

DEVON LOCAL ADMISSIONS FORUM

19 February 2004

Present

Devon County Council

Councillors Hart (Chairman), Berman, Mrs Morrish, Mrs Spence and Mrs Squires

Devon Schools Group

Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools

Mr Birch, Mrs S Nield and Mr R Shilvock

Foundation Schools

Mr Sindall

Voluntary Aided Schools

Mr Walker

Church of England Diocesan Board of Education

Mrs Coombes and Mrs Iffla (Observer)

Community Representatives

Early Years Childcare Development Partnership

Ms M Tout

Devon Association of Governors

Mr R Adcock

Neighbouring LEAs

Plymouth Council

Mr Leigh

Torbay Council

Mr Jordan

Cornwall County Council

Mrs J Turner

Dorset County Council

Mr Farmer

Somerset County Council

Mr Pollock

Apologies

*Mr Duttson (Devon Federation of PTAs), Mr Mannix (Roman Catholic Schools Commission)
and Mrs Ladbury (Parent Governor)*

19 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 27 November 2003 were signed as a correct record.

20 **Role of the Admissions Forum**

The Forum noted the report of the Secretary (EO/04/017) on its role, as outlined in the 'The Admissions Code of Practice – Chapter 5' and its constitution as detailed in the report (EO/03/12) previously considered at the meeting held on 20 February 2003. The role of the Forum included consideration of existing and proposed admission arrangements, and how processes might be improved, accessibility of the guidance for parents, effective arrangements for Looked After Children and those with special educational needs and the general promulgation of advice.

21 **Co-ordinated Admission Scheme for Secondary Schools – An Update**

The Forum considered the report of the Secretary (EO/04/018) on a proposed Admissions Scheme, which had been sent to Voluntary Aided and Foundation Schools for consultation. The agreed scheme would be submitted to the Secretary of State by the end of January 2004, for implementation in 2004, ready for the 2005/6 intake. Of the 5 VA and Foundations schools two had, as yet, not responded. It was noted that Exeter, St Peter's VA High School would require parents to provide additional information on a supplementary form. A member expressed the view of the importance of the need to establish parity of esteem in the City.

Members expressed some concern about the dates of the exchange of information by the LEA to neighbouring LEAs by 19 November and to Devon VA and Foundation Schools by 26 November. The Secretary reported that the LEA would endeavour to provide the information in advance of these dates and that work was continuing on improved co-ordination between neighbouring authorities.

Members reported on the need for clear and understandable information for parents and that certain terminology used in the 'Common Application Form' would be difficult for some parents to understand. It was noted that many primary schools assisted parents with the forms. It was suggested by Members that, in addition, a help line number should be available for parents to contact County hall officers or local members or that other arrangements could be developed for example by involving PTAs or the newly formed Children's Trusts which aimed to integrate services to meet the needs of vulnerable families.

22 **Admission Arrangements for 2005**

The Forum received the report of the Secretary (EO/04/019) on the consultation letters sent to all Governing Bodies on the new proposed admission arrangements and information about over subscription criteria, designated Area Mapping and arrangements for Inclusion and In-Year Admissions (Casual).

Members noted that the information on planned admission numbers for 2005/06 needed clarification due to the change of names of the Exeter schools arising from reorganisation in 2005.

The Forum noted the role of the LEA in overseeing adherence to the Code of Practice of admission arrangements by VA and Foundation Schools, particularly in respect of looked after children and children with special needs. The Chairman referred to current good working relations and the need for continued effective liaison.

The Forum discussed the supplementary information which might be required from the primary VA church schools relating to denominational criteria and potential problems in establishing proof.

The Plymouth LEA representative reported that the grammar schools in the City would only be testing where a first or second ranked preferences had been made and not on the third, to avoid additional testing.

23 Inclusion: In-year Admissions (Casual)

The Forum received the report of the Secretary (EO/04/020) on the impact of the agreed protocol relating to how admission applications received after the normal admission round, or for years other than the normal year of entry, were handled. The LEA had asked Schools that the information be disseminated by Heads to staff involved in admissions, to help ensure effective operation.

24 Availability of School Places

The Secretary reported on the improved number of places as a result of the expanded capital programme and associated improved capacity in the secondary sector. A 'Surplus Places Working Group' had been established to address issues relating to falling rolls, particularly within the primary sector and problems resulting from parental preference and the 'step factor' in smaller schools, where loss of a few children could lead to redundancy and where there was less flexibility than in the larger primary schools. Arrangements were being developed for possible collaborative arrangements for groups of smaller schools and community use of buildings. Members also referred to the need for affordable housing in rural areas and effective community planning and regeneration initiatives in liaison with district authorities and other agencies.

25 Admission Appeals

The Forum received the report of the Secretary (EO/04/021) on the number of appeals received and heard in the Devon LEA, performance indicators relating to admissions, statistics for appeals in England by LEA and information relating to Exeter. The Forum noted that the 97% of parents received a place for their child in a school of their first preference in relation to all applications for school places. Compared to other similar LEAs and nationally this figure was particularly high, largely due to the fact that often the first preference was also the designated school.

26 Dates of Future Meetings

Wednesday, 14 July 2004 at 10 am,
Tuesday, 23 November 2004; and
Wednesday, 23 February 2005

The meeting started at 10 am and finished at 11.20 am