

TOPIC GROUP REVIEW OF CASUAL ADMISSIONS

Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families

Author: - Nick Powley
Education Access Manager - Tel No. 01992 555933

Topic Group Members: T I Ambrose, R S Clements, T Douris, F Guest,
D W Hills, T G M Kent (Chairman), J Reynolds

Executive Member: - Robert Gordon

1. Purpose of the Report

To advise the Scrutiny Committee on the recommendations of the Scrutiny Topic Group following their review of secondary casual admissions.

2. Summary

The aims of the scrutiny were to review and scrutinise the casual admissions process in respect of children moving into Hertfordshire or within the county and to consider:

- concerns expressed by parents and schools about the current process
- alternative approaches to the casual admissions process, which might be beneficial to children, parents and schools

3. Conclusion

The Committee is invited to consider recommendations proposed by the Scrutiny Topic Group.

1. Background

- 1.1 Hertfordshire County Council introduced the current casual admission arrangements for secondary schools in March 2001, in response to the need for a co-ordinated approach to ensuring that children of compulsory school age who move into or within the county were allocated a school place. The allocation system runs every two weeks and processes all new and existing applications on the continuing interest list for community and voluntary controlled secondary schools.
- 1.2 Places are allocated according to the published admission rules and headteachers are required to contact the parents of children who are allocated by this process within 5 days of the allocation date.
- 1.3 Since September 2001, 1159 casual admission applications for secondary schools have been received.
- 1.4 Before 2001, the parents of children of secondary school age, moving into the county and requiring a school place, approached schools directly. Concerns were expressed by parents who were unhappy with the length of time it was taking for them to identify and obtain a school place for their child, and the fact that admission rules were not used.
- 1.5 The benefits of the new process are that:
 - It provides a single point of contact for parents moving into Hertfordshire when they are looking for a suitable school
 - It speeds up the allocation process for children moving into the county
 - It provides transparency and consistency through the application of admission rules
 - Data is collected to monitor trends and pressure points across the county.
- 1.6 Co-ordinated casual admission arrangements are not in place for primary school admissions. Children of primary school age moving into the county and requiring a school place are referred directly to the schools who will admit them if they have a spare place.
- 1.7 A number of concerns have been raised by parents and secondary schools about the casual admission arrangements.
 - a. Frustration at not being able to secure a school place for their child close to their home.
 - b. Frustration at not being able to secure a place in a school that they really want for their child.
 - c. The length of time taken to admit a child into school after submitting a completed casual admission application.
 - d. The difficulty of matching subjects and meeting the needs of children at Key Stage 4

- e. A feeling by schools that children admitted via the casual admissions route are not being fairly distributed.
 - f. The perception that many children admitted under these circumstances exhibit challenging behaviour.
 - g. That schools are often called upon to admit over their standard numbers, so problems arise from the pressures of overcrowding in schools.
- 1.8 The Topic Group met on four occasions and listened to the views of head teachers, parents and admissions staff.
- 1.9 Since the Topic Group last met, the Authority has received a consultation document from the Department for Education and Skills with a revised code of practice for admissions. The Topic Group will want to review its work in light of this development.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 On the basis of this information provided, the following recommendations in respect of the procedures were agreed by the Topic Group:
- The allocation process should be run when a place becomes available at a school, or when a request is received. The success of this change would depend on schools informing the LEA promptly when they have a vacancy.
 - Standing Appeals Panels should be set up in each Quadrant to meet every four weeks and parents should be given the opportunity to waive their right to 2 weeks' notice of appeal. Parents should be informed in advance of the dates.
 - A time limit of four weeks should be set for children remaining on the continuing list in order to prevent pupils already well settled at another school being suddenly offered a place elsewhere, and to assist those children moving into an area. Parents who want their children to remain on the list beyond this time should be required to indicate this positively.
 - The casual admissions form completed by parents should be redesigned in light of the requirements of the revised code of practice. This will ensure that schools have more information about a child and will ease integration.
 - The timescale of casual admissions should be changed so that a school is given 10 days to put a child on roll, rather than 5 days to first see parents.

- 2.2. The Topic Group also considered further recommendations about rules and protocols for ensuring appropriate distribution of pupils to schools. These will also need to be reconsidered in light of the revised code of practice.
- 2.3 The Topic Group felt that further scrutiny should take place in respect of primary casual admissions.

3. Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications.

Background papers used by the author in writing this report:

Minutes of the Casual Admissions Topic Group