

To Kent Admission Forum  
From: Scott Bagshaw  
Subject: A report on Choice Advice delivery in Kent

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## **Background**

1. School admission arrangements can appear complex, (particularly in Kent), and children must not be disadvantaged because their parents have difficulty in accessing the admission process. Section 86(1A) of the SSFA places a duty on local authorities to provide advice and assistance to parents when they are deciding which schools to apply for. However, some of the parents most in need of support may be reluctant or unable to access help from traditional sources. Such parents require more intensive support from professionals who act independently from the local authority.
2. Choice Advice enables those parents who find it hardest to navigate the secondary admissions system to make informed and realistic decisions about which schools to apply for in the best interests of their child. Local authorities have the flexibility in deciding how best to deliver their Choice Advice service but they must provide an independent service that is focused on supporting the families who most need support. Local authorities may also provide choice advice at the primary school admission stage.
3. The Choice Advice service was funded through Standards Fund Grant initially and through Area Based Grant subsequently. Kent is one of very few local authorities who have provided a Choice Advice service from its inception in September 2006

## **How has Kent developed the service**

1. Kent has three Choice Advisers who work at key points in the transfer process; they are retired local authority officers with experience in admissions. They man a telephone help-line during the September to October 'choosing period' and following the offer of places on 1 March. They also attend drop-in sessions and meetings at primary schools and gave advice via e-mail.
2. In December 2007 the local authority sought the views of all schools on how best to develop the service. The returns to the questionnaire suggested that the key point of contact should be through schools working with individual families already known to Family Liaison Officers (FLO's) and Parent Support Advisors (PSA's). Kent has approximately 250 FLO's and PSA's who already work with families on a day-to-day basis and are a point of contact that is known and trusted by parents.

3. To ensure FLO's and PSA's are able to give informed advice to parents Choice Advisers hold regular training sessions together with induction training for new staff and attend FLO/PSA network meetings and the annual conference. They also provide back office support to ensure all FLOs and PSAs have an experienced point of contact at all times during the transfer process.

4. The Choice Advice service has also developed literature to publicise the service that is sent to all primary schools together with a step by step guide to applying for a secondary school place. This easy to read guide was developed for FLO's and PSA's to use when speaking to parents about making realistic choices for their child's secondary school.

5. Choice Advisers keep in contact with colleagues in other local authorities attending regional choice advice meetings and by attending national conferences that are held twice a year. The work of the service is reported to the DfE who require that all contacts made are recorded on a national database.

### **Parental Contact**

The use of the service by parents has grown since its start in 2006 and the involvement of FLO's and PSA's has shown a dramatic increase in the number of parental contacts.

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Secondary transfer parent contacts</b>
2006/2007	723
2007/2008	929
2008/2009	2658
2009/10	3342

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