

Minute Annex

Dear Luciane,

Many thanks. My comments are around Pupil Premium children and children who may be disadvantaged by the new online admissions arrangements. I brought this up a couple of weeks back to Emily Waddilove and copied Piers in – and I went to the Children’s Advisory Board to ask if they will be able to support parents with their applications for school. They have agreed that this is a good idea and that it will be a good thing for them to be able to offer, which will be a tremendous help.

Vicky Lewendon assured me that paper applications will still be accepted by Wokingham, but I cannot see in the paperwork where this will be made explicit for parents, who might panic. Some of our parents are already disadvantaged by a lack of literacy and oracy, and the sending out of the pack on an unspecified date in November (why unspecified? I would like to see this date as a few days *before* online admissions open so that disadvantaged parents have time to find out about the best way to apply if they do not have access to a computer) will widen this gap. In light of the new ‘Social Mobility’ agenda I find this disheartening to say the least. Vicky assured me that in the new process the only disadvantage to those who may have to complete their application forms on paper will be that they hear about their schools a bit later than other parents do – but I cannot see really why this should happen, either. I am sure the post can be timed so that everyone receives the name of their school on the same day. This is a lesser issue, however.

In the proposed timetable for coordinated admissions schemes 2019/20, the pack is described as an ‘Application pack’, which would seem to me to indicate the possibility of an application form being included (page 15 of the papers that came out to us); however, in the scheme for primary and secondary schools it is described, again against the unspecified November date, as ‘Information sheets alerting parents to online application process for entry to primary...’ (page 40), which I find disappointing and worrying – very different indeed from an application pack.

We are trying to close the disadvantaged gap – and this might scupper us in this aim – which as heads we feel passionately about, and which we are urged to do by the government also - from the start.

I’m sorry to keep banging this drum, continue to be like a terrier with a rag, etc - but this issue really worries me, and the two different versions of what will happen on the unspecified November date worry me in particular. Will an application pack be sent to parents, or an information sheet telling them they will need to apply online? And is there a third possibility – perhaps that the information sheet can suggest that Children’s Centres have access to forms as well as the expertise to support parents in this application, which after all is one of the most important services a parent performs for their child?

I’m copying in Piers Brunning, David Babb, Vicky Lewendon, Emily Waddilove and Louisa Gurney, the latter of whom it is my understanding will be joining you this evening as our headteacher rep; also Beccy Franklin and Rupa Joshi, who lead our Children’s Centres. I have sent my apologies for this evening’s meeting as I have had a family situation arise this weekend that needs my attention. I had hoped to be able to give this feedback in person. The previous minutes show how tenacious I have already been about this matter – and I really hope it can be resolved so that we can expect the support of the admissions board in our attempts to close the gap, diminish the difference, ensure equality of opportunity of choice.

Best wishes,

Sue Runciman

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