



## DETERMINATION

**Case reference:** ADA2711

**Objector:** A parent

**Admission Authority:** Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

**Date of decision:** 22 August 2014

### 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 Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council for Lane End Primary School, Cheadle Hulme, Stockport for admissions in September 2015.**

### The referral

1. Under section 88H(2) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, (the Act), an objection has been referred to the adjudicator by a parent (the objector), about the admission arrangements (the arrangements) for Lane End Primary School (the school), a community primary school for 4 to 11 year olds. The objection received on 29 June 2014 is to the clarity of the admission arrangements in respect of how distance is measured between home and school when allocating places at the school.

### Jurisdiction

2. These arrangements were determined under section 88C of the Act by Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, the local authority (LA), which is the admission authority for the school. The objector submitted his objection to these determined arrangements on 29 June 2014. The objector said that *"this objection relates to admission policy for 2014-15 (reception intake 2014) but point still valid for 2015-16 too"*. Objections to the admission arrangements for September 2014 had to be made by 30 June 2013. The objector says that the matter about which he is objecting also relates to the 2015 arrangements and the objection was made within the time specified of being on or before 30 June 2014 for objections concerning admission in 2015. I am therefore considering the arrangements for 2015 in accordance with section 88H of the Act and am satisfied that it is within my jurisdiction to do so.

### 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 form of objection dated 29 June 2014;
  - b) the school's response to the objection dated 16 July 2014;
  - c) the LA's response to the objections and supporting documents dated 22 July 2014;
  - d) the LA's composite prospectus for parents seeking admission to schools in the area in September 2014;
  - e) maps of the area identifying schools and their catchment areas;
  - f) confirmation of when consultation on the arrangements last took place;
  - g) a copy of the minutes of the meeting of the LA's services to people directorate meeting which is undated and which determined the arrangements.
  - h) a copy of the determined arrangements.

### **The Objection**

5. The objector suggests that the arrangements contravene paragraphs 14 and 1.13 of the Code. Paragraph 14 of the Code states that *"In drawing up their admission arrangements, admission authorities **must** ensure that the practices and the criteria used to decide the allocation of school places are fair, clear and objective. Parents should be able to look at a set of arrangements and understand easily how places for that school will be allocated"*
6. Paragraph 1.13 of the Code states that *"Admission authorities **must** clearly set out how distance from home to the school will be measured, making clear how the 'home' address will be determined and the point in the school from which all distances are measured."* The objector contends that the arrangements are not clear and cannot be easily understood by parents because of the use of the terms *"property point"* and *"school point"* in the definition in the arrangements of how the LA measures distance from school to home.
7. The objector goes on to say that the LA does not follow its own policy in terms of measuring distance from home to school because of the use of the terms 'centre of property' and 'centre of school'. He suggests that these terms should not be used and goes on to suggest that where they are used they are not an accurate description of the points used by the LA for measuring distance.

### **Background**

8. The school is a community primary school and its arrangements are

determined by the LA as the admission authority. An appropriate consultation was undertaken between 20 December 2013 and 21 February 2014 and the amended arrangements for admission to secondary and primary community schools in September 2015 were determined by the LA's services to people directorate. At this meeting the directorate agreed the arrangements which had been discussed at the admission forum on 26 March 2014. The arrangements were published on the website on 15 May 2014. The elements which are pertinent to the objection were unchanged from the previous arrangements for September 2014.

9. The school has a published admission number (PAN) of 30. It is regularly oversubscribed. The oversubscription criteria are as follows;
  - A. *Looked after children and previously looked after children*
  - B. *Children considered to have 'highly exceptional medical/social reasons'*
  - C. *Children who live in the catchment area of the school and will have a sibling at the school at the time of admission*
  - D. *Children who live in the catchment area of the school*
  - E. *Children who live outside the catchment area of the school and will have a sibling at the school at the time of admission*
  - F. *Any other applicants, in order of straight line distance measured between home and the school*
  - G. *Applications received after the closing date ordered by the criteria detailed at A-F above*
10. The school admitted all those who applied within categories A to E in September 2013 and two children by distance from category F.
11. In its response to the objection dated 16 July the school referred the matter to the LA school admissions section and made no further comment.

### **Consideration of Factors**

12. I have looked carefully and in detail at the arrangements published on the LA's website. Terms used in the oversubscription criteria such as catchment area, sibling and straight-line distance are defined in the LA's 'glossary of terms' and also in the 'policies and procedures 2015/16' documents on its website.
13. The objector refers to the LA's definition of 'distance' which states that; *"For the purpose of allocating school places, distance will be measured in a straight line, using the Local Authority's computerised measuring*

*system as follows;*

- *Property point – Eastings and northings of the centre of the property as defined within Stockport Council’s Local Land Property Gazetteer*
- *School point – Eastings and northings of the centre of the school as defined within Stockport Council’s Local Land and Property Gazetteer*

*Applicants will be ordered starting with those living closer to the school within each of the appropriate published criteria categories”*

14. The objector contends that the definition is unclear because the policy refers to Stockport Council’s Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG) to define ‘centre of property’ and ‘centre of school’. He points out that an LLPG has to meet British Standard BS7666-2 which *“at no point makes any reference to ‘Property’ or ‘School’ and instead uses the term ‘Basic Land and Property Unit’ (BLPU) when referring to land parcels and buildings.”* He goes on to say that guidance booklets for completing LLPGs acknowledge that defining geographic spaces and features is a challenging task and that clear terminology is crucial. He maintains that the use of these different terms (property and school) is *“irresponsible and leaves their admission policy open to misinterpretation or inconsistent application”* and *“causes their school admission policy to contain essentially meaningless terminologies”*.
15. In its response of the 22 July 2014 the LA describes the wording in the definitions as *“an accurate reflection of the processes used by Stockport Council’s school admissions team.”* It goes on to say that *“The wording does use some technical terms, but only to tightly and accurately define the processes followed and the information source used”*.
16. The LA explains that it uses the location points (Eastings and Northings) representing residential properties and school buildings taken from the LA’s LLPG. It goes on to say that the *“dataset is maintained to nationally defined data entry conventions with regard to its accuracy and completeness and that the location points are used nationally to create Ordnance Survey’s premiere addressing product OS AddressBase. This is in turn used by local and national government, emergency services and private companies.*
17. In response to the objector’s reference to British Standard BS7666-2, the LA reports that no reference to this standard appears in the arrangements because it is not relevant to admission processes as it defines the data format for exchange of LLPG information and not for data entry. The LA goes on to say that *“the standards for the LLPG are laid out in the data entry conventions and are adhered to by Stockport Council”*.
18. The LA is keen to point out that the council’s LLPG holds a location point representing co-ordinates for every residential property and school within Stockport. The LLPG contains all buildings and parcels

of land. These units of land may or may not include a property and the LA suggests that the term BLPU could be confusing to the lay person and is not used within the arrangements.

19. The LA contends that the terms 'property' and 'school' are both self-evident when used in connection with the admission of children to schools referring to the residential property where the prospective pupil lives and the school to which they are applying.
20. I have consulted the Ordnance Survey website and can confirm that the OS AddressBase is used by a large number of local authorities and government offices including the Department for Education. I consider it an appropriate tool for the LA to use when calculating home to school distance in admission arrangements as it adds to the clarity of how distance between home and school is measured in line with paragraph 1.13 of the Code.
21. I agree with the LA that the inclusion of specific reference to British Standard BS7666-2 would not increase the clarity of the arrangements for parents and might detract from it.
22. I agree further with the LA that the terms 'property point' and 'school point' are unambiguous and easily understood in the context of school admissions. They increase clarity for parents and contribute to the requirements in paragraph 1.13 of the Code.
23. I have scrutinised a detailed map from the database which covers an area within the school's catchment area and includes the school itself and the property where the objector lives. This map shows each distinct property and its boundaries or BLPU. If there is a building within the BLPU a point is identified within the footprint of the building from which the straight line distance is measured. I consider this clear and easily understood.
24. The objector expressed concerns that the points on the map from which distance are measured are defined by the LA as the centre of the property but that they are not in fact in the centre of the buildings. He suggests that this indicates that the arrangements are not clearly defined and therefore the LA does not adhere properly to its own policy.
25. The LA quotes from the arrangements which say that the points are defined as *"the centre of the property (or school) as defined within Stockport's LLPG"*. The LA goes on to suggest that very few buildings have a perfect square footprint which makes an exact centre hard to determine. It suggests that this is especially true for primary schools with a quadrangle courtyard as there is a possibility that the exact centre point of the building is within the quadrangle, not within the building. It goes on to say that as there are over 150,000 LLPG points within the Stockport Metropolitan Borough it would not be feasible to keep them all within the exact geographical centre of each building as buildings are often altered and have extensions built, some of which

are not notifiable to the LA. It is for this reason that the LA refers to *“the centre of the school as defined within Stockport Council’s LLPG”* rather than stating the *“centre of the building”*. The LA uses the school as an example and points out that the school has had two separate extensions constructed at different times and one of the extensions is not shown on Ordnance Survey mapping and can only be determined with a site visit or by viewing photographs.

26. In my view, to define the point from which measurements are made as ‘centre of property/school’ would not be accurate in these arrangements as from the maps it is clear that not all points are at the centre of the buildings. I am of the view that the wording which states “centre of the property/school as defined within Stockport Council’s LLPG” is a clearer and more accurate description.

### **Conclusion**

27. The arrangements as published on the LA’s website are comprehensive and clear. Navigation to specific elements of the site including the definitions of basic terms is straightforward and easily managed.

28. ‘Property point’ and ‘school point’ are easily understood terms within the arrangements and are clearer terms than BLPUs for parents. The use of the LLPG is an appropriate and widely used tool for the purpose of measuring distance between school and home. The definition of the measurement points as those defined within the LLPG is clear and the production of specific maps on request adds to the clarity.

29. I therefore conclude that the arrangements conform with the Code at paragraphs 14 and 1.13.

### **Determination**

30. 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 Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council for Lane End Primary School, Cheadle Hulme, Stockport for admissions in September 2015.

Dated: 22 August 2014

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Mrs Ann Talboys