

# Minutes

**For:** Extraordinary Admissions and Place Planning Forum (Covid-19 Response)

**Date:** 06 May 2020

**Time:** 15:00-16:00

**Location:** Conference call (due to Covid 19 restrictions)

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## Attendees:

### Chair

Councillor Julianne Marriott: Cabinet Member for Education (JM)

Councillor Jane Lofthouse: Deputy Cabinet Member for Education (JL)

### Local Authority Officers

Peter Gibb: Head of Access and Infrastructure (PG)

Simon McKenzie: Interim Head 0-25 SEND Service (SM)

Tracy Jones: Group Manager, Pupil Services (TJ)

### Clerk

Kiran Parkash Singh: Pupil Services

### Representative: Nursery schools

Jo Aylett: Head Teacher, Edith Kerrison Nursery School and Children's Centre

### Representatives: Maintained primary schools

Diane Barrick: Head Teacher, Carpenters Primary School

James Dawson: Head Teacher, Winsor Primary School

Kate McGee: Head Teacher, Manor Primary School

### Representatives: Maintained secondary schools

Ian Wilson: Head Teacher, Little Ilford Primary School

### Representatives: Academy primary schools

Paul Harris: CEO Tapscott Trust

Quintin Peppiatt: New Vision Trust

### Representatives: Academy secondary schools

Peter Whittle: Associate Principal, Langdon Academy (Brampton Manor Trust)

John Blaney: Principal, Royal Docks Academy (Burnt Mills Trust)

Paul Kean: Assistant Head Teacher, Stratford School Academy

### Representative: Free schools

David Perks: East London Science School

### Representative Single Sex Schools

Charlotte Robinson: Head Teacher, Rokeby School (boys only)

### Representative: Virtual School

Val Naylor: Executive Head Teacher

**Faith Representative: Catholic schools**

Gael Hicks: Head Teacher, St Helen's Roman Catholic Primary School (Our Lady of Grace Catholic Academy Trust)

**Faith Representative: Catholic schools**

Chris McCormack: Head Teacher, St. Bonaventure's

**Faith Representative: Church of England schools**

Matt Hipperson: Head Teacher, St. Luke's Church of England Primary School

**Apologies**

Sue Ferguson: Head Teacher, Ellen Wilkinson Primary School

Omar Deria: Head Teacher, The Cumberland School, Community School Trust

Anthony Wilson: Head Teacher, Lister Community School and CEO Newham Community Schools Trust

Geoffrey Fowler: Principal and CEO, London Design and Engineering UTC

**Key**

Secondary Head Teacher – SHT

Primary Head Teacher - PHT

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## Action Points

### **3. Key issues for normal admissions for September 2020 entry**

Working groups to be established to develop processes for the following issues for transition (membership list to follow separately);

- Transition Data
- 0-25 SEND Pupil Transition
- Transition Day & Induction

### **4. In Year Admissions**

Business as usual reminder message to schools via Director for Education update emails. Schools to put children on roll to ensure education needs are being met.

### **5. Independent Admission Appeals**

Primary schools to offer support to appellants appealing for a year 7 place for September. The local authority to send a list of pupils to each primary school in case they are approached for advice/support on new processes.

### **6. Key issues for normal admissions for September 2021**

Schools to provide high resolution photos for use in composite prospectuses

**In response to the Covid-19 virus pandemic, the above action points will remain under constant review as the Government's lockdown and social distancing advice permits.**

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## **1. Welcome and Introductions**

1. Chair welcomed the attendees to the virtual forum and explained the reason for holding an extraordinary forum. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic had necessitated a meeting to discuss measures the local authority and schools will need to put in place for when schools reopen, and the admission of children during the current time and from September 2020. The main objective of this forum was to formulate working groups to work on different aspects of admissions of children transitioning in September 2020. Apologies were forwarded for members who were unable to attend today's forum.

## **2. Overview of current situation for schools admissions and appeals.**

2. TJ provided an outline of what the expectations and arrangements were during the current time. The expectation of the DfE was that admissions outside the normal rounds (in year) must continue as normal. Schools were expected to arrange the admission of children who were offered a place even when closed to the majority of pupils. Out of 213 new to Newham children being offered a place since 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020, only 26 had put admitted to school. The concern was that that whilst only children of key worker parents and those considered vulnerable can attend school during the lockdown, other children on roll still needed to be provided with support. By not being admitted these children were missing out on being supported. All schools needed to ensure that they were admitting children offered a place during this time.

3. A PHT suggested that this could be down to the relevant school staff that are responsible for admissions may not be working due to self-isolating or schools not being open. Has the local authority checked with head teachers? TJ advised that it is schools' responsibility to ensure that they have staff in place to deal with this in the absence of the staff that normally deal with this.

4. It was agreed a reminder that in year admissions should be proceeding as normal will be sent as part of the Director of Education's daily updates to head teachers.

5. A PHT stated that there was no clarity if schools were required to admit when the child was already on roll at another Newham school. TJ advised that it was business as usual and schools would still be expected to admit. However, the matter of transfers between Newham primary schools was discussed at the last primary pupil placement panel meeting and a decision should be made at the next placement panel meeting, to put transfers on hold.

6. PG advised the forum that despite the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, Newham met that statutory national offer day for primary school admission in September 2020. Schools were thanked for supporting parents to submit applications prior to the national closing date and providing advice to make informed decisions. JM echoed this. It is acknowledged that schools face challenges in providing information and encouraging applicants to utilise the option to name up to six preferences to increase the opportunity to gaining a place at a preferred school

7. TJ notified the forum that the emergency Covid-19 Act included details on how admission authorities now need to administer school admission appeals. They will now have to be heard via video or phone conference and where this is not possible (either due to access to technology or through preference), appeals will be considered based on a written submission. The local authority will be writing to appellants to advise them of the new arrangements.

### **3. Key issues for normal admissions for September 2020 entry:**

8. TJ notified the panel that one of the biggest challenges facing school during the Covid-19 restrictions is the induction of children due to start school in September. One of the key parts of the process was making initial contact with families and the checking of documents for admission. The local authority has provided the contact details for parent/carers of children offered a place and schools could also accept copies of the documents. In addition to this the school files from primary/nursery schools should have certified copies of proofs of dates of births.

9. TJ added that it was important schools notified the local authority of any cases if there is a discrepancy between the address provided on the application form and the proof provided. The local authority will need to investigate these as potential fraudulent applications.

10. TJ asked the forum if there was a need for a working group to focus on how schools should be contacting, checking and verifying documents.

11. A PHT advised that some schools had already started the induction process and had already been in contact with parent/carers.

12. A SHT also added that there school had started the induction process for year 7 admission and was obtaining the necessary documents using online resources to do this.

13. A PHT added that it was unlikely that a working group was required for this as it appeared that schools had already put processes in place to contact families and request copies of proof of identification and any that haven't should follow the advice to obtain the

documents.

14. Another PHT stated that it appeared this was in hand. However, the more pressing concern is what pupil level data primary schools are expected to provide secondary schools as part of the transition process.

15. A SHT stated that data from primary schools will enable secondary schools to plan for when the child starts in September rather than having to test New Year 7 pupils at the start of the academic year.

16. A PHT stated that it would not be unreasonable to ask teachers to provide this information due to ongoing assessments in year 6. This will enable schools to determine what level year 6 pupils were working at prior to the lockdown.

17. Another PHT agreed however acknowledged that there can be a major difference to the level a child is at in March and where they could potentially be in June/July.

18. A PHT added that Government guidance has suggested that schools should not be asking for data so there may be some kickbacks. Another pressing concern was getting year 6 children from a vulnerable background or with SEND settled in to a new school without going through the normal transition process.

19. PG agreed that there was a need for a working group to look at the data of pupils moving school in September.

20. A SHT stated that there was an important need for there to be some form of transition process for children with SEND, particularly for those who are on the Autistic Spectrum Disorder who may find change more difficult.

21. SM agreed and added that there should also be a working group to develop protocols for SEND children starting school in September. The focus should not only be on the children starting in a resource provision, but also on children who will be attending mainstream education, with or without Education & Health Care Plans (EHCPs).

22. The discussion moved onto the normal transition process where secondary schools hold induction days and primary schools carry out home visits.

23. A PHT stated that processes will be dependent on the Government announcements on the potential easing of the lockdown. But possible consideration could be given to children transitioning before July before the start of the academic year in September.

24. Another PHT asked if it was possible for schools to stagger the reception intake which will allow staff to carry out more home visits when it will be considered safe to do so. TJ advised that previously there used to be a September and January intake but parents opposed the staggered process. Whilst there was no legal requirement for child to be in education before their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday, local authorities are required to provide education from September onwards. It could be possible but will need to be based on if the Government make changes to attendance regulations.

25. PG added that it would be unlikely that the government will enforce attendance regulations for at least a year but will need to await confirmation. But a phased admission could work if permitted. In addition if it was possible for transition to start early then it should be explored.

26. A PHT added that it would be difficult to plan ahead without knowing what the Government will advise.

27. A SHT stated that the key group is year 6 children starting secondary school in September. It will be difficult for them to leave their primary school in March and start secondary school in September.

28. Another SHT stated that schools needed to think about social distancing in all of this and it will require a lot of planning. A PHT added that a lot of children had gone abroad and there may also be some that are self-isolating. Schools will need to know what the numbers are so that they can plan.

29. A SHT added that their school also work closely with parent/carers who did not name their school as first preference to support them with transitioning as they will be the least likely to engage with the process. The current situation had made this difficult.

30. Another SHT stated that most secondary schools will normally open on the first day of the academic year for year 7 pupils only. If transition is not possible then schools could look at limiting the start of the academic year to year 7s only for 2-3 days.

31. A further SHT suggested that schools could look at holding virtual tours so that families could look around prior to starting.

32. JM stated that does appear to be a need to hold some form of transitioning.

33. It was agreed that a transition and induction working group will be established to manage this process.

#### **4. In Year Admissions**

Covered in agenda item 2.

#### **5. Independent Admission Appeals**

34. TJ advised the forum that advice had been received by the DfE about how admission appeals need to be heard (outlined in agenda item 1). A letter will be sent to appellants providing the details of the arrangements. This had created challenges as a number of the independent panel members are retired and may not be able to access the technology required. In addition it may prove equally challenging for appellants who may not have access to the technology required. The local authority will do its best for families and will provide support where possible.

35. Where appellants cannot access the technology or do not feel comfortable with a video conference appeal, they will be given more time to submit their appeal in writing. This however was also a challenge as some may not be able to elaborate on their grounds for appeal in writing and may feel more comfortable and provide more detail in person.

36. It was agreed that primary schools will be sent a list of their year 6 children who are appealing for a year 7 place for September so that they can provide reassurance, support and advice about the process.

## **6. Key issues for normal admissions for September 2021**

37. TJ advised the forum that the publication of the composite prospectuses (September 2020 edition) were on track to be signed off by early June. This demonstrated that it could be possible to bring the transition process forward in subsequent years (as discussed at previous forums).

38. Although a photoshoot is normally arranged with a school for photos to be used in the prospectuses, as this would not be possible this year, the intention was to use photos from previous versions unless schools have high resolution photos that can be used where they have the consent to do so. If any schools have such photos they should contact the local authority.

## **7. Any other business, items for next meeting**

None

Meeting Closed 16:00

Date for next 2019-20 meeting

10<sup>th</sup> June 2020 unless there is a need to meet sooner

End.

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