

NURSERY ADMISSIONS WORKING PARTY

DATE – MONDAY 9TH NOVEMBER 20092ND FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM, CIVIC CENTRE, HARROW

ATTENDEES: CLLR ANJANA PATEL
SUE JONES, Headteacher. Weald First and Nursery
HELENA TUCKER

OFFICERS: WENDY BEETON, Head of Early Years and Childcare
NOREEN SEVERYN, Deputy Manager, Place Planning & Admissions
MADELEINE HITCHENS, Manager, Place Planning & Admissions

APOLOGIES: RUTINDER MAHIL-POONI, Head of Kenmore Park First and Nursery

The main focus of the meeting was to discuss feedback from a questionnaire sent to all nursery school headteachers, the outcome of which was to inform a review of nursery admissions

There was a 50% response from nursery headteachers. Analysis of the responses looked at what worked well, what was not working well and what change might need to be considered.

In addition the Working Group considered information and recommendations from the Local Government Ombudsman following a parental complaint about nursery admissions.

Issue	Action
The survey showed that there was an issue with oversubscription.	Most nursery classes are oversubscribed but it was suggested that where vacancies exist, this information could be added to the Family Information Service website. Also to clarify on the website and in other information for parents that, once a child is three, places are funded wherever child attends and the same curriculum is on offer. Members of the Working Party were concerned about ensuring vacancy information was accurate. The Head of Early Years and Childcare agreed to check who can update the FIS website
Feedback from the survey of headteachers identified a number of areas where the current oversubscription criteria needs to be reviewed, specifically Children Looked After (CLA) and those referred by the Special Educational Needs and Assessment Service (SENARS).	<p>Recommendation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ That first priority be given to CLA in the oversubscription criteria ▪ To clarify that places are offered in date of birth order with priority given to older children.

<p>The Working Party's attention was drawn to the fact that children referred by SENARS already had priority in the oversubscription criteria. It was acknowledged that because of the age of nursery children it was very possible that many had not yet formally been identified as have special educational needs.</p> <p>The Ombudsman had indicated that greater clarity was needed to show that places are offered to the eldest children first.</p>	
<p>Consistency is essential across all nurseries in the way admissions are administered. A clear timetable for the nursery application process is needed so that parents know when to apply. Currently parents can apply after child's 3rd birthday. This needs to be changed to after 2nd birthday as children are now starting nursery earlier. However, no applications should be accepted before a child is two as problems can occur when parents apply earlier and then move and do not cancel their application or advise the nursery of their new address.</p>	<p>Recommendation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In collaboration with Foundation Stage headteachers the Council to agree a format for an annual timetable and protocol for nursery admissions for approval by the Harrow Admissions Forum that formal sign-up is obtained from all relevant headteachers. 2. To obtain formal sign-up to the protocol from all nursery headteachers.
<p>Following a parental complaint, the Ombudsman had identified the need for greater clarity in information, advice and instructions given to schools on the administration of the council's admissions policy. The Ombudsman also recommended that a school must consider the application and then pass to the next preference shown on the form if unable to offer a place. As nursery classes mainly fill from first preference applicants, the option for parents to apply for only one nursery and if not offered a place to ask to go on the waiting list for other nurseries was considered. The problem was highlighted that parents 2nd and 3rd preferences do not get considered because these schools are already full. Experience of nursery headteachers indicates that parents would prefer their child to stay with the current provider until a place becomes available from the waiting list rather than accept alternative nursery place.</p> <p>SJ confirmed there is a system in place within her local area where schools email other nurseries with list of offers. This ensures that no parent receives a multiple offer. Children do not get more than one year in nursery</p>	<p>Recommendation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. See above 2. Applicants to give only one preference on nursery form. MH to seek advice from Legal (Legal advise this is acceptable provided parents are informed they have not been offered a place, that their child's name has been added to the waiting list and also that their child's name can be added to the waiting list for any other nursery class. 3. Schools need to develop robust systems for sharing information about offers to ensure no child receives more than one nursery class place.

<p>Although not raised through the survey, a number of concerns have been made to the local authority about the tie-breaker, which is felt no longer reflects current circumstances.</p> <p>Options discussed. One member of the Working Group felt distance would create unfairness as there is an imbalance in the spread of nurseries, where some areas have 2 or 3 nurseries and other areas have less accessibility to nurseries. Also there would be issues for schools in undertaking accurate measurements.</p> <p>The Head of Early Years and Childcare Services advised that Early Years Foundation Stage means there is standard curriculum across all providers. The private and voluntary sector makes good provision and their nurseries are accessible to all children. She confirmed that places are funded once a child is three.</p> <p>Concern was expressed that using language as tiebreaker is not transparent as it is not measurable.</p> <p>Random allocation was also considered but not felt appropriate as very young children could be required to travel long distances.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Distance from home to nursery measured in a straight line is used as tiebreaker. Admissions Service to measure any instances and provide schools with measurement.</p>
<p>The Working Group identified that if changes are to be made to nursery admission arrangements then the application form will need to be reviewed.</p> <p>It was felt that although the current form gives some information, there is a need to make it even clearer that there is no automatic priority for school place (except Moriah) if a child is offered a nursery place.</p> <p>Officers need to meet with nursery heads to review form.</p> <p>The current two-part form was agreed to be useful.</p>	<p>Recommendation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In collaboration with headteachers, officer to review the nursery application form to ensure it meets current circumstances 2. To review nursery application form annually to ensure it is up-to-date and relevant.

All recommendations to be presented to Harrow Admissions Forum on 18th November 2009.