

## **Strategic Advisory Group**

### **Minutes of 5th Meeting of Strategic Advisory Group**

**Slieve Donard Hotel, Newcastle – 1- 2 November 2004**

#### **Present:**

Chairperson  
Members

DEL Observer  
Secretariat

Apologies

#### **Chairperson's Introduction**

The Chairman welcomed all members to the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting and in particular who was substituting.

#### **Minutes of the previous meeting**

Attention was drawn to minute 6, indicating that the reference to a sub-group had not been agreed as definitely as the minutes record and that a definition of local is required.

The following points were also made:

2<sup>nd</sup> bullet – it was not clear who would provide the guidance. In response explained that DE would prepare this in consultation with managing authorities.

3<sup>rd</sup> bullet – the establishment of local groupings on a voluntary basis should ensure that no schools could sit outside new arrangements.

4<sup>th</sup> bullet – external support for local groupings should not preclude support from managing authorities.

#### **Minutes of meeting on 8 and 9 September**

pointed out that the minutes did not refer to a discussion about the need to identify the resources required to implement the new arrangements. He had asked for information about the bids for additional resources in the

spending review and had been advised of the general order of magnitude. He pointed out that the resources made available to the Department for the next 3 years (£20m) were significantly less than the bid made by the Department. explained the nature of the bidding process and that bids tend to be pitched at a highest justifiable level in the knowledge that they would not be met in full. Decisions on resources to be allocated to particular activities would be for the Minister to take in light of the final outcome of the Spending Review.

## **Pupil Profile**

was invited to give a presentation to members on the Council's work on the development of the Pupil Profile. Copies of the slides, a worked example of an earlier version and a draft revised example of a Pupil Profile were circulated to members for information.

responded to member's questions – the key points are set out in Annex A. Members also discussed what comments should be included in the advice to the Minister – these are set out in Annex B.

## **Tuesday 2 November**

### **Admissions arrangements**

outlined the format for the discussion of the admission arrangements. The aim is to consider what the Department should consult on when proposals are published at the end of the year.

### **Principles and Objectives**

The principles and outcomes will help to inform the discussions. They will also provide a means of assessing subsequent decisions. The overall view was that the principles and objectives were satisfactory subject to the comments set out in Annex C. Members suggested that it would be necessary to revisit them again at the end of the discussion.

### **Information requirements**

reminded members that in considering admission arrangements it is important to look forward to the context in which new arrangements will operate from 2010 ie taking account of:

- the continuing decline in pupil numbers;
- greater flexibility for pupils and the main decisions about pathways being made from age 14 onwards;
- the Entitlement Framework and cooperation and collaboration being in place;
- parents having a wider choice of schools offering different curricula.

Members had a wide-ranging discussion around admission issues and the main points raised are set out in Annex C.

## **Streamlining admission arrangements/ Central Body for admissions**

Members discussed how the admissions process might be streamlined, using information technology where appropriate, and whether there could be a role for a central body. Key points from the discussion are set out in Annex C. It was agreed to revisit this issue following the discussion on admissions criteria.

## **Statemented children**

Members considered whether statemented children should be included in a school's admission numbers or whether they should be considered as supernumerary to the admissions number. The key points of the discussion are set out in Annex C. There was no clear view about the approach and it was suggested that this issue could be deferred until a later time in the wider context of open enrolment arrangements.

## **Timetable**

There was a widely held view that the process should start earlier ie in P6. The key points of the discussion are set out in Annex C.

## **Admissions Criteria**

gave a presentation on the research work to help inform members consideration of the admissions criteria and arrangements. The presentation covered an analysis of oversubscribed schools, a survey of application criteria in oversubscribed schools, an examination of travel to school distances and patterns, an analysis of demographic trends and an overview of admissions criteria elsewhere.

reminded members that the objective was to provide advice about what should be included in the consultation document.

Members discussed the criteria identified in Paper 5.3. It was accepted that where there is no strong view about whether to include or exclude specific criteria the issues should be included in the consultation document.

The key points made by members is set out in Annex C. On the issue of boarding departments made the point that the issues are wider than admissions, it is not a high-volume issue and that the policy on boarding departments could be re-examined at a later time if necessary. There was agreement that first preference should not be included in admissions criteria.

Members agreed to adjourn the meeting at this point and to discuss the remaining issues at the next meeting on 23 November.

## **Pupil Profile – Points Clarified by – CCEA**

### **Content of the Pupil Profile**

- Teachers involved in the Pupil Profile Pilot have indicated that they are content with the proposed format for 2004/05, as CCEA have taken account of all the issues raised during the evaluation of the 2003/04 pilot.
- Teachers are very definite in their opinion that the class or NI average figures should not be part of the Pupil Profile.
- There are mixed messages coming from parents as to whether they wish to have class and NI averages contained within the profile. CCEA are proposing to make this information available to parents in addition to the profile but not as an integral part of the Pupil Profile.
- The levels within the profile may be difficult for parents to understand initially until they become more familiar with them. However CCEA will fully explain the significance of the levels to all parents through information leaflets and it is envisaged that schools will also play an important role in informing parents.

### **Use of the Pupil Profile**

- It is envisaged that the Pupil Profile will be used by parents to inform key decisions at 11, 14 and Post 16. The Pupil Profile will be phased in to ensure that the first cohort of pupils transferring to Post-Primary schools in 2010 will have 2 Pupil Profiles on which to base their decisions about preferred school. This group will also be the first cohort to use the profile to make choices at 14 and post 16.
- CCEA are working on with the SEN sector to ensure the Pupil Profile is suitable for the needs of children with Special Educational Needs and that the information will assist parents to make informed choices for these children.
- The Pupil Profile is an assessment of learning and will highlight areas for development for all pupils. This will be particularly important for pupils in the lower ability range, as it will allow schools working with parents to initiate early intervention strategies.

### **Piloting the Pupil Profile**

- The 2003/04 Pilot was difficult as teachers were being asked to test a new assessment regime against the existing curriculum.
- All issues raised in the evaluation have been considered and amendments have been made to the Pupil Profile to be used in the 2004/05 Pilot.
- The pilot will be extended to ensure that there is extensive trialling prior to the Pupil Profile going “live”.

## **Support for Teachers**

- Teachers will receive comprehensive training on the Pupil Profile. Support will be given in the use of the technology and in understanding the levels within the profile.
- Local moderation will be established involving teachers from primary and post-primary schools to ensure that the levels are moderated properly and applied consistently across all schools.
- ICT will be developed to ensure that teachers are able to complete the Pupil Profile within a reasonable timescale – CCEA are working towards a completion time of approximately 45 minutes per profile.
- CCEA are exploring options for “drop down” menus for teachers to assist with completion of the profile.

## **Information to parents**

- CCEA recognise that there is extensive work to be carried out to ensure that parents are fully aware of the significance of the information contained within the profile. A “joined up” approach will be necessary, involving DE, CCEA, the managing authorities and schools, to inform parents of the new arrangements.
- The language to be used in communications with parents must be fit for the audience and information on the levels will not be in “education speak” that means little to the majority of parents.
- Parents will be informed about the Pupil Profile prior to having to use the profile to inform their choices.

## **Annex B**

### **SAG Advice on the Pupil Profile**

#### **Piloting of the Pupil Profile**

- Trialling should be taking place earlier
- ICT capacity must be available to support large scale trialling.

#### **Use of the Pupil Profile**

- One aim of the Pupil Profile should be a tool to drive up literacy. Teachers could use the ALTA materials as a basis to assess literacy.
- Moderation of the levels is essential to ensure understanding and consistent application.
- Cross phase moderation should be used to increase the credibility of the information contained within the Pupil Profile.
- Moderation should also be applied at the end of KS3 between courses and schools.
- Links between the key stages is essential.
- KS3 is a critical phase – parents will use this to help young people to select subjects – need for moderation internally between courses and schools.
- An agreed position on the use of the Pupil Profile for Post 16 pupils should be established.
- Consideration should be given to the availability of profiles – should this be all the profiles from year 1 or should it be limited to the last say 4 years.
- HE should be encouraged to consider the Pupil Profile particularly in relation to key skills – Life Long Learning

#### **Support for Teachers**

- Teachers will need space to complete and consideration should be given to ensuring teachers have ICT capacity are able to complete this work at home if necessary.
- Teachers should be confident that that levels are moderated properly and applied consistently.
- NOF taught us that all teachers must be involved – teachers working together can support each other. Consideration should be given to how this can best be taken forward.

#### **Information for parents**

- Need for clear unambiguous statement on the purpose of the document – parents need to understand that it is not a replacement for dialogue with the school – it is an aid to assist, provide guidance and support.
- Careers guidance is essential and should be available at the point when parents and pupils make key decisions at 14 and Post 16.

## NEW ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE TRANSFER OF PUPILS FROM PRIMARY TO POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

### Principles

#### Comments

- Partnerships should be a principle as well as a means to an end ie delivery of the Entitlement Framework

Principle: “Facilitate informed choice by parents and pupils”

- Is preference more appropriate than choice?

Principle: “Be fair and free from any inadvertent bias.....”

- Is this a problem in legal terms?
- Need to take account of the situation in England – legal challenges
- Do we need this principle given Section 75

Principle: “Acknowledge that schools serve local communities”

- “Acknowledge that **most?** schools **often? Normally?** serve local communities” .
- Local needs to be wide enough to take account of special circumstances of some schools – local may be too limiting.
- Do we need local?
- Local area partnerships would suggest that children should have some priority in their local area.
- In rural areas schools can’t serve the local community.
- Need to define local – needs to be in principles.
- Reflect on “travel to school” area.
- At a minimum, schools should serve local communities?
- Some qualification is needed for this principle.

### Objectives

#### Drafting suggestions

**The objectives for new admissions arrangements should be:**

- To ensure parents have a clear role in the process and are better informed to make key decisions about their children;
- To provide [greater] **Maximise?** opportunities for parents to exercise their preference;
- To support access to the Entitlement Framework;
- To ensure as far as possible that the admissions criteria of schools in a **local?** area are **complementary?** so that each child is given **priority?** under at least one set of admissions criteria in that area;

- To take account of the particular circumstances of pupils with special educational needs, and pupils wishing to attend Irish-medium and Integrated schools;
- To provide a clear cut decision that minimises the scope for appeal; and
- To give schools sufficient flexibility in setting their criteria to reflect their ethos and local circumstances.

## Comments

**Objective:** “To ensure as far as possible that the admissions criteria of schools in a **local?** area are **complementary?** so that each child is given **priority?** under at least one set of admissions criteria in that area”

- How will it work? Is this more bureaucracy? Could it be challenged legally?
- Remove? Does this lead to 1<sup>st</sup> preference?
- Does this mean that a child should have a priority in at least one school?
- The system needs to be flexible to allow for local demand
- Should the link between the admissions number and the overall enrolment number be more flexible?
- Administrative process must give priority to the needs of the child
- Transport is an issue – need to be realistic – available resources would not permit an open transport policy alongside open enrolment.
- Only required when schools are oversubscribed – this forces children to go to schools that they do not want to go to
- No child should be precluded from a local area or local group of schools

**Objective:** “To take account of the particular circumstances of pupils with special educational needs, and pupils wishing to attend Irish-medium and Integrated schools”

- Do we need this given that we are maximising choice?
- Needs to be in to facilitate the growth (catch up) of the IM and IE sectors.
- This should not be so narrow ie refer to just IM and IE
- SEN requirements are dealt with in the statement – and this must be in the objectives
- What basis are we saying that some parents have more choice?
- Implication about single sex schools and those with a particular ethos
- Section 75 does not cover the right to IM education
- More potential to be different will lead to more people claiming to be different

**Objective:** “To provide a clear-cut decision that [minimises] **Obviates?** the [scope] –**need?** for appeal.

- very negative – needs to be written differently

## **The Admissions Process**

### **General Comments**

- How will we manage this change – new system looks like lottery
- More complicated the system the more chance of disaster
- High stakes now because the quality of provision is not equal – must be real good quality options available for all pupils
- How can we create social cohesion? – need balance between the individual and social cohesion
- New system should fall somewhere between one where pupils are told where to go and one where there is genuine open enrolment and schools are allowed to expand - there an interim solution?

### **Information and Advice to Parents**

#### **Comments**

#### **Context**

- Need to look forward to the new arrangements – entitlement framework new curriculum, specialisms - consultation will set the context

#### **Content**

- Not something that happens in a rush at P6 & P7 but is a result of a cumulative gathering of information
- The deliverer of the information will determine the information given
- Will schools be able to include how well pupils are doing in relation to the pupil profile?
- FOI will make it important to provide a complete picture as parents will ask the questions
- Value added information is missing at present
- Information must be consistent, transparent and available

#### **Use and Process**

- In line with the principles outlined above, this would preclude any reference to required levels of prior attainment. Schools will want to identify this and it must be transparent
- Information and choice favours those who can handle it
- Parents will inform themselves – we therefore need to shape the information that parents have to enable them to differentiate between the provision available
- Do we need to decide what information we give and then what advice - such as active counselling
- New arrangements will be more challenging for parents - greater involvement in the learning process for their child and they will have more information
- Pupil Profile will mean parents as active partners in the learning process
- Should the information provided be directly linked to the pupil profile to allow parents to “match” their child’s needs and the provision available

- Need to ensure that there is training for teachers and to ensure links between primary and post primary schools – how do teachers help parents?
- The early years will be difficult and parents will be seeking information that may not be available
- In 2010 we will have information that is based on previous intakes and this may not be giving parents the information needed to make the best choice for their child
- Should ensure the information that is available supports the changes and does not perpetuate the interim

## **The Pupil Profile**

### **Comments**

- Should this read child's prior learning
- Need to avoid education speak
- Costello should not appear in the consultation document

## **Advice from the primary school**

## **Post-primary school prospectuses**

## **Attendance at open days/nights and advice from post-primary schools**

## **Transfer booklets (1 for each area board)**

## **Additional advice from DE/Managing Authorities**

### **Comments**

- Elements above fall into 2 categories - Information and advice
- Difference between information and advice. We have more control over the information than the advice
- Simple English which is easily understood
- Do we need to contextualise - something about the local partnerships and structures (advice from DE)
- DE needs to paint a picture of the new arrangements

## **Role of DE and Managing Authorities**

### **Comments**

- Role needs to be defined
- A helpline already exists but it is for parents where a child is unplaced.
- Help line must be objective
- Will parents be frustrated by the help line if the information is not what they are looking for
- Should not be a hierarchy of advice - Need to ensure we are not setting professionals against one another – information should be well documented

- Quality of initial information is important and the “prepping” we do
- Need to ensure that those who really need the advice get it
- Advice should remain with local schools
- School, as service delivery point, is most appropriate source of advice
- Parents must have confidence that the advice is objective and in the best interest of the child in question
- Parents must be made aware that there will be a series of decision points 11, 14, Post 16
- Tell parents they can ask for advice but that they will be responsible for the decision
- Closer relationships between primary schools and post-primary schools are important
- Pathway information is important for parents when they are making decisions
- All schools should be giving clear and accurate information on which parents will make their decisions

### **Responsibility for the Application of Criteria**

#### **Comment**

- Should be possible under the new arrangements to streamline the system
- This is an ICT governance issue
- Appeals may be a problem – would need a mechanism
- Should a central body be “approve” the criteria?
- If we achieve the “menu” then a central body could implement
- May run into difficulties where verification of criterion is necessary – ie siblings
- This may be a longer-term solution

### **Inclusion of Statemented Children in School Admissions Numbers**

#### **Comment**

- Schools need to know at an early date if they will have statemented applications
- Statemented children should not be supernumerary without resources
- If counted in the admissions number then we could possibly “displace” other children
- Allow schools flexibility up to 5% of their admissions number - with statemented children admitted first – will this increase the number of requests for statements
- Current system allows children with statements admission to many schools. We have developed a premium on a statement.
- Could statemented children be handled under “special circumstances”?
- Statemented children should not drive the system
- Schools may be less receptive if statemented children are included in the admissions number
- Resources to meet the needs of the child are essential

- Supernumerary should come out of the system
- Danger is that if we use special circumstances it will grow the “statemented” issue
- Issue should be reviewed as the circumstances change and if and when numbers of statemented children increase.

## **Admissions Process Timetable**

### **Comments**

- Process should start as early as possible – P6?
- Information in P6 will start parents thinking about their choices at an early stage
- Should we start to encourage parents to visit schools earlier rather than wait until P7 year
- Building the relationship with post-primary school should commence in P6
- If we use the P6 profile it will be available from end June in P6 year and it will be a matter of gathering the other pieces of information and advice
- Should the visit be restricted to one given time of year or should there be more opportunities
- P6 and P7 pupils and parents should be able to attend open nights
- Could open nights start in say November? What about September?
- Do we need the transfer booklet available at the time of the school visit?
- Schools must ensure that they give parents the opportunity to get appropriate information about school
- Should there be guidance to schools on what they should provide and how they should do this?
- Curricular links between primary and post-primary schools should be used.
- Will we still need the transfer booklet? What form will it take?
- Should DE commission research into how useful the booklet is
- Format and information should be streamlined and contain info on the provision available – checklist about the school – DE guidance on format

### **(a) Family Connections**

#### **Siblings who currently attend the school**

#### **Siblings who formerly attended the school**

#### **Other relations who are current/past pupils**

#### **Eldest child/only child**

##### **Comments**

- Eldest child – is this logical? Put it in the consultation
- Former Sibling - should this be in?
- Half brothers and sisters should be taken into consideration
- How can new families in an area penetrate the system?

- Nuances should be taken into account – twins, Quakers at Friends School, siblings in special education etc
- Other family connections - should this be left out?
- Siblings attending school higher priority than former siblings?
- No child should be disadvantaged because of their circumstances – should ask are we disadvantaging any child?
- Are other family connections being used to manage the process and to avoid using the random criterion? Could it be used as a tiebreaker?
- Single sex education is an issue

**(b) Geographical Factors**

**Catchment/defined area**

**Parish**

**Attended feeder or named primary**

**Nearest suitable school**

**Comments**

- Feeder primary schools – integrated school could be named as feeder primary
- Catchment area is the area from which a school traditionally draws its pupils?
- Should schools be able to define their own catchment?
- The tighter we define the term “local” the more likely people will find a way round it.
- The key is flexibility and descriptors that encourage schools rather than tie them down – make reasonably open taking account of traditional area and/or travel time.
- Suitable schools – currently there are 4 categories how many more of these do we need?
- There may be a need for more categories and we should consult on this
- Need to redefine “denominational”
- Are we making education decisions on the grounds of transport policy?
- Nearest suitable school should be included but this needs to be defined
- Many parents want a single sex school
- Transferor relationship with the schools similar to “parish”
- Post-primary arrangements may impact on primary school admissions
- Nearest suitable school categories will impact on transport policy

**(c) Connection with the school**

**Comments**

**Parent is a member of the Board of Governors**

- No support?
- Important to the integrated sector school (first 5 years?)
- Leaves Governors in risky position if over subscribed
- Governors tend to come from particular parts of society

### **Parent is an employee of the school**

- Views in support of, and opposed to, parent working at school
- Should be open to all employees at the school
- If included it should well down the criteria
- Is this family friendly – practical for employees at school – small numbers involved?

### **Attendance at Preparatory Department**

- Advantages a particular section of children
- Must ensure we are not disadvantaging any group of children
- Omit?
- Preps are part of the schools
- Preps could be named feeder primary school
- Check the legal position of this

### **Boarders**

- Important for the community to have facility for boarding.
- Need to address the policy issue of priority for boarders
- Need to take account of wider picture
- Boarders supernumerary and capped?
- Is it an admissions to boarding department's policy problem?

### **Comments**

#### **(d) Other Criteria**

##### **1<sup>st</sup> preference**

- Exclude

##### **Extra-curricular achievement**

- No – but should consider if it is relevant
- Been tested in court and found to be OK
- Is this too subjective?.
- Difficulties in measurement
- Creating disadvantage?
- Should not be dependent on voluntary activities
- Does this need to go to consultation?

##### **Attendance at Irish-medium primary school**

- Leave in if necessary

##### **Attendance at Integrated primary school**

- Leave in for consultation
- Do we need to put in a reference to balance

##### **Active promotion of integrated**

- Remove

### **Mixed Marriages/Unions**

- Remove

### **Comments**

#### **(e) *Final Criterion/Tie-breaker***

#### **Proximity**

- Should this be used as a tiebreaker?
- Should one child in the street be advantaged over another?
- If using as a main criterion then is it fair to use it as a tiebreaker?

#### **Random computerised selection**

- More manageable than lottery
- Class system use by some schools

#### **Lottery**

- Should be included in the consultation

#### **Age**

- Omit

#### **General points**

- Need to look at the terminology – must be future looking
- Need advice for schools on when to bring in the tiebreaker – should it be at the end of each stage or at the end.