



Cabinet
14 April 2015

**Report from the Strategic Director
Children and Young People**

Wards Affected:
ALL/

**Primary School Admissions - Proposed changes to
community schools' oversubscription criteria and
admission arrangements for the 2016/17 admission round**

1. Summary

- 1.1. In December 2014 Cabinet agreed to consult on proposals to amend the council's oversubscription criteria for community primary schools for 2016/17.
- 1.2. Following the completion of the statutory consultation period of eight weeks, Cabinet is asked to decide whether the proposed changes should be agreed.
- 1.3. This report provides Cabinet with the results of the consultation undertaken on proposals to:
 - 1.4. create an additional criterion which prioritises siblings who live within the catchment area of Brent Community Schools over siblings who live outside the school catchment.
 - 1.5. amend the wording and expand the explanation of the social medical criterion to provide clearer information for parents and carers.
 - 1.6. change the method of measuring the distance in the 'tie breaker' within each criterion from shortest safe walking distance using public rights of way, to straight line measurement.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That the results of the consultation carried out from 31 December 2014 to 28 February 2015 be considered and noted.
- 2.2. That the changes to the admission arrangements for community primary schools for 2016/17 as detailed in this report at section 5 be approved: to prioritise siblings and children living within the catchment area over siblings living out of the catchment, to amend the wording and explanation of the social medical criterion and to change the distance measurement method to straight line measurement.

3. Detail

- 3.1. Currently there are 61 primary schools in Brent made up of community schools, Voluntary Aided (VA) schools, foundation schools and academies. VA and foundation schools and academies are their own admission authority and determine their own admission arrangements. The council is the 'Admission Authority' for primary community schools in Brent - there are 33 such schools in Brent. There are no secondary community schools in Brent. The recommendations in this report relate solely to Brent primary community schools, a list of which is attached as appendix 1.
- 3.2. A catchment area is the defined neighbourhood in which the school is sited. It is generally bounded by major roads and/or railway/tube. The catchment area is defined by the local authority and is designed to ensure that each address in the borough falls into the catchment area of one school. Information on which streets make up a catchment area is available for parents/carers on the council's web site.
- 3.3. The Admissions Code requires that Admission Authorities have a mechanism to rank applications in order of priority. All schools and Admission Authorities must have admission arrangements that clearly set out how children will be admitted, including the criteria that will be applied if there are more applications than places at the school. Admission arrangements are determined by the council (as a Cabinet decision) as the Admissions Authority.

4. Consultation

- 4.1. As the Admissions Authority for Brent Community Schools the council is required to consult widely on any proposed changes to the admission arrangements and oversubscription criteria for 2016/17. The period of consultation must be for a minimum of eight weeks and be completed by 1 March 2015. This consultation period allows parents, other schools, religious authorities and the local community to raise any concerns about proposed admission arrangements.
- 4.2. Following Cabinet's decision in December 2014, consultation was carried out on proposals to amend the oversubscription criteria for community schools for 2016/17 between 31 December 2014 and 28 February 2015.
- 4.3. A public notice was placed in the local press, two public meetings were arranged, one daytime and one evening meeting. All Brent schools, children's centres, other local authorities and other statutory bodies were consulted as required by the Admissions Code. Information was provided on the admissions pages of the council's web site, on the consultation portal and through a 'twitter feed'. The proposed changes were a substantial agenda item at the Strategic Director's termly meeting with headteachers in February, when approximately 40 headteachers were in

attendance. A lengthy discussion took place and headteachers were encouraged to respond to the consultation. An information session for elected Members on the proposals was provided on 26 February 2015.

- 4.4. Cabinet will recall that the proposed changes consulted on were as follows:
- 4.5. create an additional criterion which prioritises siblings who live within the catchment area of Brent Community Schools over siblings who live outside the schools catchment.
- 4.6. change the method of measuring the distance in the 'tie breaker' within each criterion from shortest safe walking distance using public rights of way, to straight line measurement.
- 4.7. amend the wording and expand the explanation of the social medical criterion to provide clearer information for parents and carers.
- 4.8. Only two consultation responses were received, and these were from schools: one against the proposal to prioritise in catchment siblings, and one in favour of the proposal.
- 4.9. One response (from Byron Court School) was in favour of the proposed changes. The other response on behalf of the Governors of Donnington Primary School argued against the proposed change to the sibling criterion. It was argued that giving out-catchment siblings a lower priority may result in parents having to take their children to two different schools. Clearly for those people who move home through choice, it is incumbent on the family to ensure that they can secure school places at their new address. This is becoming easier within the borough as we build in more school capacity. Often in Brent, however, families move not through choice, particularly those in the private rented sector.
- 4.10. Officers consider that vulnerable families can be protected from splitting up of children by using the social /medical criterion and consider that this addresses the concerns that these Governors raise.
- 4.11. The admission round for 2016/17 begins in September 2015 and a publicity campaign highlighting the changes will be carried out.
- 4.12. Parents/carers have a right of appeal against any decision not to offer a place at a preferred school, and the right of appeal will also be highlighted.
- 4.13. Admission arrangements can be amended annually, subject to fulfilling the required statutory consultation. To ensure there is no unintended negative impact on vulnerable families, appeals, complaints and concerns raised about the changes will be monitored carefully by the admissions service.
- 4.14. At the headteachers' meeting, headteachers welcomed the clarification to the social/medical needs criterion and were positive and supportive in relation to the change to the method for measuring distance from the school.

5. Proposed Oversubscription Criteria for Community Schools 2016/17

- 5.1. Cabinet is therefore asked to agree to adopt the following oversubscription criteria for Brent community schools for 2016/17 which prioritise siblings living within the catchment, and children living within catchment over siblings living outside of the catchment. The proposed criteria read as follows, in priority order:

1. A 'looked after child' or a child who was previously looked after but immediately after being looked after became subject to an adoption, residence (now child arrangement) order, or special guardianship order.
2. Children attending an infant school on the same site as a junior school.
3. Children for whom it is essential to be admitted to *a specific school* because of special circumstances to do with significant medical needs, social needs or special educational needs.
4. Brothers or sisters of a child who attends the school, or an infant or junior school on the same or adjoining site, living in the catchment area of the school and who will continue to do so on the date of admission.
5. Children living within the school's catchment area.
6. Brothers or sisters of a child who attends the school, or an infant or junior school on the same or adjoining site, and who will continue to do so on the date of admission.
7. All other applicants.

5.2. Special circumstances to do with significant social needs and or medical needs

5.3. This criterion relates to the child's social and or medical needs. The application must be supported by written evidence that sets out the particular reasons why the school in question is the most suitable and the difficulties that would be caused if the child had to attend another school. The recommendation for the specific school should demonstrate knowledge of the school in terms of resources and organisation which deems it essential that the named pupil be admitted to the specific school. The council will not give higher priority to children under this criterion if the required documents have not been submitted.

5.4. Social needs

5.5. Applications made on social grounds must be accompanied by compelling evidence at the time of application. Social needs claims will be considered where there is involvement from a social worker, or other professional and where it can be demonstrated that the child has exceptional social needs that cannot be met at any other school. Parents' circumstances can have an impact on a child's social needs and evidence of this will be considered.

5.6. Medical needs

5.7. Applications made on medical grounds must be accompanied by compelling medical evidence from a hospital consultant at the time of application. The letter from the hospital consultant must provide information about the child's medical condition, the effects of this condition and why, in view of this, the child needs to attend the parent's preferred school. If the school is not the closest to home, the consultant must set out in detail the wholly exceptional circumstances for attending this school and the difficulties if the child had to attend another school. Medical claims will only be considered for one school and this should be named by the consultant. In assessing these applications, advice will be sought from Brent's Special Education Needs Service.

5.8. Distance measurement

- 5.9. 'Tie Break' measurement. Within each criterion priority will be given to the applicant who lives closer to the school.
- 5.10. The distance from home to school will be measured by straight-line, from a point in the property to a point in the school determined by the grid references for the centre of the school's postcode. The measuring system is an integral part of the admission software produced by Tribal Technology Ltd. It uses Ordnance Survey maps and the LLPG (Local Land Property Gazetteer) and is accurate to one metre.

6. Next steps

- 6.1. If the recommendations in this report are agreed, the changes to the admissions oversubscription criteria will be reflected in all the materials publicising primary admissions for 2016/17. This includes the admissions booklet and all the online materials. Officers will also explain the changes at face to face sessions for admissions staff in schools so that they can answer parents' questions clearly and accurately.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. There are no specific financial implications for this report.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1. The School Admissions Code has been issued under Section 84 of the School Standards and Framework Act. The suggested changes to the council's oversubscription criteria adhere to the requirements of the Admissions Code, revised 19 December 2014.
- 8.2. Admission Authorities are responsible for admissions and must act in accordance with the Code, the School Admissions Appeals Code, other laws relating to admissions and relevant human rights and equalities legislation.
- 8.3. As the Admissions Authority for Brent Community Schools the council is required to consult widely on any proposed changes to the admission arrangements and oversubscription criteria for 2016/17.
- 8.4. Consultation must be carried out for a minimum of eight weeks ending on 1 March 2015.

9. Diversity Implications

- 9.1. In general the admissions policy aims to protect the interests of those who are disadvantaged or vulnerable. The changes should benefit those less able to 'work the system' by for example moving into specific catchment areas of popular schools. Unintended consequences and downsides, in particular in relation to the consequences of welfare reform on families will be monitored.
- 9.2. Admission arrangements can be amended annually, subject to fulfilling the required statutory consultation. To ensure there is no unintended negative impact on vulnerable families, appeals, complaints and concerns raised about the changes will be monitored carefully by the admissions service. If such an impact is identified

consideration will be given to a further revision of the oversubscription criteria for future years.

10. Staffing/Accommodation Implications

10.1. There are no staffing or accommodation implications from this report.

Background Papers

- i) Cabinet Report 15th December 2014 Consultation on Community Schools Oversubscription Criteria and Admission Arrangements

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