

CABINET – 19 NOVEMBER 2019

ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

1. Question from Councillor Richard Webber to Councillor Lindsay-Gale

“Some Service families moving into Oxfordshire mid-year are experiencing difficulties in finding school places. As all but one of the secondary schools in Oxfordshire are academies and control their own in-year admissions policies will the Cabinet Member agree to write to the Secretary of State for Education asking for control of in-year admissions.”

Answer

Oxfordshire is fully committed to supporting Service families and it is deeply concerning that some Service families have experienced difficulties in finding a school place for their children. However, problems associated with in-year admissions are not confined to Service families.

Currently all mainstream state funded schools are required to take part in the coordinated admissions system for the main entry points for primary and infant schools, junior schools and transfer from primary to secondary school. It would be sensible to require studio schools and university technical colleges to take part in a coordination of admissions scheme for the main point of entry. Local authorities are responsible for coordinating admissions and in Oxfordshire the scheme has worked well with a high proportion of children receiving first preference schools.

Most schools in Oxfordshire are part of the in-year admissions scheme but it would be helpful if all schools were required to take part in a coordinated admissions scheme for in-year applicants. In-year schemes should have timescales that apply to all local authorities and all admission authorities.

Therefore, I would be happy to write to the Secretary of State to ask for changes to the School Admissions Code 2014 to ensure that all admissions to mainstream schools are included in coordinated admissions arrangements for which local authorities are responsible. Primary legislation may be necessary to enable changes of this kind and I would support such a step to achieve a more efficient and fairer system.

There are arrangements in place to identify schools for hard to place children, but they can involve long delays due to the need to ask the Secretary of State to direct admission. This is against the interests of these vulnerable children and it would be helpful if local authorities responsible for coordination of admissions also had the legal right to direct admission when no school is willing to offer a child a school place. Therefore, I am also willing to write to the Secretary of State to request changes to primary legislation that would invest local authorities with the power to direct admission of hard to place children.

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