



Office of the  
Schools  
Adjudicator

**LOCAL AUTHORITY REPORT**  
**TO**  
**THE SCHOOLS ADJUDICATOR**  
**FROM**

**Darlington Borough Council**

**30 JUNE 2010**

**Report Cleared by : Murray Rose, Director of Children's Services**

**Date submitted : 30 June 2010**

**By: M Stainthorpe, Schools Admissions Manager**

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## SECTION 1

**FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR IN WHICH THE REPORT IS MADE - 2009 - 2010**

**Please complete using data/information for the period 1 September 2009 to date of report**

***NOTE: This template is designed to be filled in electronically – boxes can/should be expanded as necessary.***

### **Fair Access Protocol**

*Code 4.9 a) (i) how well the Fair Access Protocol has worked and how many children have been admitted to each school in the area under the protocol;*

NOTE: The Code at 3.44 requires (1) each local authority to have a Fair Access Protocol and (2) all schools and Academies to participate in their LA area's protocol

- a) Please confirm that the LA has a Fair Access Protocol that has been agreed with all the relevant schools in its area (relevant schools are all maintained schools and academies).

Tick as appropriate:

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If NO please explain:

- b) Give your assessment of how well the Fair Access Protocol has worked since 1 September 2008:
- a. in placing children in schools;
- b) Give your assessment of how well the Fair Access Protocol has worked since 1 September 2009. In particular in placing children, the co-operation of schools and Academies well as any other issues you have had in implementing the protocol.

A Pupil Placement Panel is used by the LA in decisions regarding placement of children under the Fair Access Protocol. For the academic year two children have been placed, 1 child in KS2 and another in KS3. In both cases when schools were approached, there were difficulties although these cases have now been satisfactorily resolved. St Aidan's CofE Academy had sought clarification of the protocol. Officers of the Authority have worked constructively with the Academy regarding this. A Behaviour and Attendance conference was held in the Borough on 25 May 2010 where the Fair Access Protocol was debated at length. The Local Admissions Forum will consider the responses and work with officers on updating and re-launching the protocol.

- c) In Appendix A, please record for each school the number of children considered to be placed in (column O) and those actually placed in (column P) to the school under the protocol between 1 September 2009 and the date of this report.

### **Infant Class Sizes**

*Code 4.9 a) (ii) whether primary schools are complying with infant class size legislation*

Are all Primary Schools in your area complying with infant class sizes?

Tick as appropriate:

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If NO please comment and also include the number of schools where qualifying measures are being taken:

It should be noted that schools are complying with KS1 legislation but appeal panels have admitted children and therefore 2 schools have had to employ an additional fully qualified teacher in order to meet the legislative requirements.

### **Admission Appeals**

*Code 4.9 a) (iii) the number of admissions appeals held for each and every school\* in the area, and the number of appeals that were upheld.*

\* Every school includes: community, voluntary controlled, voluntary aided, foundation, Academies, city technology colleges and city colleges for technology of the arts.

For the period 1 September 2009 to the date of this report please insert in Appendix A the following for each school:

- column Q - the number of appeals held;
- column R - the number of appeals upheld; and
- column S - the number of appeals pending from the date of this report.

*Code 4.9 a) iv the extent to which the local authority and appeal panels in the area complied with the requirements of the Appeals Code, with reference to ensuring the timeliness and transparency of appeals, effective communications with parents and any other relevant matter.*

All appeals held by the Authority complied fully with the requirements of the Appeals Code. All appeals were held and all information/documentation was provided within within the time limits set out in the Code. All potential appellants were provided with a locally prepared guide, which fully explains the appeals process and give details of organisations and websites which may be helpful. In addition correspondence to the appellants contained the information in respect of the appeals process and composition of the panel as required by the Code, and the Chair reiterated this information at the hearings themselves. In all correspondence/documentation appellants are encouraged to contact the Clerk if they require further assistance or information.

NOTE: other appeals panels have a duty to provide you with information on appeals (Section 88Q of Schools Standards and Framework Act).

Has your independent appeals panel complied with the requirements of the Appeals Code?

Tick as appropriate:

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If NO please explain including non-compliance and action taken:

Have all other appeals panels for own admission authority schools complied with the requirements of the Appeals Code?

Tick as appropriate:

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If NO or Don't Know please highlight any issues raised and if you have been unable to obtain information:

## SECTION 2

### FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR WHICH STARTS AFTER THE REPORT IS MADE – 2010-2011:

*Code 4.9 b) (i) the extent to which admission arrangements for schools in the authority's area serve the interests of children in care, children with disabilities, children with special educational needs and service children.*

NOTE: You may wish to point out if specialist staff from within the Council has contributed to this report and highlight any problems that may have occurred.

Children in care: In line with the Code of Practice, the 1st oversubscription criterion, which all admission authorities use in Darlington, looks at the placement of LAC. Thereafter, there is no special provision within the admission arrangements, though the LAC co-ordinator works very closely with the school admissions team to advise on future placements so that a provisional place may be allocated ahead of their arrival or change of address.

Children with disabilities: There is no special provision with the admission arrangements for children without a statement of SEN. However, the LA does look at children under a criterion of 'medical', which encompasses those who have SEN but without a statement and those with a medical diagnosis.

Children with Special Educational Needs: These children would be covered as above.

Service Children: The Authority does not look at allocating places some period ahead of a family arriving within the Borough, unless during a holiday period. However, in the case of service personnel when a family contacts the Authority and can provide a letter from a commanding officer or similar, which indicates their intention to move, then a provisional offer can be made.

*Code 4.9 b) (ii) the effectiveness of co-ordination.*

NOTE: You may wish to report on the authority's assessment of the effectiveness of any scheme for co-ordinating:

a) the admission of pupils to LA schools in September 2010

The admissions for 2010 entry have been effectively managed. The Authority has seen a significant increase in the number of reception aged pupils and has worked hard to identify those parents who did not apply, so that the take up of places within the Borough is nearly 100%.

b) the admission of pupils in the authority's area to other admission authority schools in September 2010.

The process of co-ordination between all schools is excellent, at both secondary and primary levels.

### SECTION 3

**FOR ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS THAT HAVE BEEN DETERMINED IN THE APRIL IMMEDIATELY BEFORE THE DATE OF THE REPORT IS MADE (determined by 15 April 2010 for admission in September 2011):**

*Code 4.9 c) (i) a statement of whether or not admission arrangements for maintained schools in the area complied with the mandatory requirements of this Code and admissions law.*

NOTE: All non-compliant admission arrangements must be corrected. All mandatory requirements can be changed by the admission authority. Any other non-compliant issues must be referred to the OSA.

Are you satisfied that the admission arrangements for all maintained schools in your area are fully compliant with the Code?

Tick as appropriate:

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If YES please provide a statement to confirm this: The Local Authority can confirm compliance with the Code of Practice and relevant admissions law for the 2011 admission arrangements.

If NO, please specify what action you are taking:

Using column T in Appendix A, please identify those schools that you have identified with problems now or which you have referred to the OSA, or may be referring to the OSA by the 31 July 2010.

## SECTION 4

### OTHER MATTERS:

#### Admission Forum

Code 4.9 d) (i) details about the current membership of the Admission Forum for the area

NOTE: Please list the bodies represented and the number of representatives in each category. Do **NOT** give the names of members.

Community Schools: 3 Voluntary Controlled Schools: 2 Voluntary Aided Schools: 2 Foundation Schools: 1 Academy Schools: 1 Religious Denomination Rep: 1 Parent Member: Vacancy Community Reps: 1 Local Authority: 3
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Is the Admission Forum writing a report?

Tick as appropriate:

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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If YES is the report attached or has it been sent separately?

Tick as appropriate:

Attached	<input type="checkbox"/>	Separately	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If separately please provide the date the report will or has been sent to the OSA?

DATE:

<input type="text"/>
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Please confirm whether the Admission Forum has seen, or will see, a copy of this LA report.

Tick as appropriate:

Has seen	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Will see	<input type="checkbox"/>
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## **Free School Meals**

*Code 4.9 d) (ii) the proportion of children currently on free school meals at each school in the area.*

NOTE: The data provided by the Local Authority to the DCSF in January 2009 has been "cleaned" and is included in Appendix A.

If the data for 2010 is significantly different from 2009 please state how it differs.

There are 2 primary and 1 secondary school for whom there has been an increase of more than 5% in the uptake of FSM.

These schools intake is from families who predominately live in social housing.

Using and interpreting the data, please comment on whether the allocation of school places meets parental preferences for those children on Free School Meals.

The LA does not operate 'catchment areas' but implements the use of distance as a criterion for allocation of places. In a small number of cases where parental preference has not been met, it has been due to the parent living some distance from a preferred school and thereby being refused a place on distance.

*Code 4.9 d) (iii) any other matters which affect the fairness of admission arrangements for schools in the area.*

NOTE: Please identify any issues not covered elsewhere on this template.

The Local Authority operates an oversubscription criterion for secondary schools known as 'Associated Transport'. This provides free transport to certain schools from designated localities in the Borough. For one school it is seen by some parents, when applying, as being unfair, as it allows for children to gain a place at a school which is not their nearest in distance. This is before children who would be applying for a place and assessed under a distance criteria.

## SECTION 5

### OTHER ISSUES REQUESTED IN ADDITION THIS YEAR BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

#### Choice Advice

Please complete with reference to Choice Advice provided to parents applying for a secondary school place for the 2010/2011 school year.

Appendix 5 of the Code requires local authorities to provide an independent Choice Advice service that is focused on supporting the families who most need support in navigating the secondary school admissions process (paragraph 5). Choice Advice must be independent and free from any potential conflict of interest between the need of the local authority to allocate places and the advice that parents receive (paragraph 8). As a minimum, local authorities must ensure that Choice Advisers are not in the same management chain or reporting lines as the local authority's admissions staff (paragraph 9).

- a) Please confirm that your local authority has an independent Choice Advice service in place.

Tick as appropriate: 

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
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- b) Please explain how you ensure the independence of the Choice Advice provided (for example, the Choice Advice service may be situated in the Parent Partnership service or Family Information Service).

The Choice Adviser in Darlington works closely with the School Admissions Team. Independence of choice advice is ensured by the Choice Adviser being managed by the Assistant Director, Planning and Resources whilst the School Admissions Team are managed by the Assistant Director, School Improvement and Development.
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- b) Are your Choice Adviser(s) in the same line management chain or reporting lines as staff on the admissions team.

Tick as appropriate: 

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Choice Advice must be targeted at those parents who most need support with the secondary school admissions process (paragraph 10). Local authorities and Choice Advisers should market their service to ensure that they reach the families most in need of their support and that other relevant agencies and professionals are aware of the service they provide (paragraph 11). Choice Advisers should be proactive in reaching 'hard to reach' parents and should develop good links with organisations that may be able to refer parents to them (paragraph 12).

- d) Please explain how you ensure Choice Advice reaches those parents who are most in need of it.

Choice Advice in Darlington is provided at both primary and secondary school levels and aimed at all parents. Evidence that the Choice Adviser is supporting the most disadvantaged and disengaged parents can be gauged by the number of Application Forms that are returned on time in the admissions rounds. In the year before Choice Advice commenced in Darlington (2006) 87.2% of parents returned their secondary school application forms on time. In the latest admission round, 97% of parents returned their application forms on time. The targeting of parents at Y6 drop-in sessions at primary schools, attending and addressing secondary school open evenings and working closely with partners such as primary schools, has increased the number of families submitting timely application forms.

- e) Describe how Choice Advice has contributed to the fairness of the admissions process.

Darlington's Choice Adviser has contributed the fairness of the admissions process by targeting support to ensuring all parents apply for a school place within the time allowed. By ensuring parental concerns are addressed at the time of application reduces anxiety of the process. It also reduces the number of appeals that are lodged and this has been the case in Darlington where there has been a substantial reduction in the number of appeals. The Choice Adviser also helps parents prepare for appeals and represents parents at appeals where necessary. Choice Advice is available all year round in Darlington.

Local authorities may provide Choice Advice at the primary school admission stage and for in-year applications (paragraph 5).

- f) Choice Advice is offered at the primary admissions stage?

Tick as appropriate:

Yes	√	No	
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- g) Choice Advice is offered for in-year applications?

Tick as appropriate:

Yes	√	No	
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It is good practice for Choice Advisers to provide support during the appeals process, particularly to those parents who accessed Choice Advice at the application stage.

h) The Choice Adviser provides support during the appeals process?

Tick as appropriate:

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
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i) If no, do you plan to provide support during the appeals process in future?

Tick as appropriate:

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
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### **Transport**

Admission authorities **must** explain clearly whether or not school transport will be available, and, if so, to which schools and at what cost (if any). Are details of the availability and cost of home to school travel and transport clearly set out in the composite prospectus?

Tick as appropriate:

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If No, please provide an explanation

Paragraphs 1.90 and 1.91 of the Code provide guidance on how Governing Bodies **should** ensure that the cost of a school uniform does not inhibit the choice of school. In the following box, please provide details of where schools do not comply with this and what actions you or Governing Bodies have taken or are proposing to take.

There is no requirement when applying for a school place for parents to have the means by which to pay for a uniform. To the knowledge of the LA prices for school ties, blazers and school badges are reasonable and in some cases can be paid for over a period of time. There are also standard articles of clothing such as black trousers, which can be bought cheaply at supermarkets.

Please provide details of any improvements that you feel can be made to this template.

This year's template is much simpler to follow, yes and no answers with text boxes, give an opportunity to comment, whilst not making the report an onerous task.