

AHTSS RESPONSE

New Admissions Arrangements for Post-Primary Schools

CHAPTER 2

QUESTION 1

We acknowledge that the principles listed in paragraphs 2.1-2.3 are child centred but we have serious reservations about the context in which they are to be applied. We do not believe that they will provide a sound basis on which to develop new admissions criteria. There are also concerns that by giving priority to the interests of the individual child the interests of all children will be overlooked.

We consider that the current serious inequalities in school provision have not been addressed by this document. The consultation booklet continues with the notion that children can be categorised into certain types and that certain types of schools must exist to cope with the different types of children. We believe that all children have different needs and abilities and that our school system must be flexible enough to ensure that all children have the opportunity to realise their own full potential.

The principles address the interests of the individual child and do not give sufficient weight to meeting the interests of all children. An education system, which supports the interests of all children, should have a guarantee to support the interests of the weakest in the system at the forefront. The interests of the weakest are not a feature of the guiding principles.

The real issues, which must be addressed in order to provide a sound basis on which to develop new admissions arrangements, are the significant demographic downturn and open enrolment. The current proposals protect the current hierarchy of schools, further reinforce self-centred values and ignore the social and moral dimension.

CHAPTER 3

QUESTION 2

We do not support the development of the pupil profile as set out in the proposals as this will lead to the categorising of children into 'types' and as previously stated we reject this concept. The pupil profile should not be used as mechanism to aid

transfer. We see the pupil profile as a record of the achievements and successes of children through-out their primary years.

QUESTION 3

- (1) We have serious concerns about the pressure that will be exerted on teachers and principals of primary schools in preparing the pupil profile. The pupil profile is a document that may be used by some to identify academic potential.
- (2) Primary principals' knowledge of post-primary schools will be fundamental in giving advice to parents and yet their knowledge is largely based on perception, as they have limited involvement with the range of post-primary schools.

QUESTION 4

- (a) Discussions with parents: We question the practicality of one to one discussions with post-primary schools, as the time required could be significant and probably unrealistic.
- (b) By providing a copy of the pupil profile prior to an interview in post-primary schools there is significant potential for misuse of the profile.

QUESTION 5

The information currently provided by the area boards and DE is adequate.

QUESTION 6

The school to which a pupil is admitted at age 11 should be, as far as is possible, the school at which the child completes their secondary education with an appropriate opportunity via a pre-arranged discussion at the end of KS3 and KS4 to review progress and consider choices and options.

The implications in this section again suggest the intention to perpetuate current inequalities and a hierarchy of schools. (Ref. response to Q1)

QUESTION 7

Care should be taken to avoid information overload.
The timetable is generally acceptable.

CHAPTER 4

QUESTION 8

Where a child has compelling individual circumstances this is generally recognised by the drawing up of a statement of educational need. Any special need experienced by a child occurs through-out their school career not just at transfer. As a result we consider that those with compelling individual circumstances can be catered for within the special needs provision.

QUESTION 9

Regular review of enrolment numbers in the context of demographic trends could be one method of addressing downturns strategically. The current practice of review only when considering rebuild is unsatisfactory.

Children with compelling individual circumstances should be the first to be placed according to their needs but should be included in a schools admissions number before the transfer process begins.

QUESTION 10

To ensure consistency and impartiality we consider the appointment of a central panel most appropriate.

The panel should consist of educationalists only (e.g. retired head teachers) taking advice from medical practitioners and social workers.

QUESTION 11

Children with statements of educational need should be placed in a school before the transfer process begins and should then be included in the school's admissions number.

CHAPTER 5

QUESTION 12

There are serious concerns here that the interests of an individual child could take precedence over the best interests of all children. In the context of open enrolment

and no strategic planning by DE, demographic downturn will result in many schools 'withering on the vine'.

QUESTION 13

We have reservations about using feeder primary schools, as a criterion as there is potential for social selection in some cases.

QUESTION 14

We support the idea that every child be given priority in their closest school and where parents do not choose the local school then they should bear any additional transport costs.

QUESTION 15

- (a) To ensure fairness, equality and transparency in every situation, we consider random selection to be the most appropriate tiebreaker.
- (b) Random letter generation is the most appropriate method of operating random selection.
- (c) Random selection should be standardised for all schools.

QUESTION 16

As stated in the introduction to chapter 3, the fundamental principle underlying the new arrangements will be informed parental choice. As parental choice is paramount it is important that every parent has the right to their first preference and that the order of preference should be included in the admission criteria. No child with first preference for a particular school should be denied admission in order to accommodate another child with a second, third or other preference for that school.

QUESTION 17

We consider that there should be a compulsory core to include the order of preference with an open menu otherwise.

CHAPTER 6

QUESTION 18

The current appeals procedure is appropriate. We consider an annual review of panel decisions should be undertaken to ensure consistency and develop good practice.