

Frequently asked questions (FAQs) for consultation on proposed changes to the Schools Admission Arrangements for 2014/15



Q - What is an admission authority?

An admission authority is the body responsible for admissions to the school or academy

Q – What are admission arrangements?

Admission arrangements are the methods and procedures that determine how children will be admitted to any given school and include the admission criteria which are applied if more applications are received than there are places available. Admission arrangements must comply with regulations and legislation including the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998.

Q - What are Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools?

These are schools which the Council is responsible for.

Q - What is the Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme?

It is the timetable for the processing of applications for the area, taking into account national closing dates for the submission of applications and the date on which places must be offered.

Q – What does ‘over-subscribed’ and ‘published admission number’ mean?

A —When a school receives a number of applications for a particular year group which is above their published admission number (PAN) for that year group, the school is classed as oversubscribed for that year group. A school’s PAN is based upon the physical size of its classrooms and the number of teachers within the school. A school will not normally admit children in excess of that number.

Q – What are the significant changes to education provision in Central Bedfordshire which are driving the proposed changes to the school admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools?

A — The major changes are as listed below -

- 36 schools are now Academies with a further 23 forecast to convert to Academy status before April 2013. Academies can determine their own admissions criteria and three academies have defined their own catchment areas as part of their new admissions criteria.
- 4 Houghton Regis lower schools will convert to primary schools, and will extend their age range from 3-9 years to 3-11 years, from September 2013
- Other academies within Central Bedfordshire have received permission from the Education Funding Agency to change their age range to primary.
- Barnfield Vale Academy (formerly Mill Vale Middle School) in Dunstable is to convert to a primary school and Houghton Regis Academy (formerly Kings Houghton Middle School) is currently consulting on a proposed change from middle to secondary
- All Saints Academy is due to convert from an upper to a secondary school from September 2013
- the new Central Bedfordshire University Technical College is now open in Houghton Regis and caters for students from years 10 to 13

In addition to these changes, the shift of some schools to a two tier system from a three tier has made the existing catchment areas obsolete. Moreover, the three academies which have defined their own catchment areas may cause confusion for parents and carers, and add more complexity to the process.

The proposed open admissions system allows for this shift and for more changes of age range that may be implemented, without it adding complication to both the system and the admissions process.

With an open admission arrangement for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools the Local Authority would not have the problem of changing a catchment area to suit the system in operation. For example, the local authority still has lower, middle and upper catchment areas for Houghton Regis; however four of the five Houghton Regis Lower Schools plus All Saints Academy have recently changed their age range to Primary and Secondary respectively. This has changed the provision within the area from three tier to two tier which effectively makes the catchment areas for the town redundant. Removing the catchment areas would eliminate this issue of them being out of date once a new system is in operation.

Q –How is a ‘straight line distance’ determined?

A — The pupils home address will be measured in a straight line to the designated measuring point on the school’s site, with those living closer having priority for a place. Because of the size and layout of school sites, each school has to have a designated measuring point, which is often the main access door to the main school building. This criteria would be used when, for example, a school with 60 places received 80 applications requiring a place and 2 applications were for ‘looked after’ children and 10 met the sibling criterion, 48 would then need to be ranked according to their distance from the school. This would result in 12 applicants who lived further away being declined a place at the school in order to keep within the admission numbers

Q –Will children attending an ‘on-site’ nursery or pre-school have priority under the new proposal?

A — No. The Community and Voluntary Controlled schools within Central Bedfordshire which

currently have an addition to the standard admissions arrangements giving priority to children attending the school's nursery or pre-school ahead of the last criterion of 'Any Other Children' has proved to be misleading. It can appear to give parent/carers a false guarantee that their child will eventually be admitted to the school if they attend the nursery or pre-school on site at the school, despite the fact that other oversubscription criteria will take priority.

Q – Will children with special needs be affected by the proposed changes?

A — No. The arrangements for admitting a child with a statement of special educational needs are different to children who do not have a statement. The 1996 Education Act states that the local authority must consult with a Head teacher and Governing Body of a school before it can be named on a child's statement. Places to children with a statement of special educational needs are allocated before allocations are made to children without a statement.

Q – Will school transport be affected by the proposed changes?

A — The Council's Home to School Transport Policy would be revised in line with the Council's proposed admission arrangements. It is proposed that a policy would be operated which would complement the new admissions policy by providing transport where required to the child's nearest school, in line with the Local Authority's statutory obligations. A separate consultation will take place to convey this and gather people's views

Q – Do other local authorities use straight line distance instead of catchment areas for their admissions criteria?

A – Yes – Hertfordshire County Council use straight line distance for admissions to their Community and Voluntary Controlled schools

Q – Do any schools in Central Bedfordshire use admission criteria other than catchment areas?

A — Yes six Voluntary Aided schools and one Community school do not serve a defined catchment area. The six Voluntary Aided schools admit children in accordance with their own admissions criteria, some of which are faith based and the Community school - Greenleas Lower School (Sandhills site) is a new school due to open in September 2013 and will not serve a defined catchment area.

Q – Who are 'looked after children'?

A — A 'looked after child' is someone who is living away from home, for whatever reason, and are either in the care of the Council, The Council has a responsibility to look after these children and becomes their Corporate Parent.

Legislation requires the admissions authority for maintained schools and academies to give priority in its over-subscription criteria to 'looked after' children (one who is looked after by a local authority at the time of his or her application, and who will still be looked after when s/he is admitted to the school) and previously 'looked after' children. An application for a 'looked after' child would be considered under the proposed criteria regardless of the distance they live from the school.

Q – If my child is currently attends a school or an academy that is not a community or voluntary controlled school (listed on page 5 of the consultation document), will they be affected by the proposed changes?

A — No, the proposed changes to the admissions criteria only affect Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools as listed on page 6 of the consultation document. All other schools and academies, for which the Council is not the admissions authority, set their own admissions criteria, which can usually be found on the schools' websites.

Q – Will those currently applying for a new school place for academic year 2013/14 be affected by these proposed changes?

A – No, the proposed changes to the school admissions arrangements will not affect children applying for school places for the academic year 2013/14. The criteria for school admissions will remain the same as it is at the moment. The proposed criteria, if implemented, will apply to children applying for school places from academic year 2014/15 onwards.