

Admissions Forum – Meeting held on Tuesday, 9th June, 2009.

Present:-

Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools

Gill Bodman
Kate Makinson

Foundation Schools

Maureen Ball
Hilda Clarke

Voluntary Aided Schools

John McAteer

Parent Representatives

Mohammed Din

Local Education Authority

Councillors Bains and Pantelic (vice-Chair in the Chair)

Officers Present

Bill Alexander, Assistant Director, Raising Achievement
Tony Browne, Head of School Services
Clair Pyper, Strategic Director of Education and Children's Services

PART 1

1. Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 23rd March, 2009 were approved as a correct record. Regarding the objection to Slough Grammar School's admission arrangements, Tony Browne, Head of School Services circulated a draft of the objection to the and requested that any comments be submitted in the following days.

2. Admission Forum Membership

The Vice-Chair introduced the item making reference to the minutes from the previous meeting. Members were asked whether they agreed to the amendments suggested as recorded in the minutes. An objection was raised to the number of representatives from community schools as they had only been allocated two Members. This would suggest that a large number of primary schools would be represented by just one person.

A further concern was raised regarding the division of representatives between the primary and secondary sectors especially in cases where there was only one representative allocated to each group; as with the Voluntary Aided,

Voluntary Controlled and Parent Representatives. Members agreed that these should be increased to two Members in order to satisfy the division between the primary and secondary phases. Members agreed the remainder of the amendment to the revised terms of reference for the Admissions Forum.

Resolved – That the Admissions Forum Membership be agreed with the amendments detailed above.

3. Primary Application Process September 2009

Tony Browne referred to a table of allocations for primary school applications for admission in September 2009. It was noted that the increase in applications was significantly higher than had been expected. In the previous year there was a total of 1711 applications. This had increased to 1855. The Forum was advised that at present there was a shortfall of approximately 90 places. Considerable work was underway to ensure that additional places were made available at three schools. Two of which had already agreed to an increase in places by a class of 30. The local authority was still waiting to hear from another school who had also been approached. It was expected that this would be agreed upon shortly.

A representative from the nursery sector advised that there was considerable concern amongst parents regarding school places for September. It was noted that Chalvey was the only ward in the Borough without primary school provision. The admission arrangements for schools meant that children from Chalvey were at a particular disadvantage as a distance criteria was often used. It was confirmed that the distribution of children without places for September was heavily concentrated in the Chalvey area, therefore the additional places were being targeted in the two schools closest to Chalvey. In forthcoming years there would be demand for a two form entry primary school in the area. Members of the Forum considered that it was undesirable to add a form of entry to schools which were designed for fewer pupils as this would have an impact on other facilities at the school. A map of the distribution of pupils not allocated a place for September admission was provided for the Forum.

Clair Pyper, Director of Education and Children Services emphasised the need for additional school places in the area and advised that it was detrimental for young children to attend schools which were a considerable distance from their home.

A Member asked whether the additional faith schools in the area impacted on school places. Officers informed the Forum that the children at Iqra School came mainly from the locale but children attending Khalsa School came from further afield. However it was felt that this did not significantly impact upon the distribution of school places. Another Member noted that there needed to be more support for parents in the application process as a number of parents were confused about their situation. The Forum noted that local authorities had to abide by the School Admissions Code which often provided for practice that parents and local authorities did not necessarily want or believe was fair. A Councillor informed the Forum that the ruling group was fully aware of the

situation in Slough regarding primary school places and that the funding for additional places was a high priority.

Bill Alexander, Assistant Director, Raising Achievement advised that the current data on the growth and distribution indicated that this year was probably the beginning of increased pressure on primary school places over the next couple of years. The situation was compounded by the fact that infant class sizes could only be a maximum of 30. Many of the Members present believed that the pressures of additional pupils would impact on the education the schools provided.

Resolved – That a further update on the situation be brought to the next meeting of the Admissions Forum.

4. Fair Access to Schools Report

Tony Browne introduced the item to the Forum. It was explained that a new code of practice introduced by the DCSF required that a return should be submitted to the Schools Adjudicator by the 30th June each year concerning School Admissions and access to places. It was noted that the report was very detailed and included information on a number of different issues. It was agreed that a draft of the submission would be circulated to Members of the Forum and that any comments could be sent back to Tony Browne. The draft would be distributed to all Members in the third week of June and any comments be returned as soon as possible. The Forum was advised that the form provided for fairly open questions therefore some considerable detail could be included in the submission.

5. Any Other Business

Slough Grammar School Objection – This had not yet been sent to the Adjudicator and any comments should be returned to Tony Browne. Members were reminded that the current number had increased significantly from the published admissions number. Clair Pyper noted that this was the third year that the Forum had raised an objection to the admissions process of Slough Grammar School. The Secondary Heads were seriously concerned about the situation and noted that recommendations of the Adjudicator had not been implemented.

6. Date of the Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held on Wednesday, 16th September, 2009 and that the Clerk would set dates for future meetings for remainder of the Academic Year.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 4.00 pm and closed at 4.45 pm)