

Education, Children and Families Committee

10am, Tuesday, 9 December 2014

Review of 2014 Admissions and Appeal Process

Item number	8.2
Report number	
Executive/routine	Routine
Wards	All

Executive summary

The purpose of this report is to provide information on the school admissions and appeals process for 2014.

Links

Coalition pledges	P5
Council outcomes	CO1 , CO2 , CO3
Single Outcome Agreement	SO3

Review of 2014 Admissions and Appeal Process

Recommendations

- 1.1 The Committee note the changes to processes in admissions and appeals for 2014 and further changes for 2015.
- 1.2 The Committee request a report on the 2015 Admission and Appeal Process in December 2015.

Background

- 2.1 As a result of self evaluation processes between September 2013 to March 2014 which included a lean review and audit there were significant process changes implemented for admissions and appeals for session beginning August 2014.
- 2.2 The key changes are highlighted in the main report and are set against the backdrop of rising rolls.
- 2.3 Edinburgh has high levels of placing requests with many pupils attending non-catchment schools. In August 2014 approximately 21.4% of primary pupils and 24.1% of secondary pupils did not attend their catchment primary school.
- 2.4 There are 4351 spare places in the primary sector in the city but they are not in schools where the demand is highest. The figures are based on 2014/15 census results.
- 2.5 There has been a sustained media campaign to encourage parents to visit their local school and to clarify that there will be less likelihood of out of catchment places in the coming year, even for siblings.
- 2.6 For August 2014 266 primary appeals were lodged initially with 43 appeals granted by the appeal committee and 17 secondary appeals were lodged with 6 being granted by the appeal committee. It is noteworthy that some placing requests which were initially refused were then placed by the Grants, Awards and Placement Team prior to the appeals as the ongoing process rolled out across the city before August 2014.

Processes

- 3.1 The policy and procedures which underpin the admissions process for mainstream primary and secondary schools have been in place since the inception of Edinburgh City Council. This policy is on the Council website.
- 3.2 Following the self evaluation in 2013, processes were streamlined with regard to revised paper work for the Committee on Pupil, Student Support, Information to Parents and Appeal Reports.
- 3.3 An online form was introduced for the first time for out of catchment requests which facilitated applications and the administrative processes. A new version of this form which links to the One Citizen of Edinburgh account will be in place from November 2014. This will facilitate the checking of proofs of residence.
- 3.4 The Committee on Pupil Student Support reports were made more succinct and the parental online requests were pasted on to them instead of using additional resources to type up all individual parental requests.
- 3.5 The Senior Education Manager: Inclusion, Pupil and Parent Support reviewed all out of catchment requests prior to the Committee and highlighted those with complex needs and exceptional circumstances. All requests were reported to committee however the process lead to a much more focused and efficient review of all requests at each Committee. This will continue but with only exceptional cases now being looked at by the Committee on Pupil, Student Support for the session 2015 -16 in line with the audit recommendations.
- 3.6 The layout of appeal reports and information contained in them was changed to facilitate clarity and ease of understanding. Most appeal panel members felt this reduced duplication, brought clarity and were positive about this. Reports however will have numbered pages for next year. There still remains a need to have up to date information on the ever changing numbers on the appeal date. Sometimes parents at the appeals would say they knew numbers were different however this could not be counted if the Grants Awards and Placement team had not received proofs of residence for checking.
- 3.7 The following key points were clarified for parents in all of our communications :
 - 3.7.1 2 proofs of residence are required.
 - 3.7.2 Allocations of places are based on residence before 28 February.
 - 3.7.3 Late catchment pupils after 28 February are not guaranteed
 - 3.7.4 Siblings are not guaranteed placements.
 - 3.7.5 Parents will be asked to sign confirmation of a non catchment place and the understanding there is no guarantee of a place for a sibling.

3.7.6 An outwith catchment place for a first child could mean that future siblings are in different schools – parents are responsible for this not the department.

3.7.7 Next step after refusal by the appeal committee is the sheriff court.

This will again be the case in 2015.

Reserved Places

- 3.8 In some schools we have no reserved places from the start of the placement process and numbers are managed down throughout the period until schools resume in August. However where places are available one place in each class is reserved until the start of term.
- 3.9 In one school this session we retained more reserved places due to increased building in the area and we were able to hold this reason at appeals. The option to do this in other areas will be retained for the coming session.
- 3.10 It is proposed that for 2015 reserved places are held throughout the year as this should help with the placement of incoming catchment children during the year. It will also assist if an appeal is granted where there are 60 pupils in a team teaching organisation taking numbers to 61. In such cases if there is an appeal to the sheriff court our legal advice is that we can no longer use the original grounds for refusal of teacher at future stage.

Appeals Administration

- 3.11 Committee Services manage the organisation of appeals and send out all paperwork to the parents. A simple change to telephone answering machines this year directed queries about placements or appeals appropriately. It is also important that parents receive all paperwork for appeals within the statutory time period.
- 3.12 Numbers of panel members have been decreasing over the past few years and it is important that further panel members are recruited for 2015.
- 3.13 The layout of rooms and waiting areas for appeals require to be reviewed to ensure clear definition of space for each party.

Presentations

- 3.14 Panel members welcomed the new succinct conversational style presentations from most officers and this year for the first time some officers focused mainly on one grounds for refusal which was successful. In some cases however some panels wished to explore information about accommodation when it was not being used as grounds for refusal. Officers did not have detailed information with them on accommodation if it did not form part of the grounds for refusal.
- 3.15 This year there was a team of 9 officers presenting appeals with two members of the Placements Team supporting the officers on alternate days. It will not be possible to have this size of team for the coming year due to budgetary constraints. A small core team of officers will present the Primary 1 and Secondary 1 appeals in 2015 and the placements team will not attend appeals rather they will concentrate on the

customer focus on a daily basis and the collection of information for the presentations.

- 3.16 For the past two years the headteachers of the primary schools have been invited to the appeal as witnesses so that they could answer questions specific to the school. It is often in the individual cases that the headteacher can supply information on breakfast clubs or after school clubs.
- 3.17 This attendance by headteachers also affords them a continuous professional development opportunity which assists when they are required to present the other stage appeals which is their responsibility under Devolved School Management.

Training

- 3.18 Training was offered by a Senior Solicitor and the Senior Education Manager: Inclusion, Pupil and Parent Support to all officers and appeal panels and chairs separately. The uptake on training for panels was very poor this year. This was problematic as changes had been made to processes which would have been helpful for panels to understand
- 3.19 Intakes are set jointly by Children and Families staff from Pupil Placements, Devolved School Management and Asset Management in January of each year based on
- 3.19.1 the number of catchment pupils registered for each school
- 3.19.2 the available accommodation
- 3.20 It is necessary to ensure best value when setting intakes and it is noteworthy that an additional class is not normally opened for outwith catchment children.

Class Organisation

- 3.21 Head teachers plan their class organisation for the following year in December each year. In planning class organisations headteachers must take heed of class size legislation and national agreements.
- 3.22 The Education (Lower Primary Class Sizes) (Scotland) Regulations 1999 amended 2010 specifies a class size maximum of 25 for Primary 1. In Primary 2, 3 class sizes are set in legislation at 30. Primary 4-7 classes are set at 33 class size maximum.

Intakes

- 3.23 Headteachers and Officers cannot grant a placement to take numbers above class size legislation only the appeal committee can do this.
- 3.24 It is important to note that team teaching is now more common when intakes are based on multiples of 30. Government guidance states clearly that there should not be a floating teacher to assist with team teaching [that is a teacher who works between two larger classes] instead there should be, for example, one teacher for 25 children and two teachers for 35 children.

- 3.25 Composite classes are also common across the city and nationally. Children experience the same high quality teaching and learning as children in single stage classes. It is not normally the case that composite classes are arranged over three stages as in this example P1/2, P2, P2/3
- 3.26 Overall it has been a successful year for admissions and appeals. However this still remains a high profile area for the council with a large number of queries and concerns raised by parents, elected members and MSP's if placements are refused and appeals not granted. Significant time is still spent in answering these queries and concerns.

Measures of success

- 4.1 Overall progress will be measured using the following:
- 4.1.1 Compliance with all Statutory Deadlines
 - 4.1.2 80 % usage of online forms to request an outwith catchment form
 - 4.1.3 Numbers of appeals not upheld in line with department policies and class size regulations

Financial impact

- 5.1 All work in this area is delivered within existing budgets.

Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 The risk in this area is that statutory deadlines are not met.

Equalities impact

- 7.1 All work within this area seeks to address inequalities both in terms of provision of resources and impact on outcomes for children and young people. There are no negative impacts arising from this work.

Sustainability impact

- 8.1 There are no adverse economic, social or environmental impacts resulting from these areas of activity.

Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 There are a variety of means of consultation with parents. These are at school and local authority level. Parents are consulted through Neighbourhood Groups and Consultative Committee with Parents. Parents are also part of the Rising Rolls working group and officers meet with individual parent councils where schools are affected by rising rolls. Headteachers meet with their own Parent Council to discuss placements in their own school.

Background reading/external references

Class Size Legislation <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2010/326/contents/made>

Choosing a School

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/parentzone/yourchildatschool/choosingaschool/whichschool/introduction.asp>

Education Scotland Act 1980 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/44/contents>

School Placements Edinburgh

http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20074/schools/388/school_places

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Links

Coalition pledges	P5 - Seek to ensure the smooth introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence and that management structures within our schools support the new curriculum
Council outcomes	CO1 - Our children have the best start in life, are able to make and sustain relationships and are ready to succeed CO2 - Our children and young people are successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens making a positive contribution to their communities CO3 - Our children and young people in need, or with a disability, have improved life chances
Single Outcome Agreement Appendices	SO3 - Edinburgh's children and young people enjoy their childhood and fulfil their potential.

