



SIR PAUL BERESFORD, M.P.
Member of Parliament for Mole Valley

Mr. and Mrs. P. Stroud,
57 Nightingale Crescent,
West Horsley,
KT24 6PD

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON, SW1A 0AA

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Dear Mr. and Mrs. Stroud,

Thank you for your letter relating to children from Horsley who applied for but failed to get entry into Howard of Effingham School for the next academic year. Like you I am very concerned at what appears to be a fairly arbitrary redrawing of the boundaries which have in effect cut out the opportunity for children in the Horsleys to attend this very popular school. I was made aware of the problem last Thursday afternoon and attempted to gain some details on the background from Surrey County Council.

As I am sure you are aware, this is a LEA matter over which I have virtually no influence. Nevertheless I had a telephone discussion with C.Cllr Bill Barker on Saturday prior to his going to a meeting with parents the following day.

Howard of Effingham is a victim of its own success. It is one of the best LEA schools in my constituency, if not Surrey. As a consequence every year a considerable number of children apply for, but do not obtain, entry to the school. This year I understand there have been 532 equal-preference applications for 240 places. Obviously selection in some way is a necessity. This means a large number of very disappointed children who will be allocated places to schools of their second, third, fourth choice school, or even to a school that was not chosen. Some of these schools, such as Therfield, are on a par academically but of course this immediately introduces transport problems and a breakup of the community associated with the Raleigh School and the Horsleys. I am not as well aware of the merits of the schools outside my constituency to which some children are being directed.

The change that appears to have caused the difficulty is that this year all preferences have been taken into account, whether first, second, or third choice, unlike previous years when the first choice cases were considered at least initially. Thinking behind this is that the children are therefore considered on an "equal preference" basis. I find this decision quite extraordinary as it presumably means a considerable number of the 532 "preferences" are for children who did not place Howard of Effingham as their first choice.

Children are then chosen according to "priority needs" which are:-

1. Children in care.
2. Exceptional arrangements - such as medical.
3. Siblings already at Howard of Effingham.
4. Children for whom the school is the nearest from the permanent home. Interestingly, and more satisfactorily, this is no longer measured "as the crow flies" but the distance if walking.



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I am unsure as to whether this new approach was a decision of the LEA or as a result of the directive from the Government. In any event it seems to me that this is flawed in that first preferences should be given a very high priority as indeed should the community links.

The obvious answer, and one I sought to use when a local government Leader, was for expansion of popular and successful schools. Of course at that stage we had a Conservative Government which did not have such direct control of schools as currently prevails under this Labour Government.

I would imagine all parents whose children failed to get into Howard of Effingham have plans to appeal. Regretfully, only a few appeals are allowed. The other but somewhat doubtful possibility is that every child turned down for Howard of Effingham as their first choice is automatically placed on a waiting list for vacancies. These do occur but are not numerous.

From my past experience appeals need to have some special reason to override the original decision. C.Cllr Bill Barker may be able to help here but it would be best to see if any of the four "priority needs" above may apply. I regret to say that the chances of success on appeal are slim if for no other reason than Howard of Effingham has, as I am sure you will understand, a finite size.

I am sending a copy of this letter and your letter to C.Cllr Bill Barker who I know is taking up this case with his usual considerable vigour. In addition I will write to C.Cllr Andrew Crisp, Executive Member responsible for schools and to C.Cllr Nick Skellett, Surrey County Council Leader, promoting a reconsideration on the grounds that the Raleigh School and West Horsley community, school level has long-term close links with the Howard of Effingham. I realise that this is a "long shot", particularly for this year but certainly worth a try. It would be helpful if you and all other affected parents wrote to both County Councillors specifically putting your own case as well as the community link. Please copy your letter to C.Cllr Barker for his information. If enough parents write this may help C.Cllr Bill Barker in his battle on your behalf. It would also help if the Headteacher of the Raleigh School wrote supporting the school and community links.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Beresford
Member of Parliament for Mole Valley

Encl.