

MAYOR AND CABINET		
Report Title	Nursery, Primary, Secondary and Sixth Form Admissions Arrangements and School Admissions Limits For 2008/9	
Key Decision	Yes	Item No. 10
Ward	All	
Contributors	Executive Director for Children and Young People	
Class	Part 1	Date: April 18 2007

1. Purpose of the Report

The report seeks the Mayor's approval of the authority's admissions arrangements for community schools for the academic year 2008/9. The report also seeks approval for Lewisham's co-ordinated schemes for primary and secondary transfer and casual admissions and the admission limits for all maintained mainstream schools for 2008/9.

2. Policy Context

The Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998, as amended by the Education Act 2002 and the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the relevant regulations, requires admission authorities to consult annually on their proposed admissions policies. This consultation must be complete by 1 March each year. The Education (Determination of Admission Arrangements) 1999 state that admission arrangements must be determined by 15th April of the year preceding the year of admission. This means that the admission arrangements for 2008/9 should be determined by 15th April 2007.

Once the decision is made, Lewisham has two weeks in which to contact everyone who was originally consulted in order to inform them what the determined policy is. Any objections must be lodged within six weeks of notification.

As is the usual course of events, Lewisham LA consulted governors during the autumn term 2006. The consultation included the:

- proposed primary admission scheme, including the timetable,
- secondary transfer co-ordinated scheme,
- admissions policies for community schools,
- admissions policy for community sixth forms and
- admission limits for each maintained school.

The Code of Practice on School Admissions, which came into force on 28 February 2007, is relevant to much of the work covered in the report.

3. Recommendation

3.1 Admissions arrangements

It is recommended that the nursery, primary, secondary and sixth form admission arrangements set out in the appendices be agreed. Any changes are outlined below.

3.2 Admissions Limits

It is recommended that admission limits for the academic year 2008/9, including the revised numbers for Lewisham Bridge and St Michael's CE primary schools, as set out in the appendices, be agreed.

4. Background: Education Act 2002

The Education Act 2002 required all Local Authorities (LA) to introduce co-ordinated admission schemes for primary and secondary admissions with effect from 2005. These schemes enable parents to apply for schools through the authority where they live, and to express a number of preferences which, although ranked by parents, are treated equally by the schools involved. This widens the scope for parents and pupils and tackles the problem of multiple offers which used to clog the transfer system. Lewisham, like all London authorities, participates in the Pan London secondary transfer scheme which assists cross-border applications and sharing of information.

The Act also requires local authorities to establish an Admissions Forum and sets out its constitution and duties. Lewisham's Forum actively monitors the admissions arrangements for community schools as well as those for voluntary aided, foundation schools and Academies, and has had a significant impact on admission arrangements in the borough.

1300 school governors were consulted. Consultation also took place with members of the Early Years Development and Child Care Partnership (EYDCP), the boroughs of Bromley, Greenwich and Southwark, the Trades Unions and teachers' groups, and the Archdiocese of Southwark and the Southwark Diocesan Board.

5. Key issue 1: priority for certain siblings

- 5.1 The new Code of Practice on school admissions highlighted an issue to do with giving priority to siblings. The Code says schools 'must not allocate places at a school on the basis that a sibling or other relative is a former pupil, including siblings who were on roll at the time of application but will have left by the time the child starts school'. This particularly affects children whose older siblings are in year 6 or year 11.

The reasons for this are twofold. Such policies could be indirectly discriminatory as they can work against children who are new arrivals to the area and whose older siblings are unlikely to have attended the school in question. Secondly, by giving priority to children whose older siblings will still

be at the school when they themselves start, authorities are recognising parents' needs to have their children in the same school.

This change will not affect children who apply for places at a separate infant school in Lewisham where the older sibling attends the linked junior school (e.g. Sandhurst, Stillness or Torridon Infant and Junior) as they will still have sibling priority. Applicants to schools in the Hillside Federation (Forest Hill, Sedgehill and Sydenham), whose older sibling is in year 11 or 12 of the school they are applying for, will still have sibling priority, because the two siblings would be attending the same institution on the same site. However, applicants to schools in the Crossways Federation (Addey and Stanhope, Catford High, Crofton and Deptford Green) will not have sibling priority if their older sibling attends Crossways Academy or is in year 11 of the school being applied for. This is because Crossways is a separate institution on a different site.

5.2 Key issue 2: changes in admissions limits

The governors of St Michael's CE Primary School are proposing to reduce its admissions limit from 45 to 30. Governors felt that the school could be run more effectively with this reduced number. Work carried out on the Primary Review shows that this change for St Michael's will to a certain extent reduce the number of surplus places in the locality and will not affect the authority's ability to provide enough school places there.

Lewisham undertook a separate consultation to develop a new school on the site of Lewisham Bridge Primary School and in that consultation proposed to reduce the admissions limit of Lewisham Bridge at reception from two forms of entry (60) to one form of entry (30). The Mayor and Cabinet were advised of the conclusions of the consultation on 31 January 2007, including in relation to reducing the school's admission numbers. The intention in reducing the intake was to make as many places available as possible in the new school to applicants in the local area, aside from those already on roll of the all-age establishment. The reduction is also important educationally to secure a good balance of new and existing pupils in year 7 of the new school.

The report therefore recommends accepting both these changes.

5.3 Key issue 3: applications to nursery

The headteachers of Chelwood and Clyde nursery schools replied to the consultation to make the following points:

- making admissions decisions for nursery places at one point in the year, i.e. May, disadvantaged many families particularly those where English was not the first language or those who were not familiar with the system; they suggested that nursery offers should be made twice a year, in advance of the two points of entry;
- the policy needed to be clearer as to how decisions were reached for those making applications under social or medical need;
- previous siblings should be taken into account when younger children's applications were considered.

Officers have amended the proposed admission arrangements in the following respects:

- decisions for nursery admission will be made separately for the September and January intakes;
- the headteacher will be able to make the decision on prioritising an application made on special grounds. If further advice or guidance is required the headteacher may refer such cases to the LA.

It would not, however, be appropriate to give priority in the nursery for children whose older sibling attended in the past, for the reasons given in section 5.1 above. Such a policy would contravene the Code of Practice.

6. Financial implications

There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.

7. Legal Implications

These are contained in the body of the report.

8. Equalities implications

The admissions scheme should take account of the different needs of various groups, to ensure maximum access. The Code of Practice requires admission authorities to adopt policies that enable fair access and do not discourage parents from applying. Admissions policies and arrangements must not contravene legislation such as the Disability Discrimination Act and the Race Relations Act. Analysis of the primary-secondary transfer process is undertaken annually and reported to the Admissions Forum.

9. Environmental implications

There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

If you have any questions on this paper, please contact Linda Fuller, Team Leader – Admissions & Appeals, 3rd Floor, Laurence House, SE6 4RU (telephone 0208 314 6212 or email linda.fuller@lewisham.gov.uk).