

Education Admission Forum	EAF/02/12
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Proposed Changes to the Admission Policies of Chelmsford County High School and of King Edward VI Grammar School for the 2013-14 admission year

Report by School Planning and Admissions Manager – School Planning and Admissions

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the Forum of the consultations currently being carried out by the two Chelmsford grammar schools with regard to their admission policies for 2013-14, and to seek the views of the Forum on the proposed changes.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Chelmsford County High School for Girls (CCHS) and King Edward VI Grammar School for Boys (KEGS) are both designated grammar schools. As such, they are permitted to select pupils by reference to general ability. Both schools have done so for many years, on the basis of performance in the common 11+ test managed and administered by the Consortium of Selective Schools in Essex (CSSE).
- 2.2 Both of these schools are academies, which means the governing bodies of the individual schools are the admission authority and responsible for setting and applying the admissions arrangements (not the County Council).
- 2.3 Currently, the oversubscription criteria for the schools are effectively the same in that places are offered, up to the respective published admission numbers, to the highest ranking children through the 11+ process for whom an application is made and a place is required through the co-ordinated admissions process.
- 2.4 Put simply, places are currently offered to children scoring highest in the 11+ test, irrespective of where they live – this applies equally whether children are resident within the Essex County Council area or not.

3. THE PROPOSED CHANGES

- 3.1 Both the governing bodies of CCHS and KEGS are currently consulting on changing the admission policies of the schools, to take effect for admissions in the 2013-14 school year.

- 3.2 The proposals are largely similar in the case of both schools in that they seek to ensure that a minimum of 80% of the available places at the schools are offered to children living within a 12.5 mile radial area of a fixed point in central Chelmsford (The War Memorial, Duke Street). Copies of both schools consultation documents are attached as annexes to this report.
- 3.3 The principal reason the schools are proposing the changes is, as they have cited, to ensure that a greater proportion of the intake than in recent years come from within what the schools perceive as a more local and appropriate travelling distance to the schools.
- 3.4 The schools have referred to information from the past 2 admission rounds (2010 and 2011) to establish that in these years, 40% of the intake live more than 12.5 miles from the schools and that 40% of pupils travel for 60 minutes or more to reach school.
- 3.5 The schools believe that these long journey times have an impact on students and on the schools capacity to play an active role in the communities in which students live.
- 3.6 There is an added dimension to the proposed admissions policy for KEGS in that the school is considering introducing a musical aptitude criterion for up to 10% of the available places. Arguably, this adds an increased and further complexity to the policy.

4. THE ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST CHANGE

- 4.1 The proposals raise a number of interesting issues which ultimately require value judgements to be exercised. This report does not seek to address each and every one of these issues, nor does it give a detailed consideration of whether the proposed arrangements would comply fully with the statutory School Admissions Code (the Code) and admissions law.
- 4.2 The governing bodies of the schools, as the admission authority, must ensure full compliance with the Code and admissions law. Upon determination of any set of admission arrangements, any party has a right to object to the independent Schools Adjudicator if they are of the opinion, and can demonstrate, that in their view the arrangements are not in compliance with the Code or admissions law. The Adjudicator has the power to determine (and effectively direct) that a school or academy must revise its arrangements to ensure compliance.
- 4.3 In terms of the proposals themselves, the general concept that the distance children travel to and from school should be minimised is not unreasonable. The notion that schools should strive to serve their local communities and play a central role in those communities (to promote community cohesion) has been an accepted one for some time. Clearly, much rests on interpretation of the terms 'local' and 'communities' when considering the case from this perspective.

- 4.4 On another front, however, one could argue that the schools, as selective grammar schools, *de facto* are not local community schools in the traditional sense since they, by their very nature, serve the more able and admit by reference to ability – not locality *per se*. The combination of selecting by both ability and reference to locality is not unique (the admission arrangements for Southend grammar schools and a number of Kent grammar schools do this) – whether this is right or wrong is for individuals and groups to exercise their own judgements upon.
- 4.5 Another consideration, which in the light of established understanding and the Admissions Code is that admission arrangements must be fair, clear, objective and be able to be easily understood by parents (and others). Again, interpretation of these terms can vary, but what is clear is that the current arrangements for the schools are simpler and easier to understand than those proposed. At the moment, children sit the 11+ and parents apply for a place and in very simple terms, those scoring highest (in rank order) up to the admission number are offered a place. Arguably, given that the schools are grammar schools (by definition there to serve the most able) one cannot get more simple admissions policies than the current ones – those scoring highest (and through testing established to be ‘the most able’) get offered a place.
- 4.6 The proposed arrangements, by introducing a geographical area from within which a minimum of 80% of places will be offered are more complex than the current arrangements. It would result, without doubt, in enquiries and complaints from parents of say a child living 12.6 miles away who scores higher in the 11+ than a nearby friend from within the 12.5 mile area, where the latter is offered a place and the former not. This is not to say the proposals are flawed or inappropriate – it could be argued that this situation is no different to a comprehensive school’s priority admission area where families live either side and are either in or out of area. However, the argument could be extended to say but if you are out of one schools area then you are in another’s area.
- 4.7 The musical aptitude proposal for up to 10% of the available places at KEGS, however, can be considered by some to be an unnecessary additional complication which will further confuse parents.
- 4.8 The schools clearly believe the proposed changes have merit in ensuring that more children from within a more local area secure a place, whilst still having at least 20% of places available to high scoring applicants in the 11+ no matter where they live. Arguably, this could be said to achieve the balance of a more local intake than in recent years, whilst still preserving the opportunity for the most able children in the wider Essex community, both urban and rural (and beyond) to secure a place at the schools. A map is attached with the KEGS consultation document showing the 12.5 mile circle and the areas of Essex that would be outside this priority area.
- 4.9 Areas of Essex outside of the proposed 12.5 mile radial area include the villages of Gosfield, Coggeshall, Tiptree and other parts of north and eastern Essex. It could be argued however, that as these areas are within comparable proximity of the 2 Colchester grammar schools, these communities will not be

disproportionately disadvantaged if the Chelmsford schools decide to adopt their proposed changes.

- 4.10 Other areas outside the proposed 12.5 mile area are Southminster (and the Dengie), Rochford, parts of Benfleet and to the north and west, Stansted, Thaxted, Debden, Saffron Walden, Harlow, Loughton, Epping and Chigwell. Parents in these areas could perceive their chances of securing a grammar school place as being significantly diminished, without realistically having the option of the Colchester schools. Should the Chelmsford grammar schools make their proposed changes, the outcome could conceivably be that in the future, fewer children from these areas apply for and secure a grammar school place.

5. SUMMARY AND FORUM ADVICE AND RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 Consultation on admission arrangements for the 2013-14 school year must, by law, be completed by 1 March 2012. Thereafter, the governing bodies of both schools will be required to formally determine (set) the admission arrangements for 2013-14 by no later than 15 April 2012, and then publish these arrangements.
- 5.2 The Forum is asked to consider the changes proposed by the schools and provide its opinion and comments, which can then be forwarded to the respective governing bodies for their consideration, as part of the consultation process.