

14 February 2019

The School Admissions Process

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor Chris Towe – Education & Skills

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to provide background information on the school admissions process.

Reason for scrutiny:

The report was requested by the Chair and Members of the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 10 January 2019 to provide Committee Members with an opportunity to further develop their understanding of the Council's statutory responsibilities in respect of the school admissions process.

Recommendations:

That the report be noted.

Background papers:

School Admissions is a statutory process and must be operated in accordance with the requirements of the School Admissions Code (2014) and the School Standards and Framework Act (1998)

Resource and legal considerations:

Not applicable for this report.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities:

The report supports the Council's corporate plan priorities, specifically the priority that children have the best start and are safe, happy, healthy and learning well.

Environmental impact:

Not applicable for this report.

Performance management:

Not applicable for this report.


Consultation:

Not applicable for this report.

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1. Report

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School Admissions is a statutory process and must be operated in accordance with the requirements of the School Admissions Code (2014) and the School Standards and Framework Act (1998).

Admission Arrangements

School places are offered in accordance with the published admission arrangements for each school. Walsall Council is the admission authority for all Walsall community and voluntary controlled primary schools, and acting in this capacity the Local Authority consults on the admission arrangements for these schools each year. The consultation on the admission arrangements for 2020/21 closed on 31 December 2018 and cabinet will determine the admission arrangements at the February meeting.

The admission arrangements for all foundation and voluntary aided schools and academies are determined by the admission authority for each individual school.

Admission arrangements set out the criteria that will be used to determine who will be offered a place when there are more applicants for a school than there are places available. The admission criteria for Walsall community and voluntary controlled schools are included as Appendix A to this report.

Admissions process and outcomes

Walsall Local Authority participates in a coordinated inter local authority admissions process with other West Midlands local authorities including, Birmingham, Dudley, Sandwell, Staffordshire and Wolverhampton. Parents submit one application for admission to Reception, transfer from Year 2 to Year 3 and transfer to secondary school in Year 7 to their home local authority regardless of where their preferred schools are located.

The admissions process operates around national closing dates for applications and national offer dates. The national closing dates are 31 October for secondary applications and 15 January for primary applications. The national offer date for secondary places is 1 March and the national offer date for primary places is 16 April.

Parents are able to express up to 5 preferences for a secondary school place, and up to 3 preferences for a primary school place on their application, and the vast majority of applicants in Walsall are offered a place for their child at one of their preferred schools.

The table below shows the outcomes from the 2018 and 2017 primary admission rounds:

On time applications from Walsall residents	2018 Number of applications	2018 Percentage	2017 Number of applications	2017 Percentage
Offered 1 st preference	3056	90.04%	3109	89.8%
Offered 2 nd preference	186	5.48%	158	4.56%
Offered 3 rd preference	50	1.48%	42	1.21%
Offered one of their preferences	3292	97.00%	3309	95.57%
Total number of on-time applications	3394		3417	

The table below shows the outcomes from the 2018 and 2017 secondary admission rounds:

On time applications from Walsall residents	2018 Number of applications	2018 Percentage	2017 Number of applications	2017 Percentage
Offered 1 st preference	2516	74.57	2490	74.57%
Offered 2 nd preference	412	12.21	439	13.15%
Offered 3 rd preference	161	4.77	133	3.98%
Offered one of their top 3 preferences	3089	91.55	3062	91.7%
Offered one of their 5 preferences	3159	93.63	3142	94.1%
Total number of on-time applications	3374		3339	

The data given above relates to on time applications from Walsall residents only.

Parents who are not offered their highest ranked preferences have the option to lodge an appeal against the decision to refuse their child a place, and their child's name will be added to the waiting list for their higher ranked schools.

There is a statutory requirement that local authorities coordinate the primary and secondary admissions process and for this reason the process is the same across all local authorities in England, including our neighbouring local authorities.

Infant Class Size Legislation

Infant classes (Reception, Year 1 and Year 2) must not contain more than 30 pupils with a single school teacher. This means that infant class size admission appeals are usually unsuccessful.

Midyear Admissions

Applications made for admission to any year group outside the normal primary and secondary admission rounds are called 'midyear' admissions.

There is no statutory requirement for local authorities to manage the midyear admissions process. Walsall Local Authority coordinates midyear admissions for all Walsall primary schools, but the secondary midyear process is managed by the schools themselves.

Other local authorities have different arrangements in place to manage midyear admissions:

- Birmingham Local Authority do not coordinate midyear admissions, and all Birmingham schools manage their own midyear admissions;
- Dudley Local Authority coordinates midyear admissions for all primary and secondary schools;
- Sandwell Local Authority coordinates midyear admissions for community and voluntary controlled schools, and all other schools manage their own midyear admissions;
- Staffordshire Local Authority do not coordinate midyear admissions, and all Staffordshire schools manage their own midyear admissions;
- Wolverhampton local Authority coordinates midyear admissions for all primary and secondary schools.

Key Issues

- Where families with a number of children move into the borough, it may not be possible to offer all children a place at the same school. Parents have the right of appeal against the decision to refuse their child a place at any school, and their child's name will be added to the waiting list for their higher ranked schools;
- In the primary and secondary admission rounds, all on time applications are processed before applications that are received after the national closing date. This effectively means that children whose parents submit a late application may be disadvantaged, as they may not be offered a place at an oversubscribed school even if they meet a higher ranked criterion than some on time applicants;
- The infant class size legislation means that it is very difficult for parents to win an admission appeal for a place in an infant class;
- There are a number of issues created by the fact that Walsall secondary schools manage their own midyear admissions. Not all schools provide information to the Local Authority on their vacancies, or provide details of midyear admission applications made to the school and the outcome of these applications. This means that the Local Authority is unable to provide accurate information for parents on the availability of places for midyear admission, and there are safeguarding concerns relating to delays in the Local Authority being made aware of children who are without a school place. The Local Authority attempted to reintroduce coordination of the secondary midyear admissions process in September 2018, but secondary schools were unwilling to participate in the process;
- The Local Authority includes priority for children with siblings already on roll, and children with a medical or social need to attend a particular school in the admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled primary schools. There is however no required for sibling and medical/social criteria to be included and not all Walsall schools include these criteria in their admission arrangements. The lack of a sibling criterion in the admission arrangements for some Walsall secondary schools can create difficulties for families as it may result in siblings not being offered places in the same schools;

- Some Walsall schools located close to the borough boundaries are very heavily oversubscribed and receive a high volume of applications from families who live outside the borough. This causes frustration for some Walsall resident families whose applications may be unsuccessful. Admission authorities are not permitted to give priority to children who live within the borough in their admission arrangements.

Appendix A

The Admission Arrangements

Where there are sufficient places available in the year group at a particular school, all applicants are allocated a place. Where the total number of applicants exceeds the number of places available for this year group, Walsall Council has established an order of priority for admission as follows:-

[Children with Statements of Special Educational Needs are placed in schools by virtue of the Education Act 1996, before consideration is given to other pupils]

1. Children in Public Care (Looked After children) or previously looked after children;
2. Children who have a sibling already in attendance at the school or paired junior school when the application is made and who will still be attending the school at the proposed admission date;
3. Children for whom a place at the school is essential on medical or social grounds and is supported in writing by a medical practitioner or a social worker.
(Applications will be subject to verification by the Director of Children's Services, Walsall Council);
4. For applications to junior schools only. Attendance by the child at the relevant paired infant school, when the application is made;
5. Distance between the designated point of the home address and the designated point of the school as measured in a straight line, with priority given to those living closest, using the Authority's GIS software used for this purpose.