

Gwybodaeth Ychwanegol at y Cyfarfod Llawn Information Further to Plenary

Cyhoeddir ymatebion yn yr iaith y'u darparwyd, gyda chyfieithiad Saesneg o ymatebion yn y Gymraeg.

Responses are published in the language in which they are provided, with a translation into English of responses provided in Welsh.

Gwybodaeth ychwanegol at y Datganiad a Chyhoeddiad Busnes a gyhoeddwyd gan Leighton Andrews, y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau, ar 12 Mawrth 2013 Information further to the Business Statement and Announcement issued by Leighton Andrews, the Minister for Education and Skills, on 12 March 2013

At/To Eluned Parrott:

You asked for a statement about school admissions criteria at the Business Minister's plenary session on 26 February 2013. I am writing this letter to provide relevant information.

Every local authority must consult on the admission arrangements it makes for its schools on an annual basis and must carry out this consultation within a 6 month window between 1 September and the following 1 March in relation to admissions to schools 2 years ahead of the September in question. There is no prescription about the length of the consultation, but it must be completed by 1 March in the relevant year. This means that for admissions to schools in September 2014, consultation will have been completed by 1 March 2013, and could have started as early as September 2012. Most local authorities carry out consultation in the early part of the calendar year in question and will recently, as in the case of the Vale of Glamorgan, have completed their consultation.

Once a local authority has taken account of its consultation, it can be expected to determine its arrangements by mid April at the latest, and is then under an obligation to inform all statutory consultees (these are other relevant admission authorities, including voluntary aided and foundation schools) of the determined arrangements. Statutory consultees may object to the determined arrangements, and must do so within 6 weeks of being notified of the determined arrangements. In that case an objection would be referred to me for determination. Parents can contribute to a consultation exercise but cannot object to admission arrangements that are determined, other than where the arrangements involve selection according to ability or admission numbers which are lower than the number produced after applying the measurement of schools in Wales capacity formula.

Local authorities must provide parents with the opportunity to state which school they would like their child to attend. All admission arrangements need to make reference to oversubscription criteria for admission to schools, as some schools may be more popular with parents than others. Such criteria are used to decide who should be admitted **only** if the number of applications exceeds the number of school places in a school. If the number of applications is fewer than or equal to the number of places available, then all are allocated a place.

The School Admissions Code, which is a statutory code also providing guidance, makes reference to both catchment areas and feeder schools as oversubscription criteria. Many, but by no means all admission authorities make use of catchment areas when setting arrangements and deciding on oversubscription criteria. When catchment areas are defined, and used to decide priority for admission, parents must be given access to information about boundaries so as to identify whether they live in a relevant school's catchment area. In addition to giving priority to children in a catchment area, many admission authorities also

give priority to siblings of those already in a school. Those local authorities not using catchment areas often give priority based on distance travelled; with priority given to pupils with the shortest journeys. Most Voluntary Aided schools with a religious character give first priority to children of the faith, but some also refer to catchment areas based on parish boundaries.

The current Code makes reference to the use of named feeder primary schools as an oversubscription criterion for admission to secondary schools. Though this approach is not widespread, and its use is in decline, it is an accepted and lawful method of prioritising applications. Paragraph 2.57 of the Code advises that although this method can support continuity, it should be used with caution. Admission authorities should ensure that such arrangements do not unduly disadvantage children who move into an area at a late stage (and who may not be able to access a feeder school as it is already full) and consider carefully the impact that such arrangements have on the ability of a school to serve its immediate local area. There are of course issues to consider whatever objective criteria are adopted, and the Code does not promote any particular approach so long as it complies with the law. It is for admission authorities to decide on arrangements appropriate to their area, and to consult on them in line with the legislation on the matter. All oversubscription criteria must be clear and unambiguous.

Admission arrangements are made so as to ensure that every child is allocated a school place. There are other arrangements for transition between primary and secondary schools in terms of continuity of curriculum delivery and these are completely separate from admissions procedures. This transition between primary and secondary education is managed by local authorities and governing bodies under a requirement, unique to Wales. The governing bodies of maintained secondary schools and their 'feeder' primary schools are required to draw up and maintain a Transition Plan to facilitate the transition of pupils making the move from primary to secondary school. Areas of focus include curriculum planning, alignment of classroom practice and consistency in assessment, plus pastoral arrangements. This may include special arrangements to ease the process, such as familiarisation visits by the primary school pupils to their future secondary school, or by arranging for secondary school teachers to provide some lessons to pupils in their final year of primary school. The term 'feeder' primary has a different meaning in this context, and it applies to primary schools from which a substantial proportion (more than 50%) of pupils progress to a particular secondary school.

The first Transition Plans were in place in September 2007. In order, to support schools in the early stages of implementation, during the period 2007-10 the Welsh Government:

- provided specific guidance for schools on producing a Transition Plan;
- commissioned and published guidance on good practice in transition planning produced by Estyn;
- provided ring fenced funding in the Better Schools Fund for use by local authorities working with schools to develop Transition Plans and meet staff development costs;
- provided additional INSET days that could be used by schools for cluster meetings to agree transition arrangements;
- provided local authorities with additional grant (Key Stage 2-3 Transition Grant) to support the development of exemplar projects and dissemination of good practice; and
- commissioned Estyn to monitor and report on progress.

Estyn's report, *An evaluation of the impact of Transition Plans and Transition Grant on primary and secondary partnerships at Key Stages 2 and 3* was published in May 2010. The report concluded that schools and local authorities have improved their early arrangements, noting better embedding of transition planning, improved monitoring by local authorities, and

better arrangements for development and dissemination of transition planning. You may wish to refer to this report for further information on Estyn's findings.

I hope that this clarifies the issues.

**Gwybodaeth ychwanegol at y Datganiad a Chyhoeddiad Busnes a gyhoeddwyd gan
Leighton Andrews, y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau, ar 12 Mawrth 2013
Information further the Business Statement and Announcement issued by Leighton
Andrews, the Minister for Education and Skills, on 12 March 2013**

At/To Andrew R.T. Davies:

You asked for a statement about school organisation and school admissions at the Business Minister's plenary session on 26 February 2013. I am writing this letter to provide relevant information.

Although you referred to the school organisation code, your primary concern seemed to be about admissions.

School organisation and school admissions are related but separate matters, with distinct legal frameworks, albeit currently deriving from the same Act of Parliament. Once local authorities have decided how many schools they require and where they should be located, any changes are subject to relevant school organisation legislation (currently in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998). Local authorities must then establish fair means of deciding who should attend those schools. Separate parts of the same Act place requirements on admission authorities in relation to this matter and also provide for statutory School Admissions and School Admissions Appeals Codes.

A school organisation code will be issued within the next few months for the first time, and it will clearly set out the recently approved provisions of the School Standards and Organisation Act 2013, which will come fully into force in October 2013. The school organisation code will set out what changes to the organisation of schools require the publication of statutory proposals, requirements on consultation, and what arrangements will be made for decision making. At present, around half of all statutory proposals published by promoters result in objections, and must be referred to me for determination. For proposals published on or after 1 October 2013, almost all will be decided by local authorities who will themselves decide whether or not they will be implemented. The change of legislation as it affects school organisation will not affect school admissions, which will continue to be subject to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

Statutory School Admissions and Admission Appeals Codes have been in place since July 2009. Amongst other matters these contain provisions about consultation on admission arrangements. Every local authority must consult on the admission arrangements it makes for its schools on an annual basis and must carry out this consultation within a 6 month window between 1 September and the following 1 March in relation to admissions to schools 2 years ahead of the September in question. There is no prescription about the length of the consultation, but it must be completed by 1 March in the relevant year. This means that for admissions to schools in September 2014, consultation will have been completed by 1 March 2013, and could have started as early as September 2012. Most local authorities carry out consultation in the early part of the calendar year in question and will recently, as in the case of the Vale of Glamorgan, have completed their consultation.

Once a local authority has taken account of its consultation, it can be expected to determine its arrangements by mid April at the latest, and is then under an obligation to inform all

statutory consultees (these are other relevant admission authorities, including voluntary aided and foundation schools) of the determined arrangements. Statutory consultees may object to the determined arrangements but must do so within 6 weeks of being notified of the determined arrangements. In that case an objection would be referred to me for determination. Parents can contribute to a consultation exercise but cannot object to admission arrangements that are determined, other than where the arrangements involve selection according to ability or admission numbers which are lower than the number produced after applying the measurement of schools in Wales capacity formula.

I have recently undertaken consultation on new codes and these will go through Assembly procedures later this year. The new codes will require laying for 40 days as they too will be statutory codes. I anticipate that the revised codes will come into force by 1 September 2013. The new codes make fairly minor changes to the existing statutory School Admissions and Appeals Codes, and I do not expect them to affect the rules about consultation and determination of arrangements.

All admission arrangements need to make reference to oversubscription criteria for admission to schools. Such criteria are used to decide who should be admitted only if the number of applications exceeds the number of school places in a school. If the number of applications is fewer than or equal to the number of places available, then all are allocated a place.

The School Admissions Code makes reference to both catchment areas and feeder schools. Many, but by no means all admission authorities make use of catchment areas when setting arrangements and deciding on oversubscription criteria. When catchment areas are defined, and used to decide priority for admission, parents must be given access to information about boundaries so as to identify whether they live in a relevant school's catchment area. In addition to giving priority to children in a catchment area, many admission authorities also give priority to siblings of those already in a school. Those local authorities not using catchment areas often give priority based on distance travelled; with priority given to pupils with the shortest journeys. Most Voluntary Aided schools with a religious character give first priority to children of the faith, but some also refer to catchment areas based on parish boundaries.

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