees.

Supporting Information

- 1.1 On the 4th February 2003 the DfES started a consultation that runs until 11th April on proposals for new regulations and non-statutory guidance on School Organisation.
- 1.2 The DfES intend that the new regulations and guidance are effective from 1st June 2003 and will impact on School Organisation Plans that have to be published in 2003.
- 1.3 The main rationale to the consultation is to update the regulations to take account of changes in education law and policy since 1999.
- 1.4 The DfES also wish to encourage greater focus in SOPs on the government's transformation agenda.
- 1.5 The draft regulations and guidance take into account a number of improvements that have been recommended to the DfES by LEAs, SOCs and Diocesan bodies as a result of an evaluation of the procedures.

2. School Organisation Plans: Main changes in the new Regulations:

- 2.1 From 2003 SOPs need only be published on a 3 yearly cycle rather than the current annual cycle. The exception to this being that if an LEA should experience a significant change in local circumstances (e.g. the availability of significant additional capital funding, major new housing development), then a mid-term report can be published.
- 2.2 LEAs will however have to publish annual demographic information.
- 2.3 The DfES require the first draft 3 yearly plans covering the period 2003/04 to 2007/08 to be published by 1st July. Subsequent draft tri-annual plans will have to be published by the 1st July.
- 2.4 An extension to the consultation period for the SOP to 10 weeks from 2 months to take account of the Summer Holiday period.
- 2.5 All representations on a SOP should be taken into account. This is so that general comments as well as those supporting or objecting are noted in the consultation process.
- 2.6 The DfES state that future SOPs will have to outline how LEAs will ensure that provision will raise standards and improve outcomes for pupils. They will also require SOPs to state how it will increase diversity, encourage collaboration between schools and promote community cohesion.
- 2.7 Additional demographic information, including details of the number of SEN pupils (statemented and non-statemented) at each school and the numbers of part-time 3 and 4 year olds will have to be included.
- 2.8 SOPs will have to reflect that the DfES wish plans to give greater emphasis to the Government's transformation agenda. The plan will have to set out an LEA's strategic vision, show how we will encourage successful and popular schools to expand, encourage new providers and take action where standards are poor.
- 2.9 The plan will need to include reference to how we are taking forward the 14-19 agenda, ensuring sufficient free early years school places and promoting the schools' contribution to community life.
- 2.10 The role of the newly reconstituted Admissions Forum will need to be reflected in the SOP and we will need to show how we will take account of the Forum's views on sufficiency and distribution of school places.
- 2.11 The SOP will have to be cross-referenced to an LEA's Accessibility Strategy.

3. Statutory proposals and decision-making.

The main changes to the regulations, which also reflect changes arising from the 2002 Education Act are:

- 3.1 When an LEA identifies a need for a new Secondary School and this school does not replace an existing one LEAs will have to invite other interested parties to bring forward proposals, before an LEA publishes its own proposals. In these circumstances the Secretary of State will decide on the proposals.

- 3.2 A promoter who is not represented on a SOC and whose proposals for a new school are rejected by a SOC may appeal to the Adjudicator.
- 3.3 If a new school is intended to be part of a federation of schools the proposals must give details.
- 3.4 Approval of proposals may be conditional on a new school becoming part of a federation or on the agreement of a change in admission arrangements.
- 3.5 Community schools may publish proposals to expand or to add a sixth form.
- 3.6 A popular school, providing it is not a grammar school, may appeal to the Adjudicator if its proposals for expansion are rejected by a SOC.
- 3.7 All representations received by an LEA on statutory proposals, whether objecting, supporting or just commenting, must be taken into account.
- 3.8 The period during which representations can be made will be reduced from two months to one month and the period for an LEA to forward objections to a SOC is reduced to two weeks from one month.
- 3.9 A SOC may refer a decision to the Adjudicator if at least two groups on a SOC have disqualified themselves from voting on a proposal because they have an interest in a case.
- 3.10 An LEA may refer an issue to a SOC even if there have been no objections if conditional approval is necessary (where new provision needs to be become available before a schools may close, for example).
- 3.11 Detailed guidance is set out on publishing proposals for new nursery schools and nursery classes.
- 3.12 Specified information on community cohesion must be provided in respect of proposals for new schools.

4. Revised Statutory guidance.

The aim is to make clearer the key factors that decision makers must bear in mind when coming to a decision. The following issues are covered in the consultation:

- 4.1 A focus on ensuring that changes to local school provision will support higher standards and meet the needs and wishes of the greatest number of parents and pupils.
- 4.2 A strong presumption that proposals put forward by popular and successful schools will be approved.
- 4.3 Guidance that approval for closing nursery schools should only be given if approved specific conditions are met.
- 4.4 An emphasis on the importance of collaboration, including through the creation of federations of schools.
- 4.5 That each case should be considered on its merits and that proposals should not be turned down just because they are not consistent with traditional practice

- 4.6 An emphasis on the desirability of new and different providers putting forward plans for new schools (including replacing existing schools)
- 4.7 The importance of the contribution that schools can make to community cohesion and the community cohesion issues that SOCs should consider when looking at proposals for new schools.
- 4.8 The importance of schools as the focal points for their communities, especially in rural areas.
- 4.9 Guidance on creating Extended schools and supporting schools to provide community activities.
- 4.10 Guidance covering situations where SOCs have to implement a decision made by the Secretary of State.

Your questions and views

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this paper please get in touch with the Contact Officer whose telephone number is given at the head of the paper.

If you have any views on this paper which you would like the Committee to consider please inform the Secretary to the School Organisation Committee. This can be done by telephone (01296 383710 or 383610) or e-mail to rpopat@buckscc.gov.uk or cgray@buckscc.gov.uk