

TITLE	School Admission Arrangements 2016/2017
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on 26 March 2015
WARD	None specific
DIRECTOR	Judith Ramsden, Director of Children's Services
LEAD MEMBER	Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Executive Member for Children's Services

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The school admission arrangements address the local authority's statutory duty to ensure that all school places for maintained schools and Academies (excluding special schools) are allocated and offered in an open and fair way, comply with the School Admissions Code, relevant regulations and legislation and support the council's key priorities.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive determines the 2016/2017 admission arrangements for community and controlled schools and co-ordinated admission schemes as set out in the annexes to this report.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The main co-ordinated admission schemes apply to all state funded schools within the Borough (including free schools and academies), and include the admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools. These schemes deal with applications for entry to primary (F2 reception), junior (year 3) and secondary (year 7) schools. It also allows for co-ordination for middle schools within the primary scheme and upper school entry specifically to year 9 and year 10 (e.g. university technology colleges, The Forest School and selective schools) within the secondary scheme.

There is no longer a legal requirement to co-ordinate in-year admissions except to community and voluntary controlled schools. The local authority has proposed an in-year co-ordinated admissions scheme, which if adopted would apply to all community and voluntary controlled schools; the participation of voluntary aided schools, free schools and academies is subject to agreement by the individual trust/governing body.

Some minor changes are proposed to the 2015/2016 admission arrangements which Children's Services Leadership Team and the School Admissions Forum considered did not require formal consultation, according to current legislation. The changes are detailed later in this report.

Admission matters are reviewed and determined annually, subject to consultation unless no changes are proposed.

The proposals contained in the report do not have any direct implications for the Council's capital or revenue budgets.

Background

Under the Education and Skills Act 2008 (as amended) and the statutory School Admissions Code, admission authorities must consult annually on their admission arrangements (or at least every seven years where no changes are proposed). The Council is responsible for setting the admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools. Individual governing bodies are responsible for consulting and setting the admission arrangements for the nine voluntary aided schools and six academy/free schools ("own admission authority schools") in the Borough. Last year, Wokingham consulted between December 11, 2013 and February 6, 2014 on the 2015/2016 arrangements which were subsequently determined by the Council's Executive Committee at its meeting in March 2014.

Local authorities must also agree co-ordinated schemes for school admissions in their area. These provide that parents can apply to their home authority for admission to any state-funded schools, including schools in other authorities, and receive a single offer of a place. This applies to the main admission rounds for entry to primary; transfer from infant to junior, and transfer from primary to secondary education. Applications are also co-ordinated for middle and upper schools within the primary and secondary co-ordinated schemes.

In addition the Council operates a co-ordinated scheme for in-year applications for school places within its area. Whilst this scheme is no longer a statutory requirement; clarification has been received from the Department for Education that local authorities are required to co-ordinate in-year admissions for community and voluntary controlled schools, and those voluntary aided and academy/free schools which agree to participate in the scheme. Currently all own admission authority schools in the borough are included within the in-year co-ordinated scheme.

The value of the in-year co-ordinated scheme is that it ensures that children who arrive in the borough or whose parents wish to change school mid-year are swiftly allocated school places, where possible in line with parental preference. Where a place cannot be offered in line with parental preference, parents are notified of their statutory right to appeal and allocated the most accessible school with places available. It further ensures that multiple place offers are not held for one child, so maximising the potential supply of places for all children. Without the in-year co-ordinated scheme alternative arrangements would be required to monitor allocations and to consider applications for places at those schools where the Council administers admissions on behalf of the school.

Admission arrangements for each school year must be decided by April 15 in the previous year. Therefore the 2016/2017 arrangements must be decided by April 15, 2015. Once decided, there is a statutory duty to administer admissions strictly in accordance with the determined arrangements, without variation except in prescribed circumstances to meet a change in school organisation, a change in law, or to comply with a decision by the Office of the Schools Adjudicator.

Determination of the co-ordinated admission schemes must be notified to the Secretary of State for Education by April 15 in the previous year; failure to do so can mean that a scheme is imposed on the local authority.

All schools' determined admission arrangements within its area must be sent to the

local authority to enable it to publish the details on its website and notify how objections can be made by 1 May of the previous year.

A new School Admissions Code was published on 19 December 2014 which included a number of changes to be made to admission arrangements for 2016/2017. As there are no substantive changes to be made to the 2015/2016 arrangements; Children’s Services Leadership Team and the School Admissions Forum considered that no formal consultation is required as the changes proposed below are those simply required to comply with current legislation.

Analysis of Issues

The changes to be made are listed here and expanded below:

- The setting of sixth form admission numbers for external applicants at community secondary schools
- The inclusion of reference to Education, Health and Care Plans in addition to Statements of Special Educational Needs
- Clarification to Criterion A – looked after and previously looked after children including amendments to the Orders referred to the Code
- Clarification to the wording of the sibling clauses to make clear that the rule applies to siblings attending the school 'at the time of application'
- Clarification of the process for summer born children F2 reception whose parents may request that their child works out of normal year group.
- Date changes to reflect the difference in year.

- **The setting of sixth form admission numbers for external applicants**

The new School Admissions Code (section 1.2) makes clear that all admission authorities must set an admission number for each relevant age group and this includes year 12 where the school admits external applicants to the sixth form. Following consultation with each school, it is proposed to apply a small admission number for year 12 to allow the schools to admit external applicants to their sixth forms as follows:

The Bulmershe School	20
The Emmbrook School	20
St Crispin’s School	30
Waingel’s College	10

Children already attending the school continue to remain at the school provided they meet the course requirements.

It is proposed that the sixth form admission policy is changed to provide an external admission number for year 12.

- **Reference to Education, Health and Care Plans**

The Code now requires under section 1.6 that all children whose statement of special educational needs (SEN) or Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan names the school **must** be admitted to a school.

An Education Health and Care plan will, after assessment and over a prescribed period of time, replace a Statement of Special Educational Needs under new legislation described under Section 37 of the Children and Families Act 2014 specifying the special education provision required for that child.

It is proposed that the admission arrangements are changed to include children with an Education, Health and Care Plan.

- **Clarification to Criterion A – looked after and previously looked after children**

1.7 of the new Code requires that the highest priority **must** be given to looked after children and all previously looked after children. Previously looked after children are children who were looked after, but ceased to be so because they were adopted (or became subject to a child arrangements order or special guardianship order). Further references to previously looked after children in the Code means such children who were adopted (or subject to child arrangements orders or special guardianship orders) immediately following having been looked after.

The previous Code restricted admission to some previously looked after children as it referred only to children adopted from care under the terms of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 section 46. The DFE has amended the legislation to include those children adopted from care prior to the Act under the Adoption Act 1976 (section 12) and changes as a result of the introduction of the Children and Families Act 2014. Child arrangements orders replace residence orders and any residence order in force prior to 22 April 2014 is deemed to be a child arrangements order.

It is proposed that the admission arrangements are changed to reflect the changes to legislation as it affects criterion A.

- **Clarification to the wording of the sibling clauses**

The council consulted on changes to the sibling clauses for the 2015/16 admission arrangements, however it is considered that the wording can be made clearer to show that the rule applies to siblings attending the school 'at the time of application'. The inclusion of this distinction was the subject of an adjudication by the Office of the School's Adjudicator and is recommended to be applied to all admission arrangements. There are no further changes to the wording under these criteria and the exceptions to this rule are clear (e.g. infant to junior transfer).

It is proposed that the admission arrangements are changed to include the wording "at the time of application".

- **Clarification of the process for summer born children F2 reception whose parents may request that their child works out of normal year group**

The DFE has issued guidance (September 2014 and December 2014) regarding the process for the admission of children whose parents may request that their child works out of their chronological year group and the new Code (sections 2.17, 2.17A and 2.17B) now confirms that admission authorities must make clear in their admission arrangements the process for requesting admission out of the normal age group.

Whilst Wokingham Borough Council has a policy within the existing arrangements on how the council will consider such requests, the new Code is more prescriptive as to how such requests for summer-born children whose parents are due to apply for their child to start school must be considered and what the parent and the admissions authority must do.

The proposed admission arrangements are changed to include a section clarifying the processing of requests to work outside the normal year group and separate guidance is being prepared for parents, early years' settings, schools and officers on this subject including information on the ramifications of taking the decision to do so. The proposed wording states on page 7:

“Children are normally allocated to their chronological year group. Where a parent considers that their summer-born child will not be ready and would like their child to work a year behind; the admissions authority would consider such requests in accordance with their policy relating to admission outside the normal age group (the council's is shown on page 9 of Appendix A). In order that such requests (supported by evidence from relevant professionals) can be fully considered, the parent will be asked to submit their request together with an application for the normal age group by the deadline. This ensures that if the request is refused, the child's application for preferred schools will not be disadvantaged and the request can be considered appropriately including the views of the preferred schools either prior to the offer date or after. The parent will be informed of the implications of making such a request.

If the request is agreed, their application for the normal age group may be withdrawn before a place is offered. If their request is refused, the parent must decide whether to accept the offer of a place for the normal age group, or to refuse it and make an in-year application for admission to year one for the September following the child's fifth birthday. Where a parent's request is agreed, they must make a new application as part of the main admissions round the following year. Requests to continue working out of normal age group would need to be made whenever the child moves schools.

An admissions panel will make decisions for community and voluntary controlled schools based on the circumstances of each case and in the best interests of the child concerned. (Where preferences are expressed for own admission authority schools, the parent must submit information to each school for consideration.) Consideration will include taking account of the parents' views; information about the child's academic, social and emotional development; where relevant, the child's medical history and the views of a medical professional; whether they have previously been educated out of their normal age group; and whether they may naturally have fallen into a lower age group if it were not for being born prematurely. The views of the head teacher of the school concerned and the child's early years setting will also be taken into account. When informing a parent of the decision on the year group to which the child should be admitted, the parent will be notified of the reasons for the decision and where possible, the decision will be made prior to the offer date for the child's chronological year group.

Where it is agreed that a child will be admitted out of the normal age group and, as a consequence of that decision, the child will be admitted to a relevant age group (i.e. the age group to which pupils are normally admitted to the school) the local authority and admission authority must process the application as part of the main admissions round on the basis of their determined admission arrangements only, including the application

of oversubscription criteria where applicable. The parent has a statutory right to appeal against the refusal of a place at a school for which they have applied. This right does not apply if they are offered a place at the school but it is not in their preferred age group.”

It is proposed that the admission arrangements are changed to include more information on the process for parental requests for their child to work out of their chronological year group.

- **Date changes to the co-ordinated schemes**

The proposed timetable for the co-ordinated schemes is below and the proposed arrangements have been changed to reflect it. Schools were notified in early January that the council was not intending to consult on any changes and the following timetable was included in The Education News:

PROPOSED TIMETABLE CO-ORDINATED ADMISSION SCHEMES 2016/2017	
Date	Action
July 8, 2015	Maintained schools to provide school information to enable composite prospectus to be compiled
By September 11, 2015	Application packs for secondary transfer to be distributed via primary schools and on request
By September 12, 2015	Composite prospectus published on council's website
September 11, 2015	Online admissions open for applications for transfer to secondary school
October 31, 2015	National closing date for secondary transfer applications
November 25, 2015	Secondary transfer applications to be forwarded to Wokingham Borough own admission authority schools for consideration
November 2015	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, 2015	Online admissions open for applications for entry to primary and transfer to junior school
January 15, 2016	National 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, 2016	Ranked lists to be submitted to the local authority by own admission authority schools for secondary transfer
February 10, 2016	Entry to primary and junior transfer applications to be forwarded to Wokingham Borough own admission authority schools for

	consideration
February 16, 2016	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
By February 28, 2016	Appeals timetable published to website (own admission authority schools will publish details on the school's website)
March 1, 2016	National secondary offer day – letters posted by first class post (the next working day after 1 March)
March 15, 2016	Secondary transfer: Deadline for accepting the offer of a place Late applications to be processed Waiting list information available
March 15, 2016	Ranked lists to be submitted to the local authority by own admission authority schools for the entry to primary and junior transfer
March 31, 2016	Final co-ordination with other local authorities for entry to primary and junior school transfer
April 14, 2016	Closing date for notification of a secondary appeal to be heard together
April 18, 2016 (next working day)	National offer day for primary applications for those starting school and transfer to junior school offer day – letters posted by first class post
May 3, 2016	Entry to primary and junior transfer: Deadline for accepting the offer of a place Late applications to be processed Waiting list information available
May 18, 2016	Closing date for notification of an entry to primary or junior transfer appeal to be heard together
End May/early June 2016	Local authority to advise schools of final allocation details
May/June 2016	Secondary appeals to be heard in accordance with published timetable
June/July 2016	Starting school and junior transfer appeals to be heard in accordance with published timetable

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	None		n/a
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	None		n/a
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	None		n/a

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

The proposals contained in the report do not have any direct implications for the Council's capital or revenue budgets.

Cross-Council Implications

The School Admissions Code expects admission arrangements to promote sustainable travel and equal access to educational opportunities, in providing a fair system of school admissions that allows families to express school preferences and to access places at local schools.

Robust and fair admission arrangements mitigate the risk of unforeseen additional revenue and capital costs to the local authority and individual schools arising as a consequence of successful admission appeals.

List of Background Papers

Proposed admission arrangements
School Admissions Code 2014 and School Admissions Appeals Codes (2012) and associated School Admissions Regulations.

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