

## **SCRUTINY REVIEW – 30 JANUARY 2008**

### **School Admission Arrangements – Stockton on Tees**

#### **Statutory basis**

The new School Admission Code came into force in February 2007 and applies to all maintained schools and Academies. The Code is made under section 84 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 as amended by section 40 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. Section 84(2) provides that the Code may impose requirements and may include guidelines setting out aims, objectives and other matters in relation to the discharge of functions by certain bodies listed below:

- **Admission authorities:** local authorities are the admission authorities for community and voluntary controlled schools. For voluntary-aided schools, governing bodies are the admission authority.
- **Governing bodies (when not admission authorities)**
- **Local authorities (when not acting as admission authorities)**
- **Admission Forums**
- **Schools Adjudicators**
- **Admission appeal panels**

The Code has a much stronger statutory basis than its predecessors. All admission authorities are required to 'act in accordance' with its mandatory provisions (whereas the previous versions admission authorities only had to have 'regard to').

#### **Co-ordinated admission schemes**

All local authorities are required to formulate and consult on a scheme for each academic year for co-ordinating admission arrangements for all maintained schools within their area. This is intended to simplify the admission process for parents whilst reducing the likelihood of any child being left without a school place. Co-ordination establishes a process which will ensure that every child living in a local authority area, who has applied for a place, is offered one place at around the same time.

Each year the scheme is consulted on alongside admission authorities arrangements for that year of admission eg oversubscription criteria, admission numbers, any changes in policy/admission zones etc. The result of consultation is fed back through senior management team and the presented to Cabinet and ultimately sanctioned by Council. This procedure is completed 18 months in advance of the next admissions round. Attached is a report for admission arrangements for 2009 which has recently been consulted on, the results of which will go to Cabinet in February.

#### **Net Capacity/Admission Numbers**

The net capacity assessment of a school is designed to calculate the number of pupils, that a school can reasonably accommodate based on the floor area of the premises. For primary schools this is based on the number and size of spaces designated as 'class bases' – for secondary schools it is based on the number, size and type of 'teaching spaces'. In both bases this is checked against the total useable space available to ensure that the overall size of the school is neither too great nor too small to support the core teaching activities.

The Department for Children, Families and School (DCSF) provide a spreadsheet that calculates net capacity when all the details about the size and use of every space have been entered.

The net capacity measure aims to match a school's admission number to its measured capacity. If net capacity is the pupil capacity of the whole school, the 'Indicated Admission Number' is the pupil

capacity of each year group. The spreadsheet divides the net capacity by the number of year groups in the school. The result is a logical admission number that relates to the capacity of the school.

The law says that when setting the admission number for a school, the Admission Authority 'must have regard to the Indicated Admission Number for the school'. The admission number also needs to comply with the infant class size limit.

There is close liaison with the Officers responsible for Planning School Places, Management Information Systems, Asset Management and School Admissions in order to ensure the management of admission numbers within the Borough. School admissions allocate school places and ensure that admission numbers are adhered to both in the main round of admissions and with through year transfers, to ensure that places are filled and parents receive their preferred school if at all possible. If schools were consistently admitting children above their admission number, this would be addressed with the school and relevant officers within the Local Authority (LA) would be alerted.

### **Publication of information**

LAs are required to publish in hard copy, the admission arrangements for all maintained schools in their area and make this information available for parents. Attached is a booklet which has been published for admissions in September 2008 which is made available to parents. Admission authorities must then follow the determined published admission arrangements. Failure to do so would amount to a breach of the admission authority's statutory duty.

Parents must be able to make informed decisions when applying for school places for their children. The admission system can appear very complex to some parents and admission authorities must make every effort to ensure that all parents are able to understand the process and in particular how over-subscription criteria is applied.

All of the published information for parents has the 'Crystal Mark' which means that the Plain English Campaign has looked at it and it meets with their standards.

### **Choice Advice**

LAs are required to provide advice and assistance to all parents of children of all ages in their area when they are expressing a preference of school for their child. The new Code indicates that the LA should set up an independent Choice Advice service to give practical support and advice to those parents who are most likely to need extra help in navigating the admissions system. This is now offered to parents in Stockton.

### **Appeals**

If any admission authority cannot offer a place at a parents preferred school because a school had reached its admission number, a parent would be given the right to appeal to an independent appeal panel.

There is an Admission Appeals Code which the LA a duty to follow. All parents will receive a booklet from the LA to assist them with the appeals process.

Law & Democracy Services within the Council manage the administration, organisation and training for appeals and panel members to give parents some assurance of independence from the LA school admissions section.

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**22 January 2008**