

SCHOOL ADMISSIONS REVIEW

Consultation with Parent Participation Forum (PPF)

Location: 1st Place Children and Parents' Centre, Chumleigh Gardens, Burgess Park. SE5 ORN.

Visit date: Tuesday 25 January 2011, 12 noon - 12.30pm

Members present: Cllr David Hubber, Education and Children's Services scrutiny sub committee chair.

PPF contact: Danna Johnson / Gillian Reeve
Parent Development Co-ordinator
Children's Services Department
Sure Start Children's Centres Development Team

Officer support: Julie Timbrell, Scrutiny project manager

Introduction to Parent Participation Forum (PPF)

The aim of the group is to build on the work of local forums and partnerships where parents play an active part in decision-making and consultation, to create a Southwark-wide early year's forum for parents. The Forum is developed and supported to feed into and contribute to the planning and development of services for children, young people and families. The Forum particularly relates to and responds to the priorities and targets originally set by the 0 – 6 sub partnership, and Children's Centres Development programme. Delegates from the PPF feed information to and from the Early Years Strategic Partnership. Members are trained as Parent Mentors and Advocates, Project Evaluators, and contribute to the development of information and materials for Southwark parents. The group meets monthly. Membership currently runs at 45 parent members, of who 90% are bi-lingual.

Questions asked

1. Do you think you had the right kind of information available to help you choose the right school for your child and make an application? What worked well? What could be improved?
2. How did you find the application process - either online or by submitting a CAF form? What worked well? What could be improved?
3. Did you feel you had enough support to select a school and make an application? What worked well? What could be improved?

Comments in response to the questions

A parent commented that they found it difficult to get information, and thought this was because they used a university nursery rather than a local nursery.

One of the outreach officers commented that parents found the booklet difficult to navigate, particularly if English is not your first language.

There were several comments that parents whose first language was not English found the whole admissions process particularly difficult to understand.

The guide should be made easier to navigate.

There was not enough information about special needs in the guide.

Suggestions to improve communication included a short version in different languages.

Parents thought increased reminders would be very helpful and there should be more of them.

There was a suggestion that Health visitors & the council use existing details on birthdates and contact information to communicate with families as their child approaches school age through a direct mail out or email.

Parents suggested that Children's Centres also used their records to contact parents and carers to send information to parents – however it is important these databases are updated

Health visitors doing the 2 ½ year check could give out information.

It was noted that many of the more excluded parents need to be reached as they do not use centres and nurseries. There pilot project using an outreach worker. This worker supports parents through the whole admissions process.

Sessions in children's centres were very useful (it was noted that many did this already).

The good practice of Kintore Way children's centre and nursery was noted and held up as an example; staff held information sessions, reminded parents at the door when parents entered and left the building, sent letters and made booklets available.

Most parents found the electronic admission process very good. However there were a few comments about glitches; a parent with two children's applying in the same year (not twins) only got confirmation, information and an offer of a place for one child. There was a comment that the process worked well if you had one child at one address, but failed if you were none standard.

One parent filled in a form, but there was a problem. In the end that application was a late application. Her son was supposed to start in January, but he is still on the waiting list. The school offered is not suitable as the child has asthma.

A parent commented that the phone support received was very good

There was praise for the school preference advisors one to one support

An outreach officer arranges presentations from the school preference advisor and these were very useful.

One parent noted that it can be confusing when you ring up schools to find out your child's place on the waiting list; as the place can go up as well as down.

There were a few glitches noted:

- One parent received a letter requesting a form be completed and returned to indicate that they were still interested in the offer; however the deadline for this to be returned was after the letter was received.
- The Guide to starting primary school says that Surrey Square primary school requires supplementary form, but the parent reported that it did not.

There was a comment that there needed to be more awareness and knowledge of 'special guardianship orders'.

Information should be more widely available in libraries, one stop shops, playgroups, and one o'clock clubs and after school care clubs. There was a suggestion that one worker in each setting should be trained up.

Mouth to mouth is very important and parents would be empowered to do this – members of the PPF are trained as parent mentors

Members of the Forum recommended that that the booklet comes to the Forum for feedback.

Summary

The main concerns for parents are:

- The guide should be made easier to navigate.
- There should be more information in the guide on special needs
- Consider producing a short version in different languages
- Bring next year's draft guide to the forum for feedback
- Increase / maintain support for parents where English is not their first language – the admission process is particularly difficult for this group
- Continue the work of the school preference advisor – both outreach and one to one support
- Use networks and contact details more smartly to decimate information and send reminders (health visitors, children centres, nurseries)
- Use face to face contact – health visitor 2 ½ year check ups with parents, parent mentors at the forum, nursery school attendance)
- Train workers and keep booklets on the admissions process at settings such as libraries , one stop shops and community centres

- Fix the glitches in the system