

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

KENT SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS FORUM

MINUTES of a meeting of the Kent Schools Admissions Forum held in the Garden Room, Oakwood House, Maidstone on Monday, 14 June 2010.

PRESENT: The Reverend N Genders (Chairman), Mr G Cooke (Vice-Chairman), Mr K Burleton (Substitute for Mr S Parr), Mr P Dalton, Mr P Luxmoore, Mr A J Stanley and Mrs J Young

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr S Bagshaw (Head of Admissions & Transport) and Mr G Rudd (Assistant Democratic Services Manager)

APOLOGIES: Mrs R Chinnadurai, Mr G Chisnell, Mr F Green, Col J Gunnell, Mrs S V Hohler, Mr P Karnavas, Mr S Parr, Reverend Canon J Smith, Mrs E Watson and Mr J Watt.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

29. Minutes of the meeting held on 22 April 2010

(Item 2)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 April 2010 are correctly recorded subject to the amendment of Item 24 (2) (iii) to read “important” and not “impellant”.

30. Matters Arising

(Item 3)

(1) Mr Burleton referred to item 21 (3) of the Minutes and confirmed that the Diocese was in the process of seeking a replacement for Mr McBride.

(2) Reverend Genders referred to item 26 of the Minutes and advised the Members that they still had the opportunity to comment on the item.

(3) Mr Dalton referred to item 26 (i) of the Minutes and sought clarification on the rationale of allocating Grammar Assessed pupils to an Academy where another grammar school was not nearby. Mr Bagshaw advised that this decision was taken because a number of Academies are now located in selective areas of education and are wide ability schools. Academies are by definition able to be meet the needs of pupils across the entire ability range. In light of parents expressing concerns in previous years about their children being offered schools many miles from their home the LA offered a local wide ability school to grammar assessed pupils who were resident in the selective area of education and unable to secure one of their named preferences or where there was no grammar school within a reasonable travelling distance.

(4) (i) Mr Dalton suggested that some Academies did not have a selective policy and should not be considered as being able to meet wide ability needs. This view was shared by Mr Luxmoore.

(ii) Mr Bagshaw explained that Funding Agreements for Academies and notice when set up was on the basis that they were Wide Ability Schools. In selective areas with 'G' and 'H' Academies were seen as Wide Ability Schools. Mr Bagshaw explained that Hextable is in a Comprehensive Area and where children living in a comprehensive area had been assessed as suitable for grammar school but unable to secure a local grammar place, the LA would offer the nearest school with a vacancy this would have been either the local comprehensive school or Academy depending on which was closer.

(iii) Mr Cooke felt that the issue was more one of distance. The Local Authority had been criticised in the past for sending 'G' assessed pupils across the County to another grammar school. He commented that the Academies were new schools in their own right and that they should be recognised as such rather than the High Schools they replaced, e.g. Skinners Academy and not Tunbridge Wells High School. In response to Mr Dalton's concerns Mr Cooke confirmed that some 'G' assessed pupils who could not be offered a grammar school were offered Wide Ability Schools that were not Academies.

(iv) Mr Bagshaw advised the Forum that the Local Authority was legally obliged to make an offer of a school on National Offer Day but that in practice parents would not be happy with any of the offers they received if they do not relate to one of the named preferences.

Reverend Genders requested that a policy view be ready for next year. Mr Cooke confirmed that there was not a policy in the Cabinet that Academies should be given priority only that a Wide Ability School should be looked for.

31. Constitution of Forum and Terms of Reference

(Item 4)

(1) Reverend Genders advised that he was still continuing to look at obtaining Business Link representation on the Forum.

(2) Mr Rudd confirmed that he would be approaching Mrs Lissimore in the Governor Support Team to seek nominations for parent representation on the Forum.

Mr Rudd also confirmed that Reverend Canon Smith had announced his retirement and that a replacement from the Rochester Diocese would be needed. Reverend Genders agreed to seek a replacement. Mr Rudd confirmed that he would write to Reverend Canon Smith thanking him on the Forum's behalf for his valuable contribution as a Forum Member.

32. Draft Local Authority Report to the Schools Adjudicator

(Item 5)

(1) Mr Bagshaw introduced the draft Local Authority to the School Adjudicator and referred to some of the points being made. He invited the Forum Members' views and comments for inclusion in the report.

(2) (i) Mr Bagshaw referred to Section 1 of the report and the item relating to the Fair Access Protocol. He explained that more consistency was needed and that the

original IYFA was clumsy with a clear need now for a co-ordinated approach. He confirmed that he had raised concerns with the Attendance and Behaviour Service as in his view it is time the process is reviewed with a sharing of best practice to support those areas where it is less successful in delivering the required outcomes promptly.

(ii) Mr Luxmoore advised the Forum that the Thanet Secondary Planning Forum strategy used had worked well but the time span in between the meetings was a difficulty. He added that the issue of Looked After Children had caused problems in Thanet and the Thanet Forum had refused to co-operate with the Local Authority over this. Mr Bagshaw agreed that the timing was a very important issue if the Local Authority was to comply with its Statutory Policy and there was clearly a need to keep an eye on this.

(iii) Mr Luxmoore sought further clarification regarding hard to place pupils who may not be Looked After Children. In response Mr Bagshaw confirmed that if the schools cannot place those pupils through the IYFA protocol the Local Authority can direct a school to take the pupil if it does not have grounds to refuse.

(iv) Mr Luxmoore stated that he wanted to see Looked After Children and Hard To Place pupils dealt with in the same way. Mr Cooke agreed that where possible this should be done through the IYFA Protocol but legally there was a difference between the two categories. As an elected Member of the County Council he had parental responsibility for Looked After Children and there was a different timescale. Any decision relating to Looked After Children was ultimately that of the Corporate Parent, i.e. the Local Authority. Mr Bagshaw raised a concern that the difference in timing and law in relation to children in care, meant that there may be reservations from the LAC Advisors in including LAC in the normal IYFA process. He stated that LAC children are afforded a level of priority from the outset, not when they have been out of a school for 30 days and as a result they should not come to panel other than in exceptional circumstances.

(v) other than in exceptional circumstances as these Mr Stanley felt that the issue was more about children being educated than about placement and that in some areas relationships were at breaking point. He emphasised the importance of sharing good practice. Mr Bagshaw agreed that a framework needed to be in place that could challenge those schools that were failing to co-operate.

(vi) Mr Dalton concluded that when the schools who are the key players withdraw from the process the Local Authority should get involved but in most cases these issues are normally best solved between the headteachers themselves.

(3) Mr Bagshaw apologised for an error in the Infant Class Sizes reported figure and confirmed that this would be re-run.

(4) (i) Mr Bagshaw referred to the section on Admission Appeals and noted the issues raised by Mr Karnavas in his email to the Forum in respect of this. The concerns raised at the last KSAF meeting together with feedback from the Presenting Officers had also been noted. Mr Bagshaw advised the Forum that Panel Members were trained each year and everything possible was being done to address the issues raised. Mr Burleton confirmed that the Catholic Dioceses Members were being regularly trained.

(ii) Mr Bagshaw drew attention to parents deliberately misleading the Panels and suggested that this should be considered in future Code revisions.

(iii) Reverend Genders referred to Mr Karnarvas' comments and also to the concerns raised on page 7 about schools weak defences.

(iv) Mr Luxmoore expressed his concerns that some grammar schools were being given pupils who did not meet the requirements. Mr Cooke concurred with this point and added that often there was not the evidence to support such a decision. Mr Luxmoore felt that Panels should be made aware that High Schools were quite capable of delivering the education required. Mrs Young agreed that this should be looked at in training.

(v) The Forum concluded that Mr Bagshaw had captured the views expressed and that the report appropriately reflected these.

(5) (i) Mr Bagshaw referred to the section relating to Children in care and acknowledged his awareness of the difficult situation in Thanet.

(ii) Mr Cooke agreed that there were difficulties arising with other Local Authorities placing children in Kent. He advised the Forum that discussions were taking place with those Local Authorities with a view that children should not be placed more than 25 miles from their home. He confirmed that he did not expect to see Thanet receiving as many children in the future. Mr Cooke also advised that Kent would be helping the London Boroughs to develop strategies and give assistance to place the children within their own boundaries where possible. He reported that at the moment some London Boroughs were placing up to 25% of their children outside the boundaries as a matter of policy not as an emergency measure. Mr Cooke also advised that Kent itself was now trying to spread those in care around the County. He added that of those children in care in Kent schools only half of them were Kent children.

(iii) Mr Bagshaw informed the Forum that the Corporate Parent, which might be one of the London Boroughs, could direct a Kent School to take a child. The school could refer this to the adjudicator within seven days and the adjudicator would confirm the direction if he felt that it was appropriate. Mr Bagshaw added that Kent was also a Corporate Parent that sometimes placed its children outside of the County as well.

(6) (i) Mr Bagshaw commented on the section relating to Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and referred to a situation where an Academy had refused to take a child with SEN. The Secretary of State referred this to SENDIST with the issue having dragged on for several months. Mr Bagshaw felt that there should be consistency in timescales.

(ii) Mr Cooke made it very clear that there was no intention on the part of the Local Authority to close SEN units and that there would be a return to the system as in 2003.

(7) Mr Bagshaw commented on Kent's arrangements in dealing with the significant number of service children moving in and out of Kent and had noted the comments in the email by Mr Watt tabled in his absence.

(8) (i) Mr Bagshaw felt that the effectiveness of the co-ordination process in Kent had worked quite well and that there was no real problem. He reported that the only real issue that had arisen related to unforeseen pressures in some areas which had left the Local Authority with no alternative but to seek agreement with some schools to temporarily offer over the Published Admissions Number. Kings Hill Primary School in West Malling was an example of this where it had classrooms not in use and could offer places to pupils.

(ii) Reverend Genders referred to the Kent Test issues. Mr Bagshaw explained the error in timing in one of the tests and how this was dealt with. Mr Bagshaw went on to explain the LA's concerns relating to some grammar schools selecting their intake on score which goes against the principle of local children getting local schools. He confirmed that this had been raised by a number of parents and that he understood it to be the LA's intention to challenge schools through the adjudicators office where there appeared to be significant numbers of pupils from outside of local area displacing local grammar assessed pupils.

(iii) The Forum formally endorsed the action to be taken by the Local Authority in this matter and asked that the LA report reflect the Forum's support.

(9) Mr Bagshaw referred to Section 3 of the report and confirmed that the Local Authority had written to 176 schools requesting that they amend their admissions arrangements. He reported that 28 schools had responded with amended procedures taking on board the Local Authority's comments.

(10) (i) Under Section 4 discussion took place on the Forum Membership. Mr Luxmoore requested clarification about his membership as he was the Head of both a Foundation Grammar School and Secondary High School. Mr Bagshaw confirmed that Mr Luxmoore was there to represent the Foundation Grammar School.

(ii) Mr Luxmoore also queried the number of Diocesan representatives. He was advised by Reverend Genders that the Diocesan authorities were statutory partners with the LA and therefore each diocese needed to be represented (i.e. Canterbury, Rochester and Southwark).

(iii) With regard to the item on the proportion of children currently on free school meals Mr Bagshaw advised the Members that he was running some more checks on this data as there were doubts about its accuracy. Mr Stanley commented that the criteria had changed over the last couple of years and so the figures might be correct.

(11) (i) With regard to 4.9 d) (iii) of the report which related to other matters affecting the fairness of admission arrangements for schools in the area Mr Cooke felt that the Local Authority may have to review how it looks at Admissions in the light of those schools choosing to select on score.

(ii) Mr Bagshaw referred to the issue of the tick box and whether it should be retained in future. For 2011 some of the concerns affecting siblings not getting a place because parents did not tick the box will be removed with siblings being placed

higher in the criteria. Reverend Genders felt that he would like to see some figures on this before giving a view.

(12) (i) Mrs Young reported on the role of the Choice Advisor referred to in Section 5 of the report.

(ii) Mr Bagshaw confirmed how well this had developed in Kent and agreed to produce a report for the next meeting of the Forum regarding this.

(13) Mr Bagshaw confirmed that the Local Authority complied with the requirement that information regarding school transport be made available.

(14) (i) Mr Bagshaw referred to the issue surrounding schools uniforms and advised that whilst schools are aware of these requirements the Local Authority did not have the resources to monitor this.

(ii) Mr Cooke felt that for the most part schools handle this well but that perhaps Members could look at this through their school visits.

(15) (i) Mr Bagshaw confirmed that the final version of the report would be sent to the Forum Members.

(ii) The Forum endorsed the report and gave its formal agreement to the Local Authority issuing a challenge to other Admissions Authorities admission arrangements through the Schools Adjudicator.

33. Co-ordinated In Year Admissions

(1) Mr Bagshaw advised the Members that he would be doing presentations for this to headteachers in a similar manner to the Secondary transfer process. In his view Co-ordinated In Year Admissions will be a time consuming exercise. He had little confidence that it would benefit parents. There were likely to be approximately 15,000 in year admissions which would bring issues relating to staff resources and office accommodation. There had been several meetings held to try to resolve the complexities. Mr Bagshaw confirmed that a framework had been put in place however the question was would it be able to meet the time limits. He advised that two sets of forms had been devised relating to where there were more than five vacancies in the year group or where the school was full in that year group. He advised that parents would be able to complete the form at the school and that the Local Authority can then get offers out. However, if the school is full more extensive information would be required.

(2) Mr Dalton said there were concerns as at the moment headteachers try to work together to prevent unnecessary movement between schools. Mr Bagshaw reported that schools would need to sign the form as well and that the Local Authority was trying to put together a fast track process.

(3) Mrs Young voiced her concern at the process and fully expected it to generate more appeals.

34. Dates of Future Meetings

(Item 7)

- (1) It was agreed to look for an October 2010 meeting.
- (2) Mr Rudd agreed to liaise with Mr Bagshaw and Reverend Genders regarding a date.