



Report to Cabinet

AGENDA ITEM: 7

Title: Changes to Admission Arrangements and Secondary School Catchment Areas

Date: 10 November 2003

Date Decision can be implemented: 18 November 2003

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Electoral Divisions Affected: All

Portfolio Areas Affected: Schools
Children and Young People
Planning & Transportation

Relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Lifelong Learning

Summary

The County Council is required by the Education Act 1998, as amended by the Education Act 2002, to establish and manage coordinated primary and secondary school admission schemes within its area, for operation to commence with the admission round for 2005 school entry or transfer. Following publication of a new School Admissions Code of Practice (DfES/0031/2003) issued February 2003, authorities are required to review their admission arrangements. These must also take account of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Discrimination Act 2001, which brings all aspects of education within the ambit of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Admission authorities are under a new duty not to discriminate against disabled pupils in their access to education.

A review of all admission policies and procedures has been undertaken in Buckinghamshire to ensure that arrangements will comply with new and existing legislation and will work to the best possible advantage of all Buckinghamshire children and parents. This review included oversubscription criteria and catchment areas for secondary schools.

Following the review, parents and schools have been consulted on a number of proposed changes to oversubscription criteria and revised secondary school catchment areas. The responses from the consultation have been analysed and some changes to the proposals considered together with the implications of any such amendments.

Recommendations

Where relevant the boxes beneath each recommendation summarise the results of the consultation for the specific issue.

Cabinet is asked to recommend that the County Council agrees:

1. **The Coordinated Scheme for Primary Admissions in Buckinghamshire, to commence with the normal admission round for 2005 as set out in Appendix A.**

Group consulted	Agree %	Disagree %	No opinion %
Schools	87	0	13

2. **The Coordinated Scheme for Secondary Admissions in Buckinghamshire, to commence with the normal admission round for 2005 as set out in Appendix B**

Group consulted	Agree %	Disagree %	No opinion %
Schools	86	1	13

3. **The proposed changes to admissions oversubscription criteria for community and voluntary controlled schools:**

- a. **Linking of named community and voluntary controlled infant schools with the junior or combined school into which the children traditionally transfer, by application of an additional oversubscription criterion:**

'Children attending a primary school linked with the school in the defined list of Buckinghamshire linked schools.'

A list of the proposed linked schools can be found on page 15 of 'Getting a School Place' and in Appendix C.

Group consulted	Agree %	Disagree %	No opinion %
Parents	80	7	13
Schools	84	2	14

- b. **The sibling oversubscription criterion should be retained in primary school admissions**

Group consulted	Agree %	Disagree %	No opinion %
Parents	92	4	4
Schools	90	2	8

- c. **The sibling oversubscription criterion should be retained in secondary school admissions but should only apply to siblings of children in Y7 to Y11 at the point the child would be admitted.**

Group consulted	Retain %	Remove %	No opinion %
Parents	62	30	8
Schools	42	40	18

d. That to count as a sibling connection for a primary school admission the child must have been formally offered a place at the school (or linked school) under the coordinated admission arrangements.

e. That the final oversubscription criterion for grammar school admissions becomes distance rather than the Verbal Reasoning Test Score (VRT):

Once places are allocated under criteria 1 – 6, the remaining places will be awarded according to the distance from the family's normal home address and the school's nearest entrance gate; closest first. The shortest designated route is a public route with a proper made up surface, such as tarmac or concrete. If it is a road it does not have to have a separate pavement.

Group consulted	Agree %	Disagree %	No opinion %
Parents	56	37	7
Schools	80	6	14

4. Any amendments to the secondary catchment areas should be in accordance with the principles, drawn up with the involvement of Headteachers, listed on pages 8 and 9 of 'Getting a School Place' consultation booklet for parents and Appendix D.

Group consulted	Agree %	Disagree %	No opinion %
Parents	72	14	14
Schools	81	5	14

5. The secondary school catchment areas should be as shown on the maps in the consultation document sent to parents, 'Getting a School Place', with the amendments numbers 1 to 13 listed in Appendix E (Table 1).

6. The requested amendments to proposed catchment areas numbers 1 to 15 listed in Appendix E (Table 2) should not be implemented.

7. That further work should be undertaken on the detail of administration of the secondary 11+ transfer procedure and the timeline necessary to meet deadlines in the scheme.

8. There should be a review and evaluation of admission arrangements at the end of the first and second years of operation of the coordinated scheme and every 5 years thereafter.

A. Narrative setting out the reasons for the decisions

The Education Act 1998 as amended by the Education Act 2002 sets a duty on Local Education Authorities to establish coordinated admission arrangements and to notify the Secretary of State of the schemes by 1 January, 2004. A new School Admissions Code of Practice was published in February 2003, following the 2002 Education Act.

By the September 2005 entry round, each LEA must formulate and manage coordinated admission schemes for all admission authorities within the LEA area. It must also share

information, about applications for their schools, with other LEAs. These requirements will affect the timeline for the secondary transfer process

The Code of Practice also requires that careful attention be given to the effect of admission arrangements on children with special or additional needs or those who are vulnerable. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Discrimination Act 2001 must be complied with in admission arrangements.

A complete review of admissions policies and procedures has been undertaken to ensure our admission arrangements comply with the new Code of Practice and the requirements of the schemes to be implemented, as well as with social and demographic changes which have occurred since previous reviews. Work has been undertaken with Headteacher colleagues, Governor representatives and diocesan representatives to determine the schemes to be used for Buckinghamshire admissions.

Following this work there are also proposals for changes to the catchment areas of secondary schools; to oversubscription criteria for both primary and secondary schools; and to the administrative arrangements for admission to secondary schools.

We believe that the new requirements and the arrangements we are proposing will work to the maximum advantage of Buckinghamshire children. Once in place the admissions process should be simpler, the outcome more predictable and easier to understand than the current arrangements complying with the Rotherham decision.

Full details of the proposals and the reasons for them can be found in the 'Getting a School Place' consultation documents.

Siblings

Parents and schools were in agreement with keeping the sibling priority in primary and secondary schools. However, with changed arrangements for pre-school children, and the requirement for a coordinated admissions scheme with a common offer date, it is necessary to be clear that children may only count as a sibling link to give admission priority if they have a formal school place (offered in accordance with the coordinated admission arrangements) rather than a pre-school place. We are therefore recommending that the sibling criteria are retained with clarification of when siblings will give a priority for admission.

The new regulations for sixth form admissions will mean that it will not be possible for schools to confirm that a student will be continuing into the sixth form at the time of the secondary allocations on 1 March of the relevant year. In retaining the sibling priority in secondary schools it is recommended that only siblings in statutory school years (Y7 to Y11) should count.

Linking of Infant and Junior or Combined Schools for Admissions

Schools and parents responding to the proposals to links schools have requested that the priority works between both schools. This can be achieved by replacing the criterion described in the consultation document to:

'Children attending a **primary** school linked with the school in the defined list of Buckinghamshire linked schools.'

This criterion would be number 8 and the current number 8 (referring to distance) would become number 9. A list of the schools proposed for linking is in Appendix C.

B. Other options available, and their pros and cons

The coordinated admission schemes

- Do nothing - The current admission arrangements in Buckinghamshire would not be fully compliant with the requirements of the new Code of Practice on Admissions;
- Consider alternative schemes - Alternative schemes have been considered and it was determined that they would not work to the benefit of Buckinghamshire children. Details of the rejected schemes are explained in Appendix 4 of the 'Getting A School Place' consultation document for schools.

Oversubscription criteria

- Do nothing - There is the possibility of challenge over meeting the requirements of the Special Needs and Disability Discrimination Act 2001 in retaining VRT score for the final oversubscription criterion of grammar schools. The definitions of sibling for primary and secondary arrangements should still be clarified as above to comply with the requirements of the coordinated admission schemes.

Secondary school catchment areas

- Do nothing - The only alternative option is to do nothing at the moment and conduct another review at some time in the future. The current catchment areas, however, are likely to create significant problems for the equitable operation of the secondary coordinated admission scheme.

C. Resource implications

Under the new arrangements for coordinated admissions there could be significant changes to parents' preferences. It is therefore difficult to gauge the impact. It is likely that the proposed amendments to catchment areas would have a neutral effect or possible small increase to the home-to-school transport budget during the time that the current and new systems are operating together. Reducing the number of directions of journeys may reduce the home-to-school transport costs in the longer term.

D. Legal implications

The Education Act 1998, as amended by the Education Act 2002, requires the establishment of coordinated admission schemes. The Buckinghamshire Schools Admission Forum must be consulted on the schemes. The Forum has approved of the schemes and the Head of Legal Services has agreed that the schemes fulfil legal requirements.

In preparing the proposals due regard was specifically given to the Race Relations Act 1976, as amended by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and the Special Needs and Disability Discrimination Act 2001.

E. Other implications/issues

None.

F. Feedback from consultation and Local Member views

In addition to the major consultation exercise with parents, schools, The Buckinghamshire Schools Admissions Forum, the Northampton Diocese, the Oxford Diocese, and other

partners which is detailed in Appendix G, there has been significant input from the Schools' Policy Advisory Group and the Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Local Members have had the opportunity through briefings and seminars to feed in views. The Members of Parliament for Buckinghamshire have also had the opportunity to feed their views into the exercise.

G. Communication issues

The decision of the County Council will be published on the consultation website in December.

During the spring and summer of 2004 there will be major training and briefing sessions for Headteachers and Governors.

New guidance material will be written for parents and a publicity campaign to explain the new processes, particularly the operation of the coordinated schemes.

H. Progress Monitoring and Review

It is recommended that there should be monitoring of the arrangements with a review at the end of the first and second years of operation.

As part of the County Council duty to consult, the usual annual admissions consultation with schools and statutory consultees will be held during each spring term.

Background Papers

Getting a School Place – consultation with parents
Getting a School Place – consultation with schools

School Admissions Code of Practice DfES/0031/2003

Education Act 1998
Education Act 2002

Special Educational Needs and Disability Discrimination Act 2001
Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
Race Relations Act 1976

Members will have received copies of both Getting a School Place consultation booklets (one for parents and one for schools). Spare copies will be available in the Members' library.

A1 composite maps will be displayed in the Members' lounge, Members' library and group rooms showing the catchment areas. They will also be available during the meeting.

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 that you would like the Cabinet Member to consider, or if you wish to object to the proposed decision, please inform the Democratic Services Team by 5.00pm on Friday 7 November 2003. This can be done by telephone (to 01296 383604 or 383610), Fax (to 01296 382538), or e-mail to cabinet@buckscc.gov.uk