

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CHILDREN SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES
COUNTY ADMISSIONS FORUM
THURSDAY, 23rd FEBRUARY 2006 AT 6.30 P.M.**

Agenda Item No.

6

**CONSULTATION ON ADMISSIONS 2007-2008:
FOUNDATION AND VOLUNTARY AIDED SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report to the Forum on the proposed arrangements for Hertfordshire Foundation and Voluntary Aided Secondary Schools for 2007-2008.
- 1.2 To highlight to members of the Forum recent information received from the DfES regarding regulations relating to:
 - (a) Looked After Children which come into force on 21st February 2006, and
 - (b) Aptitude (proposed regulations).
- 1.3 To remind members of the Forum about areas of concern previously brought to their attention and which have been raised by the Schools Adjudicator.
- 1.4 To highlight those aspects of the proposed arrangements where there may be areas of concern and to invite the Forum to comment, where applicable.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The proposed admission arrangements for Foundation and Voluntary Aided Secondary Schools have previously been circulated. The Forum is asked to note and comment on these proposals.
- 2.2 An analysis of the areas where there is potentially non-compliance with the Schools Admissions Code of Practice and the imminent regulations on LAC is attached as Appendix 1.

2.3 The LA has written to Headteachers of individual Voluntary Aided and Foundation secondary schools over the last month, where the proposed admission arrangements indicate potential non-compliance. These letters specifically raise concern over the following general themes:

- Looked After Children, and the regulations which come into force on 21st February 2006
- Compliance with the proposed Aptitude Regulations (these will not now affect the 2007/2008 admission rules)
- Equal Opportunity issues, for example where priority is given to children of the incumbent religious leader, priority is afforded to the children of former pupils
- Children with Statements of Special Educational Needs

The letters also highlight the duty placed upon LAs to refer objections to the Adjudicator and then go on, where applicable, to draw attention to other issues relating to the proposed admission arrangements for the specific school in question.

2.4 In addition to the above, there are two key areas which are specific to particular parts of Hertfordshire:

1. Bishop's Stortford/Sawbridgeworth and the planned operation of First Preference First/Conditionality, and
2. Rickmansworth School's planned arrangements for 2007.

3. Background

3.1 The Code of Practice requires that the Forum should seek to ensure that the interests of local parents and children collectively are well served by local admission arrangements. In the Annual Report of the Schools Adjudicator for 2004-5, published on 1 November 2005, the Adjudicator outlines "Schools need to be reminded that admission arrangements are drawn up for the benefit of local parents, not for themselves. We are still seeing too many cases where arrangements are not clear enough ..."

3.2 At its last meeting, the Admissions Forum noted the activity which had taken place during summer/autumn 2005 with the Diocese of St Albans, the Archdiocese of Westminster and individual admitting authorities concerning the determined arrangements for 2005 and the need for clarity/transparency relating to Looked After Children and those with special needs.

3.3 The LA continues to be minded, given its monitoring role, and responsibility to the agenda of Every Child Matters, to respond to and take forward concerns relating to proposed admission arrangements for 2007 which include practices that are stated in the COP to be poor practice.

4. Current Situation

4.1 Regulations relating to Looked After Children were laid before Parliament on 31st January 2006 and they come into force on 21st February 2006 - the following provides the detail:

4.2 **The Looked After Children (LAC) Regulations** - once the regulations on Looked After Children come into force, all admission authorities must ensure that they give top priority to these children in their published admission arrangements for September 2007 onwards, i.e. above all other mainstream applicants. It is understood that it will not be acceptable to give priority to LAC within any individual criterion as that would mean that some LAC would not be given sufficient priority to secure admission. With regard to schools with a denominational status, the minimum requirement will be to give priority to LAC of the faith, though guidance will encourage them to give priority to all LAC. Any admission authority that has already consulted on and determined its arrangements for that year must amend its arrangements if they are not compliant with those regulations.

4.3 **The Aptitude Regulations** - (which prevent the introduction of new selection by aptitude for ICT and Design Technology) – only those arrangements that already allow for admission by aptitude for Design and Technology and Information Technology will be able to continue to do so. These regulations have not yet been made and therefore they will not apply to 2007-2008 admissions round.

Schools in Hertfordshire have been advised of this update.

4.4 **Equal Opportunities** - there is concern that some admission authorities are not acting in the spirit of equal opportunities and avoiding discrimination (i.e. not in accordance with 3.12 of the COP), particular examples include where priority is afforded to the children of former pupils and, for some denominational schools, where priority is given to children of the incumbent religious leader.

4.5 **Children with Statements of Special Educational Needs** - the LA continues to wish to see clear and transparent reference to the admission of this category, either by offering the first priority, or making clear in the supporting notes to the rules, that children with statements of special educational needs which names the school are to be admitted. It is good practice to make it explicit in the oversubscription criteria.

- 4.6 **First Preference First/Conditionality** - the draft revised COP, consulted in Summer 2005, referred to this as poor practice, as consideration of a parent's preference for one school is influenced by the other school(s)/type of school(s) to which they have applied. It is understood that despite the draft COP not being laid before Parliament, ministers' view is still that conditionality is unacceptable (emphasised by the Secretary of State's adjudication of several objections to conditionality made during 2005) There is evidence that at least one primary school has proposed First Preference First.

Bishop's Stortford/Sawbridgeworth

Within Bishop's Stortford/Sawbridgeworth area, evidence was received during the autumn term from local parents and some schools concerning the operation of First Preference First/Conditionality features for admission in 2006. It was felt to cause confusion to parents in the local area at the time of visits to schools by parents and expressing preferences, given that Hertfordshire operates an equal preference system of co-ordination. Certain schools in the locality, which are their own admission authorities, have signalled that they do not believe that First Preference First/Conditionality works well and would wish to challenge such schools proposing to operate such arrangements for 2007. Officers have met with individual admission authorities in the area and also with the schools collectively to signal these concerns. The LA recognises that the faith conditionality which has always been a feature of the equal preference co-ordinated scheme in Hertfordshire is separate to the issues raised here.

- 4.7 The table below highlights the issues in the proposed arrangements for 2007 admissions in the Bishop Stortford/Sawbridgeworth areas:

School Name	Conditionality	First Preference First	Supplementary Information Form	Any Progress on SEN/LAC?
Bishops Stortford High School	Priority to those ranking a single sex school first	-	SIF asks parent to tick a box if they ranked a single sex school first.	Have now included SEN/LAC
Herts and Essex High School	-	-	-	n/a
Leventhorpe School	-	Priority to those ranking Leventhorpe first	SIF asks parent to tick a box if they have ranked Leventhorpe first	n/a
Hockerill Anglo European College	-	-	SIF asks parent why they wish their son/daughter to attend Hockerill and to provide a statement to support the application.	n/a

4.8 Mill End and Maple Cross

In response to the Rickmansworth School Post Determination Outline Timetable published as part of Agenda Item 5 at the last Admissions Forum meeting, the following table illustrates what has happened over the last few months:

Activity	Outcome
Meeting with Lydd Gadd, Principal of Harefield Sports Academy	Harefield Sports Academy wishes to admit children from the areas of Maple Cross, Mill End and vicinity. The school identified that particularly for children from Maple Cross, these families naturally fall within their school community catchment area. The Principal is in the process of fostering liaison with primary schools in this locality.
Discussions with the London Borough of Hillingdon	2006 admissions: through the PAN London co-ordination, arrangements have been made to consider and meet preferences for schools in Hillingdon, eg Harefield Sports Academy. In addition, arrangements have been put in place to allocate non-ranked allocations for Hertfordshire residents, whose closest school with available places is either Harefield Sports Academy or Northwood School. 2007 admissions: to continue to promote the above.
Consulting upon moving Watford Rural parish from the co-educational priority area 6 to priority area 11, Borehamwood and Watford Rural priority area, as part of the community admission arrangements for 2007	The LA is consulting upon this move of parish, in order to enhance the chances of children from Maple Cross and Mill End obtaining places at their nearest community school, Westfield Community Technology College. The result of this consultation will be tabled under Item 7c in the agenda.
Meeting with Rickmansworth School to pursue partnership working: to review its admission arrangements and consider the capacity of the school.	A meeting took place on 31 st January 2006 to take forward the partnership working and reflect upon the proposed admission arrangements for 2007 (see below), mindful of the feedback provided by the OSA in the determination of September 2005.

4.9 **Rickmansworth School** - their proposed admission arrangements for 2007 have almost identical arrangements to those consulted upon and originally determined by the school for 2006, and which were criticised by the Schools Adjudicator in her judgement of September 2005, with a determination that the school should revert to its 2005 arrangements.

- (1) The changes proposed for 2007 are as follows:
Rickmansworth School now proposes a new criterion for looked after children and those with statements of special educational needs as criterion 3, which is not therefore top priority.

The LA has recommended that this be positioned as the first criterion in the light of the regulations relating to Looked After Children which come into force on 21st February 2006. It has also suggested the words “children with a public care order“ be replaced to read “Children in Public Care”.

- (2) The school is proposing to increase the percentage of children who can be admitted with reference to academic ability from 25% to 35%, and to reserve 10% of places for children living nearest to the school. Both of these proposals have already been rejected by the Adjudicator.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 Members of the Admissions Forum are asked to note the report, which should serve to aid their consideration, and where applicable decisions, to respond to the proposed admission arrangements for Foundation and Voluntary-Aided Secondary Schools.