

Admissions in 2006/07

1. The consultation exercise about admissions in 2006/07 is about to commence. The timetable proposed for consultation is as follows

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| December 2004 | Release of consultation documents |
| Early February 2005 | Closing date for comments |
| End February 2005 | Comments considered by the School Admissions Forum |
| 15 March 2005 | Cabinet determine the arrangements for 2006/07 |
| 29 March 2005 | Schools and neighbouring LEAs advised of arrangements |

NB arrangements for 2006/07 have to be determined by 15 April 2005

2. Aided schools are also required to consult the LEA and schools within their admission area over their proposed arrangements for 2006/07. Church of England schools are also required to consult the Diocesan authority. A circular will be sent to aided schools reminding them of the duty placed upon them to consult. The circular will also suggest that they let the LEA have details of their proposals by the end of January so that any issues can be reported to the Forum.
3. The LEA does not propose to make any significant changes to the current arrangements. However the Forum need to be aware of an exchange of correspondence with Eastbourne Borough Council and consider whether it believes any changes should be made to the current admission arrangements. The Borough Council originally wrote to the County Council with the following resolution -

‘That this Council recognises the fact that there is a significant continuing pressure on secondary school places in Eastbourne on transfer at eleven. The Council calls upon ESCC to continue to review its allocation process to ensure that, whenever possible, no child is allocated a place at a school outside of their parents’ top three preferences. To assist members and provided information, the Council directs that the subject of Schools Admissions be placed on the annual programme of work for the Scrutiny Committee’.

A response to the original minute was sent to Eastbourne Borough Council and a copy is attached as annex 1.

The Borough Council wrote again having passed the following resolution -

‘School admissions – motion by Councillor Harris, referred from Council 5 May 2004. Councillor Harris attended to address the Committee regarding the motion to Council on 5 May 2004. Councillor Warner stated that as school admissions were a County Council matter that the motion should be referred back to County to be dealt with on Eastbourne’s behalf by the Scrutiny Committee responsible for Education.

Resolved: That the Scrutiny Co-ordinator write to East Sussex County Council requesting that Councillor Harris’ concerns be addressed by the Scrutiny Committee responsible for Education.’

The Scrutiny Committee for Education considered the matter at their meeting on 16 September and decided that it should be considered by the School Admissions Forum. The Committee also asked to be kept informed of the views reached by the Forum.

4. It has to be acknowledged that there is an alternative model of allocating places outlined in the School Admissions Code of Practice. Under this system all three preferences are regarded as 'equal' and each preference is judged against the admissions criteria. This can result in second/third preferences being met for schools whilst first preferences are refused. So, a parent living relatively close to a school and gives that school as a third preference (with first and second preference schools some distance) may well be allocated their third preference school whilst other (first/second) preferences for that school might be refused.
5. It has been a long held view in East Sussex that priority will be given to first preferences. Schools have always been keen to see first preference applicants allocated places rather than be refused places whilst other children are allocated places even though it is a lower preference. This view was endorsed by the former School Admissions Forum which in 2002 supported the following statement of admissions policies and practices –

'The County Council will ensure that plans for future provision of places, admissions criteria, use of existing places and a transport strategy all support the administrations policy steer of maximising parental preference whilst making realistic use of available services. To this end the County Council –

- Believes in the principle of one first preference for each child,
 - Will provide as much information to parents as possible of the likely success of their preference
 - Will ensure that the preference is considered with care, and equally with other applications
 - Aims to meet as many first preferences as possible
 - Will give priority to first preferences
 - Will apply the admissions criteria appropriately to all stated preferences
 - Will ensure parents are informed of their rights if their preference cannot be met'
6. The first of these bullet points which related to parents completing more than one application form has now been enshrined in legislation but it would be helpful if the Forum were to consider the other bullet points and reconfirm commitment to the other principles.
 7. With regard to the resolutions from Eastbourne Borough Council it is important that the Forum is aware of the breakdown of the circumstances where first preferences were not met. It will be noted from the letter to the Council that there were about 1100 children considered for places in secondary schools in the Eastbourne area. Of these 124 did not get their first preferences. This breaks down as follows –

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| Applications received after the closing date | 14 |
| Children given their second or third preference | 65 |
| Children where only one preference was given | 18 |
| Children where only two preferences were given | 8 |
| Children with SEN and different legislation applies | 4 |
| Children who did not obtain one of their three preferences | 15 |

After the appeal stage the 15 children who did not get one of their three preferences reduced to 8 when their appeals were upheld. In all eight cases the children were allocated places at their nearest schools which were in the area in which they lived.

8. It can therefore be seen that the number of children who did not get one of three stated preferences in the Eastbourne area is very small. Across the county there were 33 children who were not given one of their three stated preferences (including some where preferences for schools in Kent were not met). This is out of a total transfer group of about 5500 children.
9. It is inevitable that whichever scheme is used to allocate places situations will develop where children are not allocated a place at one of their three stated preferences. Parents are advised of previous patterns of admissions and which schools were oversubscribed last year. They will also be aware from the admissions booklet as to which area their address falls within and that priority is given to stated first preferences. If parents give three preferences for schools which have usually been oversubscribed, do not have siblings at those schools and do not live within the areas served by the schools it is likely that none of those preferences will be met.
10. In view of what has been said it is suggested to the Forum that the current process of allocating places should not be changed although this will be subject to the normal consultation exercise.

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