

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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, 22 April 2010.

PRESENT: The Reverend N Genders (Chairman), Mr G Chisnell, Mr P Dalton, Mr F Green, Col Jo Gunnell, Mrs S V Hohler, Mr P Luxmoore, Mrs R Matthews (Substitute for Mr S Parr), 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: Mr G Cooke, Mrs R Chinnadurai, Mr P Karnavas, Mr D McBride, Mr S Parr, Reverend Canon J Smith, Mr J Watt

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

19. Minutes of Meeting held on 12 February 2010

(Item 2)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2010 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

20. Matters Arising

(Item 3)

(1) Reverend Genders referred to paragraph 10 (1) of the Minutes and confirmed that he had now received a response from the Secretary of State which had been circulated to the Forum Members.

(2) Mr Bagshaw referred to paragraph 13 (4) (i) and circulated a copy of the online application to indicate the tick box. He explained that by clicking the '?' option the user was taken to a link which explained the significance of the tick box.

21. Constitution of Forum and Terms of Reference

(Item 4)

(1) Business Link representatives on the Forum – Reverend Genders confirmed that he was continuing to pursue this.

(2) Mr Rudd agreed to continue to liaise with Mr Bagshaw and Mr Duncan from CFE Policy Unit on parent representatives.

(3) Mr Rudd advised the Forum that Mr McBride was standing down as the Voluntary Aided Primary Catholic School representative due to relocating to a Medway Authority post. Mrs Matthews agreed to refer this to Mr Parr.

22. Feedback on Local Authority Duty to check Admission Arrangements

(Item 5)

(1) Mr Bagshaw advised the Forum that this was the first year of the Local Authority having a duty to check Admission Arrangements. He explained that he was looking for consistency. Letters had been sent to schools regarding the definitions. Mr Bagshaw reported that he had commissioned Legal Services to look at the Admissions Arrangements. He advised that 48 of the schools had decided to consult on their Admission Arrangements within the specified date of 1 March and he added that there were 100 schools who should have done this. Mr Bagshaw felt that the Legal Services letter might need to be toned down in the future and apologised that they had not been sent to the Dioceses as they should have been. He confirmed that he had subsequently met the Diocese representatives. The Legal Services agreed that there would need to be some amendments to the letter and that further letters would go out in May with copies going to the Dioceses. Mr Bagshaw pointed out that the letters had been sent with the best intentions to offer schools free legal advice.

(2) Mr Chisnell asked whether there had been a reduction in the number of schools Admission Arrangements being sent to the Schools Adjudicator. Mr Bagshaw confirmed that as much as possible he tried to avoid this course of action preferring to work with schools to achieve this and that so far he had managed to avoid the formal route of the Adjudicator. He added that the Dioceses were already involved in any discussions taking place.

23. Judicial Review

(Item 6)

(1) This item had been previously proposed by Mr McBride and was briefly discussed in his absence.

(2) Mrs Matthews felt that Mr McBride's main concern had been that the school had to pay its own legal costs whereas the complainant received legal aid.

(3) Reverend Genders agreed that unfortunately this was the case in most of these types of action. Mr Green felt that it highlighted the fact that schools should check their legal cover insurance.

24. Report on In Scheme Appeals Statistics

(Item 7)

(1) Following a request at the last meeting of the Forum Mr Rudd circulated statistics relating to LEA Primary and Secondary Schools Appeals together with those of Foundation and Aided Schools that the Legal and Democratic Services Appeals Team act for. Reverend Genders invited the views of the Forum Members.

(2) (i) Mr Luxmoore felt that the appeals system was flawed and that the statistics showed a high proportion of grammar school appeals being upheld compared to non-grammar. He felt that there was an implication that the appeals process was not balanced and that the Panel should hear the views of Headteachers other than those for the representatives of the school presenting the case. Mr Chisnell did not agree and felt that it was the parents case and not for other schools to enter the process. Mrs Young responded that the Panel is hearing a case for a school that the parents want. Any changes as suggested by Mr Luxmoore would require the Code to be re-written. She added that some schools, and not only grammar schools, did not make as robust a case as they could do. Mr Bagshaw reiterated this point.

(ii) Mr Dalton shared Mr Luxmoore's view and expressed concern that some schools might be taking a whole form of entry on appeal and quoted Tunbridge Wells Boys Grammar School trend. Mr Bagshaw advised the Forum that there were pressures on places in some areas but that it was not only grammar schools taking extra pupils. He referred to Valley Park filling up on successful appeals.

(iii) Mr Stanley also felt the figures reflected a flawed appeals system. Mrs Young advised the Forum that it was impellent to remember that the Panel members are governed by the Statutory Appeals Code and could not deviate from it even if they wanted to.

(iv) Mrs Matthews felt that it would be useful to know the PAN of the schools and how many were over their PAN and by how much. She also asked if it would be possible to know how these figures were affected by the appeals process. Mr Bagshaw confirmed that it would be possible to present this information but that it would have to wait until after the September Census had taken place.

(v) Reverend Genders sought the view of the Forum Members regarding Forum making written representation to the Secretary of State. The consensus was that this should be left until the next opportunity for consultation as any revisions to the Code becomes available.

25. Primary Year R Admissions - September 2010

(1) Mr Bagshaw circulated statistics on the Primary Schools admissions process as at 22 March 2010. He advised the Forum that although there would have been some movement since the information had been put together it was clear that there was a pressure on places in the Tunbridge Wells area but overall he was expecting roles to fall. He invited Members comments.

(2) Mr Chisnell asked whether capacities issues had been fed into the Local Authority's strategies. Mr Bagshaw advised that there would be liaison on those issues between himself, the Area Education Officers and the Headteachers within those areas.

26. Secondary Year 7 Admissions - September 2010

(1) Mr Bagshaw circulated statistics on the Secondary Schools admissions process as at 1 March 2010. He advised the Forum that there was a slight drop in the cohort and in applications received from outside the County. He also advised that there had been a slight increase in those getting the preference that they wanted. Mr Bagshaw reported that with regard to West Kent in particular as much as was reasonably possible he had tried to allocate Grammar Assessed pupils to a grammar school. However where this could not be done pupils were allocated an Academy rather than send them to grammar schools across the County. He reported that girls places in West Kent was a larger problem than boys this year. He invited Members comments.

(2) Reverend Genders noted that although the Members of the Forum had not raised any questions on this item they could always be added to future agendas if issues arise.

(3) Mr Rudd agreed to send the statistics to those Members who had not been able to attend the meeting.

27. DCSF Statement on the Children, Schools and Families Bill

(1) Mr Bagshaw circulated for information a statement issued by DCSF in relation to the Children, Schools and Families Bill.

(2) Mr Bagshaw highlighted two items which had been taken out of the Bill because no agreement could be reached between Government and opposition policies. They related to:

(i) Parental satisfaction surveys – the feedback received to Kent’s survey was that parents were very pleased with the range of variety of schools on offer but were not happy that they could not all get into the school they wanted; and

(ii) Registration and monitoring of home education – this related to an independent report carried out by Graham Badman.

28. Dates of Future Meetings

(Item 9)

(1) Mr Bagshaw referred to the Local Authority report to the Schools Adjudicator and felt that Members of the Forum should see it before it goes to enable them to add their own comments. Reverend Genders agreed that when Mr Bagshaw was ready to timetable his draft report a meeting could be arranged.

(2) Mr Luxmoore referred to the In Year Fair Access issue and felt that this should be a future agenda item. Mr Bagshaw agreed that he could look at what is used in different areas and how they are dealing with this. Mr Rudd confirmed that he would continue to liaise with Mr Berry and Mr Fox from CFE about this item.