

TITLE	Office of the School's Adjudicator's Annual Report to the Secretary of State
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	School Admissions Forum on 27 January 2016
WARD	None Specific
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR	Judith Ramsden, Director for Children's Services

SUMMARY

Each year, local authorities are required to submit information to the Office of the School's Adjudicator by 30 June and there is a requirement for the local authority to publish their report. A template is usually provided for this purpose. These reports in turn are used for the Chief School Adjudicator to make a report to the Secretary of State and to publish her findings on how well admission authorities are complying with the School Admissions Code and highlighting where there is room for improvement. This report may be used by the government to influence changes to the School Admissions Code.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Forum notes the report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The report, based on admissions between September 2014 and August 2015 was published on 17 December, 2015. The main findings of the report are:

1. There has been some progress in complying with the Code on consultation about and determination and publication of admission arrangements, but too many schools that are their own admission authority, do not comply fully with what are relatively modest requirements.

Recommendation: Communications from the DFE to schools, local authorities, academy trusts and religious bodies could usefully include reminders about the dates by which consultation, determination and publication of admission arrangements must be completed. Schools that convert to become academies and new schools need to have their attention drawn to their responsibilities as an admission authority.

2. The arrangements for admission to the sixth form still frequently contravene the Code. There continue to be misunderstandings about the general requirements that apply to admission to the sixth form.

Recommendation: The DFE might consider whether the entire Code should apply to admissions to the sixth form or there should be some flexibility or some other process as used by other providers of education post-16 that would be more appropriate, but would not disadvantage students seeking a place in a school sixth form.

3. The admission arrangements for many schools that are their own admission authority are unnecessarily complex and lack transparency, especially those with numerous subcategories within individual oversubscription criteria. Such arrangements are difficult to understand and limit parents' ability to assess the chance of their child being offered a place.

Recommendation: The DFE should consider providing examples of admission arrangements and setting out some general definitions that will apply for all admission authorities to avoid every admission authority having to include information that could more helpfully be standard for all schools and provide clarity to parents. Examples include specifying that: the final tie-breaker will be random allocation if two or more applicants have equal priority for the final place available; and the waiting list will be maintained until 31 December and how it will be applied, which would avoid asking every admission authority to set out such details.

4. The guidance provided for schools designated as having a religious character by the body or person representing the religion or religious denomination is of variable availability and quality. Some guidance is clear, up to date and takes full account of the Code, but much is not.

Recommendation: The DFE should consider providing guidance about or specifying what is expected in guidance from the relevant person or body for schools that can give priority for admission on grounds of faith.

5. The Code provides for any person or body to make an objection. Local authorities and dioceses have acted responsibly in objecting to the arrangements for some schools in their areas. Although there are some matters on which an objection cannot be made, there have been instances of pressure groups and individuals making use of the provision to object when it appears to be more about trying to influence a policy matter than concern about the arrangements of a school for which parents might legitimately be considering applying for a place for their child.

Recommendation: The DFE may wish to reconsider who can make an objection to the arrangements for a particular school, possibly limiting it to those with proper standing for making the objection.

6. The reports for local authorities raise some important matters, for example, concerning the provision of a school place for looked after children outside their home area; the problems created by late application; and concerns about the in-year admissions process.

Recommendation: Consideration should be given by the DFE to making greater use of the information provided by local authorities in their reports to assist in making further improvements to the admissions process.

List of Background Papers

School Admissions Code and School Admissions Appeals Codes and relevant regulations

Office of the Schools Adjudicator Annual Report – September 2013 to August 2014

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