

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### 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 Thursday, 5 February 2009.

PRESENT: Mrs M Bolton (Substitute for Mrs F Cottam), Mrs D King, Ms R Matthews, Mr S Parr, Mr J Simmonds, Mr J Speller, Mrs P Stockell (Chairman), Mr R Tolputt and Mr G Wetherell.

In Attendance: Mr S Bagshaw, Head of Admissions and Transport, Dr I Craig, Director of Operations and Mr G Rudd, Clerk for the Forum.

Apologies: Mrs C Angell, Mr I Bauckham, Ms V Bentley, Mrs F Cottam, Mrs V Fitch, Mrs P Gibson, Mr F Green, Mr J Gunnell, Mrs J Morgan, Mr C McKenzie (Medway Council), Ms A Nee, Mr L Ridings, Mr J Smith, Mr M Vye and Mrs L Willis.

#### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

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

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2008 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

**2. Matters Arising**  
*(Item 3)*

Mr Bagshaw referred to paragraph 37(2) and confirmed that he was pursuing data capture in respect of schools being put under pressure with additional pupils.

**3. Membership of Forum**  
*(Item 4)*

Mr Rudd confirmed that he was still pursuing replacement Members with Ella Hughes.

**4. Terms of Reference**  
*(Item 5)*

Mr Bagshaw referred to the Admissions Code updates regarding changes to the Forum Membership. Mr Bagshaw confirmed that he would report further on this at the next meeting of the Forum.

**5. Update on Admission Forum Annual Report process**  
*(Item 6)*

(1) Mr Bagshaw reported that the terminology in the tables had now been amended.

(2) He reported that the draft was now with Mr Vye to prepare his foreword and final editing.

(3) Mr Bagshaw advised that the Local Authority's role in preparing the report was now complete and that he would arrange to circulate and publish it next week to Members, the website and DCSF.

**6. Feedback on School Admissions Consultation on Co-ordinated Schemes**  
*(Item 7)*

(1) Mr Bagshaw circulated an extract from the School Admissions Code in respect of Admission Authorities mandatory requirement to consult on the full details of their proposed admission arrangements. He confirmed that he was looking at the admission arrangements sent in and that he would be writing to the schools by 1 March 2009 to give Governing Bodies time to consider the arrangements. He also agreed to keep the Diocesan Boards informed.

(2) Mr Bagshaw was concerned that some of the schools may not have realised some of the detailed items that should have been included. He advised the Members that the Local Children Services Partnerships would also be notifying schools that more information was on its way.

- (3) (i) Mr Bagshaw also circulated responses received on a Primary/Secondary consultation questionnaire distributed by the Local Authority.
- (ii) He confirmed that the publicised scheme had been agreed by all parties. He drew attention to the concerns expressed by Hillview School who nevertheless recognised the need to implement the scheme as imposed by the Secretary of State.
- (iii) Mr Bagshaw referred to the Primary Scheme aspect of the consultation and circulated proposed revisions to the 2010 dates following this consultation. He reported that a problem with Easter Holidays had been recognised and therefore a range of alternative dates had been sought out but that there was very little time to get these out. He had arranged that Local Children Services Partnerships would get these out by Tuesday 10 February 2009, but this would mean a short turn around time.
- (iv) Mr Bagshaw confirmed that he had prepared papers to go to Cabinet and invited the Forum Members comments.
- (v) Mr Speller referred to paragraph 130 a) and sought clarification that Year 12 was considered by the Admissions Code to be subject to the co-ordinated scheme. Mr Bagshaw confirmed that the co-ordinated scheme referred to in the Code related to Year R, Year 7 and Year 12. Mr Speller also referred to those parents who fail to respond to offers by the due date. If the date has passed and no response has been received he asked whether the place can be re-offered straight away. Mr Bagshaw advised that the school would need to contact the

parents concerned and be seen to take reasonable measures, i.e. phone calls, reminder letters before re-offering the place.

- (vi) Mr Simmonds referred to the Goudhurst and Kilndown Primary School nearness to home issue referred to in the questionnaire and expressed his concerns about schools who had amalgamated being disadvantaged. Mr Bagshaw agreed that it was difficult to deal with an issue such as this. Mr Simmonds felt that every effort should be made to support parents in this position. Dr Craig commented that this amalgamation was at least twenty years ago and if changes were made at this school it would be necessary to go back in history to consider other schools who had amalgamated.
- (vii) In response to a question from Mr Tolputt; Mr Bagshaw advised that whilst Community Schools could have individual admission arrangements it would not be practical to arrange. He also confirmed that Foundation and Aided Schools could set their own catchment areas but they would need to be legal. Dr Craig added that in theory Foundation and Aided Schools could set their own admissions criteria but the Local Authority could challenge these if it felt they were unfair. Mr Wetherell confirmed that a Foundation and Aided School would need to be able to defend its scheme and criteria to the Local Authority and that this had to be borne in mind when setting the criteria.
- (viii) Mrs Bolton requested information regarding the monitoring of Academies and their criteria. Mr Bagshaw advised that if they were in Kent they would be bound by the Co-ordinated Scheme. He confirmed that they were obliged to consult in the same way as other schools in the scheme and could be challenged through the School Adjudicator. Dr Craig also confirmed that Academies were bound by the School Admissions Code of Practice.

## **7. National Challenge Schools** *(Item 8)*

(1) Mr Bagshaw circulated a report in respect of changes in the new School Admissions Code relating to National Challenge Schools and their requirement to admit pupils with challenging behaviour. He advised the Forum that this clause only applied to schools in which less than 20% of pupils gained 5 A\*– C GCSEs including English and Mathematics. Mr Bagshaw confirmed that there were only 7 schools in Kent which came into that category. Mr Bagshaw recommended that:

- (a) All National Challenge Schools should be written to explaining Kent's interpretation of the code, and that an IYFA panel might still require the seven schools to admit a pupil with challenging behaviour;
- (b) In order to assist Placement Officers and IYFA panels, make appropriate and timely decisions about placements, each LCSP should be encouraged to establish a process to quickly assess a child's needs and the most suitable education provision for him/her.

- (c) Clear records of the decision making process should be maintained in the event that a panel's decision is referred to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator.

(2) Mr Tolputt referred to the Folkestone Academy and how its outstanding achievements had made other schools recognise the need to raise the quality of education. Dr Craig agreed that this was the rationale behind academies and that new buildings and a new name would attract pupils initially. However, he advised that in the short term academies would be popular but in the longer term they had to continue to raise the measured quality of education. He also referred to the New Schools for the future initiative which would bring other schools up to the same level of attractiveness to prospective pupils.

(3) Mrs Bolton took the view that as soon as the standard of one school was raised out of the bottom order it left fewer poor performing schools in the ladder.

(4) Ms Matthews sought clarification as to how many National Challenge Schools there were. Dr Craig replied that there were 9 schools now above the 30% but that they had not gone above the 40% so stayed on the list. He also suggested that it was possible that others could drop in to the list. He reminded the Forum though that these were 2011 targets and that the target for 2010 was 30%. In response to Ms Matthews further question Dr Craig advised that the 40% target had arisen because the Minister thought it was a good idea.

(5) RESOLVED that the Forum support the recommendations referred to in paragraphs 7 (1) a), b) and c).

## **8. Casual Admissions from September 2010** *(Item 9)*

(1) Mr Bagshaw advised the Forum that the new Schools Admissions Code required Local Authorities to co-ordinate casual admissions. He circulated an extract from the Code together with a co-ordination timeline. His response to the DCSF had been that it was impractical and inappropriate as work was already being done by headteachers who liaise and co-ordinate on these matters. Mr Bagshaw was of the view that for Admissions to undertake this role he would need a whole new team dedicated to that role. He reported that he would need to set up meetings with headteachers and Diocesan Boards and that consultations on a scheme would need to be agreed by 1 January 2010 to apply from September 2010. He added that from 2011 this would need to be included as a single scheme rather than separate schemes for different year groups.

(2) Mr Tolputt was concerned that this would hold everything up and create bureaucracy whereas before, parents could find a school themselves. Mr Bagshaw could only think that the DCSF was trying to stop unfair admissions practices by some schools but he agreed that it was very complicated and difficult to deliver.

(3) Mr Speller advised the Forum that he had been unhappy about the lack of guidance on casual admissions to grammar schools and he hoped that these proposals would bring some cohesion. He felt that the present arrangements were unfair in that they gave as much advantage to a child who wanted a change of school as a child who moved into the area without a school to go to. Nevertheless

he acknowledged the difficulties that Mr Bagshaw and his team would face in trying to deliver such a scheme.

Whilst Mr Wetherell shared some of Mr Speller's views, overall he felt that the proposals would disadvantage disadvantaged families even more so and would be likely to lead to more admission appeals.

Mr Bagshaw advised that the Code had always been clear about how this should be dealt with. Mr Speller's concern was that grammar schools had different methods of assessing suitability for other year groups which may lead to children moving from one school to another without having met that particular school's criteria.

(4) Mrs King shared Mr Tolputt's view and expressed concern that parents might try to sue the Local Authority for delay in providing an education for their child. Mr Bagshaw felt that in theory if the process worked, as it should, his team ought to know where vacancies were fairly quickly. He advised that although the Code would come into force from 10 February 2009 aspects of it were still being looked at and therefore there may be further changes to these proposals.

(5) Mr Parr shared Mr Bagshaw's views and agreed that it was important to liaise and that the Diocese had met a couple of authorities already.

(6) An additional concern raised by Mr Bagshaw related to the lack of additional funding and the DCSF adamant stance that this would not be available.

(7) Mrs Stockell supported Mr Bagshaw's views and expressed her concerns at the proposals and would have liked the Forum to have been able to write to the DCSF about them.

(8) Mr Bagshaw confirmed that the Code's requirements were mandatory, although Kent, along with colleagues in other Local Authorities who had the same concerns, had challenged these as best as could possibly be done.

(9) Ms Matthews commented that whilst she understood the problems she could see the issues that had led to this and wondered how the managed moves arrangements would be affected. Mr Bagshaw did not have an answer on this yet but it would be included in the consultation process.

(10) Mr Bagshaw advised the Forum that Cabinet Members were aware of these proposals for budgetary purposes only but not detailed information as this was still being consulted on.

## **9. Any Other Business** *(Item 10)*

(1) Mr Bagshaw circulated a report from Sally Williamson (Head of Attendance and Behaviour Services) giving an overview of the In-Year Fair Access Protocols and that Miss Williamson would like to attend the next meeting of the Forum. This point was noted by Mr Rudd.

Mr Bagshaw referred to the six days issue and asked the Forum Members to let Mr Rudd have their views/comments. Mr Rudd agreed to get an electronic copy of the report to all Members of the Forum.

(2) Mr Bagshaw circulated a summary of the main changes to the Revised School Admissions Code. He commented that the in year applications closing date of 31 October did not tie in with the Regulations and that there would be difficulties with half-term and no-one in schools to help collate responses. He reported that this would put pressure on Kent's scheme timetable to allow early testing and would reduce the amount of time available to parents.

Mr Speller requested information on what would happen if the 31 October fell on a weekend. Mr Bagshaw advised that a later date could be accepted on reasonable grounds and that Kent was exploring this as its date would be 7 November.

(3) Mrs Stockell referred to the issues relating to the membership of the Forum in paragraphs 4.29 and 4.30. Mr Bagshaw agreed that these would need to be considered at the next meeting of the Forum but that the present Constitution of the Forum would be alright until after the June County Council elections.

(4) Ms Matthews referred to the last item relating to the rights of a Sixth Form child to appeal and how does a 16 year old appeal to anything other than a sixth form. Mr Bagshaw agreed to check this although he felt it may relate to overage children wanting to go back into education.

## **10. Dates of Future Meetings** *(Item 11)*

To be agreed by Mr Bagshaw and Mr Rudd.