

Children of staff members contracted to work at the school in question

Proposal

The School Admissions Code 2021 (and the previous code issued in 2014) allows admission authorities to offer priority to children of staff members contracted to work at the school in question where:

- a) the member of staff has been employed at the school for two or more years at the time at which the application for admission to the school is made, and/or
- b) the member of staff is recruited to fill a vacant post for which there is a demonstrable skill shortage

It is proposed that East Sussex County Council prioritises offering school places for children of staff as above with these definitions:

A member of staff will be considered to be a child's parent for the purpose of this criterion if they are living in the same family unit as the child at the same address and are:

- *their mother or father;*
- *any other person who has parental responsibility, such as an adoptive parent, a special guardian or person named in a child arrangement order;*
- *any other person who does not have parental responsibility but otherwise has the care of the child, such as a foster carer.*

For applications made as part of a normal intake, the length of employment will be considered as at the closing date for applications. For in year applications and for the purpose of maintaining a waiting list, the length of employment will be considered as at the date the application is received.

To be considered under this category, applicants must indicate this in the reasons section of the application and supply an official letter/email from the headteacher/Chair of Governors of the school in question verifying that the parent with care qualifies under a) or b).

The proposal is to include these children as priority 3 (4 for junior schools) after in area siblings but before other children living in the area served by the school.

Rationale:

For some years now there have been representations from headteachers of community schools in East Sussex wishing to introduce this category, given that a number of own admission authority schools in the area have done so. Several of the surrounding local authorities have also adopted it for schools for which they are the admission authority.

Community school headteachers feel that they are at a disadvantage in terms of recruiting and retaining staff given that other local schools can offer this to aid recruitment and retention, while they cannot.

As a result of this, a survey was conducted of community and voluntary controlled schools in the spring of 2022 which encompassed 81 primary schools and seven secondary schools.

Responses were received from six of the seven secondary schools, all of which were in favour of affording priority to children of staff. 27 primary schools responded, of which 21 were in favour, five were against, and one was unsure.

Of the schools which were in support of the proposal, the highest number wanted to see this group of applicants prioritised as priority 3) after in area siblings but before other in area children. Fewer schools supported prioritising these children after in area children, or after out of area siblings. The vast majority of those who supported the proposal felt that it should apply to all staff members employed to work on site, although some specified that it should be restricted to those who work more than a certain number of hours per week and would therefore struggle with school runs.

Possible issues

There is a risk that prioritising children of staff would leave fewer places available to local children, particularly in small rural schools. However, the risk of this is low as the number of staff in schools is finite and it is unlikely that more than one place per form of entry would be filled in this way.

A related issue is that this priority could prove unpopular with parents who do not work in schools. This is particularly the case given rising childcare costs and decreasing availability of wraparound care, leaving many working parents struggling to maintain employment around school hours.

The second risk is that, while popular schools may well find that offering places to children of staff aids recruitment and retention, schools facing challenging circumstances will be even less likely to be able to recruit to hard-to-fill posts given that the offer of a place there for the staff member's child is unlikely to be so attractive. This is particularly the case at secondary level where children are more capable of independent travel. Staff members in challenging schools may, in fact, be tempted to apply for jobs in more sought-after schools to secure places for their children at one of them.

The final risk is that this will add an unnecessary administrative burden to senior leaders in schools, and to officers in the Admissions and Transport Service, when these parents make applications. It may also prove difficult if a parent is recruited to a post where there is a demonstrable skill shortage between the closing date and the date the child would start at the school- all places may have been offered to other children and the waiting list would be disadvantaged if the child is then re-prioritised on this basis.