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Admissions – get ready to object to arrangements

Each year by the 15th of April admission authorities (i.e. governing bodies or local authorities) are required to “determine” their admission arrangements. These include the admission criteria and the published admissions number (PAN). In doing this admission authorities must act in accordance with the Code and any other laws relating to admissions, human rights and equalities. The Code requires admission arrangements and criteria to be fair, clear and objective.

If any changes in admission arrangements are proposed, authorities must first have consulted publicly. For admission in the September of the following year the consultation on changes must be completed by March 1st over a minimum of eight weeks. The Code (1.44) sets out who must be consulted. The proposed admission arrangements must be on the school’s website. All admission authorities must publish their admission arrangements on their website once determined and send them to their local authority before May 1st. By May 1st local authorities must have published the admission arrangements for all local schools for the September intake of the following year.

So this is the time that it should be possible to check the admission arrangements for all your local schools. You have until June 30th to object to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA). Change will only come if there are objections (www.education.gov.uk/schoolsadjudicator).

The OSA website has details about how to object. Any “person or body” who considers that any maintained school or Academy’s arrangements are unlawful or not in compliance with the Code or relevant law relating to admissions can object. Objectors have to provide evidence. Local authorities also have a duty to ensure that admission arrangements are lawful and must object to the Adjudicator if they are made aware of any unfair admission arrangements in the area. There are restrictions on what each potential objector may object about (Code 3.3). For example, objections cannot be brought about selection to grammar schools, increases in the planned admission number or variations to Academy admissions arrangements which have been agreed with the Secretary of State.

What to do:

- After May 1st check your local schools’ admissions arrangements on the local authority website.
- If they seem unfair object, by June 30th, to the Adjudicator and encourage others to do so; provide as much evidence as possible.
- Inform your local authority.
- Let *Comprehensive Future* know.

Do you live in a selective area?

Some supporters living in areas where there are selective schools are now in an email network with the intention of sharing information. If you live in the following local authorities and can share information please contact Margaret Tulloch (mtulloch@poptel.org): Barnet, Bexley, Birmingham, Bournemouth, Bromley, Buckinghamshire, Calderdale, Cumbria, Devon, Enfield, Essex, Gloucestershire, Kent, Kingston, Kirklees, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Liverpool, Medway, North Yorkshire, Plymouth, Poole, Reading, Redbridge, Slough, Southend, Stoke on Trent, Sutton, Telford and the Wrekin, Torbay, Trafford, Walsall, Warwickshire, Wiltshire, Wirral.

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PS: Can we email your newsletter? Please let us know.*

Agreement on calls for more independence

Since the beginning of the year several voices have called for more openness in admissions. The RSA Academies Commission review on academies *Unleashing Greatness* reported that numerous submissions had reported covert selection in academies. Among several recommendations it called for an independent appeals service, i.e. taking appeals away from own admission authority schools (www.thersa.org/action-research-centre/learning,-cognition-and-creativity/education/reports-and-events/reports/unleashing-greatness).

This call was backed up by the Administrative Justice and Tribunals Council in a letter to Michael Gove (http://ajtc.justice.gov.uk/docs/Michael_Gove_letter_13_2_13.pdf).

The Education Funding Agency has reminded academies that when it reviewed complaints about academies

appeals last year there were several key issues. Panels were not considering the lawfulness of their arrangements adequately or the child's individual circumstances; the clerk's records were not always accurate or legible and parents did not see the panels as independent (www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/executiveagencies/efa/efabulletins/h00224005/issue-27/article-06).

Comprehensive Future policy is that the administration of all admissions should be done by the local authority, including for schools that are their own admission authorities. A similar point has been made by the IPPR in the past and a post on the *Guardian* website by Jonathan Clifton at the IPPR said an impartial body such as a local school commissioner should take on this role (www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/mar/01/end-school-places-inequality-impartial-admissions).

Adjudicator's latest decisions

Decisions reported by the School Adjudicator demonstrate the importance of the requirement that admissions criteria must be clear, fair and objective. Also they show that the Adjudicator may require other changes once a complaint is made, even if the original complaint is not upheld.

In December, an objection to the proposal by Chatham Grammar School for Boys and Chatham Grammar School for Girls to set another entry test in March was upheld on the grounds of lack of consultation and non-compliance with the Code.

The Adjudicator said: "The admission authorities of the schools are now offering four different test methods: the Medway Test, the Kent Test, NFER tests arranged by the schools and lastly a headteacher assessment of SATs results. The offer of such a choice to parents presents an overall selection process that appears to have lost its clarity and objectivity and as a result appears not to comply with these elements of the Code."

The London Oratory decision has had publicity. Here the Adjudicator said that: ". . . assisting in the liturgy, assisting in pastoral work and assisting with housekeeping or the maintenance of church property. . . this criterion is clearly not compliant with the Code and must be removed."

Useful historical admissions overview

School Admissions and Accountability: planning, choice or chance? by Mike Feintuck and Roz Stevens (Policy Press, www.policypress.co.uk), published in January, traces the changes in legislation and policy on admissions from the 1944 Education Act to the present day.

It puts into perspective how policy has changed from local planning, through quasi market mechanisms and on to random allocation. It is an academic book but a good read for anyone interested in admissions.

Take a look at our new website

Very welcome donations have allowed us to redo our website. Please check it out and let us know what you think (www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk).

Thanks are very much due to Fiona Millar, who has been working for some time to get the material onto the website. Also we would like to thank Brian Tomlinson, who until now has been our webmaster. We are extremely grateful for his support for the past 10 years since we started.

We hope that the website sets out our

aims clearly and we can use it to gather more supporters and provide more information.

We want your contributions to the website. We need local stories. Please write to us about admissions in your area. Are your local schools taking on admissions and are there changes as a result?

As before, newsletters are on the site, along with briefings, which will be added to regularly. There is also a new frequently asked questions section.

Grammar school myths exposed

In February Chris Cook of the *Financial Times* published an analysis looking at how poorer children achieve in areas which are selective compared to those in non-selective areas.

He found: "If you plot how well children do on average by household deprivation for selective conditions and the rest of the country, you can see that the net effect of grammar schools is to disadvantage poor children and help the rich."

So much for selection being an engine of social mobility (<http://blogs.ft.com/ftdata/2013/01/28/grammar-school-myths/>)

Kent's 'satellite' grammar plan

Events have moved on in Kent. A site which grammar school supporters hoped might be used for the "satellite" grammar has been earmarked for a free faith school.

Meanwhile Valley Invicta Academies Trust, which runs Invicta grammar school and Valley Park – essentially the secondary modern several miles away in Maidstone – has announced it will be opening a grammar annexe in Sevenoaks. Watch this space!

ACE Ed offers training and advice

The Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) closed recently after many years but a new training and advisory organisation, ACE Ed, is based on it.

Its training on admissions is proving popular and the next training session, in London, is on June 6th. ACE Education Advice & ACE Education Training, 36 Nicholay Road, London N19 3EZ; 020 8407 5142; www.ace-ed.org.uk