

TITLE CONSULTATION ON 2014-15 ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED AND COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AND CO-ORDINATED ADMISSIONS SCHEMES

FOR CONSIDERATION BY Admissions Forum on 11 December 2012

REPORT PREPARED BY David Armstrong

SUMMARY

The School Admissions Forum is invited to comment on the content of the local authority's annual admissions consultation. This statutory consultation will include the draft coordinated admissions schemes and any proposed changes to the admissions arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools.

Consultation will take place with the local authority's relevant area for a minimum eight week period to conclude by 1 March 2013. The forum is invited to comment on the proposed content of the consultation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Forum:

- a) comments on the proposed items to be consulted upon and
- b) advises the local authority of any other issues which it feels should be addressed within the consultation on admission arrangements for the 2014-15 admission year

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Items that the local authority proposes to consult upon are set out in annex A to this report. Some consultation has already taken place with parents and schools regarding the priority given to siblings for primary school admissions, and this is summarized at annex B.

The Forum is invited to advise upon these matters prior to the consultation being extended to schools, admission authorities within the relevant area, adjoining local authorities, the Diocesan authorities, parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen and any other persons within the relevant area who in the opinion of the admissions authority have an interest in the proposed arrangements.

List of Background Papers

Current School Admissions Code, School Admissions Appeals Code, and relevant Regulations

Approved coordinated admissions schemes for previous years.

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DRAFT (FOR CONSIDERATION BY ADMISSIONS FORUM)
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**CONSULTATION ON ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS FOR WOKINGHAM BOROUGH
COUNCIL COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED SCHOOLS AND THE
COUNCIL'S
PROPOSED CO-ORDINATED ADMISSIONS SCHEMES FOR 2014/15**

AN EXPLANATION OF PROPOSED CHANGES ON WHICH VIEWS ARE INVITED

Consultation is on the whole of the admission arrangements and draft schemes; the issues highlighted in this document are those where significant changes are proposed or on which further views are particularly sought. Responses are also welcome on any other aspect of the admission arrangements and coordinated schemes.

The consultation runs from 20 December 2012 to 28 February 2013. Responses should be returned by 1 March 2013 to

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OVERSUBSCRIPTION CRITERIA

1. Criterion B – serious medical, physical or psychological grounds for admission (Primary and Secondary School Admissions)

It is proposed to revise the wording used for this criterion to include social need. The number of children admitted under this existing criterion is very small as it is only used in exceptional cases. Looked-after children and previously looked-after children already have priority under Criterion A. The inclusion of social needs in Criterion B will allow for other exceptional cases to be considered where there are social needs but the child does not meet the definition in Criterion A, which is prescribed by the Admissions Code. The revised wording is proposed below.

*"Children who have medical, physical, psychological, or **social needs** as the grounds for their admission to a particular school.*

This must be supported by written evidence, relating specifically to the school you are applying to under this criterion, from an independent professional aware of the child's case (e.g. doctor, hospital consultant, psychologist, or **social worker**) which must explain the reason why the school in question is the most suitable and the difficulties caused if the child had to attend another school.

When submitting applications under category B (serious medical, physical, psychological or **social needs** grounds for admission) your application cannot be considered if you do not declare that you are applying under this criterion and you do not provide written independent professional evidence. All supporting documentation must

be received by **15** January for consideration prior to the main allocation of places. An admissions panel will consider the supporting evidence provided and will advise the applicant of its decision; the panel's decision is final. Any evidence received by the school admissions team after **15** January will not be taken into account in the main allocation of places but may, if agreed by panel, affect the applicant's position on a school's waiting list."

2. Denominational criterion – current Criterion F (Primary School Admissions)

It is proposed to delete this oversubscription criterion, which only applies to applications for Voluntary Controlled schools. Parents wishing their application to be considered on denominational grounds have to state this and provide confirmation from the local clergy that at least one parent, or guardian, frequently attends for worship or has other significant involvement with a relevant church (previous admission arrangements define this in full detail).

This criterion has the lowest priority apart from 'any other'. There are only a very small number of children admitted under this criterion each year. Voluntary Controlled schools have a Designated Religious Character, but it is the view of both the Diocese of Oxford and individual school governing bodies that the ethos of these schools is that they serve the whole of their local community ('children from families of any faith and of no faith').

The Diocese and individual Voluntary Controlled schools have been consulted and support this change. The schools concerned are:

The Coombes Church of England Primary; Crazies Hill Church of England Primary; Polehampton Church of England Infant and Polehampton Church of England Junior; Robert Piggott Church of England Infant and Robert Piggott Church of England Junior; St Nicholas Church of England Primary; St Paul's Church of England Junior; Woodley Church of England Primary;

3. Sibling criteria for Primary School Admissions (Criterion C and E)

Representation have been made by some parents for the council to consider amending the admissions criteria, to give priority to all siblings (Criterion C). The proposal would be effected by deleting the words "whose permanent home address ins in the school's designated area and" so that this criterion applied to all siblings. Criterion E (siblings not living in the designated area) would be removed, along with the sibling protections indicated in footnotes to the current criteria (footnotes 3-5) as these would be redundant.

This proposal would prevent the problems of siblings being split over several schools, as such children would have priority above other children living in the school's designated area. However this could mean other local children might not be admitted to their designated area school. As these children would not have priority for admission to any other school, this might disadvantage some families if their first or only child was unable to access any reasonably local school.

Responses to this issue from both parents and schools have been mixed, with strong views both for and against. A summary is appended to this report.

At this stage this change to sibling priority has **not** been included in the draft arrangements proposed for consultation. But nor has a change been ruled out as the local authority recognises this is a significant issue which needs to be addressed directly or through other measures to mitigate the risk of families having to manage the consequences of siblings attending different schools. Therefore further views on this are invited from all interested parties

during this full formal consultation period, and these will be considered by the local authority in determining the final arrangements.

Other measures are also proposed that will themselves mitigate the risk of siblings being split between schools in future. In some cases revisions to designated areas have been put forward (see relevant section) and there are also statutory proposals, to be considered separately, to expand the number of school places in the areas where the high demand for places has led to these difficulties.

No change is proposed for sibling priority for Secondary School admissions, as older children are regarded as more able to travel independently, so managing split siblings in this case does not have the same impact for families as for primary age children.

4 ADMISSION NUMBERS

The new School Admissions Code no longer requires consultation on increase to school admission numbers and comments are not invited on these proposals as part of this consultation. However, for information, the Council has adopted a Primary School Strategy setting out its aims to increase school places during the period 2013-2016, either by expanding existing schools or by commissioning new schools. Further information about individual proposals, with opportunity to comment on them, will be available through separate consultation processes.

The planned admission numbers, to be set out in the draft coordinated scheme, will be updated in the light of any decision taken to consult on statutory proposals for implementation in 2013-14, or any changes determined and notified to the Local Authority by own-admission authority schools

5 DESIGNATED AREAS

Comments are invited on school designated area arrangements. Further explanation is included in separate documentation associated with this consultation. The designated areas of other community or voluntary controlled schools remain unchanged. The following specific changes are being put forward for consideration:

(a) The Colleton Primary and Polehampton CE Infant and Junior Schools

The proposal is that the current designated areas for these schools becomes a single shared area. This change is supported by the schools, to enable parent preferences within the Twyford area to be met and to mitigate the risk of siblings being split. Within the shared area the tiebreak arrangements would operate as before, i.e. radial distance to the school site concerned.

There is likely to be a statutory proposal to expand primary school provision on a new site in Charvil. If approved, this may lead to modifications to the proposed designated area arrangements, if these are necessary to implement the proposal.

(b) Walter Infant, St Pauls' Junior, Wescott Infant and Westende Junior Schools

The proposal is that the current designated areas for these schools becomes a single shared area. This is one of a number of options, of shared, paired or overlapping designated areas, that was explored in discussions earlier in 2012, to see if such arrangements might better enable parent preferences within parts of Wokingham town area to be met and to mitigate the risk of siblings being split. The way the area is

apportioned between these schools does not fit well with recent development of the town centre and relative pupil numbers / school. Within any shared area arrangement, the tiebreak arrangements would operate as before, i.e. radial distance to the school site concerned.

There is likely to be a statutory proposal to expand primary school provision in Woosehill. If approved, this may lead to modifications to the proposed designated area arrangements, if these are necessary to implement the proposal.

(c) Other areas

No changes are proposed elsewhere in the Borough. However, there are likely to be statutory proposals to expand primary school provision in Winnersh and in Shinfield / Spencers Wood. If approved, these may lead to modifications to the current designated area arrangements, if changes are necessary in order to implement the proposals.

6 CO-ORDINATED SCHEMES

There are no major changes to the timetable for the co-ordinated schemes. Proposed elements of the scheme are set out below for comment.

a Key dates

PROPOSED TIMETABLE CO-ORDINATED ADMISSION SCHEMES 2014/2015	
Date	Action
July 8, 2013	Maintained schools to provide school information to enable composite prospectus to be compiled
By September 12, 2013	Application packs for secondary transfer to be distributed via primary schools and on request
By September 12, 2013	Composite prospectus published on council's website
September 12, 2013	Online admissions open for applications for transfer to secondary school
October 31, 2013	Closing date for secondary transfer applications
November 25, 2013	Secondary transfer applications to be forwarded to Wokingham Borough own admission authority schools for consideration
November 2013	Application packs to be posted for entry to primary to parents who are either attending Wokingham Borough early years' settings or who have registered with the School Admissions Team or who are transferring to junior school to be distributed via infant schools or on request,
November 12, 2013	Online admissions open for applications for entry to primary and transfer to junior school
January 15, 2014	Closing date for evidence to be provided to meet Wokingham Borough Council criteria for those transferring to secondary school;

	transferring to junior school; or starting school
January 15, 2014	Ranked lists to be submitted to the local authority by own admission authority schools for secondary transfer
January 15, 2014	Closing date for entry to primary and transfer to junior school applications, together with aided schools' supplementary information forms, if applicable.
February 10, 2014	Entry to primary and junior transfer applications to be forwarded to Wokingham Borough own admission authority schools for consideration
February 14, 2014	SEN Team to inform parents of pupils transferring to secondary school or to junior school with statements of special education need of their allocated school
February 28, 2014	Appeals timetable published to website (own admission authority schools will publish details on the school's website)
March 3, 2014	Secondary offer day – letters posted by first class post
March 17, 2014	Secondary transfer: Deadline for accepting the offer of a place Late applications to be processed Waiting list information available
March 17, 2014	Ranked lists to be submitted to the local authority by own admission authority schools for the entry to primary and junior transfer
March 31, 2014	Final co-ordination with other local authorities for entry to primary and junior school transfer
April 1, 2014	Closing date for notification of a secondary appeal to be heard together
April 16, 2014	Starting school and transfer to junior school offer day – letters posted by first class post
April 30, 2014	Entry to primary and Junior Transfer: Deadline for accepting the offer of a place Late applications to be processed Waiting list information available
May 21, 2014	Closing date for notification of a entry to primary or junior transfer appeal to be heard together
End May/early June 2014	LOCAL AUTHORITY to advise schools of final allocation details
May/June 2014	Secondary appeals to be heard in accordance with published timetable
June/July 2014	Starting school and transfer to year 3 junior school appeals to be heard in accordance with published timetable

b In-Year Co-ordinated Scheme

The School Admissions Code no longer requires in-year applications to be co-ordinated. The Council is proposing to continue to maintain a local co-ordinated in-year scheme for community and voluntary controlled schools and for this to include own admission authority schools where there is agreement to do so. This will be similar to the 2013-14 scheme.

c. Change of Preference

In the light of a recent schools adjudicator decision, the authority is considering re-wording its arrangements in respect of changes of preference. At this stage the details of the relevant adjudication, which relates to another local authority area, is still awaited.

d. Online acceptance of school places

An amendment to the scheme is proposed, to provide for online acceptance of offers. This facility will be available for first preference offers in 2014-15; it would in principle be extended to all offers, but this is currently beyond the capabilities of the IT system used for school admissions.

7 Foundation Stage One.

Adjustments may be proposed to this policy as a result of reviewing them in relation to changes in national policy. It is proposed to review the policy in consultation with the relevant schools to determine if any changes are advisable. The main issue to consider is the introduction of funded places for 2 year olds, which is not addressed in the current policy.

Earlier views on changing sibling priority

Parents (online survey on WBC website, August – November 2012)

Question 10

Should the Council review its admission arrangements to make it easier for siblings to attend the same school?

Yes - for siblings living within a local area including those living in the designated area of adjacent schools. **Count 166**

Yes - for all siblings including those out of area **Count 87**

No -siblings attending their local school, or who have to attend another school because their local school was full, are already given priority. **Count 64**

Grand Count 317

Question 11

Which of the following would be the best way to avoid this problem in future?

By redesigning school designated areas, or shared areas, of the right size **Count 73**

By providing more information to parents to help them make informed choices about schools. **Count 62**

By providing additional school places in the areas where this is a problem **Count 143**

By giving all siblings an equally high priority in the admissions criteria **Count 115**

Grand Count 393

Views of schools (surveyed October-November 2012)

Should all siblings be given higher priority in the admissions criteria?

Against	4
For	3
Neutral or no strongview given	6
other	1
Total schools responding	14