

**REVIEW OF SECONDARY ADMISSION RULES FOR COMMUNITY AND
VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED SCHOOLS**

Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families

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Executive Member: Robert Gordon

1. Purpose of report

- a) To inform the Cabinet of the recommendations arising from the Resources Panel on 10 January regarding the statutory consultation on admissions.
- b) To inform the Cabinet of outcome of the further advice received from Counsel in respect of proposals to introduce a criterion to give priority to the children of staff for admission to secondary schools in certain circumstances
- c) To ask the Cabinet to consider the proposal for statutory consultation the review of secondary admission rules.

2. Summary

- 2.1. The proposed admission rules take account of responses to the
 - informal consultation, which took place in November and December
 - further modelling work on Priority Areas
- 2.2. The legal advice received is that the children of staff can be prioritised for admissions providing that there is, in the view of the County Council, a genuine recruitment and retention difficulty at a particular school. Schools wishing to use this rule would need to justify their request by providing evidence such as a history of recruitment and/or retention difficulties; details of the impact or likely impact on educational standards and the number of staff and children likely to be affected.

- 2.3. The legal advice received is that it is possible for the Admitting Authority to select up to 10% of pupils to specialist schools by aptitude providing it uses tests which are objective, fair, non-discriminatory and consistent with the 1998 Education Act and Admissions Code of Practice. Subsequent discussion with the DfES has clarified that this provision only applies to Language, Arts, Sports and Technology specialisms and will not be extended to cover the new areas currently being developed. Only one school has shown an interest in pursuing this option in 2003 and work is underway to identify an appropriate test of language aptitude in liaison with local schools and Sheffield Hallam University.
- 2.4 The proposed consultation paper sets out the proposed admission rules and the schedule of public meetings.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1. The Cabinet is asked to authorise consultation on the proposals contained in the report subject to adjustments in the exact wording of the consultation document as agreed with the Executive Member.
- 3.2. The Cabinet is asked to authorise that the consultation paper be sent to statutory consultees and parents of children in Year 5.

1. Background

- 1.1. Detailed modelling work has been undertaken prior to and following the initial consultation with a view to developing improved proposals to include in the statutory consultation.
- 1.2. The Resources Panel met on 10 January and recommended to the Cabinet that the rules for co-educational and single sex community and voluntary controlled schools as set out in Appendix 1 should form the basis of the statutory consultation in February and March.
- 1.3. The Resources Panel also discussed proposed Priority Areas and recommended further modelling in liaison with the Executive Member on the greater Harpenden and Kings Langley areas. The final proposals for Priority Areas are attached as Appendix 2.
- 1.4. The proposals in respect of priority areas for co-educational schools also reflect:
 - a) the concern expressed that where a parish is served by a two-tier primary school, then the parish should be situated within a priority area served by the two-tier system for secondary schools.
 - b) views expressed in response to the informal consultation about traditional links between certain communities and schools.
- 1.5. The proposals in respect of priority areas for single sex schools reflect the view expressed that where there is both a boys and a girls school in the same town, then the priority area for the two schools should be shared.
- 1.6. The proposal for the allocation of places to single sex schools in proportion to applications received, apart from those considered under Rules 1-5, reflects the aim of enabling a wide distribution of places to different parishes.
- 1.7. Advice from Counsel clarifies that it is possible to include a criterion to give priority for admission to the children of staff if there is evidence that:
 - a) a particular school/admissions authority finds it is difficult to recruit and retain staff
 - b) educational standards are suffering as a result
 - c) potential or actual staff have school-age children and would be attracted to stay in employment at the school if such a criterion were adopted.

It is not enough, however, simply to assert, without supporting evidence, that such a criterion would, or might be, desirable.
- 1.8. Advice from Counsel clarifies that it necessary to use educationally sound tests of aptitude as the basis of introducing a criterion for partial selection on the basis of

aptitude. Officers which currently select on the basis of aptitude, are liaising with the NFER, Sheffield Hallam University and schools and colleges both nationally and locally, in order to inform the development of robust testing materials.

- 1.9 Informal consultation suggests that one community specialist school may be interested in introducing partial selection on the basis of aptitude from September 2003.

Background information referred to by the author whilst compiling this report.

Informal Consultation Paper October 2001

If you would like to know more about the issue referred to in this report please contact Nick Powley, Education Access Manager, Telephone number 01992 555933