

Maintained school admission arrangements 2017/18

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Maintained school admission arrangements 2017/18

Purpose of document

The purpose of this document is to explain the need for a consultation in advance of determining the admission arrangements for 2017/18, and what the proposals are.

The consultation which has been published today proposes to change the definition of sibling to include the child of a parent or carer's partner living at the same address and also that a maximum distance be applied for the sibling criteria for primary schools. These are mutually exclusive changes, so one can be agreed while the other not agreed.

The new full definition of sibling, if both changes are agreed would read

'A full brother or sister

A half brother or sister

A step brother or sister

A foster brother or sister

The child of a parent or carer's partner living at the same address

Children with a brother or sister on roll in Reception to Year 6 at the time of the proposed admission up to a distance of 0.5 miles from the school if the family has moved since the last sibling was offered a place

In all cases the sibling must be living at the same address and must still attend the school at the time of admission of the child for whom the application is being made. If you do not provide the name and date of birth of your child's sibling we will not be able to take it into account and it will affect your child's chances of being offered a place at that school.'

This discussion document explains the reasons for proposing these changes, while also explaining why other potential changes have not been proposed.

Admission arrangement requirements – requirements of the Code

The Admissions Code requires all admission authorities to formally agree their admissions arrangements each year, even if they have not changed from previous years.

Admission authorities must determine admission arrangements by 28 February in the determination year, regardless of whether there have been changes.

When changes are proposed, all admission authorities must consult on their admission arrangements, including any supplementary information form.

Where the admission arrangements have not changed there is no requirement to consult, subject to the requirement that they must be consulted on at least once every 7 years, even if there have been no changes during that period.

Consultation must take place between 1 October and 31 January in the determination year and must last for a minimum of 6 weeks.

Previous consultation

In December 2014, the LA consulted on providing priority to children of staff at the school. This was implemented for the 2016/17 academic year.

Some non-maintained schools wish to consult for 2017/18 to be in line with the Local Authority schools. If the Local Authority is to consult on any other proposed changes for 2017/18, non-maintained schools should be made aware in advance to allow them to arrange their consultation accordingly.

Any new consultation should be published by December.

Possible change 1: Pupil premium

Admission authorities of maintained schools are now permitted within the Admissions Code 2014 to consider giving priority in their oversubscription criteria to children eligible for the early years pupil premium, the pupil premium or the service premium who:

- a) are in a nursery class which is part of the school; or
- b) attend a nursery that is established and run by the school. The nursery must be named in the admission arrangements and its selection must be transparent and made on reasonable grounds.

Consideration – population profile affecting Pupil Premium

Waltham Forest has high levels of deprivation and is ranked 15th nationally in the Index of Multiple Deprivation. The proportion of children living in poverty is 35%, which is higher than the national figure. The proportion of children entitled to the Pupil Premium in Waltham Forest is amongst the highest in the country. Since its introduction in 2011, it has tripled in size for primary schools in Waltham Forest.

Eligibility for Pupil Premium is particularly high among those primary children who qualify for School Action Plus (48%), pupils with Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties (56%) those with Moderate Learning Difficulty (55%).

When looking at ethnicity, around 82% of pupils at primary school are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Of those, the largest groups eligible for Pupil Premium are Black Africans (58%), Black Caribbean (50%), any other Black background (54%), White and Black African (48%) and White and Black Caribbean (46%).

Priority criteria should be used to protect vulnerable groups. However in some areas of the borough the proportion of children who would fall into this potential criteria would be very high, thereby disadvantaging those children of other groups who are in a minority.

Consideration – nursery places

Waltham Forest has 3 nursery schools, and several primary schools have attached nursery provision.

Waltham Forest has a younger than average population among the 0-15 and 25-49 age groups compared to London and national statistics. With the continued high birth rates, high levels of fertility, and high migration, the demand on primary school places remains great. Nursery places are also in increasing demand with the introduction of more free places for 2, 3 and 4 year olds.

Many families arriving into the borough have young children and the high migration level has accounted for much of the 71 bulge classes and 35FE permanent expansions within the primary sector since 2007.

Therefore it is clear that there is strong demand for nursery provision, however admissions criteria used for nursery classes are not necessarily in line with admission criteria used for schools. For example, nursery criteria can include distance measured from a childminder's address.

Furthermore, there are communities within Waltham Forest who choose not to send their children to nursery schools, but when their children reach school age these families will be looking for local school places. If priority is given to children who are already attending the nursery classes, the likelihood of other local families getting a place at their local school could be reduced.

This could be a particular concern for schools that have twice the number of nursery places than Reception places (morning and afternoon sessions) plus high levels of deprivation.

Giving priority to children who attend a nursery class attached to a school will encourage parents to secure a nursery place at an early age for their children, especially at the popular primary schools. This could disadvantage children of families who

- were not able to secure a place at their local nursery attached to a school as places were full
- were not living in the local area prior to applying for a Reception place within the national timeframe
- chose not to send their children to nursery school

The impact of receiving the funding for children who are entitled to Pupil Premium cannot be understated for schools, however the guiding principle of the Admissions Code is that it must be fair, transparent and objective. If introducing new criteria could lead to disadvantaging pupils, some of whom may also be disadvantaged children themselves due to their family circumstances, it cannot be reasonable to introduce such a criteria.

It is also interesting to note that none of our neighbouring local authorities currently have this criteria for their maintained schools.

Recommendation

It is not recommended to introduce a new criteria to give priority to children who are eligible for the early years pupil premium, the pupil premium or the service premium and who are in a nursery attached to a school

Possible change 2: Definition of sibling

Sibling is currently defined as a full, half, step, foster brother or sister living as part of the family unit. In all cases, the brother or sister must be living as part of a family unit with, and at the same address as, the child for whom the application is being made.

Cousins, aunts or uncles are not defined as siblings.

To be eligible for sibling criteria, the sibling must be attending any of the preferred schools at the time of admission.

A younger sibling attending the nursery attached to a preferred school will not be taken into account.

It has been suggested that the definition of sibling is extended to include cousins, aunt or uncle living in the same house.

The Waltham Forest definition of sibling is largely in line with that use by neighbouring boroughs. However Hackney LA uses a definition of sibling that includes 'the child of a parent or carer's partner living at the same address'.

Half or step sibling would include those children who share the same mother or the same father. However the current WF definition does not include children who have different parents from other children living in the same house but where one child's mother is living with but not married to another child's father. Therefore children living in the same house who are cared for by the same adult may not be given sibling priority.

Consideration

Schools are understandably keen for places to be allocated to local children where there is a strong network of adults able to bring and collect children from school, and there is benefit from pupils having family links with other pupils at the school.

The profile of families living within Waltham Forest means that it is not unusual for extended families to be living in the same property, and for adults within the extended family to help with childcare responsibilities. This is especially true in the south and central areas of the borough.

When applying for a school place, it is necessary to provide evidence that the adult completing the form has parental responsibility for a child, and that they live at the address given. In this way, it is reasonably simple to identify siblings who live at the same address.

Consideration must be given to how this can reasonably be proved. It is expected that if someone has been living at an address for any length of time then their name will be on the bills/Council Tax so they can submit a proof of address. Alternatively any proof of address from an official authority (ie letter from the NHS for a hospital appointment) could be accepted. If that person has just moved in and they are in the process of getting their name put on the bills/Council Tax then they will allow them more time to submit the appropriate proof of address.

It would be much more difficult to accurately check the true relationship of a cousin, uncle or aunt. Therefore extending the definition of sibling to include these could be open to fraudulent applications, with additional risk that it may not be possible to effectively check eligibility for this criteria.

Recommendation

It is not recommended that the definition of sibling is extended to include cousins, aunt or uncle living in the same house.

However it is recommended that the definition of sibling be increased to include the child of a parent or carer's partner living at the same address. The definition of sibling would be:

A full brother or sister

A half brother or sister

A step brother or sister

A foster brother or sister

The child of a parent or carer's partner living at the same address

Possible change 3: Maximum distance to be applied to sibling link

There is a suggestion to consider the following:

- introduce a maximum distance by which siblings can apply under the sibling priority for primary schools
- remove the sibling criteria completely for secondary schools

This is in response to families who have children in a popular school, then move outside the local area, but younger siblings are given priority admission.

It is not unusual for families to move house to get a better chance of securing a place at a popular over subscribed school. This is not a new behaviour, or one that is exclusive to particular areas of the country.

However, as the population grows and there is more demand for local school places in both primary and secondary sectors, consideration should be given to the fairness of giving priority to a child who does not live within the local area.

In 2015/16, thirteen primary school had a cut off distance of less than half a mile, and 24 primary schools had a cut off distance of less than a mile. This is based on pupils who received a place under the distance criteria and does not take into consideration the distance of siblings.

The smallest cut off distances for 2015/16 were:

Greenleaf (0.168 mile)

Coppermill (0.176 mile)

Hillyfield on the Hill (0.180 mile)

Handsworth (0.248 mile)

Dawlish (0.262 mile)

Oakhill (0.294 mile)

Yardley (0.307 mile)

South Grove (0.322 mile)

Mission Grove (0.370 mile)

Gwyn Jones (0.383 mile)

Newport (0.398 mile)

Edinburgh (0.416 mile)

Henry Maynard (0.441 mile)

Some London authorities have introduced a maximum distance of less than a mile for applying under the sibling criteria, so that if any child lives further than a certain distance they are no longer eligible to be given sibling priority. This allows more school places to be given to local children.

The number of pupils that this would affect is likely to be minimal, however setting a maximum distance for anyone applying for a primary place under the sibling priority would guarantee more places would be allocated to local children.

Consideration must be given to those families who have been forced to move due to no fault of their own. The LA will consider any such applications under the medical/social criteria, and priority can be granted to those who have been experienced a compulsory move so as not to disadvantage them unfairly.

For secondary aged pupils who are expected to travel independently, some authorities have removed the sibling criteria completely to ensure more places are allocated to local children rather than to siblings whose families have moved away from the local area.

Cut off distances for secondary schools are much more wide spread, with only 4 secondary schools having a cut off distance of less than a mile, and none have a cut off distance of less than half a mile.

There is a benefit from pupils attending a school who have family links and are supported in travelling to and from school. There is also a benefit and a desire to provide local school places to local children. There is more pressure on local places being provided to local children at primary level, and there is benefit in considering introducing a maximum distance of say 0.5 miles for anyone applying for a primary place under the sibling priority.

Recommendation

It is not recommended that the sibling is removed for secondary pupils.

It is recommended that a maximum distance be considered for the sibling criteria for primary schools, and would read 'Children with a brother or sister on roll in Reception to Year 6 at the time of the proposed admission up to a distance of 0.5 miles if the family has moved since the last sibling was offered a place'