

Admissions Forum – Meeting held on Wednesday, 12th March, 2008.

Present:-

Foundation Schools

Maureen Ball – Baylis Court Secondary School
Italo Cafolla – Castlevew Primary School

Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools

Kate Mackinson – Chalvey Early Years Centre

Parent Governor Representatives

Mohammed Din – Ryvers Primary School.

Local Education Authority

Councillors David Maclsaac and Patrick Shine (part).

Also present: Kevin Marsh (NUT)
Clair Pyper (Director of Education and Children's Services)
Tony Browne (Head of School Services)
Claire Gray (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor P Choudhry, Gill Bodman, Hilda Clarke and John McAteer.

PART 1

7. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 17th January, 2008

The minutes of the last meeting held on 17th January 2008 were agreed as a correct record.

8. Proposed Admission Arrangements - 2009/10 School Year

Mr Browne introduced the proposed admissions arrangements for the 2009/10 school year. He informed the Forum that this was an opportunity to comment on schools admissions arrangements. He noted that there were no proposed changes for the admissions arrangements to community schools. The policies for voluntary aided and foundation schools were included in the agenda and the Admissions Forum were able to consider the policies and make appropriate comments at the meeting, which would then be forwarded to relevant schools so that they could agree the final version of their admission policy by 15th April.

A Member informed the Forum that they felt that priority for a place in the grammar schools should be given to Slough residents who reach the required pass mark. It

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was noted that this was very important to Slough as there was a high proportion of students in Slough grammar schools not from Slough. The Chair sought confirmation of the current system that was used for entrance to grammar schools and a Member noted that it was based on selection by ability. Those achieving over the required pass mark of 111 were ranked in order of their test scores for entrance to grammar school for which they had expressed a preference and taken the 11+. It was noted that some children who passed the 11 plus did not receive a place at their preferred grammar school. . As Slough Grammar School was operating separately from the Consortium and Langley Academy had used banding as part of their admissions policy there were now more tests in place. Members also noted that places were allocated according to their preference on the Consortium application form and it was felt that this was against current guidance.

A Member thought that the number coming from outside Slough to the grammar schools was approaching 45% of the total pupil population in grammar schools. Most Members felt that it was important that the balance should be shifted back to Slough children in order that they could be allocated a place in a Slough school. It was noted that as all the grammar schools had foundation status they controlled their own admissions policies and it would not be possible to change them without a full consultation process. A Member noted that there were more children than places available in the primary school sector, although it was felt that this was not due to children attending Slough Schools from outside of the Borough.

The Director of Education and Children's Services informed the Forum that this was a growing problem for Slough families. Many children received places at schools outside Slough and many children have not yet been allocated a school place for September 2008. Members felt that it was difficult to make an informed recommendation regarding this without supporting statistics.

Resolved – It was agreed that information on the following would be provided to the Admissions Forum:

- the number of 1st preferences met
- the number of pupils reaching the required pass mark and
- the number of children from inside and outside of Slough attending Slough grammar schools and taking/passing the entrance exams

Officers noted that they had much of this information already and would compile it for the Forum.

A Member proposed that it be recommended to Slough grammar schools that places be given to Slough residents first and then in order of the highest ranking marks for those outside of the borough. This was amended and agreed by the Forum that they would seek to engage with the grammar and foundation schools' governing bodies to discuss as this would be a more productive course.

Resolved - That a meeting/consultation should be arranged with all foundation, voluntary aided and grammar schools in Slough in order to discuss admissions arrangements and issues raised at the forum.

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A Member noted that for those children who failed the admissions test for Slough grammar schools, the situation could appear very bleak. However all schools in Slough were ranked as 'good' or better by OfSTED and a grammar school education was not right for all. It was suggested that parents should be able to see the historical picture and the improvements in Slough schools. Other Members noted that opting to take the tests was already a parental choice and there were many cultural pressures surrounding this.

It was noted that many children are not allocated a place in a local primary school but are allocated a place on the other side of Slough that they could not reach easily, as schools in some areas were heavily oversubscribed. The localised oversubscription is due to high local populations and migrants. The Director of Education and Children's Services reported that the officers are already discussing the long term admissions strategy

Resolved - That statistics be provided to the Admissions Forum on the numbers for primary school admissions.

A Member tabled a list of issues surrounding some of the schools admissions policies. Priory School's nursery admissions procedure included at point two 'recruitment and retention – children of staff working at the school' Members questioned whether this could still be applied as it was believed that this had been previously outlawed. It was resolved that it should be checked to ascertain whether a non-statutory provider was allowed to do this. The second point raised was that St Anthony's admissions statement did not give priority to children with a statement of educational needs naming St Anthony's School. Mr Browne agreed that this would also be looked into. The third issue raised was that the sixth point on Slough Grammar School's admissions criteria stated 'in cases where people have written evidence of special educational needs (from a recognised professional in an appropriate discipline). Members felt that this should refer to a Local Education Authority recognised professional, as this left less room for ambiguity or distortion. It was noted that all of these changes should be suggested to the schools involved. A Member also noted that all the selective schools should have as part of their admissions policy a statement similar to point six on Herschel Grammar School's policy, regarding in-year admissions to the schools. It was felt that there was a certain amount of ambiguity in the other grammar schools' statements regarding this. Any further action regarding this would be decided at the next meeting.

Resolved - that a letter be sent to St. Anthony's, Priory and Slough Grammar Schools recommending the suggested amendments to their admissions policies with a deadline for responses of 10 working days and that a letter be written to Slough grammar schools recommending that there be further clarity to their admissions procedures regarding in-year admissions, similar to that of statement 6 of Herschel's policy.

The Member also queried the timetabling of primary schools' admissions and the dates that data and information were received. It was noted that the change in the schedule for primary school admissions should be taken to the Primary Heads Association and be looked into carrying out this process earlier in the year. It was also noted that there may be financial implications to be looked into if capacity

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needed to be increased. However an earlier date may cause problems with those moving around the area.

The Director of Education and Children's Services noted that the admissions policies referring to Looked After Children included differences between schools as some mentioned an area requirement. It was noted that it may be appropriate to have a single means of expressing this and that the area requirement should be removed. However some Members noted that the area requirement may be necessary. It was agreed that Mr Browne would check whether schools can take over their number or make a catchment requirement for Looked After Children. This would be checked against the White Paper before final recommendations were made.

Members noted that it was appropriate for the Admissions Forum to look into admissions arrangements for future years and how they were developed for 2010 and 2011 when there were an estimated 122 and 200 extra pupils respectively. It was noted that it should be included in the school places report. Tony Madden should be invited to the next meeting and this would be included as an agenda item.

Separate registration forms need to be completed by parents for the grammar schools. This allowed schools to organise the admissions tests. However parents also stated preferences on these forms and it was questioned how this could be when Slough operated an equal preference system. Mr Browne noted that the local authority had been against this practice as other schools do not receive information about the preferences. Grammar schools sent out their own offer letters and this had caused problems. Members reported that on one of the grammar schools' websites it was suggested that preference played a role in achieving a place at the school. It was agreed that Tony Browne would look into the website and take further action if necessary.

Members also noted that all of the foundation and voluntary aided schools conducted their own appeals arrangements and it may be appropriate for this to be looked into to judge whether these were at arms length and completely impartial to the school. It was noted that information on the different types of appeals panels would be brought back to the Forum to discuss appropriate arrangements and to ensure that Appeals Panels were independent and at arms length.

Resolved - That an audit be carried out into the appeals procedures for all foundation and voluntary aided schools.

A Member noted that some schools gave preference to those pupils who had received a place in the school's nursery. Mr Browne noted that although the community schools did not use this as part of their admissions criteria it did not contravene the admission code and some foundation schools did use this as one of their admission criteria..

It was noted that the discussion about admissions arrangements to selective and foundation schools should be done in consultation with the school Heads and that it

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was appropriate for this to be approached through SEF. The foremost priority following the meeting was that feedback should be given to those schools whose admissions policies have been the subject of suggestions by the Admissions Forum.

It was agreed that there should be a clarity of response times provided in the letter; as such ten working days was suggested as an appropriate time. It was accepted by the Admissions Forum that there may not be enough time to implement the changes suggested. The Panel noted the difficulties that would be faced by the schools due to the strict timeframe involved but felt that under the current rules they had no choice in this matter.

Resolved - It was agreed that the changes should be suggested to the schools involved and if these were not implemented it would be decided at the next meeting whether they should be referred to the Adjudicator. It was accepted by the Admissions Forum that there may not be enough time to implement the changes suggested.

9. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting date should be Thursday, 24th April, 2008 at 4.00 p.m. and that further meeting dates should be agreed with the Chair and the Clerk of the Forum.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 4.00 pm and closed at 6.00 pm)