

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MAINSTREAM SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a brief outline of Mainstream Admissions during the 2013-2014 admission year and the usage of the Council's online admission application system (eAdmissions).

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.

For entry to primary/secondary school in September 2014 there were over 3,800 applications for primary school (Foundation 2) and 3,700 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 2013-2014 the total number of appeals lodged for all Wirral schools was higher than the previous year (758 vs 639). 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	Withdrawn (%)	Resolved (%)	Refused (%)	Agreed (%)	Total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
2013-2014	55 (21%)	57 (22%)	136 (53%)	10 (4%)	258

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. 12 young people were placed through the Fair Access Protocol in 2013-2014.
- 2.5 For information, Negotiated Transfers (NTs) also form part of the Wirral Fair Access Protocol. NTs follow a similar process to Managed Moves for young people at risk of Permanent Exclusion, however NTs are intended for young people with lower level behaviour and/or attendance issues who might benefit from a fresh start in another Wirral school. NTs are discretionary and are overseen by a former secondary headteacher. 100 NTs were instigated in 2013-2014 of which 14 were withdrawn by the parent, 45 were unsuccessful and 41 resulted in a successful transfer of school.

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 2013-2014 (the most recent fully completed year), 62% of 6,940 home pupil applications were made online (59% secondary, 64% primary). Usage of the e-admissions system will continue to be monitored, with further encouragement and promotion employed to increase efficiency.
- 3.5 In 2012 an online secure system for schools, "SAS Impulse" was introduced 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.
- 3.6 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 Changes to the School Admissions Code introduced in 2012 included the obligation 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 meant significantly redesigning the 11 plus testing schedule to meet the new requirements. 2014 is the third 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 The non-Catholic grammar schools now comprise a Wirral Consortium of schools (as from September 2013). This has reduced 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 did not change as a result of this action.
- 4.5 Further discussions with the working group of headteachers have taken place during 2014-2015. Demonstrations from both the existing and another test provider of the test products available have taken place. Discussions have included the potential introduction of non-verbal reasoning, as well as a potential change of test provider. If

either or both of these changes are decided upon, this may have further possibilities in reducing the cost of selective testing. This type of change 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 2016 for entry to school in September 2017. The outcome will be advised in a future report to Schools Forum.

5.0 Finance

The overall budget for School Admissions in 2015-16 is £341,800, a reduction from the previous year of £23,600 following a review of central costs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

Julia Hassall
Director of Children's Services