

DETERMINATION

Case reference: ADA/002318

Objector: The Governing Body of Payne Primary School

Admission Authority: Cambridgeshire County Council

Date of decision: 26 July 2012

Determination

In accordance with section 88H (4) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I do not uphold the objection to the admission arrangements determined by Cambridgeshire County Council.

By virtue of section 88K (2) the adjudicator's decision is binding on the admission authority. The School Admissions Code requires the admission authority to revise its admission arrangements as quickly as possible.

The referral

1. Under section 88H (2) of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998, (the Act), an objection has been referred to the Adjudicator by the governing body of Payne Primary School (the School) a 4 -11 community primary school about the admission arrangements (the arrangements) for the School, for September 2013. The objection is to the reduction of the School's catchment area. As a result of the reduction, the catchment area is no longer the same as the parish boundary.

Jurisdiction

2. These arrangements were determined under section 88C of the Act by Cambridgeshire County Council, (the Council) which is the admission authority for the School. The objector submitted his objection to these determined arrangements on 26 June 2012. I am satisfied the objection has been properly referred to me in accordance with section 88H of the Act and it is within my jurisdiction.

Procedure

3. In considering this matter I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the School Admissions Code (the Code).
4. The documents I have considered in reaching my decision include:
 - a. the objector's letter of objection dated 26 June 2012;
 - b. the Council's response to the objection and supporting documents;
 - c. the Council's composite prospectus for parents seeking admission to primary schools in the area in September 2013 ;
 - d. a map of the area identifying relevant schools;
 - e. confirmation of when consultation on the arrangements last took place;
 - f. the Ofsted inspection reports for the School and Murrow Primary School; and
 - g. a copy of the determined arrangements.

The Objection

5. The objector states that the Council has given no reason for the catchment boundary change. Nor has it explained fully where the new boundaries run. Paragraph 1.14 of the Code says that, "Catchment areas must be designed so they are reasonable and clearly defined."
6. A year ago, a day centre on the school site was closed and the school expanded, yet the change in the catchment area potentially reduces pupil numbers. At the same time, the published admission number (PAN) has been increased from 13 to 15. The School's catchment area was formerly coterminous with that of Parson Drove Parish Council and the School has worked closely with local elected parish councillors in improving the local environment.

Background

7. The School is a small village school in Wisbech. It is classed as satisfactory. Murrow Primary School, the school to whose catchment the area concerned is to be added, is also a small village school. In November 2011 Ofsted gave Murrow Primary School a notice to improve.
8. Back Road, the part of the catchment area which is now in question, is in the village of Murrow. The Council says that the reason for the proposed change to the school's catchment area is to bring the description into line with the catchment area description for the neighbouring primary school, Murrow Primary. This will avoid potential confusion over the designated catchment area for children

living in houses on the northern side of Back Road. It will ensure that children living in Back Road have priority for admission to Murrow Primary School, their village primary school.

9. A year ago the decision was made to close the day centre that was operating on the School's premises and expand the school. The objector suggests that, had the School known about the proposed change in catchment area and potential reduction in demand for places, it would have seen these decisions in a different light. The Council has confirmed that it financed the conversion of the day care centre into a classroom and that the School requested the increase in PAN.

Consideration of Factors

10. The School currently has children from Back Road on roll in Years 1, 3, 5 and 6. This amounts to five children out of a total roll of 98. For September 2012, the School will admit 13 children in the Reception Year in accordance with the previous PAN. In the first round of offers, one child from Back Row was offered a place but subsequently withdrew in favour of an independent school. There were no other applications from Back Row for places in September 2012. Following further offers, nine catchment children and four out of catchment children accepted places at the School. The School has recently agreed to accept a fourteenth child in September 2012. Three out of catchment children are on the reserve list. None of these are from Back Row.
11. Under the proposed arrangements, those parents who wished their children to attend Payne Primary School would still be able to express a preference for Payne Primary School, but they would no longer be considered as in-catchment. The objector has concerns that the reduction in the catchment area might decrease pupil numbers but the figures above do not suggest that the change in catchment area is likely to have a significant impact on the School.
12. Murrow Primary School is accessible for Back Row residents. Since neither school is classified as good or outstanding, quality is not at issue in this case.
13. The objection is supported by the parish council which has worked closely with the School on traffic calming measures, safer routes to school and other environmental issues. However, there is no suggestion that the change in the catchment area is likely to cause traffic problems. Nor does it preclude further fruitful partnership with the parish council.
14. The admissions consultation documents for 2013/2014 were published on the Cambridgeshire County Council website on 3 January 2012. An email, explaining that the consultation documents had been published on the Council website, was then sent to all maintained schools and academies in Cambridgeshire, and to the statutory

consultees (including all eight neighbouring Local Authorities, and both the local Dioceses). In addition, a notice was published in the local press informing parents of the consultation process and advising them where and how to access the documents on the website.

15. On 28 March in its report on the consultation process, the Council noted that, “The Governing Body of Payne Primary School (Community) does not wish the catchment area for Payne Primary School to change – it is currently coterminous with Parson Drove Parish Council. The school works closely with local elected councillors in improving the local environment, including participation in Safer Routes to School and a local Street Pride group around the village.”
16. The Council subsequently received letters from a Fenland District Councillor and Parson Drove Parish Council expressing their concerns about the change to the catchment area.
17. The Council had discussed the proposed change with the School prior to the launching of the formal consultation. This is evidenced by the letter the Council wrote to the head teacher of the School on 22 December 2011 setting out the proposal and inviting formal responses to the consultation. This letter described the proposed new catchment area and said, “I would like to assure you that we have given the Governors’ views very careful consideration, but have concluded that as Payne Primary School is a community school, and not a designated faith school, use of the parish boundary to define the catchment boundary should cease for admission to the school from September 2013.”
18. The Council has stated that the basis for the change is the fact that the School is not a designated faith school. From a parental point of view, aligning the admissions criteria of the School with those of other community primary schools in the vicinity is likely to introduce greater clarity into the arrangements.

Conclusion

19. In this case, the objector has argued that the change in the catchment area breaches the Code. The Code states that catchment areas must be reasonable and well defined. A parent might reasonably expect the catchment area of a village school to be coterminous with the village. I cannot therefore judge the proposal to be unreasonable, nor is it ill defined. The Council has explained the reason for the change to the School and considered their views. It has consulted on the change. The objection also raises concerns about the impact of the change on applications to the School and therefore its finances. I accept that this is a legitimate concern, but current figures do not suggest grounds for it to be a major one and it does not constitute a breach of the Code. I therefore do not uphold the objection.

Determination

In accordance with section 88H (4) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I do not uphold the objection to the admission arrangements determined by Cambridgeshire County Council.

Dated: 26 July 2012

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Mrs Janet Mokades