Amendment to the sibling link – Details of Schools Admissions Forum member consultation and Questions and Answers

Introduction

In a letter dated 14 November 2007 members of the Forum were asked for their views on a possible amendment to the sibling criterion for inclusion in the statutory consultation on School Admissions Arrangements for September 2009 which was sent to interested parties in December 2007.

This amendment relates to the sibling criterion for entry into Year 7 when the older sibling is currently in Year 11 or 12.

The questions and answers below are based on the contents of the aforementioned correspondence.

How do the current criteria operate?

At present, community school admission arrangements state that the sibling priority is given for an applicant provided the older sibling will be on roll at the time of admission. If there is a child currently on roll in Year 11 or 12 and we are looking at applications for Year 7 entry into the following September, the older sibling may not be at the school in September of the following year.

We ask the school to advise us whether the child is likely to stay on into the 6th Form, in order to decide whether the sibling priority is applicable for entry into Year 7. However, this is not always certain because the outcome of public exams is not known until August and this may impact whether the pupil qualifies to stay at school, or wants to stay on at the school.

What criteria is entry based on?

The entry requirements for 6th form entry into non-selective community schools are based on performance and course options/availability. In some cases, pupils may want to attend 6th form elsewhere and may not be decided about moving until after the decisions for transfer to secondary school are made in March. With the widening of course options and provision for 14 to 19 year olds, it is important to ensure that sibling priority is correctly applied i.e. that the older sibling will be on roll at the time of admission.

Whilst we recognise that parents will want their children to attend the same school, it is accepted that this is more significant for younger children and that it is reasonable to apply this criterion for Year 7 to 11 at secondary school. The School Admissions Code states:

“In setting oversubscription criteria the admission authorities for all maintained schools must not allocate places at a school on the basis that …siblings who were on roll at the time of application but will have left at the time the child starts school”. (School Admissions Code Page 47 paragraph 2.13 h)
Which RBK Community Schools are affected?

Coombe Girls' School is the only oversubscribed community school which is affected by this criterion at present. The LA managed the admissions for Tolworth Girls school until 2007 entry and both Coombe Girls' and Tolworth Girls' Schools were affected by the application of this criterion. The numbers of children affected in 2006 and 2007 is shown below.

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<th>Year 11</th>
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<td>Coombe Girls</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Tolworth Girls</td>
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<tr>
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<th>Year 11</th>
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<tr>
<td>Coombe Girls</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolworth Girls</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
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For Tolworth Girls' School, in 2006 and 2007, all the girls would have got in under the distance criterion.

For Coombe Girls' School, in 2006 3 out of 10 girls would not have got in on distance (1 in Y12 and 2 in Y11), in 2007, 2 out of 9 girls would not have got in on distance (1 in Y12 and 1 in Y11)

What is the proposed amendment to the sibling criterion for non-selective secondary community schools?

The proposed amendment is to add a note shown in bold italics below –

_This criterion only applies to applicants who will have a brother or sister attending the same school in Years 7 to 11 at the time of admission. This criterion does not apply to applicants who will have brother or sister attending the sixth form at the time of admission._

Please note there is **no proposed change** to the wording of the criterion which states:

places will be offered next to children who have a brother or sister, including an adopted, foster, half- or step- brother or sister, living at the same address and attending the same school at the time of admission;

What do other authorities do?

Some LAs do not apply the sibling priority if the older sibling is already in Year 11 or beyond. Other LAs rely on the school to predict whether the older child will stay on into the 6th form to decide on whether the sibling link is given.
Summary of e-mail responses from School Admissions Forum Members on the proposed change

1. Sharon Mehta, Chair Schools Admissions Forum

- My understanding is that anyone wishing to attend 6th form has to apply to do so, there is no automatic right to stay, so the individuals in year 11 are an integral part of the school only while in year 11 and have to ensure that they can meet specific criteria before they are guaranteed to be part of that community in year 12. There will be pupils that are not attending Coombe Girls in yrs 7 - 11 that will join Coombe 6th form. They will be part of the school community in the same way as their peers that have been at the school since yr 7, their siblings will have no sibling priority.

- while 6th form pupils may be part of the school community they are managed by a different team, they have more liberal school rules, I'm not sure that an appeals on the grounds of being an integral part would stand up to serious scrutiny.

- Looking wider, nursery school children that are an integral part of the school community, those children that are far more vulnerable have no right to stay in their schools, did we get any appeals when those admissions criteria changed, that has certainly been in my life time.

2. David Bradley

There are a number of compelling arguments to maintain the sibling links with as much generosity in interpretation as the Code allows. For example:

- While the purpose of the link in the first instance may be to support the progress through a school of a younger sibling, it is also important to maintain the school’s links with its “contributing” families as much as possible over the years of the children’s growing up. That strengthens community links, increases the recognition of a school’s standing within its area and enhances the sense of ownership which schools surely aim to establish in their localities - over a longer term than just the years of attendance of children in a school.

- The beneficial influences on a younger sibling are surely no less important or significant simply because they come from, say, a brother or sister in a Sixth Form. Indeed, that influence of the older child is arguably likely to be greater. To split hairs about a year or so difference in the sibling linkage seems both illogical - and rather absurd, given the sound social policy aim of the preference.

- Indeed in an ideal world one would like to see the link applied to siblings of any age who follow their elder brothers or sisters in a given institution and for the continuing alignment of the school with its constituents in the community.

- While one cannot press this last point in practice, it does underline the need for the widest interpretation to be given in this case; and I see no issues of equity which should preclude the Borough from adopting the widest possible approach which the Code allows.
I hope the policy for the preference can apply for siblings in years 7 through 13 – with the removal of the restriction which you show at present.

3. Michael Reading

I agree to the proposed change – not only for the reasons given but also because I would not wish an older sibling to be out in a position where his or her choice of 6th form might be influenced by the effect it would have on the younger sibling’s chances of admission (and the pressure that might consequently be brought to bear).

4. Michael Hall

- I agree that the sibling connection is more important for younger children.

- The code is quite clear and therefore must be complied with. Therefore the proposal is logical and justified in restricting the sibling criterion to Ys 7-11.

- However will there not be Appeals on the basis that there will be students in Y12 on a two year course and the LA is being unreasonable in excluding the sixth form which is an integral part of the school?

5. Tom Cahill

If a student is on roll at a school, he or she should be treated the same as any other student on roll irrespective of year group.

Officer response - Hatija Bhatia

- In normal circumstance of overage admissions when the decision is made at the same point in time as the admissions is taking place, your point is valid and that is what should and does happen.

- we are looking at making decisions now about admissions for the following year based on future status of the older sibling, we need to be clear and that is why the proposal is for the sibling link to apply for Years 7 to 11.

- Even if the older child is in Year 12, there is no clear case that he/she will remain at the school for Year 13, especially when the provision is so varied and some courses may not require a student to stay on into Year 13.