

Education, Children & Families Committee

10:00am, Tuesday, 7 November 2023

School Admissions and Appeals Planning - Response to Motion by Councillor Mowat

Executive/routine
Wards

1. Recommendations

1.1 The Education, Children and Families Committee is asked to:

1.1.1 To note the findings in this Report on the School Admissions and Appeals Planning Process - Motion by Councillor Mowat at Full Council 31 August 2023. Item 8.13

<https://democracy.edinburgh.gov.uk/documents/g6983/Public%20reports%20pack%2031st-Aug-2023%2010.00%20City%20of%20Edinburgh%20Council.pdf?T=10>

Amanda Hatton

Executive Director of Children, Education and Justice Services

Contact: Lorna French, Service Director of Education

E-mail: Lorna.French@edinburgh.gov.uk

Report

School Admissions and Appeals Planning – Response to Motion by Councillor Mowat

Executive Summary

- 2.1 Although the previous audit actions were closed, further issues with the management of school appeals emerged last session. This was highly regrettable and attributable mainly due to lack of resource to manage the process. A new process, including use of a digital solution aligned with placing requests, is proposed.

Background

- 3.1 The motion required the following:
- Assess whether all actions identified in the 2019 internal Audit into School Admissions, Appeals and Capacity Planning have been completed and embedded in practice and confirm evidence that supports this.
 - Confirm reasons why the appeals process was delayed this year with appeals not being heard until the 2023/24 session had started.
 - Confirm a timescale for appeals for admission into 2024/2025 school year so that this year's experience can be avoided in the next academic session.
 - An approved addendum asks "Further to this that a wider review into both the Placing in Schools Process and the Placing in Schools Appeal Process is undertaken with a report to follow within two cycles."
- 3.2 In 2019 there was an Internal Audit carried out into School Admissions, Appeals and Capacity Planning which was reported to GRBV in July 2020.
- There were 3 red rated findings reported and whilst there were no outstanding actions being reported currently via GRBV. The concerns expressed about the appeals process for this session included:
- 3.2.1 The lateness of hearing appeals this year – which did not start being heard until after the start of the summer holidays and therefore after the transition days had taken place increasing the stress for pupils, families and schools;

- 3.2.2 The resignation of a long-standing Chair who expressed grave concerns in their resignation letter about how the process was serving families and children;
- 3.2.3 The difficulty recruiting to the panels.

Main report

- 4.1 All 25 recommendations from the 2019 Schools Admissions and Appeals Audit were met and the audit was closed on 18 March 2022.
- 4.2 In response to 3.21 – An annual calendar is created in September of each academic session, which outlines the timing of P1 and S1 enrolment, allocation of places and any required appeals. Colleagues in Education, Transactions, Place and Committee Services work towards these agreed deadlines.
- 4.3 School Appeals are heard by volunteers, who are trained by Brodies LLP. The volunteers cannot be employees of the council. Best practice would be to have a Chair, a parent of a pupil from a City of Edinburgh Council and a Councillor on the panel.
- 4.4 This past session, a new Chair joined the available volunteers, however despite a recruitment drive, only one new parent agreed to join the parental volunteers group. This meant that Committee Services only had a small group of parents available to hear appeals. This caused delays to both P1/S1 appeals in the summer of 2023, and also to the other year group appeals which are ongoing throughout the year.
- 4.5 Ongoing difficulties are being experienced with the recruitment of Independent Chairs and Parent Members to the committee. Efforts have been made on an annual basis to recruit members, including meetings with parent councils, website advertisements, open evenings, locality meetings and targeted advertisements to parents of school aged children. Recruitment efforts were limited by the COVID 19 pandemic and currently there are only 4 independent chairs and 4 parent members.
- 4.6 Committee Services arrange all School Appeals, including hearing dates, and co-ordination of the Appeals Panel. Transactions and Education provide any Hearing reports for the panel. Legal Services or the school's Headteacher present the Council's case.
- 4.7 Appeals in 23/24 were delayed in part due to significant resources pressures within Committee Services. Due to a number of resignations over a short two-month period, the team were reduced by 50% when the appeals were received. This resource pressure resulted in a delay to communication with parents and the processing of appeals which in turn delayed the commencement of the appeal meetings. Additional resource was brought in to try to mitigate the delays, but delays persisted, and the existing team had to work additional hours, including weekends to process the appeals. At time of writing, Committee Services is fully resourced, and consideration is being given to whether a dedicated resource for School Placements Appeals is necessary.

- 4.8 To recruiting parents moving forwards, Committee Services have a webpage on the front facing website with key information for volunteers -

<https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/council-democracy/school-appeals-committee>

The issue of volunteers was previously discussed at the Consultative Committee with Parents. It will be raised again at the next cycle of Locality Parent Council Meetings and Headteachers will be asked to write to parents and carers to encourage volunteering on the Appeals Panels.

- 4.9 Information about school appeals can be found [here](#).
- 4.10 School Placements timetable: P1 & S1 intake 2024/25 can be found in appendix 1.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Conduct a wider review into both the “Admission to Schools” Policy and Procedure, to be undertaken, with a report to follow within two cycles.
- 5.2 Confirm new digital solution to making school placing requests.
- 5.3 Confirm a timescale for appeals for admission into 2024/2025 school year with Committee Services

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 Cost of a digital solution to be determined.

7. Equality and Poverty Impact

- 7.1 An IIA will be developed as part of the new Placements Policy

8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

- 8.1 We seek to place pupils in local schools that best meet their need. We will ensure that travel is at a minimum. We will increase the use of digital consortia to meet curricular need. We aim to deliver more aspects of the curriculum outdoors, supported by Outdoor Learning Officers.

9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact

- 9.1 Failure to provide education to children and young people including those who are care experienced and have additional support needs could result in significant reputational damage, as well as the potential for litigation and references to the ASN first tier tribunal. It also renders us less well able to meet the needs of the population and raise attainment and achievement.

10. Background reading/external references

N/A

11. Appendices

11.1 Appendix 1 School Placements timetable: P1 & S1 intake 2024/25

Appendix 1 School Placements timetable: P1 & S1 intake 2024/25

Date	What is happening?
<i>From Monday</i> 28 August 2023	<p>School Placements working group meet to review and agree procedures and timeline for the year ahead.</p> <p>Last session data cleared on SEEMiS to allow preparations to begin for 2024/25, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address verification (UPRNs) and bulk allocation on SEEMiS • Merge data for letters populated <p>Online P1 Registration Form updated</p> <p>Transactions Team to ask Primary and Nursery/Partner Administrators to update Nursery and P7 Addresses</p> <p>Prepare P1 advert.</p>
Monday 16 October 2023	P1 information letters about registration sent to parents during October holiday.
Monday 23 October 2023	Briefing session for Administrators/HTs/Settings
(TBC) Friday 27 October 2023	Deadline for S1 ERG Applications to be submitted
<i>From Monday</i> 30 October 2023	<p>Online Registration Form goes live.</p> <p>Advert in Evening News publicising P1 and S1 procedures.</p> <p>Online/Media promotion.</p> <p>P1 registrations will be recorded on the new Gateway system – no longer entered on SEEMiS.</p> <p>P7 to S1 provisional allocation information letters sent to parents by end of this week – based on postcode/denomination.</p> <p>Provisional Allocations Report populated for P7 pupils, based on address details held on Click+Go.</p> <p>Placing requests open – to be completed by all parents wishing to request a school outside their catchment area. Applications recorded on Gateway (P1) or SEEMiS (S1).</p> <p>S1 catchment requests open – to be completed by all parents requesting their RC catchment school or those wishing to change the allocated catchment school. Proof of baptism must be provided.</p> <p>Applications submissions reviewed on a weekly basis and requests for further information issued where applicable.</p>
Wednesday 1 November 2023	P1 Open Day. Headteachers to promote school on websites and social media.
Friday 24 November 2023	Closing date for return of primary school proposed class organisation to Devolved Finance & Resource Officer.
24 December 2023	<p>Catchment deadline - The Council aims to place P1 and S1 pupils at one of their catchment schools if they are living in the catchment area by the end of November of the year before the start in P1 and S1.</p> <p>New Intake Registration screen and Delete Registration screen locked from this date – schools to email late P1 registrations after this date to School Placements team.</p>

	<p>Closing date for non-catchment placing requests to allow for accurate projection of requests citywide. These will be answered as part of the 'first round' of allocations.</p>
<p><i>From Monday</i> 1 January 2024</p>	<p>School Placements working group meet to assess demand for places citywide, propose intake limits and class organisations.</p> <p>Oversubscribed Roman Catholic schools identified.</p> <p>Home to school route measurements requested to prepare for the creation of waiting lists.</p> <p>Nursery & Primary schools to investigate N5 children who are not yet registered on SEEMiS and encourage parents to register within two weeks.</p>
<p>(TBC)Friday 12 January 2024</p>	<p>Deadline for P1 ERG Applications to be submitted</p>
<p>Mid-January 2024</p>	<p>Requests for over-subscribed schools reviewed by officer panel to identify cases to present to Committee on Pupil/Student Support. Further information requested where required.</p>
<p>Late January 2024</p>	<p>Proposed intakes and class organisations issued to Head Teachers by Devolved Finance & Resource Officer.</p> <p>Pupils still not registered for P1 at CEC nurseries registered by Schools Transactions team after checking Council Tax database.</p> <p>S1 ERG offers go out and shared with Transactions</p>
<p>Early to Mid February 2024</p>	<p>Meeting of the Committee on Pupil/Student Support to consider exceptional reasons submitted for placement in all oversubscribed schools.</p> <p>Availability timetable to be sent out to appeal committee members.</p> <p>Waiting lists to be created based on committee decisions.</p> <p>Draft staffing allocations notified to schools by Devolved Finance & Resource Officer.</p> <p>ASL service to establish where P1 and S1 pupils will be going/applying – liaison with current establishment</p>
<p>29 February 2024</p>	<p>Closing date for requests to delay entry to P1. Registrations will be deleted when these are granted.</p>
<p><i>By Friday</i> 8 March 2024 (week 10)</p>	<p>First round of allocations completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decisions on oversubscribed schools sent to parents • Waiting lists become operational • Preparation of reports to the Placing in Schools Appeal Committee commences. <p>Initial P1 ERG offers go out and shared with Transactions</p>
<p>Monday 8 April 2024</p>	<p>Second round of allocations completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Places granted from waiting lists and late requests received up to 15 March responded to by end of this week.
<p>Friday 19 April 2024</p>	<p>Closing date for submission of first round placing in school appeals and second-preference requests.</p>
<p>Monday 6 May 2024</p>	<p>Third round of allocations completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any available places granted from waiting lists, second preference and further late requests received up to this date responded to by end of this week. <p>Parents to confirm acceptance of their mainstream place.</p>

Friday 12 May 2024	Closing date for submission of second round placing in school appeals
<i>During</i> May and June 2024	Placing in Schools Appeal Committee hearings take place. Pupil movement continually monitored, and places offered to parents of children on waiting lists on a weekly basis.
Friday 10 June 2024	Closing date for submission of third round placing in school .
18 – 20 June 2024	P7 transition days into S1 – aim to hear the majority of S1 placing appeals by 17 June 2024.
31 July 2024	Applications close temporarily to allow for final allocations and preparation for start of term. Parents advised to contact schools on Monday 12 August for a place.
<i>From Monday</i> 12 August 2024	Waiting lists passed to relevant schools. Responsibility for subsequent allocation of places devolved to Head Teacher from this date following waiting list priority. Primary & Secondary schools to contact parents of children who have not attended as expected by telephone. Schools to liaise with EWO service to support children into school. Where possible, one reserved place per class held at primary schools (two in Team Teaching classes), and one per every 40 children at high schools, held for incoming catchment children.
<i>By Friday</i> 6 September 2024	Places held by children who have not attended as expected can be withdrawn. Pupil data cleared from SEEMiS.