

REPORT OF THE INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MAINSTREAM SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a brief outline of Mainstream Admissions during the most recently completed 2015-2016 admission year and the usage of the Council's online admission application system, Parent Portal.

2.0 Mainstream Admissions

- 2.1 Statutory roles of the Mainstream Admissions team 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 2016 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. For information, the outcomes for the community and VC school appeals handled by the team are shown below.

	Withdrawn (%)	Resolved (%)	Refused (%)	Agreed (%)	Total
2013-2014	55 (21%)	57 (22%)	136 (53%)	10 (4%)	258
2014-2015	61 (23%)	66 (24%)	125 (46%)	18 (7%)	270
2015-2016	97 (26%)	82 (22%)	173 (47%)	20 (5%)	372

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

The number of appeals was significantly higher than in previous years, however the outcome of appeals was proportionately similar.

- 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 2015-2016, compared to 10 in the previous year.
- 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. 98 NTs were instigated in 2015-2016 of which 52 resulted in a

successful transfer of school, 4 were withdrawn by the parent and 42 were ultimately unsuccessful.

- 2.6 The Wirral Fair Access Protocol arrangements, including hard to place young people, Managed Moves, Negotiated Transfers and those who are permanently excluded, will be re-evaluated in 2017-2018 in order to provide a clear consistent process leading to the most appropriate outcome for young people.

3.0 Online Admissions – Parent Portal

- 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. This went live in October 2011.
- 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 Former technical issues with eAdmissions have now been resolved by the introduction in September 2016 of Parent Portal from Capita, which also ties in with the Capita Admissions administrative software in use by the Admissions team.
- 3.4 In 2015-2016 (the most recent fully completed year, using the old online system), 92% of 7,161 on-time home pupil applications were made online (92% secondary, 91% primary). This is an increase from the previous year (87% overall, 88% secondary, 86% primary) and brings Wirral in line with the regional and national averages.

On this basis, this item will not be reported to Schools Forum in future years unless there is a significant change or issue.

- 3.5 In 2014-2015, the Admissions team introduced in-house online registration for Year 6 selective testing, which has proved popular with parents, reduces manual data entry for the team, and will continue to operate for forthcoming years in conjunction with the new Capita modules.
- 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 The non-Catholic grammar schools now comprise a Wirral Consortium of schools (as from September 2013). This reduced the total cost of administering the selective tests for non-Catholic grammar schools by approximately £20,000 annually to £80,000 (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.

- 4.2 Further discussions with the working group of headteachers took place during 2014-2015, including demonstrations from the existing and another test provider and discussion of the introduction of non-verbal reasoning, as well as a potential change of test provider.
- 4.3 The outcome is that the test provider for the selective tests has now changed from GL Assessment to CEM Durham with effect from testing being carried out in September 2016 for entry to school in September 2017. The tests comprise two tests taken on the same day, with a mixture of verbal reasoning, non-verbal reasoning and mathematics questions.
- 4.4 A two year contract has been signed covering 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 testing years. Financially, the change to the new test provider is expected to further reduce the total cost of administering the selective tests for non-Catholic grammar schools by approximately £35,000 annually.
- 4.5 The possibility of obliging grammar schools to introduce a priority admission criterion for children from low income families has also been discussed at government level. The proportion of children from low income families attending grammar schools is lower than the local cohort in Wirral, as elsewhere. However, it is open to all parents to register their child to take the test, and the parents of lower income families are less likely to apply. Only those tested and reaching the standard are then eligible to apply for a place.
- 4.6 It is open to all schools (September 2016 onwards) to introduce an admission priority criterion for “pupil premium” children following statutory consultation on the policy. Looked after children and previously looked after children are already the highest priority for admission to Wirral secondary schools.
- 4.7 The four non-Catholic grammar schools have now formally consulted on changing their policies to introduce a priority criterion in relation to low income families. From September 2018 entry onwards, each school will admit up to 15 children who have reached the standard, and who are in receipt of free school meals at the time of application (e.g. Autumn 2017).
- 4.8 The Admissions team have therefore amended the selective test registration and secondary school application forms to allow parents to provide the personal information required to validate low income eligibility in Autumn 2017. Validation of low income will now be an additional administrative task falling to the Admissions team, using the Department for Education’s FSM Eligibility Checking Service.

5.0 Software changes

- 5.1 The Capita Admissions and Transfer modules which integrate with the Capita ONE Pulse module have been implemented. The GIS (mapping) element of the system is expected to be installed in the next few months.
- 5.2 In relation to Special Educational Needs and Disability Assessment software, this has been installed. Staff changes have resulted in a delay to the implementation of the software and negotiations are underway as to the best way forward for the migration of data from the former system. The Capita ONE modules are now expected to be implemented by June 2017.

6.0 Finance

6.1 The overall budget for School Admissions in 2017-2018 remains at £341,800. The costs include:

Staffing (8.1 FTE)	£232,200
Software and implementation	£64,800
Selective tests	£40,000
Overheads	£43,300
Income/recharges	(£38,500)
Total	£341,800

The budget has been reduced by £70,000 compared to spend levels in 2011-2012. There is potential for a further reduction in one-off costs in future years.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Forum notes the report.

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