

# **North Somerset Admissions Forum Report**

## **1. Introduction**

Section 85A(1A) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (as inserted by section 41(3) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006) provides admission forums with an important power to produce an annual report on school admissions. The Education (Admission Forums) (England) Regulations 2007 prescribes what could be included in such reports. The report covers as far as possible the new intake admissions for 2008-09 school year and In-Year admissions for 2007-08 school year.

## **2. Purpose and scope of the forum report**

Local authorities are required, under section 13A of the Education Act 1996, as substituted by section 1 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, to exercise their functions, so far as possible, with a view to 'ensuring fair access to educational opportunity'. Paragraph 1.67 of the 2007 School Admissions Code extends the duty to achieve fair access to all schools:

'Admission authorities and governing bodies must ensure that their admission arrangements and other school policies are fair and do not disadvantage, either directly or indirectly, a child from a particular social or racial group, or a child with a disability or special educational needs'.

As far as possible the report has focussed on the arrangements for the 2008-09 school year but has used data for other years where appropriate.

## **3. Summary**

The Forum has examined the issues highlighted in the Advisory Guidance on Admission Forum Reports issued by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). Each issue has been addressed as far as possible and where further investigations are required this has been recommended.

## **4. Key Recommendations**

i) To further satisfy parental preferences in the village of the Long Ashton. This could include plans to expand Birdwell Primary School, subject to funding, to expand from a 210 place school to 315 place school as soon as possible. Progress Report to Forum by July 2009.

ii) The Local Authority and Churchill Community Foundation School and Sixth Form Centre complete their proposals, as part of the 2010-11 admissions consultation by 15 April 2009, to create revised Geographical Areas for the parishes of Bleadon and Hutton for admissions from the 2010-11 school year onwards.

iii) The Forum works with the Somerset Racial Equality Council to investigate possible reasons for people from ethnic minorities not obtaining their preferred schools, making more late applications and lodging more appeals compared to white British applicants, and to consider possible solutions. Progress report to the Forum by September 2009.

iv) All other recommendations are included within each section of the report.

## 5. Issues considered

The issues considered in this report were included in the Advisory Guidance on Admission Forum Reports issued by the DCSF. The headline issues are shown in bold with individual sub-issues shown after bullet points in italics.

### 5i - The numbers and percentage of 1st, 2nd and 3rd preferences met and factors affecting preference

- *Details of the on-time applications and allocations for new intake admissions for 2008-09 broken down by school type and category:*

#### A) Reception Intake – for all 2008-09 on-time (from within and outside North Somerset) 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> preferences allocated

	Allocated	Preferences	% Allocated	South West Average % Allocated
<b>58 Infant, First and Primary schools of all status types</b>				
1 <sup>st</sup>	1799	2032	88.58	92.14
2 <sup>nd</sup>	112	1088	10.29	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	21	618	3.40	
<i>Of which:</i>				
<b>28 schools are Community</b>				
1 <sup>st</sup>	1053	1151	91.49	
2 <sup>nd</sup>	74	640	11.56	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	32	333	9.61	

<b>13 schools are Voluntary Aided (VA)</b>				
1 <sup>st</sup>	355	435	81.61	
2 <sup>nd</sup>	9	188	4.79	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	2	123	1.63	
<b>17 schools are Voluntary Controlled (VC)</b>				
1 <sup>st</sup>	391	446	87.67	
2 <sup>nd</sup>	29	260	11.15	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	9	162	5.56	
<b>Sub-Groups:</b>				
<i>Of the 13 Voluntary Aided schools:</i>				
10 are Church of England (including those combined with other denominations)				
1 <sup>st</sup>	266	321	82.87	
2 <sup>nd</sup>	9	151	5.96	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	1	91	1.10	
<b>3 are Catholic</b>				
1 <sup>st</sup>	89	114	78.07	
2 <sup>nd</sup>	0	37	0.00	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	1	32	3.13	
<i>Of the Voluntary Controlled schools:</i>				
<b>16 are Church of England</b>				
1 <sup>st</sup>	318	373	85.25	
2 <sup>nd</sup>	28	255	10.98	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	9	157	5.73	
<b>1 is Durban Trust</b>				
1 <sup>st</sup>	73	73	100.00	
2 <sup>nd</sup>	1	5	20.00	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	0	5	0.00	

## Conclusion

Comparisons of 1<sup>st</sup> preferences:

- The number of pupils offered a Voluntary Aided school was 9.88% fewer than those offered a Community school.
- The number of pupils offered a Church of England Voluntary Aided school was 8.62% fewer than those offered a Community school.
- The number of pupils offered a Catholic Voluntary Aided school was 13.42% fewer than those offered a Community school.
- The number offered a Voluntary Controlled school was 3.82% fewer than those offered a Community school.
- The number offered any school was 3.56% less than the average of local authorities in the south west area.

## B) Junior Transfer

100% of all on-time applicants were offered their 1<sup>st</sup> preference.  
The average in the South West area was 98.46%.

### **Conclusion**

Comparison of 1<sup>st</sup> preferences:

The number offered there 1<sup>st</sup> preference was 1.54% higher than the average of local authorities in the south west area.

## C) Secondary Transfer – for 2008-09 on-time 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> preferences allocated

All Applicants						
	Allocated	Preferences	% Allocated	NS Res %	SW Ave %	Nat Ave %
<b>10 Schools of all types</b>						
1 <sup>st</sup>	2080	2196	94.72	93.1	88.0	82.0
2 <sup>nd</sup>	80	907	8.82	2.2	6.3	8.7
3 <sup>rd</sup>	21	350	6.00	0.4	1.4	3.3
<i>Of which:</i>						
<b>7 are Community</b>						
1 <sup>st</sup>	1238	1287	96.19			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	58	586	9.90			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	17	223	7.62			
<b>3 are Foundation or Trust</b>						
1 <sup>st</sup>	842	909	92.63			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	22	321	6.85			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	4	127	3.15			

### Key

All applications = data for all applications from residents within and outside North Somerset

NS Res = % Allocated for North Somerset Residents Only

SW Ave = % Allocated for South West Area Average

Nat Ave = % Allocated for National Average

### **Conclusion**

Comparison of 1<sup>st</sup> preferences:

- The number offered a Foundation or Trust school was 3.56% fewer than those offered a Community school.

- Based on details of applicants living within their **own** authority, the number offered a school of any type was 5.1% higher than the average of local authorities in the south west area and 11.10% higher than the national average.

- *Are there any schools that are substantially over-subscribed i.e. any infant, first, junior and primary schools that received 10 or higher 1<sup>st</sup> preference on-time applications than their Admission Number and are there any secondary schools that received 20 or higher 1<sup>st</sup> preference on-time applications than their Admission Number for 2008-09 admission?*

<b>Substantially over-subscribed (as defined above) schools</b>	
<b>A) Reception Intake</b>	
All schools	9 out of 58 schools = 15.52%
Sub-Groups	
Community Schools	3 out of 28 schools = 10.71%
Voluntary Aided Schools	4 out of 13 schools = 30.77%
Voluntary Controlled Schools	2 out of 17 schools = 11.76%
Voluntary Aided Schools:	
- Church of England*	3 out of 10 schools = 30.00%
- Catholic	1 out of 3 schools = 33.33%
Voluntary Controlled schools:	
- Church of England	2 out of 16 schools = 12.50%
- Durban Trust	0 out of 1 schools = 00.00%
*including those combined with other denominations	
<b>B) Junior Transfer</b>	
No junior schools were over-subscribed	
<b>C) Secondary Transfer</b>	
All schools	2 out of 10 schools = 20.00%
Sub-Groups	
Community Schools	1 out of 7 schools = 14.29%
Foundation/Trust Schools	1 out of 3 schools = 33.33%

- *Why are schools under-subscribed? The Forum could consider examination results in comparison with other schools or the effect of catchments etc. Do they have – in the local context - poor behavioural standards? Value added data and GCSE*

*scores could be a useful indicator of whether there are perceived quality issues.*

The total number of Reception intake places available was 2293 and 2032 on-time applications were received.

The total number of Secondary Transfer places available was 2410 and 2196 on- time applications were received.

For secondary schools with their own First Geographical Area the number of children within the Area is less than the Admission Number for the school.

### Exam Results

Of the five schools with results higher than both the national and the LA average only two were over-subscribed. Two schools with results below the top five schools and below the LA and national averages were over-subscribed. These two schools are in Weston-super-Mare which is served by four schools and the other two schools with lower exam results were under-subscribed.

### Catchment Areas

The LA is a mainly rural area with in some parts one school serving a large geographical area. The LA does not have specific catchment areas for any of its primary schools. All secondary schools have either a designated individual and/or shared geographical area. The LA currently provides transport for 2917 pupils, mainly to pupils attending their nearest or area school who live more than 2 miles from their nearest appropriate primary school or 3 miles from their nearest appropriate secondary school, by safe walking route. The LA also provides transport to 24 pupils under the Low Income Transport scheme for those attending one of their 3 nearest secondary schools within 2 and 6 miles (2 and 25 miles for a Church school) whose parents are in receipt of a qualifying benefit.

### Poor Behaviour Standards – Secondary

The Forum used a table of attendance data (where schools with the highest levels of attendance are at the top of the table) as a loose indicator of behaviour standards. Of the four over-subscribed schools, two were in the top half of the table and two were in the bottom half. Of the six under-subscribed schools three were in the top half of the table and three were in the bottom half.

## Conclusion

The first factor that leads to some schools being under-subscribed is the number of places available being higher than the number of pupils needing them – so some schools will be under-subscribed regardless of exam results, catchment areas or behaviour standards or any other issue. The LA aspires to have between 5 and 7% surplus places so needs some schools to be under-subscribed.

Examination results appear to possibly have been a factor in under-subscription in the urban areas of Nailsea and Weston-super-Mare where many pupils can travel to at least one school other than their nearest one. In urban area socio-economic factors may also affect the exam and behaviour performance of schools and parents perceptions of the school. The opening of a new school in Bristol has affected the number of applications for one school that traditionally has had the majority of its pupils from Bristol. In rural areas where travel to alternative schools is not easy, exam results appear to have not always been a factor.

Whilst perceived poor behaviour standards (based on attendance data) may appear to have affected whether a school was over or under-subscribed for some schools, equally it did not appear to affect other schools, so it is not possible to conclude from such limited data if behaviour standards influenced schools being under-subscribed. In rural areas transport mainly only being provided to pupils attending their area school may mean that the area school would be selected by parents regardless of any other factor, so it is not possible to know if such parents have been influenced by other factors when making their preferences. A detailed survey of parent's reasons for their preferences would be needed in order to come to more definite conclusions about the factors affecting under-subscription.

- *Are there geographical areas where residents are consistently failing to obtain a preferred school?*

With regard to **In-Year** applications, apart from places schools offer themselves to parents or where parents are verbally informed that a school is full but do not make a formal application to North Somerset Council, the Forum examined areas where more parents who have made formal applications, have been refused than those who have been offered places between 1 September 2007 and 19 June 2008.

### Primary Schools

There were five areas in North Somerset where more **In-Year** applications had been refused than approved. Whilst in four areas there were more refusals than approvals for some of the schools,

there were always alternative schools with places available within the area concerned. Two of the schools refusing more applications were Catholic schools whose serve a bigger area than just the locality they are situated within. In the 5<sup>th</sup> area, Long Ashton, the problem of over-subscription is only relevant across Key Stage One.

With regard to **new intake** applications, 23 schools were over-subscribed with first preferences for 2008 entry compared to 16 in 2007 and the number of applications above a school's Admission Number was generally small. The LA increased the capacities of the two schools in Long Ashton (Birdwell and Northleaze) from a combined total capacity of 313, to 420 by the 2006-07 school year. A small number of residents were unable to obtain a school place for 2006 and 2007, but the issue was particularly evident for 2008-09 admission when 19 residents were not offered either of the village schools in the first round of allocations.

Whilst both schools are not full, there is a shortfall of places for the Reception and Year One age groups. The over-subscription criteria that enabled children from outside the area with an older sibling at one of the Long Ashton schools to have priority for places over children from within Long Ashton has been amended to give greater priority to local pupils. The 'First Preference First' method of allocating places that gave priority to first preference applications can no longer be used. This has resulted in a greater chance for local pupils to obtain a local school. The LA had applied for 'Basic Need' funding but this was refused due to the number of surplus places at the two schools.

The LA has now changed its over-subscription criteria to recognize a sibling-link at a rural school only where it is the child's nearest school, and in accordance with new legislation, now operates the 'Equal Preference' method of allocating places that increases an applicant's chances of being allocated a local school.

## **Conclusion**

Parental preference for some schools over other schools will lead to some being refused. However with the possible exception of Key Stage One in Long Ashton, this does not indicate a problem of parents consistently being denied schools in any particular geographical area, because there are generally spaces available at other schools within the areas concerned.

The applications refused in Key Stage One for the two schools in the Long Ashton area are an indication of geographical problem across

the age group. Whilst both schools have increased in size, the demand for places caused by the increase in new housing is more than initially was anticipated by the LA. The changes made by the LA to their over-subscription criteria will ultimately reduce the occasions when Long Ashton residents are refused places at their village schools but additional accommodation may also be required in the longer term.

## Recommendations

The LA continues with plans to obtain funding to enable Birdwell School to expand from 210 places to 315 places from September 2010 or 2011. Progress Report to Forum by July 2009.

## Secondary Schools

Only for one secondary school, Broadoak Mathematics and Computing College in Weston-super-Mare, have more In-Year applications been refused than approved (11 offers, 16 refusals). Places are available in all year groups at Wyvern School which is one mile from Broadoak Mathematics and Computing College.

For families who live outside Weston-super-Mare within the parishes of Bleadon and Hutton, Broadoak Mathematics and Computing College is the nearest school. Some of the parishes' residents have been refused places at the school and are entitled to be transported to alternative schools. The Home to School Transport Manager has reported an increase in the number of requests for transport from within these areas to Churchill Community Foundation School and Sixth Form Centre and a number of parents from Elborough Village (within Hutton parish) buying the spare vacant seats on the transport to Churchill Community Foundation School and Sixth Form Centre. The LA is proposing to create a First Geographical Area of Bleadon and most of Hutton parish for Broadoak Mathematics and Computing College. Churchill Community Foundation School and Sixth Form Centre is proposing to extend its First Geographical Area to include the Elborough Farm and Elborough Village areas of Hutton parish.

## **Conclusion**

As there are places available in all year groups at nearby Wyvern School the figures do not indicate a geographical problem in the locality Broadoak Mathematics and Computing College is actually in. However some residents in Bleadon and Hutton parishes are being refused places at what is their nearest school, and there are transport implications for alternative schools.

## Recommendations

That the LA and Churchill Community Foundation School and Sixth Form Centre complete their proposals, as part of the 2010-11 admissions consultation by 15 April 2009, to create new First Geographical Areas for the parishes of Bleadon and Hutton for admissions in the 2010-11 school year onwards.

- *Are some schools constantly under-subscribed because of a high concentration of schools in an area? Would a review of catchment/priority areas resolve this?*

### Primary Schools

In the urban areas within the Authority there are some primary schools that are constantly under-subscribed whilst other near by schools are not. The popularity of over-subscribed schools is often a factor affecting the number of applicants for neighbouring under-subscribed schools. In line with Audit recommendations the LA aspires to maintain between 5 – 7% surplus places in its schools, so there should always be some schools that are under-subscribed. Apart from a small number of Voluntary Aided Schools, North Somerset Primary Schools do not have their own designated catchment/priority area.

### Secondary Schools

As a mainly rural area, four of the secondary schools do not have another secondary school within their immediate area i.e. not within walking distance, so the number of pupils who travel to schools in other areas is small.

Backwell and Nailsea Secondary Schools have their own designated areas of responsibility, are approximately 1.5 miles apart and the latter is generally under-subscribed. The number of applicants for Backwell Secondary School is normally greater than the number of places available. A number of children from Nailsea do apply for and obtain places at Backwell School.

The number of pupils within the First Geographical Area for the 6 schools outside of the Weston Shared Geographical Area, is invariably less than the Admission Number for the schools.

The Weston Shared Geographical Area is made up of four secondary schools. One of which, Wyvern is under-subscribed in all year groups.

It is approximately one mile from a regularly over-subscribed secondary school, Broadoak Mathematics and Computing College. The next nearest school, Worle Community, is also regularly over-subscribed.

Due to the future house building plans in Weston-super-Mare a 5<sup>th</sup> secondary school is proposed for the town. The Authority is proposing to reconsider the priority areas for the schools when planning for the creation of the new 5<sup>th</sup> school.

## **Conclusion**

Some schools being less popular than others and so being under-subscribed is a natural consequence of having several schools to meet the demand of urban populations and the freedom of parental preference. However the spaces available at the schools that are under-subscribed are often needed to accommodate those who do obtain places at the over-subscribed schools and for late applicants and subsequent movers into the area. The LA endeavours to take appropriate action to try to ensure surplus places are within 5-7% recommended limits. Being under-subscribed is not necessarily a permanent state - even where schools are regularly under-subscribed it does not mean they will always be. There are schools that were once regularly under-subscribed that are now regularly over-subscribed and vice-versa.

Clevedon School's First Geographical Area could be reviewed to include the parish of Kingston Seymour. Kingston Seymour is nearer to Clevedon than Backwell School (whose area it is currently within) The LA provides transport to take the pupils from Kingston Seymour to Backwell.

Kingston Seymour residents would still require transport if they attended Clevedon School and a change would result in increased transport costs during the seven year transitional period whilst existing pupils were still transported to Backwell and new pupils were transported to Clevedon. Such a change may not be wanted by residents of Kingston Seymour.

## **Recommendations**

If there were no under-subscribed schools and all schools were over-subscribed there would obviously not be enough places to meet demand. A review of priority areas with the intention of eliminating or reducing the number of under-subscribed schools is not necessarily desirable. A review of the areas may just lead to different schools

being over-subscribed. In the main urban area of the LA, Weston-super-Mare, the priority areas will be reconsidered as part of the plans for the creation of a 5<sup>th</sup> secondary school so it is recommended that, apart from the already in place review of the areas serving Broadoak Mathematics and Computing College and Churchill Community Foundation and Sixth Form Centre schools, the priority areas for Weston schools are not reviewed.

In the rural areas of the LA there is not a high concentration of schools in an area, so it is not a factor of under-subscription.

### Recommendation

The LA contact Kingston Seymour Parish Council to ascertain an indication of the likely views of its residents if it were proposed to place the parish in the First Geographical Area of Clevedon School. LA to write to the Parish Council by April 2009.

- *Is there any information which shows that parents are finding the application process complex? Can the admission form be made simpler?*

The School Admissions Team carried out a survey of 25% of all new intake applicants for 2007-08 admission.

The responses indicated a high level of customer satisfaction with application process. In particular 94.6% indicated that they were satisfied with the application process and 93.8% indicated that they were satisfied with the clarity and ‘understandability’ of the forms, guide books and letters they received.

**Conclusion** – the responses appear to show parents are very generally satisfied with the application process, finding forms easy to complete and understanding the application process. More information on the survey is included in Section 5ix.

### *Are parents applying online?*

The LA has actively promoted the online application service. The percentage of applications made online out of the total number of on-time applications made, were as follows:

	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
Reception Intake	55%	64%
Junior Transfer	53%	60%
Secondary Transfer	64%	72%

## Conclusion

These figures show that parents are using the online service to apply. More information on the online service is included in Section 5ix.

## Recommendation

The LA continues to actively promote the Online Admissions Service.

- *Is the choice advice service being used and, if data is available, is it having a positive effect on target parents obtaining a chosen school?*

Feedback was very positive from Transition Service itself but mixed response from schools. However schools were positive about rationale for Transition Advisor. The advice service contributed to a reduction in the number of late secondary transfer applications, down from 291 for 2007 to 75 for 2008. 7 out of 15 users of the service got their first preference school for September 08. For more information on the Transition Service see Section 5ix.

**5ii. The number of appeals made within the area including the number of successful and unsuccessful appeals, for local authorities and own admission authority schools, broken down school by school. It should also analyse the outcomes of appeals, broken down school by school.**

- *How do the number of appeals and successful appeals compare against previous years and the national average?*
- *Is it higher or lower than might be expected taking into account the local context?*

In considering this question, North Somerset Admissions Forum has looked at figures for Reception intakes and secondary transfers for the school years 2007-08 and 2008-09. The figures for casual admissions have been looked at in relation to the school years 2006-07 and 2007-08. In comparing these figures against national data, the Forum has looked at DCSF data for the two most recent years available: 2005-06 and 2006-07.

<b>Reception intake appeals</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
Heard	38	66
Upheld	0	5
Dismissed	38	61
Places available in Year Group	2286	2318

First preferences met	1802 (92.4%)	1799 (88.5%)
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<b>Secondary transfer appeals</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
Heard	33	39
Upheld	3	12
Dismissed	30	27
Places available in Year Group	2410	2410
First preferences met	2126 (97.08%)	2080 (94.7%)

<b>Casual (In-Year) admission appeals - Primary</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>
Heard	20	23
Upheld	6	12
Dismissed	14	11

<b>Casual (In Year) admissions – Secondary</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>
Heard	22	3
Upheld	8	2
Dismissed	14	1

## **Conclusion**

### Reception intake appeals

The fact that fewer first preferences were met in 08-09, despite an increase in the overall number of Reception places available, may be attributed to the change in the authority's admission arrangements to an equal preference system from a first preference first system, as required by the 2007 School Admissions Code. This fall in the number of first preferences met is also the most likely explanation for the 73.68% rise in the number of appeals held. Of the 5 Reception appeals upheld, none were related to infant class size legislation. For these non-infant class size appeals, the Appeal Panels are not restricted on the grounds on which they may uphold an appeal. This is the most likely cause of the increase in the number of appeals upheld.

In Long Ashton which is served by Birdwell and Northleaze Schools, as mentioned earlier there was a shortage of places available. There were a higher number of appeals compared to other schools for places in 2008:

	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
Birdwell	0	4
Northleaze	2	7

The number of appeals for places at Northleaze School for 2008 was the highest number for any one school in the authority. The LA is currently conducting a review of the options for expanding provision in this area.

The increase in the number upheld could be expected in the local context.

### Secondary Transfer appeals

Comparison with national data shows that the increase in appeals heard in North Somerset (18.18%) is marginally greater than the national increase of 16.4% although the years in question are different. Changes to admission arrangements as described above are the most likely causes of this possible discrepancy. The increase locally in appeals upheld (21.68%) is higher than the national increase (4.2%) over a two year period. Although appeals heard nationally in 05-06 and 06-07 fell by 6.2% from 41650 to 39230, appeals heard in North Somerset rose by 18.18% from 33 to 39 between 07-08 and 08-09. Such comparisons are probably meaningless given the differences between the national and the local total figures but the similarity between the percentage increase in the number of appeals heard and those upheld (21.68%) may suggest that panel decision making is consistent. 30.77% is not an unreasonable amount to be upheld.

### Casual admissions (Primary)

There was a 15.00% increase in the number of appeals heard and a 22.17% increase in the amount upheld. Whilst this is a tangible increase it represents only 12 actual appeals which is not a significant number. It is therefore difficult to draw any meaningful Background.

### Casual admissions (Secondary)

The number of appeals heard fell from 22 in 2006-07 to just 3 in 2007-08 – a decrease of 86.36%. Just 3 heard appeals are too small to make any meaningful analysis of the numbers upheld between the two years.

- *If appeals are being upheld where admissions authorities wouldn't expect them to be, does this indicate a need for better training of presenting officers?*

It is impossible to answer this question without information about the expectations of admissions authorities, who do not keep records of 'appeals upheld they expected to be dismissed', and/or additional evidence from panels/schools/parents which expressed concern about the quality of cases made by presenting officers and it ignores completely the quality and/or weight of cases put by parents. No complaints have been received.

- *Does it indicate a need for training for panel members to comply with their statutory duties?*

A LA Solicitor has provided a statement detailing how panel members are trained. There is no evidence available to suggest panel members need training (other than that is already provided).

- *Is the percentage of those appealing higher/lower from those entitled to FSM or from different ethnic groups in relation to the percentage of that ethnic group in the area? What Background can be drawn from this?*

In North Somerset, 9.9% of all primary aged children are eligible for free school meals but 15.2% of all in-year admission appeals for primary places in the school year 2007-08 were on behalf of children so eligible. All appeals for new Reception intake are usually made before a child has started school so it is not usually known if the family are entitled to Free School Meals at that stage.

In the secondary phase, 8.0% of all students are eligible for free school meals and 8.4% of all in-year admissions appeals in the same school year were made on behalf of students so eligible.

With regard to ethnicity, 5.5% of all school-aged children in North Somerset are from ethnic groups other than 'White British' (excepting those for whom no information about their ethnicity is available). From information gathered about admission appeals, these combined minorities are represented as follows:

Reception intake appeals 2008:	9.7%
Secondary transfer appeals 2008:	7.0%
Casual admission appeals 2006-07:	3.1%
Casual admission appeals 2007-08:	9.1%

## **Conclusion**

These figures suggest that families with eligible children in the primary phase are not being excluded or excluding themselves from the appeals' process; this is encouraging. It may also indicate that more people on FSM are being refused their preferred schools than those not receiving them.

These secondary figures appear to suggest that the level of participation in the appeals' process by families receiving FSM and the number of them not obtaining their preferred school is at least appropriate.

These figures may suggest that ethnic minorities generally participate in representative numbers at admission appeals. They would also suggest that more people from ethnic minorities are failing to obtain their preferred schools compared to white British people. This is also indicated in Section 3.

It is noticeable that some of the LA's printed information on admissions and appeals gives no information to families whose first language is not English about where they may go for help with the admissions or appeals processes should they need it.

## **Recommendations**

The Forum investigates why the number of appeals from families in receipt of FSM is proportionally higher than from other families. Progress report to Forum by September 2009.

The Forum works with the Somerset Racial Equality Council to investigate possible reasons why a larger proportion of people from ethnic minorities lodge appeals. Progress report to Forum by September 2009

The LA ensures that in accordance with Council policy by March 2009, for 2009-10 intake admissions, admission and appeal documents state that help is available for people whose first language is not English.

- *The forum should consider the independence of panel members and clerking arrangements and consider what can be done to*

ensure independence.

In North Somerset, all schools, including those that are their own admissions' authorities, use the local authority's Legal Services Department to administer the admissions appeals process. This Department is independent of the schools and the authority's Children's Services Department.

The Forum is not aware of any complaints from appellants about the independence of panel members or clerks. The Forum has considered the training provided to panel members and is satisfied of their independence.

### 5iii. Information on the ethnic and social mix of pupils attending schools and factors that might affect this.

- *How do FSM and other deprivation indicators compare between types of school in the area? How do ethnicity indicators compare between schools? Is this due to selection or other aspects of admission arrangements?*

#### Free School Meals - January 2008

##### Primary Schools

	Data		
Status	Sum of Full Time Pupils Total	Sum of FSM Eligibility	FSM Eligibility
Community	8447	1079	12.8%
VACE	1572	103	6.6%
VARC	634	24	3.8%
VC	3817	243	6.4%
VC Durban	200	10	5.0%
All schools	14670	1459	9.9%

##### Secondary Schools

	Data		
Status	Sum of Full Time Total	Sum of FSM Eligibility	FSM Eligibility
Community	8074	744	9.2%
Found/Trust	4873	347	7.1%
All schools	12947	1091	8.4%

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#### School IDACI based on School Ward and Average of Pupils' SOA Scores

*IDACI 2004 (Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index)  
January 2008 Pupils*

**Primary Schools**

Status	Average IDACI based on SOA of pupil)	Ward IDACI (Average of SOAs)	Pupil IDACI difference to Ward IDACI
Community	0.15	0.15	<b>0.01</b>
Voluntary Controlled	0.09	0.09	<b>0.00</b>
Voluntary Aided – Church of England	0.12	0.13	<b>-0.01</b>
Voluntary Aided - Catholic	0.11	0.14	<b>-0.03</b>
Voluntary Controlled - Durban Trust	0.10	0.09	<b>0.01</b>
All schools	0.13	0.13	<b>0.00</b>

**Secondary Schools**

Status	Average IDACI based on SOA of pupil)	Ward IDACI (Average of SOAs)	Pupil IDACI difference to Ward IDACI
Found/Trust	0.10	0.13	<b>-0.02</b>
Community	0.13	0.11	<b>0.02</b>
All Schools	0.12	0.12	<b>0.01</b>

SOA = Super Output Area

NB figures in the end column may not tally with other columns due to rounding up of figures.

**Conclusion**

Free School Meal eligibility varies as much as 9.0% between categories of primary schools and 2.1% between the categories of secondary school.

The IDACI table shows there is minimal difference between the categories of schools.

The proportion of non-white British pupils ranges from 0.00% to 31.2% in individual primary schools with an average of 5.9% and from 3.0% to 9.9% in individual secondary schools with an average of 5.1%.

North Somerset schools do not have 'selection' criteria and there is no evidence to suggest that the figures are due to aspects of admission arrangements.

- *Does the social/ethnic mix of pupils in a school reflect the area in which it is located? (data on 'social mix' can be determined by IDACI data or FSM). If not what factors are affecting this?*

## Conclusion

The above IDACI table shows that there is negligible difference between the social mix of pupils in schools and the wards they are in so the schools do reflect the area they are in.

- *Are ethnic minorities failing to apply for local schools?*

The following table shows the number of late applications received for Reception Intake for 2008 admission:

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Number of late Reception applications</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>% in North Somerset schools</b>
White British	100	85.47%	94.1%
Other	17	14.53%	5.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Conclusion

The table shows that whilst children from ethnic minorities make up 5.9% of the total number of children in our primary schools, 14.53% apply late, a difference of 8.63% - so this would indicate that people from ethnic minorities may be failing to apply for school places. One possible reason for their applications being received late may be that some members of Ethnic Minorities may have only arrived in the United Kingdom after the closing date for bulk new intake applications.

## Recommendations

The Forum works with the Somerset Racial Equality Council to investigate possible reasons for late applications ethnic minorities and possible solutions. Progress report to Forum by September 2009.

- *Are ethnic minorities failing to obtain places?*

### Reception Intake 2008 – as at 1<sup>st</sup> round of allocations January 2008

Number of applicants whose ethnic origin is known – 1291  
Offered 1<sup>st</sup> Preference:

- Total – 1159 (89.78%)
- WBRI – 1094 (90.26%)
- Other – 65 (82.28%)

### Secondary Transfer Intake 2008 – after initial round of allocations and including late applications up to May 2008

Number of applicants whose ethnic origin is known – 2071  
Offered 1<sup>st</sup> Preference:

- Total – 1982 (95.70%)
- WBRI – 1901 (95.96%)
- Other – 81 (90.00%)

### Junior Transfer Intake 2008

All on-time applicants were offered their 1<sup>st</sup> preference – 100% 1<sup>st</sup> preference offers for all ethnic groups.

### Late Reception Intake Applications

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Number of late Reception applications</b>	<b>Allocated 1st Preference</b>	<b>%</b>
White British	100	78	78%
Other	17	12	71%
<b>Total</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>77%</b>

WBRI = White British

Other = All other ethnic Groups

The Office of the School's Adjudicator has examined all of the LA admissions policies as well the policies of some own admission authorities schools, and has not found them to be in breach of race relation legislation. Somerset Racial Equality Council has also examined the LA policies and has confirmed that they are not racially discriminatory.

## **Conclusion**

For on-time Reception Intake admissions, 7.98% fewer of people from ethnic minorities were allocated their first preference school compared to white British people.

For secondary transfer admissions, 5.96% fewer of people from ethnic minorities were allocated their first preference school compared to white British people.

For late Reception Intake admissions, 7.00% fewer of people from ethnic minorities were allocated their first preference school compared to white British people.

Whilst it has been confirmed that the admissions policies are not racially discriminatory, the figures indicate that some people from ethnic minorities are failing to obtain places at their preferred school compared to white British people.

## **Recommendations**

The Forum works with the Somerset Racial Equality Council to investigate possible reasons for the differences and possible solutions. Progress report to Forum by September 2009

- *What should be done to ensure better access for under represented groups?*

The Forum works with the Somerset Racial Equality Council to see if there are ways of increasing access for under represented groups. Progress report to Forum by September 2009

- *Are the admission arrangements potentially discriminatory?*

The LA new intake admission arrangements for 2008-09 were examined by the Somerset Racial Equality Council who determined

that the arrangements were not racially discriminatory. The 2009-10 arrangements, that are very similar to the 2008-09 arrangements, were examined by the Office of the School's Adjudicator who did not report that the policies were in any way discriminatory.

## **Conclusion**

Admission arrangements are not discriminatory.

### **5iv. How well admission arrangements serve the interests of looked after children.**

*How well admission arrangements serve the interests of looked after children*

- *Do all admission arrangements give top priority to looked after children (if not, the forum should and the local authority **must** convince the admission authority to change the arrangements or otherwise object)?*

Yes the admission arrangements of all schools give top priority to Looked After Children.

- *Are looked after children gaining access to the most appropriate schools?*

18 applicants (including all on-time ones) for Looked After Children for new intake admission were allocated places at their first preference school.

Being allocated the first preference school does not necessarily mean that the most appropriate school (educationally) has been allocated. The Head of the North Somerset Virtual Primary School, that has responsibility for Looked After Children, has indicated that there have been cases where the school that has been chosen, has been made without reference to the Virtual School service. This has not always resulted in the most appropriate placement.

## **Conclusion**

All on-time applications for Looked After Children are virtually guaranteed to be offered their first preference school.

## **Recommendations**

That wherever possible, Social Workers consult with the Virtual

School Service before applications for Looked After Children are made. The School Admissions Team to issue request on behalf of Forum by March 2009.

- *Is the local authority using its statutory powers of direction to ensure that looked after children arriving in year are admitted to the most appropriate school for them?*

All cases are considered by the LA on their individual merits and what is the most appropriate school is open to debate. The LA has exceeded Admission Number in one case, offered a named alternative preference in two cases (including one refused due to infant class size restrictions). In only one case did a school refuse to admit a child but this was part of being consulted as part of the consultation process for naming a school in the child's Statement of Special Educational Needs.

## **Conclusion**

The LA is prepared to use its power of direction where it thinks appropriate and after taking into consideration other relevant legislation.

### **5v. How well admission arrangements serve the interests of disabled children and children with SEN.**

- *Do local admission arrangements give priority to children on social or medical grounds (i.e. which take account of disability)?*

The admission arrangements for all Community, Voluntary Controlled, Foundation and Trust schools and also for 12 out of 13 Voluntary Aided schools, do not give priority to children on social or medical grounds. The only school that does include a criterion concerning social or medical grounds is Burrington Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School.

The Authority has an In-Year Fair Access Protocol to cover complex placements and also has established policies in place relating to Negotiated Transfers, Permanent Exclusions, Special Educational Needs and provision for pupils with Anxiety, Health and Medical Needs covered by the Educational Psychology service. Children with social or medical issues, including disability, may come under one or more of these policies.

- *Would fair access be increased if admission authorities did adopt such arrangements?*

Some children with a disability may have a Statement of SEN that names the child's school. The named school is legally required to admit the child, regardless of the over-subscription criteria. These children with a disability are covered by the SEN processes. For those not covered by Statements of SEN but with a disability some feel it may be appropriate to give them priority. However such requests are often difficult to administer as most schools can cater for pupils additional needs. The vast majority of pupils obtain a place at their parents preferred school. If parents are refused their preferred schools and are concerned that due to either their or their child's medical needs they will not be able to get to the offered school, they have the right to appeal to an independent appeal panel for a place at their preferred school. They may provide medical evidence in support of their appeal (although appeal rights are limited for Infant Class size cases).

Also for whatever school a child attends, if parents feel that medical issues would prevent the child from attending, parents may appeal to the Home to School Transport appeal panel for transport assistance to enable the child to attend and parents may again provide medical evidence.

The Council did previously have a policy that gave priority to children where it was deemed essential for the child to attend their parents preferred school due to a child's medical condition. However only in a negligible number of cases was it ever proved to be essential for a child to attend a particular school. The existence of the medical criterion seemed to encourage applicants to claim that whatever medical condition their child had, made it essential for them to go to their preferred school. The parents would then obtain letters from their Doctors which, whilst confirming the existence of a medical condition, did often not necessarily explain why attendance at a certain school was essential. The letters had to be sent to Paediatricians for assessment. The outcome in the vast majority of cases was the child could attend another school. The criterion raised parent's expectations of obtaining a place and created large amounts of additional work for parents, Doctors, Officers, Paediatricians and Panel members. There were also different views from both Doctors and Paediatricians on similar conditions leading to inconsistent decision making.

## **Conclusion**

SEN procedures may cover cases where there is most level of need and most parents obtain a place at their first preference school.

Previously those that did not obtain their preferred school were rarely able to prove it was essential for their child to attend a particular school. For the very rare cases where priority may help someone with a social or medical need, the additional work created would not justify returning to policies that give such priority. It would also falsely raise parental expectations and could lead to some children inappropriately obtaining places at the expense of other children.

## **Recommendations**

The LA and own admission authority schools do not change their admission policies to give priority to children on social or medical grounds.

- *Are there factors which dissuade some disabled children and children with special needs who do not have statements from applying for locally popular schools? What could be done about this?*

‘Supportive Parents’, a parent led organisation providing information and support to parents of children with any kind of special educational needs stated that do not have any tangible evidence to support any parents reporting access to barriers on entry to local schools.

## **Conclusion**

There is no other evidence available to suggest parents of these children do not apply for particular schools.

- *Do schools all have effective accessibility plans (that is a plan to increase accessibility to the premises and the curriculum)? Does the local authority and all schools have disability equality plans and are they effectively implemented and reviewed*

All schools are required to have an Access Plan or Policy (AP) and a Disability Equality Scheme (DES) in place to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, 2005. The Local Authority has a responsibility to monitor that these are in place.

In undertaking a monitoring exercise this year all mainstream primary and secondary schools were asked whether they had:

- An Access Policy in place with review dates
- A Disability Equality Scheme in place with review dates
- A named responsible person

The request for information was made following a comprehensive document produced last year giving all schools guidance on meeting equalities legislation. The request was also sent out with an offer of 2 training sessions for schools on AP/DES. Schools that had contacted either SEN or the EPS directly were offered individually tailored support if they wished to work with a partner school on this. No school has requested this support.

The response rate was 48% for primary schools and 30% for secondary schools. Of those that did respond of the 76 mainstream schools 27 (35.53%) indicated that they had an Accessibility Plan and 32 (42.11%) indicated that they had a DES. Special schools had already submitted this information to the Local Authority and comply with the duties.

One primary school's DES was considered by a member of the Forum and the DES for two primary schools and for one secondary school was considered by the Council's Access Officer for Disabled People.

## **Conclusion**

One primary school policy refers to reviews but is not specific as to their frequency. The two primary schools policies were very similar to each other giving the impression they had followed the same template without making the plans unique to the requirements of their particular school. The impression is that a 'tick box' exercise has been followed rather than a scheme being written that has been tailored to what the school needs to do and its own aims. The secondary school scheme that was submitted for consideration was actually an Equalities policy rather than a DES and would appear to need a series of actions that will change the schools approach to the issues the policy might raise.

The low number of schools who confirmed that they have DES and Accessibility plans in place and the issues raised above concerning the content of some of the schemes would indicate that despite the LA issuing guidance and offering training, schools are not meeting their statutory responsibilities regarding DES and accessibility schemes. It is noted that the LA has proposals to address the issue of schools not having policies.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommend that the LA carries out its proposal to address the issue of schools not having policies in place by seeking copies of

school's policies as part of the applications process for Audit Funding in April 2009. The Forum should also seek the support of colleagues in the School Improvement Team in raising the issue on school visits and reports on progress to the Forum by July 2009.

It is recommended that the LA compares and examines the contents of schools policies to ensure each schools policy is tailored to what the school individually needs and its individual aims and that they are clear, measurable and well defined outcomes.

The LA should continue to make training available for schools.

If required schools/the LA should request assistance from the Council's Access Officer for Disabled People in ensuring the policies are appropriate.

- *Are there any schools which do not provide for children with special needs either with or without a statement? Why is this?*

All schools have a requirement to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs with and without a Statement and there is no evidence to suggest that schools are not complying with this requirement.

## **Conclusion**

There are no schools that do not provide for children with special educational needs.

### **5vi. How well the local admission forum protocol (i.e. the local fair access protocol) has worked and how many children have been admitted to each school under the protocol.**

- *How well the local admission forum protocol (i.e. the local fair access protocol) has worked and how many children have been admitted to each school under the protocol.*

Between September 2007 and May 2008 the In-Year Fair Access Protocol was implemented on three occasions. This low number of instances does not usually mean that schools are refusing to take 'complex placements' but just they are not recording such admissions on the IYFA forms and so are not informing the Authority that they have made such admissions. Such admissions are often coming to light when a school is approached to admit a child under a negotiated transfer - the school then point out how many 'Complex admissions' they have made unknown to the Authority. It is suspected that this is

because school staff are very busy and the form completion is another administrative task to their workload.

## **Conclusion**

The In Year Fair Access Protocol is not being used by all schools.

## **Recommendations**

The Forum investigates why schools are not using the protocol and ways to increase its use. Progress report to Forum by September 2009.

- *Are there any schools refusing to take children? Every school is now under a duty to participate (paragraph 3.15 of the School Admissions Code) and so Recommendations should focus on the fact that the local authority should take enforcement action where there is non compliance.*

There is no evidence to suggest that schools are refusing to admit children where the In Year Fair Access Protocol has been used.

- *Are there any schools taking a high proportion of children with challenging behaviour? Are other schools admitting a very low proportion of such children? What is the local authority doing to address any problems?*

In the 2007-08 school year there was only one permanent exclusion and two Negotiated Transfers in the Primary sector so there is no evidence of schools taking too high or too low a proportion of children with challenging behaviour.

Within the same year in the secondary sector there were 16 permanent exclusions from 8 secondary schools. These were fairly evenly spread amongst the schools except for St Katherine's School who excluded 5 pupils.

Whilst the number of St Katherine's exclusions is relatively high, the pupils involved all live in Bristol Local Authority and it may not always be possible for Bristol based pupils who may have behaviour problems, to access all of the resources that would normally be available to North Somerset based pupils.

Negotiated Transfers - all secondary schools took at least one child. Most schools exported or imported no more than 3 pupils more than they imported or exported. St Katherine's School imported three pupils without exporting any but this may be again due to a lack of availability of resources for its Bristol pupils.

## Addressing Problems

**In Year Fair Access Protocol** - a Senior Education Welfare Officer attended a Secondary Schools Partnership meeting in June and promoted the importance of using the protocol and when schools indicate to the School Admissions Team that they have concerns about admitting a child, they are reminded of the protocol procedure.

**St Katherine's School exclusion figures** - St Katherine's School negotiates with Bristol schools for managed transfers, and Parent Support Advisers (PSAs) and the Education Welfare Officer have developed improved working relationships with education support services in Bristol.

The LA has suggested that where appropriate, St Katherine's School use their Connexions Personal Adviser to try to set up alternative programmes for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion as North Somerset alternative programmes (for example Education Other Than At School provision) are not available for Bristol pupils. The School has processes in place to reduce their permanent and fixed term exclusions and have two PSAs allocated to their school to work with pupils and parents in Bristol. There are cross boundary protocols in place regarding permanent exclusions and court attendance procedures.

## **Conclusion**

Whilst there are differences between schools, the numerical evidence does not suggest that any schools are necessarily admitting a high or low proportion of children with challenging behaviour. The figures for St Katherine's School may be disproportionate due to the apparent paucity of appropriate provision in Bristol for Bristol pupils attending North Somerset Schools.

## **Recommendations**

The LA and St Katherine's School continues with, and develops as necessary, the actions mentioned above to try to ensure that as far as possible, pupils do not receive differing levels of support depending on where they live, to try to reduce the number of permanent exclusions. Progress report to Forum by September 2009.

- *Does the protocol include all relevant children (i.e. primary and secondary, including those moving into the area, in year) and not just 'challenging' pupils?*

The protocol covers all relevant children, not just those with

challenging behaviour. Children who move into the area in-year are not normally included as there is no requirement for them to be so. The protocol is only required to cover complex placements and most cases of those moving to an area in-year are not complex but are routine admissions. If such children meet the definitions of a complex placement they would be considered under the protocol.

- *Are all children quickly found a place under the protocol? If local arrangements are such that some children are spending longer than before (before the protocol came into being) to get a school place, then the way the protocol works should be reviewed.*

All permanently excluded North Somerset based pupils were out of full-time education for an average of 5.23 days.

Of the recorded cases with known dates under the In Year Fair Access Protocol, the average time for a school place to be resolved was 13.25 days.

## **Conclusion**

Permanently excluded pupils are back in full time education quickly. The number of children recorded under the protocol is too small to enable any meaningful Background to be reached.

- *Does the protocol work cohesively with the provision of alternative education and support phased reintegration to mainstream schools where this is necessary?*

Yes. Whilst Negotiated Transfers and Permanent Exclusions do not come under the protocol they are part of it.

## **5vii. The degree to which schools and the local authority are meeting their infant class size duties.**

*The degree to which schools and the local authority are meeting their infant class size duties.*

- *Where do the oversize classes exist?*

The January 2008 PLASC return shows that are no schools with an infant class size in excess of 30 pupils.

- *What are the reasons for these? Are they lawful exemptions under infant class size legislation? Is the local authority exercising its statutory duty to consider whether the 'no other school in the area' exemption is being correctly applied before allowing schools to admit pupils under this exemption ?Is there*

*a suitable plan in place to ensure that schools with large classes subsequently revert to classes of 30 or fewer?*

## **Conclusion**

As there are no infant class sizes above 30 exist the above questions do not apply this LA.

- *Do admission authorities understand their class size duties? How effective is the local authority at managing compliance (by all primary/infant schools) of the infant class size duty? Are appeal panels aware of the very limited discretion they have to uphold infant class size appeals?*

## **Conclusion**

As no classes exceed 30 the evidence would confirm that all admission authorities are aware of their infant class size duties, which the LA is effectively managing compliance with the infant class size duty and that appeal panels are aware of the limited discretion they have to uphold such appeals.

## **5viii. Other information relevant to whether admission arrangements are fair and promote parental choice and fair access.**

*The Forum should consider any other information relevant to whether admission arrangements are fair and promote parental choice and fair access.*

- *Are any admission arrangements non-compliant with mandatory provisions of the Admissions Code, unlawful or unfair? The forum should recommend the school changes its arrangements and object if it does not.*

The 2009-10 new intake admissions arrangements for all admissions authorities within North Somerset were reviewed by the LA and by the Admissions Forum before the required return was made to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator at the end of June 2008. During this process, the admissions arrangements for sixth form entry at three schools and the Year 7 intake arrangements at one Foundation school were identified as being non-compliant. The Admissions Forum wrote to the schools involved. They made the necessary amendments as recommended by the Forum. The Office of the Schools'

Adjudicator asked for an amendment to the LA's admissions arrangements for clarification around the areas of geographical areas for secondary school admissions, requested that some further amendments were made to some sixth form policies and that all Foundation/Trust schools include an Admission Number within their policies.

These were all amended and all admissions arrangements for the 2009 year of entry have been signed off as fully compliant and no formal objection had to be made by the Admissions Forum.

## **Recommendations**

That the LA continues with its pro-active approach to the resolution of potential issues in relation to school admission arrangements, developing further the dialogue with schools in order to ensure their understanding of all of the statutory requirements. This will be critical with the introduction of a new Code of Practice due in 2009/10 and with the mandatory annual return by LAs to the Office of the Schools' Adjudicator relating to the compliance of all admissions arrangements. The LA and own admission authority schools ensure that admission arrangements for 2010-11 reflect any new requirements arising from the new School Admissions Code and are set by 15 April 2009.

That NS Council is aware of the resources required for this work and ensures that sufficient funding is available to facilitate it.

- *Does the forum have the results of any parental satisfaction surveys? What do these indicate about the fairness or admission arrangements and other policies which affect fair access?*

The forum is in receipt of two parental satisfaction surveys relating to the admission application processes.

1 - The Admissions to School Questionnaire 2007.

474 responses received. The general level of satisfaction with all aspects of the process was very positive. There were two issues where a significant minority of respondents indicated dissatisfaction, which were as follows:

i) A total of 27 respondents (5.7%) did not consider that the closing date for applications was widely known.

The LA did write to all parents of children who were due transfer to either Junior or Secondary school, via their current school, to inform them of the need and time to apply. For Reception Intake the LA wrote via the Avon Health Authority, to all parents with a child due to start school in 2007-08 to advise them of the need and time to apply. The LA also sent publicity posters to schools, nurseries, libraries, supermarkets, post offices, doctor's surgeries, sports centres and issued a press release.

ii) Of the small number of parents who indicated that they had visited the School Admissions Team (30 of the respondents), 4 indicated that they were not able to talk to the individual dealing with their application and 7 indicated that they did not have a private place in which to discuss the situation.

The bulk admission of approximately 5000 applications each year is processed by the whole School Admissions Team not by specific individuals. Whilst two officers of the Team lead for bulk allocations, it is not always practical or possible for them to be available when parents visit the Town Hall.

Parents who make an appointment with staff are always seen in a private interview room, which has to be booked in advance.

Parents who visit the Town Hall without a prior appointment are seen in the general reception area that is used for all visitors. It is usually not until they are seen by a member of the Team and the nature of their query is then explained, that it can be established that a private interview room may be required. Without prior booking, the interview rooms may not be available. The vast majority of issues raised in visits are not of a personal nature.

## **Conclusion**

The LA has taken reasonable measures to raise awareness of the closing date. Whilst it would be preferable for parents to always be able to see the lead person who is dealing with their application, it is not always possible and only 4 people were unable to do so.

## Recommendations

- That consideration is given to any additional means of ensuring that the closing date for 2010-11 applications is known to all parents.
- The LA to remind staff to use private interview rooms for discussions with parents where appropriate and possible, ensuring the safety of all parties at all times.

Progress report to Forum by June 2009.

### 2 – Survey of Online applications for 2008-09

Online application questionnaires for Reception, Junior and Secondary applications for 2008 admission have been received by the Forum.

## Conclusion

The overwhelming evidence from these surveys was very positive in relation to the information available to parents and the on-line application process itself. The following points should be noted:

- The majority of parents had learnt about on-line applications via letters and leaflets sent directly to their homes by the LA
- At Year R, almost 20% had heard about it via other parents. This was not mirrored at Junior or Secondary entry
- For Reception intake, the 'Starting School in North Somerset' guide book was the source of information about on-line applications for more than 25% of parents
- For secondary entry, the primary or junior school was the source of information for 188 of the 513 respondents
- At all stages the majority of applicants found the completion of the on-line application form straightforward
- Indications are that the ability to express reasons for preference could be made easier
- More than 50% of applicants found links to other schools and website at least 'quite useful'.
- This figure was mirrored by the percentage finding the information on the School Admissions website useful
- While the majority of respondents found the leaflets and starting school booklets useful, there was a significant minority at Yr R (15%) and Yr 7(10%) entry who did not, and a high percentage at Junior entry who did not use them at all (38%)
- An overwhelming majority of respondents (over 90%) would use the on-line application process again

- The majority of respondents at all stages took between just 6-10 minutes to complete their application

## Recommendations

That the LA ensures parents of Reception intake children continue to receive individual letters direct to their homes to notify them of the admissions application process. For 2010-11 the letters should be received by early September 2009.

That the element within the on-line application form to express reasons for preference be reviewed to see if it can be made easier for parents. LA to consider and raise with Capita (IT software supplier) by April 2009.

The LA to consider including within its annual survey of online applicants, a request for suggestions as to how the 'Starting School' booklet could be made more useful. Survey to be issued in October 2010.

- *Catchment areas: do they avoid long journeys to school and work in favour of fair access or do they segregate populations based on ethnicity or deprivation factors?*

North Somerset does not operate catchment areas. For secondary admission applications, each school has either a First Geographical Area and/or is part of a Shared Geographical Area. There is no evidence that these cause any issues in relation to ethnicity or deprivation factors. North Somerset policy aims to ensure fair access for all.

- *Distance criteria: - do they favour particular social/ethnic groups?*

The distance criteria for all categories of school within North Somerset have been broadly standardised, with common wording used for all admissions authorities. There is no evidence that the distance criteria have any impact on applications from any social or ethnic groups.

- *Does the way some schools market themselves have the potential to dissuade deprived parents from applying?*

For the purposes of this report a sample of school prospecti was reviewed from a range of different types of school within North Somerset LA. These included a small VC primary, a large Community

primary, a Catholic primary school and a community secondary school. These schools were located in communities of different sizes and socio-economic demography. The prospecti varied significantly in style and layout but were all of good quality and user friendly. No complaints have been received by the admissions team to suggest that any parents have been put off from applying for any specific school as a result of the way that the schools market themselves.

The Diocese of Bath & Wells emphasises that all Church of England schools were established to serve all children within their local community, as well as nurturing those of Christian faith. There is an emphasis on inclusiveness and community and this is often reflected in the school's trust deed. The Diocese has received no complaints or comments indicating that parents were put off applying for a place at a Church of England school because of the ethos of the school or because of the published admissions arrangements.

- *Do local admission arrangements take account of the needs of special groups of children, such as forces children, children who are carers, traveller children, children with additional needs and EAL children?*

Other than within the council's In-Year Fair Access Protocol, there are currently no specific local arrangements in place for any of the special groups of children as outlined above within the bulk new intake application arrangements. There is no mandatory requirement within the current School Admissions Code to do so. Research was carried out in relation to the significant number of Polish children applying for school places, to ensure that they had not been put off applying for a church school place, due to the misconception that church school education has to be paid for(as it is in Poland). This has been an issue in other authorities, but no evidence was uncovered to indicate that this has been a problem in North Somerset.

## **Recommendations**

That the situation is kept under review to ensure that no special group is disadvantaged from applying from the school of their preference. In particular the LA and own admission authority schools ensure that their admission arrangements are amended to take into account of any new requirements that may be included within the new School Admissions Code, by 15 April 2009. Progress report to Forum by July 2009.

- *Do expensive foreign trips and extra-curricular activities (i.e. without support for those not being able to afford it) dissuade some from applying?*

No reports or complaints have been received from parents to indicate that the cost of foreign trips or extra-curricular activities is a factor in parents' expressed preference for a school place. Schools have clearly stated policies in relation to parental contributions and many have measures in place to support those in receipt of benefits or suffering hardship.

- *Are uniform policies unreasonable expensive in relation to local, regional or national averages and do they dissuade some from applying?*

Evidence indicates that uniform policies within the district are within the national average costs. There have been no complaints received to indicate that uniform cost has influenced any expressed parental preference for a school place. Many schools have policies in place to assist any parent who is struggling to meet uniform costs.

- *Transport policy: can low income families access preferred schools?*

School transport provision in North Somerset is in line with statutory guidance, including all requirements as specified under the current Admissions Code. North Somerset Council took the decision to remove the right to free denominational transport in 2007. The concern of the Catholic community over the impact of this on applications for Catholic primaries within the authority has not yet been fulfilled, and Catholic schools continue to be fully subscribed.

- *How clear and accessible is information to parents (including the composite prospectus and online information)?*
- *How comprehensive and effective is advice and guidance for parents published online and in the composite prospectus?*

The clarity and accessibility of the information to parents has been reviewed during the preparation of the forum report and appears to be offering a sound and comprehensive service to parents. The composite prospectus is written in plain English and is clearly indexed. Recommendations elsewhere in the report suggest a parental survey seeking ideas for how both this and the on-line admissions information can be improved and made more user-friendly and useful in the admissions process for parents (Please see Recommendations relating to the outcome of the parental surveys).

Copies of the prospectus are available in other formats and languages on request.

- *Does this information enable parents to understand the level of demand for places at schools?*

The number of preferences and allocations at all schools for the two previous years are included within the composite prospectus. Parents can access the individual school website for Background information relating to the net capacity of the school and the numbers on roll.

- *How clear is the online application service?*
- *How clear is information online on school admission arrangements?*
- *How many parents apply for schools online?*
- *What are the barriers to increasing online take up?*

Evidence indicates that the online application service is clear and easy to use (please see report on online parental surveys). There could be improvement relating to the ease of expressing reasons for preference and in relation to church links for those applying for church schools. These are issues which would need to be taken up with those who developed the online admissions application service, possible at a national level. Clarity over the need for supplementary evidence in relation to applications to church schools is essential. Steps have already been taken in North Somerset to ensure that parents understand what evidence they need to send, to whom and by what date. This will be monitored to see if any parents feel that they have failed to gain a place at their preferred school as a result of not understanding the requirements.

Another issue arose this year where parents using the online application service for a sibling, having used it in the past, were unable to proceed without approaching the admissions team for assistance. The system retains details of online applications in order to monitor sibling link criteria, but if using the same e-mail address, the parent may be told that that e-mail address is already in use. They need then to contact the admissions team for a new password. This could be off-putting for those not familiar with the process and could lead to a drop in online applications for parents applying for a sibling.

The number and percentage of online applications were as follows:

	<b>2008/09</b>	<b>2007/08</b>
Reception intake	1328 (64%)	1077 (55%)

Junior Transfer	306 (60%)	309 (53%)
Secondary Transfer	1528 (72%)	1367 (64%)

The obvious barriers to the take-up of online applications relate to the access to computers and to the computer literacy of those completing the application form. Those with SEN or EAL are others whose potential to use this method of application could be compromised. For parents of children at secondary transfer, transition advisers will be available to work with vulnerable families to ensure that they understand and have completed the application process. Some schools voluntarily offer to help families making applications where they know the parents may find the process challenging.

- *What is the evidence that choice advisers are supporting the most disadvantaged and disengaged parents?*

In North Somerset this service is provided by Transition Advisers based within the Children and Young People's Information Service. The service is already experienced with providing families with advice and information on a wide range of topics. In order to ensure that the most vulnerable parents were supported through the secondary transition admissions application process, transition advisers worked not only with the schools, but with the following agencies and professionals:

- Parent Support Advisers, including the Transition Coordinator
- Learning Mentors
- Special Educational Needs Team
- Education Welfare (including Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) and Looked After Children
- Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS)
- Supportive Parents

As well as dealing with a wide range of enquiries, mostly by phone, they have specifically targeted those parents who had not made an application a week before the closing date. There is evidence that this intervention has helped to reduce the number of late applications from 291 for September 2007 to 75 for September 2008. Transition Advisers continue to work to contact and support those from whom no application had been received, this being 38 families as of January 2008. As part of this process 11 families were identified who had thought that they had completed an application, but for some reason it had not arrived with the admissions team, so these cases were successfully resolved before the closing date.

## **Recommendations**

To help evaluate the service it would be useful to have a breakdown of those families contacted who had not submitted an application form to see how many of them were already identified as vulnerable by the school or by one of the multi-agency teams with whom the transition advisers are working. Transition Advice service to investigate and report to Forum by June 2009.

- *The report should also consider decisions of the Ombudsman, Courts, Schools Adjudicator or directions by the Secretary of State in relation to the area's schools, in considering the extent to which fair access has been achieved locally.*

North Somerset was challenged and taken to the School's Adjudicator by a parent in relation to the new criterion for certain rural schools within North Somerset. The challenge related to a change implemented to the sibling link criterion. This change had been introduced to ensure that local children, who would otherwise have to be transported out of their local community to an alternative school, were not being displaced by siblings living out of the school's area. This supported the 'local schools for local children' policy. The Adjudicator found in favour of the LA.

### **5ix. A best practice case study or two or recent developments in practice.**

#### **Best Practice Case Study - Way of working with VA and Schools in relation to Admissions Arrangements**

Until 2003, little specific work had been undertaken between North Somerset LA and the Dioceses of Bath & Wells and Clifton to review the admissions arrangements of the voluntary aided schools within the Authority. Changes of personnel at all of the organisations, and the introduction of new admissions legislation offered an opportunity to develop a coordinated method of working and to introduce clear procedures and guidance for schools in relation to admissions.

#### **Action Taken**

Significant work was undertaken with head teachers and governing bodies to raise their understanding of the role of the governing body of a VA school as the admissions authority for that school. Extensive training was required and this was undertaken in partnership between the LA and the Dioceses. Specific topics covered were as follows:

- Looked after children legislation
- The role of the trust deed in relation to VA school admissions
- The need for clarity and precision in all criteria
- The place of the sibling link in oversubscription criteria
- Supplementary evidence
- The application of oversubscription criteria
- The equal preference with ranking system
- The timescales relating to school admissions
- The admissions consultation process
- The need for the determination of admissions arrangements

## **Current Situation**

VA schools now meet with Dioceses and North Somerset Officers in September of each year to review the admissions arrangements and processes and to be updated on any changes. The need to review the school's admissions policy on an annual basis is recognised by all governing bodies.

The most recent development has been the adoption by VA schools of LA definitions and wording for all common areas of their admissions arrangements.

Model criteria have been drawn up from which the admissions authorities can compose their policies and oversubscription criteria. A model letter for clergy to sign in support of parents applying under church attendance criteria has been issued for use in Anglican VA schools.

## **Contribution to Fair Access through This Policy**

- Parents now receive consistent information and definitions for all admissions authorities within North Somerset
- VA admission arrangements are fully compliant with all requirements of the Code of Practice
- Oversubscription criteria are clear and easy for parents to understand when applying
- The process for providing supplementary information has been simplified.

## **6. Evidence**

The data and other evidence used by the Forum to reach its conclusions:

- a) Preference and allocation statistics
- b) Appeals heard and upheld statistics

- c) Ethnic Origin statistics
- d) Set Admission Arrangements for 2008-09
- e) Composite Prospectus (Parent Guide books)
- f) Admissions survey results
- g) Online survey results
- h) Online application statistics
- i) FSM data
- j) IDACI
- k) Transitional Advice Service Report
- l) DCSF national appeal data
- m) DCSF national application and allocation data
- n) IYFAP data
- o) PLASC data
- p) DES and Accessibility plan data
- q) Examination results data
- r) Attendance data
- s) Looked After Children data
- t) Comparative data on cost of School Uniforms
- u) School prospecti
- v) Schools DES and Accessibility plans

Tess Robinson  
Chair of North Somerset Admissions Forum

Date: