

TITLE	School Admission Arrangements 2012-13
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	School Admissions Forum 15 March 2011
WARD	None Specific
GENERAL MANAGER	Andy Couldrick
LEAD MEMBER	Rob Stanton, Executive Member for Children's Services

OUTCOME

School admission arrangements address the local authority's statutory duty to promote fair access to educational opportunities, and also support the corporate priority to provide excellent children's services and skills for all.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Forum considers the outcome of consultation on proposed 2012-13 admission arrangements for community and controlled schools and coordinated admissions schemes for the relevant area.

That the Forum offers any advice to the local authority on its final proposals in the light of that consultation.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Advice was sought from the Forum prior to the local authority's consultation at its meeting on 23 November 2010. The Forum also received a progress report on the consultation at its meeting on 15 February 2011, and had an opportunity to comment on the proposals as set out in the consultation paper.

As advised at the last meeting, an analysis of the consultation responses has now been produced and is attached as an annex to this report. Officers are considering the issues raised, to finalise recommendations which are likely to include the following aspects:

- An expanded designated area for Maiden Erlegh School, to form part of a shared designated area for Bulmershe School
- "Additional radial distance to alternative designated area school" tiebreak within the Maiden Erlegh designated area
- The option of an additional inner designated area, in the immediate vicinity of Maiden Erlegh School, is under consideration.
- A shared area for The Emmbrook, Forest, Holt and St Crispin's Schools
- A tiebreak arrangement within this area that treats Forest and Holt schools as a pair, ie 'radial distance to both schools'
- An increase in the maximum number of school preferences from 3 to 4
- Removal of the linked primary school criterion for secondary admissions
- Priority for infant school pupils as a tiebreak when transferring to the linked junior school.

Background

Under the Education and Skills Act 2008 and the statutory School Admissions Code, admission authorities must consult annually on their admission arrangements (unless they consulted the previous year and no changes are proposed). The Council is responsible for setting the admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools, and individual governing bodies in the case of the 10 voluntary aided schools.

Local authorities must also agree coordinated schemes for admissions. These provide that parents can apply to their home authority for admission to any maintained schools, including schools in other authorities, and receive a single offer of a place. This also applies to in-year applications for admissions as well as the main admission rounds for entry to primary and secondary education.

Admission arrangements must be decided by 15th April in the previous year, and must then be administered strictly in accordance with the determined arrangements, without variation except in certain prescribed circumstances, such as a change in school organization, a change in law, or to comply with a decision by the Schools Adjudicator.

Analysis of Issues

An analysis of the main issues raised in the consultation is included in the consultation outcome summary, attached as annex 1.

A copy of the consultation proposals is attached for reference as annex 2.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
Not applicable

List of Background Papers	
School Admissions Code (as revised February 2010), and associated Admissions Regulations Consultation papers Secondary Admissions Review Board reports, Secondary Admissions Review Report and consultation papers	
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Date 8 March 2011	Version No. 1.2

Overview of Consultation Responses

OVERVIEW

1026 responses were received to the online questionnaire on the consultation pages of the Council's website.

In addition there were 1,111 email and postal responses.

Two well-attended public consultation meetings were held in January at Maiden Erlegh and St Crispin's Schools.

By far the majority of the responses to the consultation focused on the proposals for Maiden Erlegh and Bulmershe Schools.

It should be noted that this statutory consultation follows on from an earlier consultation prior to proposals being developed. The responses received to both these exercises are being taken into account in preparing final recommendations.

RESPONSES TO PROPOSALS

1 Admission Numbers

No changes were proposed to admission numbers in the consultation. The few relevant comments that were received were concerns about the overall sufficiency of places. Admission numbers are set with regard to the known current capacity of schools to accommodate pupils. Where there is a need for additional capacity required in the school system this has been identified in the Council's Capital Strategy for primary and secondary schools. Where school expansions or other school organisation changes are planned, admission numbers will be reviewed as part of the process to approve and implement such changes.

915 Online responses:

Strongly agree	257 (25.3%)	39.6%
Agree	145 (14.3%)	
Neither agree nor disagree	470 (46.3%)	
Disagree	17 (1.7%)	14.1%
Strongly Disagree	126 (12.4%)	

2 Oversubscription criteria

a) Linked Schools

The majority of responses were against removing this criterion.

1014 online responses

Strongly agree	223 (22.0%)	32.3%
Agree	125 (12.3%)	
Neither agree nor disagree	200 (19.7%)	
Disagree	115 (11.3%)	45.9%
Strongly disagree	351 (34.6%)	

This is a reverse of the outcome to earlier consultation (September – October 2010) when the online responses to the same question were as follows:

1008 online responses

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	256 (25.4%)	47.9%
<i>Agree</i>	227 (22.5%)	
<i>Unsure</i>	185 (18.4%)	
<i>Disagree</i>	133 (13.2%)	
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	207 (20.5%)	33.7%

From the comments received in the most recent consultation, the shift against this proposal may reflect responses supporting the campaign for Aldryngton Primary School to retain a linked school status as a high priority for admissions to Maiden Erlegh School, as an amendment to the authority's proposed designated area arrangements (see later).

Some comments were received in both consultations in favour of the principle of having linked schools as a higher priority than, or as a replacement of, designated areas. Officers' view is that the linked school criterion is largely redundant alongside the designated area system and is at best misleading. The disadvantages of a feeder school –based system over a designated area system have been expounded in earlier reports to the Admissions Forum and to the Secondary Admissions Review Board.

b) Infant/Junior linked schools

1007 Online responses

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	208 (20.7%)	300 (29.8%)
<i>Agree</i>	92 (9.1%)	
Neither agree nor disagree	503 (50%)	
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	51 (5.1%)	204 (20.3%)
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	153 (15.2%)	

The high proportion that neither agreed nor disagreed reflects that most responses were made in the context of secondary school admissions.

Designated areas – Bulmershe and Maiden Erlegh Schools

This issue dominated the consultation responses, as was the case in last autumn's consultation on the Secondary Admissions Review report.

(a) Proposed Designated Area

1024 Online responses

Strongly Agree 538 (52.5%) **570 (55.6%)**

Agree 32 (3.1%)

Neither agree nor disagree 33 (3.2%)

Strongly Disagree 38 (3.7%) **421 (41.1%)**

Strongly Disagree 383 (37.4%)

(b) Proposed tiebreak arrangements for Maiden Erlegh designated area

1020 Online responses

Strongly Agree 540 (52.9%) **575 (56.3%)**

Agree 35 (3.4%)

Neither agree nor disagree 37 (3.6%)

Strongly Disagree 32 (3.1%) **408 (40.0%)**

Strongly Disagree 376 (36.9%)

276 letters and emails against the proposed new designated area and tiebreak were received, and also a petition with **600** signatures.

Further letters and emails were received against the changes as proposed in the consultation, but supporting one or more alternative amendments to them (see later section for more details).

92 Letters and emails in support of the proposal were received, and a petition with **450** signatures.

Further correspondence was received in support of the proposal but against an amended version (see later section below for more details)

The main theme of comments both for and against the proposal concerned access to local schools within walking distance, and whether the proposal had a positive or negative effect overall on travel to school.

Concerns were raised about safe walking routes from Earley to Bulmershe School. An independent road safety assessment has been commissioned in response to this.

Concerns were raised about the impact on traffic, including local congestion around Maiden Erlegh School. The view of the Council's Traffic Planning team is that there would not be a net effect on the Strategic Road Network (A329 junctions at Loddon Bridge and Three Tuns). Local traffic issues should be addressed through School Travel Plans, drawn up by the Governing

Body in consultation with the school community. These should include measures to promote sustainable travel to schools.

Amended versions of the proposal - Maiden Erlegh designated area tiebreakers.

468 letters and emails were received, and a petition with **1401** signatures, expressing views against the published consultation proposals but supporting a number of alternatives.

The alternatives put forward included a number of suggestions which would essentially create an inner area in the immediate vicinity of the school with higher priority for admission. Examples put forward were for these extra criteria to apply before any designated area distance-based tiebreaker, (that is to say after designated area siblings and before any other designated area children).

a) Priority to children living in the designated area attending Aldryngton School, or

b) Priority to children attending Aldryngton School, or

c) Priority to children living in Aldryngton School's designated area, the Maiden Erlegh estate, or an otherwise defined 'safe walking distance' area around Maiden Erlegh School.

36 letters and emails, and a petition with **308** signatures, were received that supported the proposals and specifically objected to any amendment whereby Aldryngton School pupils would be given a higher priority within the proposed designated area.

Another alternative tiebreaker was put forward, of radial distance to Maiden Erlegh /radial distance to Bulmershe. This would generate an effect that children very close to maiden erlegh but still relatively close to Bulmershe would be more likely to have sufficient priority to gain places at Maiden Erlegh. The argument, and mathematical case, put forward was that this would be a more stable tiebreak model year to year, as the proposed tiebreak using the formula distance to Maiden Erlegh – distance to Bulmershe would be relatively unpredictable within the areas close to Maiden Erlegh and between the two schools.

However this would negate the principle that the proposal puts forward, in that those children with the furthest travelling distance to Bulmershe would probably not gain entry to Maiden Erlegh and have to travel to Bulmershe.

A number of comments were made that radial distance is not appropriate. The arguments for using radial rather than walking distance as an admissions criteria are well understood: Radial distance can be objectively and consistently measured, whereas the shortest safe walking route is often open to argument as to which of multiple routes to use, which crossing points, etc. Where walking routes are used, additional resources are needed for admission authorities to assess such routes and validate them for admissions systems. Further resources are needed to reassess them if challenged at appeal. Radial distances are suitable within admissions criteria, being transparent, objective and consistent, and give a general indication of relative proximity for school travel.

Respondents also argued that the larger area creates uncertainty. That is true, but any degree of parental preference introduces a degree of uncertainty. It does create greater likelihood that children across the area as a whole will be able to be offered a place at one of the two local schools serving the area and that this will be a school within potential walking distance.

Academy status and delaying decision until later.

Maiden Erlegh will gain academy status on 1 April 2010. It will therefore take over responsibility for consulting upon and deciding school admission arrangements for 2013-14 onwards. Other schools are also consulting on this issue and may convert to Academy status at other dates.

Delaying a decision until later, when several secondary schools are likely to be responsible for taking separate admission arrangements in consultation with one another and the local authority, is likely to make it more challenging to reach an agreed solution and address the issues which the local authority, secondary admission review, and schools adjudicator have identified.

Town and South Schools

(a) Shared Designated Area

946 Online responses

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	196 (19.5%)	273 (27.2%)
<i>Agree</i>	77 (7.7%)	
Neither agree nor disagree	555 (55.3%)	
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	58 (5.8%)	118 (17.6%)
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	118 (11.8%)	

(b) Holt/Forest Tiebreaker

947 Online responses

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	191 (19.1%)	268 (27.2%)
<i>Agree</i>	77 (7.7%)	
Neither agree nor disagree	561 (56.0%)	
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	35 (3.5%)	118 (17.3%)
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	138 (13.8%)	

The Forest School submitted a response in support of the proposal.

The Holt School, Finchampstead Parish Council and a number of parents responded against the proposal. Concerns from The Holt School were: destabilisation and uncertainty, and potential impact on the gender balance in coeducational schools.

St Crispin's School responded seeking reassurance on gender balance, asking for an ongoing commitment to maintain broadly balanced boy and girl single sex places, and that the proposals should not cause girls' single sex and boys' single sex place availability within Wokingham Town area to be out of balance. Case law on equalities aspects of school organisation supports the view that the supply of girls and boys school places in single sex schools across an area should be planned to keep broadly in line with each other.

Finchampstead Parish Council and a number of parents in the perimeter parts of the proposed area, eg Finchampstead and Shinfield, raised concern about the impact for families in the south, ie at the extremities of the area. Families living towards the centre of the area will be in an advantageous position living reasonably close to all of the schools. However, provided there are sufficient places amongst the four schools, families living further away would still have

designated area priority for all four schools and should have a good likelihood of obtaining a place at one of the preferred designated area schools.

Another common theme in the responses was that the Council should consider deferring any change until the proposed relocation of Emmbrook School takes place. However the proposals for the shared area in the South will overall provide greater scope for parental preference in the short term, as well as being future-proofed should Emmbrook School move in the future and for further changes to housing and school places as they occur.

Consultation on
School Admission
Arrangements
2012-2013



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Children's Services

The Council is consulting on its admission arrangements for children entering or transferring schools during 2012-2013.

This document summarises the changes that are being proposed. Copies of the full draft arrangements and coordinated admissions schemes are also available.

1. ADMISSION NUMBERS

–Admission numbers are published for the normal year of entry to each school. They show how many pupils are planned to be admitted, being the number at which the year group is considered full.

No changes to admission numbers for community and controlled schools are currently proposed.

2. OVERSUBSCRIPTION CRITERIA

Secondary schools: Feeder schools criterion

It is proposed that the feeder school criterion (Criterion F) is removed. The criterion has limited value in real terms, compared to the priority given to designated area and sibling applicants.

Secondary schools: transitional protection for siblings

It is proposed that where designated areas change, sibling applications from families resident in the former designated area should continue to have priority. It is proposed to follow the same principles already established for changes to designated areas of primary schools, as follows:

“Siblings of older children at the school, who resided at an address in the previous designated area of the school on 1 September 2011 and continue to live at that address, will be treated as living in the school’s designated area (criterion C). This clause will no longer be applied after 30 June 2018.”

As is currently the case, sixth formers will count as siblings for the purpose of admissions.

Primary Schools – Infant – Junior transfer.

Infant school pupils are given a high priority for admission to the linked junior school. However, should there be insufficient places in the junior school to offer places to all of the infant children applying, it is proposed that those living in the designated area or with siblings in the schools are given priority, then those living nearest by radial distance.

3. DESIGNATED AREAS

Comments are invited on school designated area arrangements, arising from the Secondary Admissions Review. The proposed changes are set out below.

(a) Bulmershe and Maiden Erlegh School

It is proposed that **Maiden Erlegh School's** area be

- expanded to incorporate parts of the current Bulmershe area in Lower Earley.
- expanded to incorporate parts of the current Holt/Forest area in Lower Earley.

It is also proposed that part of the current **Bulmershe School** area (Shinfield North, west of Shinfield Rd) is reassigned to a proposed shared area for Emmbrook, Holt, Forest and St Crispins – see b) below.

It is proposed that the whole of the new Maiden Erlegh area be treated as a shared area, so that it also forms part of the designated area for Bulmershe School.

Within the designated area criteria (C and D) for **Maiden Erlegh School**, the tiebreaker to be used, in place of radial distance from the school, is 'additional radial distance to the alternative designated area school. This would be calculated as the distance to Bulmershe School *minus* the distance to Maiden Erlegh School.

In effect this tiebreaker would mean that priority would be given to those applicants who, if they were not admitted to Maiden Erlegh, would have to travel the furthest to Bulmershe as their alternative designated area school.

(b) Emmbrook, Holt, Forest and St Crispin's Schools

It is proposed that all 4 schools share a single designated area, based on merging the current areas, with the addition of the Shinfield North part of Bulmershe School's area and the removal of the Lower Earley part of the Holt / Forest area, as referred to in (a).

It is proposed that radial distance from the school would remain the tie breaker within the designated area criterion (C and D) for applications to The Emmbrook and St Crispins Schools.

For the two single sex schools, The Holt and The Forest Schools, it is proposed that, within the designated area criteria (C and D) the tie breaker would be calculated as the distance to the Forest School *plus* the distance to the Holt School, giving in effect an ellipse around both schools.

In each case the tiebreaker is only applied if there are more children from the shared designated area than the particular school is able to admit. Radial distance will continue to be used as the tie breaker within all other criteria.

Proposed secondary school designated area maps for all six schools have been produced.

4. COORDINATED SCHEMES FOR PRIMARY, SECONDARY, AND IN-YEAR ADMISSIONS 2012/13

The coordinated schemes set out how the local authority will manage the admissions process, which is designed to ensure that all applicants receive one offer of a school place.

- **Number of preferences**

It is proposed to increase the maximum number of preferences which parents can state on the admissions form, from 3 to 4.

- **Allocation to schools where no preference can be met**

We propose that, in cases where we have been unable to meet any of the parent's preferences, we will allocate to the designated area school, or the most accessible school with places available. This will allow us to take account of transport, etc. in deciding which school we should allocate, rather than allocating the nearest school as at present.

- **Operational dates**

The operational dates for the admissions process have been updated from the previous year, in consultation with other local authorities.

3 OTHER MATTERS

The Council's model policies for nursery admissions has been reviewed to reflect the current early years care and learning framework, and the details of the free entitlement offer and funding requirements.

4 RESPONDING TO THE CONSULTATION

Comments are invited from parents and any other persons with an interest in the proposed arrangements. If you wish to make a comment on the Council's consultation you may do so online, or by letter or email to the address below. Comments should be sent in by 14 February 2011.

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