

LOCAL AUTHORITY REPORT
TO
THE SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS FORUM

August 2009

Context

Darlington Borough Council is responsible for administering school admissions at the normal age of entry for 2 infant schools, 25 primary schools (of which 6 are their own admission authorities) 7 secondary schools (3 of which are their own admission authority) and 2 junior schools.

There are also three neighbouring local authorities, Durham, Stockton and North Yorkshire which impact on the allocation of school places.

Darlington LA works in co-ordination with all admission authorities in order that parents can express a preference and their reason for doing so and to ensure that every child is offered a single school place. That preference is met to the maximum extent possible.

This is the second year that the Forum has reported on the admission arrangements in Darlington in a formal report.

Secondary Breakdown of preferences met in September 2009

There was 1132 secondary application received by the closing date for 2009, 1160 in total.

Preferences received	Allocated places	Percentage of preferences met
1st	977	84.2
2nd	89	7.7
3rd	30	2.6
Other	64	5.5

- The figure for Darlington slightly exceeds the national average of 83.2% for families getting their highest preferred school. For families gaining a place at one of their 3 stated preferences, Darlington achieved the national average of 94%.
- The LA set themselves a target to reduce the number of children who had either not made a preference for a school, had returned their application form after the deadline or had made either an unrealistic choice or had expressed only a single preference. There were a total of 184 in 2008 but only 86 in 2009. The LA believes that work undertaken by the Schools Admissions Team and the Choice Adviser to work closely with schools, reminding parents through various correspondence and visiting parents at home, has worked towards halving the number of those families not engaging in the process.

APPENDIX

Primary Breakdown of preferences met in September 2009

There were 2489 primary applications received by the closing date, this figure includes applications made by families living in another local authority area. 97% of families got one of their stated preferences, the same as last year, with 88% of children gaining a place at a school ranked 1st, a drop of 2% on last year.

School	Admission Numbers	Total Number of Preferences	Received Ranked 1st	No. of Places Offered
Abbey Infants	90	252	109	90
Alderman Leach Primary	60	95	46	60
Bishopton/Redmarshall Primary	15	9	5	12
Cockerton CE Primary	30	128	50	30
Corporation Road Primary	45	39	24	45
Dodmire School	75	105	59	75
Firthmoor Primary	45	67	37	45
Gurney Pease Primary	30	26	12	30
Harrowgate Hill Primary	75	146	80	75
Heathfield Primary	60	99	57	60
Heighington Primary	34 (+ 6)	66	51	40
High Coniscliffe Primary	15	64	19	16
Holy Family RC Primary	30	98	26	30
Hurworth Primary	30	70	27	30
Mount Pleasant Primary	35	55	35	35
Mowden Infants	60	186	60	60
North Road Primary	60	79	38	60
Red Hall Primary	30	26	19	30
Reid Street Primary	60	126	60	60
Skerne Park Primary	45	69	49	45
Springfield Primary	30	88	29	30
St Augustine's RC Primary	30	135	49	30
St Bede's RC Primary	30	105	37	30
St George's CE Primary	45	50	45	45
St John's CE Primary	30	61	29	30
St Teresa's RC Primary	40	97	45	40
Whinfield Primary	90	154	80	90
	1219 (+6)	2489	1177	1223

- There were a total of 1223 children allocated a place to start a Darlington primary schools in September 2009, of whom 124 children had either not made a preference for a school or had been allocated a school that was not a preference, this figure includes late applications (53).
- The Authority offered over the PAN at Heighington Primary School, as applications received were either siblings or lived in the Chestnuts estate or Heighington Village. As a responsible LA the decision to offer over the PAN was taken with due regard to the School Admissions Code of Practice and the

availability of alternative school places within a reasonable distance for the children to attend, without causing prejudice to the education of the children at the school.

- The Authority also offered 16 children places at High Coniscliffe as the last place offered was to a twin. As the schools admission number is 15 there were no legislative problems around classes of 30 due to mixed aged classes at KS1.
- For both primary and secondary the majority of parents were offered a school that they have stated a preference for. Trends show that parents who apply late or make an unrealistic choice will not be successful in gaining a local school.

The number of appeals for entry in September 2009

There were appeals for the following schools after the initial allocation of places:

School Name	No. of multiple appeals heard for 2009 entry		No. of successful multiple appeals	
	2008	2009	2008	2009
Carmel (VA)	21	37	8	12
Haughton	1	N/A	0	N/A
Hummersknott	17	24	5	10
Hurworth (Foundation)	19	13	8	1
Longfield	6	0	1	N/A
Branksome	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Eastbourne (Academy)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

School Name	No. of multiple appeals heard for 2009 entry	No. of successful multiple appeals
Abbey Infants	7	0
Cockerton (VA)	2	0
High Coniscliffe	1	0
Holy Family (VA)	3	0
Mowden Infants	3	0
Skerne Park	4	0
St Augustine's (VA)	6	2
St Bede's (VA)	4	0
St Teresa's (VA)	3	1

- The national average for appeals allowed in favour of parents is 36%
- There were 26 multiple appeals for community schools in 2008 for 3 schools. In 2009 there were 24, however these were for 1 school only. Any number of factors could be attributed to this.
- There were no successful appeals for a community or voluntary controlled primary school.

- There were successful appeals at 2 VA schools, breaching the KS1 legislation at only 1.
- The number of appeals heard for community primary schools was down considerably on last years figure. For VA schools the number of multiple appeals was higher than 2008.
- Before the start of the academic year 2009/10 only one school had to take qualifying measures in order to comply with the legislation.
- There is no evidence to say that families who are entitled to Free School Meals or those from different ethnic backgrounds do not use their right to appeal.
- All appeal panels have three members who must be trained so that they are familiar with the latest Appeals Code of Practice.
 - One member must have experience in education; be familiar with educational conditions in the Admission Authority's area; or be a parent of a registered pupil at a school
 - One member must be a layperson, that is, someone without personal experience in the management of any school or the provision of education in any school (disregarding experience as a school governor or in any other voluntary capacity)
 - The third panel member will be from either of the above two categories
- The last training the Local Authority undertook for panel members used in maintained school appeals was in February 2008.
- It is the role of the Clerk from Democratic Services to ensure that all panel members have received their training and have no connection with the appellant or the schools involved.

Ethnic and Social Mix

- See attached Appendix 1

Admission arrangements and LAC

All admission authorities in Darlington give top priority to children who are in the care of the local authority in their oversubscription criteria.

There were 3 LAC children admitted at the start of the academic year 2008/09 using the oversubscription criteria for a Community school.

SEN and Disabled Children

- In accordance with statutory regulations all admission authorities in Darlington admit children with a Statement of Special Educational Need where the school is named in the statement.
- Since 2003, schools have been expected to have an accessibility plan, which complements the local authority's accessibility strategy. In order to help schools identify objectives for their plan it is expected that all schools in Darlington will have an "**accessibility rating**". This rating system will reflect not only the physical environment but also the additional arrangements that the school will make to increase the extent to which pupils with a disability can participate in the curriculum. The grading system identifies, within each category of special educational need (SEN) and disability, the basic standard or baseline, that schools within the borough of Darlington are expected to achieve.
- The rating system is a reflection of the school's accessibility in relation to the impairments, which may be experienced by current or future pupils. It is not a method for rating schools in relation to the ability to meet the special educational needs of the generality of pupils who may experience barriers to their learning.
- The standard of the baseline "**universal**" rating, shows the level expected from all schools in relation to accessibility of the building, curriculum and methods of communication.
- In addition to the universal rating there will be two levels of enhanced access rating ("**Enhanced**" and "**Enhanced Plus**") in respect of each type of SEN and disability. A specific school may have a universal rating for most areas of disability but enhanced access in one area, for example special provision for pupils with an autistic spectrum disorder giving rise to significantly high levels of need for special arrangements. The local requirements for enhanced provision will be informed by a regular audit of need and be decided by Children's Services following consultation.
- The Special Education Needs Inclusion Service has collected ratings from all schools and highlighted where the universal level is not met. They have also checked that up to date access plans have been written showing how gaps will be addressed.
- The School Place Planning Team is using the access ratings from schools to enhance the information available in the Local Asset Management Profile. The School Improvement and Development Team is working with the SEN Inclusion Service to remind schools to keep their rating under review and inform the local authority of any changes

Current Provision

The table below shows which school the local authority additionally resource so that provision is enhanced.

SEN Primary Need/Disability	Universal	Enhanced	Enhanced Plus
Cognition and Learning	All mainstream schools	Heathfield Primary <i>(Resourced provision for 16 children)</i>	Beaumont Hill School & Technology College
Social Communication Needs	All mainstream schools	Mount Pleasant Primary <i>(Resourced provision for 14 children)</i> Hurworth Maths and Computing College <i>(Resourced provision for 12 children)</i>	Beaumont Hill School & Technology College
Speech, Language and Communication Needs	All mainstream schools	North Road Language Base <i>(Resourced provision for 10 children)</i>	Beaumont Hill School & Technology College
Behaviour Emotional and Social Difficulties (including Mental Health)	All mainstream schools		Beaumont Hill School & Technology College
Visual Impairment	All mainstream schools		Beaumont Hill School & Technology College
Hearing Impairment	All mainstream schools		

- Local authorities and schools are also required to publish a Disability Equality Scheme that must show how they have consulted with disabled children and young people, parents, staff and disabled people in the community. They also need to monitor the impact of their policies, including reporting on the achievements of children and young people.

- The local authority has offered advice and support to schools in the development of their Disability Equality Schemes and a number of schools have taken advantage of this service.
- The SEN Inclusion Service and School Improvement and Development Service work together to ensure that all schools have a Disability Equality Scheme.
- All schools are expected to provide for children and young people with additional needs.
- Actual progress information is compared with predicted progress and benchmarked against other schools in Darlington and a neighboring local authority. This analysis for 2009 is not yet available but in 2008 the Key Stage 2 results show that once again pupils with SEN made just over 2 levels progress, achieving a Value Added Average Points Score (VA APS) of 12.7, compared with 12.6 for their non-SEN peers. In 59% of mainstream primary schools the VA APS for pupils with SEN was greater than 12.7.
- In 2008 Key Stage 3 pupils with SEN achieved their highest Value Added Average Points Score, 4.4, for at least five years. This represents just over two thirds of a level progress.
- The KS2 – KS4 Contextual Value Added (CVA) for pupils with SEN increased from 1005.2 in 2007 to 1027.7 in 2008. This was higher than that of their non-SEN peers, for whom the CVA was 1017.9.
- Ofsted Inspection judgments over the last four years show that 97.5% of schools and settings have been rated as at least satisfactory for the progress made by pupils with SEN/LDD, with 78% being rated as good or better. All schools have achieved a rating of at least satisfactory for meeting the full range of learners' needs with 75% being rated as being good or better.

Fair Access Protocol

- All schools within the Local Authority area have agreed to admit a child identified as 'hard to place'.
- In the academic year 2008/09 the Schools Admissions Team identified 2 children for whom the Fair Access Protocol was used to help secure an appropriate setting until a final decision could be made on their future placements.

Infant Class Size Legislation

- Admission authorities and schools in Darlington act in accordance with the legislation concerning KS1. In the academic year 2008/09 only 1 school was not able to comply and this was due to a successful appeal. When questioned the school were able to identify extra resources within their own budget, which meant they were able to comply with requirements of legislation. When the DCSF enquired as to the schools action they were satisfied with the explanation given and the action taken by the school to take ‘qualifying measures’.
- The LA ensures as far as is ‘reasonable’ to comply with KS1 legislation. When a family moves into Darlington, should a school places(s) not be available at the nearest school to the parental address and the next nearest school should be over 2 miles, the LA will provide transport to another school. Parents will however, always be advised of their right to appeal.
- Appeal panels have received training and are aware that they can only allow an “infant class size” appeal if one of the three factors stated below applies:
 - A that the child would have been offered a place if the admission arrangements had been properly implemented;
 - B the child would have been offered a place if the arrangements had not been contrary to mandatory provisions in the School Admissions Code and the SSFA 1998 and, or;
 - C that the decision to refuse admission was not one which a reasonable admission authority would make in the circumstances of the case.

Are Admission Arrangements Fair and Promote Parental Choice

- At secondary phase from September 2008 new regulations gave parents the opportunity to consider further their choices when stating a preference in the knowledge that free transport may be provided. Should a child have been offered one of their 3 nearest appropriate schools that was over 2 miles and the family be in receipt of free school meals or full working tax credit, they were entitled.
- The new regulations are in addition to the ‘associated’ areas, where the LA already provides free transport from certain schools.
- All parents are given the opportunity to attend ‘open’ evenings at all secondary schools in Darlington, this information was included in the Guide for Parents given to all Year 6 pupils at the start of the academic year.
- Admission arrangements for children starting school at the normal point of entry are compliant with the School Admissions Code of Practice and do make allowances for consideration of applications received late because of

circumstances, e.g. moving into the authority or the death of a close family member.

However the Authority does not make reference to the needs of special groups of children, such as forces children, traveller children, children with additional needs.

- For families moving into Darlington there is a level playing field for those regarded as ‘special groups of children’ as opposed to those who are not. Should there be only one place available at a school and a number of families are interested, then the admission authority will refer to its oversubscription criteria when looking to offer the place.
- Yr6 parents are issued a guide on secondary school admissions for all secondary schools in Darlington in September of each academic year. The comprehensive prospectus gives parents information that is required by regulations set out in the School Admissions Code of Practice.
- Children starting education at Reception phase are also given a guide in September of each academic year. This is also code compliant.
- Both brochures are reviewed annually in order to improve the information given to parents in clear, concise text and also to be code compliant. Both are available as a PDF version on the Council’s website.
- 25% of secondary applications were received on-line for 2009 intake, this is a significant rise on last years 10%. Nationally the figure was 30% and for the North-East 19%. Information and advice on how to apply is contained in the admissions guide, using a step-by-step process. Information given in the guides, advises parents that where they are not in a position to access a computer of their own, they can go to a library in the town and staff there would be able to assist them to set up an e-mail address.
- In line with government guidance both primary and secondary ‘schemes’ are available to access on the Council’s website. This allows parents the right to object the proposed proposals for the forthcoming academic year within the timescale for objections.
- The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), commissioned the Centre for Education and Inclusion Research (CEIR) at Sheffield Hallam University to evaluate the effectiveness of the Choice Advice initiative and identify good practice to date. The report, published in 2008, builds on the pilot evaluation which examined the first year of the service and presents the findings from the fuller evaluation conducted between September 2007 and July 2008. Overall, the findings of the research suggests that the Choice Advice services were positively regarded by the parents who used them and had a beneficial impact on the vulnerable parents that were successfully targeted and supported through the initiative.

On a local level, targeting was mainly focused on ensuring parents submitted applications on time by attending drop-in sessions and talks for parents of year 6 children at primary schools and attending all secondary school open evenings. In addition, chasing potential late applications or contacting parents to amend incorrect applications.

- The number of Secondary Application Forms that were returned in the last admissions round (2008 for entry to secondary school in September 2009) was 1160. A total of 1184 application forms were issued to Darlington resident year 6 pupils - a return rate of 98%. The return rate in the previous 2 years was 95.4% and 87.2%. Clearly, the targeting of parents at Year 6 drop-in sessions at primary schools, attending and addressing secondary school open evenings and chasing potential late application just before the closing date has increased the number of families submitting timely application forms.
- The LA takes every opportunity to keep abreast of current legislation and will address any issues raised through the Schools Adjudicator, the Courts, and any directions by the Secretary of State in relation to the LA area. For cases where a parent has raised an objection to the Ombudsman, timescales dictate a swift response.

Points for Discussion

Does the Forum believe that the Guides For Parents are enabling parents to understand the process entirely?

Should more emphasis be placed on the number of applications so that parents understand the level of demand for certain schools?

A question the forum may wish to consider is whether or not schools should promote the open evenings/days or themselves to a wider audience using the media.