

Proposed Structure for the Admissions Forum Annual Report

Introduction

There are three main objectives of the annual admissions forum report. Firstly to report to the Local Authority to help it exercise its duty to promote fair access, secondly as a report to the Schools Commissioner to inform his report to Parliament on Fair Access and thirdly as a basis for the forum to make broad recommendations on improving admissions arrangements or as an evidential basis for any forum objections.

Admissions Forums have been empowered under Education and Inspections Act Section 41(3) to publish an annual report. The purpose of the report is to draw together information and data that will highlight good practice and draw attention to where intervention may be necessary in ensuring a fair admissions process.

Following lengthy debate at the introduction of the Education and Inspections Bill, it was decided that it is for the Admissions Forum to publish this report, not the Local Authority. The advantage of this is that there will be greater ownership by the schools that are represented on the Forum and it cannot be seen as the Local Authority trying to impose its will on schools.

The attached report will attempt to draw together the 9 key areas that the draft regulations are proposing should be included in the report. Comments on the structure and layout of the report are welcomed in order that they can inform a proposed structure for future publication. As a minimum the following points are expected to be included.

- a) the number and percentages of first, second and third preferences met (or more if applicable) and the main factors that affected whether preferences were met;
- b) the number of appeals made to the appeal panel within the area of the authority;
- c) the ethnic and social mix of pupils attending schools in the area of the authority and the factors that effect this;
- d) the extent to which existing and proposed admission arrangements serve the interest of looked after children, children with disabilities, and children with special educational needs;
- e) how well the hard to place pupil protocol has worked and how many children have been admitted to each school under the protocol;
- f) whether primary schools are meeting their statutory duty in relation to infant class sizes;
- g) details of other matters that might affect how fairly admissions arrangements serve the interest of children and parents within the authority; and
- h) any recommendations or recommendations that the forum wishes to make in order to improve parental choice and access to education in the area of the authority.

Providing the forum with the assistance of the LA are able to capture this information, it will allow future comparisons. The forum report will be a sound measure on which to report if admissions arrangements are working well and provide a facility to identify areas that may be of concern.

There is a significant challenge in preparing this report, recommendations indicate that there should be scrutiny of individual schools in how admission have been applied and that these should form the basis from which to seek patterns. The scale of Kent and the 600+ schools means that it will be difficult to establish meaningful information unless we break down the reporting into areas of the county.

With the agreement of the forum it is recommended that data is reported in cluster groupings and by school type. This will allow for issues that relate specifically to areas to be highlighted and to establish if certain types of schools are facing difficulties in attracting pupils.

Guidance recommends that the Admissions Forum give consideration as to how well the admissions arrangements are working at individual school level. Admission forums in addition to considering the effectiveness of local admission arrangements are encouraged to advise admissions authorities on ways in which the arrangements can be improved.

Admission authorities of all maintained schools and academies must have regard to any advice from the forum. The advice may require that admission authorities will review factors that affect admissions following the advice of the forum to individual admission authorities.

Scott Bagsaw
Head of Admissions & Transport

Kent Admission Forum

Annual report on school admissions within the County of Kent in 2007.

Foreword

This report is the first annual report produced by the Kent Admissions Forum and it deals with school admissions in all the maintained schools and academies within the authority for the year 2007/08

Although the requirement for admissions authorities to produce a report following the Education and Inspections Act 2006 does not come into effect until the 2008 admission round, Kent admissions forum has decided to prepare a draft report for the 2007 admission round.

This will enable the admissions forum to refine the report for next year, and the information in this report will be a benchmark for future years. The report will act as a useful guide to Admission Authorities in understanding some of the admissions issues that transpire during the year and provide a conduit for sharing admission information and good practice.

The report will seek to identify where admissions authorities have been challenged about their admissions arrangements and it will make recommendations about future admission arrangements.

You will appreciate that this is the first annual report from the admission forum: for that reason your comments on both the format and content of the report will be particularly welcome and will serve to inform the shape of future reports.

Kent Admissions Forum

Introduction

For ease of reference, the information in this report (as required by The Education (Admissions Forum) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2007) is set out using the order of the regulations.

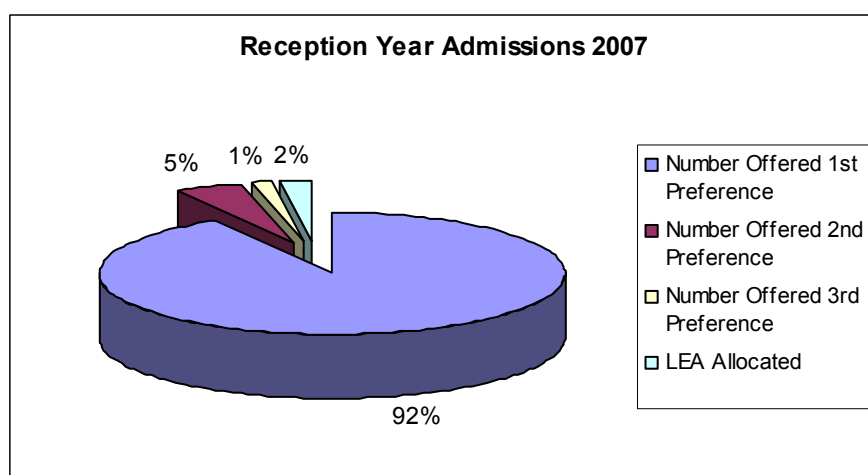
At the time of compiling this report, the guidance from the DCFS was still being developed. For each section, there is a brief analysis of the information. The report will provide graphics under each section to provide an immediate visual representation of the data and the data fields will be displayed more fully in the appendices.

At the end of each section where appropriate recommendations will be identified.

Section (a)

The number and percentages of first, second and third preferences met and the main factors that affected whether preferences were met.

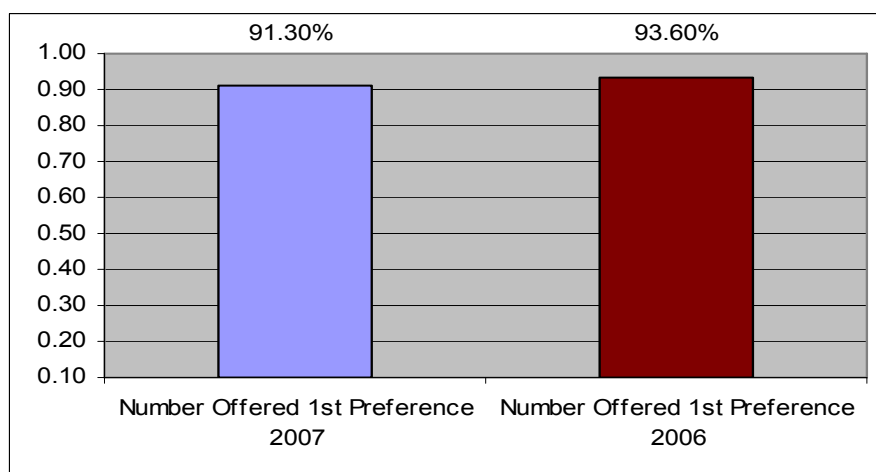
Fig.1



In any local authority, the popularity of schools and the level of oversubscription have the major impact on the number of first second or third preference secured.

In Kent there is overcapacity in the number of Primary school places available and despite there being over capacity, this is not necessarily in the right places. The Kent Primary Strategy is actively seeking to resolve this issue and its application has been the single largest strategic evaluation and review of primary provision in the country. Fig.1 shows the percentage breakdown of first, second, third preferences and the local authority allocations for Kent. Over 13800 pupils were allocated a reception place during the admission round. Below in Fig. 2 you will see that this is slightly down on 2006.

Fig. 2



You will see from Fig. 2 that there has been a slight reduction in the number of 1st preference schools being offered. Interestingly the primary admissions cohort number increased by 1.2% which may provide some of the reason for this.

Fig. 3

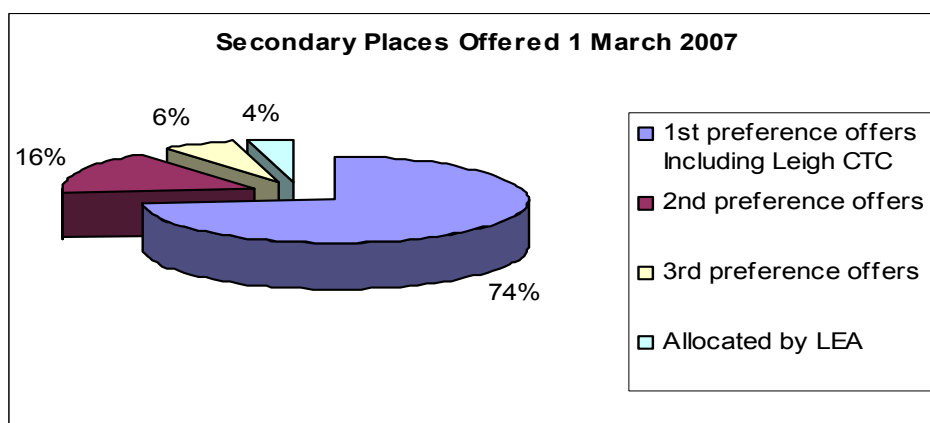


Fig.3 shows the % breakdown of places offered during the Process for Entry into Secondary Education (PESE). Just over 96% of the cohort were offered one of their 3 preferences. As with the Primary round there was a slight reduction in the number of successful first preferences and it is considered that this is directly related to the removal of First Preference First (FPF). The removal of FPF has meant that more parents have opted for a Grammar as a true first preference safe in the knowledge that if their child does not meet the required standard this does not reduce their chance of a place at their second or third preference school.

Fig 4

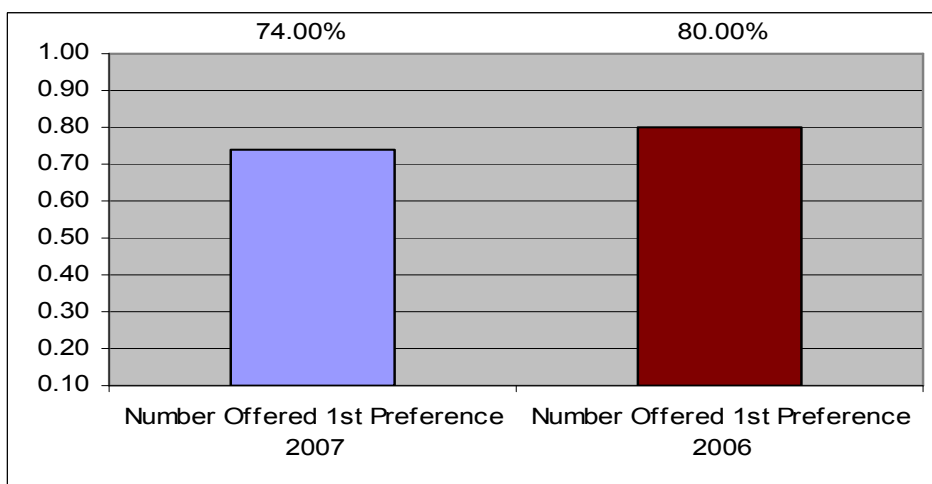
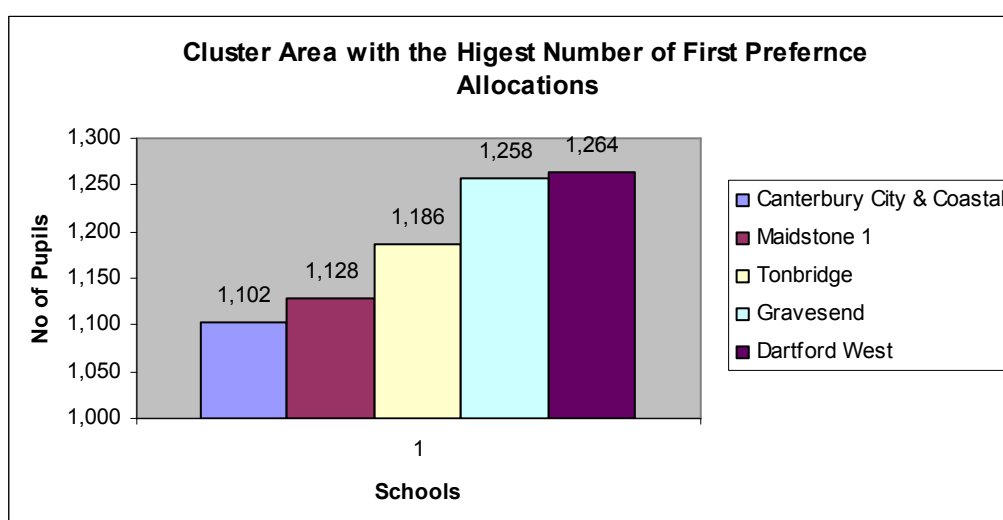


Fig. 4 shows there has been a reduction in the percentage of 1st preferences being allocated, this is despite there being over 900 pupils less in the round and there a number of potential reasons for this that are not necessarily negative. It is clear that a greater percentage of pupils have chosen to take the Kent Test and therefore this means that there have been raised expectations across the entire cohort. Parents know they can afford to place a true preference at the top of their application form and this may have resulted in parents opting for a school they might otherwise have not expected to get into. Improvements in school performance can equally have been a factor in the reduction of first preferences being allocated. If parents consider their local schools to be of a good quality they may well have stretched their aspirations for schools further a field safe in the knowledge their local school will be an acceptable alternative lower down the preference list.

Fig. 5 Below shows the cluster areas with the highest allocation of 1st preferences.



In Fig. 6 & 7, are the 10 primary/Infant schools and 10 Secondary schools with the greatest number of preferences made by parents. The charts identify that the most popular schools are spread right across Kent and do not form a pattern in any one particular area.

Fig.6

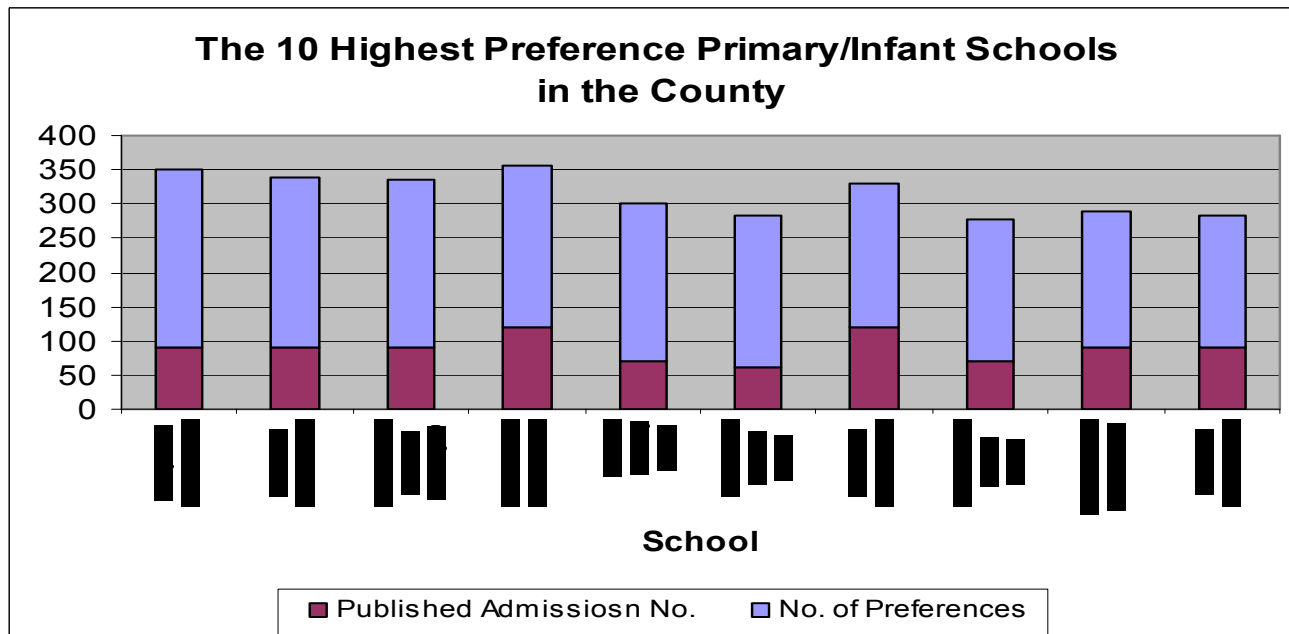
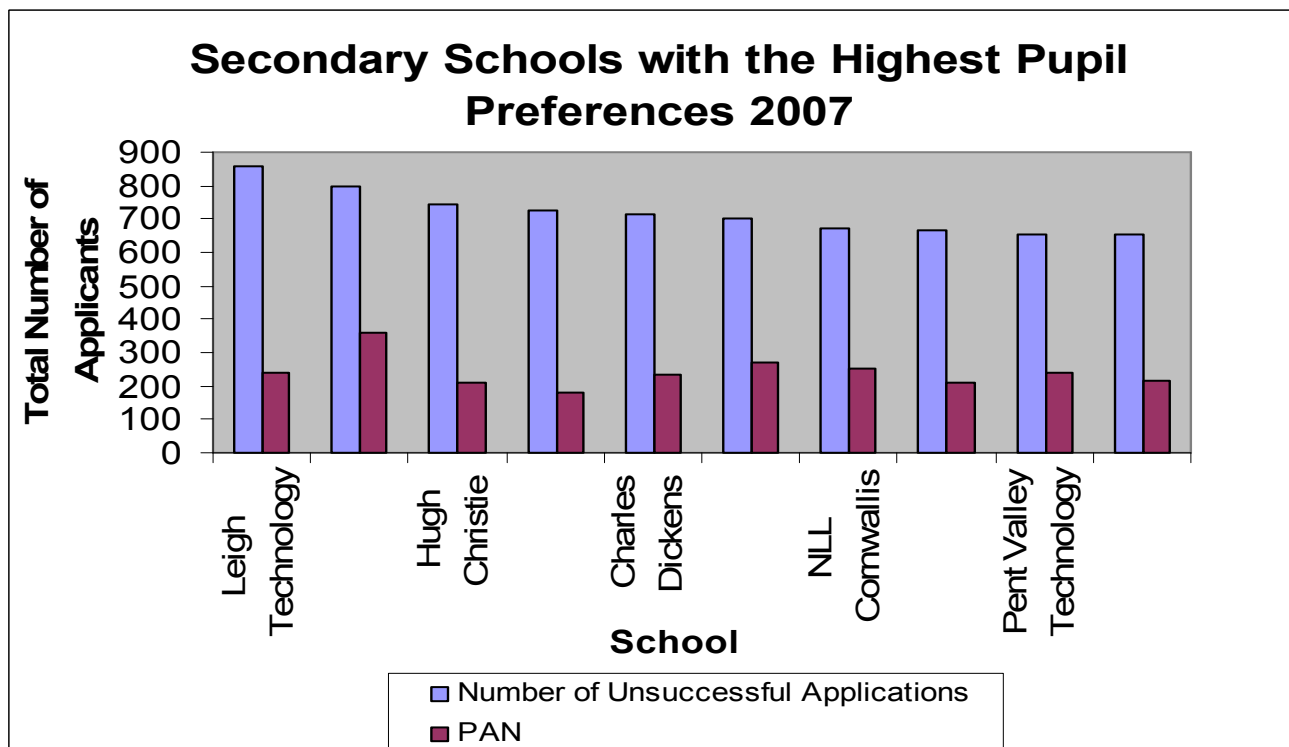


Fig. 7



The blanket application of the equal preference scheme has allowed parents to make true preferences on the common application forms. This has been raised as a concern by a number of admission authorities concerned that pupils allocated their school will not be as committed as those who have named them first on the application form. This is the first round of admissions where such a system has been applied across the country and it is too soon to establish if the new legislation will have the affect some highschoools and church schools fear.

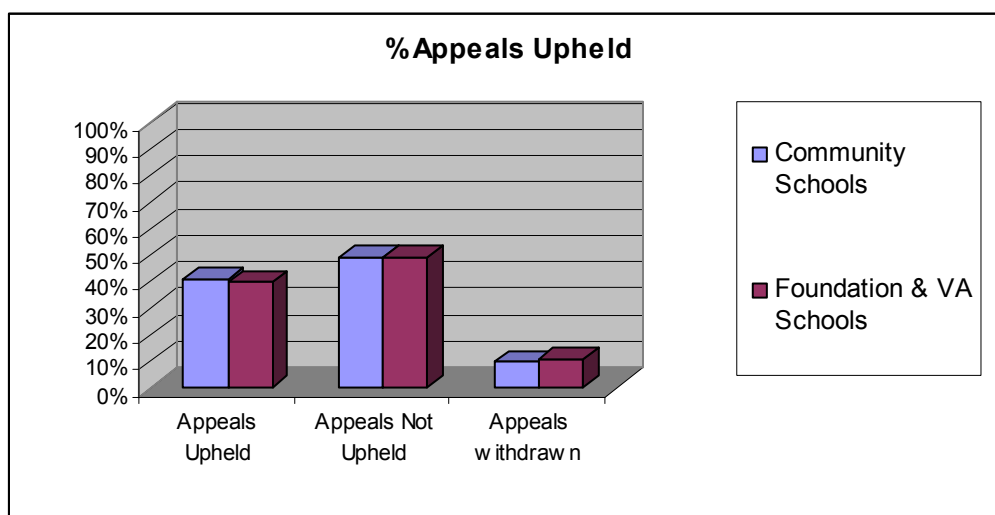
Comparative data on admissions next year will give a clearer pattern as will comparative data between the offer places and the schools where pupils end up in September after pupil movement from appeals and waiting lists.

Section (b)

The number of appeals made to the appeals panel within the area of the Authority

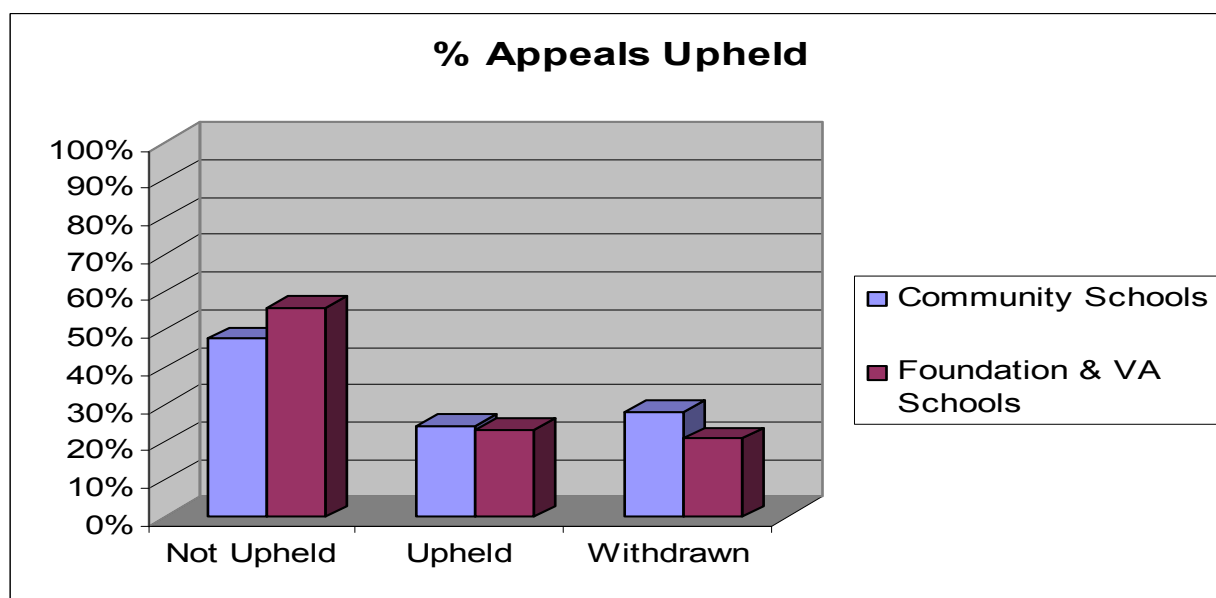
Legal Democratic Services recorded almost 1900 appeals for Secondary schools in Kent. This figure is split roughly 40% Community Schools and 60% Foundation and VA Schools. The chart in Fig.8 displays a breakdown of appeals for both types of schools based on the numbers upheld, not upheld and withdrawn.

Fig. 8



The above chart shows there does not appear to be any patterns of concern in the appeals process with broadly comparable percentages of appeals being upheld regardless of the type of secondary school.

Primary Infant and Junior school Appeals



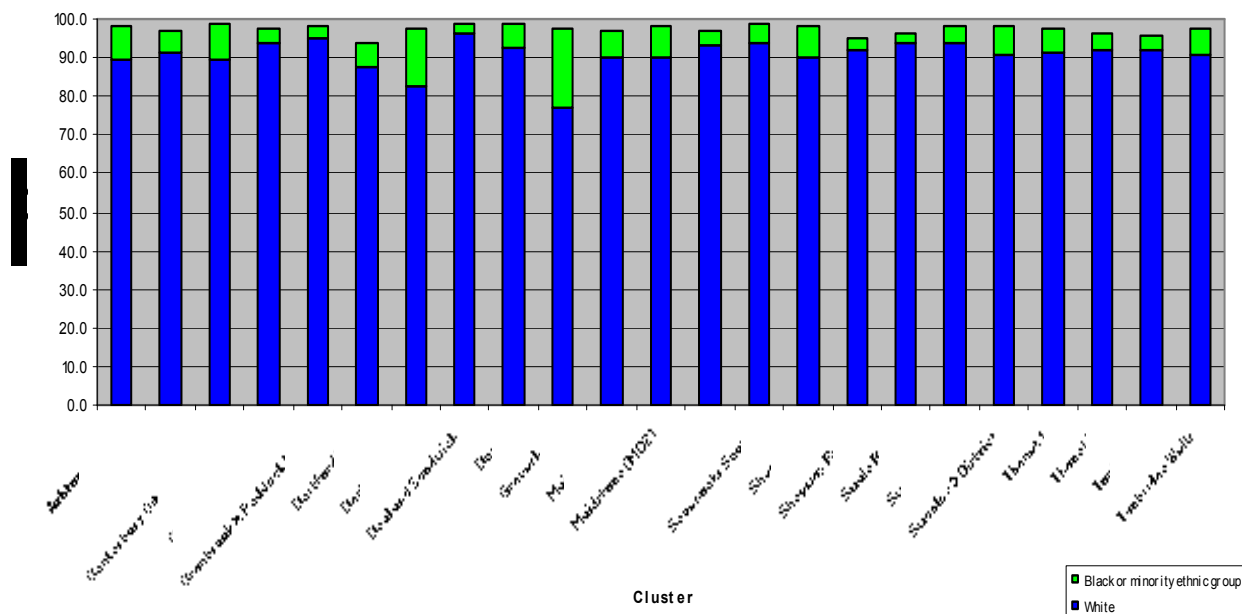
The above chart shows the % of successful appeals comparing the Community schools with those Foundation and VA schools that had their independent appeals administered by Legal and Democratic services. Whilst this provides indicative information showing that a similar % of appeals are upheld regardless of the type of school, the data is not complete as we do not currently capture appeal information from the Foundation and VA schools that administer their own independent appeals panels. It also perhaps noting that the total number of appeals lodged for Community schools was 359 and for the Foundation and VA schools administered by L&D services this was 43.

Section (c)

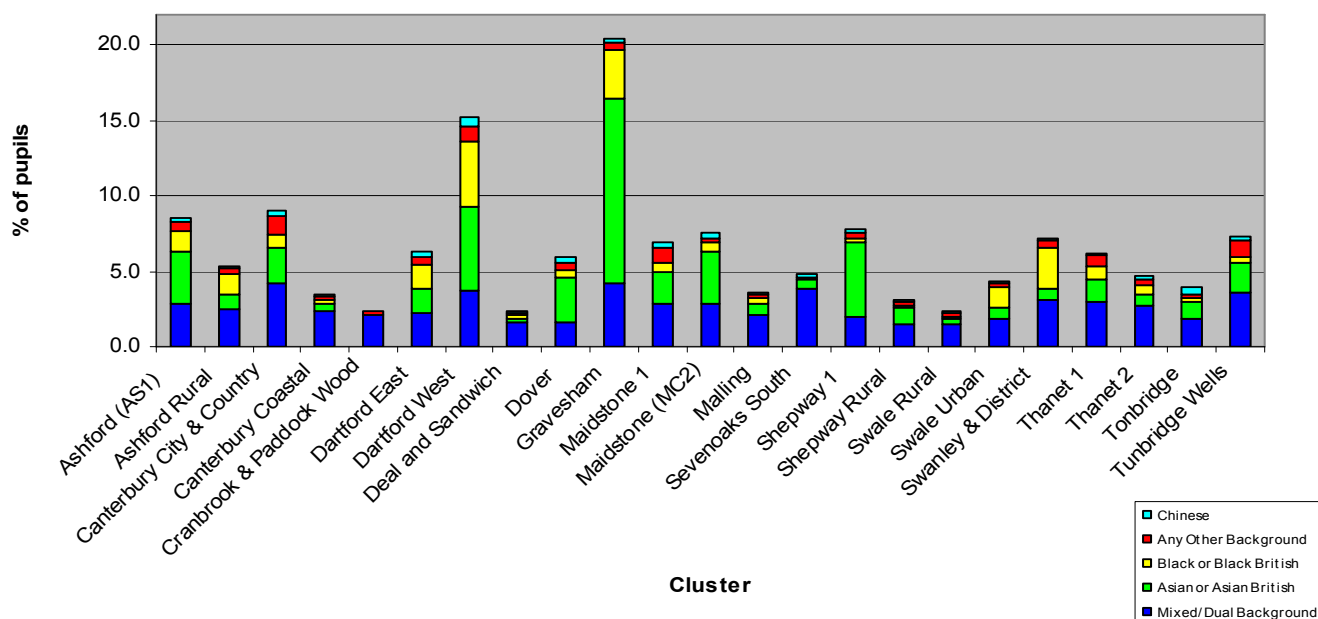
The ethnic and social mix of pupils attending schools in the area of the authority and the factors that effect this.

The charts below shows a breakdown of the Kent clusters and the ethnicity of primary school children. The second chart shows a further breakdown of the ethnic groupings.

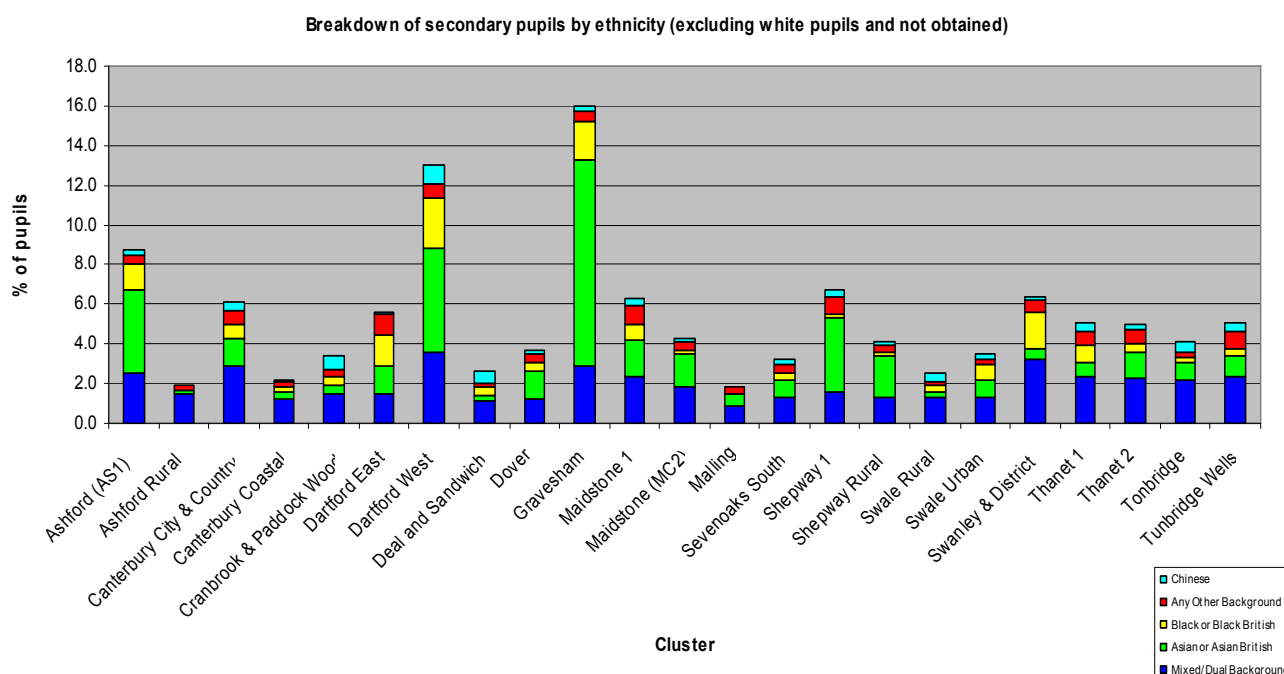
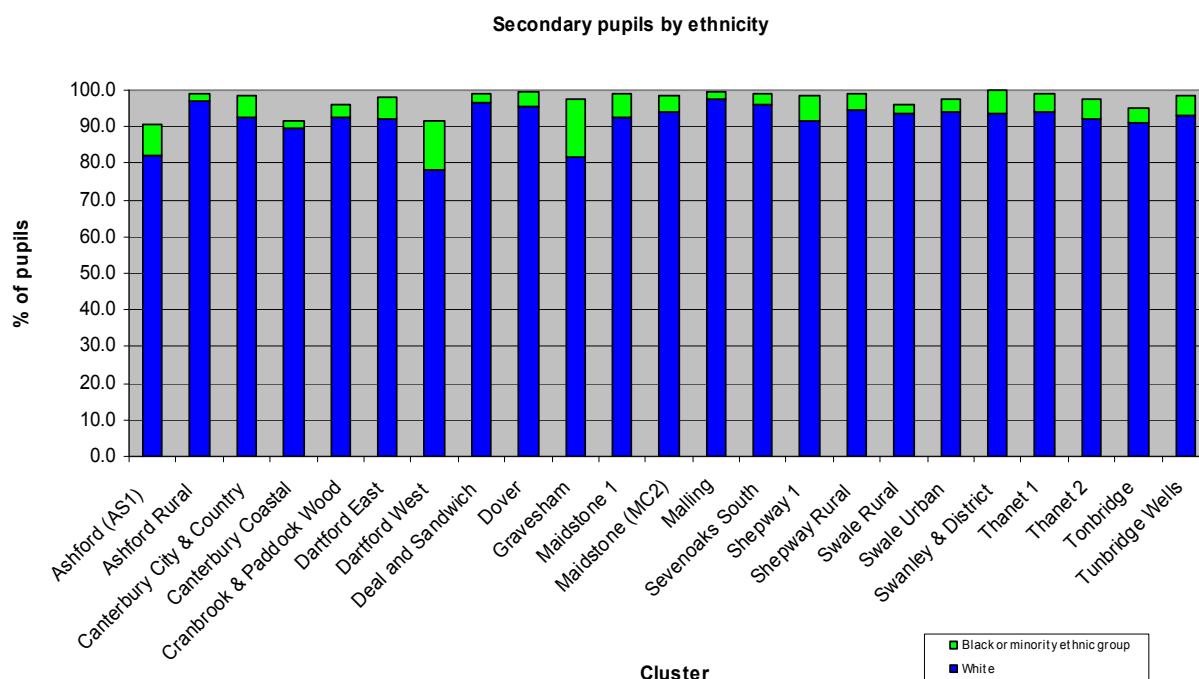
Primary pupils by ethnicity



Breakdown of primary pupils by ethnicity (excluding white pupils and not obtained)



The breakdown of ethnicity for pupils attending secondary schools is outlined below, as with the primary school data a second chart provides a breakdown of the ethnic groupings across the clusters.



A breakdown in the numbers of children from particular ethnic groups is useful information for schools. Admission authorities should monitor and report where the pupil population in a school does not reflect that of the surrounding area.

Section (d)

The extent to which existing and proposed admissions arrangements serve the interests of looked after children, children with disabilities and children with special educational needs.

Admission arrangements for 2007/8 distinctly favour the afore mentioned groups. The new Admissions Code requires that any child with a statement of special educational need is given priority before any places are offered. Details of children that have a named school on their statement are provided to the LA admissions team by the SEN team and the PAN for the school in question is reduced by that number accordingly.

The provision for children in Local Authority Care is also given the highest priority in any schools oversubscription criteria. This development in the code comprehensively serves the interest of any child in public care. Approximately 50 schools originally failed to name children in public care as a first priority in their oversubscription criteria, these were all contacted and amended their arrangements accordingly.

The interests of children with disabilities are also served by giving priority to those children in the oversubscription criteria before the distance criterion is considered. Historically this was more of an issue when certain schools were regarded as more suited to accommodating disabled children. More recently as all schools have had to ensure that they are accessible to disabled children the need for special treatment for admissions purposes is reduced. Not all schools have chosen to adopt giving a level of priority to children on medical or disability grounds but all community schools do and the majority of Foundation and VA schools have taken a similar line.

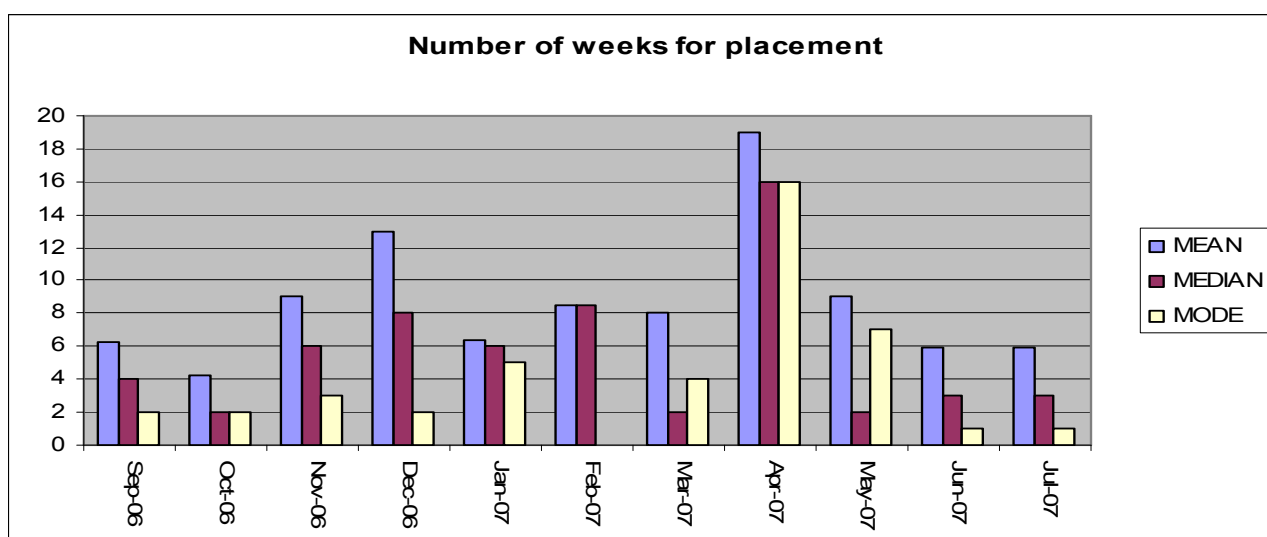
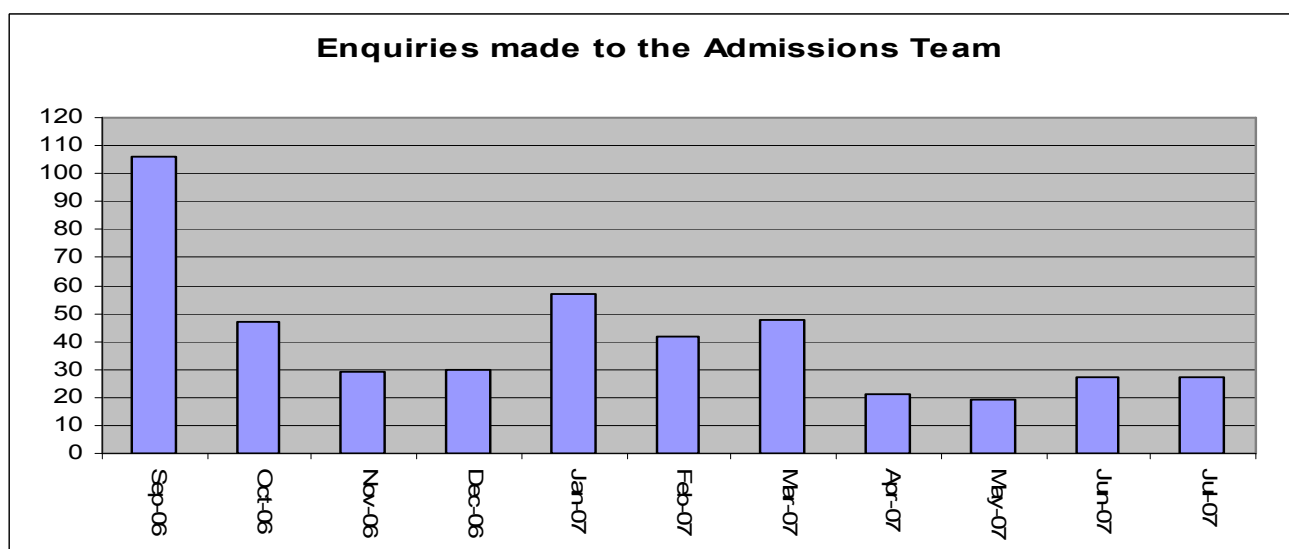
Section (e)

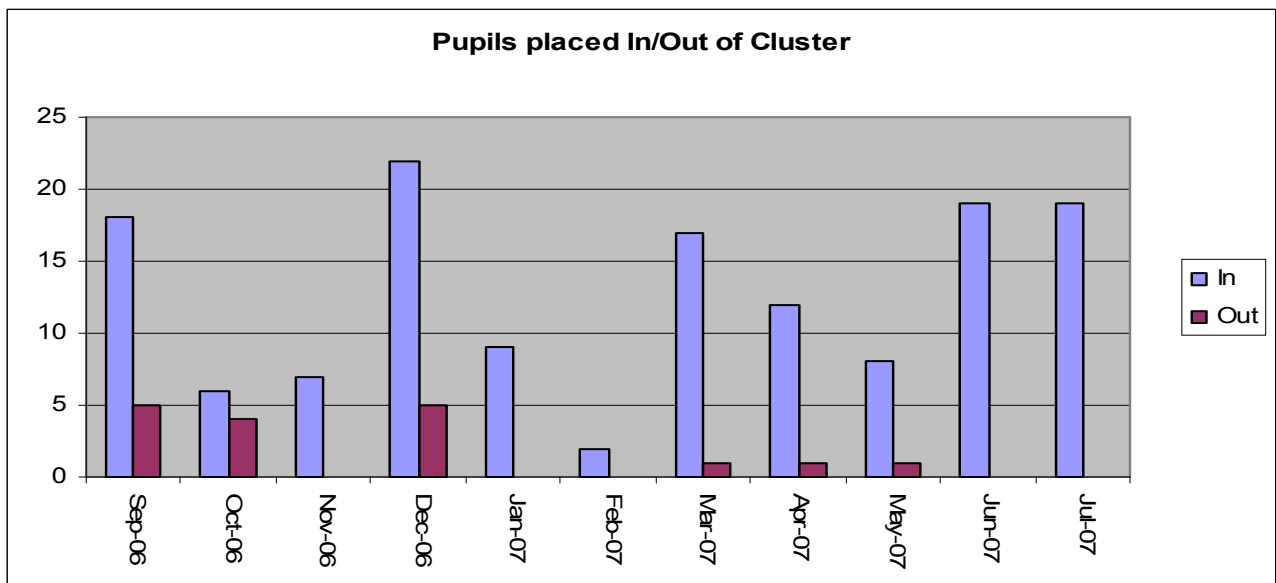
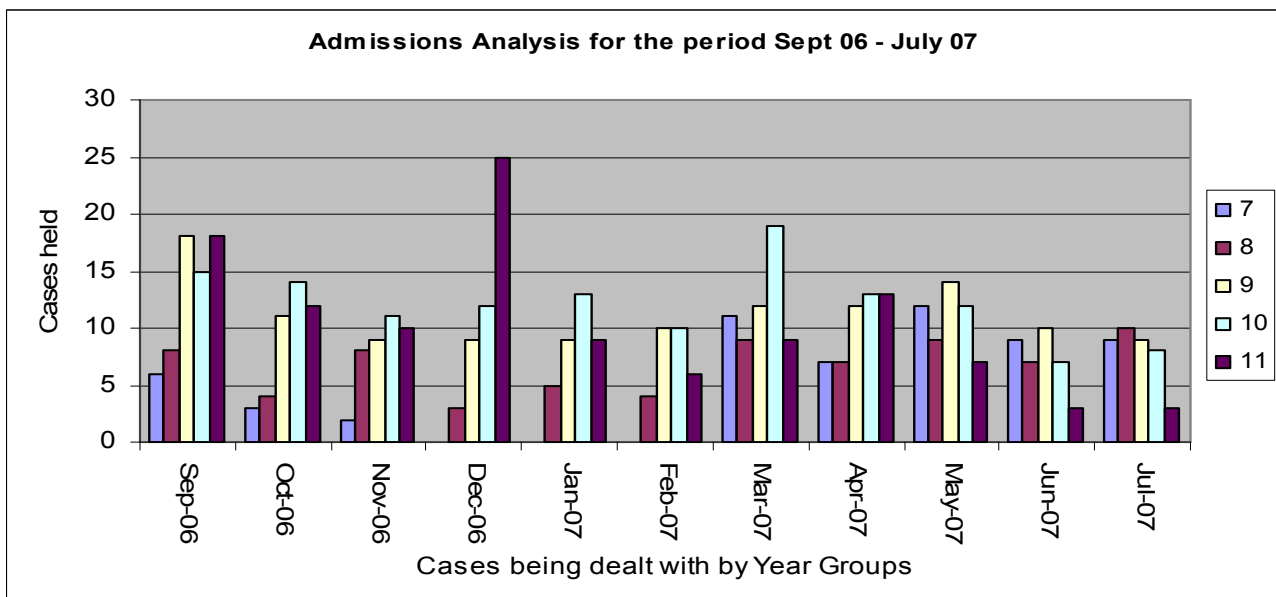
How well the hard to place pupil protocol has worked and how many children have been admitted to each school under the protocol.

The In Year Fair Access Protocol (IYFAP) came into effect from September 2007. It is recommended that the number of times the protocol is brought into use will be recorded and reported on a cluster basis for future reports.

The information collected should also include details of performance and whether pupils are being placed within the legislative timeframe.

Because the IYFAP is not yet fully established for monitoring purposes included below are some charts which highlight the number of admission enquiries that are received outside of the normal admissions round, the timescales associated with placing children, breakdown by year group and whether children have been placed within their home cluster.





The above charts show that officers have considerable difficulties in securing places for hard to place children within reasonable timeframes. Unfortunately this is because there tends to be a concentration of LAC in certain areas and this causes pressures on schools often in areas of relative deprivation.

Often the nearest appropriate school with vacancies may be one that has recently come out of special measures or indeed have already taken a disproportionate number of looked after children. There is provision within the code for such schools to refuse a place and consequently the time taken for correspondence to pass between the first choice schools and alternative schools the guardians may wish to consider results in delayed admission. The new IYFAP is expected to significantly assist officers in reducing these timescales, and provision within the code to direct schools has also been strengthened.

Section (f)

Information on whether Primary schools are meeting their statutory duties in relation to infant class sizes.

In the January 2007 PLASC return 2 schools were identified as facing a potential breach situation in September 2007, both schools in question were able to justify the initial cause and have taken appropriate action. In one case the school has employed an additional member of teaching staff and the other had a child leave the school which prevented the breach.

This year has seen an influx in the number of schools that have been placed in a potential breach situation as a result of independent appeal panel decisions. The LA are aware of approximately 9 schools currently in this situation and unless there is pupil movement before September 2008 the schools in question will be required to either reorganise their classes or employ additional teaching staff to comply with the infant class size legislation.

Section (g)

Details of other matters that might affect how fairly admissions arrangements serve the interests of children and parents within the authority.

- **On Line Admissions**

During the 2007 admissions process the opportunity for parents to apply on line was introduced for the first time. The government set targets of between 5-10% of the cohort to have applied on line. For the secondary admission in Kent this was 17.8% and for the primary it was 18.9 % and for Yr3 10.9% this significantly exceeded government targets and enabled a total of 5679 parents to apply online and successfully receive their offers electronically.

The online process was not without its problems in 2007, the in house design of the on line application form meant that parent details were not entered until the end of the form and this meant that where forms were incomplete we had no way of tracking the parents to issue reminders etc.

The On Line for 2008 has been greatly improved, and there have been several improvements to enhance the parents experience when using the form. The on line system went live as of Friday 7th September and at time of preparing this report over 50 applications have already been submitted all displaying positive customer feedback.

Some parents complained in 2007 citing that it was unfair that on line applications were able to view their applications on National Offer day where as those who applied on paper were required to wait for their official letter. The situation is the same for 2008 however the offer will only be available to view from 4pm on National Offer day. In 2007 Admissions took the view that this would be available to parents from 9am after the start

of the school day to avoid any playground banter resulting from some pupils knowing and others not. This resulted in a number of parents keeping their children out of school on national offer day and it is anticipated that the change of time will hopefully avoid this.

- **Parents on the border of Medway**

For 2008 Medway have devised a scheme that will enable them to deliver the results of their 11+ testing before parents are required to submit their Common Application Forms. This creates an awkward inequity in the process for parents in Kent who may be considering a Medway school.

Because Kent are signed up to the PAN London agreement and therefore as part of their legal obligation to coordinate with neighbouring authorities must supply pupil preference information to neighbouring authorities by mid November we must collect the common application forms by the 19th October.

Medway District council are not required to meet this deadline and despite the difficulties this will cause parents on the borders of Medway they have set a closing date for their CAF of 6th December. This will mean that Kent parents applying for a Medway school will be required to have made that choice by the 19th October without knowing the outcome of the Medway test.

- **Appeals panels**

There have several complaints from schools regarding the admissions appeals process in 2007. There have been several decisions that have resulted in schools facing a future breach situation and potentially putting them into financial deficit position.

There is a legal requirement to adhere to the decisions that the Independent appeal panels take and consequently it is essential that proper training and clerking is in place. Some schools have felt aggrieved by the decisions of some panels and it is considered that the Clerks of the appeals take a greater role in ensuring panels can justify the decisions they wish to take in line with the legislative guidelines.

- **Concentration of Grammar assessed pupils in areas of high affluence**

This year the Process for Entry into Secondary Education (PESE) identified that in the more affluent areas of Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells approximately 40% of pupils were identified as of selective ability. This resulted in a higher number of pupils eligible for Grammar school than the number of grammar school places available in the area.

- **Decision of the Adjudicator to retain the Dover test**

During 2007 the LA and St Edmunds School challenged the admission arrangements for the Dover Grammar School for Boys. Unfortunately when applying the letter of the law the school do not break any admissions rules outlined in the code consequently the Adjudicator found in favour of retaining the Dover Test.

The LA must now allow for those pupils who are considered ineligible for a grammar place through the PESE test to be deemed selective for the Dover Grammar schools (but no other grammar schools in Kent) if they are able to pass the Dover Test.

- **Monitoring of schools and the use of their supplementary forms**

Some complaints have been received from parents where schools have asked for inappropriate information on their supplementary forms. The new code relating to admissions makes clear that supplementary forms are part of a schools admission arrangements and must comply with the code of practice.

Where this has been brought to our attention we have written to schools explaining that they can only request information that is relevant to them applying their admissions arrangements.

This year where there have been some breaches (i.e. schools asking for preference information, or the amount of time a person has lived in the country) when challenged schools have claimed older forms have gone out in administrative errors. Next year any schools found acting unlawfully will be named and reported to the Admissions Forum, the DCSF and the Office of the Schools Adjudicator.