

DEVON LOCAL ADMISSIONS FORUM

23 November 2004

Devon County Council

Councillors Hart (Chairman), Mrs Morrish, Mrs Rogers (for Berman) and Mrs. Squires

Devon Schools Group

Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools

Mr. Birch, Mr Kirk and Mr. Shilvock

Foundation Schools

Mr. Sindall

Voluntary Aided Schools

Mr. Walker

Church of England Diocesan Board of Education

Mrs. Iffla

Community Representatives

Devon Association of Governors

Mr. Adcock

Devon Federation of PTAs

Mr. Duttson

Neighbouring LEAs

Plymouth Council

Mr. Leigh

Cornwall County Council

Mrs. Turner

Somerset County Council

Mr. Pollock

Apologies

Ms. Tout (Early Years Childcare Development Partnership), Councillor Berman (Devon County Council), Mr Jordan (Torbay),

34 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 14 July 2004 were signed as a correct record.

35 Co-ordinated Admission Schemes

The Forum considered the report of the Secretary (EO/04/76) on the co-ordinated schemes for secondary and primary schools for 2006/7.

The Secondary Schools Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme had commenced on 1 September 2004 and the deadline for preference forms had been 22 October 2004. At this stage it was difficult to assess whether the scheme was effective.

For Primary Schools it was a requirement that the scheme for primary admissions was in operation for 2006 and agreement to the scheme was required between all primary admitting authorities in Devon by March 2005. If agreement could not be reached a scheme would be determined by the Secretary of State.

Members' and Officers' discussions included

- For the Secondary Scheme it appeared that a large number of parents were not indicating second or third preferences, if a first ranked preference school was full the LEA would have to allocate the next nearest available, however members recognised that in rural areas there was often only one realistic option
- there was still a lack of clarity about the process, misunderstandings amongst parents and schools and conflicting advice
- the letter to Primary Heads had been clear and similar wording should be used in the "Next Step". The LEA would review the booklets with a view to including this wording
- for primary VA schools it would be made clear that places could not be reserved for any category of child
- the First Step booklet would be available as soon as possible for admissions, to Reception in September 2005 and copies distributed to LAF members,
- the number of pre-school children not known to the LEA was relatively small but officers would endeavour to raise awareness via community facilities, such as GP practices
- the LEA would be required to carefully consider reasons given by parents for particular schools and have regard to those reasons
- supplementary forms for primary schools should be sent direct to schools and not the LEA.

RESOLVED

(a) that the secondary Co-ordinated Scheme for 2006 as determined for 2005 with amended timetable and minor amendments as highlighted in the reports be approved;

(b) that the draft primary co-ordinated admissions scheme subject to formal consultation with schools and other admitting authorities as part of the consultation on admissions arrangements for 2006 be approved.

36 Admission Arrangements for 2005 and 2006

The Committee considered the report of the Secretary (EO/04/77) and the Next Step booklet for secondary transfer and the Second Step booklet for first to middle transfers in Exeter. Draft evaluation forms following the receipt of questionnaires from parents would help the LEA evaluate the whole admission process and would be reported to a future LAF meeting.

It was noted that in Exeter the LEA would also be managing primary admissions in 2005 in view of the re-organisation.

The report also detailed the annual consultation process on admission arrangements for 2006. Currently the 'relevant area' for Devon for consultation was the Devon LEA area.

RESOLVED that the relevant area be retained as currently in operation – Devon LEA area - for consultation on arrangements for 2006.

37 **Admission Arrangements Voluntary Aided Schools and Foundation Schools**

The Forum considered the report of the Secretary (EO/04/78) on the requirements for consultation on admission arrangements for 2006, oversubscription criteria and the current situation in Devon and recent developments. The LEA proposed to coordinate consultation for all admitting authorities - VA and Foundations Schools. This would be undertaken electronically in view of the amount of paperwork involved.

In respect of oversubscription criteria, all schools whose criteria were not reflective of good practice as indicated by the Admissions Code of Practice had received a letter from the LEA with suggested improvements. The LEA would formally object to the adjudicator if a VA or Foundation school reflected bad practice in terms of their oversubscription arrangements. The Forum referred to an article in TES 22 October regarding denominational schools that had used 'First Preference' within their oversubscription criteria and the Secretary of State's intervention objecting to the criterion. The implications of the Secretary of State's intervention outlined in the TES article would need to be investigated further by LEA officers. A member indicated that at St Peter's CoE Aided School, Exeter if foundation places were under subscribed the balance of places was transferred to the 'open' category.

38 **Inclusion**

The Forum considered the report of the Secretary (EO/04/79) on the role of the Forum in monitoring the admission of vulnerable pupils, and on monitoring of how well the In-Year Admissions Protocol was working.

The Forum received a presentation on the effectiveness of LEA Inclusion Policy and support for schools leading to encouraging falls in the number of excluded children. The Forum noted the value and good joint work being undertaken but referred also to the increasing number of fixed term exclusions and concerns over tacit or unofficial exclusions.

The Forum also discussed potential difficulties in establishing workable policy for 'hard to place' children referred to in the recently published DfES Five Year Strategy for Education and noted the factors recommended by the DfES to be considered in establishing a protocol for these children.

The Forum also received a presentation on the support for schools and children with statements of special educational needs, the code of practice and guidelines for statementing. The Forum noted the importance of early identification of special needs during the Early Years stage and appropriate training for staff, proper resourcing and support for schools.

The Forum received a summary report for In Year 'Casual' Admissions by all secondary schools and a breakdown by year group of data including 'Out of Normal Round or 'Casual' admissions that had made using the in-year policy. This enabled

the Forum to monitor how admissions related to published numbers, in accordance with the Code of Practice.

RESOLVED that a small Working Group be established to consider in detail the protocols for hard to place children and casual admission arrangements.

39 **Admission Appeals**

The Committee noted the report of the Secretary (EO/04/80) on statistical information relating to admission appeals and improvements in LEA presentations to the Appeals Panel. The data did not include appeals relating to VA or Foundation Schools. A member suggested that the guidance to parents provided by the Clerk to the Independent Appeals Panel could be clearer about the criteria used by Panel in determining appeals relating to social, medical and educational matters.

40 **Dates of Future Meetings**

Wednesday, 23 February 2005; Tuesday, 12 July 2005 and Tuesday, 13 December 2005.

The meeting started at 10.35 am and finished at 11.40am