



CONSULTATION ON ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR LUTON'S COMMUNITY SCHOOLS FOR SEPTEMBER 2007

INTRODUCTION

This paper sets out the proposed admission arrangements for Luton's community schools for the academic year beginning September 2007.

The Council is legally obliged to annually consult on its proposed admission arrangements for community schools.

LUTON BOROUGH COUNCIL'S ADMISSIONS POLICY

Luton operates a catchment area system. Parents are advised of their designated catchment area school and of their right to express a preference for any school.

The Admissions Forum, in conjunction with the Council's Executive, oversees and co-ordinates the effective working of admission arrangements. Pupils are admitted to Luton schools, without reference to ability or aptitude, up to the published admission number for each school. If the number of places in a particular year group at a school is not sufficient to meet the number of applications from parents, the following criteria are applied (in the order of priority given below) to determine how places will be allocated.

Priority may also be given to the admission of challenging pupils in accordance with protocol agreed by Luton's Admissions Forum, following consultation with schools.

COMMUNITY INFANT/PRIMARY SCHOOLS

In accordance with the Education Act (1996), children with a Statement of SEN are required to be admitted to the school named in the Statement. Thereafter, the following priorities will apply:-

1. Pupils who are 'looked after' by a local authority where the person with parental responsibility completes the application form.
2. Pupils living in the catchment area of the school.
3. On medical grounds supported by a medical certificate.

4. Brothers and sisters of pupils currently attending the school or the linked junior school.
5. On the shortest distance, measured in a straight line, between the main entrance of the school site and the pupil's home address (mid point, front of house), with those living closer to the school being accorded higher priority.

COMMUNITY JUNIOR SCHOOLS

In accordance with the Education Act (1996), children with a Statement of SEN are required to be admitted to the school named in the Statement. Thereafter, the following priorities will apply:-

1. Pupils who are 'looked after' by a local authority where the person with parental responsibility completes the application form.
2. Pupils living in the catchment area of the school.
3. On medical grounds supported by a medical certificate.
4. Brothers and sisters of pupils currently attending the school, or the linked infant school.
5. Pupils attending the infant school.
6. On the shortest distance, measured in a straight line, between the main entrance of the school site and the pupil's home address (mid point, front of house), with those living closer to the school being accorded higher priority.

Note:

Linked infant and junior schools normally share the same names (e.g. William Austin Infant School is linked to William Austin Junior School) with the exception of:

- Whipperley Infant School for which Farley Junior School is the linked school.
- Cheynes Infant School for which Sundon Park Junior School is the linked school.

COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOLS

In accordance with the Education Act (1996), children with a Statement of SEN are required to be admitted to the school named in the Statement. Thereafter, the following priorities will apply:-

1. Pupils who are 'looked after' by a local authority where the person with parental responsibility completes the application form.
2. Pupils living in the catchment area of the school.
3. On medical grounds supported by a medical certificate.
4. Brothers and sisters of pupils currently attending the school*.
5. On the shortest distance, measured in a straight line, between the main entrance of the school site and the pupil's home address (mid point, front of house), with those living closer to the school being accorded higher priority.

* For Challney High School for Boys this criterion will apply to brothers of pupils attending either Challney High School for Boys or Challney High School for Girls. For Challney High School for Girls this criterion will apply to sisters of pupils attending either Challney High School for Girls or Challney High School for Boys.

The admissions criteria will be applied separately and sequentially until all places are filled. Priority is not given within each criterion to children who meet other criteria. If the Council is unable to agree a place for all applicants meeting a specific criterion, the distance criterion (priority 5 for infant/primary and high and priority 6 for junior) will be used as a tiebreaker.

ADMISSIONS PROCESS FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has issued a document consulting on proposals to change the Code of Practice for Admissions. The draft Code requires all admitting authorities in the local authority area to process parental preferences in the same way. At present two preference systems operate in Luton. Community and foundation schools operate a "first preference first" system, whereby initially only first preferences are considered, with second and third preferences only being considered for those parents who have not secured a place at higher ranked school. Voluntary aided schools currently operate an equal preference system, whereby all three preferences of all parents are considered and compared to the relevant admissions criteria (the two stages of this system are set out below). If the DfES adopts the Code proposed in its consultation draft (as seems likely) and if the Council continued to employ the familiar "first preference first" methodology the Council could find its admission arrangements being challenged by other admitting authorities, potentially leading to them being overturned by the national Schools Adjudicator. The Council is proposing to adopt the equal preference system for September 2007 admissions for the following reasons:

- ❑ This methodology is preferred by the DfES and the draft Code of Practice sets out an expectation that all admitting authorities will consider carefully whether they should continue to use "first preference first".
- ❑ There is a clear expectation in the draft Code that all admitting authorities in an area will adopt the same approach (i.e. "first preference first" or "equal preference") – failure to do so will be regarded as poor practice.
- ❑ The Luton Admissions Forum has previously agreed that it would be desirable for all admissions authorities to use the same methodology, but have been unable to secure consensus as to the most suitable option for Luton.
- ❑ It is unlikely given the DfES' stated preference for equal preference arrangements and this being enshrined in the Code that other local admitting authorities would consider adopting the first preference first approach.
- ❑ The risks of a referral to the Schools Adjudicator are high, as are the risks of losing such a referral.
- ❑ The effect of losing a referral would be to cause confusion to parents and school staff and governors about local admissions arrangements and would impact adversely on the Council's reputation.
- ❑ This system gives more weight to the school's admissions criteria and less weight to preference order. Therefore, parents will have a better chance of gaining a place at their second or third preference school.
- ❑ Neighbouring local authorities operate this system.

The disadvantages of this system:

- ❑ Depending on how parents respond to the change in arrangements fewer first preferences might be agreed and this might lead to an increased number of admission appeals.
- ❑ The system is more complex to understand for parents who are familiar with the existing system, for example a second preference catchment area applicant will gain a place ahead of a first preference out of catchment applicant.
- ❑ The system is more complex for the Council to administer.

'Equal preference' system

Stage 1

All first, second and third preference applications are considered equally against the schools' admissions criteria. At this stage the Council does not distinguish between first, second and third preference applications. For example, if the school has 150 places and there are 300 first, second and third preference applications all are considered equally against the admissions criteria.

Stage 2

If a pupil qualifies for a place at more than one school the parent's highest ranked preference (i.e. first or second preference on the parent's application form) will be offered, and any lower ranking offers will be disregarded. For example a parent's first and third preferences might both qualify for a place, in which case the parent would be offered their first preference, leaving the place at the third preference school available for another pupil.

TIMETABLE

<p>September 2006</p>	<p>Parents of pupils born between 1/9/02 – 31/8/03 receive a <i>Starting School</i> information booklet, catchment area list and an application form.</p> <p>Parents of Year 2 pupils receive a <i>Going to Junior School</i> information booklet, catchment area list and an application form.</p> <p>Parents of Year 6 pupils receive a <i>Going to High School</i> information booklet, catchment area list and an application form.</p>
<p>October 2006</p>	<p>High School Open Evenings take place.</p>
<p>3 November 2006</p>	<p>Closing date for receipt of application forms by the Council.</p>
<p>12 December 2006</p>	<p>Applications for Luton's voluntary aided and foundation schools are passed to the relevant schools for consideration.</p> <p>Out of borough applications are sent to the relevant Council for consideration.</p>
<p>8 January 2007</p>	<p>Luton voluntary aided and foundation infant, junior and primary schools provide the Admissions Team with a list that ranks all applications received against their School's Admissions Criteria.</p>

APPENDIX A

	Luton voluntary aided and foundation high schools provide the Admissions Team with a list that ranks all applications received against their School's admissions criteria.
5 February 2007	Luton Borough Council to receive notification of the outcome of applications to schools outside of the borough. Luton will notify neighbouring Council's of the outcome of applications for a place at a Luton school, from pupils resident in their area.
21 February 2007	Allocation lists sent to community schools by the Council. In the case of Foundation and Voluntary Aided schools a list of pupils who have been granted or refused a place will be sent to the relevant school.
1 March 2007	Starting School: Parents receive decision letters by post from the Council. Transfer to Junior School: Decision letters are sent to parents by the Council via the infant schools. Transfer to High School: Decision letters are sent by the Council to parents, via junior or primary schools.
April 2007	Admission appeals take place from April 2007

If schools receive direct applications they must inform Luton Borough Council of the application and forward it to the Council by the closing date of 3 November 2006 regardless of whether the child(ren) reside in the Luton area.

The Council may undertake the processing of applications for foundation school high schools; this is subject to negotiation with schools.

APPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOLS OUTSIDE OF LUTON

Luton parents wishing to apply for a place at a school(s) outside of the Borough should specify the school(s) on Luton Borough Council's application form. The Council will ensure that applications for a place at schools outside of the Borough will be sent to the relevant Council for consideration. Application forms submitted, by Luton parents, direct to other local education authorities will not be accepted. The Council will have regard to whether a place can be offered at a school outside of the borough. If a pupil qualifies for a place at more than one school and the highest ranking offer is for an out of borough school this place will be offered and any lower ranking offers will not be offered.

Parents will also be advised to check with the out of borough school to see if they need to complete any supplementary forms supplied by the school.

Luton Borough Council will liaise with neighbouring Councils over the outcome of applications for Luton pupils. Decision letters will be sent to parents on 1 March 2007.

APPLICATIONS FOR LUTON SCHOOLS FROM PARENTS RESIDING OUTSIDE OF THE BOROUGH

Out of Borough applications will be processed in parallel with Luton applications. Out of Borough applications will be forwarded to the relevant admitting authority for the school for consideration.

Luton Borough Council will then notify the home Council as to whether a place can be offered.

WAITING LISTS

Where it is not possible to agree all first preference applications for a school a waiting list will be devised. A child's name will only be held on one waiting list, if their first preference school is a community school. Waiting lists are organised in the order of priority of the school's admissions criteria. Waiting lists are not based on the date the application was added to the list.

For the new junior and high school intakes (Years 3 and 7) the names will only be held on the waiting list for their first preference school until 31 October 2007. Parents will need to reapply for a place at their preferred school after this date if they wish their child's name to be carried forward on the waiting list.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

For the purposes of allocating places where a school is oversubscribed the pupil's catchment area will be determined by their home address as at 3 November 2006.

Children who gain a place at a school because their parents/carers have given the Council a false home address will have their place withdrawn.

LATE APPLICATIONS

Applications received after the closing date will not be considered in the initial allocation of places, except in very exceptional circumstances.

Where parents have submitted a transfer form before the closing date, but then seek to change their preference after the closing date, this late expression of preference will be treated as a 'late' application and will not be considered in the initial allocation of places.

CHILDREN 'LOOKED AFTER' BY THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

The revised Code of Practice for Admissions states that admission authorities should give top priority to 'looked after' children, after children with a statement of special educational needs.

In accordance with Government guidelines, Luton Borough Council will secure an educational placement, for any pupil in public care, within 20 school days of receipt of their application.

PUBLICATION OF ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS

The Council will publish information booklets for parents on the admissions process. It will be made clear that in the case of community schools, parents who specify their catchment area school as their first preference and apply for a place before the closing date will be offered a place at the school providing there are sufficient places available. Information on the phase transfer procedures will be available in community languages on cassette tapes. Assistance is also available in community languages from the Council.

RELEVANT AREA

The current relevant area for admissions consultation purposes is all admitting authorities within the Borough of Luton, neighbouring Councils and all admitting authorities within a three-mile radius of Luton.

DEFINITIONS

Siblings

The term 'siblings' includes both natural, adopted and stepbrothers and sisters. It also includes fostered siblings, where foster care has been arranged by Social Services. Other family relationships such as cousins will not be considered under this criterion.

Medical Grounds

This refers to the health of the child for whom a place is being requested and for whom the requested school is the most suitable in the area to meet the child's medical needs. It must relate to a recognised medical condition for which the child is receiving treatment. A medical certificate must be provided to substantiate the claim. The medical certificate will be sent to the Health Authority for advice in determining whether the child should be prioritised on medical grounds with regard to admission to the requested school.

Home Address

The LEA regards a pupil's home address as where she or he spends the majority of the school week (i.e. Monday to Friday, including nights) with her/his parent or legal guardian. The address of a childminder or family member who looks after the child before or after school cannot be used. If there is any query on the home address this will be checked against official documentation.

Looked After Children

If your child is 'looked after' by the local authority, they are either accommodated by the Social Services Department under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 or are the subject of a care order (a court order) under Section 31 of the Children Act.