



Tricia Davies

Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Local Authority Report

to

The Schools Adjudicator

from

Sefton Local Authority

to be provided by

30th June 2021

Report Cleared by: Name Tricia Davies

Title: Interim Head of Education

Telephone number: 0151 934 3428, 07813 544809

Email: Tricia.Davies@sefton.gov.uk

Date submitted: 24th June 2021

By: Name Tracy McKeating

Title: Locality Team Manager-Lead Officer School Admissions

Telephone number: 07837 863075

Email: tracy.mckeating@sefton.gov.uk

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Please email your completed report to: osa.team@schoolsadjudicator.gov.uk
by **30 June 2021 and earlier if possible**

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Introduction and guidance on completing the report

1, Section 88P of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (the Act) requires every local authority to make an annual report to the adjudicator. The Chief Adjudicator then includes a summary of these reports in her annual report to the Secretary for State for Education. The School Admissions Code (the Code) sets out the requirements for reports by local authorities in paragraph 6. Paragraph 3.23 specifies what must be included as a minimum in the report to the adjudicator and makes provision for the local authority to include any other matters.

2. This template requests the same information as that set out in the revised template we sent on 15 April 2020:

- a) information about how admission arrangements in the local authority serve the interests of looked after children and previously looked after children, children with disabilities and children with special educational needs, including any details of where problems have arisen;
- b) an assessment of the effectiveness of Fair Access Protocols and co-ordination in their area, including how many children were admitted to each school under them.

3. We should be grateful if local authorities would follow the approach used in statutory provisions and in the Department for Education Statistical First Release¹ and the Education Middle School (England) Regulations 2002².

4. In the template last year we did not ask about the determination of admission arrangements because of continued constraints on local authorities. Again, we have not asked for that information this year, but we intend to return to this area in future years given the importance of determination and checking compliance of all admission authorities. It is a key role for the local authority's leadership to encourage schools to determine arrangements in line with the provisions in the Code.

5. We welcome all comments that local authorities make in the comment boxes and we aim to reflect those comments in the Annual Report, but we ask for the comments to be entered under the right headings. Section 3 invites comment on any other matters not specifically addressed in this template if local authorities wish to do so. The views expressed in previous years also remain a matter of public record.

6. We ask that where possible, you return the template in Word instead of PDF formatting. A number of you have commented on the formatting of the template and we have tried to make it as accessible as possible, but we are aware that some local authorities use different versions of Word.

7. The report **must** be returned to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator by **30 June 2021**.

¹ [Department for Education Statistical First Release](#)

² [The Education Middle School \(England\) Regulations 2002](#)

Information requested

Section 1 - Normal point of admission

A. Co-ordination

i. How well did co-ordination of the main admissions round work?	Not well	A large number of small problems or a major problem	Well with few small problems	Very well
Reception			√	
Year 7			√	
Other relevant years of entry			n/a	

ii. Please give examples to illustrate your answer if you wish:

Coordination continues to work well within Sefton and our neighbouring Local Authorities when we exchange applicant information.

This year generally, the own admission authority schools returned their rankings to the Local Authority within the agreed deadlines allowing the Local Authority to complete coordination successfully.

There were some minor issues relating to systems and technology. This year for the Secondary national offer day, a minority of applicants were unable to access their school offer email. This issue has been raised with our IT supplier which they are still looking into. The same issue did NOT occur on Primary national offer day.

B. Looked after and previously looked after children

i. How well does the admissions system in your local authority area serve the interests of looked after children at **normal points of admission**?

Not at all Not well Well Very well Not applicable³

ii. How well do the admissions systems in other local authority areas serve the interests of children looked after by your local authority at **normal points of admission**?

³ 'Not applicable' will only be appropriate if there are no children falling within this definition.

Not at all Not well Well Very well Not applicable³

- iii. How well does your admissions system serve the interests of children who are looked after by other local authorities but educated in your area **at normal points of admission**?

Not at all Not well Well Very well Not applicable³

- iv. How well does the admissions system in your local authority area serve the interests of previously looked after children at **normal points of admission**?

Not at all Not well Well Very well Not applicable³

- v. Priority in admission arrangements for 2022 for adopted children previously in care abroad. Please comment on the use of a priority in admission arrangements for a child adopted who was previously in care abroad if you wish:

A minority of OAA Schools have previously chosen not to incorporate the category of 'previously looked after children from state care abroad' into their admission arrangements, despite the LA recommending that they do so. Since the new Admissions Code for 2021 has been published, the DFE statutory information has been distributed again to all OAA schools to ensure their Admission Arrangements comply with the new code. Schools not updating their arrangements sufficiently are being challenged on an individual basis by the LA.

- vi. If you wish, please give any examples of any good or poor practice or difficulties which exemplify your answers about the admission to schools of looked after and previously looked after children at **normal points of admission**:

Sefton Admissions Team work very closely and engage support from the Virtual School where issues are identified, and the child may require additional support.

We have appointed another Principal Admission Officer & part of their role is specifically the Admission of Looked After Children who are resident in Sefton and those who come from out of borough. This role has proved to align the care planning and the education processes.

C. Special educational needs and/or disabilities

Please provide any comments you wish to make on the admission of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities at normal points of admission:

All children supported with an Education, Health and Care Plan that names a Sefton school are automatically admitted to the school named within the plan, even if this is above the agreed admission number.

The sharing of information between Sefton's SEN & Inclusion Team and the School Admissions Team regarding the finalising of EHC Plans continues to work well. This has allowed the Admissions Team to have up to date information in order to complete coordination successfully.

Sefton has a minority of Secondary schools that have identified specialised adaptations and resources for children with disabilities or additional physical needs. These schools still have this aspect included within their admission arrangements (as shown below) for those schools to admit children who require specialised resources e.g. mobility difficulties/wheelchair users.

"Children identified as needing specialist facilities that go beyond expected reasonable adjustments will be given priority for this school if it is the nearest school with suitable resources".

It has been agreed that all Sefton primary schools should be able to make reasonable adaptations to ensure a child with disabilities should be able to access all provision within any primary school.

In addition, Sefton have a Complex Needs Team which is part of the Inclusion Team who can support children with their enhanced transition to school which has been shown to minimise the number of requests to move school in the Autumn Term.

Section 2 - In-year⁴ admissions

A. Co-ordination of in-year admissions

⁴ By 'in-year' we mean admission at the start of any school year which is not a normal point of entry for the school concerned (for example at the beginning of Year 2 for a five to eleven primary school) and admission during the course of any school year after the end of the statutory waiting list period (31 December) in normal years of admission.

Please provide any comments on the co-ordination of **in-year admissions** if you wish:

Sefton co-ordinates In Year Admission requests for all schools within the borough including VA Schools & Academies (who are signed up to a Service Level Agreement). Overall this works very well. The number of In Year Admission requests (a mixture of families moving into or near to the area and school transfer requests) continues to increase year on year.

B. Looked after children and previously looked after children

i. How well does the **in-year admission** system serve children who are looked after by your local authority and who are being educated in your area?

Not at all Not well Well Very well Not applicable⁵

ii. How well do the **in-year admission** systems in other local authority areas serve the interests of your looked after children?

Not at all Not well Well Very well Not applicable⁵

iii. How well does your **in-year admission** system serve the interests of children who are looked after by other local authorities but educated in your area?

Not at all Not well Well Very well Not applicable⁵

iv. How well does your **in-year admission** system serve the interests of previously looked after children?

Not at all Not well Well Very well Not applicable⁵

v. If you wish, please give examples of any good or poor practice or difficulties which support or exemplify your answers about **in-year admissions** for looked after and previously looked after children:

Sefton Admission Team work very closely and engage support from the Virtual School (for Sefton Looked After children) where issues are identified, and the child may require additional support.

Sefton experience some difficulties with placing Looked After children at schools within other LA's in our region.

⁵ 'Not applicable' will only be appropriate if there are no children falling within this definition.

C. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities

- i. How well served are children with special educational needs and/or disabilities who have an education, health and care plan that names a school when they need to be **admitted in-year**?

Not at all Not well Well Very well Not applicable⁵

- ii. How well served are children with special educational needs and/or disabilities who do not have an education, health and care plan when they need to be **admitted in-year**?

Not at all Not well Well Very well Don't know

- iii. Please give examples of any good or poor practice or difficulties which support or exemplify your answers about **in-year admissions** for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities:

All children supported with an Education, health and care plan that names a Sefton school are automatically admitted to the school that is named in the plan, even if this is above the agreed admission number.

The number of children seeking a new school place in year, who have complex SEN difficulties, but are without an EHCP is increasing. In accordance with the Admissions Code, the Fair Access Protocol is invoked so that these children can be found a suitable placement as quickly as possible. We now have senior early help worker who will identify when children and their families may require additional family support.

- iv. If you wish, please provide any comments about **in-year admissions** in respect of other children:

D. Fair access protocol

- i. Has your fair access protocol been agreed⁶ with the majority of state-funded mainstream schools in your area?

Yes for primary
 Yes for secondary

- ii. If you have not been able to tick both boxes above, please explain why:

⁶ An existing protocol remains binding on all schools up until the point at which a new one is adopted.

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iii. How many children were admitted to schools in your area under the fair access protocol between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021?

Type of school	Number of Primary aged children admitted	Number of Secondary aged children admitted
Community and voluntary controlled	91	11
Foundation, voluntary aided and academies	47	134
Total	138	145

iv. How well do you consider hard to place children are served by the fair access protocol in your area?

Not at all Not well Well Very well Not applicable⁷

v. Please make any relevant comment on the protocol not covered above if you wish:

Sefton's Fair Access Panel has representation from Health, Educational Psychology and Inclusion Service & an Early Help professional to address any additional needs. This also enables support to schools for children who are hard to place.

Due to the pandemic Sefton Council has continued to operate a fair access panel remotely. This has enabled unplaced children who have arrived into Sefton to access a school place in a timely manner.

E. If you wish, any other comments on the admission of children **in-year** not previously raised:

To comply with the provisions of the new Admissions Code 2021. The Fair Access Protocol will shortly be reviewed & agreed with the majority of Headteachers.

Also, to comply with the new code particularly the 10/15 day timeframe for decisions, the back office processes for In Year Admissions will shortly be reviewed. This includes but is not limited to, In year application forms, advice & guidance to parents, collecting information from previous & existing schools were relevant, decision letters for parents and exchanging information with schools.

⁷ 'Not applicable' would mean that there were no hard to place children for which the protocol was required.

Sefton is hoping to launch an online In Year admissions process to replace the current paper based system. Further IT enhancements for communication with schools are also being explored.

Section 3 - Other matters

Are there any other matters that the local authority would like to raise that have not been covered by the questions above?

Delayed Entry to Schools

To date, applications for Delayed Entry to school have decreased since last year. This is, in part thought to be due to the number of parents being allocated one of their 3 preferred schools increasing from 96% in 2020 to 98% in 2021.

Sefton LA continues to follow the advice distributed in 2015 (by Nick Gibb, Secretary of State) in considering each application individually. If the promised change to the Code is made, this would hopefully clear up any confusion about these requests and ensure that all LA's follow only one process. This would also make it clearer for all schools and parents to follow.

Studio Schools with atypical points of admission

The requirement for the Local Authority to contact all children in Year 9 to advise of their options in possibly choosing a Studio School from Year 10 onwards is a costly & time consuming burden placed upon the LA. It is immensely frustrating that there is no reciprocal requirement for these schools to **automatically** inform LA's about children who have been admitted into the school for the purposes of pupil tracking & children missing education.

Section 4 - Feedback

We would be grateful if you could provide any feedback on completing this report to inform our practice for 2022.

The form was straight forward and easy to complete and is much preferred to earlier versions from other years prior to 2020.

Thank you for completing this template.

Please return to OSA.Team@schoolsadjudicator.gov.uk by 30 June 2021