

**REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN**

**MAINSTREAM SCHOOL ADMISSIONS**

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**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report provides a brief outline of Mainstream Admissions during the most recently completed 2016-2017 admission year and an update on upcoming changes to selective testing.

**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 2017 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	Withdrawn (%)	Resolved (%)	Refused (%)	Agreed (%)	Total
2014-2015	61 (23%)	66 (24%)	125 (46%)	18 (7%)	270
2015-2016	97 (26%)	82 (22%)	173 (47%)	20 (5%)	372
2016-2017	48 (25%)	43 (23%)	92 (48%)	7 (4%)	190

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

The outcome of appeals was proportionately similar to previous years.

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.

2.5 The Council's Fair Access Protocol applies to "hard to place" young people, for example with a history of poor attendance or significant behavioural issues. 26 young people were placed through the Fair Access Protocol in 2016-2017, compared to 12 in the previous year.

2.6 Negotiated Transfers (NTs) ceased as of January 2018 (see below), but were still operational during the 2016-2017 Academic year. NTs followed a similar process to Managed Moves for young people at risk of Permanent Exclusion, however NTs were intended for young people with lower level behaviour and/or attendance issues who might benefit from a fresh start in another Wirral school. NTs were discretionary and were overseen by a former secondary headteacher. 112 NTs were instigated in 2016-2017 of which 66 resulted in a successful transfer of school, 3 were withdrawn by the parent and 43 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, have been re-evaluated in 2017-2018 in order to provide a clear consistent process leading to the most appropriate outcome for young people. New Negotiated Transfers are no longer taking place – there remains at time of writing one young person whose pre-existing Negotiated Transfer is still on-going.
- 2.7 The role of the Fair Access Panel, with a wider membership including officers with responsibility for alternative provision special educational needs and educational psychology, exclusions etc. has expanded to also include decisions on applications from schools for young people to be placed on the Alternative Provision Census, decisions on Managed Move destinations, and re-integration decisions for young people with a single permanent exclusion.

### **3.0 Update on changes to selective testing**

- 3.1 The non-Catholic grammar schools comprise the Wirral Consortium of schools for testing purposes. The test provider is The University of Durham (CEM). Following from the original two year contract covering the 2016-17 and 2017-18 testing period, a further one year contract extension has been signed for the 2018-2019 testing period.

#### **Testing in primary schools**

- 3.2 Approximately 1800 pupils sit the non-Catholic selective test each year, of which more than two-thirds currently sit the test in their own Wirral primary school (72% for 2017-2018 tests). Wirral primary and junior schools with 10 or more pupils entered for the test are automatically a test centre, others may decide to volunteer, even if only 1 child is entered.

Pupils attending the grammar test centres are largely those from outside Wirral or private schools (23%), with a minority from Wirral primary schools (5%). The latter applies where only a small number of pupils are entered for the test (fewer than 10) and the school has decided not to take up the option to test children in school. This has been the protocol for several years.

- 3.3 Selective test working groups including primary school representatives, met in 2014 and in 2016, the outcome of these was that arrangements for testing in primary schools continued as in previous years. However, in Spring 2018, the Primary Headteachers Consultation Group (PHCG) asked primary cluster groups to vote again on the continuing involvement of primary schools in the selective test arrangements.

The outcome at the PHCG meeting in April 2018 was that the majority of primary cluster group representatives voted that primary schools should end their involvement (13 agreed; 7 disagreed; 1 abstention) from September 2019 onwards.

- 3.4 The test venue is not specified in the Council's co-ordinated scheme for admission to secondary schools and does not formally require any consultation. It has been agreed that the PHCG's decision will not come into effect until September 2019 testing for September 2020, that is, children currently in Year 4.

There is no impact on current Year 5 children in relation to testing in September 2018.

- 3.5 The Authority has met with the four grammar headteachers to begin to discuss the logistical implications of all pupils being tested at a test centre in September 2019.

This discussion included the possibility of providing additional local non-school venues, the day of testing (Saturday vs Monday), staggered test times, providing

sufficient school invigilators, arrangements for children with additional needs, and so on. These discussions are on-going.

- 3.6 Primary schools should be aware that this change will mean that from September 2019 onwards, all pupils registered to take the non-Catholic selective test will need to provide photographic proof of identity using an official form in order to sit the test, and verification of the ID forms will be the responsibility of primary schools.

#### **Impact of Academy status**

- 3.7 All schools acting as a test centre are asked to sign a declaration in relation to the security and confidentiality of the test and test materials each year, as well as declaring any staff who may have a personal conflict, e.g. a child taking the test, and ensuring those staff have no involvement with the test at any stage.

Following discussions with the test provider, Wirral primary schools that have converted to Academy status, where the school has previously acted as a test centre, can continue to act as test centres for September 2018 providing the declarations are completed and all guidance is followed. Any such school that has not previously acted as a selective test centre will not be permitted to do so.

#### **Independent Assessment Board**

- 3.8 The Council's co-ordinated scheme for admission to secondary schools includes an Independent Assessment Board (IAB), which in other areas is called a review. This is a process whereby primary schools can refer individual pupils who did not reach the standard for non-Catholic grammar school but where this does not, in their view, reflect the child's ability, for consideration. Over 260 referrals were made in 2016-2017, of which about a third were upheld.

- 3.9 The IAB comprises grammar and primary school headteachers, with the primary heads participating on a rota basis. The IAB then decides whether or not the pupil can be deemed to have reached the standard for entry for grammar school, taking into account evidence of their academic ability and any mitigating circumstances.

- 3.10 Parents whose child was referred to the IAB but was not deemed to have reached the standard, retain their right of appeal to an Independent Appeal Panel after 1<sup>st</sup> March in the year of allocation, as do parents of children who were not referred.

- 3.11 The PHCG majority vote in April 2018 was to end primary school involvement in the IAB process, however this is not a decision that schools can take.

As the IAB forms part of the co-ordinated scheme for admission to secondary schools, discontinuing the IAB process would need to form part of a general formal consultation on the Council's co-ordinated scheme. Permission to consult on this item will be sought in Autumn 2018, with the consultation then expected later that term, on which any interested person can comment.

- 3.12 At present, the test is planned to allow an appropriate number of pupils to reach the standard for grammar school, taking into account an "allowance" for the IAB to supplement this number after review. If the IAB is revoked, for the September 2019 testing cohort onwards, the test provider would be asked to increase the number of pupils meeting the standard at the outset. Those pupils who did not reach the standard but whose parents still believe their child should attend a grammar school, would retain their right to an appeal to an Independent Appeal Panel after 1<sup>st</sup> March, just as now.

- 3.13 In terms of the School Admissions team's workload, this would be a reduction in administration, for example in terms of document preparation, staff time and communications with schools, which would allow the team to focus on other aspects of the admission of pupils to secondary schools at a very demanding time of year.

3.14 It may, however, result in an increase in the number of school appeals submitted after 1<sup>st</sup> March. In relation to three of the four grammar schools, this involves the Council's School Appeals team within Legal Services who may therefore experience a higher workload if this change goes ahead, as well as some additional costs to the grammar schools themselves.

#### **4.0 Finance**

4.1 The overall budget for School Admissions in 2018-2019 is £372,200. The costs include:

Staffing (8.6 FTE)	£262,600
Software and implementation	£64,800
Selective tests	£40,000
Overheads	£43,300
Income/recharges	(£38,500)
Total	£372,200

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That the Forum notes the report.

**Paul Boyce**  
**Corporate Director for Children**