

22 October 2018

Our ref: PA/TW
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Headteachers & Chairs of Governors of all Maintained Schools
Neighbouring Local Authorities
Worcester Diocesan Board of Education
Church of England Diocese Birmingham
Birmingham Diocesan Schools Commission
Chair of the Worcestershire Association of Governors
Trade Unions
SENDIASS

Dear Colleagues

**Consultation on Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary
Controlled schools for the Academic Year 2020-2021**

Consultation is now taking place on the admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools for the academic year 2020/2021. Consultation will run from **22nd October 2018 to 7th December 2018**. A Consultation Response Form has been included with this letter and a response is invited from all interested parties.

A copy of the current approved admission arrangements is attached as Appendix 1a and 1b for your information.

Detailed below are the changes proposed for the 2020/2021 academic year. The Authority is seeking views on these changes before the Cabinet makes a final decision at its meeting in January 2019.

The changes proposed for inclusion in consultation are as a result of requests from interested parties.

- 1. The Minister of State for School Standards has requested that admission authorities consult on giving priority in their oversubscription criteria to children who have previously been in state care outside of England, and have ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted.**

School admission authorities are currently required to give looked after children and previously looked after children highest priority in their oversubscription criteria. On 4 December 2017, the Minister announced that when the opportunity arises he intends to amend the School Admissions Code (the Code) to ensure that children who were previously in state care outside of England, and have ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted, also receive the same highest priority for admission into a school in England.

Until such a time, however, the Minister wishes admission authorities to introduce oversubscription criteria to give these children second highest priority for admission into school.

By children previously in state care outside of England, we mean children who have been looked after outside of England by a public authority, a religious organisation or another

provider of care whose sole purpose is to benefit society. The care may have been provided in orphanages or other settings.

It is therefore proposed that consultation take place on:

Children who have previously been in state care outside of England, and have ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted should be given second highest priority in the oversubscription criteria.

Your response is sought.

2. Co-ordination of In-Year Applications

Currently when a parent makes an application they have to apply to the individual admission authority for each school. Applications with a first preference for In-Year transfers into a Community or Voluntary Controlled School in Worcestershire are forwarded to Babcock Prime, School Admissions. All applications with a first preference for 'In Year' transfers into an Academy, Foundation, Free or Voluntary Aided School in Worcestershire or a school in another Local Authority must be forwarded to the individual schools. Once the first preference school has reached a decision and decides to refuse a place, the form should then be forwarded on to the next preference school and so on.

Attached as Appendix 3 is the In-Year Process that is currently in place in Worcestershire for your information.

The number of in-year applications has increased, for the academic year 2012, 2000 In-Year applications were received and processed by the Local Authority on behalf of 226 schools. However, for the academic year 2017 with no co-ordination, the Local Authority received and processed a total of 2400 in-year applications on behalf of 132 schools. It is estimated therefore that there are approximately 1700 in-year applications/preferences being made directly to own admission authority schools. This is a huge administrative burden being placed on schools.

In line with the Code on School Admissions, **all own admission authority schools must**, on receipt of an in-year application, notify the local authority of **both the application and its outcome** and inform parents of their right to appeal against a refusal of a place. This is a **statutory duty** placed on all own admission authority schools. However, currently this information is not consistently returned to the Local Authority. This information is legally required to be provided to the Local Authority to allow the Local Authority to keep up to date figures on the availability of places in the area. This information is required in addition for DfE Sufficiency Returns and is required to be included in the Office of the Schools Adjudicator Reports. The Local Authority recognises this administrative burden placed on schools and would like to support schools in simplifying this process and ensure that the data that the Local Authority maintains is up to date and accurate.

The current process in place in Worcestershire does not make for timely processing of applications, particularly where there is more than one preference. In some cases this has meant that parents are awaiting the offer of a school place for over half a term. This is of grave concern where no offer of a school place is being made and the Local Authority has not been advised of the outcome of applications. Children may be out of school for unacceptable periods of time.

The decision on whether or not to admit a child to a school rests with the admission authority for the school. Any change in the process for In-Year co-ordination will not change this. The decision rests with the admission authority for the school. However, the Local Authority strongly believes that by co-ordinating In-Year applications on behalf of Worcestershire residents, that this will provide a comprehensive service that is clear and fair to all parents and schools. It will reduce the amount of time parents are waiting for decisions from all of their preferred schools, if all applications are considered at the same time. It will provide consistency and timely processing of applications for the benefit of parents. It will ensure that schools legal responsibilities, to notify the local authority of the application and its outcome, are met. All decisions and rights of appeal, where necessary will be communicated from a central contact point for parents, at the same time. This is consistent with how In-Year applications are dealt with in 9 out of 13 of our West Midlands Regional statistical neighbours. The proposed In-Year Admission scheme ensures that all statutory duties are met in a more robust, timely and measured way.

Please find attached as Appendix 4 a Co-ordinated Scheme for In-Year Applications for Worcestershire Schools for the 2020 Academic Year.

Under the proposed scheme, it allows parents to apply for up to 3 preferred schools at the same time, rather than waiting for the outcome of an application for 1 school before another school even considers the application. This brings the process into line with the way applications are dealt with in the normal admissions round, providing consistency for parents. It allows responses to be provided to parents on all of their preferred schools at once, including the full appeal rights and waiting list procedures. It will continue to be the responsibility of the individual admission authority to make arrangements for an independent appeal panel and maintain any waiting list. This makes the process clear, fair and objective as well as easily understood by parents and also ensures that admissions are in line with the Code on School Admissions and comply with the statutory duties placed on all admission authorities.

This will ensure that children are not out of school for unnecessarily long periods of time, the more vulnerable and hard to place children are safeguarded by a robust admissions process, which is timely and ensures their application is handled appropriately. It is particularly important that Children that are Looked After or Previously Looked After, those that are Hard to Place and that may be subject to the Worcestershire Fair Access Protocol can be identified early and any relevant referrals made in a timely manner. This minimises the days lost to education.

By co-ordinating in-year admissions this will also ensure that the Local Authority is able to keep up to date figures on the availability of places in the area, in order to fulfil the statutory duty to provide this information to parents, complete accurate DfE Sufficiency Returns to ensure appropriate funding and to accurately report the information to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator. Thus alleviating the administrative burden placed on schools.

It is therefore proposed that consultation take place on:

In-Year admissions should be co-ordinated by School Admissions on behalf of the Local Authority and the proposed scheme at Appendix 4 be approved.

Your response is sought.

3. Admission Policy for Academy (A), Foundation (FO), Free (FR) and Voluntary Aided (VA) Schools.

All Academy, Foundation, Free and Voluntary Aided schools must consult on their proposed Admission Policies, where there is a change from the 2019 policy. A copy of the proposed arrangements for Academy, Foundation, Free and Voluntary Aided schools can be found on the Worcestershire County Council website, at www.worcestershire.gov.uk/schooladmissions the individual school's website or from the schools' offices. A public notice has been placed in the free local press to this effect.

Where there is no change from the determined policy approved for 2019, and no objections were received to that policy, those admission authorities need not consult for 2020.

Any comments on Academy, Foundation, Free and Voluntary Aided school policies should be directed to the schools themselves.

All Academy, Foundation, Free and Voluntary Aided school have also been asked to consider consulting on giving priority in their oversubscription criteria to children who have previously been in state care outside of England, and have ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted. It will be for the Governing Body/Academy Trusts for those schools to determine whether or not to include this in consultation prior to any changes in legislation.

4. Co-ordinated Admission Arrangements and Dates

Local Authorities are required, to operate a co-ordinated admissions scheme for the normal admissions round for all schools. Under the scheme, LA's are required to coordinate with neighbouring authorities, and all admission authorities within their area to ensure that **only one offer of a school place** is awarded to pupils.

The draft schemes are attached as Appendices 2a (Prim/Midd) and 2b (Sec) for implementation in 2020/21 and subsequent years. These are similar to the schemes implemented for the last few academic years.

5. Published Admission Number changes (PAN)

Admission Authorities are not required to consult on an increase to the PAN if the school has the accommodation. However, there is still a statutory requirement to consult on an increase to the size of a school where the increase is 30 places and by more than 25% of the existing accommodation.

Included as Appendix 5 are a list of those schools that are being put forward to be considered for expansion. Academies will need to seek permission from the Regional Schools Commissioner to vary their PAN and funding agreements. Additional accommodation will be required at some schools to meet this Basic Need and the projects will need to be included in the capital investment plan.

The PAN changes will be published in the Information for Parents Book 2020 which when published can be found at www.worcestershire.gov.uk/schooladmissions

If a school is not included in Appendix 5 and has not approached the Local Authority to increase its PAN within existing accommodation then the PAN is proposed to remain unchanged. The PAN's for 2019 can be viewed on the Worcestershire County Council Website in the Information for Parents Book 2019 which can be found at www.worcestershire.gov.uk/schooladmissions

Baxter College is consulting on a decrease in PAN due to falling numbers. As this school is now an Academy, any response to the proposed decrease in PAN should be sent directly to the school.

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Broadway is also consulting on a decrease in PAN, any response to the proposed decrease should be sent directly to the school.

Please also find attached a consultation response form; all responses will be collated and reported to Cabinet.

Timescales for this consultation

Responses are required by Friday 7th December 2018. They should be sent to:

Admission Arrangements Consultation
School Admissions
Babcock Prime
Prime House
Woodbury Lane
Norton
Worcester
WR5 2PT

Or by e-mail to tracey.wilson@babcockinternational.com

If you have any queries on these issues please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



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Mainstream Admissions Manager