

## **Appendix 3**

### **Proposal 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:**

In recent years there has been pressure on places in rural schools in a number of parts of the county. This has at least partly been as a result of families in urban areas choosing to send their children to rural schools rather than making use of schools in the town where they live. This fills the rural schools in the initial allocation process, leaving it difficult for them to accommodate children moving into the community area at a later date.

For September 2015 the situation in the rural schools surrounding Hastings and Bexhill is that, including siblings of existing pupils, over 40% of children allocated places lived outside the community area for the school in question.

Clearly we cannot refuse children places at out of area schools if there are spaces available (the School Admissions Code does not allow this), and nor would we wish to do so (this would have a potentially serious impact on school budgets). However, we do recognise that rural schools in particular serve a local community and that the needs of the local community should be prioritised ahead of those living outside the community area who choose to use the school as a result of preference rather than need.

The first proposal to alleviate this problem is to prioritise children living in the community area ahead of children with a sibling link who live outside the area. This would not prevent out of area siblings from being offered a place, but they would only be offered a place if all children living in the area had been offered a place already. This model is already in use at Frant CE Primary School, where it has had some impact on the number of places available to local children. If we were to explain to parents that if their older child is offered a place at their preferred school, there is no guarantee that the younger one will be able to follow them, this could act as a disincentive for parents to send their child further afield, freeing up places for local children moving into the area.

The introduction of this measure would not necessarily prevent families from outside the area from applying for rural schools, or obtaining places at them, but it would enable those schools to serve their local community as a priority in years when they are oversubscribed.

This strategy is not without risk: parents of existing pupils living outside the area may feel aggrieved that the priorities have changed since their older child was offered a place and for this reason it is recommended that we phase the proposal in by limiting it to families whose older child was admitted after 1 September 2017 (although this would limit its effectiveness for seven years). Furthermore there are always families who will be insecurely housed and may find themselves obliged to move out of the rural area in question, thus compromising their younger child's ability to attend the same school as the older one. However this needs to be set against the hardship faced by rural families who are unable to access their local school as there are no spaces available in the child's year group.

### **Proposal to change the measurement of the home to school distance tie-break from shortest walking route to straight line**

Currently we use home to school distance as a tie breaker for our admission arrangements, and this is measured by shortest walking route via surfaced, passable routes. This does present some challenges, for example:

- Parents dispute the distances as they cannot see how these are calculated, and there are websites available which will show different measurements
- Parents find it difficult to estimate in advance their chances of securing a place at their preferred school, as they do not know their home to school distance measurement as measured by our system
- As new building projects come on stream, the routing network needs to be kept up to date to ensure accurate measurements. This means numerous site visits which are time consuming and costly

The proposal therefore is to change the method of measurement to straight line 'crow flies', which would be easy for parents to understand (we could publish maps showing circles indicating previous years' distances), and would not require maintenance of the routing network.

Clearly using this method of measuring would result in different decisions to the existing method. In some cases, where railway lines or rivers intervene, parents may find that they are denied a place at a school at the expense of children who have to walk past their home in order to get there, but these cases are likely to be few in number and limited to urban areas where there are alternative school places available, as the normal expectation is that rural schools will admit those children who live in their community area, and the county council negotiates with rural schools where necessary to try to ensure that this happens. Community areas (and in the case of Peacehaven Community School, the priority community area) would still apply, and the measurement is only used to differentiate between pupils within the same admission priority.

Modelling the impact of this change using this year's reception cohort shows that very few children (less than 5%) received a different allocation using this method of measurement, split roughly equally between children receiving a higher preference and children receiving a lower preference.

### **Proposal 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**

To secure more places for children moving into a given area it is proposed to allow late applications to be processed as on time where there is proof of a change of address. This would enable them to be considered as resident in the area, prioritising them ahead of other children who live further away than their new home address.

We would need to have a cut-off date for accepting these applications as on time as clearly there comes a point when decisions have to be made in order to meet the allocation date of 1 March or 16 April (for secondary and primary respectively). However we propose to allow these applications up until 1 February (secondary) and 15 March (primary) so as to allow as much time as possible for movers-in while at the same time being confident of being able to achieve the legal obligation to offer places on national offer day.

Other authorities take this approach and have reported that it works well. For example, this approach is used in Brighton & Hove, who outline it in their admissions literature so that parents are aware of the situation and can act accordingly. In this way the authority is seen to be acting reasonably to respond to the needs of movers-in, as well as reducing the number of children placed long distances from home, which in turn has a positive impact on the number of appeals received and on the home to school transport budget.