



Reading
Borough Council
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DECISION BOOK

Issue: 612 Date: 16 OCTOBER 2020

Decisions set out in the book have been made under delegated powers by the Chief Executive, Executive Directors or the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer, in consultation either with the relevant committee or Lead Councillor.

The Decision Book process has been altered to suspend the current Councillors' call-in arrangements within the 10-day period after its publication and replace it with the ability during that period for three Councillors to request a retrospective review of the decision in writing to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

The decision book can be accessed on the Council's website - www.reading.gov.uk/decisionbooks.

The officer reports accompanying the decisions are attached.

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DECISION BOOK - ISSUE 612 - 16 OCTOBER 2020

1. EXTENSION FOR PERIOD OF EXPRESSING PARENTAL PREFERENCE FOR GRAMMAR SCHOOL PLACES FOR SEPTEMBER 2021 TO ENABLE RESULTS OF ENTRANCE EXAM TO BE KNOWN

<u>DECISION</u>	<u>LEAD COUNCILLOR(S)</u>	<u>WARDS AFFECTED</u>	<u>PAGE NO.</u>
1. EXTENSION FOR PERIOD OF EXPRESSING PARENTAL PREFERENCE FOR GRAMMAR SCHOOL PLACES FOR SEPTEMBER 2021 TO ENABLE RESULTS OF ENTRANCE EXAM TO BE KNOWN	COUNCILLOR PEARCE	BOROUGHWIDE	1

This report sets out the decision that, where a child has taken the entrance test for a grammar school, but failed to achieve the qualifying pass mark for consideration, parents/carers will now be permitted to amend their child's application until 10 December 2020 (subject to certain conditions - given in the report).

It is the decision of the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Education, that where a child has taken the entrance test for a Grammar School, but failed to achieve the qualifying pass mark for consideration, parents/carers will now be permitted to amend their child's application until 10 December 2020, subject to the following conditions:

- (1) The parent/carer has submitted a valid application for a grammar school (i.e. applied to the school and sat the test);
- (2) The grammar school is listed on the child's "on time" application to Brighter Futures for Children School Admissions team;
- (3) The parent/carer has listed four preferences on their "on time" application.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION - BRIGHTER FUTURES FOR CHILDREN

LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILOR ASHLEY PEARCE - LEAD COUNCILLOR FOR EDUCATION		
DATE:	16 October 2020		
TITLE:	EXTENSION FOR PERIOD OF EXPRESSING PARENTAL PREFERENCE FOR GRAMMAR SCHOOL PLACES FOR SEPTEMBER 2021 TO ENABLE RESULTS OF ENTRANCE EXAM TO BE KNOWN		
SERVICE:	BRIGHTER FUTURES FOR CHILDREN	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the decision that, where a child has taken the entrance test for a grammar school, but failed to achieve the qualifying pass mark for consideration, parents/carers will now be permitted to amend their child's application until 10 December 2020 (subject to certain conditions - given in the report below).
- 1.2 Brighter Futures for Children is aware that grammar (state-funded selective) schools have postponed their admissions tests from September to October due to the coronavirus pandemic. As a result, parents will not know the results of these tests until after the deadline for submitting secondary school applications on 31 October. The Department for Education released [guidance](#) to Admission Authorities in July 2020 making reference to this situation.

The pertinent paragraphs are:

Paragraph 6. Where the outcome of tests will not be known before 31 October, it is strongly recommended that a local authority considers offering all applicants for a secondary school at least one additional preference, under the admission co-ordination process, where this is possible.

Paragraph 46. The local authority should amend its online admissions prospectus to include the varied admission arrangements. The admission authority and the local authority should ensure that what is published on the school's website and the local authority's website is consistent.

Paragraph 47. Admission authorities are asked to note that, if they vary their admission policy for 2021 entry but then wish to revert to their previous policy for 2022, they must consult on it for any 6 weeks between 1 October 2020 and 31 January 2021, in accordance with the provisions set out in paragraphs 1.42-1.49 of the Code.

2. DECISION

2.1 It is the decision of the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Education, that where a child has taken the entrance test for a Grammar School, but failed to achieve the qualifying pass mark for consideration, parents/carers will now be permitted to amend their child's application until 10 December 2020, subject to the following conditions:

- (1) The parent/carer has submitted a valid application for a grammar school (i.e. applied to the school and sat the test);
- (2) The grammar school is listed on the child's "on time" application to Brighter Futures for Children School Admissions team;
- (3) The parent/carer has listed four preferences on their "on time" application.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 In July 2020, the School Admissions team at Brighter Futures for Children reviewed the new guidance and, in line with many neighbouring local authorities, took the view not to amend our process or policy.

3.2 However, in mid-October some authorities decided to amend their position. In view of this, the School Admissions Manager sought legal advice from RBC. The RBC Legal team advised that the wording in the guidance applies only to Grammar School entrants as this is the entire basis of the guidance. The advice confirmed that action needed to be taken in terms of the existing arrangements for the admission to grammar schools only.

3.3 For the September 2021 entry to secondary school, there are approximately 2025 residents who could apply for a place. As of 15 October, 946 have made an application - of these 200 have requested as grammar school place. The majority are for Kendrick and Reading schools; however, some have requested grammar schools outside Reading, particularly Slough (who have extended the deadline to express a preference to 10 December 2020).

3.4 At present, all applications must be submitted to the local authority by 31 October 2020. However, within the local authority's policy, there is the ability to extend the deadline for applications in specific circumstances. Given the government guidance, legal advice and the position of our neighbouring authorities, I propose using this element of the policy to extend the deadline for submission of admission applications for those to express a preference for a grammar school, and to allow the outcome of the entrance exam to be known before the preferences are finally taken into account.

3.5 All those who submit an application for any secondary school (including grammar schools) will be informed of their school allocation on National Offer Day on 1 March 2021.

3.6 I am therefore requesting that in light of the exceptional circumstances faced by this group of children, we make the following changes to our admissions process for this year only:

3.7 Where a child has taken the entrance test for a grammar school, but failed to achieve the qualifying pass mark for consideration, parents/carers will now be permitted to amend their child's application until 10 December 2020. Amendments will only be accepted in cases where all the following conditions are met:

- The parent/carer has submitted a valid application for a grammar school (i.e. applied to the school and sat the test).
- The grammar school is listed on the child's "on time" application to Brighter Futures for Children School Admissions team.
- The parent/carer has listed four preferences on their "on time" application.

3.8 For every grammar school preference removed, a new preference may be added. The new preference will be added at the bottom (i.e. as the last preference) with any remaining preferences moving up to replace the grammar school preference(s) removed. Where more than one grammar school preference is removed, the parent/carer will indicate the order in which the replacement preferences are to be added. Again, the new preferences will be added beneath any remaining preferences from the "on time" application.

3.9 We believe there will be no parental advantage or disadvantage by this action. As we already allow some changes within our co-ordinated scheme this proposal will fall within that and therefore this is not a varied admissions arrangement and we will not need to amend our online prospectus or consult to revert the policy back as referred to in the Government guidance (paragraphs 6, 46 and 47 referred to above).

3.10 This would bring Reading's position in line with neighbouring local authorities as given below:

- Wokingham is allowing parents only to change the order of their preferences up until 10 December;
- West Berkshire is now allowing parents to change their preference up until 31 December;
- Oxfordshire is not making any amendments at the moment, this position may change; and,
- Slough is allowing parents to change or amend their preferences up until 10 December.

4. THE DECISION

4.1 Where a child has taken the entrance test for a Grammar School, but failed to achieve the qualifying pass mark for consideration, parents/carers will now be permitted to amend their child's application until 10 December 2020. Amendments will only be accepted in cases where all the following conditions are met:

- The parent/carer has submitted a valid application for a grammar school (i.e. applied to the school and sat the test).
- The grammar school is listed on the child's "on time" application to Brighter Futures for Children School Admissions team.
- The parent/carer has listed four preferences on their "on time" application.

4.2 Failure to act could expose the local authority to legal challenge, alongside additional complaints.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 This report meets the Council’s strategic aim of providing the best start in life through education, early help and healthy living by ensuring that young people sitting the selection exam for grammar schools are still able to exercise their right to express a preference for a secondary school place.

5.2 It further contributes to the aim of establishing Reading as a learning city and a stimulating and rewarding place to live and visit.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The decision does not impact directly on the Council’s climate change strategy.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 Both Reading grammar schools, Kendrick and Reading schools, are aware of the proposal. In addition, we have had a high number of enquiries from parents about our current position. We have communications ready to send to parents once the decision is made alongside a public statement for our website.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 An equality impact assessment is not relevant to this decision.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 This decision is made on the basis of the coronavirus-covid-19 - assessment processes for selective school admissions issued by the Government in July 2020.

9.2 Local authorities have a duty under section 86(1A) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 to ‘provide advice and assistance to parents of children in the area of the authority in connection with [their] preferences’. Where grammar school assessment results will not be provided until after 31 October, DFE recommend that local authorities advise parents to use their final preference(s) for a local non-selective school(s). This will improve the chances of a child being allocated a preferred school if he or she does not demonstrate sufficiently high academic ability in the assessment process for a grammar school. DFE strongly advised local authorities both to offer an additional preference (where possible) and to advise parents to use any additional preference for a local non-selective school, parents are free to use an extra preference in any way they see fit.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There will be no additional costs to this decision.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None