

FAIR ACCESS PROTOCOL

CONCEPT:

The School Admissions Code determines that each local authority must have a fair access protocol. This is to ensure that outside the normal admissions round unplaced children, especially the most vulnerable, are offered a school place as quickly as possible.

The weekly Fair Access Panel (FAP) meetings consider those cases that are on-going and new Hard to Place (HTP) cases. The Panel will also consider cases referred back to the panel by schools, for review after an allocation has been made. This will include where schools have further information on a pupil that leads them to believe that the pupil is potentially HTP. In such cases the school will refer the case back to the FAP together with the evidence they have that requires a further consideration of the case.

There is an established Fair Access and Children Missing in Education Panel (FACME) should there be a requirement to escalate cases not resolved at FAP. One course of action open to this panel is to instigate direction proceedings to the Education Funding Agency / Secretary of State.

ACTIVITY:

The FAP will address the following issues:

- casual pupil mobility
- hard-to-place (HTP) pupils
- appropriate management of transfers

Membership of the panel will include headteacher consultants from the secondary and primary phases, designated representatives from each phase and officers from the school admissions team.

The panel uses a common application form to:

- meet legal requirements in respect of parental preference and request for school transfer.
- assess the application against published admission arrangements for all schools.
- monitor the number of transfers between schools.

The operation of the panel ensures that:

- all transfer requests are date-logged on the common transfer form by LA admissions staff.
- the LA database is used to acquire any available school history.
- preferred schools are logged in preference order and home-school distances calculated.
- the number on roll (as notified weekly by each school) is compared with admission limits.
- pupil places are available.

CO-ORDINATION:

- The interests of schools will be represented on the panel as described below.
- The Panel will be chaired by the Service Manager – School Organisation and Support (or their representative).
- The panel will meet every week to consider all HTP cases (both new and on-going).
- The panel will make the decision about whether or not any individual child should be designated as HTP
- Where possible, parental preference will be met, with panel recommendations being made to the admitting authority
- Alternatively, the LA Admissions Team will write to advise the parent that the preference cannot be met and the right of appeal offered accordingly.
- Where a child does not have a school place (i.e. following a permanent exclusion or move into the City) and a preference cannot be met then the nearest school with places available will be allocated. For pupils that are not HTP, the school allocated will be within a 'reasonable distance' as specified by government guidelines. This is up to 2 miles for a child aged under 8, and up to 3 miles for a child aged 8 and over.
- For pupils that are HTP, places will be allocated in accordance with HTP availability.
- For children that move into Wolverhampton outside of the normal admissions round, the FAP will aim to ensure siblings are allocated to the same school. Regard will be given to place availability in all of the year groups required by the siblings. In some instances this could mean that allocations will be made even if the school has reached their PAN in a respective year group. By allocating siblings to the same school this will help negate any issues regarding attendance and lateness that results in an extra strain on resources for schools and parents.
- A copy letter will be sent to the receiving school advising of the allocation/recommendation and a date by which the child should be admitted.

- The panel can recommend that an Action Planning Meeting (APM) takes place (organised by the receiving school) to assess in more depth the needs of the child concerned prior to a final decision on placement being made.
- Supplementary information should be provided by the Headteacher of the child's current school where such an APM is deemed necessary.
- Where the application is for a pupil in a Wolverhampton school, Headteachers must complete section 8 of the common application form as the details disclosed will aid the identification of potential Hard to Place pupils. It also enables partnership working and an honest and open approach to transfers.

PANEL MEMBERSHIP:

The panel is Chaired by the Service Manager – School Places and Transport (or his representative)

ConnectEd Membership:

Primary Headteachers Consultant
Secondary Headteachers Consultant

School Membership:

Primary phase:

One community/VC school representative, one own admitting authority representative (representative to change each half term)

Secondary phase:

One representative (representative to change each half term)

In all cases the Headteacher is the representative, although in practice either a deputy head or an assistant head will attend the meetings of the panel on their behalf.

LA Membership:

Admissions and Appeals Manager or Officer

EXTENDED PANEL MEMBERSHIP:

When there is a professional view that a pupil is not ready for mainstream school, an extended version of the Fair Access Panel will be convened. In addition to the Fair Access Panel membership, the Vulnerable Young Persons Team Manager (or their representative) and a Local Authority Educational Psychologist will attend.

The panel will meet to discuss the information pertaining to the pupil that has been collated by professionals and will determine the most suitable educational provision as a result.

HARD-TO-PLACE (HTP) CRITERIA

Classification of pupils as HTP:

Typical indicators are likely to include one or more of the following (although the list is not exhaustive or prescriptive). It will include pupils

- who have been permanently excluded. (Significant “one-off” events that lead to a permanent exclusion may not necessarily mean that a pupil is designated HTP – the panel will determine whether or not the HTP designation should be applied in such cases).
- currently in Pupil Referral Units or other full time alternative provision.
- who have been out of school for a term or more, often because they have been withdrawn by a parent.
- from unsupportive family backgrounds
- with a history of violent or aggressive behaviour and/or those whose presence may put other pupils or staff at risk
- with a history of poor attendance, defined as less than 50% attendance during the previous half term, or with a history of having been out of school for a term or more from mainstream education.
- withdrawn from school by a family, following a fixed term exclusion, who are subsequently unable to find another school place
- with unsupportive family backgrounds, where a place has not been sought by the family
- known to the police or other agencies

Additional categories:

There are a number of categories, which although not by definition HTP, can prove difficult in a minority of cases. Where this is the case, the panel will determine that the pupil should be designated as HTP. Such cases may include

- **Looked After Children (LAC).** All schools should note that a LAC is a priority case for admission (overriding all other considerations including the PAN) whether or not they have been designated as HTP. A LAC must be admitted by the allocated school.
- Those living in Hostels/Havens
- Other vulnerable children including:
 - Children whose parents have been unable to find them a school place after moving to the area because of a shortage of spaces
 - Children of UK Service Personnel and other Crown Servants
 - Children of refugees and asylum seekers
 - Homeless children
 - Traveller children
 - Children who are carers
 - Children with special educational needs but without a statement
 - Children with disabilities or a medical condition

HTP AGREEMENT:

- In the secondary phase, schools have agreed that they will reserve **3** places above PAN in each of years 7,8,9 10 and 11 for HTP pupils. However, only when the numbers have been reached in all schools, they will have to be increased (one at a time) to accommodate the increased demand for HTP places. Schools will be informed when this has become necessary. The protocol will always keep 3 places as the aspirational limit. Avoiding the need to increase beyond three will always be a high priority for the LA and schools.
- In the primary phase, the panel will consider the PAN in the respective cohort, place availability and the circumstances of the pupil.
- Schools have agreed that they will do everything they can to avoid permanent exclusion
- Schools have agreed that where a pupil is transferring back to mainstream from any recognised Alternative Provision placement, they will be transferred as HTP pupils
- New Arrivals from overseas are to be allocated as any other pupil arriving new into the City. They will only be allocated HTP status if they meet the criteria described in this protocol
- Schools have agreed to do everything they can to keep challenging pupils on their roll, particularly in Key Stage 4, using permanent exclusion as a last resort only when all other strategies to modify behaviour have been exhausted
- Schools have agreed that any school subject to special measures will only have to accept HTP pupils in exceptional circumstances.