

<b>Item No:</b> 4	<b>Classification:</b> OPEN	<b>Committee:</b> Education, Youth & Leisure Scrutiny Sub-Committee	<b>Date:</b> 20 November 2003
<b>Report Title:</b>		School Admissions in Southwark	
<b>Ward(s) or Group affected:</b>		All Wards	
<b>From:</b>		Deputy Director – Achievement, Access & Inclusion CEA@ Southwark	

## 1. PRIMARY AND SECONDARY BOOKLETS

- 1.1 Seven thousand 'Starting Secondary School' booklets were produced in 2003 for parents of Year 6 pupils who will be entering Secondary Schools in September 2004. The cost of production was £11,714.00 (including design and amendments).
- 1.2 'Starting Secondary School' booklets are circulated to:
- all Southwark primary schools;
  - all Southwark secondary schools;
  - all inner London boroughs;
  - all Southwark libraries;
  - primary schools in neighbouring LEAs which are close to Southwark's borders;
  - Southwark town hall;
  - elected members;
  - members of the admissions forum;
  - officers in John Smith house;
  - officers in the Education Resource Centre, Cator Street;and
  - pupil referral units in Southwark.
- 1.3 Eight thousand 'Starting Primary School' booklets were produced in 2003, in the main for parents of pre-school children. The cost of production was £5,364. Circulation is similar to that for the secondary booklets but, in addition, copies are sent to the five nursery schools and to the Early Years Team for circulation to other pre-school providers.
- 1.4 'Starting Primary School' is translated into Somali, Chinese, Bengali and Turkish, copies of which are sent to all primary schools and libraries in Southwark. In recent years, there have been no additional requests for the translated booklets.
- 1.5 Schools were irritated this year by the delay in the production of the secondary school booklet. This was due, in part to a requirement that production is put out to tender with three quotations sought. The cheapest had to be accepted but this was not the same printer as in 2002. The 2002 printer held the master plates and had only to make amendments. The 2003 printer had to start from scratch.

## 1.6 **Issues**

- (a) Southwark's 'Starting Secondary School' booklet contains far more information about each school than is usual in other LEAs. This makes it a costly exercise and means that there are no resources to translate the booklet into community languages. It is recommended that the booklet limits itself to essential information and makes it clear to families that further information can be found in schools' individual prospectuses.
- (b) There is a need to confirm that translations are still meeting the needs of Southwark communities.
- (c) In order to meet the Disability Discrimination Act requirements, the booklets should be available on audiotape and in large print.
- (d) In terms of production, cheapest does not mean most efficient. The Admissions Team needs to be allowed to choose a printer that can guarantee production deadlines even if it is not the cheapest and to agree a contract for a three-year period.
- (e) There are also distribution difficulties with members of staff taking personal responsibility for some deliveries. The distribution of mail generally to schools and others is under review and speedier and more efficient processes will be established.

## 2. **ADMISSION AUTHORITIES**

2.1 There are 38 separate admission authorities in the London Borough of Southwark.

- (a) The LEA is the admission authority for all community schools, including nursery and special schools, and the pupil referral units.
- (b) Each voluntary aided school is its own admission authority. There are 12 Church of England primary schools and two secondary. There are 12 Roman Catholic primary schools and four secondary.
- (c) Each foundation school is its own admission authority. There are four foundation primary schools.
- (d) Each city academy is its own admission authority. There are two city academies in Southwark.
- (e) The city technology college is its own admission authority.

## 2.2 **Issues**

- (a) Each admission authority is able to determine its own admission criteria following consultation with all other admission authorities. This consultation process is, therefore, complex and the Admissions Forum has a key task in ensuring that the process is completed properly. Great care needs to be taken to help families understand the differences amongst schools. Primary schools make a significant contribution to this.

- (b) Currently, each admission authority manages its own admissions and appeals but major changes are proposed for 2005 admissions. See section 6. In Southwark the community primary schools currently organise their own admissions but using common criteria.
- (c) The Admissions Code of Practice explains requirements and best practice. In Southwark there is an urgent need to supply schools with accessible guidance on the Code.

### **3. ADMISSION APPLICATIONS AND APPEALS**

- 3.1 The Admissions Team dealt with some 3,500 secondary transfer applications for September 2003 admissions. Each family can state up to three preferences.
- 3.2 The Charter School received over 952 applications for 180 places and was the only school for which the LEA organised appeals. There were 93 appeals heard but only two were upheld by the independent panel.
- 3.3 52% of applicants to Southwark secondary schools were successful in gaining their first preference. All year 6 pupils living in Southwark were offered a secondary school place. The Admissions Team allocates a place to those families who were unsuccessful in obtaining any of their preferences or who failed to make any application.
- 3.4 The Admissions Team follows up those Southwark children who failed to take up their allocated place in September. If parents do not let the Admissions Team know of alternative placements, the cases are referred to Education Welfare and Attendance Service for direct follow up. Each year there are between 100 and 150 children in this situation. Virtually all are found to have accepted places in other schools.

#### **3.5 Issues**

- (a) The percentage of families obtaining their first preference is very low which could be the result of families not receiving information which helps them specify informed and realistic preferences.
- (b) Currently, it is the Admissions Team which arranges the appeals. As appeals panels are entirely independent bodies, it is the case that the current arrangements could represent a conflict of interest and Southwark could be challenged. It is normal practice for the democratic services sections of local authorities to take responsibility for all appeal hearing arrangements thus properly distancing the exercise from those administering the process. This matter is being discussed with Legal and Democratic Services.

### **4. CASUAL/LATE ADMISSIONS**

- 4.1 The Admissions Team currently sees parents every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday in John Smith House to register their children for Southwark community secondary schools. The Team provides additional advice about out borough schools, how to apply to non-community schools in Southwark and the appeals process. The child's address and date of birth are checked. Passport details are also checked where appropriate.

- 4.2 On average about 30 children a week are registered as new arrivals in Southwark and most are new arrivals to the UK. As there is a shortage of secondary school places in Years 9, 10 and 11, not only in Southwark but also throughout London, waiting lists for all community secondary schools can be lengthy.
- 4.3 For a variety of reasons, some families miss the closing date for applications in what is referred to as 'the normal admission round'. The LEA tries to accommodate as many late applications as possible but does have a final cut-off point of 1<sup>st</sup> April. This makes it possible to complete the allocations. Applications received after this date are dealt with in the same way as 'casual' admissions.

## **5. THE ADMISSIONS FORUM**

- 5.1 Southwark had established an informal admissions forum prior to such a body becoming statutory in early 2003. The new requirements were not followed and work is underway to confirm membership in line with regulations and for a constitution and terms of reference to be agreed. It is possible for the Executive Member to agree to the nomination of up to five elected members to serve on the Admissions Forum. In addition, the two parent governors elected to the Education, Youth & Leisure Scrutiny Committee become members of the Forum by virtue of their election.
- 5.2 The Admissions Forum has wide-ranging powers and influence in terms of all matters relating to schools admissions. (Copies of the constitution and terms of reference are available on request.) It must, therefore, seek to fill the agreed quota of places from each designated category and agree the work plan for the next two years.

## **6. CO-ORDINATED ADMISSIONS**

- 6.1 In order to implement new legislation, LEAs have been tasked with co-ordinating all admissions for all admission authorities for September 2005 secondary schools entrants and for September 2006 primary school entrants. The only exception to this is city technology colleges which can volunteer to join the co-ordinated scheme.
- 6.2 The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has provided resources to enable London Boroughs to devise a Pan-London Scheme. This is essential because families will only complete a single preference form (with up to six preferences) regardless of where the schools are located or which category of schools they are. The pupil's home LEA will be responsible for circulating relevant details to the various admission authorities be they in or out Borough.
- 6.3 **Issues**
- (a) This represents a major change for LEAs and schools and LEAs will need to be absolutely secure in their administrative systems. This will include investment in IT resources.
- (b) Great care will need to be taken to ensure that families understand how to navigate the new arrangements.

- (c) LEAs and Diocesan Boards of Education will need to work in close partnership to ensure that all schools understand the new arrangements.
- (d) As there are such significant changes on the horizon, it might be helpful if Members requested a separate briefing in the early part of 2004. There are some significant benefits for families with this new system.

## **8. THE ADMISSIONS TEAM**

- 8.1 Bearing in mind several of the issues raised above, CEA@ Southwark would like to draw to Members' attention the fact that the Admissions Team is not close to the size it needs to be to manage the scale and complexity of the task it faces each year. In Southwark the team consists of four fulltime equivalents, including the team leader.
- 8.2 CEA@ Southwark is transferring the Pupil Benefits Team from Student Support to the larger Access and Inclusion section. The team will work alongside the Admissions Team. There is a clear rationale behind this change as it will be easier for families to obtain information about clothing grants, free school meals and travel concessions at the same time school admissions are dealt with. The potential exists for further developing this more holistic approach.

## **9. THE SIX TERM YEAR**

- 9.1 Southwark is currently consulting on proposals to introduce a six-term year for 2004/5. A briefing letter has been sent out to all Southwark schools and parents/carers with children attending Southwark schools and nurseries for their comments. The final decision regarding the introduction of a six-term year will be largely dependent on our neighbouring authorities agreeing to set similar dates. Currently Southwark ensures that its term dates match surrounding LEAs as far as possible. Non-community schools are allowed to set their own holiday dates but it is usual practice for them to co-ordinate with the authority's dates in order to minimise disruption for families who may have children in more than one type of school or nursery.

## **10. CONSULTATION**

- 10.1 A draft version of this report was circulated to officers and all members of the Admissions Forum for comment.
- 10.2 This report was requested by the Sub-Committee. Officers would welcome advice and constructive suggestions, particularly in respect to those comments made under the issues headings.