

Agenda Item: 9

Meeting: Admissions Forum

Date: 24 June 2009

Subject: CHOICE Advice

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children, Families and Learning

Summary: The attached report summarises the work of the county's School Transfer Adviser, Jo Maule, for the period April 2008 – March 2009. The current post holder is providing a service for both new authorities until September 2009 when the post will be duplicated.

Contact Officer: Jo Maule – School Transfer Adviser

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Council

Reason for urgency (if appropriate) -

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the

- (a) School Transfer Adviser regularly provides information to the forum as she has regular contact with many parents regarding School Admissions issues and assists numbers of vulnerable families, often as a result of referrals from the School Admissions Service.**

Work undertaken by the CHOICE Adviser (School Transfer Adviser) 2008-2009

1. The Annual Report of Bedfordshire's School Transfer Adviser, Jo Maule, is attached in Appendix A. It details the reactive case work and proactive projects that were undertaken to help vulnerable parents engage with the school admissions process across Bedfordshire.
2. The report details some of the new initiatives that were undertaken during this period such as the joint School Action/Action+ Admissions sessions that were very successful in Leighton Buzzard and the 38 sessions that were delivered in Children's Centres to try to increase the numbers of parents completing Lower School, application forms on time.

3. There appeared to be a 18% reduction in the number of outstanding Lower to Middle school application forms to follow up and a 30% decrease in the number of Middle to Upper school application forms. It is not clear exactly why this might be but it is hoped the proactive work undertaken with schools and parents has contributed to this reduction.

Progress in Central Bedfordshire since April 2009

4. **Appointment of Central Bedfordshire School Transfer Adviser**
It was agreed that the School Transfer post and the Parent Partnership (where the post sits) should remain a shared service until the end of the academic year. It was agreed that the School Transfer Adviser post would be replicated at its current staffing level (ie 0.6 fte) in both new authorities. The Central Bedfordshire School Transfer Adviser post was advertised in April but it was not possible to progress with the interviews due to insufficient numbers of potential candidates. The post has been re advertised and interviews will be undertaken on 16 July. It is hoped that the successful candidate will be able to start on 1 September. A short hand over period will follow before the two posts separate.
5. **Central Bedfordshire Parent Partnership/ Admissions sessions**
Following on from the successful School Action/School Action Plus Admissions sessions last year, four sessions are planned with the Parent Support Advisers in Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable/Houghton Regis to take place on Thursday 11 June and Thursday 2 July. To date the schools in Leighton Buzzard have again been very supportive.
6. The school provided us with contact details of all parents whose children are in Year 3 and who are at School Action or School Action Plus. Parent Partnership has received a number of calls from parents confused as to why their child was being described as having Special Educational Needs. It is apparent that some parents either have not understood that their child is receiving additional help for SEN or that the school have not informed the parents. One parent was most upset that her child was described as having SEN in the invite as Mum had believed her child to "just be a bit behind". Parent Partnership/School Transfer Adviser have provided support to these parents.
7. **Support to vulnerable parents through school admissions appeals**
The Revised School Admissions Appeals Code 2009 suggested that the Choice Adviser should be listed as one of a number of people who could support and attend school appeals with parents.
8. In previous years the School Transfer Adviser in Bedfordshire has helped support vulnerable parents with completing their appeal application form and their preparation for the appeal hearing. The revised Admissions Appeal Code 2009 placed increased emphasis on the supportive role the CHOICE adviser could offer vulnerable parents through the Appeal process.
9. In order to manage the potential demand for such support, an agreement with the school appeals team was reached regarding which parents the detailed level of appeals support would be offered to. Please see Appendix 2.

10. **School Organisation Review**

The School Transfer Adviser is working with Bedford Borough and the Parent Partnership Service to offer sessions to parents of children at School Action Plus or who have a statement, to increase participation in the “School Review Consultation” by vulnerable parents. If the sessions attract sufficient numbers of parents, it could be that if Central Bedfordshire decide, in the future, to undertake a similar consultation, the School Transfer Adviser could help facilitate similar sessions

Appendices:

Appendix A – (Annual Report – School Transfer Advice Bedfordshire April 2008 – March 2009)

Appendix B – (Criteria for providing in depth School Transfer Advice through the School Appeals process)