

KENT SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS FORUM

MINUTES of a meeting of the Kent Schools Admissions Forum held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Monday, 14 July 2008.

PRESENT: Mrs C Angell, Mrs K Box (substitute for Mr F Green), Mrs F Cottam, Mrs V Fitch, Mrs D King, Mr L Ridings (substitute for Mrs P S Stockell), Mr J Simmonds, Mr R Tolputt, Mr J Watt, Mr G Wetherell.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr S Bagshaw, Head of Admissions and Transport; Mr G Rudd, Clerk to the Forum, and Ms S Williamson, Head of Attendance and Behaviour Services for Item 9.

APOLOGIES: Mr I Bauckham, Mr J Gunnell, Mrs P Gibson, Mr F Green, Ms R Matthews, Mrs J Morgan, Ms A Nee, Mr S Parr, Reverend Canon J Smith, and Mrs Stockell.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

24. Minutes of the meeting held on 1 April 2008 *(Item 2)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2008 are correctly recorded, subject to the insertion of Mr G Wetherell under Apologies, the amendment of Mrs to Mr Truelove in paragraph 16 (2) (a) and the amendment of L D to L A in paragraph 17. (1), and that they be signed by the Chairman.

25. Matters Arising *(Item 3)*

(1) (a) Mr Vye referred to paragraph 18 (16) regarding Kent's views that the Headteacher Appeal stage was not a review process and reported that he had written to Mrs Curle (Legal Services) who had confirmed the legality of the LA's position.

(b) Mr Bagshaw updated Members on the latest position regarding the DCSF views and pointed out that the scheme which included the headteacher assessment process was imposed by the Secretary of State having been scrutinised by the legal team at DCSF.

(2) Mrs Cottam referred to paragraph 19 (4) and replied that Medway would like to use the same test. Mr Bagshaw replied that amongst other things there would be difficulties in obtaining compatible thresholds, Mrs Cottam felt that attempts should be made to try to persuade Medway to use the test.

(3) Mr Bagshaw agreed that Medway had seemed to be receptive, and that he would be happy to explore the possibilities of this for 2010 or 2011. However, he advised that there would be difficulties around the parent's local review used by Medway and Kent's obligations to PAN London, and that he would need to see Medway's dates.

(4) Members of the Forum agreed with Mrs Cottam's view that this issue should be kept to the forefront.

26. In-Year Fair Access Protocol Update *(Item 7)*

(1) Ms S Williamson, Head of Attendance and Behaviour Services circulated copies of the updated In Year Fair Access Protocol and addressed the Forum on its contents.

(2) Ms Williams advised the Members that it was the Forum's responsibility to monitor the placement of those pupils who had been permanently excluded and those actively seeking a place at a school. She reported that all clusters were aware of the need for the protocol and there were some good examples of where this was working. She held the view that there seemed to be a commitment to the protocol but that there were difficulties with excluded pupils. Ms Williams complimented officers in Mr Bagshaw's team with the specific role of trying to find places for hard to place pupils. Ms Williams was able to advise the Members that 84% of pupils got places without the need to use the IYFAP, although only 23% were within the designated timescale. She also reported a reduction in permanent exclusions this year.

(3) Ms Williams reported that intelligence led monitoring was in place, and that an identified area for improvement was in trying to place excluded pupils within 6 days

(4) The points that arose from Members are recorded as follows:-

- (a) Mrs Cottam advised that with an accelerated KS3 Grammar Schools would need some guidance on managed moves as it would be unfair if the child could not fully access the curriculum.
- (b) Mr Simmonds asked whether Headteachers were accepting their responsibilities as set out in the protocol. Ms Williams had to report that unfortunately this was not always the case.
- (c) Mr Vye was conscious of the Forum's monitoring responsibilities, and asked whether a list of schools being put under pressure with additional pupils could be provided for the next meeting.
- (d) Mrs Angell was interested to know where she could find out more information. Ms Williams referred Mrs Angell to pages 75-83 of the School Admissions Code. Mr Bagshaw agreed to send a copy of the Code to Mrs Angell.

27. Membership of Forum *(Item 4)*

(1) Mr Rudd advised the Forum that there was still a vacancy for the Community Secondary School Representative.

(2) Mr Rudd agreed to liaise with Ella Hughes (Dr Craig's Executive Support Officer) to raise the matter again at the Cluster chairs meeting.

28. Terms of Reference
(Item 5)

The Forum agreed that it did not have anything to discuss under this item.

29. Update on Admission Forum Annual Report Process (Martin Vye)
(Item 6)

(1) Mr Vye reported back to the Members in respect of his attempt to get more resources for the Forum and confirmed that Mrs K Weiss, Policy Officer in the Children's Families Education Directorate would be providing this. He also referred to his previous intention to gather information available on schools in the Canterbury area, and advised the Forum that did not do this, but that he had chosen to liaise with Officers and Clusters to determine the best way of getting information.

(2) Mr Vye circulated a copy of the first Draft of the Annual Report for 2007 together with a copy of proposals for the way forward for the Forum Annual Report. Mr Vye spoke of the Report and Proposals and suggested the Forum meet mid to end September to consider the Draft Report. He felt that the Forum should treat the first Annual Report as a starter document. He referred to the substance of the Report and questions that needed answers. Given the number of schools, Mr Vye advised the Members that he intended focusing on those that were significantly undersubscribed. Mr Ridings estimated that this related to approximately 25%.

(3) Mr Vye invited the Members to discuss this and accepted that it was a complex situation.

- (a) Mr Ridings confirmed that the Local Authority was required to return information relating to significantly under described schools.
- (b) Mrs Angell was concerned that admission arrangements were working in such a way that a number of schools didn't have the children they should have. She also felt that if the Government was seeking this information shouldn't it already be available to the Forum.
- (c) Mr Wetherell sought clarification as to whether the 25% related to the entry point of admission or total school roll. Mr Ridings thought that it related to the Published Admission Number.
- (d) Mr Simmonds agreed with Mrs Angell and questioned the purpose of such an exercise as it might give an unrepresentative view of the situation. Mr Vye again referred to the Government guidance in respect of these issues, and felt that they needed to be addressed.
- (e) Mr Vye advised the Forum that Mrs Weiss and Management Information have already spoken to Mr Bagshaw. Mr Bagshaw confirmed that they had the Government Guidance and would provide as much as possible and that he would try to fill in the information that they couldn't provide.
- (f) Mrs Angell asked if Academies should be closely looked at. In response Mrs Box advised the Forum that the Leigh Academy operated a very fair admissions process. Mr Bagshaw confirmed that

to the best of his knowledge the admission arrangements had always been applied in accordance with the published admissions arrangements and had been independently verified.

- (g) Mr Vye confirmed that he would ensure that the timetable relating to the Forum Report was kept to.

30. Briefing on Admissions Code Consultation Document (Scott Bagshaw)
(Item 8)

(1) Mr Bagshaw advised the Forum that on the 12 June 2008 the Government launched a consultation document in respect of further proposed changes to the Admissions Code. He circulated copies of the consultation document.

(2) Mr Bagshaw referred to the suggestion that there should be a reduction in consultation the period to three years from every year. His concern was that where governing bodies and management teams changed within time the requirements of when consultations should be carried out could be lost or forgotten.

(3) The role of the Admission Forum

(a) In some LAs the Forums have not worked effectively and the DCSF was concerned that some Forums had taken poor decisions through lack of understanding of the admissions legislation. Mr Bagshaw made the point that this was not the case in Kent and that it's Forum had a good scrutiny process. The DCSF was looking at the possibility of greater parental representation. He held the opinion that the last Admissions Code had given the Forums powers to act but that the new proposals seemed to be going back to how Forums used to operate.

(b) Mr Vye referred to the Annual Report and the duty placed on the LA to produce this. He felt that it was still important for the Forum to work on this as a Scrutiny Group. Mr Vye asked the Members to e-mail Mr Bagshaw with their comments, preferably during September.

(c) Mr Bagshaw advised the Forum that the new revised Code would probably come into effect in January 2009 and that in future years it may not be necessary for the Forum to publish a report if the LA was already doing so. However the Forum would still have an important role in scrutinising the LA report and providing a commentary before being returned to the DCSF.

(d) Mrs Angell referred to primary school admission arrangements. Mr Bagshaw advised that he expected there to be a National Offer Day for primary schools in the same way as secondary school places are offered where the LA offers a place rather than individual schools and that the LA co-ordinates the admission arrangements with other LAs to avoid duplicate offers.

(e) Mr Watts advised the Forum that casual in year admissions caused the service community the most problems.

- (f) Mr Vye enquired about parental satisfaction surveys. Mr Bagshaw replied that all material published by the Admissions Team contained feedback questionnaires as to whether it had been clear to understand. The responses were monitored to ensure that parents continued to find the process clear and simple to understand
- (g) Mrs Cottam referred to Paragraph 1.26 and asked whether there would be grounds for grammar schools to challenge the Code as it seemed to be discriminating against Selection and grammar schools. Mr Bagshaw agreed with this point and that he would be happy to seek legal advice and would be liaising with the Cabinet Members on this issue anyway. Mrs Cottam took the view that as Kent was a selective authority the proposals should be challenged. Mr Vye's view was that the LA should do this and not the Forum.
- Mrs King supported Mrs Cottam's view and agreed that Kent should challenge this. Mr Vye reiterated that because of the differences in the membership of the Forum it would be difficult to put the case from the Forum.
 - Mr Wetherell supported the proposal but sought definition of "successful and popular".
 - Mr Watts felt that it would be difficult for the lawyers to give advice as the revisions to the Code had not been approved yet. Once the Code was drafted a legal challenge could then be made.
 - Mr Bagshaw felt that paragraph 1.26 undermined the work of the Area Education Officer on future planning needs, and referred to the difficulties in the Dartford area. Mr Ridings reported that he was the Governor of a popular grammar school that had received 368 applications for the 240 intake. He would be concerned at taking such a high number of pupils as it would wreck the planning of the three high schools in the area.
 - Mr Vye agreed that this proposal should be put on the next meeting agenda for first Forum discussions.

31. Feedback on compliance with new Code *(Item 9)*

- (a) Mr Bagshaw circulated a document outlining his findings on primary schools. Most schools were complying with the Code and only a handful were not. He proposed to submit his report to the adjudicator by the end of July. He advised the Forum that he intended being more pro-active in future years.
- (b) Mrs Angell asked whether it was possible that those incidents where the Code was not being compiled could be due to ignorance of the procedures. Mr Bagshaw replied that this was most likely the case.

32. Members Expenses
(Item 10)

Mr Rudd confirmed that he was seeking guidance on this to determine whether there were budget provisions to pay Members expenses.

33. Any Other Business
(Item 11)

Mr Bagshaw advised the Forum that he had received a complaint from Bexley in respect of a letter from Dartford Grammar School to parents stating that their child met the entry requirements but that the school was over subscribed and could not offer a place but invited them to place the child on the waiting list. The concern of Bexley was that it had already offered the children in question places as they had placed a Bexley School as a higher preference. Mr Bagshaw's understanding was that Dartford Grammar School had written to the parents after they had approached the school in which case this was legal. He advised the Forum that he would be writing to the Head of Dartford Grammar School to reiterate about what was acceptable but he was confident that the school had not acted inappropriately.

34. Dates of future meetings
(Item 12)

The Members of the Forum suggested that the afternoon of Monday 29 September would be the best date for the next meeting Mr Rudd agreed to arrange this.