

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 23 March 2010	Meeting Name: Executive
Report title:		Admission Arrangements for Primary Schools, nursery schools and classes - September 2011	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Strategic Director of Children's Services	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Executive agrees the primary community schools, nursery schools and nursery classes admissions criteria for 2011 attached as Appendix 1. Executive is also asked to note the improvements to the school admissions process summarised at paragraph 3 of this report.

These changes:

- Continue to reduce the complexity of the local scheme making it more easily understood by parents and carers;
- Meet all requirements of the required statutory frameworks; and,
- Bring admission arrangements across local boroughs in-line with one another.

BACKGROUND

2. This paper describes changes to the admissions scheme that are required as a result of the move to a single admissions process for London. As part of this process, amendments made to our local scheme ten years ago when education was outsourced now needs to be changed as the criterion implies that we can reserve places at Southwark community schools for Southwark children: this is not the case. Further, the system as presently described is unnecessarily complex, making it difficult for parents to understand and hard for officers to apply. Finally, by removing one unnecessary distance criterion, the cost of applying our scheme will be significantly reduced.
3. A total of 3,292 primary school applications to Southwark were received by the 29th January closing date this year, this represents an increase of over 200 additional applications received on time when compared with last year. A comprehensive publicity campaign to raise parents and carers awareness of the need to apply for a primary school place involving media, schools, community organisations and Diocesan boards which has helped to achieve this result, with additional one to one support through our School Preference Adviser service available across the borough. The campaign also encouraged families to submit their applications online which saw an increase from 727 last year to 1,160 online applications this year, an increase of 62%. The school admissions team has been increased by five officer posts to deal directly with the day to day process which enables greater efficiency and availability of information to families as they progress through the school admissions process for their child.

4. The Council is the admission authority for community primary schools, nursery schools and nursery classes within the London Borough of Southwark.
5. Nursery schools and classes have admission arrangements which are completely separate from the coordinated admission arrangements in place for primary schools. Applications for places at nursery schools and classes are made to each school, assessed against the agreed admissions criteria and allocated directly to parents and carers for their children.
6. An amended School Admissions Code of Practice (the Code) came into force on 10th February 2010, it applies to all maintained schools and academies. Admission authorities are required to act in accordance with all mandatory provisions contained in the Code.
7. Admission arrangements must also adhere to the requirements of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, The Education (Determination of Admission Arrangements) Regulations.
8. Admission authorities are required to consult on their admission arrangements every three years unless a significant change to arrangements are proposed. Southwark did consult on its community primary school arrangements for 2010 admissions but is proposing changes for 2011 and therefore must consult this year.
9. Consultation on admission arrangements must run for a period of at least eight weeks and be completed by 1st March in the year preceding the year the change is to be effected (e.g. in March 2010 for admissions in 2011). Final admission arrangements must be confirmed by April 15 2010 for September 2011 admissions.
10. The 2011 admission arrangements for Southwark community primary schools, nursery schools and classes have been consulted on between 18th December 2009 and 12th February 2010 in line with the Code and are attached as Appendix 1. These criteria will be determined by 15th April and published by the local authority in its Starting Primary booklet for September 2011 along with the admissions criteria for all Southwark primary schools which is a statutory requirement. Many parents/carers will use this publication as a main source of information when selecting a nursery school, nursery class or primary school.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION ON ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS

11. The oversubscription criteria for schools must be clear, fair and objective. The Code provides guidance on what are and are not acceptable criteria to use in setting admission arrangements and prescribes which are mandatory or recommended as good practice.
12. Children in public care (Looked After Children) must be given top priority in their oversubscription criteria. This is one of the means by which Elected Members can fulfil their responsibilities as Corporate Parents, and ensure compliance with the statutory Guidance on the Education of Young People in Public Care. The Code makes it very clear that this group of children is especially disadvantaged, with 'low average levels of attainment' not least as a result of 'frequent changes of school because their care placements change'.

13. Specific consultation took place on Southwark's oversubscription criteria relating to distance. The current arrangements have two methods for prioritising applicants which represent the 4th and 5th oversubscription criteria:

- Children for whom it is their nearest Southwark community school measured by straight line route from home to main school gate
- Children living nearest the school measured by straight line route from home to main school gate

The consultation put forward a proposal to change to a single distance criterion:

- Children living nearest the school measured by straight line route from home to main school gate.

14. It is proposed to change to a single distance criterion that measures the distance from home to the main school gate using a straight line route for all applicants for admission in 2011. The main reasons for proposing this change to arrangements are:

Access to closest Southwark community school

15. The current distance criterion 4) was established several years ago in Southwark and aimed to provide families with a higher priority to their local community school. Southwark has 42 community primary schools spread across the borough which enables most families to apply to a local school. Admissions legislation has changed significantly since then focussing largely on parents' and carers' right to express their preference for a school which may or may not be their closest school. There is no evidence to suggest that parents/carers will always prefer their child to attend their closest school, nor that applying this current system to a school that is oversubscribed is any fairer than a single distance measurement would be and tests on data using both systems have not provided any evidence that this change would lead to more parents being unsuccessful in receiving their school of preference. Admission authorities must apply their criteria equitably to both residents and non residents therefore, the 4th criterion is also applied to out borough residents which may not have been the original intention when it was first introduced.

Clarifying admission arrangements for parents and carers

16. The Code of practice states that arrangements must be fair but also, able to be clearly understood by parents/carers. The use of the two distance criteria has increased the complexity of the admissions administration process and often proves difficult for parents/carers to understand. There has been a significant increase in the number of appeals made to community schools, a large number have been based on matters related to distance. It has proved difficult for panels and appellants to understand the use of two distance criteria and in some circumstances, appeals have been lost as a result of this. Moving to a single distance measure will be much simpler to explain and to understand by key stakeholders.

Coordinated primary admissions 2011

17. This proposed change would apply to 2011 admissions which will be the first pan London coordinated admissions round for primary schools. As families will now be able to apply to boroughs seamlessly through the co-ordinated process and receive a single offer, it is more important than ever to have the same criteria as our neighbouring boroughs to support a fair and equitable process.

The admission criteria proposed is identical to that in place for neighbouring Lewisham and Lambeth, introducing a single distance measurement will bring all three boroughs in line and reduce complexity for parents.

Reduced administration

18. A significant amount of additional administration is required to implement two distance criteria as every applicant to a community school has to be measured to all schools within a set radius to determine which is closest to the family home before determining whether or not applicants should be placed in the 4th or 5th criterion and the process requires specialist software to carry out the task. Moving to a single distance criterion will enable the department to improve efficiency and reduce administration costs.
19. Other changes proposed in the primary community school admission arrangements for 2011 include; reduction in the number of places available at Gloucester primary school to 60 places and confirmation to reflect current legislation that states all admissions to reception class must be offered to commence in September unless a parent wishes to defer their child's admission until later in the school year or when their child reaches 5 years of age which is the compulsory school age.
20. The fifth year of primary co-ordinated admissions is under-way. The closing date for 2010/11 applications was 29th January 2010. Offer letters will be sent to parents and carers on 10th May 2010. A total of 3,292 on-time primary school applications have been received. Of this number, 1,160 applications were made online. Parents and carers were able to express up to four school preferences on their application forms.
21. Local authorities have a duty to confirm the determined admission arrangements of all admission authorities within the relevant area (within the Southwark borough boundary) to the Secretary of State each year and also, to publish a notice in a local newspaper confirming all admission arrangements in their area. This will be carried out in April and May respectively.
22. Publicity and information about the primary co-ordinated admissions arrangements has been made available to parents and carers living in Southwark informing of the deadline to submit applications and that it is important not to miss it. Support from many schools and outreach work by the Council's School Preference Adviser has also helped to raise parent/carer awareness of the need to apply for a school place.

Community Impact Statement

23. The co-ordinated process for primary admissions is designed to produce fair and equitable access to school places for all children. Allocation of places is delivered through strict application of admissions and oversubscription criteria of each school across Southwark through a central computer.

Resource Implications

24. All costs associated with the admissions process are chargeable to the Schools Budget and, are, therefore, met from Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Strategic Director of Communities Law & Governance

25. The Executive is asked to agree the Admissions Criteria for 2011 for Primary Community and Nursery schools and Nursery Classes and to note the benefits of introducing such a scheme.

26. The Executive is advised that all school admissions arrangements are governed by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, The Education (Determination of Admission Arrangements) Regulations 1999 and the School Admissions Code of Practice as stated within the body of the document.
27. Having reviewed the document, the Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance is of the opinion that no legal issues arises and the proposed Criteria meets the Local Authority's statutory obligations in relation to the relevant legislation.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
The School Standards and Framework Act 1998	Tooley St DCSF	Glenn Garcia
The Education (Determination of Admission Arrangements) Regulations	Tooley St DCSF	Glenn Garcia
The School Admissions Code of Practice 2010	Tooley St DCSF	Glenn Garcia

APPENDICES

Number	Title
Appendix 1	Southwark Community Primary Schools, Nursery Schools and Classes Admission Arrangements for September 2011

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Romi Bowen, Strategic Director of Children's Services	
Report Author	Glenn Garcia, Head of Pupil Access	
Version	Final	
Dated	9 th March 2010	
Key Decision?	Yes	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Strategic Director of Communities, Law and Governance	Yes	Yes
Finance Director	Yes	None required
Executive Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Support Services	15 March 2010	