



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

Miss C. Pears,
The Raleigh School,
Northcote Crescent,
Northcote Road,
West Horsley,
KT24 6LX

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON, SW1A 0AA

22 March 2007

Dear Charlotte,,

Thank you for your letter relating to Horsley children affected by Surrey County Council's policy on education.

Sadly some parents are unaware that this is a Surrey County Council matter using a Government recommended formula. This formula is expected to be forced on all LEAs next year. **It is not a decision made by me or indeed any Surrey MP.** Even so, like you, I am very concerned at the effect that this new system has had; that it has apparently cut out the opportunity for children in the Horsleys to attend this very popular school.

I had a discussion with C.Cllr Bill Barker on the Saturday prior to his going to a meeting with parents the following day and then on to the SCC Executive Meeting a few days afterwards. I have also met a delegation from the Raleigh parents.

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 other schools. 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 association with the Howard.

The Government recommended 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. The 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" may be 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.

I am unsure as to whether this new approach was a decision of the LEA or under pressure from the Government as a result of a directive from the Government to use the formula early. 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. 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. I understand from the delegation I met that there may be room for a number of children and there is a feeling that the LEA have failed to take into account a pathway that shortens the "to school walking distance".

I am sending a copy of this letter to C.Cllr Bill Barker who I know has taken and is taking up the case with his usual considerable vigour. In addition, I have written to C.Cllr Andrew Crisp, Executive Member responsible for schools and to C.Cllr Nick Skellett, Surrey County Council Leader. I have asked for a copy of the report the SCC Executive called for in response to C.Cllr Bill Barker's presentation to their last meeting. I have also asked to be kept up to date on progress over attempts to resolve the issue. Finally, I have asked to help them if as a result of this year's application of the formula they and I need to put pressure on Education Ministers. I believe that some flexibility is required for LEAs to recognise first preferences first, community links and that semi rural and rural areas are different from the inner cities that are these Ministers' constituencies.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Beresford
Member of Parliament for Mole Valley