

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 04 October 2010	Meeting Name: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Report title:		School Admissions briefing	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Romi Bowen, Strategic Director, Children's Services	

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. That Members note this report and put forward any questions to Officers as required.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Sub Committee, 12th July 2010 agreed to receive a report on school admissions with focus on reviewing clarity of information available alongside reviewing support networks to help parents negotiate the system.
3. The report is asked to explain the government's guidance on schools admission criteria, the local authority's role in coordinating school admissions and the role of the Admissions Forum. An overview of support for parents is also requested.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

4. The current School Admissions Code (the Code) came into force on 10th February 2010 and applies to admissions to all maintained schools. Academy Funding agreements require Academies to adopt practices and arrangements that are consistent or in accordance with the Code and admissions law as it applies to maintained schools.
5. The Code comprises a series of particular mandatory requirements or provisions where it is stated that relevant bodies 'must' comply and sets out prohibited practices or criteria which 'must not' be used. The Code also contains guidelines which relevant bodies 'should' follow. The Schools Adjudicator is responsible for enforcing the mandatory requirements of the Code.
6. The framework for school admission appeals is set out separately in the School Admissions Appeals Code 2009.

7. Admission authorities 'must' ensure that their determined admission arrangements¹ comply with the mandatory provisions of the Code. Academies funding agreements require their arrangements to be in accordance, or consistent with the Code.
8. The Code sets out the regulations in place for management and implementation of school admission arrangements which includes:
 - i) Equity and Fair Access to school places and consultation
 - ii) Setting Fair Oversubscription Criteria
 - iii) Coordination schemes for admission applications
 - iv) Referral of objections
 - v) Admissions Forums
 - vi) Choice Adviser service
 - vii) Support for parents and carers
9. i) Equity and Fair Access to school places and consultation
 - 9.1 Each admission authority is responsible for setting clear and equitable admission arrangements which are fully compliant with the Code for their respective schools. Local authorities set admission arrangements for all community schools in its area, governing bodies carry out this role for non community schools. Admission arrangements for Academies are approved by the Secretary of State as part of an Academy's Funding Agreement.
 - 9.2 All admission authorities 'must' consult on the admission arrangements they propose to use by 1 March for admission in September of the following year. Consultation 'must' last for a minimum of eight weeks between 1 November and 1 March and target a range of consultees including parents and carers, other admission authorities, neighbouring local authorities, religious authorities where appropriate. Admission authorities 'must' then determine their admission arrangements by 15th April in the determination year. NB. There is provision for admission authorities to retain admission arrangements for three years without the need for annual consultation if there are no proposed changes.
 - 9.3 Admission arrangements 'must' include: pupil admission numbers; criteria to be used if there are more applications than places available (oversubscription criteria); information about any tests for aptitude/ability; details of how late applications and waiting lists will be handled and explain whether any supplementary information forms are to be used by the school.
 - 9.4 Admission authorities are required to ensure that their admission practices are fair and equitable to all families. Schools 'must not' for example, require parents to attend an open evening or other meeting as a condition for the allocation of a place. The use of interviews (prior to an offer of place being made) in school admission arrangements is unlawful.
 - 9.5 All schools that have enough places available 'must' offer a place to every child who has applied for one without condition or the use of any criteria.

¹ 'Admission arrangements' means the overall procedure, practices, criteria and supplementary information to be used in deciding on the allocation of school places and refers to any device or means used to determine whether a school place is to be offered. (School Admissions Code 2010)

9.6 A timeline setting out the process for application and admission to primary and secondary school in Southwark for the 2011/12 academic year is attached as appendix 1.

10. ii) Setting Fair Oversubscription Criteria

10.1 Oversubscription criteria are used to determine how offers of places will be prioritised in the event of their being more applications to a school than places available. All admission authorities 'must' set fair and clear oversubscription criteria for their school. Looked after children must receive first priority for admission to all schools. Other typical oversubscription criteria will include in a priority order, whether an applicant has a sibling at the school, any social/medical needs, distance between the family home and the school. Faith schools will have specific criteria relating to the religious practice of families.

10.2 While they cannot be guaranteed a place at a particular school for their child, parents 'must' be free to express a preference for the school or schools they want for their children. It is important that families consider how closely they are able to meet oversubscription criteria of each school they apply to as this will determine the priority their application will be given.

10.3 A list of oversubscription criteria for community schools is attached as appendix 2 of this report.

10.4 The Code contains a list of prohibited oversubscription criteria which are deemed to be unfair and 'must not' be used by admission authorities. The list of these prohibited criteria is attached as appendix 3 of this report.

11. iii) Coordination schemes for admission applications

11.1 Local authorities are responsible for coordinating and processing all primary, secondary and in-year admission applications to schools in its area. Southwark processed 3725 primary and 4048 secondary applications for 2010/11 admissions and has received 292 in year applications from 1st September 2010 to date. Each year, schemes to manage the coordination of admissions are included in the admissions consultation process full details of Southwark's primary, secondary and in year coordination schemes can be found at: http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/200172/school_admissions/1634/co-ordinated_admission_arrangements

11.2 Parents are able to apply for up to six schools of their preferences, these must be listed in priority order and submitted to the local authority either online or on a paper common application form (CAF) by the current closing dates (for 2011 admissions) – 31st October 2010 for secondary school applications and 15th January for primary school applications. Many voluntary aided schools and some academies will also require a supplementary information form to be completed which is used to rank all applicants in priority order against their published admissions criteria. It should be noted that completion of the CAF is the document that makes an application valid, If a CAF has been completed and a supplementary form has not been even though it is required, the application must still be considered. Failure to complete a supplementary form will, in most cases,

reduce the priority against oversubscription criteria that an application form receives.

11.3 In addition, to school admissions at normal points of entry and regular in-year applications for families that perhaps have moved into the area during the school year, a separate In Year Fair Access protocol is in place to support the admission of vulnerable children or those who present challenging behaviour and may be harder to place in a school.

12. iv) Referral of objections

12.1 Local authorities have a duty to ensure fair access to educational opportunities and have a key role in ensuring that school admission arrangements are lawful and comply with the mandatory provisions in the Code. Any objections 'must' be referred to the Schools Adjudicator.

12.2 A local report is submitted to the School Adjudicator each year on how effectively admission arrangements have operated in the area. The report includes details of how many admission appeals were made and how effective the coordination processes have been.

12.3 Parents also have the right to raise any objections relating to admission arrangements either through the consultation process – between November and March or, after the determination of arrangements have been made in April. Local authorities 'must' publish a notice shortly after all admission arrangements for schools in their area have been determined, setting out that they are available for inspection. This provides an opportunity for parents' access to view the arrangements and consider whether to make an objection to the Schools Adjudicator.

12.4 All objections should be referred to the Schools adjudicator in the determination year by 31st July.

13. v) Admissions Forums

13.1 Local authorities have a duty to establish an Admission Forum for its area which comprises membership that reflects the types of schools in the locality. The main focus of the Forum is to consider the fairness of admission arrangements in their local context. Southwark's Admissions Forum has the following ethos: *To consider and promote a fair and effective schools admission system which advances social equity and inclusion, serving the interests of local parents and children collectively.*

13.2 Admissions Forums have a statutory role to deliver which includes: consideration of how well current and proposed admission arrangements serve its area; review effectiveness and accessibility of advice and guidance for parents and to monitor the effectiveness of local authority Fair Access Protocols.

14. vi) Choice Adviser Service

14.1 Local authorities are required to provide advice and assistance to all parents of children of all ages in their area to help them navigate the school admissions application process. This 'must' be provided through an independent service that is focused on supporting the families who most need support. Southwark delivers this role through a School Preference

Adviser (Choice Adviser), term time only as a member of the Parent Partnership Service which is also an independent service.

14.2 The School Preference Adviser supports parents through the process through: i) one to one and group meetings with parents at schools and community centres to explain admissions processes; ii) telephone and email requests; iii) explaining the admissions appeals process and accompanying parents to admission appeal hearings. For the two week period immediately after primary and secondary school offers are made (in March and April/May each year), the SPA holds a surgery for parents who want further advice and support to pursue options if they have not received a school of their preference at a time when these families are most in need of clear impartial advice on what they can do next. A series of starting school events attracting over 150 parents at a time have also been arranged by the School Preference Adviser.

14.3 This service has become increasingly popular with parents and has proved to be a vital resource to support families that need it. Between September 2009 and July 2010, the following support was given to parents by the School Preference Adviser:

Number of group meetings held	Number of Parents seen	Number of phone calls taken	Number of appeals attended
38	771	106	17

15. vii) Support for parents and carers

15.1 Southwark provides comprehensive information regarding the school admissions process for parents and carers online and through publication of primary and secondary, starting school brochures each year which is a statutory requirement.

15.2 One of the main challenges facing the local authority is to ensure that as many parents as possible understand the admission processes and then, apply by the appropriate closing date. Submission of late applications is particularly problematic for primary school admissions as it is more difficult to raise awareness with families who may not have used formal childcare facilities and totally unaware of the systems in place. Almost 700 late primary school applications were received during last year's admission round, this has been reduced to 452 this year.

15.3 A series of support measures to help parents to apply on time and understand the admission processes involving schools, early years' providers and various departments of the council have been put in place. This is complementary to the work carried out by the School Preference Adviser. A summary of these initiatives is given as appendix 4 of this report.

Policy implications

16. Three year funding through the Area Based Grant (2008-11) was made available to local authorities towards the cost of providing a Choice Adviser service, this is used to fund a School Preference Adviser in Southwark and to contribute towards the cost of providing information and events for parents to support them through the admissions process. This service has proved to be an extremely valuable resource for families navigating the admissions system, particularly to those who may not find it easy to access or understand published information.
17. The Area Based Grant (£49,425) supporting the Preference Advisers was 'protected' from the significant in year budget cuts for 2011-12; however, funding beyond the end of this financial year remains uncertain until the comprehensive spending review in October. Southwark Admission Forum is due to consider support options for parents and carers post August 2011.

Community impact statement

18. Community impact statements are a corporate requirement in all reports to the following meetings: the cabinet, individual decision makers, scrutiny, regulatory committees and community councils.

Resource implications

19. There are no resource implications in this report.

Consultation

20. No consultation has taken place as this report is an information only item.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance

21. The Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance has reviewed the paper and advises that there does not appear to be any legal issues with this document

Finance Director (CS0100)

22. The financial implications are as set out in paragraph 17 of this report.

Head of Procurement

23. There are no procurement implications to this report.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
School Admissions Code 2010	Children's Services, Pupil Access, Tooley St.	Glenn Garcia 52717

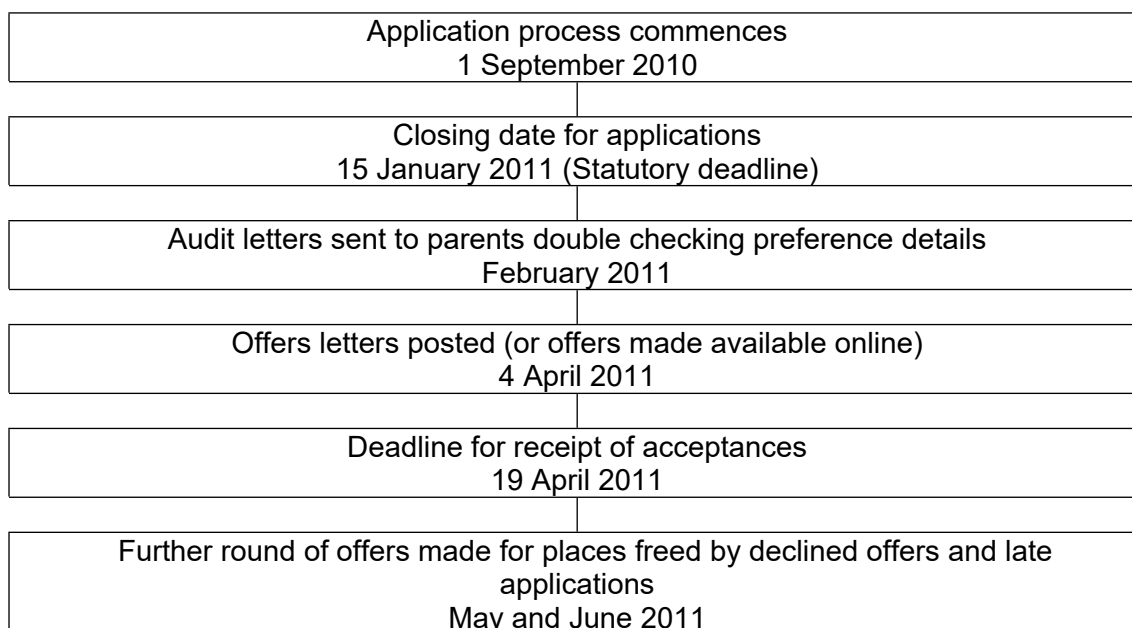
APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Coordinated Admission Arrangements, primary and secondary schools 2011/12
Appendix 2	Oversubscription criteria for community schools 2011
Appendix 3	Prohibited oversubscription criteria
Appendix 4	Summary of school admission support for parents and carers

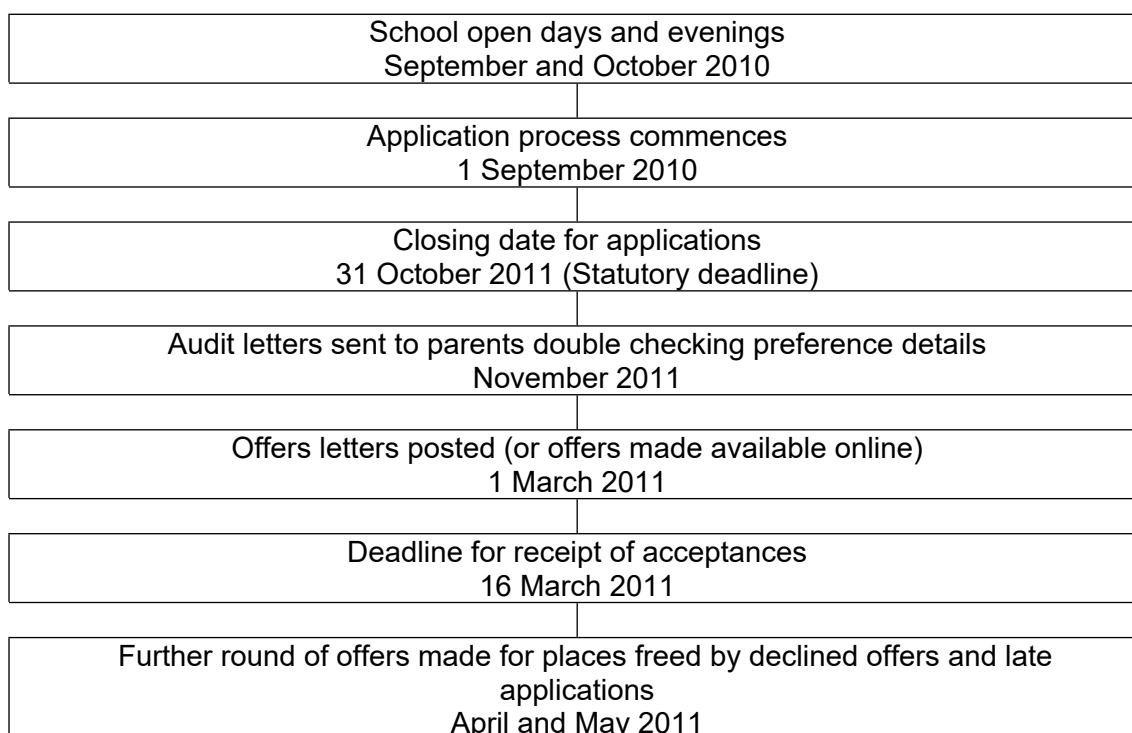
AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Romi Bowen, Strategic Director, Children's Services	
Report Author	Glenn Garcia, Head of Pupil Access	
Version	Final	
Dated	23 rd September 2010	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance	Yes	Yes/No
Finance Director	No	Yes/No
Date final report sent to Constitutional/Community Council/Scrutiny Team	23 rd September 2010	

Coordinated Admission Arrangements for Primary Schools 2011/12



Coordinated Admission Arrangements for Secondary Schools 2011



Oversubscription criteria for community schools 2011

In the event of there being more applications than places available, places will be allocated in the following order of priority:

- (i) Children in public care (Looked After Children) [see note (a)];
- (ii) Children who will have brothers or sisters attending the school at their time of entry [see note (b)];
- (iii) Where professional evidence indicates that there are particular psychological, medical or social needs which the LA and Headteacher agree can best be addressed at the school [see note (c)];
- (iv) Children living nearest the school measured by straight line route from home to the main school gate [see note (d)]

Notes

- (a) A child in public care (looked after child) means a person under the age of 18 years who is provided by social services with accommodation by agreement with their parents/carers (Section 20 of the Children Act 1989) or who is the subject of a care order under Part IV of the Act. Children who are looked after under an agreed series of short-term placements (such as respite) are excluded.
- (b) Brothers and sisters include half brothers and sisters and step brothers and sisters who share the same home. It also includes adopted and foster brothers and sisters who share the same home.
- (c) Evidence of psychological, medical or social needs including the reasons why a particular school would best meet those needs and the difficulties that would be caused if the child had to attend another school. This must be substantiated by written evidence from relevant qualified professionals e.g. a child or educational psychologist, a child psychiatrist, a general practitioner, an orthopaedic consultant or social worker.
- (d) The LA determines the distance using the computerised Geographical Information System (GIS). This system measures the distance from each applicant's home to the designated main entrance of the school by the shortest straight line route in metres. A centroid (centre point), supplied by Ordnance Survey (OS), determines the start point of the home address. If a child lives in a block of flats where a communal entrance is used, the centroid for the block and not the individual flat is used for calculation purposes. When dealing with multiple applications from a block of flats to the same community school, lower door numbers will take priority.
- (e) Where a school becomes oversubscribed within a single criterion, places will be offered to children who live nearest the school. If oversubscription still exists, lots will be drawn. The process will be overseen by a person independent of the process.
- (f) The home address is the address where the child resides. Where a child spends time with both parents/carers in separate homes and both have parental

responsibility, the school will need to establish where the majority of school nights (Sunday to Thursday) are spent and treat that as the home address.

- (g) A child's attendance at a co-located nursery class does not guarantee admission to the school for primary education a separate application must be made for transfer from nursery to primary school.
- (h) Multiple births – if only one place is available at the school and the next child who qualifies for a place is one of multiple birth siblings, we will ask community schools to go over their published admission number to support the family when possible to do so.

Proof of Address

When offered a place at a school, the offer will be conditional until proof of address has been given. Original copies of the following documentation will be required:

- child benefit documentation
- council tax bill
- one other from bank statement, TV licence, credit card or store card statement

Proof of address must be supplied within 15 days of the date of the offer of a place.

Occasionally we have reason to suspect that a family does not live at the address stated. If this is the case, we will carry out an investigation. Should we discover that a parent is making a fraudulent claim the offer of a place will be withdrawn.

Dates of entry

All children within the reception year group will be offered a place in a primary school for September 2011. Parents may request that their child's entry be deferred until later in the same school year or until the child reaches compulsory school age. Where entry is deferred, the school place offered will be held and will not be offered to any other child. Parents however will not be able to defer a child's entry beyond the beginning of the term after the child's fifth birthday, nor beyond the academic year for which the original application was accepted.

Waiting Lists

Parents/carers can apply to have their child placed on the waiting list for any oversubscribed community school in Southwark.

The LA will hold waiting lists for all oversubscribed community schools up until the 31st August. Waiting lists will then be handed over to oversubscribed community schools.

Names will be placed in oversubscription priority order

Any parent/carer has the right to be informed of their ranking on the waiting list and the criteria that applies to them should they request this information.

Capacity of Primary School places

We will constantly review our position in order to identify areas of need. Places will then be allocated in accordance with the oversubscription criteria.

Prohibited oversubscription criteria

In setting oversubscription criteria admission authorities **must not**:

- a) stipulate any conditions that affect the priority given to an application such as taking account of other preferences for schools made on the same application form or the type of school previously attended by the child unless those schools are named feeder schools in accordance with paragraph 2.72. For example, by saying that priority will be given if all or some other preferences are for a school with particular characteristics (e.g. other schools are of a particular religious denomination) or on the basis that the child attended a particular type of school previously. This includes criteria often described as ‘conditionality’;
- b) give priority to children according to the order of schools named as references by their parents, including ‘first preference first’ arrangements;
- c) give priority to children according to their parents’ willingness to give practical support to the ethos of the school which includes:
 - i. asking parents to commit themselves or their child to taking part in activities outside of normal school hours; and
 - ii. asking parents to support the school financially or in any other practical way. This does not prevent admission authorities from including a factual statement about the school’s ethos in their admission arrangements as set out in paragraphs 2.31 and 2.32.
- d) give priority to children according to the occupational, financial or marital status of parents, subject to paragraph 2.17 below;
- e) give priority to children according to the educational achievement or background of their parents;
- f) take account of reports from previous schools about children’s past behaviour, attendance, attitude or achievement;
- g) discriminate against or disadvantage children with special educational needs or disabilities. Governors have no discretion over the admission of children with statements of special educational needs;
- h) allocate places to relatives of former pupils of the school. A former pupil includes a sibling who will not be at the school when the younger child starts. This includes those who were attending at the time the younger sibling’s application is made but will have left by the time of admission (see paragraph 2.23).
- i) take account of the behaviour of other members of a child’s family, whether good or bad, including a good or bad attendance record of other children in the same family;
- j) give priority to children whose parents are current or former staff or governors or who have another connection to the school, subject to paragraph 2.18 below;
- k) give priority to children according to their, or their parents’ particular interests, specialist knowledge or hobbies. This does not include taking account of membership of, or participation in, religious activities for faith schools providing this is consistent with this Code and guidance issued by the faith provider body/religious authority;
- l) give priority to children based on the order in which applications were received;
- m) in the case of designated grammar schools that rank all children according to a predetermined pass mark and allocate places to those who score highest, give priority to siblings of current or former pupils;
- n) in the case of schools with boarding places take account of a child’s suitability for boarding (see paragraphs 1.84 to 1.85 and Appendix 6 of this Code); and
- o) use oversubscription criteria that give priority to children according to the alphabetical order of their first name or surname or their date of birth.

Summary of school admission support for parents and carers

The following actions are in place to support parents from September 2010:

- The Family Information Service has been briefed by admissions officers and is able to assist parents with basic enquiries regarding the primary admissions process.
- Parents and carers are being encouraged to submit their admission applications online where possible to do so. Support and training from the admissions team is available for schools staff so they in turn can support families they come into contact with.
- The Parent Partnership team, led by the School Preference Adviser, held a family fun day event in July 2010 at Peckham Park targeted at families with children under 5 to help raise awareness of the primary admissions process approx 150 families attended. Children were entertained by clowns, a bouncy castle, Surrey Docks Farm and face painting. The Parent Partnership Team, Sure Start and various schools were also present on the day to talk to parents and provide them with advice.
- The School Preference Adviser will be meeting and assisting parents throughout the admissions process. Meetings will be held at schools across the borough, Sunshine House and the One Stop Shop ["OSS"] Walworth Rd.
- Support in the campaign to raise admissions awareness will again be requested from Diocesan Boards.
- Training and awareness of admissions deadlines brought to the attention of key officers/teams across the council last year and will be repeated this year.
- Private, Voluntary and Independent ["PVI"] early years managers to be contacted to inform them of the admissions process and deadlines so that are able to raise awareness with parents using their facilities. This was a huge success last year and will be repeated this year.
- Training to be provided to the One Stop Shop and Call Centre staff to deal with admission queries and provide basic on the spot assistance to parents. Boxes to be placed in each OSS so that parents can drop off applications.
- Campaign posters will be distributed and displayed at every early years setting, doctor's surgery and library in Southwark during October.
- News story published in September 2010 on the Southwark website home page regarding the primary and secondary admissions process.
- Article on 'How to apply for a school place' to be placed in the September 2010 edition of Southwark Life and Let's Go publications.
- Full page advert to be placed in the December 2010 edition of Southwark Life and a quarter page news item to be placed in the January 2011 edition.
- Regular Facebook and Twitter reminders to be sent to parents including reminder posted a week prior to the primary admissions deadline.
- One page advert to be placed in Southwark News and a banner to be placed on the Southwark homepage a week prior to the application deadline.
- Admissions team will liaise with schools staff to ensure a primary school application form has been received for all children attending nursery class provision.