

WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM 7TH JULY 2011

REPORT OF THE INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDRENS SERVICES

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION CONSULTATION ON CHANGES TO THE ADMISSIONS FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

On 27th May 2011, Michael Gove announced a 12 week consultation on a new Draft School Admissions Code. If approved the new Code would impact on admissions to schools from September 2013 onwards.

Information regarding the consultation can be found on the DFE website:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm?action=consultationDetails&consultationId=1744&external=no&menu=1>

KEY CHANGES SUMMARY

The key changes in the draft Codes are as follows:

Draft Code	Existing Code
“Popular and successful” schools can increase their admission number by notification only (p1.42), with no requirement to consult. Objection on this is to the Adjudicator with a strong presumption to approve. (p1.2,1.3, 3.4)	Increasing admission number requires consultation with all admission authorities
LA no longer required to co-ordinate in-year admissions (p2.21). Parents applying for in-year places apply directly to the school they are interested in, who must notify the LA of the application and it’s outcome	All in-year applications are made via the LA.
All schools allowed to give priority to children of school staff (as defined by the school) as an over-subscription criterion (p1.33)	Schools can offer places to children of school staff to aid in recruitment in areas of skills shortages
Additional Infant Class Size limit exempt categories created: (p2.15) Children of military personnel Twins and multiple births	
Requirement to reduce to 30 in an Infant Class with Excepted pupils within 12 months is removed. (p2.15)	Excepted pupils may exceed 30 for 12 months – after this an additional teacher is required if class still over 30
LA no longer allowed to operate area-wide “lottery” method of allocation, although individual school admission authorities can do so (p1.28)	All admission authorities able to use lotteries to allocate places
Required to consult every 7 years. If changes	Required to consult every 3

Draft Code	Existing Code
are made must consult – although increasing the admission number does not constitute a change requiring consultation. (p1.36)	years, or in any year if any change is made including increasing the admission number
Academies and Free schools to be able to use deprivation (FSM) as an oversubscription criterion.(p1.7)	
Anyone can object on admissions arrangements to the Adjudicator. (p3.3 Admissions Code) Deadline on objections on arrangements brought forward to 30 th June each year.	Prescribed list of objectors. Objections to be made by 31 st July.
APPEALS CODE	
Parents have 30 days to appeal against admissions decisions (p2.4)	Parents have 10 days to appeal.
Schools to be able to hold appeals in any suitable premise (including the school) (p2.12)	Neutral non-school venues must be used.
Appeals panel members can sit on the same school panel for an indefinite period (p1.3)	Panel members can sit on the same school panel for a maximum of three years
Schools no longer obliged to train appeals panel members other than initial training (p1.6)	Panel members must be retrained every two years, with annual updates
Only remaining appeals to be reheard at a later date if a panel member drops out part-way through the hearing (p1.5)	All appeals must be rescheduled to be reheard in this situation
Two stage appeal process renamed three stage process (Section 3)	Two stage process

CONSULTATION RESPONSE

A proposed response to the consultation is attached in Appendix 1. The response is required by 19th August. It is suggested that the Schools Forum review the Draft Code and the proposed consultation response and consider a formal response from the Schools Forum to the DFE.

ELEVEN PLUS TESTING – NOT PART OF THE CONSULTATION

The new Draft Admissions Code also includes proposed changes to Eleven Plus testing, these changes are not included in the consultation document however if adopted in the new Code they will impact on current arrangements in Wirral. The Schools Forum may wish to consider responding to the DFE regarding these proposed changes to the Code. Before his departure from the Council John Bulmer wrote to the Headteachers of Grammar Schools alerting them to the proposed changes to the code.

The requirement introduced in the 2007 Code for parents to have test results before completing the preference forms has been retained and escalated to MUST rather than SHOULD. Paragraph 1.26 says:

“inform parents of the outcome of selection tests before parents make applications for other schools – while making clear that this does not equate to a guarantee of a selective place.”

Research indicates that as in Wirral the majority of local authorities where grammar schools still exist, testing takes place in November or December, after the deadline for expressing secondary school preferences has passed. In order to meet the national secondary allocation day of 1st March, all preference forms must be returned by 31st October each year.

In 2007 when this item was first introduced into the Admissions Code, the Wirral Admissions Forum considered whether 11 plus testing could be carried out in the Summer term of Year 5 in order for parents to have the results when preference forms were distributed in September, but members felt this would bring the process including practice tests forward to February of Year 5, increasing pressure on pupils at a younger age, and demotivating pupils who had not reached the grammar standard. At an administrative level, carrying out testing arrangements on Year 5 whilst still dealing with the admission of the Year 6 cohort would put pressure on local authority staffing levels.

A working party in 2008 examined the possibility of testing in September of Year 6, and reducing the number of practice tests from two to one, but even with these changes, the preference form deadline would have to be extended to the end of November. This would cause significant co-ordination issues with neighbouring authorities, in particular Cheshire West with whom there is considerable cross- boundary traffic. The solution agreed at that time was to continue with the current system of testing and increase the number of preferences available to parents from three to five which resolves the issue effectively due to the equal preference system.

The equal preference scheme means that an application for a grammar school that is unsuccessful is not a wasted preference, providing there are a sufficient number of preferences to allow grammar and non-grammar preferences to be chosen. In Wirral's case, the maximum number of grammar schools any parent can apply to is three. Five preferences allows two non-grammar preferences to be selected. Under equal preference, no-one is disadvantaged by expressing a first preference for a grammar school as the place offered will be for the highest available.

It is of concern that this item has been changed in the Draft Code but without an official route to respond to the change from should to must. If the change is confirmed in the new code the arrangements for testing will require change for admissions in 2013 which requires consultation in the spring term 2012 on possible arrangements. It is suggested that a working party is convened in the autumn term to consider the options for Eleven Plus Testing in Wirral.

Recommendation

That the Forum considers a response to the new admissions framework.

David Armstrong

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