

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MAINSTREAM SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a brief outline of Mainstream Admissions, the usage of the Council's online admission application system (eAdmissions) and an update on recent changes to the administration of the non-Catholic grammar selective tests.

2.0 Mainstream Admissions

2.1 Statutory roles of the Mainstream Admissions include the administration and allocation of places in all primary and secondary schools, and representing the Council in school place appeals.

This year there were over 3,700 applications for primary school (Foundation 2) and a similar number for secondary schools (Year 7). The team co-ordinates admission to school with all own admission authority schools within Wirral and other admission authorities in England.

2.2 The team produces appeal statements and presents appeals on behalf of all community and voluntary controlled (VC) schools as a statutory function. Overall, in 2012-2013 the number of appeals lodged for all Wirral schools was 10% higher than the previous year (639 vs 577). For information, the outcomes for the community and VC school appeals handled by the team are shown below.

| | Withdrawn (%) | Resolved (%) | Refused (%) | Agreed (%) | Total |
|-----------|---------------|--------------|-------------|------------|-------|
| 2011-2012 | 43 (19%) | 55 (24%) | 107 (47%) | 24 (10%) | 229 |
| 2012-2013 | 54 (21%) | 46 (18%) | 115 (46%) | 37 (15%) | 252 |

Outcome of appeals lodged for community and voluntary controlled primary and secondary schools by academic year.

2.3 The team administers the grammar school selection tests on behalf of the four non-Catholic grammar schools. Around 1,800 children are tested each year. The team also administers the Independent Assessment Board, and is responsible for disseminating the outcome of the selective tests to parents.

2.4 As well as admissions to Foundation 2 and Year 7, the team also processes around 2,000 in-year transfers between and into/out of Wirral schools. This includes the administration of the Council's Fair Access Protocol. This Protocol applies to "hard to place" young people with a history of poor attendance or significant behavioural issues.

3.0 eAdmissions

3.1 The Council has a statutory obligation to enable parents to apply for school places via an on-line application system. On 16th June 2011, delegated authority was given to replace the pre-existing in-house online admission system with a proprietary software module, CACI eAdmissions, which links into the Admissions administrative software, CACI Impulse.

- 3.2 Prior to the introduction of eAdmissions, levels of online applications for Wirral schools were low in comparison with other local authorities. In 2010-2011, 25% of applicants used the in-house system (5% secondary, 45% primary). Other nearby Authorities operate at over 80% online applications and this remains the target for applications to Wirral primary and secondary schools. Benefits to parents of eAdmissions include a secure user account which will manage all their children's school place applications, instant acknowledgement that their application has been received and allocations sent by e-mail rather than waiting for a letter in the post.
- 3.3 The new system went live in October 2011 and has been strongly promoted to parents through the website and admissions literature. In the first year of introduction over 2,000 Wirral parents applied online. Almost three-quarters completed the optional customer satisfaction questions and 97% of those who did so rated the online application system as either "very clear" or "clear".
- 3.4 In 2012-2013 (the most recent completed year), 50% of 7,440 applications were made online (48% secondary, 53% primary). Usage of the e-admissions system will continue to be monitored, with further encouragement and promotion employed to increase efficiency.
- 3.5 An online secure system for schools was introduced in 2012 which enables schools to view their F2 or Year 7 applications as they are inputted "live" on CACI Impulse, and also allows each school to update the number of in year vacancies electronically immediately a change occurs to the school's roll. The Mainstream Admissions team is continuing to actively look for ways to optimise usage of ICT in order to increase efficiencies and provide value for money.

4.0 Update on changes to selective testing

- 4.1 The School Admissions Code changed in February 2012 with various implications for the Admissions and Appeals processes. A major change was that parents must have the outcome of their selective tests prior to submitting their secondary application forms at the end of October each year. This has meant significantly redesigning the 11 plus testing schedule to meet the new requirements. 2013 is the second year of "results before preferences" and the new schedule has embedded well. It will continue to be reviewed annually to improve the service.
- 4.2 Following issues in 2011 and 2012, a review of the selective testing arrangements for non-Catholic grammar schools has been carried out. This review identified a number of potential amendments that could reduce the reputational risk both to the Academy non-Catholic grammar schools and the Local Authority, and also enhance value for money. The estimated cost of administering the selective tests is £120,000 per annum and is part of the overall Admissions budget.
- 4.3 The options were discussed with a working group of primary headteachers and with all six grammar schools (Catholic and non-Catholic) following a meeting of Wirral Association of Secondary Headteachers (WASH). Various options for change were considered, and the outcome was reported to Councils' Cabinet in March 2013.
- 4.4 Following from this report, further discussions took place with the test provider and the working group during summer term 2013, which has resulted in the formation of a Wirral Consortium of schools for non-Catholic selective testing from September 2013 onwards. This is expected to reduce the total cost of administering the selective tests for non-Catholic grammar schools by approximately £20,000 annually (2013 costs compared with 2012 costs). The number, duration, format, style and administration of the tests have not changed as a result of this action.

- 4.5 The test provider has also been asked to consider revising and modernising the Familiarisation Pack provided to parents/carers for future years. This should improve the familiarisation experience for children. This is, however, unlikely to result in a significant reduction in cost to DSG.
- 4.6 An additional cost reduction of approximately £6,000 could be obtained by joining a larger existing Consortium, where every school in that Consortium would use the same test papers each year, however this would require a change to the existing verbal reasoning tests to introduce non-verbal reasoning. A change of test provider was also considered by the working group, which could also result in a reduction in the overall cost of selective testing, but is a more significant change to the existing system.
- 4.7 Further discussions will take place during 2014 with the test provider(s) and a working group of headteachers. If non-verbal reasoning is to be introduced with the current test provider or the test provider changed, it will require public consultation as part of the co-ordinated admission scheme for Wirral secondary schools. The earliest these changes could take effect if agreed by Council's Cabinet would be testing carried out in September 2015 for entry to school in September 2016.

5.0 Finance

The overall budget for School Admissions is £452,500. The reduction in costs described in the report will be included in the Schools Budget for 2014-15.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. That the Forum notes the report.**

Julia Hassall
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