

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Agenda Item No.

1

**CABINET
FRIDAY 30 MARCH 2001 AT 10.00 AM**

PRIMARY SCHOOL/ NURSERY ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS 2002-2003

Report of the Director of Education

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Executive Member:- Keith Emsall

1. Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to consider the outcome of the consultation on the admission rules for community and voluntary controlled primary schools and nursery schools/classes for 2002-2003, and on the introduction of a ranking system for allocating children to all state primary schools and nursery schools/classes in Hertfordshire for 2002-2003. Furthermore to consider the views of the Student Services Panel which met on 13 March and the Children Schools and Families Select Committee on 28 March.

2. Summary

The consultation exercise revealed that there was strong support for the proposed rules. The Student Services Panel recognised that the proposed change in the sibling rule might disadvantage a number of families with children currently in Year 6 and wishing to seek a place for a younger sibling. Whilst it appreciated that the change might cause some anxiety, it felt that on balance that the proposed rules should be adopted.

The consultation exercise revealed that there was strong support for the introduction of a ranking system. The Student Services Panel considered that the proposed ranking system increases the likelihood of parents obtaining one of their preferred schools/nurseries in an area and should support the community nature of schools. It supported the proposal that the rankings should remain confidential, since governing bodies do not need to know this information.

The views of the Children Schools and Families Select Committee on the issues above will be reported to the Cabinet meeting.

3. Conclusion

The Cabinet will need to propose to County Council whether to adopt:

- a) the proposed admission rules for primary schools and nursery schools/classes for 2002-2003;
- b) the proposed ranking system for the allocation of places for children at all state primary schools/classes in Hertfordshire for 2002-2003.

1. **Background**

- 1.1. The Executive Committee on 18 December 2000 agreed:
- a) the admission rules for community and voluntary controlled primary schools and nursery schools/classes for 2002 – 2003 on which the County Council should consult; and
 - b) the arrangements for consultation
- 1.2. The admission rules proposed are set out below. The bold type shows where they differ from the 2001 – 2002 rules.

Rule 1

Children who must go to the school because they have a statement of special educational needs under the 1996 Education Act which names the school.

Rule 2

Children who can prove that they have a particular medical or social reason why they must go to the school.

Rule 3

Children who have an elder brother or sister on the roll of the school **at the time of admission**. (See note below).

Rule 4

Children for whom the school is the nearest in relation to alternative schools. (If more families qualify under this rule than there are places available, those families with the longest extra journey to an alternative school with places will be given priority).

Rule 5

Children who live nearest to the school. (If more families qualify under this rule than there are places available, those families with the shortest journey to the school will be given priority).

Note:

The sibling rule applies where:

- a) The child entering the reception has an older sibling on the roll of the school (an, in the case of an infant school, on the roll of the linked junior school) **at the time of admission**.
- b) The child entering the nursery has an older sibling on the roll of the school **at the time of admission** (or, in the case of infant school with a nursery class, on the roll of a linked junior school).

- 1.3. The above rules proposed for 2002 – 2003 are different from those for 2001 – 2002 in one respect. The sibling rule (Rule 3) used for 2001 – 2002 is ‘Children who have an older brother or sister on the roll of the school at the time of application’. The proposed sibling rule (Rule 3) for 2002 – 2003 is ‘Children who have an older brother or sister on the roll of the school at the time of admission’.
- 1.4. In addition to consultation on the rules, it was agreed that consultation should take place on the proposal to introduce a ranking system for all state primary schools/nurseries 2002 – 2003 to replace the preference system which was used for 2001.
- 1.5. A preference system means that all parents are allocated their first preference school first and only after all first preferences have been satisfied are second and third preferences considered.
- 1.6. A ranking system means that parents are, wherever possible, given their highest ranked school. Parents who do not get their first preference are likely to get the second and, if not their second, then their third ranked school.
- 1.7. The consultation which took place on the rules and the ranking system was as follows:
 - a) A consultation document and response sheet (Appendix 1 to this report) was sent to:
 - all Statutory Consultees, i.e. schools, neighbouring admitting authorities, district councils and admission forums; and
 - all affected parents, i.e. parents of children who will be entering nursery and reception class in 2002 - 2003.
 - b) A series of ten public meetings were held across the county during the two weeks beginning 5 February 2001. The meetings were attended by County Councillors as observers. The meetings were promoted through:
 - the consultation document which was sent to Statutory Consultees and affected parents; and
 - through adverts in the local press.
 - c) The closing date for comments was 28 February 2001.

2. Responses to Consultation

- 2.1. The number of completed written responses was 4,223 and some 500 people attended the 10 public meetings. Of the 4,223 written responses, 4,176 were from parents, 46 from schools and 1 from an 'other' consultee. The written responses included the return of the response sheet attached to the consultation document, letters and e-mails. The notes of the public meetings and the views of admissions forums are available in the Members' Room.
- 2.2. The response sheet included two questions and the responses are set out below. The total figures are not consistent between questions 1 and 2 because not all the response sheets were completed fully.

- a) Question 1: Do you agree the proposed rules should be used?

| Group | Yes | No | Unsure or both boxes ticked |
|--------------|------------|-----------|------------------------------------|
| Parents | 3997 | 150 | 6 |
| Schools | 40 | 6 | 6 |
| Other | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 4037 | 157 | 12 |

- b) Question 2: Do you agree that the ranking system should be used?

| Group | Yes | No | Unsure or both boxes ticked |
|--------------|------------|-----------|------------------------------------|
| Parents | 3865 | 257 | 18 |
| Schools | 40 | 5 | 0 |
| Other | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 3905 | 263 | 18 |

- 2.3. The above shows support for the proposed rules and ranking system. However, there were comments about the proposals which should be considered before a decision is taken.
- 2.4. A total of 561 responses contained additional comments which, when analysed, revealed 731 separate comments on different topics. Appendix 2 gives a detailed breakdown of the comments and may be summarised as follows.
- a) The S.E.N. and Social-Medical Rule (18 comments – see numbers 1 and 2 in Appendix 2)

There were 8 responses where it was suggested that these rules should not have priority.

The numbers of children involved are few and the responses suggest that it is generally felt to be right that children in these categories should have priority for admission.

b) Siblings (110 comments – see numbers 3 to 9 in Appendix 2)

There were 43 comments which made reference to the proposed change in the sibling rule being unhelpful because it can result in parents losing the connection they have built up with the school.

The proposed sibling rule means that parents with an older child in year 6 and a younger child about to enter the school will not be considered under the sibling rule.

The reason for proposing that the sibling rule should apply only when the older sibling will be at the school at the time of the younger child's admission is because it follows logically from the benefits to parents of the sibling rule, i.e. getting two children to and from the same school. Also, it can reduce the number of siblings being admitted who will not have a brother or sister in the school when they start school and so allow more local children to be admitted. A younger child who is not admitted under the sibling rule, because the older sibling is in year 6, may of course be admitted under the distance rule.

c) Distance from home to school and reasons for wanting a school (183 comments – see numbers 10, 11, 12 and 13 in Appendix 2)

There were 107 comments which emphasised that children should be able to attend their nearest school. The proposed rules will help this to happen.

A number of parents suggested that rules 4 and 5 should be swapped. This, however, would result in all children being admitted under a new rule 4 (former rule 5) which is distance from the school. Since they would all be admitted under rule 4, the longest extra journey rule would not be reached. The result would be that in some cases children who do not get their nearest school would be sent to a school some distance away; using the longest extra journey rule as rule 4 can help to avoid this situation.

There were 76 comments which suggested reasons why parents would want to attend a school further away. There is no reason

why parents cannot apply for any school they wish but, if it is over-subscribed, objective admission rules are required to decide who should be admitted.

- d) Priority for nursery children who move into reception (29 comments – see Appendix 2, Item 14)

There were 29 comments about giving children who attend a nursery class priority for places in the reception class of the school.

A substantial number of parents (3,000) do not send their child to a community and voluntary controlled nursery class but do send their child to a reception class. To give preference to children in a nursery would be unfair to those parents who decide not to send their child to the nursery.

It needs to be recognised, however, that by applying the same rules to nursery admissions and to reception class admissions means that some children who start in a nursery class do not progress into the reception class of the same school.

- e) The ranking system (201 comments – see Appendix 2, items 15 and 16)

There were 190 comments which indicated opposition to the ranking system mainly on the grounds that parents should be given the opportunity to obtain their first preference.

The reason for proposing a ranking system was that it is felt to be a fairer and more instinctive way of making choices about which school to apply for. Also it optimises parents' rankings and, in this respect, the system always tries to offer parents their highest ranked school. It is also helpful to parents in communities where schools are over-subscribed on first preferences.

Since consultation started, the allocation of reception class places has taken place for 2001 under the preference system. The number of children receiving one of their preferred schools is as follows:

| | | |
|---|-------|---------|
| Number obtaining a first preference | 11021 | (93.4%) |
| Number obtaining a second preference | 292 | (2.5%) |
| Number obtaining a third preference | 100 | (0.8%) |
| Number not obtaining a preferred school | 347 | (2.9%) |

The above indicates a high percentage obtaining a preferred school under the preference system. The reasons for changing are that in some areas of the county when schools are over-subscribed on first preferences, the system does not help parents obtain one of their ranked schools and as pupil numbers increase, this situation will become more prevalent.

f) Miscellaneous (190 comments – see Appendix 2, item 17)

Comments that have been classified as miscellaneous include comments not strictly relevant to the consultation process, comments whereby the intention or meaning was not clear, comments about the consultation process itself, comments which were actually asking questions or clarifying points and a few other comments, e.g. no flexibility for late applications (1 comment), children of employees should have priority (1 comment), have all schools of the same standard and there would not be a problem (5 comments) and childminder addresses should be used (21 comments).

- 2.5. The ranking system has important implications for voluntary aided and foundation schools. A working party of headteachers was established with representatives of the dioceses to consider the implications. A copy of their report is attached (Appendix 3). The report which supports the ranking system has been sent to all voluntary aided and foundation schools. The Panel will be advised of how voluntary aided and foundation schools are responding to the proposals – they have until the end of March to decide whether or not to adopt the ranking system. It should be noted that there is a concern about the confidential nature of application forms (see para. 4.7. of Appendix 3).

- 2.6. The Local Admissions Forum and the County Admissions Forum have considered the proposals. Overall there is support for the proposed admission rules and ranking system although some concerns were expressed along the lines of the comments described in paragraph 2.4. above. Copies of the key points raised by admissions forums are available in the Members' Room.

- 2.7. A point that was made on a few occasions during the public meetings was that it would be helpful to phase in the rules. For example, the revised sibling rule will affect some parents in 2002 – 2003. The legal situation is that the L.E.A. is consulting on the rules to apply in 2002 – 2003 and the phasing in of the sibling rule would in effect mean not using the rule until 2003 – 2004. The rules for 2003 – 2004 need to be consulted on during 2001 – 2002.