

# **BRIEFING PAPER FOR PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR SCHOOLS**

DATE: 11 June 2015

## **BY THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS**

### **PROPOSED ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR NOTTINGHAM CITY COMMUNITY SCHOOLS 2017/18**

#### **Legal Implications**

##### **Consultation**

Section 88C(1) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (“SSFA”), states that the admission authority for a maintained school in England must, before the beginning of each school year, determine in accordance with this section of the SSFA the admission arrangements which are to apply for that year. Section 88C(2) of the SSFA requires the admission authority to carry out such consultation beforehand about the proposed arrangements as may be prescribed.

The relevant regulations under section 88C(2) of the SSFA are the School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended) (“the Admission Arrangements Regulations”).

Regulations 14 and 15 deserve special attention here. They state the following:-

#### **Matters about which consultation is not required**

##### **14**

(1) Subject to paragraph (2) an admission authority are not required to consult about a proposal to increase or keep the same admission number in any consultation on admission arrangements under section 88C(2) for the school year 2013–2014 or any subsequent years.

(2) Where the admission authority for a community or voluntary controlled school are the local authority they must consult the governing body of the school if they propose to increase or keep the same admission number.

#### **Circumstances where consultation on admission arrangements is not required**

##### **15**

(1) This regulation prescribes for the purposes of section 88C(2) the circumstances in which an admission authority are not required to consult on their proposed admission arrangements.

(2) Subject to paragraphs (3) and (4) an admission authority are not required to consult on their proposed admission arrangements for the school year 2013–2014 and any subsequent admission year where they consulted on their proposed admission arrangements in accordance with section 88C(2) in any of the six preceding determination years, and the proposed arrangements are the same as those determined following the last such consultation.

(3) The proposed arrangements are treated as the same for the purpose of paragraph (2) if the only change made to the proposed admission arrangements is one or more of the following changes—

(a) an increase to the admission number in accordance with regulation 14, or

(b) a change made to comply with any mandatory requirement in the School Admissions Code or these Regulations.

(4) A consultation required under regulation 14(2) is not to be regarded as a consultation for the purpose of calculating whether an admission authority have consulted in any of the six preceding determination years in paragraph (2).

It is noted that this report refers to the following points:-

- A recommendation that the Portfolio Holder approves that Nottingham City Council's admission arrangements determined for the 2016/17 school year, which were approved by Nottingham City Council's Executive Board on 17 March 2015, be maintained for the 2017/18 school year with no change.
- Non-statutory guidance published by the Department for Education ("DfE") in May 2014 stated that the DfE had adopted a wider interpretation of the then School Admissions Code (2012) in respect of previously Looked After Children. As a consequence of this the DfE expected admission authorities to give highest priority to all children adopted from care and not just those adopted from care under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 as set out in the then statutory School Admissions Code (2012).
- On 19 December 2014, the Secretary of State via the DfE issued a new School Admissions Code. This new School Admissions Code states at paragraph 1.7 that "...the highest priority **must** be given, unless otherwise provided in this Code, to looked after children and all previously looked after children. Previously looked after children are children who were looked after, but ceased to be so because they were adopted [i.e. children who were adopted under the Adoption Act 1976 and children who were adopted under the Adoption and Children Act 2002] (or became subject to a child arrangements order or special guardianship order). Further references to previously looked after children in this Code means such children who were adopted (or subject to child arrangements orders or special guardianship orders) immediately following having been looked after..."
- In addition, the new School Admissions Code states at paragraph 2.17: "Admission authorities **must** make clear in their admission arrangements the process for requesting admission out of the normal age group."
- Therefore, Nottingham City Council ("NCC") proposed only to amend the admission arrangements determined for the 2015/2016 school year to take

account of the above two changes in the new School Admissions Code – otherwise NCC’s proposed admission arrangements for the 2016/2017 school year would remain as before. NCC had consulted on the admission arrangements for the 2015/2016 school year from 2 December 2013 to 31 January 2014. Following that consultation, on 20 March 2014 NCC’s Executive Board had determined to implement those admission arrangements.

- From 3 November 2014 to 2 January 2015, NCC conducted consultation on the proposed admission arrangements for the 2016/2017 school year with only one response received from Nottinghamshire County Council, which was largely in the nature of a request for clarification.
- On 17 March 2015, NCC’s Executive Board approved the admission arrangements for the 2016/2017 school year.

In view of the above, NCC’s legal requirement to consult on its proposed admission arrangements for the 2016/2017 school year was technically limited. As the admission authority for the community schools it maintains, NCC was only required under regulation 14 of the Admission Arrangements Regulations to consult the governing bodies of those community schools on any proposal to increase or keep the same admission numbers. Beyond that, as NCC had consulted on its admission arrangements in accordance with section 88(C)(2) of the SSFA in the preceding six determination years and the proposed admission arrangements for the 2016/2017 school year were unchanged with the exception of changes to comply with any mandatory requirement in the School Admissions Code, by virtue of regulation 15 of the Admission Arrangements Regulations NCC was not required to consult on them.

The fact NCC did consult on its proposed admission arrangements for the 2016/2017 school year did no harm, however, and was undoubtedly beneficial in informing interested parties of NCC’s intentions. NCC would also appear to have complied with the Admission Arrangements Regulations in terms of who to consult (regulation 12), the matters to which any consultation must relate (regulation 13) and the manner of consultation (regulation 16).

Therefore, since NCC now proposes to maintain the admission arrangements for the 2016/2017 school year for the 2017/2018 school year, NCC is not required to consult under the Admission Arrangements Regulations, other than as the admission authority of community schools NCC must consult with the governing bodies of each of those schools about the consequent proposal to keep their admission numbers as they are.

Regulation 17 of the Admission Arrangements Regulations states the following:-

- (2) For the school year 2017-2018 and every subsequent school year, every admission authority must –
  - (a) carry out any consultation required by section 88C [of the SSFA] and these Regulations between 1<sup>st</sup> October and 31<sup>st</sup> January in the determination year;

- (b) allow consultees at least six weeks to respond; and
- (c) determine their admission arrangements on or before 28<sup>th</sup> February in the determination year.

Given NCC is not required to consult on the proposed admission arrangements for the school year 2017-2018, only regulation 17(2)(c) of the Admission Arrangements Regulations is relevant, which requires NCC to determine its admission arrangements on or before 28<sup>th</sup> February in the determination year. Regulation 2 of the Admission Arrangements Regulations states:-

“determination year”, in relation to the proposed admission arrangements for a school, means the school year beginning two years before the school year to which the arrangements relate;

Therefore, in relation to the proposed admission arrangements for the 2017-2018 school year, the determination year is the school year 2015-2016, so NCC must determine its admission arrangements for the 2017-2018 school year on or before 28 February 2016.

#### The proposed admission arrangements

The proposed admission arrangements generally accord with education law and guidance.

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