

Essex Admission Forum

Minutes of a meeting of the Essex Admission Forum held at 2.00 pm at County Hall, Chelmsford on 21 February 2012

Membership/Attendance

Representatives of the following:

Schools (9)

Community Schools (2)

* Mrs G Field Vacancy (Vice-Chairman)

Voluntary Controlled (VC) Schools (1)

* Mr P Tidmarsh

Voluntary Aided (VA) Schools (2)

Vacancy (primary) Mr A Schular (secondary)

Foundation Schools (2)

Mrs T Boothman * Mr J Tippet

Academies (1)

Mr S Leverett

Selective Schools (1)

* Mr K Jenkinson

Religious Bodies (2)

* Mrs B Harris (RC Diocese of Brentwood) * Mrs E Marshall (Anglican Diocese of Chelmsford)

Parents (2)

* Mr S Geddes (Primary) Mr R Carson (Secondary)

Community Representatives (7)

County Councillors (4)

* Cllr R Gooding (Chairman) * Cllr Mrs T Higgins

* Cllr Mrs V Metcalfe (substitute for Cllr S Castle) * Cllr R Pearson

Looked After Children (1)

Ms C Adams, Narrowing the Gap Officer, Essex CC

Children with Special Educational Needs (1)

* Ms A Stanford, Manager, Statutory Assessment Service, Essex CC

Neighbouring Local Authority (1)

Ms H Cole (London Borough of Redbridge)

(* Present)

The following were also present: -

Mr S Noor School Planning and Admissions Manager

Mr G Redgwell Governance Officer

1. Membership

The Chairman welcomed Mr Stuart Geddes to this, his first meeting.

The Committee also noted that Councillor Mrs Valerie Metcalfe was substituting for Councillor Castle.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs T Boothman, Mr R Carson, Councillor S Castle, Ms H Cole and Mr A Schular.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made on this occasion.

4. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2011 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. Consultation on Community and Voluntary Controlled Infant, Junior and Primary School admission arrangements for 2013/14

Introduction

Members considered a report (EAF/01/12) by the School Planning and Admissions Manager. This set out details of a proposal by Essex County Council to change the standard oversubscription criteria for Community and Voluntary Controlled infant, junior and primary schools in Essex for the 2013/14 admission year. The County Council is the admission authority for these schools.

A pre-consultation exercise in October and November 2011 had shown that the majority of respondents supported the proposed change. A formal consultation period is now underway, ending on 29 February 2012. The Forum is being consulted as part of this process.

Proposal

The proposal is that, in these schools, all children with a sibling already at a preferred school (at the time of application and admission) will have the highest possible priority for admission to that school in the case of oversubscription.

Some schools already use these criteria. However, the current standard oversubscription criteria for the vast majority of these schools gives priority for admission, in the case of oversubscription, to applicants in the following order of priority:-

- 1) Looked after Children;
- 2) Children living in the priority admission area with a sibling attending the school;
- 3) Other children living in the priority admission area;
- 4) Children living outside the priority admission area with a sibling attending the school;
- 5) Remaining applicants

In the event of oversubscription within any of the above criteria, priority is determined by straight line distance from home to school, those living closest being given the highest priority. Exceptional medical circumstances, supported by medical evidence, may override the above (except Looked after Children)

The Council proposes to change the standard oversubscription criteria for all community and voluntary controlled infant, primary and junior schools in Essex to the following:-

- 1) Looked after Children (in line with the revised Admissions Code)
- 2) Children with a sibling attending the school (at the time of application and admission);
- 3) Children living in the priority admission area
- 4) Remaining applicants

In the event of oversubscription within any of the above criteria, priority will be determined by straight line distance from home to school, those living closest being given the highest priority. Exceptional medical circumstances, supported by medical evidence, may override the above (except Looked after Children)

Where, in certain areas of the County, existing oversubscription criteria for community and voluntary controlled schools already give the highest priority to siblings, irrespective of where they live (after Looked after Children), it is not proposed to change those arrangements.

Discussion

The Forum discussed this proposal. In response to points raised it was indicated that:

- This has been raised as a matter of concern by a number of parents who have to get siblings to different schools.
- The Cabinet Member for Education supports this change as part of the Council's family-orientated agenda.
- An adopted sibling counts as a sibling for the purposes of these criteria.
- A sibling attending a special unit within a school counts as a sibling for the purposes of these criteria.

On being put to a vote, it was unanimously:-

RESOLVED:

That the County Council be advised that the Forum supports the proposed change to the oversubscription criteria for Community and Voluntary Controlled infant, junior and primary schools in Essex for the 2013/14 admission year.

6. Proposed changes to the admission policies of Chelmsford County High School and of King Edward VI Grammar School for the 2013/14 admission year

Introduction

The Forum considered a report (EAF/02/12) by the School Planning and Admissions Manager. This set out proposals from the Governing Bodies of these two Schools with regard to their admission policies for the academic year 2013/14. The Forum is being consulted as part of this process. Forum members were aware of the extensive coverage of these proposals in the local media.

Both schools are Academies, so may determine their own admission policies. Both are also designated grammar schools and, as such, 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 plus test organised by the Consortium of Selective Schools in Essex (CSSE).

Comments need to be passed to the respective Governing Bodies by 29 February 2012.

Offering of places

Both schools are proposing to seek to ensure that a minimum of 80% of the available places are offered to children within a 12.5 mile radius of a fixed point in central Chelmsford (the War Memorial in Duke Street). The reason for the proposed change is to ensure a greater proportion of the intake than in recent years comes from within what the schools perceive as a more local and appropriate travelling distance to the school.

The Forum was made aware of arguments both for and against this proposal and noted that these had also been expressed at recent public meetings, one of which had been attended by over 300 people.

The Forum discussed this proposal. In response to points raised, it was indicated that:

- It has not been proven to be illegal for grammar schools to operate a criterion setting out a defined geographical area. The Greenwich Judgement is a point of reference, however, if admission authorities were to consider setting a priority (catchment) area based on local authority administrative lines.
- The criteria must be fair, clear, objective and be able to be easily understood.
- The schools are entitled to seek further information from parents to confirm the legitimacy of their home addresses stated on their application.
- The proposal may well impact on other schools in the Chelmsford area, by taking away pupils from the higher end of the academic spectrum.

On being put to a vote, and on a majority decision, it was:-

RESOLVED:

That the Governing Bodies of Chelmsford County High School for Girls and of the King Edward VI Grammar School be advised that the Forum supports their proposals to introduce changes to the admission criteria for 2013/14 to allow a minimum of 80% of the available places to be offered to children within a 12.5 mile radius of the proposed fixed point in Chelmsford.

Proposal to open up to 10% of places in Year 7 at King Edward VI Grammar school to students who, in addition, to scoring highly on the 11 plus test, demonstrate that they have a 'significant musical aptitude'

The Forum noted that this proposal applies to King Edward VI Grammar School only.

Given its musical tradition, the School's Governing Body has proposed that up to 11 places be made available to students achieving a required musical

standard and who also perform above a defined minimum cut off mark in the 11 plus test. It is proposed that the required musical standard could be equivalent to a Grade 5 distinction in an ABRSM practical exam or as evidenced in a musical aptitude test conducted at the school. This test would be undertaken on a date separate from, but close to, the date of the 11 plus test.

The Forum was reminded that schools may take up to 10% of their annual admission based on a child's aptitude in a defined prescribed subject, one of which may be music. They must not use an aptitude criterion that has the effect of admitting on the basis of ability in that subject.

The Forum had a number of concerns about this proposal, as follows:

- It found this proposal confusing and felt that it did not satisfy the requirement that the criteria must be fair, clear, objective and be able to be easily understood.
- The criterion seems to be based on a mix of ability and aptitude and therefore open to challenge on its legality.
- There are issues around equivalence about how aptitude is being measured. The ABRSM exam is based on a classical music background and could disadvantage those preferring other forms of music.
- The criterion could potentially be discriminatory against families unable to provide a private musical tuition or whose children attend primary schools which do not offer the opportunity to play a musical instrument.

The Forum felt that the proposal introduced an additional and unnecessary complexity to the admission policy.

On being put to a vote, it was unanimously:

RESOLVED:

That the Governing Body of King Edward VI Grammar School be advised that the Forum opposes the proposal to introduce a criterion for admission based on a pupil having a significant musical aptitude, for the reasons set out above.

7. Applications for Roman Catholic Secondary Schools

The Forum noted a report (EAF/03/12) by the School Planning and Admissions Manager, setting out the comparative number of preferences expressed for Roman Catholic secondary schools in Essex for admission in September 2011 and September 2012, respectively.

8. Item for Future Meeting

Mr Tippett asked that an item be included on a future agenda, looking at (a) the potential impact of the creation of Free Schools in the county; and (b) the impact on other local schools of the establishment of a free school in Brentwood.

The meeting closed at 3.00pm.

Chairman