
NOTES FOR PARENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

The Education (NI) Order 1997 gives you, as a parent the right to express a preference as to the primary school which you wish your child to attend.

All parents are required to submit an application form for the admission of their child to a primary school in accordance with the arrangements set out below.

This booklet describes the arrangements which this Board has made to enable you to state your preferences and to seek a place for your child in your preferred schools.

2 CHILDREN TO WHOM THE ARRANGEMENTS APPLY

If your child falls into any of the following groups the regulations apply to him/her and you must follow the procedure set out below.

- (a) all children born on or between 2 July 2007 and 1 July 2008 - such children must begin their primary education from 1 September 2012 because by that date they will have reached COMPULSORY SCHOOL AGE.
- (b) any child born on or between 2 July 2008 and 31 August 2008 (i.e. an UNDERAGE CHILD) whose parents wish him/her to be considered for a place in a primary school from 1 September 2012 - parents should check with the principal of their primary school concerned to ensure that an application for an underage child can be considered. It should be noted not all schools have a policy of reception provision and in such cases where this provision exists, children of compulsory school age must be given priority. Parents of children in this category may wish to apply for a nursery place through the pre-school procedure.
- (c) all children who are now enrolled in P3 of an infant school and who must transfer to junior school at 1 September 2012 - must complete an internal application form so that such children can be considered for placement in a junior or primary school of the parents' preference.
- (d) priority will be given to children resident in Northern Ireland at the time of their proposed admission.

3 CHILDREN TO WHOM THESE ARRANGEMENTS DO NOT APPLY

- (a) If your child is at present enrolled in the reception class of a primary school you do not need to apply for a place in primary 1 of that school.
- (b) If you wish your child to attend the preparatory department of a grammar school you must apply for admission directly to that school.

4 HOW TO MAKE APPLICATION FOR ENROLMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

Application forms are available from any primary school, library in the Belfast board area or the board's website: www.belb.org.uk. Before completing the application form you should carefully read the notes of guidance on the reverse side of the application form and the information about schools and their admissions criteria contained in this booklet.

It is in your best interest to make sure that you supply all the information required on the application form eg. brothers/sisters attend/attended, close family relationships, religious affiliation etc. and in particular that you state at least **three** preferences.

If you have applied for admission directly to a preparatory department of a grammar school you may still express preferences for controlled, maintained and integrated primary schools on the board's application form. You should complete only **one** application form for your child and send it together with your child's birth certificate and any additional information, to the principal of your first preference school. The form must be returned no later than 12 noon on the 18 January 2012. As only one application form is permitted you should list the schools of your choice on this form in your order of preference.

You will appreciate that, while the Belfast Education and Library Board administers the open enrolment arrangements, it has no power to place your child in a particular primary school. The selection of children for enrolment is a matter for individual school Boards of Governors.

If you require any further information about school admissions you should contact the principal of your first preference school. A sample of the application form can be found on page 10 of this booklet.

5 CHANGE OF PREFERENCES

Apart from those necessitated by exceptional circumstances no changes of preference will be considered *punctual* if received after 12 noon on 18 January 2012. If you wish to change your preference you must withdraw the original application and then submit a new application. If this occurs after 12 noon on 18 January 2012 your "new" application will be treated as "late".

The final date by which the board will process any changes necessitated by exceptional circumstances eg change of address which necessitates a change of preference (which must be verified), any new applications/additional preferences/new information is 16 March 2012.

Parents should be aware that after 18 April 2012 a number of schools will have allocated all their places and can only give consideration to a change of preference in the event that a place becomes available. It is important that parents give very careful consideration to the stated order of their preferences and indicate any changes to the board by 12 noon on 18 January 2012 at the latest and also provide any additional relevant information by that date.

6 LATE APPLICATIONS

Late applications i.e. applications received in schools after 12 noon on 18 January 2012) will be dealt with separately and may only be considered for admission after all *punctual* applicants have been dealt with and vacancies still remain within the school's admissions number.

Where places subsequently become available in over-subscribed schools after Wednesday 18 April 2012, unsuccessful *punctual* applications/late applications and new applications will be considered on an equal basis and places allocated to the children who best satisfy the school's admissions criteria.

7 CONSIDERATION OF APPLICATIONS BY SCHOOLS

The Department of Education has fixed the maximum number of pupils which each school may admit into primary one, known as the school's admissions number.

Normally, if a school's admissions number is greater than the number of first preference applications which it receives; all such applicants will be offered places.

In the event of the number of first preference applications being greater than a school's admissions number the governors will apply the school's published admissions criteria to all such applicants to determine which children will be offered places up to the school's admission number. Responsibility for drawing up and applying a school's admissions criteria rests solely with its Board of Governors.

If your child is not accepted by your first preference school the application form and any documents attached will be sent to your second preference school. The process, already described, will be repeated until your child is placed. Places will be allocated to those who best meet the schools' admission criteria regardless of order of preference. If your child is not offered a place in any of the schools for which you have stated a preference, the Transfer/Open Enrolment Officer will ask you to state further preferences so that the procedure may continue until a place is found for your child.

In the case of junior schools the admissions number applies to primary 4 intake.

8 ASSISTANCE WITH TRAVELLING EXPENSES TO GRANT AIDED PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Transport assistance is provided in line with the policy laid down in the Department of Education Circular 1996/41.

The current policy for children starting a new school is that where there is a suitable school or schools within statutory walking distance from the parents' permanent home address, and a pupil attends a school outside statutory walking distance, transport assistance will be provided only where the pupil has sought and been unable to gain a place in **all** suitable schools within statutory walking distance. In the case of primary school pupils the statutory walking distance is 2 miles.

The order in which preference of schools is listed on the application for enrolment in a primary school is the only factor taken into consideration when transport assistance is being sought to a primary school.

Suitable schools, for transport purposes, are defined in the following categories.

(a) Primary Schools:- Controlled, Maintained, Integrated or Irish Medium Schools.

N.B Failure to apply to a suitable primary school or schools, which are within statutory walking distance, on the grounds that a pupil may not be accepted by those schools automatically excludes that pupil from transport assistance to a school which is over the statutory walking distance.

Single sex or co-educational schools

Preferences expressed on grounds of single sex or co-educational schools will not qualify for transport assistance if an otherwise suitable school or schools exist within statutory walking distance of the pupil's home and the chosen school lies outside the limit.

Travel tickets

For eligible pupils attending mainstream schools transport assistance will be provided in the form of a sessional ticket for travel by public transport.

Available transport

Parents must satisfy themselves when seeking admission to schools for their children that a suitable transport service is available. Gaining admission to a school does not automatically commit the board to provide transport.

It should be noted that the board does not have the power to:

- (i) provide a service where none currently exists;
- (ii) extend an existing service.

The board is not obliged to provide transport where the cost of so doing could be regarded as unreasonable public expenditure.

Please note that the rules governing eligibility for transport assistance may alter during your child's time at any particular school and this should be taken into consideration when choosing schools to list as preferences on the application form.

9 NOTIFICATION OF PLACEMENT

Schools are not permitted to advise parents of the outcome of applications.

Letters will be issued on Wednesday 18 April 2012 by the school the child has been placed in.

In the unlikely event of your child not having been offered a place when notification of placement is issued, the board will advise you of those schools in which places are still available and ask you to state which of these schools you would wish your child to attend.

10 APPEALS ARRANGEMENTS

The open enrolment legislation gives parents the right to appeal against admissions decisions but only on the grounds that a Board of Governors, in deciding not to admit a child, did not apply, or did not correctly apply its admissions criteria.

If in the light of this you decide to appeal against the decision of the Board of Governors of a Belfast board school, you should write to The Clerk to the Appeals Tribunal, c/o Belfast Education and Library Board, 40 Academy Street, Belfast, BT1 2NQ, informing your intention to submit an appeal.

Your letter must reach the board not later than **30 April 2012 by 4.00pm**. Intention to Appeal letters received after this date will not be accepted. **Recorded delivery is recommended.**

Your notice of intention to appeal will be acknowledged and at the same time you will be sent an official appeal form on which you must make your appeal. If you do not receive an official form within 5 working days or before the closing date (30 April 2012) please contact the open enrolment office on 028 90564080/4284.

A final date for receipt of the official appeal form will be shown on the correspondence from the board officer. If the appeal form is not received by this given date, the appeal will be withdrawn.

It is the parents responsibility to ensure that any documentation arrives with the board by the specified date.

If the appeal tribunal find that the Board of Governors did not apply or did not correctly apply its criteria and that the pupil would have been admitted, if it had, the tribunal will instruct the school to admit the pupil.

NOTE

The advice which has been given is based on the Education Reform (NI) Order 1997 and the related regulations. While every effort has been made to ensure that the information is accurate, it is given as guidance and not as an authoritative interpretation of the law.

It should be noted that any additional information, which was not available to the Board of Governors at the time of the allocation of places, cannot be taken into account by an independent appeal tribunal.

Should a vacancy arise in an over-subscribed school after 18 April 2012 all applications that were refused, new applications, late applications and new information will now be considered on an equal basis and allocated to the children who best satisfy the schools' admissions criteria..

Refer to individual criteria as some schools wish parents to inform them after 1 September 2012 if they wish their child's name to be placed on a waiting list.

Note: At the time of going to press the information published was correct.