

Report to:	Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability
Date of meeting:	22 February 2016
By:	Director of Children's Services
Title:	Admission arrangements for the 2017/18 school year
Purpose:	To determine the final admission arrangements for the 2017/18 school year

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Lead Member is recommended to:

- 1) agree the proposed admission arrangements for the 2017/18 school year, including the following changes to the existing arrangements:
 - To restrict the application of the sibling link so that children living within the community area for a given school are a higher priority than siblings living *outside* the community area but including the proposed clarification set out in paragraph 2.6;
 - To change the measurement of the home to school distance tie-break from shortest walking route to straight line;
 - To allow applications received after the closing date due to verified house move or other material change of circumstances to be treated as on time if received before a second deadline
 - 2) agree the following:
 - The admission priorities as set out in Appendix 1
 - The admission numbers as set out in Appendix 4
 - The co-ordinated schemes as set out in Appendix 5
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1 Background

1.1 The School Admissions Code 2014 states that admission authorities must determine their admission arrangements annually. However, provided the relevant admission authority is not proposing any changes to their admission arrangements, there is a duty to consult every seven years.

1.2 Consultation on the proposed admission arrangements as outlined in **Appendix 1** was carried out between 23 November 2015 and 31 January 2016. This satisfied the duty to consult for at least six weeks and end the consultation period by 31 January 2016. 80 responses were received during this period and the results are outlined in Appendix 6.

2 Supporting information

2.1 **Appendix 1** shows the admission priorities for community and voluntary controlled schools which the Lead Member is recommended to agree. **Appendix 2** shows the admission priorities previously in use in respect of these schools. **Appendix 3** outlines the reasons for these proposed changes.

2.2 The Equalities Impact Assessment is **Appendix 7**. The findings of the assessment were that, although the changes were likely to have a positive impact on some families and a negative impact on others, they were not likely to have a disproportionate impact on families with protected characteristics.

2.3 The response to the consultation was mixed, with 44% of residents favouring the change to the sibling rule and 56% preferring to retain priority for all siblings over local residents without

siblings (based on a total number of 80 responses). However, and despite the proposed arrangements being laid out at the top of the questionnaire, we believe many respondents may have misunderstood what was being proposed and assumed that the sibling link was being withdrawn entirely. For example one respondent commented that 'Withdrawing sibling policy will mean that children from one family will end up at different schools which will be impossible for working parents to manage'. Several others may have not understood that the change is to be phased in, so that it will not impact on families with children already attending the school (possibly because this was not pointed out in the online survey, only in the proposed policy attached).

2.4 Concerns were largely around the difficulties of transporting two children to different schools at the same time of day, and the need for siblings to support one another in the same school, whereas those in favour of the proposal felt that it was fair to prioritise local residents ahead of out of area siblings. A high proportion of responses in respect of the sibling change appear to be from parents in the Uckfield area, where the local paper ran an article about this aspect of the consultation, but which is unlikely to feel a significant impact from the changes, as the schools in that area usually have space for children living outside the area. With hindsight, had the mitigation of phasing in the changes been pointed out in the online survey rather than just the supporting documentation, this may have addressed these concerns and responses may well have been more positive.

2.5 There were also concerns expressed that this proposal reduced choice. However, there will be no impact on choice as parents will still have the same right to express a preference for a school, and to be offered a place if there are sufficient places available. The only difference will be that, if a school is oversubscribed, local children will be prioritised ahead of children who live outside the area, but whose siblings already attend the school.

2.6 For the future, families will be able to keep their children together if they apply for places in their local community school. It is therefore proposed to add an additional statement to the policy to explain that 'where a child has been unable to secure a place at a school in his/her community area and has been directed to attend a school outside the area as an alternative, any applications for younger siblings to attend the school will be treated as if the family were resident in the community area, as long as the sibling will still be attending the school when the younger child starts.'

2.7 The other two changes were less open to misunderstanding and were broadly supported by respondents. The proposed change to the tie break distance measurement proved particularly popular with 71% in favour, with comments such as 'the new distance measurement will hopefully make it easier to see whether you have any chance of getting into the school of your choice'.

2.8 The proposed change to the sibling priority and the proposal to allow late applications in respect of verified house moves should help ensure that children are able to attend their nearest school. This may result in a reduction to the Home to School Transport budget as a number of children are transported at the authority's expense because there are no places at their nearest local school. It may also reduce the number of appeals as parents are more likely to accept an allocated school if it is local to them.

2.9 These proposed changes should also reduce the likelihood of rural schools needing to call on contingency funds because they are unable to accommodate children moving into the area from their existing resources, even once KS1 top up money and growth funds have been allocated.

2.10 The proposed change to the tie break (measuring by straight line distance rather than shortest walking route) will result in operational efficiencies that will help mitigate against planned savings. Currently walking routes need to be kept up to date and surveyed and some activity is spent each year in disputes with parents about whether a footpath exists and is relevant for admissions purposes.

2.11 **Appendix 4** shows the admission numbers for community and voluntary controlled schools for the 2017/18 school year. The Lead Member is asked to note that there are now two schools for which there is a proposed increase to the admission number reflecting planned expansion, these are Cradle Hill Primary School from 60 to 90 and Wivelsfield Primary School from 20 to 30. The proposal to expand Meridian Primary School will not now go ahead until 2018-19.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 East Sussex County Council (ESCC) is required by law to carry out consultation on admission arrangements every seven years, or sooner if there are any changes to those arrangements for the schools where the local authority is the admission authority. The Lead Member is recommended to determine the attached admission arrangements for 2017/18 including the following three changes to the existing policy. These are:

- **To restrict the application of the sibling link so that children living within the community area for a given school are a higher priority than siblings living *outside* the community area;**
- **To change the measurement of the home to school distance tie-break from shortest walking route to straight line;**
- **To allow applications received after the closing date due to verified house move or other material change of circumstances to be treated as on time if received before a second deadline.**

3.2 The determined admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools will be published on the ESCC website by 15 March 2016 as required under current legislation. Any objections to these arrangements can then be made to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator until 15 May 2016. The final arrangements will be published in the composite prospectus both online and in hard copy by 12 September 2016 as required by the School Admissions Code 2014.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- School Standards and Framework Act 1998
- The School Admissions (Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012
- The School Admissions (Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2014
- The School Information (England) Regulations 2012
- School Admissions Code 2014

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Proposed admission priorities for community and voluntary controlled schools

Appendix 2: Previous admission priorities for community and voluntary controlled schools

Appendix 3: Rationale behind the changes

Appendix 4: Admission numbers

Appendix 5: Co-ordinated admission schemes- normal year of entry

Appendix 6: Summary of consultation responses (including a letter from the Principal of Uckfield Technology Community College and the ESCC's response)

