

Pre-consultation survey

We are carrying out a survey to ask people what admissions criteria (conditions) we should use for deciding whether to offer children a place in community and voluntary-controlled schools (admissions conditions).

Other schools such as foundation and voluntary-aided (church) schools may have different admissions conditions.

Statements 1 to 9 on the survey form show some of the admissions conditions you may feel are important to you.

We also want your opinion on the way we offer school places. There are two ways we could do this.

1 The first-preference-first system

Some local education authorities (LEAs) and admission forums have agreed to use a first-preference-first system. Under this system, parents fill in an application form giving at least three schools in order of preference. The LEA gives this information to schools. Each school then prepares a list of the children it wants to offer places to using its own conditions, including giving priority to parents who listed it as their first preference. Each school gives its list to the LEA who will tell parents if their child has a place at a school. If a child does not get a place at the school parents gave as their first preference, the LEA will consider the second-preference school and so on until a school offers the child a place.

The advantage of the first-preference-first system is that nearly all schools in Surrey have used it for some time and most parents understand it. Also, schools know how many parents have them as their first preference. In the first-preference-first system, the parents' level of commitment to a particular school is important. If they have put a school as their first preference on the application form, and their child meets that school's conditions, the child will take priority over another child whose parents have put the school down as their second preference. In this case, putting the school as a first preference is an advantage.

The disadvantage of the first-preference-first system is that if a child doesn't get a place at the school parents chose as a first preference, they may not get a place in the second-preference school because that school will already have filled up with children who listed it as their first preference. So a child will be offered a place in a third-preference school or a school parents had not listed at all. Parents have to decide whether to list preferences honestly, or use preferences tactically.

Under the present system based on the last three years' figures, between 85% and 89% of parents were offered their first-preference school but between 11% and 15% were not.

Here is an example of how the first-preference-first system could work for a family whose preferences are not met.

- 1 School A (first preference): Daniel is ranked 265th on the school's list, and the 240 places are filled by others with higher priority. Daniel is not offered a place at this school.
- 2 School B (second preference): Daniel is ranked 320th on the school's list because he comes after all the first preferences and the second preferences with higher priority. Daniel is not offered a place at this school.

- 3 School C (third preference): Daniel is ranked 503rd on the school's list because he comes after all the first and all the second preferences, even though he is high on the third-preference priority list.**

As Daniel is not offered a place at his first-preference school, he misses out on a place at all three of his preferred schools. He is offered a place at school D (which was not listed as a preference on his form) as it is the next nearest school with places.

2 The equal ranking system

Other LEAs and admission forums have chosen an equal-ranking system. Under this scheme, parents list their first three preferences on the application form. The LEA shares the information with schools, but does not tell the schools what preference is given to each school. In other words, at that stage, the preferences are given equal weight. The schools make their choices in line with their published admission conditions (but cannot give priority to parents who have put them as their first preference) and the LEA send the lists of the children they can offer places to. If more than one school can offer a child a place, the LEA will use the parents' list of preferences to offer the highest-ranked available place.

The advantage of the equal-ranking system is that parents have a better chance of getting a place for their child at one of their preferred schools. Also, parents can give preferences in the real order they want them.

The disadvantage of the equal-preference system is that a parent or child's level of commitment to a particular school will not affect the decision.

Here is an example of how the equal-ranking system could work for a family.

- 1 School A (first preference): Daniel is ranked 465th on the school's list, and the 240 places are filled by others with higher priority.**
- 2 School B (second preference): Daniel comes 120th in the priority order and there are 240 places. Daniel could have a place at this school.**
- 3 School C (third preference): Daniel comes 226th in the priority order and there are 228 places. Daniel could have a place at this school.**

The LEA offers Daniel a place at school B as it is the highest-ranking school that can offer him a place.

- 3 As you can see there are advantages and disadvantages to both systems. Neither system is perfect for all parents.**

We want to find out which system you would prefer. We will be introducing a structured exercise, with focus groups, interviews and questionnaires, in which parents, headteachers, school staff and school governors can give us their opinions.

Statements 10 and 11 on the survey form ask you to choose which system you prefer.

Your responses are very important, as they may help to shape any future policy change.

We are asking the following groups of people to take part in the survey. Please tick a box to say which group applies to you.

- 1 Parent 2 Headteacher
 3 School governor 4 Other

Please give details


Please tick the appropriate age ranges of your children. (You can tick more than one box.)

- pre-school 4 to 7 4 to 11 7 to 11 11 to 16
 16 or over

Please tell us which borough or district you live in.

Please tell us which borough or district you work in or are a school governor in (if different from above).

Statement		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	Please tick only one box for each statement.					
1	The most important thing in deciding whether your child can go to a particular school is whether they have a brother or sister already there, no matter where they live. (This is the existing policy.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Only brothers and sisters living near the school should be a priority for admissions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Each school should have a fixed catchment area.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	We should keep the flexible catchment areas which change from year to year. (This is the existing policy.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	People living in the catchment area (whether flexible or fixed) should be given priority over children with brothers or sisters at the school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	If your child goes to a particular primary, infant or junior school, he or she should be given priority to a linked junior or secondary school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Children should be able to go to their nearest school measured by walking distance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Please tick only one box for each statement.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
8	Children should be able to go to their nearest school measured by a straight-line distance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Catchment areas should take account of how easy it is for your child to get to school using public transport or walking or cycling routes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Surrey should keep a (first-preference-first system (see paragraph 1 of the notes).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	Surrey should introduce an equal-ranking system (see paragraph 2 of the notes).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	Do you think there are any other conditions we should use for school admissions?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	
If 'Yes', please list them. <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>						
13	Do you have any other comments or suggestions?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	
If 'Yes', please give them below. <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>						
<p>Thank you for taking the time to fill in this survey. Please return it to us by Friday 11 February 2005. Post it to:</p> <p>Linda Jacks Admissions and Transport Team SW Area Office Grosvenor House London Square Cross Lanes Guildford GU1 1FA. Or e-mail it to linda.jacks@surreycc.gov.uk.</p> <div style="text-align: right;">  <p>Clarity approved by Plain English Campaign</p> </div>						