

Admissions Forum – Meeting held on Thursday, 22nd January, 2009.

Present:-

Voluntary Aided Schools

John McAteer – St. Bernard's Grammar School

Foundation Schools

Hilda Clarke – Langley Grammar School

Maureen Ball – Baylis Court School

Parent Governor Representatives

Mohammed Din – Ryvers Primary School

Local Education Authority

Councillors Dale-Gough, Dodds, Pantelic and Shine

Officers Present

Clair Pyper (Strategic Director of Education & Children's Services), Bill Alexander (Assistant Director, Raising Achievement), Tony Browne (Head of School Services) and Kevin Marsh (NUT).

Apologies for Absence - Gill Bodman and Italo Caffola.

PART I

14. Minutes of the last meeting held on 24th September, 2008.

The minutes were agreed as a correct record subject to the inclusion of John McAteer in the list of those present.

15. Secondary Schools Admissions Report

The Admissions Forum received a report on secondary school admissions procedures. The report included information on the current admissions criteria for the grammar schools in Slough and considered the implications of these. The report provided further detail on those gaining places at grammar schools from within and outside of the borough. The Forum was advised that the report should be considered in conjunction with the Secondary heads responses and the proposed Herschel Grammar School admissions policy. The report was commissioned due to the increasing pressure on Slough secondary school places. The report also provided information on other authorities with Grammar schools and how the admissions arrangements functioned in those authorities. The report contained a number of recommendations on the different issues the report highlighted. It was noted that changes to the admissions arrangements would impact on both selective and non-selective schools but that some progress was being made towards

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reducing the number of Slough pupils who passed the 11+ and did not receive a grammar school place.

A Member advised that they thought that the number of children not receiving a grammar school place was significant and higher than reported by the Secondary Headteacher Admissions Group. A Member commented that out of borough children coming into Slough also caused significant traffic congestion. There was no input into the report from primary heads, governors or parents and a Member felt that these groups should have been included in the research. The Forum was advised that St. Bernard's Grammar School offered a place to every Slough child who applied and passed the 11+. In response to a question regarding Admissions at Langley Academy it was confirmed that the majority of applicants were from Langley and very few pupils received a place who did not live in Langley.

The main issue in Slough was oversubscription in all schools. Many Secondary schools had improved significantly over the past few years and there were no longer places available. The admissions process to secondary schools was complex. The ideal was to create a system where everybody received their 1st preference but this was not possible. The authority noted the demand for places in Slough and a report on increasing capacity had been commissioned and was currently in draft form and there were proposals to increase places in a number of Slough schools.

Members of the Forum considered distance to be one of the most important criteria when allocating secondary school places and recommended that schools should take distance into account when setting their admissions criteria. However it was noted that distance to a school and prioritising pupils from 'in-borough' were not the same thing. Distance to school was important but there were also many other factors to consider in secondary school admissions, for example most schools in Slough had a 'specialism'.

The Director of Education and Children's services noted that all of the issues raised were important and advised that the School Places Paper, Admissions Paper and GCSE's paper could be brought together into a single paper to consolidate the issues and demonstrate the links between them. Members requested the figures of those young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) should also be included in the report.

A task group that had been established to deal with distance criteria had influenced Herschel's new admissions policy. The changes to Herschel's Admissions policy were welcomed by the Forum.

Resolved –

(a) That a report be brought to a future meeting to include information on NEET, GCSE's Admissions and School Places.

(b) That the report, responses and proposed changes to Herschel Grammar's admissions policy be noted.

16. Ombudsman's Report Summary

The Head of Schools Services informed the Forum that an Ombudsman's report had been received in response to a complaint made regarding the Admissions procedure at Herschel Grammar school. The complaint was that the school had operated a first preference first system and had offered places to lower scoring pupils but refused a place to a higher scoring pupil who had made Langley Grammar their first choice. The Ombudsman's decision was the pupil should have been offered a place and an offer had now been made. It was noted in the summary of the Ombudsman's report that this may result in fewer Slough pupils being offered a place, although this was likely to be temporary as Herschel was due to change their admissions arrangements in 2010. It was also noted that other children scoring over 114 were offered a place.

Resolved – That the summary be noted.

17. Slough Grammar Adjudication

The Admissions Forum received the findings of the Slough Grammar Adjudication which the Admissions Forum had referred to the Adjudicator. The report concluded that although the objection was not upheld the school's admissions arrangements could be clearer and more transparent. It was recommended that the school state the number of pupils admitted below the pass mark each year. The Forum was advised that Slough Grammar admitted 180 pupils last year but the admissions number was only 145. The local authority had asked for clarification on this matter but as yet no response had been received.

Resolved – That if the adjudicator's recommendations are not included within the proposed admissions arrangements for Slough Grammar School the Forum make an objection to the adjudicator.

18. Date of the Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held on 23rd March 2009.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 4.00 pm and closed at 5.20 pm)