

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

KENT SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS FORUM

MINUTES of a meeting of the Kent Schools Admissions Forum held at Sessions House, County Hall on Thursday, 8 March 2007.

PRESENT: Ms C Barham, Mrs F Cottham, Ms S Dennis, Mr F Green, Mr S Parr, Mr L Ridings, Mr A Stanton, Mrs P Stockell, Mr R Tolputt, Mr R Truelove, Mr M Vye, Mr J Watt and Mr G Wetherell

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr S Bagshaw, Dr I Craig, Mr G Rudd, Clerk to the Forum, Mr B Rose for item 4.

APOLOGIES: Mr M Carroll, Mr J Gunnell, Rev Canon J Smith.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2006 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

2. Matters Arising

There are no matters arising from the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2007.

3. Members of the Forum

(Item 4)

(1) Mr S Parr advised the Forum that the Diocese of Southwark would be seeking to nominate 3 representatives on to the Forum.

(2) Mr M Vye welcomed Mrs F Cottham, Headteacher of Wilmington Grammar School for Boys as replacement member for Mrs N Chapman, Headteacher of Gravesend Grammar School for Girls.

(3) Mr M Vye also welcomed Ms C Barham, representative of the Early Years Childcare and Extended Schools Board.

(4) Mr M Vye advised the Forum that Mr I Baukham, Headteacher of Bennett Memorial School had resigned from the Forum and that a replacement member would be sought.

4. In Year Fair Access Protocols (Hard to Place Pupils)

(Item 7)

(1) Mr B Rose circulated a copy of the Draft Guidance which went to Clusters for formal consultation in respect of In-Year Fair Access Protocols.

(2) Mr B Rose addressed the Forum and advised the Members that the School's Admissions Code which came into force on 28 February 2007 stated that admission authorities and forums must have in place by September 2007 Fair Access Protocols. The document circulated explained the model adopted by Kent.

(3) Mr B Rose sought the early thoughts of the Forum which would be included in his report back to the Management Team. He emphasised that the Protocol had to be in place by September 2007.

(4) The points that arose from Members' comments are recorded as follows:-

- (a) In response to a question from Mr R Truelove, Mr B Rose confirmed that the most challenged schools are likely to take the least children with challenging behaviour as they will already have their share.
- (b) Ms S Dennis enquired about the Managed Move situation which had already stated in Maidstone. Mr B Rose agreed that this was a difficult aspect but that it would need to run in parallel with the Protocol being proposed. In his view, the Managed Move procedure was for children already in education but struggling in that particular school. He agreed though that it would be necessary to work with the Managed Move arrangements as he was keen that this was not disrupted by the Fair Access Protocols.
- (c) Mr G Wetherell queried on what grounds a school could refuse to offer places to children if places were available. In his view, if this was resolved there would be fewer children in the Fair Access Protocol position. Mr B Rose advised that the Admission Code was very clear about what schools could or could not do when spaces were available and that on most occasions they could not refuse to offer a space. Dr I Craig confirmed that school must admit up to their Published Admissions Number unless there were exceptional circumstances to prevent this. The Fair Access Protocol may even require a school to take over its Published Admissions Number. Mr M Vye advised that these were as set out on pages 80/81 of the Code. Mr B Rose referred to the situation where a child had been excluded twice and advised the Forum that different arrangements would need to be made in those circumstances.
- (d) Dr Craig reported that the number of children dealt with under the Fair Access Protocol should be very small and that a secondary school should be able to take a further five pupils per year and a primary school one pupil per year without being overwhelmed.
- (e) Mr R Tolputt asked whether there were any arrangements to deal with any Academies which were unco-operative. Mr B Rose explained that the Code was very helpful here. If an Academy refused to take a child after being directed by the Local Authority to do so the Local Authority had the right of appeal to the Secretary of State (this was referred to in paragraph 3.18 of Protocol circulated to Members). Dr I Craig also reported that this would apply even if the Local Authority was the sponsor of the Academy.
- (f) Mr J Watt referred to the importance of Clusters and groups talking to one another.
- (g) Mr S Parr referred to 3.16 of the Protocol and asked whether there were any figures available as to what constituted a reasonable number. Mr B Rose acknowledged that this would be an important part of the Forum's monitoring role. Once the Protocols were in place, it would be agreed with the Forum on what data is required and how it should be received to best carry out the monitoring process.
- (h) Mrs S Dennis referred to the issue of funding and asked whether it went with the child even if the child was permanently excluded. Mr B Rose explained that

the Local Authority had decided that it would devolve funding to groups of schools/clusters and issue guidance with regard to how funding was used with an excluded child. At the moment the school sent the funding to the Attendance Behaviour Service Team and this was redistributed to the school receiving the excluded child.

- (i) Mr G Wetherell referred to home to school transport if the child met the criteria for having transport costs paid. Mr B Rose explained that he would be putting a report to the Cabinet Members about transport issues. However, he advised the Forum that analysis so far had shown that transport had been cost neutral. With managed moves children had tended to move to schools which were closer to home. He did not anticipate that the transport costs would be a significant burden. Dr I Craig agreed that this would need to be costed. However, where the Local Authority had chosen the school, it would be the nearest appropriate school.
- (j) Mr M Vye welcomed the Code and recognised the importance of balancing the needs of the child and that of the school.
- (k) Mr B Rose thanked the Forum Members for their views and confirmed that he would keep the Members updated.

5. Terms of Reference – New Code Requirements

(Item 5)

- (1) Mr S Bagshaw reported that he had contacted 30 other local authorities regarding the requirements of the new Code and the role of the Forum. He advised the Members that he had received 6 responses, all of which confirmed that they had not done anything about the new requirements.
- (2) Mr M Vye referred to the last meeting in which Mr S Bagshaw was asked to produce a clear statement of powers/regulations that the Forum could act upon by the Autumn. Mr S Bagshaw had agreed to produce progress reports.
- (3) Mr S Bagshaw agreed that he would liaise with Mr G Rudd as to how these should be processed.

6. Schools Admissions Code – Update

(Item 6)

- (1) A copy of the School Admissions Code was circulated to all Members of the Forum.
- (2) Dr I Craig referred to page 15 of the Code and its reference to Choice Advisors. He confirmed that Kent was piloting the process for the DfES and other local authorities and could have used someone like Partnership with Parents but had chosen to use three recently retired experienced staff members, ie. Jenny Young, Paul Hardwick and Hilary Foulds. Their services had been bought in for a three week period. Mr S Bagshaw confirmed that he would give feedback on the Choice Advisory process.
- (3) Mrs F Cottham referred to the complications arising from the London Boroughs of Bexley and Bromley being the local authorities responsible for sending out letters offering Kent schools to their residents. Dr I Craig confirmed that Kent has to coordinate its processes with PAN London.

7. Co-ordinated Scheme Arrangements and Feedback on this year's process
(Item 8)

(1) Mr S Bagshaw circulated a document which provided an overview of the feedback received following consultation on the scheme of education proposed for Kent in 2008/09.

(2) The following items were discussed:-

- (a) Online admissions. There was some concern around being able to access results on the 1 March whereas those receiving posted confirmation would not get them until 2 March. Mr S Bagshaw confirmed that the local authority was obliged to continue with online admissions and would review the process. Mr G Wetherall expressed an interest in how many online admissions there had been. Dr I Craig referred to the online admission process this year and reported that the system could handle fifty per second. Dr I Craig estimated that 17% of the applications had been online, which was three times more than the Government target. Despite reports to the contrary, the system did not crash although some people took longer to get on. It had 'overheated' because there were more than 50 applications per second. The difficulty had arisen because the local radio had suggested that everyone could get results online, even if they hadn't applied online.
- (b) Dr I Craig reported that there had been a situation this year where a school had ranked the pupils incorrectly. The local authority had to change some of the offer letters but the primary school had already given the parents the wrong information. Mrs S Dennis thought that maybe the headteachers needed to be better informed. Dr I Craig advised the Forum that the Admissions Team had arranged workshops and briefing sessions for headteachers. Mrs S Bagshaw agreed that it had been a learning process for everyone this year.
- (c) Dr I Craig referred to the Dover testing arrangements. Dover Grammar School for Boys and Folkestone School for Girls testing arrangements were challenged by Kent two years ago. The Adjudicator confirmed that he wanted regulated testing arrangements for Kent. If the consultation document was agreed by County Council Members and published and Dover Boys do not comply, Kent would have to go through the adjudicator again and the Forum's support for this would be required. The Forum members confirmed their agreement to this course of action being undertaken if it became necessary. The expectation would be that the adjudicator would note the anomaly and bring Dover Boys Grammar in line. Dr I Craig also reported that the six north west Kent grammar schools had come in to the Kent system using the PESE Kent Test.

8. Any Other Business
(Item 9)

- (1) (a) Dr I Craig informed the Forum that the PESE Advisory Group met each year to review the process for secondary transfer. Following the new Admission Code, a PESE Review Group had been set up. This would involve three meetings with representations of secondary headteachers. The group has met once and looked at the system and Code of Practice. A second meeting was due to be held soon. There were thirty people on the group in total.
- (b) Dr I Craig reported that one of the items looked at was testing before preferences. Mr S Bagshaw had been asked to investigate this. He reported that 16,000 pupils would be involved and testing would need to be done in the

first week of September in Year 6 or July Year 5. Kent was required to work with PAN London's co-ordinated admission arrangements and had to adhere to the same timetable. Dr I Craig advised that Kent is looking at ways to reduce the timescale to see if it was possible to deliver testing before preferences. Continuous assessment was also being looked at as a possibility. He reported that Lincolnshire was looking to use SATs and Mr S Bagshaw was investigating this, although it was doubtful whether they could be used as they were not secure and were too late in the process. There was a possibility that they could be used in the appeals process though.

- (c) Dr I Craig reported that Medway had unilaterally decided to test before preference and change the timescale. Kent challenged this and had taken it up with their Admission Team. In response they had amended the timescale again to go some way to meeting the co-ordination arrangements. Dr I Craig advised the Forum that Kent was trying to work with Medway on this issue.
- (2) Mr M Vye referred to his request at the last meeting to set up a sub-committee to look at the issue of those living in the rural areas being disadvantaged in the Admissions process. He decided that this was a matter that the Forum would be better equipped to deal with as part of its monitoring role.
- (3) Mr L Ridings paid tribute to the Admissions Team for the way in which they had dealt with the difficult Admission arrangements. Dr I Craig advised the Forum that the performance had been achieved with a team that was two thirds the size that it had been last year. He added his gratitude for their efforts.
- (4) Mr G Wetherell referred to the need for Governor representation on the Forum. Mr M Vye agreed that these vacant slots should be filled and would liaise with Mr G Rudd and Mr S Bagshaw to achieve this.

9. Dates of Future Meetings

- (1) Dr I Craig asked the Forum Members how many meetings a year they would prefer. The general view was that one meeting each old term should be the minimum especially with the Forum's monitoring responsibilities.
- (2) Mr G Rudd agreed to liaise with Mr Vye and Mr Bagshaw to organise a meeting for next term.
- (3) Mr G Rudd also agreed to liaise with Mr Vye and Mr S Bagshaw to organise a small cross-party meeting to look at the issues of membership and Terms of Reference.