

DETERMINATION

Case reference: VAR/000529

Admission Authority: Springhill Catholic Primary School,
Southampton

Date of decision: 8 August 2011

Determination

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the variation to the admission arrangements determined by Springhill RC Primary School.

The oversubscription criteria shall be as set out in the appendix.

The referral

1. The Governing Body of Springhill Catholic Primary School, Southampton (the school) has referred a variation to the Adjudicator about their admission arrangements for September 2012. This is a Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School. They wish to give priority over baptised Catholic children not living in the parish to children who have a sibling at the school but are not baptised Catholics.

Jurisdiction

2. The referral was made to me in accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (the Act) which states that:

“where an admission authority (a) have in accordance with section 88C determined the admission arrangements which are to apply for a particular school year, but (b) at any time before the end of that year consider that the arrangements should be varied in view of a major change in circumstances occurring since they were so determined, the authority must [except in a case where the authority’s proposed variations fall within any description of variations prescribed for the purposes of this section] (a) refer their proposed variations to the adjudicator, and (b) notify the appropriate bodies of the proposed variations”.

3. I am satisfied that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.

Procedure

4. In considering this matter I have had regard to all relevant legislation, guidance and the School Admissions Code (the Code).

5. The documents I have considered in reaching my decision include:

- a. the school's letter of referral of 19 July 2011 and supporting documents;
- b. the determined arrangements for 2012 and the proposed variation to those arrangements;
- c. a copy of the minutes of the meeting of the governing body; dated 12 July 2011 supporting the variation
- d. a letter of understanding and general support from the Diocese of Portsmouth dated 29 July 2011;
- e. The school's Ofsted report of 2007 and the interim assessment of 2011.

Background and consideration of factors

6. The school received an outstanding Ofsted report in 2007 and an interim assessment in 2011 confirming that it continues to provide an outstanding education.

7. The school's admission arrangements have followed those recommended by the Diocese. After baptised Catholic looked after children, priority is given to baptised Catholic children living in the local Catholic community - the parishes of St Boniface, St Joseph/St Edmund and the Immaculate Conception. Other Baptised Catholic Children are given priority next. If either category is oversubscribed, then priority is given within that criterion to children with a sibling attending the school at the time of admission.

8. Parents were not formally consulted on this variation, but Governors were convinced from their informal consultations that local people accepted the fairness of the proposal in the short term. Governors have undertaken to consult formally for 2013-14 admissions.

9. In previous years, when all Baptised Catholic applicants had been accepted, there were still places available. Other children with a sibling on roll were admitted, as were children in subsequent categories.

10. The number of Roman Catholic children seeking places in the school has risen sharply and unexpectedly in the last two years, particularly due to the number of children from Poland and from Mayalam speaking parts of the world. The number of baptised Catholic children admitted to the school in 2009 was 56, whilst the number in 2011 was 89. The schools Planned Admissions Number (PAN) is 90.

11. As a result, in the 2011 admissions round 17 siblings were not offered a place. The school believes that it has a duty to the families who were welcomed into the school when places were available.

12. The school has projected that in 2012 children with a sibling at the school would once again be refused a place if its oversubscription criteria remained the same. As a result the school is asking for a variation to their arrangements, placing “*other children with a sibling on roll at the time of admission*” before “*other baptised Catholic children*”.

13. Among the factors I have considered are the following:

- a. The school maintains, to my mind convincingly, that the effect of the dramatic increase in the number of applications from baptised Catholics in 2011 on their admissions processes which is projected to have a similar impact in 2012 constitutes a “major change in circumstances” – “*a serious and unexpected event affecting the provision of education at the school*” (Code 4.25);
- b. the admission authority is seeking a variation that would address the problem arising from this change of circumstances;
- c. paragraphs 2.21 and 2.25 of the Code emphasise the importance placed on supporting families with young children of primary school age by ensuring that siblings can attend the same primary school;
- d. both the council and the diocese support the proposed variation;
- e. there would be no numerical impact on the school nor on any other school in the area.

14. I am persuaded that this proposed simple change reflects the desire clearly expressed in the Code that where possible priority should be given in the oversubscription criteria in order to enable primary school children of the same family should be educated together. Changing the criteria for 2012 will ensure that yet more such siblings and their families are not disadvantaged.

15. One necessary further change proposed by the school is to raise “*Other (non-baptised Catholic) children in Local Authority care*” to criterion 4, leaving it properly still immediately before the newly placed sibling criterion.

Determination

16. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the variation to the admission arrangements determined by Springhill RC Primary School.

The oversubscription criteria shall be as set out in the appendix.

Dated: 8 August 2011

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Dr Stephen Venner

APPENDIX

Should the school be oversubscribed, the Governing Body will consider applications in the following order of priority:

1. Baptised Catholic children in Local Authority care
2. Baptised Catholic children with a sibling on roll at time of admission
3. Baptised Catholic children resident in the local community comprising the parishes of St. Boniface, St. Joseph/St Edmund and the Immaculate Conception.
4. Other children in Local Authority care
5. Other children with a sibling on roll at the time of admission
6. Other baptised Catholic children
7. Baptised or dedicated children of other Christian faiths
8. Unbaptised children of baptised Catholic parent(s)
9. All other children who are not covered by the above categories