

KENT SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS FORUM

MINUTES of a meeting of the Kent Schools Admissions Forum held in the Garden Room, Oakwood House, Maidstone on Wednesday 20 October 2010.

PRESENT: The Reverend N Genders (Chairman), Mr G Cooke (Vice-Chairman), Mr K Burleton (Substitute for Mr S Parr), Mr G Chisnell, Mr P Dalton, Col J Gunnell, Mrs S V Hohler, Mrs T Luke (substitute for Mr F Green), Mrs E Watson 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 F Green, Mr P Karnavas, Mr S Parr, Mr J Stanley, and Mr J Watt.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

35. Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2010 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

36. Matters Arising

(1) Mrs Hohler referred to Item 4 and requested that the role of the Independent Appeal Panels be put on the agenda for the next meeting of the Forum.

(2) (i) Mrs Hohler referred to Item 7 (ii) and reported that following the Local Authority's challenge of the Super Selective grammar schools through the adjudicators office a public meeting was held in Tunbridge Wells. Mrs Hohler went on to advise the Members that the adjudicator had now given his ruling that these schools could continue with the policy.

(ii) Mr Bagshaw added that this practice was now being adopted by some of the other grammar schools, e.g. Dartford Boys Grammar School, which added to the difficulties of planning places.

(iii) Mrs Hohler reported that some parents supported the Super Selective principles where they would not qualify on location grounds.

(iv) Reverend Genders referred to a letter received from the East Sussex County Council Admissions Forum complaining that it had not been consulted on the challenge to the Adjudicator. Mr Bagshaw informed the Forum that East Sussex parents had contacted the East Sussex County Council. He confirmed that there had been a public consultation which included East Sussex County Council. He further advised that there was no duty on the part of the Local Authority or Forum to advise that objections had been received. This was the responsibility of the Adjudicators Office and that this was made clear to the East Sussex County Council officers.

(v) It was agreed that Mr Bagshaw and Reverend Genders would draft a response to East Sussex County Council Admissions Forum.

(3) (i) Mr Bagshaw referred to Item 33 and gave the Forum an update on the Co-ordinated In Year Admissions process. He advised the Members that three full time staff and ten temporary staff were engaged in the process. He explained that one of the problems experienced had been that the volume of applications initially received had been more than anticipated. He added that it had taken over a week to get them put on the system and that in the first month there had been approximately 600 applications to deal with. He confirmed that to date over 2000 applications had been received. Mr Bagshaw reported that some schools had not returned the waiting list information requested prior to the holidays and that this had added to the difficulty faced by his staff. Mr Bagshaw also explained that the additional heavy workload had affected other deadlines. He advised the Forum that there had been concerns about getting the scheme published in time. He summarised the situation by confirming that his staff had been under intense pressure and parents had been waiting a very long time to have their situation resolved. Mr Bagshaw explained that the Admissions team had been trying to find a way through the bureaucratic procedures but that for a Local Authority of Kent's size the process was not a practical one.

(ii) Reverend Genders understood that the Secretary of State had been written to about the impracticalities of the process for Kent. He formally recorded the Forum's thanks to the Admissions staff for all their efforts in trying to make this work.

(iii) Mrs Hohler endorsed her thanks to Mr Bagshaw and his staff. She had been aware of the large volume of the applications and understood that sometimes this had been as many as 100 in one day. Mrs Hohler confirmed that she had written to the Secretary of State but that his response was still awaited.

(iv) Mr Rudd advised that one of the side effects of the increase in the admissions applications is the likelihood of the increase in appeals. Mr Bagshaw added that his own staff would also be engaged in these when they would normally be doing other things necessary within the Admissions and Transport teams.

(v) Reverend Genders enquired as to how Kent compared with other Local Authorities. Mr Bagshaw advised the Forum that there was a legal duty on schools to inform the Local Authority of applications received and whether a place could be offered. He confirmed that this could be dealt with by a small team and that this would satisfy the Secretary of State's safeguarding issues which had led to the introduction of the In Year Admission process. Mr Bagshaw suggested that some of the smaller Local Authorities had found that the process worked for them and that they liked having the control over schools that it gave them. His concern was that his objections to the Secretary of State were not getting the sort of support from other Local Authorities that he would have liked.

(vi) Mr Dalton asked whether more children were getting into schools because of this safeguarding process. Mr Bagshaw felt that the opposite was the case. The delays caused by the process had kept children out of schools.

(vii) The Forum agreed that Mr Bagshaw and Reverend Genders would put together a letter to the Secretary of State from the Forum outlining its concerns about the affects of the In Year Admissions process in Kent.

37. Constitution of Forum and Terms of Reference

(1) (i) Mr Rudd reported that Mr Luxmoore had resigned as the Foundation Grammar School representative. He advised the Members that he had been contacted by Mrs Wybar on behalf of the Kent and Medway Grammar School Association with regard to the Association seeking a replacement Member on the Forum. He reported that Mrs Wybar had also raised the issue of Grammar schools obtaining Academy status and raised the issue of how this would affect representation on the Forum.

(ii) Mrs Luke commented that the original Academies were now old style and that it was from these that Mr Green had been elected as a representative.

(iii) Mr Rudd advised the Members that the current Constitution of the Forum was within the criteria set out in the Admissions Code and agreed by the County Council's Selection and Member Services Committee.

(iv) It was agreed that Mr Bagshaw and Mr Rudd would liaise with the Academies and Grammar School Association to clarify representation.

(2) Mr Rudd reported that he was still liaising with the Governor Support Team regarding Parent representation on the Forum.

(3) Mr Burleton confirmed that the Diocese was still in the process of seeking a replacement for Mr McBride as the Voluntary Aided Primary Catholic School representative.

(4) Reverend Genders also confirmed that he was still seeking a replacement from Rochester Diocese for Reverend Canon Smith.

38. Proposed Scheme of Admissions 2012

(1) Mr Bagshaw circulated documents relating to the proposed Scheme for Primary and Secondary Admissions in 2012/13. He advised the Forum that normally he would have been able to do this a month ago but the IYCA had caused this process to be delayed. Mr Bagshaw also stated that there was a view that parents should not be invited to submit an appeal if they have been offered a grammar school. He confirmed that with an equal preference scheme parents should be advised to always name their genuine first preference.

(2) Mr Bagshaw confirmed that if there were any changes to the documents he would inform the Forum accordingly.

(3) Reverend Genders commented that the consultation would need to start early November 2010 and needed to be agreed by all schools by 15 April 2011. He advised the Members that if this was not achieved the Secretary of State would be required to impose a scheme on Kent and therefore it was in the schools best interests to come to a voluntary agreement.

39. Consultation on Admissions Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools

(1) (i) Mr Bagshaw circulated documents referring to the consultation on the Admissions Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools in Kent. He advised the Forum that he was seeking to make major changes. He referred to the concerns relating to the Ashford Secondary Schools and informed Members that he was considering the options for dealing with these. Mr Bagshaw confirmed that he would advise the Members of the Forum if changes were made.

(ii) Mr Bagshaw welcomed comments from the Members. Mr Rudd agreed that he would redistribute the final drafts of the consultation documents once received from Mr Bagshaw. Mr Bagshaw advised that his deadline was 12 November 2010 so he would need responses back by then.

(iii) Mr Bagshaw referred to the Primary Schools document and gave a summary of three changes. These related to the removal of the tick box; the inclusion of a link between specifically identified Infant and Junior schools; and some changes to PAN in some specifically identified schools.

(iv) Reverend Genders confirmed that the Canterbury Board of Education understood the need for the removal of the tick box and that he would liaise with the Rochester Board of Education regarding this.

40. Coordination of Test Dates with Medway

(1) (i) Mr Burleton advised the Forum that Mr Parr who sits on both Forums had agreed on behalf of the Medway Forum to bring up at the Kent Forum, Medway's wish for grammar testing dates to be coordinated between the two authorities as the current separate systems did not best serve the parents or the children.

(ii) Mr Bagshaw reported that he had discussed this matter with Medway on previous occasions and was pleased to note that they were keen to have these again. He advised that the dates can only be coordinated if the same tests are used. Consensus has proven difficult in the past because the assessment processes are different for the two Las but he felt that there was certainly scope to align these.

(iii) The Forum noted Medway's position and noted that Mr Bagshaw would continue to also liaise with them.

41. Role of the Choice Advisor

(1) Mr Bagshaw circulated a report in respect of Choice Advice delivery in Kent. Both he and Mrs Young spoke about the role of the Choice Advisor in Kent.

(2) They confirmed that they were now training the Family Liaison Officers and Parent Support Advisors to become the point of contact for parents. Mrs Young confirmed that the current Choice Advisors would continue to provide a 'back office support'.

(3) Mrs Young took the opportunity to circulate to Members Appeal statistics released by the DfE.

42. Date of next meeting

(1) Reverend Genders, Mr Bagshaw and Mr Rudd to liaise regarding the next two meetings.

43. Any Other Business

(1) (i) Mr Bagshaw circulated and spoke on the information relating to the Kent Test Overview which had become available on Monday 18 October 2010.

(ii) Mrs Hohler clarified the position on the balance between East and West Kent numbers. Mr Bagshaw agreed that more children got through at the Headteacher Appeal stage in East Kent than West Kent this year.

(iii) Mrs Hohler also referred to the overall position regarding results in East and West Kent. Mr Bagshaw advised that although he did not have the exact information it was believed that Tonbridge/Tunbridge Wells rate had dropped from 39% to 34% and the East Kent Area figure had crept up.