

25th February 2011

Martin West
Place Planning & Provision
Children & Young People's Directorate
Grosvenor House
Runcorn
WA7 2WD.

Dear Martin,

ADMISSIONS CONSULTATION – WIDNES ZONING/CATCHMENT

I am writing with regard to the above consultation. As a matter of principle, the Governing Body of Wade Deacon High School believes in the commitment to give all parents the right to choose a school for their child. The DFE Admissions Code aims to create a system where all parents feel that they have the same opportunities to apply for the schools they want for their child. An admissions authority has a duty to increase opportunities for parental choice; the concept of zoning simply serves to go against the spirit of the code.

School Governing Bodies have a duty to ensure when considering admissions policies/criteria, that practices do not disadvantage certain social groups or discourage some groups of parents from seeking a place at a school for their child.

Admission authorities for all schools must act upon any information that suggests that a school's or admission authority's policies or practices appear to be unfairly disadvantaging one group of children compared to another. The concept of a zoning arrangement in Widnes and an open parental choice in Runcorn results in non equitable system operating in Halton. The Governing Body acknowledges the needs of pupils residing in the Eastern side of Widnes. However, it must also consider the pupils who reside in the West of Widnes who would have traditionally had a high probability of obtaining a place at Wade Deacon High School prior to the introduction of zoning.

The zoning map can suggest to parents that a catchment zone exists within Widnes and does not demonstrate clearly to parents that they still have the right to express a preference for a high school of their choice.

As you will be aware the concept of catchment zones is seriously flawed; the Rotherham Judgment confirms that there is nothing unlawful in the principle of admission authorities operating catchment areas as part of their over-subscription criteria and thereby giving priority to local children whose parents have expressed a preference for the school. The advice then gives clear warnings that admission authorities must not guarantee places to parents in a local catchment area, in case the pattern of preferences expressed does not allow this guarantee to be met. In drawing up catchment areas, admission authorities should ensure that they reflect the diversity of the community served by the school and must not exclude particular housing estates or addresses in a way that might disadvantage particular social groups.

The Governing Body propose that the zoning system be removed and that the preference system as previously operated in Widnes and currently operated in Runcorn be expanded to cover all Halton High Schools with the application of the following criteria in the event of oversubscription:

1. Children in Public Care – children who are subject to a care order, or are accommodated by the Local Authority
2. Siblings – pupils with elder brothers or sisters including half brothers and sisters and unrelated children living together as part of the same household, already attending the school and expected to continue in the following year
3. Pupils living nearest to the school measured using an Ordnance Survey address-point system which measures straight line distances in metres from the address point of the school to the address point of the place of child's permanent residence of the pupil.

Yours sincerely

Governing Body and Senior Leadership of Wade Deacon High School