

Consultation on proposed change to secondary school admission arrangements 2022/2023

The North East Learning Trust is consulting on a proposal to change the oversubscription criteria for admission to Easington Academy, Hermitage Academy, Teesdale School and Sixth Form and The Academy at Shotton Hall from 2022/2023.

The consultation will run from 20 October 2020 until 18 December 2020. This report explains why we are consulting on the proposed change and explains how you can let the Trust know your views.

Background

The current oversubscription criteria for admission to the Trust's secondary schools within County Durham were introduced in 2018/2019 and are as follows.

Current oversubscription criteria for the Trust's Secondary Academies in County Durham

When there are more requests for places than those available, the criteria used to allocate places strictly in order of priority, are as follows:

1. Children who are 'looked after' or a child who was previously looked after but immediately after being looked after became subject to an adoption, residence/child arrangement, or special guardianship order*.

A looked after child is a child who is, at the time of making an application to a school, (a) in the care of a local authority, or (b) being provided with accommodation by a local authority in the exercise of their social services functions (see the definition in section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989).

2. Children who appear to the Admissions Authority to have been in state care outside of England and ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted.

A child is regarded as having been in state care in a place outside of England if they were accommodated by a public authority, a religious organisation or any other provider of care whose sole purpose is to benefit society.

3. Medical Reasons

Children with very exceptional medical factors directly related to school placement.

4. Sibling Links

Children who have a sibling already attending the school and who is expected to be on roll at the school at the time of admission.

5. Children of staff employed at the academy

Children of staff employed at the Academy for two or more years at the time at which the application for admission is made and/or the member of staff has

been recruited to fill a post where there is a demonstrable skill shortage, and/or the member of staff has relocated.

6. Applicants to their nearest School

Those children who have applied for a place at the nearest school to their home address measured by the shortest walking route.

7. All other applicants

Tiebreaker

Where the school is oversubscribed within any of the above categories the following tiebreakers will be applied:

(a) For those children who have applied for a place at the nearest school to their home address (category 5), priority will be given to those who would otherwise have to travel the furthest distance to the next nearest school.

(b) For other children (category 6), priority will be given to those children who live nearest to the school applied for. Otherwise if only one final place can be offered and two applicants live equidistant from the school, the LA's system of random allocation will apply.

Proposed change

The sixth criterion, "Applicants to their nearest School. Those children who have applied for a place at the nearest school to their home address measured by the shortest walking route." If some children considered within this criterion cannot get a place at the preferred school, the tiebreaker is currently used "priority will be given to those who would otherwise have to travel the furthest distance to the next nearest school".

In recent years, this has resulted in some pupils who live closer to the nearest school than others, not getting a place. This is because other pupils would have to travel further to the next nearest school, therefore they would have priority, even though they live further away from their nearest school.

To avoid this situation occurring in the future, it is proposed to amend the tiebreaker to **"priority will be given to those living closest to the nearest school measured by the shortest walking route"**.

Please note that those children with Education Health and Care Plans are subject to a different process for admission to school. This proposed change therefore has no impact on them.

The Trust consultation is running alongside Durham County Council's consultation.

The tiebreaker was originally included so that those pupils living in remote rural areas of the county were not put at a disadvantage by potentially having to travel a considerable distance, if they could not get a place at their nearest school. However,

this situation has not happened, and pupil projections indicate that secondary schools in rural areas of the county, will have places available in the future. There are, however, areas of the county which are heavily populated where the tiebreaker resulted in some pupils who live closer to the nearest school than others, not getting a place. This is because other pupils would have to travel further to the next nearest school, therefore they would have priority even though they live further away from the nearest school.

We believe this change will be a fairer, more clearly understood tiebreaker that gives priority to those pupils who live closest to their nearest school rather than to those who have furthest to travel to the next nearest school.

The Trust's admission arrangements, which include the oversubscription criteria, have already been published for the academic year 2021/2022 therefore the earliest date the proposed change could be introduced is for the academic year 2022/2023.

The North East Learning Trust welcome comments on the proposal to change the oversubscription criteria and responses to the consultation can be sent by email to joanne.barker@nelt.co.uk or by post to Joanne Barker, Governance Manager, Traynor House, Traynor Way, Whitehouse Business Park, Peterlee, SR8 2RU. The deadline for responses is 12noon on Friday 18 December 2020.