

SCHOOL ADMISSIONS REVIEW

Consultation with the School Admission Forum

Location: Notre Dame School, 118 St George's Rd, SE1 6EX

Visit date: 7 February 2011, 4pm

Members present: Cllr, The Right Reverend, Emmanuel Oyewole vice chair
Education and Children's Services scrutiny sub committee chair.

School Admission Forum contact:

Anita Hawksley; Admissions & Benefits Manager.
Glen Garcia; Head of Pupil Access.

Officer support: Julie Timbrell, Scrutiny project manager

Introduction to Schools' Admission Forum

It is compulsory for every local authority to establish an admissions forum. This is a requirement of Section 85a of the [School Standards and Framework Act 1998](#). However the **Education** Bill 2011 seeks to implement the legislative proposals of the white paper published in November 2010, The Importance of Teaching. If passed this will remove the requirement on English Local Authorities to establish an admissions forum for their area.

What the forum does

The forum has a key role in ensuring the admissions system is fair, that it promotes social equity and does not disadvantage children. It also ensures that the admissions system is straightforward and easy for parents and carers to understand. Forums also monitor the local authority to ensure that we are complying with the schools admissions code.

Questions asked

- Do you think Schools and parents have the right kind of information available to help choose the right school for their child and make an application? What worked well? What could be improved?
- Do you feel you parents enough support to select a school and make an application? What worked well? What could be improved?
- How do you think the application process worked for Schools and parents - either the online form or the paper CAF form? What worked well? What could be improved?
- How did the allocation of places go? How good was the process? What was the quality of communication with the local authority like? What was the

quality of communication with the parents like? What worked well? What could be improved?

- As a whole how do you think the admissions process worked for your school? What worked well? What could be improved?

Comments in response to the questions

There is a good process at the moment which is needed because it is a complex process, a matter of expressing a preference rather than making a choice. Parents and carers are given quite a lot of information which they need.

School preference advisors are trying to make sure they are making the right preference for their child.

There are significant difficulties for parents where English is not the first language, and they do not have significant language skills. We provide supplementary forums to help this process. Open nights at school have proved popular; and this has been particularly effective at helping parents whose first language is not English, understand the process.

One of the problems is that the admissions team are very keen to go and meet parents but do not have the resources to attend One Stop shops. This can take substantial officer time as they will be diverted from their administration tasks if they leave the office. Tooley Street would be the most ideal location to take appointments as officers could meet parents without losing valuable time travelling and waiting.

The school preference advisor has managed to:

- Seen 721 parents
- Present to 38 groups
- Support 100 parents and carers on the telephone

Every school has to provide a prospective, online and in paper.

We have had a poster campaign with dates and deadlines advertising the process.

A catholic school head teacher explained that outreach has been done with chaplains with minority congregations.

The process is now coordinated across London and that is helpful. There is now one closing date.

The online process works well, although some parents can get confused. If we see an application has not been submitted we contact parents.

This is a stressful process, but driven by the government agenda around choice.

The Schools' Admission Forum have coordinated the process and instituted improvements. There is much more confidence in the robustness of the system.

Another key to the success of the process is the fact that schools in Southwark are very good, so parents are very likely to get a place in a very good school, even if this is not their first choice. It is important this is communicated so that parents feel assured their child will get a good education, even if they don't get their first choice.

An improvement could be to introduce a common test for secondary school entry.

Offer day can be particularly difficult for parents and a time when support is needed. It would be good to consider what happens in those first few days to reduce, rather than exacerbate stress.

Extra supplementary information giving explaining waiting lists would be appreciated.

The school preference advisor holds a surgery soon after offer day and people have 10 minute slots.

We work with parents right from offer day up until the 11th hour.

One tricky part of the process that can confuse parents is that they have to respond to both the school and the local authority to accept or decline a place. Parents think if they have communicated that to the Local Authority or school then both will know, but this is not the case.

Summary

- The process is complex
- The admission forum is helpful in coordinating admissions
- There are particular difficulties for parents where English is not the first language, and they do not have significant language skills. Supplementary forums, such as open days explaining the processes and outreach, are important in overcoming these difficulties
- The school preference advisor has supported significant numbers of parents
- An improvement could be to introduce a common test for secondary school entry.
- More support around offer day and including additional information explaining waiting lists and managing your place would be helpful
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- It can confuse parents is that they have to respond to both the school and the local authority to accept or decline a place