

ANNEX

TRANSFER TO POST-PRIMARY EDUCATION

GUIDANCE FOR PRIMARY PRINCIPALS ON INFORMATION AND ADVICE TO PARENTS

August 2005

PART 1

GENERAL MEETING TO EXPLAIN TRANSFER PROCEDURE ARRANGEMENTS

This guidance sets out the messages which you should convey to parents.

1. THE PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

To explain:

- . the arrangements in general terms;
- . the role of parents in the process and the decisions they will have to make;
- . the situation regarding admissions to grammar and non-grammar post-primary schools;
- . sources of advice and information; and
- . the sequence of events in the transfer process.

2. OUTLINE OF THE TRANSFER ARRANGEMENTS

- . Each post-primary school may only admit a certain number of pupils and if more pupils apply than a school has places then the school has to decide whom to admit.
- . The Department of Education decides how many pupils a school may admit and this is based on the accommodation of each school.
- . Schools must be open about how they select pupils and have to publish the factors they take into account when selecting pupils. These are called the admissions criteria. The schools decide which factors to take into account.
- . Only grammar schools may use academic ability to decide whom to admit and they use the results of the Transfer Procedure tests for this purpose. They are not allowed to use any other information on academic performance or ability unless they are considering a child who has special circumstances.
- . Pupils entered for the tests will be awarded grades based on how well they did in the tests:-
 - Grade A - to the 25% of all pupils transferring to post-primary education who get the highest results in the tests.
 - Grade B1 - to the next 5%.
 - Grade B2 - to the next 5%.
 - Grade C1 - to the next 5%.

Grade C2 - to the next 5%.

Grade D - to the remainder.

- . Grammar schools (and St Patrick's College, Maghera; Lagan College; Slemish College and Holy Cross College, Strabane, which have grammar streams approved by the Department) must admit pupils strictly in order of the grades obtained ie Grade A before Grade B1, Grade B1 before Grade B2 and so on.
- . Non-grammar schools may not use the test results, or any other information about a child's ability or attainment, to decide whom to admit.
- . Parents decide which schools they would like their child to be considered for, and list them in order of preference.
- . Applications are sent to those schools listed as first preferences.
- . The applications are considered and each school, if over-subscribed, selects pupils using its admissions criteria.
- . The applications of those pupils not selected are passed to their second preference schools and the same process is applied. This is repeated until all pupils are placed (in some cases it may be necessary to seek further preferences from parents).
- . Parents are told by the Education and Library Board which school will admit their child.
- . Parents who consider that a school did not apply its admissions criteria when selecting pupils, or applied the criteria incorrectly, have a right to appeal to an independent Appeal Tribunal established by the Education and Library Board.

3. THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND THE DECISIONS THEY WILL HAVE TO TAKE

3.1 Parents have the key role to play because they:

- . have to state their preference for the schools where they would like their children to be considered for admission;
- . have to ensure that all the relevant information is made available to enable schools to consider their child's application properly, including any special circumstances which may be relevant.

3.2 Parents are invited to an interview with their primary school Principal to discuss and complete the Transfer Form; they will receive a copy of the Form in advance of the interview.

3.3 Parents will have to state which schools they would like their child to be considered for, and list them in order of preference.

3.4 There is no limit to the number of schools which may be selected and parents should be encouraged to list all the schools where they wish their children to be considered.

3.5 At least 3 schools should be selected; one of which should be a non-grammar school. If they do not list a non-grammar school, this could delay the process and their child may not obtain a place in any of the schools they have listed.

3.6 In areas where there is a wide choice they should list more than 3 schools.

3.7 Deciding on which schools to list, will involve parents considering a wide range of important matters, including:

- . the Transfer Procedure grade (if appropriate), related to the historic pattern of admissions;
- . the child's ability and aptitude;
- . whether the pace and level of work in a grammar school or a secondary school would be more suited to the child's ability. Some pupils may find themselves out of their depth in a grammar school and may do better in a non-grammar school;
- . the impression of schools gained from a range of sources eg from visits to the schools, reading school Prospectuses, talking to other parents etc;
- . the admissions criteria of schools;
- . the information published in Education and Library Boards' Transfer Booklets and schools' Prospectuses;
- . any school fees payable;
- . travelling time and travel arrangements;
- . the child's own views on where he or she would be happiest.

3.8 Parents also have the responsibility of ensuring that post-primary schools have all the information they require to consider the application. Because different schools have different criteria, the precise information that is needed for each school may vary.

3.9 Parents should therefore study the admissions criteria for the schools to which they are applying and decide what additional information should be included in the Transfer Form eg:

- . whether the child is a first, or only, child;
- . whether a brother or sister is already attending one of the schools they list;
- . any other relevant family connections with any of the schools;

- . any special circumstances eg illness, social or other problems which should be taken into account;
- . any other factors which they would want the school to take into account.

3.10 It is stressed that the above are only examples. The admissions criteria of all schools should be carefully examined to determine exactly what information should be provided.

3.11 It is important to make parents aware that it is **their** responsibility to provide this information when the Transfer Form is being completed and that, if they do not, the post-primary schools concerned may not be in a position to give their child's application the consideration it deserves.

4. ADMISSIONS TO GRAMMAR AND NON-GRAMMAR POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

4.1 If there are more places available in a school than applications then all the pupils who apply will be admitted irrespective of Transfer grades.

4.2 If there are more applications than places available, schools will use their admissions criteria to decide who will be admitted.

Grammar schools

4.3 More parents seek places in grammar schools for their children than there are places available, so it is likely that almost all grammar schools will have to use their admissions criteria to decide whom to admit.

4.4 **It is therefore important that Principals should not encourage unreasonable expectations about the likelihood of any pupil being accepted by a grammar school.** In the long run unreasonable expectations cause problems for the receiving schools, the parents and their children and indeed the primary school itself.

4.5 Principals should refer to the Education and Library Boards' Transfer Booklets and post-primary schools' prospectuses which show the number of applications received and the number of places approved in respect of the school year in which the prospectus is published and in each of the previous 2 years.

How are pupils selected by schools?

Grammar schools

4.7 Grammar schools are required to take pupils with Grade A before those with Grade B1, B1 before those with B2, B2 before C1, C1 before C2 and C2 before D.

4.8 If a grammar school has more Grade A applicants than places, it uses its non-academic criteria for the purpose of deciding which Grade A applicants to admit. For example, priority may be given to:

- . pupils with a brother or sister already attending, or where the pupil is a first child;

- . pupils whose parents are former pupils;
- . pupils with some other family connection with the school;
- . pupils from traditional “feeder” primary schools;
- . pupils living closest to the school.

4.9 It is stressed that these are examples and other criteria may be used. The school decides and publishes in advance which criteria it will use and the order in which they will be used.

4.10 Principals may wish to give examples of criteria from local schools.

4.11 It should be stressed that grammar schools should not take account of comments from the primary school about class performance when deciding which pupils to admit. The only exception to this will be where there are special circumstances.

4.12 Where there are more Grade A applicants than places available no applicants with other grades will be considered other than those with compelling special circumstances.

4.13 If a grammar school is able to admit all its Grade A applicants and still has places left, it can consider applicants with Grade B1.

4.14 If all Grade B1 applicants can be admitted, the same procedure is used to decide which Grade B2 applicants are admitted and so on.

4.15 It is very important that when parents are applying to grammar schools which are likely to be over-subscribed they study the admissions criteria of the schools very carefully.

4.16 While grammar schools can take special circumstances into account, these will normally have to be very compelling before a child with a lower grade is admitted in preference to a child with a higher grade. Without building up undue expectations, parents should be encouraged to provide full information about the circumstances and all supporting evidence, eg a medical certificate.

Non-grammar schools

4.18 Some non-grammar schools may also be over-subscribed and will have to use their admissions criteria to select which pupils to admit.

4.19 With the exception of St Patrick’s College, Maghera; Lagan College; Slemish College and Holy Cross College, Strabane, non-grammar schools are not allowed to select pupils using the Transfer Procedure grades or any other method which is based on the ability of children.

4.20 The criteria used by non-grammar schools are likely to be similar to the non-academic criteria used by grammar schools and are applied in similar ways. For example, the criteria may give preference to certain contributory primary schools. It is therefore important that, when parents are applying to non-grammar schools which are likely to be over-subscribed, they study the admissions criteria of those schools very carefully.

4.21 In non-grammar schools pupils who do not take the tests are considered in the same way as pupils who do.

Appeals

4.22 If a parent thinks that a school has refused to admit a child because it did not apply its admissions criteria, or applied them incorrectly, an appeal can be made to an Admissions Appeal Tribunal.

4.23 The Education and Library Board will tell parents how to appeal.

4.24 The Admissions Appeal Tribunal can only make a judgement on whether the school applied its admissions criteria correctly; it cannot comment either on the criteria as such, or on the school's decision if it takes the view that the criteria were properly applied.

5. SOURCES OF ADVICE AND INFORMATION

5.1 Information about the general arrangements is available in:

- . the Department of Education leaflet called "Transfer to Post Primary School: Arrangements for 2006 – A Guide for Parents". This will be issued to all parents at the beginning of September 2005.
- . Education and Library Boards' Transfer Booklets. These will be issued to all parents in December 2005.
- . the Department of Education leaflet called "Considering Schools and Applying for a Place – Advice to Parents" will help parents make their choice of school. This will be issued to all parents in January 2006.

5.2 Information about post-primary schools is available in:

- . Education and Library Boards' Transfer Booklets. These give brief information about each school, including its admissions criteria.
- . School prospectuses. These are available free from post-primary schools and contain much more detailed information about each school, including its examination results. They also provide information about the number of applications received and the number of pupils admitted in respect of the school year in which the prospectus is published and in each of the previous 2 school years.

5.3 Post-primary schools hold open nights where parents can see around the school and its facilities, see examples of pupils' work and talk to teachers and pupils.

5.4 Principals should explain to parents that, after the results issue, a personal meeting will be arranged to discuss:

- . their child's progress;

- . the Transfer Procedure grade;
- . their choice of school;
- . the information to be included in the Transfer Form, including, if appropriate, information in support of special circumstances; and
- . to offer advice in relation to their child's future education.

6. THE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

Friday 9 September 2005	Final date for parents to return forms opting child into/out of the tests.
Friday 11 November 2005	First Transfer test.
Friday 25 November 2005	Second Transfer test.
Wednesday 30 November 2005	Final date for primary school Principals to notify CCEA and Boards of the details of pupils who will be taking the supplementary test.
Tuesday 13 December 2005	Supplementary test.
December 2005/January 2006	Parents receive transfer booklets from Education and Library Boards and guidelines from the Department to help them choose schools. Parents decide on their preferences of schools.
End January 2006	Copy of partially completed Transfer Forms are sent to parents.
Saturday 4 February 2006	Transfer test results arrive.
Monday 6 February to Friday 17 February 2006	Interviews with parents to complete the Transfer Forms on which preferences are listed.
Saturday 27 May 2006	Letters arrive to tell parents to which school their child has been admitted.
Wednesday 7 June 2006	Final date by which parents must give notice of intention to appeal to an Admissions Appeal Tribunal.

PART 2

INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS WITH PARENTS

1. GENERAL GUIDANCE

A photocopy of the partially completed Transfer Form should be issued to the parents at least a week before the meeting.

Before the meeting Principals should check that the information on the Transfer Form is correct.

2. AT THE MEETING WITH THE PARENTS

The Principal should explain the purpose of the meeting, ie to discuss the Transfer Form, for the parents to state their preferences of schools and to cover the following matters:

- . check the personal details on the Transfer Form, especially the address and that it is their normal place of residence;
- . discuss the child's performance in primary school and the type of post-primary school most suitable for the child;
- . explain the importance of the Transfer Form ie to assist post-primary schools select applicants when they are over-subscribed;
- . stress to parents that they have the right to state their preference of school, but that if the school is over-subscribed then the child may not be admitted; also that a particular grade does not guarantee a child a place in any school.
- . discuss the patterns of admissions in previous years to schools in which the parents are interested, but **avoid implying guarantees, or even probabilities, about future admissions to those schools;**
- . ask for preferences of grammar/non-grammar schools. Normally parents should be asked to list at least 3 schools, although they should be encouraged to list **all** the schools where they wish their child to be considered. If a grammar school place is being sought they should be advised that **at least one post-primary non-grammar school should be included**. In particular, the Principal should stress that there is no advantage in naming only one school, and that such an approach could create problems in placing the child;
- . consider together the admissions criteria for the schools in which the parents are interested;
- . check whether their child is the eldest or only child or first boy/girl to transfer and whether siblings or mother/father attended, or whether there are other family connections with each of the schools of preference and, if so, that this is recorded in the relevant part of the Transfer Form;

- . check that parents have included all relevant information relating to the criteria of the schools of their preference;
- . check whether there were any special circumstances which affected either the test performance or preference of school. If so, ensure that reference is made on the Transfer Form and SC1 Form and that any evidence is attached. Where there are special circumstances it may be appropriate in certain cases to add comments about the child's attainments, progress, aptitude and ability;
- . encourage parents to make other comments in the "Parents' remarks" part of the Form;
- . if the child enrolled during years 6 or 7 from outside Northern Ireland, check that any previous school reports have been obtained and are attached to the Transfer Form, and that this fact is noted on the Form;
- . ensure that the Transfer Form is signed by the parent; and
- . give a copy of the completed form to the parent.

You should emphasise to parents that it is their responsibility to ensure that all relevant information is included on the Transfer Form.