

PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION OF pe1486 QUESTIONS/ISSUES ARISING FROM COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Placing Requests

Local authorities require to deliver an education for all children within their schools. It is important that schools are part of and serve their local communities. It is also important that parents can choose to send their child to a school in another catchment area if they so wish. While it is important for siblings to attend the same school, we do not believe it should become a statutory right as this compromises the flexibility required for authorities to effectively manage their school provision and to ensure places for children who currently live within the catchment area.

Where parents make a placing request, the acceptance of this is dependent on:

1. Space being available; and
2. No additional costs being incurred.

While this informs choice on a year to year basis, it would not be possible to guarantee this for subsequent siblings. This is made clear to parents through our placing request procedures.

Normal intake to primary schools in the North Ayrshire Council area is on a once a year basis, at the start of the new session in August each year. All children due to start school in August should be registered in the catchment area primary school for the area in which they live before the end of the preceding January. Once registered, parents have the right to make a placing request for their child(ren) to be educated in a school other than the catchment area school. The closing date for August placing requests is 15th March.

After the closing date the class structure for each primary school is considered along with the maximum number of pupils that they can accommodate under current guidelines. Pupils registered who live within the catchment area are allocated a space first. If there is sufficient space to accommodate all placing requests then they will all be approved. If there are more placing requests than there are spaces available then priority will be given to:

- Those cases where medical grounds supported by the community medicine specialist, clearly indicate the benefit to the child attending the specified school;
- Thereafter to those children who have older brothers or sisters who are continuing their education in the school.

Where no priority in terms of the above are identified, the Council have agreed that the only reasonable solution is to draw lots. This is undertaken by a senior officer of the Education and Skills service in conjunction with a Councillor.

Class Sizes

This Council has a policy of maximum class sizes of 25 from P1-P3. Other class sizes are in line with legislative guidance.

The constraints on creating additional classes are mainly but not exclusively financial ones. Each additional class will automatically incur an additional cost of around £40,000 in terms of teaching costs. It may also be the case that creating an additional class will require a general purpose room, music or library to be converted for classroom use. This can impact on the overall educational experience of children in the school. It is neither cost effective nor in children's best interests to allow schools to grow in an unmanaged way by having an open ended approach to placing requests.

To reiterate, while we would always seek to meet parents' preferences in allowing siblings to attend the same school, this should not be at the expense of a broad and balanced education for other pupils or in extreme cases children who live in the catchment area being unable to access a place in their local school.