



Consultation report on proposed Admissions Policy for 2016 entry

Background

Steiner Academy Bristol opened in September 2014 under the Free School programme. The school experienced a very high level of over-subscription for admissions, due to the very strong public interest in the school's ethos and curriculum model.

In the pre-opening period (May 2013 — September 2014) the school developed an Admissions Policy for 2014 entry which was approved by DfE and published as required by the School Admissions Code. This Admissions Policy has subsequently been used for 2015 entry.

The wording of the Admissions Policy for 2015 entry was slightly amended from the 2014 version, in order to clarify a criterion relating to Pupil Premium, in light of changes in legislation that required schools to offer free school meals to all children in YR, Y1 and Y2. However, as this was a change of wording only, not affecting operation of the policy, and as it was necessitated by a change in legislation, a statutory consultation was not required.

On 23rd October 2014, the Governors of the school reviewed the Admissions Policy and agreed that, subject to consultation as required by the School Admissions Code, the policy would be amended for 2016 entry. At that meeting, Joe Evans, the School Business Manager, was requested to produce a draft policy incorporating the desired changes, and to prepare for a consultation on the proposed new policy.

On December 17th, the Governors again discussed admissions issues and reviewed the draft Admissions Policy for 2016 entry prepared by Joe Evans, who was instructed to launch the consultation on that policy.

Statutory framework

The School Admissions Code states:

"1.42 Consultation - When changes are proposed to admission arrangements, all admission authorities must consult by 1 March on their admission arrangements (including any supplementary information form) that will apply for admission applications the following academic year. Where the admission arrangements have not changed from the previous year there is no requirement to consult, subject to the requirement that admission authorities must consult on their admission arrangements at least once every 7 years, even if there have been no changes during that period.

1.43 Consultation must last for a minimum of 8 weeks and must take place between 1 November and 1 March in the determination year.

1.44 Admission authorities must consult with:

a) parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen;

b) other persons in the relevant area who in the opinion of the admission authority have an interest in the proposed admissions;

c) all other admission authorities within the relevant area (except that primary schools need not consult secondary schools);

d) whichever of the governing body and the local authority who are not the admission authority;

e) any adjoining neighbouring local authorities where the admission authority is the local authority; and

f) in the case of faith schools, the body or person representing the religion or religious denomination.

1.45 For the duration of the consultation period, the admission authority must publish a copy of their full proposed admission arrangements (including the proposed PAN) on their website together with details of the person within the admission authority to whom comments may be sent and the areas on which comments are not sought. Admission authorities must also send upon request a copy of the proposed admission arrangements to any of the persons or bodies listed above inviting comment. Failure to consult effectively may be grounds for subsequent complaints and appeals.”

The consultation

The consultation ran from Monday 22nd December 2014 to Friday February 27th 2015, a period of 10 working weeks. This exceeds the statutory minimum of 8 weeks; however, the school felt that as the consultation period spanned the Christmas break, this would be appropriate.

A consultation paper was prepared, which set out:

- Information about the detail of the proposed admissions policy and how it would differ from the Admissions Policy for 2015
- The rationale for the proposed changes
- Information about how to take part in the consultation including postal address, phone number and email address

The consultation paper is provided in the Appendix to this report.

Throughout the consultation period, this consultation paper was displayed on the Public Consultation page of the school website. There was a prominent link to this page from the home page of the site as well as an article about the consultation in the ‘News’ section of the website.

Alongside the consultation paper, the school website had a copy of the proposed admissions policy available for download throughout the consultation period.

The consultation paper and proposed admissions policy were also sent by letter and / or email to individuals, groups and organisations so as to meet the requirements of the School Admissions Code, as follows:

a) parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen;

The school consulted with:

- All of the families of children currently on roll
- A total Of 1,560 people who have joined a mailing list to receive information about the school, including local families whose children are not currently on roll; teachers and other education professionals; youth workers and others with a professional interest in education; and members of the public with an interest in our school.

This was done by contacting on roll families directly; an email inviting consultation responses to the full mailing list described above; inclusion of details of the consultation in newsletters etc; and placing details of the consultation on the school website.

b) other persons in the relevant area who in the opinion of the admission authority have an interest in the proposed admissions;

The school consulted with:

- all Bristol City Council ward Councillors;
- all schools within a three mile radius of Steiner Academy Bristol;
- a total of 37 voluntary sector organisations working with children and young people in the local area.

These individuals and organisations were contacted via a letter and email.

c) all other admission authorities within the relevant area (except that primary schools need not consult secondary schools);

The school consulted with Bristol City Council, South Gloucestershire Council and Bath and North East Somerset Council, by letter and email to the appropriate officers. The school also consulted with all schools within a three mile radius, as set out above.

d) whichever of the governing body and the local authority who are not the admission authority;

The school consulted with Bristol City Council as above.

e) any adjoining neighbouring local authorities where the admission authority is the local authority

The school consulted with Bristol City Council, South Gloucestershire Council and Bath and North East Somerset Council as above.

f) in the case of faith schools, the body or person representing the religion or religious denomination.

This is not applicable as Steiner Academy Bristol is not a faith school.

Responses

The school received five responses to the consultation. Of these, one was a parent of a child on roll at the school giving a straightforward statement of support for the proposed Admissions Policy.

Local residents

Another respondent, a local parent who does not currently have children at the school, wrote specifically in support of the proposed change to the criterion relating to Pupil Premium, to limit it to children living within two miles of the school site. She wrote:

"I therefore fully support and endorse your common sense measures to enable a school, which has such small intake at this growing stage, to take in children from the local community as a significant portion of the intake. I was concerned that the current policy would mean that even at 100m of the school gate our children would not be able to access their local school since I do not work there, we are not in receipt of child tax credit or other relevant benefits nor do we already have any children at the school."

This response is in line with the intention of the change, which was to create a school which serves its local area and is connected to the local community.

Pupil Premium

Another respondent wrote suggesting that greater clarity was needed in how Pupil premium was presented, to ensure that all parents understand the purpose and arrangements around it. She Wrote:

"I think that the consultation statement needs to be changed to reflect that Pupil Premium is [also] funding the school attracts for children who are or have been in care (fostered, adopted). It is not exclusive to families on low income."

The school accepts this point and will attempt to present the arrangements around Pupil Premium more clearly in communications regarding admissions.

Children of staff

The proposed policy increases the working hours required for an employee to be counted as a 'member of staff' for admissions purposes from 0.2 FTE to 0.4 FTE. One respondent felt that this was not sufficient. She wrote:

"I do not think that this criterion as it stands is fair for the teachers and for the other members of the school and potential families. This criterion is very high in the over-subscription criteria in the policy. I understand the reason for inclusion of this criterion to attract teachers and other members of staff to the school. At the same time, and as we have seen this year, the school has experienced a big teacher/staff turnover and this may continue for a number of years when a teacher (or other member of staff) can only be offered a part time job at SAB while they may have fuller time opportunities elsewhere.

This means that in principle a member of staff child could be offered a place at the school under criterion #3 by being employed for just 2 days a week by the school and then leave after a few months but still have their child at the school."

The respondent suggested that a further increase in the threshold to 0.6 FTE, possibly combined with lower priority for this criterion, would be more appropriate.

Siblings

Two respondents wrote concerning the admissions arrangements regarding siblings. For the first two years of operation, the school has been admitting several year groups each year. In order to make it possible for families to join the school, the school has managed admissions for siblings from the top down, giving the siblings of those who have been offered Year 7 places sibling priority in their own admissions applications for lower years, and so on down through the classes. This has caused some concerns among parents of children already at the school. One wrote:

"I am not favourable for having a sibling criterion between "primary" and "secondary" school. Offers for secondary school (Year 7 -Class6) are done prior to those on Primary school (Reception- Year 6). Under the current and proposed changed criterion, sibiligs of older children will be considered before siblings of younger children in relation to criterion number 4."

Another wrote:

"I am emailing to query the 2015 Admissions policy for 2015, asking that you make a distinction between children "on roll" and "settled" in order not to discriminate unfairly against existing families at the school

with children in Class 1 and Kindergarten who may not be able to get a sibling place after the older years are filled from the top.

I understand that the priority should be to get children from families to be placed together, but what will inevitably happen is there will be much more movement in already settled classes due to families not wanting to be split between two schools, and so taking children out of settled classes.”

The intention for the 2016 policy was that only siblings of children actually on roll would be given priority, not the siblings of those children who had received an offer of a place in the same year. The concerns of these two respondents are therefore unfounded; however, the school recognises the need to communicate more clearly about how sibling priority will be managed in future.

Outcome

The Governors wish to thank all those who responded to the consultation for the positive and helpful comments received. The consultation was run in accordance with the School Admissions Code as set out above, and the Governors are satisfied that the appropriate stakeholders were informed and engaged in the consultation.

The Governors met on 26/03/2015, discussed the consultation responses and decided the following:

1. The criterion relating to Children of Members of Staff will be changed to 0.4 FTE as proposed. The governors acknowledge the concerns of the respondent who wrote about this; however as a growing school, the school employs significant numbers of highly valued subject teachers on 0.4 FTE or less. It is essential that the school can attract the best teachers even for small part time roles, and the potential for places for children of incoming staff is a key aspect of the school's recruitment offer.
2. The change proposed to the criterion relating to siblings will be made, so that only siblings of children already attending the school will be given priority. The school will make amend the wording of the 2016 Admissions Policy to make it plain that the criterion does not apply to siblings of children who have received offers of places but who have not yet started to attend the school.
3. The criterion relating to Pupil Premium will be adopted as proposed. The school will review communications and published material regarding Pupil Premium to ensure a clear understanding of the purpose and arrangements around it.

The Governors requested that Joe Evans, the School Business Manager, should circulate a final draft of the Admissions Policy for 2016 incorporating the amended worded described in 2 above, and on approval of this wording should begin the process required to adopt the policy.

Appendix: Consultation paper for proposed 2016 Admissions Policy

This paper was published on the school website and circulated to stakeholders as set out above.

Consultation on proposed changes to Admissions Policy for 2016 entry

We are consulting on changes to our Admissions Policy for September 2016 entry. The consultation runs from Monday 29th December to Friday 27th February.

You can [download the full proposed Admissions Policy for 2016 entry here](#). If you would like a paper copy of the proposed Admissions Policy for 2016 entry, please contact the school office.

If you have any comments on the proposed changes set out below, please let us know during the consultation period:

info@steineracademybristol.org.uk

Steiner Academy Bristol, Mottistone Building, St Matthias Campus, Oldbury Court Rd, Bristol BS16 2JP

Proposed changes

The proposed 2016 policy includes three changes from our 2015 policy, which all relate to the over-subscription criteria in the policy.

We propose to change the following over-subscription criteria:

Children of members of staff (criterion number 3)

Our 2015 Admissions Policy defines 'members of staff' as being those whose working hours are greater than 0.2 FTE. The proposed 2016 policy increases this to 0.4 FTE.

Why we want to change this

As our school grows, we will employ increasing numbers of staff including many part time staff. We want to support our core staff team but we don't want to distort the admissions process, and we feel that 0.4 FTE (two days per week) strikes the right balance here.

Siblings (criterion number 4)

Our 2015 Admissions Policy has a footnote regarding siblings which states that:

"As a new school opening a number of classes, we will fill the new classes one at a time, starting with Y7, then Y4, then Y2, then YR. In each case, we will consider siblings offered places in an older class as being 'on roll' for that year."

Why we want to change this

This is no longer relevant as our school grows and we propose to remove the footnote from the policy so that only siblings already attending the school are considered in the admissions process.

Pupil premium (criterion number 5)

Our 2015 Admissions Policy includes the following over-subscription criterion:

“Children who qualify for Pupil Premium at the time of application”

We propose to change this to:

“Children who qualify for Pupil Premium at the time of application and whose home address is within 2 miles of our school site.”

Why we want to change this

We included this criterion in our admissions policy because we are committed to being an inclusive school with a broad social mix.

However, we are also committed to being a green school, with families largely walking and cycling to work. This is especially important in an area like Fishponds with a road network that is already over-stretched.

In national planning policy, a maximum reasonable walking distance is defined as being 2 miles. By making this change, we give priority to families on very low incomes, without lessening our commitment to green travel.