

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

KENT SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS FORUM

MINUTES of a meeting of the Kent Schools Admissions Forum held at Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone, on Thursday, 17 December 2009.

PRESENT: Mr G Cooke, Reverend N Genders, Mr F Green, Mr J Gunnell, Mrs S V Hohler, Reverend Canon J Smith, Mr J Stanley, Mrs J Young.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr S Bagshaw, Head of Admissions and Transport; Mr S Fox, Head of Alternative Curriculum PRUs (for Item 5) and Mr G Rudd, Clerk to the Forum.

APOLOGIES: Mr P Luxmoore, Mr P Karnavas, Mr S Parr and Mr J Watt.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Election of Chairman
(Item 1)

(1) Reverend N Genders was proposed by Mr G Cooke and seconded by Mrs S V Hohler as Chairman of the Forum.

(2) Reverend N Genders was the only nomination and was unanimously elected Chairman of the Forum. Reverend N Genders took the Chair.

2. Election of Vice-Chairman
(Item 1)

The Members of the Forum agreed that this matter should be considered at the next meeting of the Forum.

3. Constitution of Forum and Terms of Reference
(Item 2)

(1) Current Proposed Membership - Mr G Rudd had circulated a schedule identifying those positions on the Forum where nominations had been received. He also advised where vacancies still existed.

(2) Mechanism for identifying candidates for vacant positions. Mr S Bagshaw advised the Forum that the CFE Policy Officer Mr A Duncan was pursuing nominations for the Primary School vacancies with the Primary Forum and would be able to advise further on this once he had received feedback from the Forum. He reported that if insufficient Headteacher's came forward to fill the vacant positions it might be necessary to seek nominations from Primary School Governors. Reverend N Genders confirmed that he and Simon Parr would be happy to seek nominations from within the respective Dioceses.

(3) Mr S Bagshaw added that he was confident of finding a nominee for the remaining Secondary School vacancy.

4. Proposed Schemes of Education for Casual Admissions 2010 and Scheme for 2011
(Item 3)

(1) Mr S Bagshaw referred to the Co-ordinated Primary and Secondary Schemes circulated to the Members of the Forum and confirmed that the procedures for In Year Casual Admissions 2010 and the Scheme Admissions for 2011/12 would be consulted on as a whole. Members were firstly invited to comment on the Primary Admissions document.

(2) (a) Reverend N Genders expressed his concern at the tight timescale for In Year Casual Admissions and felt that the first stage referred to in number 12 should be reduced to three school days allowing schools five school days to respond to the Local Authority.

(b) Mr J Stanley felt that the In Year Applications process timescale was too tight to wait for Governors Decisions. In his view the role should be delegated to the Headteacher and Chairman of Governors to speed up the process.

(c) Mr S Bagshaw shared the concerns expressed and had already made these known to the DCSF. He advised the Forum that he was part of a working group looking at this with the DCSF. Referring to Mr J Stanley's views regarding delegating the process he reported that he had sought further guidance on this from the DCSF at the time. The Code stated that a single person could not make the decision, however, the protocol in the Local Authority guidance could suggest Chairman of Governors and Headteacher. Mr S Bagshaw confirmed that the first year of the In Year Admissions process would be very difficult to administrate as all parties familiarise themselves with the new processes. He advised that additional resources would be needed within the Admissions team and that he was in the process of recruiting into these positions.

(d) Mr S Bagshaw drew the Members' attention to the Admissions Arrangements at the back of the Scheme and advised them that the Local Authority was looking at giving siblings priority over ticking the Denominational Preferences box for Church Schools. This was a view supported by Reverend Canon J Smith.

(e) Reverend N Genders referred to the difference in completing a paper form as opposed to an on-line one. The ability to place a tick on-line sometimes seemed to present a difficulty with the different description and drop down box. Mr S Bagshaw agreed to check this as the words used should be consistent.

(f) Mrs J Young felt that on-line applications made it harder for Headteacher's to assist parents when applying. Mr S Bagshaw agreed and advised that many schools had been proactive in resolving this issue by inviting parents to apply using the IT suites within the schools. The LA has promoted this with schools and even offered to send LA admission staff to such evenings to offer advice and support through the process. Mr S Bagshaw advised that a number of schools sought to ask parents for their application

reference number so that they could satisfy themselves that parents had applied. Mr S Bagshaw also advised that the LA provide details to primary schools via S2S of children from their schools who have submitted an application on line.

(3) Members went on to look at the Secondary Admission Document with the following comments:-

- (a) Reverend Canon J Smith felt it was very complicated and more so every year and asked whether the process could be simplified. Mr S Bagshaw shared his concerns but went on to explain that if it were not fully set out in a definitive way, parents could potentially exploit loopholes where any ambiguity might exist. He welcomed Members views on how things might be simplified. He also advised Members that a new version of the Admissions Code was expected in February 2010.
- (b) Mr G Cooke agreed the situation was complex and also welcomed Members suggestions on how the process might be streamlined.
- (c) Mr S Bagshaw also went on to advise Members that for Secondary School applications the National Closing date was 31 October 2010 which would be at the end of half term and there would not have been anyone in the schools to offer advice to parents. He suggested applications be accepted up to 5 November to allow parents time for discussion with the Headteachers, whilst retaining the national Closing date of 31 October.
- (d) Mr J Stanley referred to the In Year Applications and suggested that the timescale be the same as proposed by Reverend N Genders for Primary Schools in paragraph (2)(a) ie give schools five school days to respond to Local Authority.
- (e) Mr F Green felt that the proposals for In Year Applications could work if dealing with a few applications. He advised the Forum that Leigh Academy received a large number of requests for places with several each day. The Academy allocated times a year to deal with these. He also confirmed that the Academy received requests for appeals almost every other week. He suggested that the Forum should take the view that the In Year restrictions were farcical and impossible to implement.
- (f) Both Mr J Stanley and Mrs J Young expressed concern that the proposals did not help parents.
- (g) Mr G Cooke took the view that if the admission of In Year Applications could not be done in a logical way it added to the problems including those of home to school transport. He felt that the Local Authority was lucky to have Officers who were trying to make it work. Mr S Bagshaw agreed that the concerns expressed by the Members of the Forum were shared by his colleagues but the process had already been set in regulation.

- (h) Reverend N Genders agreed to write to the DCSF on behalf of the Forum conveying the concerns expressed by its Members. Mr S Bagshaw and Mr G Rudd agreed to draft this on his behalf. Copies to be distributed to other Members.

5. In Year Fair Access Protocol *(Item 4)*

(1) Mr S Fox, Head of Alternative Curriculum PRUs presented an update on the existing protocol in place.

(2) Mr S Fox advised the Forum that when the legislation changed, Kent as a Local Authority wanted a guidance that guaranteed its requirements were met and that the challenge had been in getting schools to make it work. He went on to advise the Members that Kent's original guidance was no longer compatible with the Appendix set out in the new Code. Mr S Fox explained that he would be seeking the Members views on the proposed guidance at the next meeting of the Forum. He was concerned that performance was slipping and that the existing guidance was not as good as it should be.

(3) Reverend N Genders requested more information about what changes the proposed February Code would bring in. Mr S Bagshaw was not able to give details at the moment only that it was looking to clarify ambiguities. He advised Members that the Head of Attendance and Behaviour Services, Ms S Williams had previously brought a protocol to the Forum which related to local areas meeting local needs in their own way but that there was a need to get consistency across the County and identify those areas where this was working well.

(4) Mr S Bagshaw referred to the Forum's Terms of Reference and confirmed that one of the duties of the Forum was to look at whether arrangements were fair on both pupils and provided equality of access to schools not just whether they are meeting legal requirements.

(5) Mr S Fox commented that budget resources were available to the Fair Access Panels but that they needed to learn how to use them. This was something that would need to be taken into account when revising the guidance.

(6) Mr G Cooke agreed that this needed to come back to the Forum to tie in with the February 2010 Code. Reverend Canon J Smith felt that it would be helpful to be provided with practical examples of how the process had been previously applied and that this should be included in the report to the Forum.

6. Admission of Ghurkha Children during the Summer 2009

Mr J Gunnell wanted to formally record his gratitude to the Admissions Team and Mrs S Downing in particular, for the work done in the placing Ghurkha children into schools at short notice towards the end of August 2009. Mr S Bagshaw thanked Mr J Gunnell and committed to pass on the thanks to Mrs Dowling. Mr S Bagshaw advised that Mrs Dowling had recently been promoted and moved to another section of the Authority but was in the process of recruiting someone to continue with the very important work she undertook.

7. Future Items

Mr G Cooke asked Members to consider what items they would like to see on future agendas and that they be invited to submit these when receiving notification of meeting dates.

8. Future Dates

(1) Mr S Bagshaw advised that the consultation period ended on the 31 January 2010 and that a February meeting would be needed to consider this and also to look at Terms of Reference again.

(2) Mr S Bagshaw confirmed that a meeting within the week beginning 19 April 2010 would also be needed.

(3) Mr S Bagshaw and Mr G Rudd agreed to liaise on dates for those two meetings and Mr G Rudd would circulate them to the Members.