

Newport City Council: Education Services

School Admissions Forum

Minutes of the Meeting



Date: 21st June 2022

Present: NCC Elected Member (in the Chair)

NCC School Admissions & Appeals Manager
Roman Catholic Diocese
Community and VC Schools Representative
Parent Governor Representative
Looked After Children Representative (non - voting)
Advisor for Behaviour and Autism (non-voting)
Local Community Representative (GEMS)
Local Community Representative (EY)

Clerk to the Forum

Apologies: NCC Service Manager
VA Schools Representative
NCC Elected Member
Community and VC Schools Representative
VA Schools Representative

1. Apologies for Absence

The Chair welcomed those present, and apologies as noted above were given and accepted.

2. Minutes of meeting held on 15th March 2022

The minutes of the meeting were held to be a true and accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

Admissions arrangements for 2023 were determined by 15th April 2022 and will be published next month ready for nursery round.

4. Membership

LP updated the Forum on the following 4 changes:

2 memberships have been extended for another 4-year period: VA representative and representative of the local community (GEMS).

2 memberships have come to an end: LA representative and parent governor representative. Nominations are currently being sought through the EAS to fill the parent governor position.

5. Annual Admission Round

JL updated the Forum on the latest position. The team are continuing to work on late rounds following the 2022 closing dates and additional key points were noted as follows:

Secondary:

- Additional capacity was created at Bassaleg, Lliswerry High and the John Frost Schools to accommodate demand and as a result, all children that expressed an “on-time” preference for their catchment school were successful.
- As of 10th June 2022, whilst 37% (58) of Welsh-medium secondary school places are still available, only 5% of English-medium places remain available in 2 of our 7 EM secondary schools – Llanwern (92) and Lliswerry (9). St Joseph’s RC High School is also full.
- 13 secondary applications are currently outstanding (5 of which are currently Electively Home Educated), and a further 19 Newport pupils are currently without a school place offer. The School Admissions Team are corresponding with those families to find a solution.

The Chair queried the data within the report. JL explained that some applications note more than 1 preference and therefore where a higher preference is offered, any additional preferences become no longer required.

Reception:

- This year catchment refusals were made at Jubilee Park (23) and Clytha Primary Schools (5); 21 of the 23 Jubilee Park refusals were allocated an alternative parental preference (no need for additional cap).
- On offer date, places were still available at 5 of the 7 voluntary aided schools in Newport but the Council does not have the current position at any of these schools.
- As of 24th May 2022, 15% (294) of English-medium Reception places remain available across the city; this figure is 22% (31) for Welsh-medium places.
- 29 primary applications are currently outstanding, and a further 11 Newport pupils are currently without a school place offer. The School Admissions Team are corresponding with those families to find a solution.

Nursery:

- More than half of the Council’s nursery settings still have places available for September 2022, including 3 of the 4 WM nurseries where 60 WM places remain in total – 42 of which are at Ysgol Gymraeg Nant Gwenlli. Only 8 EM settings are full.

The Chair queried the surplus places within the nursery sector and the impact on budgets / resources. It was confirmed that surplus places are monitored by POSP and no concerns have been raised. The nursery admission number represents 2 sessions per day and there are 3 separate intakes, September, January and April, therefore surplus places will decrease as Rising 3 applications are processed later in the year. Question to be posed at the next POSP meeting and response circulated to members.

JB queried whether data is recorded on Welsh Medium allocations and catchment data to explore the reasons why some parents may be applying to out of catchment schools. DW explained that ordinarily this is not collated however specific projects have been carried out in the past. JB explained it is believed 43/44% of YGBT pupils are from outside of the catchment area and concerns have been raised as to whether this may be due to the circumstances around YGNG. Mapping exercise to be carried out and circulate to Forum.

Appeals:

- Secondary appeal hearings commenced in May, and to date, 31 appeals have been heard; only 5 were upheld in favour of the parent.
- 28 Reception appeal hearings have been scheduled to commence on 27th June 2022 for 5 days.
- As refusals have been made in late rounds, more appeals will be submitted and therefore more hearings will be arranged throughout the summer term and summer holidays.

AR informed the Forum 345 applications were received for St Joseph’s RC High (Admission Number: 240). 15 appeals were heard, and all decisions were upheld on behalf of the school.

6. In - Year Admissions

JL reported on the latest In Year position highlighting the following key points from the Sprint Term analysis.

- 449 applications received during the spring term 2022, which is almost double the number received in the same period last year. This brings the total number of applications received this academic year so far to 1197 (1437 is the average per year for the last four years).
- Around half (46%) of applications continue to be made because of a move into the city.
- 54% of first preferences met, which is indicative of the city context (large numbers of applications received versus limited capacity in certain areas).
- 92% of applications processed within WG timescales, with valid reasons recorded for those going over the deadline. This is a vast improvement on the performance for the Autumn Term (65%), arising from a staffing reduction, vacancies and the highest volume of applications for several years.
- 31 admission appeals received: 21 primary, 10 secondary. 5 were withdrawn before being heard. Out of the 26 determined, 5 were upheld in favour of the parent.
- On 27th April, the Council was holding the following level of surplus places (WG-recommended optimum level is 10%):
 - 9% EM primary school places
 - 17% WM primary school places
 - 7% EM secondary school places
 - 32% WM secondary school places
 - Within the Roman Catholic cluster, surplus places are 2% primary school and 0% secondary school.

Concerns were raised regarding the high percentage of surplus places in the Welsh Medium sector. It was confirmed that this position is continually being monitored and a programme of work is ongoing. Both primary and secondary sectors are expected to increase in line with Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 target of having 1 million welsh speakers in Wales.

FR raised a question from NAHPPS asking if the home language could be included in the Phase Reception reports which are circulated to schools. JL confirmed that a large volume of applications are now completed online and unfortunately the system is very restricted. The School Admissions Team will however review this position again and provide an update.

7. Member Training: Welsh-medium education

JL asked the Forum to note the contents of the report which outlines the Council's position and plans to increase the percentage of Welsh speakers in Newport from 10% to 20% by 2050. Welsh medium promotion is key for the authority and an area that needs to be considered by Forum members. Any questions regarding the report are to be forwarded onto the clerk.

8. VA Schools update

Updates were provided as noted above.

9. Ukraine response

JL informed the Forum that in light of the Ukraine crisis an operational group has been set up which meets on a weekly basis to ensure a Council wide approach, with representatives from a range of different departments across the authority attending.

WG are not planning to make any amendments to the school admissions code and confirmed applicants are to be treated equally. Newport City Council however have created a hub provision, specifically for Ukrainian children at Milton Primary and Llanwern School to enable resources to be pooled and targeted support to be provided to the children. Parental preference however is also still considered in assessing such applications.

In terms of the wider Wales position, 265 placements have been requested, majority of which are located in Monmouth / Carmarthenshire. To date 17 applications have been received in Newport and have been provided with school places. Data is being monitored and reported to Welsh Government.

The Chair queried if a child expressed a preference, would they get their preference. JL confirmed if the school has availability, then yes, however if they are full, they will be refused. The hub provision is not compulsory however families are encouraged to access benefits, such as targeted community classes with other families in the same situation, language support and trauma counselling. Free home to school transport is also available where eligible in accordance with the Council's transport policy.

10. Fair Access Policy

KD confirmed that the pilot was rolled out as planned during the Autumn and Spring terms and results are now being analysed with a view to implementing this procedure as a permanent measure. This will also be reviewed at the next secondary heads meeting on 2nd July. All schools which have accepted pupils during the pilot have reported they are still attending. If adopted, cases will continue to be discussed at Managed Move Panels which are held on a weekly basis.

11. Members Training Programme

A discussion took place on establishing a training programme which could be added to the agenda and different areas looked at each meeting. Forum members were asked to consider any areas / gaps they wish to focus on and forward any suggestions on to the clerk.

LP to forward the School Admissions Code on to members for review of responsibilities.

12. Reorganisation Programme

The proposal to expand Ysgol Bryn Derw has now been implemented and the new building – known as Ysgol Bryn Derw at Kimberley Park – opened to pupils on 6th June 2022.

There are currently no live school reorganisation proposals in progress.

13. AOB

FR raised 2 queries from NAPHHS regarding the responsibility of obtaining birth certificates and obtaining sufficient information regarding ALN pupils prior to admission.

JL confirmed there is no requirement in the School Admissions Code to verify date of birth however there is a need for this check, particularly if a child presents as one age but is in fact another. Admissions cannot refuse to determine an application on the basis evidence has not been received, however if this is not provided, parents are advised to take a copy to the schools when they arrange a start date. If the message is not strong enough in the decision letter, this can be reviewed.

With regards to ALN, it was agreed the School Admissions Team would respond to the school directly regarding the specific cases involved.

14. Future Meeting Dates

It was agreed to change the next meeting from the 15th to 8th November.

Summer term 2023 meeting agreed for 16th May.