

ADMISSIONS FORUM – Meeting held on Thursday, 24th April, 2008.

Present:-

Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools

Gill Bodman – Western House Primary School

Foundation Schools

Italo Cafolla – Castlevew Primary School

John Campbell – Langley Academy

Parent Governor Representatives

Mohammed Din – Ryvers Primary School

Local Education Authority

Councillors David Maclsaac (Chair) and Patrick Shine

Also present under Rule 30:-

Clare Pyper (Strategic Director of Education and Children's Services)

Tony Browne (Head of School Services)

Tony Madden (School Organisation Advisor)

Kevin Barrett (Democratic Services Manager)

Apologies for Absence:- Maureen Ball, Hilda Clarke, Kate Makinson, John McAteer and Kevin Marsh (NUT)

PART I

10. Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting held on 12th March, 2008 were agreed as a correct record subject to the following amendments:-

- The addition in the first paragraph on page 2 of the concern expressed at the last meeting that some local people had been unable to secure a place at the Langley Academy for their children.
- Clarification that the localised over-subscription referred to in the second paragraph on page 3 referred to the Chalvey and Cippenham areas in particular.

11. Grammar Schools Admissions

As requested at the last meeting, Mr Browne had circulated statistical information setting out secondary school admissions data including

applications from Slough residents for schools within and outside of Slough; the preferences expressed by parents for schools both within and outside of the Borough; and information on the home boroughs of pupils attending Slough grammar schools highlighting the numbers travelling into the town from outside of the Borough. Tabled figures also highlighted the number of preferences expressed by the parents of Slough and non-Slough pupils for grammar schools and the number of offers made by the grammar schools.

Members expressed their concern at the current situation whereby, overall, over half of the pupils at the Slough grammar schools did not live in the town. Members asked whether this situation was mirrored in any other authorities with grammar schools and it was noted that Slough fared worse than other comparable Boroughs due in large part to the fact that the Slough grammar schools did not give any preference to local residents. Mr Browne undertook to provide information for the Forum on the situation in Buckinghamshire.

The meeting discussed the best course of action to pursue this matter and, in particular, the introduction of a voluntary code whereby the grammar schools gave some priority to Slough residents in their admission arrangements. At the present time, admission was dictated purely on the basis of the 11+ results and the grammar schools perceived this arrangement as being equitable as the most talented pupils gained admission. However, Slough parents perceived this as being unfair as local children who had achieved the necessary pass mark were not all gaining places in the grammar schools because of the large number of applications from outside of the town.

Mr Din noted the frustration of some 60 Slough parents whose children had achieved the pass mark of 111 but had been unable to secure a place at one of the grammar schools.

Gill Bodman commented that because of the grammar schools situation, choosing a secondary school for their children was an extremely difficult and confusing exercise for many Slough parents and she herself found it difficult to explain the complex arrangements to parents of children at her school.

It was noted that any change in the current arrangements could not be compelled although an objection could be made to the Adjudicator. Clair Pyper reported back on a recent meeting with head teachers where she had passed on the Forum's concerns. It had been agreed with the heads to undertake work in a number of areas including:-

- A short term piece of work to give preference to Slough residents at the grammar schools.
- A longer term piece of work on the impact of the admissions procedures with secondary school heads.
- A more general review of school places in Slough and, in this regard, a presentation had been made to the Cabinet on 14th April outlining the current position and the work required to meet current demands.

It was proposed to bring in specialist help to undertake some of the work and make recommendations to the authority. The head teachers were in

Admissions Forum - 24.04.08

agreement to work together on these issues. In addition, the local MP, Fiona Mactaggart had spoken to Jim Knight MP, Minister of State for Schools and Learners, with a view to Slough being granted an extension on the current admission arrangements deadline for September, 2009 to enable changes to take place in the current admission arrangements. Without the Minister's agreement, it would not be possible to make any changes until the 2010 admissions round.

Clair Pyper also commented that there would be a meeting next week to scope the work that was required and a group of heads would be meeting to work on this. The outcomes of the work would be reported back to the Forum in due course.

Reference was also made to the point raised at the last meeting whereby it was noted that the Consortium application form was inappropriate and contrary to current guidance as it asked parents to express a first, second and third choice. Mr Browne commented that he had spoken to the grammar school heads and they had agreed that only one school should be named on the form where the child would take a test. However, the procedure document that explained the testing process was still considered to be inappropriate and he had suggested some changes and was currently waiting to hear their response. Forum members expressed their continuing disquiet with the current arrangements which were believed to be contrary to Government guidelines.

The view of the Forum was that there should only be the Common Application Form which was used by all admission authorities and that all admissions arrangements should be run by the local authority.

Mr Campbell from the Langley Academy was welcomed to the meeting and invited to outline the admissions arrangements for the new school. He commented that some 450 children had taken the non-verbal reasoning test to attend the Academy. Based on the results of that test, students had been organised into nine ability groups and places allocated to the school based on distance from home to school within each group so that there was a truly comprehensive intake from an approximately one mile radius of the school. The Forum welcomed this arrangement which was seen as being ideal in ensuring that local children attended the school. In response to a question, Mr Campbell stated that although he was unaware exactly how many children had not secured a place at the school, he was aware that there were about 50 appeals.

Mr Madden commented more generally on the issue of insufficient secondary school places in the town, outlining the action being taken by the authority to create additional capacity. He circulated a copy of the Slough School Places Plan 2008/12 for the Forum's information and it was agreed that copies should be circulated to those Members not present at the meeting.

Resolved - That the current position be noted and that the Forum be kept fully advised of progress in the work being undertaken in respect of the grammar school admission arrangements.

12. Primary Schools Admissions

Details had also been circulated of primary school admissions data for September, 2008 showing the preferences submitted by parents and the places allocated. All children had been allocated a place at a primary school in the town.

Following the discussions at the last meeting, Mr Browne reported back on the response to the representations made by the Forum. With regard to the point raised about St Anthony's admission arrangements whereby they did not give priority to children with a statement of educational needs naming that school, the School had now complied with this requirement following the Forum's representations. With regard to the point raised concerning in-year admissions to grammar schools, Mr Browne had written to the three grammar schools concerned suggesting a new form of wording but was still awaiting a response.

With regard to Priory School and the priority given to the children of staff in respect of the nursery admissions policy, it was noted that this related to non-statutory education. However, the Forum's view was that this was an issue of equality and a letter should be sent to the governing body of the school requesting them to bring the policy into line with other nursery policies across the town. It was agreed to write to Priory School in the terms indicated.

With regard to the non-response from the grammar schools, it was decided that Mr Browne should send a follow-up letter on the point previously raised.

Clair Pyper raised a more general issue in respect of nursery school admission policies and suggested that the policies currently in place should be looked at by the Forum to ensure that they were equitable across the Borough. However, it was agreed that the work required in respect of the secondary and grammar schools should take priority.

Resolved – That letters be sent to Priory School and the three grammar schools in the terms indicated.

13. Appeals Procedures

It was noted that it had been agreed at the last meeting that an audit should be carried out into the appeals procedures of all foundation and voluntary aided schools to ensure that they were robust and undertaken in accordance with the current Code of Practice. It was noted that this work was not an immediate priority and would be undertaken in due course. It was suggested that the information collected should also include statistical information about the outcomes of the various appeals processes.

Admissions Forum - 24.04.08

Resolved – That the current position be noted and that the work be undertaken in due course.

14. Looked After Children

Clair Pyper also suggested that the position of Looked After Children (LAC) should be considered across the town. LAC should be given priority in their local schools and she sought the Forum's agreement to make a formal request to schools to give priority in their oversubscription criteria to LAC in their area and this was agreed.

Resolved – That the Director write to schools in the terms indicated.

15. Dates of Future Meetings

It was agreed that the next meeting should take place in the first week of July and that a programme of dates for the 2008/09 academic year should be drawn up by the Clerk in consultation with Mr Browne.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 4.00 p.m. and closed at 5.55 p.m.)