

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

KENT SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS FORUM

MINUTES of a meeting of the Kent Schools Admissions Forum held at Invicta House, County Hall on Tuesday, 1 April 2008.

PRESENT: Mrs V Bentley, Mrs F Cottam, Mrs S Dennis, Mrs O Denson (substitute for Mr J Gunnell and Mr J Watt), Ms R Matthews, Mrs J Morgan, Ms A Nee, Mr S Parr, Reverend Canon J Smith, Mrs P Stockell, Mr R Truelove and Mr M Vye (Chairman).

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr S Bagshaw, Head of Admissions and Transport; Dr I Craig, Director of Operations; Mr G Rudd, Clerk to the Forum; Mrs S Dunn, Head of 14-24 Innovation Unit for Item 6 and Mr M Holmes, Medway Council for Item 12.

APOLOGIES: Mr I Bauckham, Mr J Gunnell, Mrs V Fitch, Mrs P Gibson, and Mr R Tolputt.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

12. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2008 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

13. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2008.

14. Membership of the Forum *(Item 4)*

(1) Mr Vye invited all Members of the Forum to introduce themselves. He then welcomed Mrs J Morgan as the Primary School Parent Governor representative.

(2) Mr Rudd advised the Forum that Mr I Bauckham, Headteacher of Bennett Memorial Diocesan School, had been appointed as the Aided Secondary School representatives but that he had submitted his apologies for the meeting.

(3) Mr Rudd also advised the Forum that he was still seeking Community Secondary School Headteacher representatives.

15. Terms of Reference *(Item 5)*

(1) An email from Mrs Nee relating to payment of expenses from the County Budget was circulated for members' discussion.

(2) Following discussion amongst the members, it was agreed in principle to pay travelling expenses with effect from 1 April 2008.

(3) Dr Craig had already advised that the CFE Directorate did not have a budget to meet travelling expenses and therefore the Forum requested that Mr Rudd investigate whether the costs could be met from the Chief Executive's Department budget.

16. Implications for Secondary School Admissions – 14-19 Curriculum
(item 6)

(1) Mrs Dunn, Joint Head of 14-24 Unit, addressed the Forum on the complexities surrounding the 14-19 Curriculum. She informed the Members that this started in 2005 and that there were 17 new lines of learning at the moment. Mrs Dunn acknowledged that this process could be confusing for parents with children aged 11. She advised that there was a pilot base scheme and that the DCSF circular looked at a gradual rolled out programme. The construction money was quoted as an example. The Members were informed that it was important that young people adopted the right learning style for their needs and that they take the right path which could involve an apprenticeship, diploma or GCSE. Mrs Dunn emphasises that individual schools were not expected to be able to deliver an entire complex curriculum. She reported that the intention was to share it across schools, colleges and work based environments. This would include spreading the curriculum over consortia so that if the home school could not offer the line of learning required, the pupil could access it at another school. Mrs Dunn confirmed that the scheme was being piloted in Thanet and Gravesend, and that she expected trialling to last 2/3 years. She acknowledged that it was important for Parents/Carers to have robust information to help make informed choices and that there was also the need to look at the option of lateral movement. The pupil may start a line of learning at 11 and then want to change it. Mrs Dunn also pointed out that the Diplomas were pilot qualifications being trialled on the Government's behalf. In her view the challenge lay in evaluating the impact of the curriculum and liaising with Parents/Carers to look at why a particular pathway was chosen. She felt that the critical point was when the child reached 14. There would need to be a series of procedures and protocols produced for those pupils going off site from the home school.

(2) Mrs Dunn invited questions from the Members and those are recorded as follows:-

- (a) Mrs Truelove asked whether Mrs Dunn was confident that teaching staff would be able to deliver specialist subjects. She replied that she was not aware of delivery issues and that in fact there were significant positives with Kent having put in huge support/training programmes.
- (b) Reverend Canon Smith referred to the shared timetable issues. Mrs Dunn confirmed that this required a lot of additional work and energy. At the moment the maximum time out of the home school was one day per week. Schools are starting to purchase courses for pupils requiring these subjects. She was aware that not many consortia had been able to produce an effective shared timetable yet.
- (c) Mrs Denson expressed her concern about the continuity of provision for mobile children and that she had already started to address this with DCFS but had not received a response yet. Mrs Dunn anticipated that modules would be transferable.
- (d) Mrs Cottham confirmed that her school's cluster did involve some common timetable arrangements but at the moment this was only one day out of school.
- (e) Mr Vye asked how the complex arrangements for 14-19 would be displayed in the Secondary booklet. Mrs Dunn confirmed that she would be liaising with Mr Bagshaw regarding collective information that will need to be agreed with

schools. Mrs Denson felt that this was a complex issue with more schools becoming Federation Schools.

- (f) Dr Craig advised the Forum that there were fluid times with 14 year olds looking at pathways not even thought about three years ago. He hopes that rationalising and co-ordinating 14+ courses would be easier in the future but schools would need to look at providing joint timetables in the future.
- (g) Mr Vye commented that the Policy and Overview Committee would need to look at the transport policy regarding 14-19s.
- (h) In response to Mrs Bentley's question, Mrs Dunn confirmed that core subjects would still have to be done.

(3) Mr Vye thanked Mrs Dunn on behalf of the Forum for her very informative session on the 14-19 curriculum.

17. Isle of Sheppey Academy Admission Arrangements

(Item 7)

(1) Mr Bagshaw referred to the correspondence from Mouchel in respect of the Isle of Sheppey Academy and confirmed that the LD did not have any issues with the proposed arrangements.

(2) Mr Truelove sought clarification about the appeal process if the site allocated was not the one that the parent wanted. Mr Bagshaw advised that this would be subject to an appeal within the academy itself.

(3) Reverend Canon Smith expressed his surprise that the proposed arrangements had come to the Forum as he would have expected it to be a matter for the Secretary of State. Dr Craig clarified the situation by explaining that the Academy was still a maintained state funded school subject to the Code of Practice in Admissions and Co-ordinated Arrangements. He added that the LA was one of the Academy's sponsors.

18. Update on Admission Forum Annual Report Process

(Item 8)

(1) Mr Vye introduced the debate on what should be included in the Annual Report. Mr Bagshaw circulated interim feedback notes to be incorporated in the Annual Report. These incorporated points made by parents about the equal preference issues and included the naming of some of the schools involved.

(2) Mrs Denson thought that it would be useful to have data about those who got their first preference as it would set the scene for the other issues. Mr Vye also referred to other data capture issues, eg free school meals and social origins.

(3) Dr Craig confirmed that the Secretary of State has asked all Las to report schools which have not complied with the Code directly to him.

(4) Reverend Canon Smith advised the Forum that he had found Bexley LA Governor support helpful by getting Aided Schools to get information about activities to the Diocese. Mr Parr reported that there were 160 Roman Catholic Aided Schools and the Diocese required information by the end of March. He confirmed that he would be happy to share this

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information with Mr Bagshaw. Mr Bagshaw welcomed this approach and confirmed that he would be happy to work closely with the Diocese.

(5) Mr Bagshaw circulated the Proposed Co-ordinated Scheme for 2009/10, to be imposed by the Secretary of State. He advised the Forum that it was very similar to that recommended by the Cabinet and that this was the opportunity for the Admission Authorities to comment.

(6) Mrs Matthews referred to information about appeals statistics availability. Mr Rudd commented that it was difficult to identify numbers until the end of the process. Mrs Matthews also wanted to know about schools numbers on national offer day and the effect of "shake down". Mr Bagshaw agreed that the report could show numbers on national offer day and then track changes on a monthly basis.

(7) Mr Truelove sought clarification as to Westlands School's error. Mr Bagshaw explained that parents had misinterpreted the Headteacher's advice about putting the school as first preference.

(8) Mrs Nee have an interim feedback and reference to things that she would like to see in the report. This included specific information about grammar schools selective process. She spoke about cohorts and successful appeals increasing the PAN. Mrs Nee felt there was a need to scrutinise the role of the Panel and the number of appeals upheld. She felt that this should not exceed the 25% referred to as grammar school pupils.

(9) Mr Vye felt that the timing of the report was an important factor and that it needed to be by early New Year and therefore for the Forum to have a meaningful debate it needed to be ready for December. Given his concern about the time available he replied that he would like to gather the information available on schools in the Canterbury area and could then look at the issues arising. In his view it was important to initiate debate.

(10) Reverend Canon Smith's view was that any Audit trail should contain data and information about how the process had worked together with the Forum's views. Mr Vye agreed that it was important to get accurate data to produce an honest statement which could then be discussed.

(11) Dr Craig referred to Mrs Nee's concerns about more than 25% of the pupils achieving places at grammar schools. He explained that the LA got the assessment as close to the 25% as it could. He also confirmed that the LA had no remit to interfere with the Independent Appeal Panel decisions and could not fetter their discretion as they were independent by law. Mrs Nee thought that the Ombudsman could become involved.

(12) With regard to gathering the data, Mr Vye suggested the possibility of the LA Members getting together to obtain the services of a research officer to assist in this process. Mrs Cottham reminded the Forum that it was mentioned at the last meeting that a lot of this information was already available. Mr Bagshaw agreed and although he had not been able to obtain it all yet he was pursuing this point with Management Information.

(13) Mrs Cottham referred to Bexley LA sending out offer letters early and its impact on her school. She felt some cross border work was needed on this. Mr Bagshaw confirmed that he had in fact received an apology from Bexley who had subsequently written to the school in question. He accepted Mrs Cottham's point that it would have been helpful to know this. Mrs Cottham also expressed her concern at testing so early in the year and this point will be

made by the schools in the consultation document. Mr Bagshaw reminded the Forum that in order to meet the legislation, requirements testing could not be held any later.

(14) Mrs Nee raised the issue of supplementary forms and suggested that if the LA could provide information about dates of birth the schools would not need to seek this information themselves. Mr Bagshaw was not able to commit to this at the moment. He did confirm though that the DCSF was concerned about inappropriate information being taken from information on supplementary forms. Dr Craig's view was that it would be impossible to provide this information for nearly 18,000 pupils. Both he and Mr Bagshaw felt that individual schools should be verifying this information at the time of offering a place.

(15) Mrs Matthews thought that the Forum should take part in the consultation on the proposed scheme. Mr Vye advised Mrs Matthews that the DCSF had already received the views of the Forum. Mr Bagshaw confirmed this. Mrs Matthews requested the Forum Members be able to see a copy of what was sent and asked whether there should be a formal response from the Forum. Mr Bagshaw explained that the Admission Proposals circulated at the meeting had been sent to Admission Authorities for consultation and that the Forum had received it for information and not consultation. Reverend Canon Smith agreed that there was nothing in the proposals that the Forum did not already know about and that the DCSF already had its views.

(16) Mrs Nee referred to page 16 paragraph 13 and the question of the Headteacher assessment in the appeal process. Mr Bagshaw confirmed that Kent took the view that the Headteacher Appeal stage was not a review process and that his interpretation of the paragraph was that the DCSF shared that view. Mr Vye referred to a letter from the Minister, Jim Knight, and that he would be writing about this issue. Dr Craig confirmed that officers of the DCSF were aware of the debate and that the wording in paragraph 13 clarified the situation.

(17) Mr Vye advised the Members that each Admission Authority could make its own points regarding the scheme and that in future he would arrange for a covering letter to go with the Forum's comments.

(18) In response to further concerns from Mrs Matthews, Mr Bagshaw agreed that the admission arrangements in Kent was a complex process and that was why a detailed choosing book was published and why Choice Advisers were provided. He also advised that letters to parents contained lots of information and that this information was also made known to Primary School Headteachers and Admissions staff both in writing and through meetings with them. Mrs Morgan commented that as a parent she found the process last year fair.

(19) Mr Vye sought a clear honest statement of the situation that could be debated at the next meeting. Dr Craig suggested that this should be left until the next meeting when the scheme details ought to be cleared by then. Mr Bagshaw advised that the end of the consultation period was 8 May 2008 and the deadline for the secondary booklet was by the end of June 2008 but this depended upon the Secretary of State's decision.

19. Report on Medway Admissions Scheme 2009 (Item 12)

(1) Mr Bagshaw referred to the concerns expressed at the last meeting of the Forum and introduced Mr M Holmes from the Medway Admissions Forum.

(2) Mr Holmes reported that the proposed timetable for the scheme was different from that initially put forward. He circulated a copy of the revised timetable for Members information. He advised that whilst Medway had not been able to mirror Kent's dates it got as close as it could to them. He accepted that there were still some implications relating to the variation in the dates but that this was a compromise. Mr Bagshaw agreed that he had less concerns about the 2009 proposals than he had had this year.

(3) Mrs Dennis referred to the review requests and was advised by Mr Holmes that it was similar to Kent's Headteacher review process but that it was instigated by the parents.

(4) Mrs Cottam referred to the month difference between the Kent/Medway testing arrangements and asked why Kent was going for an earlier date and that the Headteachers of Medway and Kent would prefer to see the same tests and dates. Mr Bagshaw responded that the current testing mechanisms were different between the two authorities and that if there was a single test some areas of Kent would fill up and some would not. Mrs Cottam suggested that Mr Bagshaw came along to the next meeting of Kent and Medway Headteachers.

(5) Mr Vye thanked Mr Holmes on behalf of the Forum for coming to the meeting.

20. Chatham House Admission Arrangements *(Item 10)*

Mrs Nee advised the Forum that following communications between herself and Mr Bagshaw, Chatham House had now amended its oversubscription criteria **from** "(G) up to 10% of the admission number, chosen by the governors as likely to contribute to the musical or sporting life of the school in some way not directly related to academic achievement" **to** "(b) to the musical or sporting life of the school in addition to academic achievement". Mrs Nee expressed her gratitude to Mr Bagshaw for pursuing the matter with the school and getting it rectified.

21. Preference for Music/Sport at a Maths, Science and Computing Specialist School *(Item 11)*

(1) Mrs Nee referred to her previous discussions with Mr Bagshaw and expressed the view she felt that it was unfair that a school could select up to 10% of its Year 7 admissions on the basis of an aptitude in a subject that was not part of its specialism. She was concerned that the Admissions Code did not make it clear that all schools could use this selection procedure regardless of specialism and she therefore checked with the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust. She reported they had advised that Para 12 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 allowed every school with a specialism in certain subject to give priority to up to 10% of pupils who could demonstrate an aptitude in the relevant subject. They had also advised that Para 13 stated that tests for aptitude must be related to one of the following prescribed subjects – MFL or any such language; Performing arts, or any one or more of the Performing Arts; Visual Arts, or only one or more of the visual arts; Physical education or sport, or one or more sports; Design and Technology and Information Technology provided this selection was before 2008 school year; no new selection in these subjects was allowed after this time. They further advised that the school must have a reasonable claim to specialist facilities in the subject, but this did not have to be the subject in which it acquired specialist status. Additionally, schools that selected for a proportion of

places by ability or aptitude in the school year 1997-98 and whose selective admissions arrangements had remained unchanged since, may continue unless there was an objection to the Schools Adjudicator, who could decide that the arrangements should be modified.

(2) Mrs Nee's concern was that schools which were not wholly selective (and consequently did not have to consider appropriate academic ability) could override the existing availability of a specialist subject in a school within the area which had a competing specialism. She quoted Fulston Manor School, Charles Dickens School, Meopham and Canterbury High School as schools that admit an additional percentage of its pupils on specialisms not related to their specialist status. She felt that the Admissions Forum should be scrutinising this situation more closely.

(3) Mrs Ballard replied that clauses in the Code allowed this. Reverend Canon Smith suggested that Mrs Nee submitted this as a written item report for discussion at the next meeting. Mr Bagshaw thanked Mrs Nee for researching items like this.

22. Items for Next Meeting

(Item 12)

- (1) Mr Vye summarised items to be considered at the next meeting:-
- (a) Advise to Parents – CAF Form – Clear statement of what is happening
 - (b) Impact on admissions of Appeals Panel
 - (c) Draft attempt at one area's equity arrangements
 - (d) Consultation with the LA members about expenses and report

23. Dates of Next Meetings

(Item 13)

Mr Rudd agreed to liaise with Mr Bagshaw about the date of the next meeting of the Forum with a preference likely to be for the end of June 2008.