

Bridgend County Borough Council

**Approved minutes of the
Bridgend Admission Forum meeting
held 06 February 2024, via Teams**

Local authority representatives

Mr R Davies (RD) – Chair	Group Manager - Business Support
Ms E Giles (EG) – Secretary	Senior Pupil Services Officer
Ms R Garner (RG)	ALN (Additional Learning Needs) Lead Early Years, Cognition and Learning and CMMI (Complex Medical and Motor Impairment)
Ms B Davies (BD)	Childcare Team Manager
Cllr J-P Blundell (Cllr JPB)	Cabinet Member for Education

School (community and voluntary controlled) representatives

Ms Delyth Davies	Acting Headteacher, Ysgol y Ferch o'r Sgêr
Mrs K John (KJ)	Headteacher, Brackla Primary School
Mr R Pawar (RP)	Headteacher, Bryntirion Comprehensive School

School (voluntary aided) representatives

Mr J Tarran (JT) – Vice-chair	Headteacher, Archdeacon John Lewis Church in Wales Primary School
Mr A Howells (AH)	Headteacher, Archbishop McGrath Catholic High School

Roman Catholic Diocesan representatives

Ms Anne Robertson (AR)	Director of Schools, Archdiocese of Cardiff
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Church in Wales Diocesan representatives

Ms Rebecca Morteo (RM)	Acting Diocesan Education Lead for the Llandaff Diocese
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Parent Governor representatives

Ms Claire Bloomfield (CB)	Parent Governor, Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen
Ms Rebecca Owens (RO)	Parent Governor, Heronsbridge School

Community representatives

Mr Shaun Sweeney (SS)	Community governor, Tremains Primary School
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Additional members

Ms C Christy (CC)	Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council
Mrs M Treharne (MT)	Education Engagement Co-ordinator, Bridgend County Borough Council

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

Apologies were noted from RP, RO, RM, Cllr JPB, SS, MT and BD

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2023 and matters arising

JT highlighted two typographical errors, which were amended. The minutes were approved as a true and accurate record.

3. Membership of the forum for the 2023-2024 school year

EG referred to Attachment A, which was a document detailing the revised membership of the forum for 2023-2024, and highlighted the following:

- Mrs Catrin Coulthard, Headteacher, Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Calon y Cymoedd had stepped down as a member of the forum and that Ms Delyth Davies, Acting Headteacher, Ysgol y Ferch o'r Sgêr is the new representative.

4. Work programme 2023-2024

EG confirmed that the draft work programme was approved at the last meeting and provided the following updates:

4.1 - EG highlighted that the forum annual report which was on the agenda for discussion, had been sent to all members for consideration on 17 November 2023, due to the Welsh Government deadline for receipt being 30 November 2023. The report was agreed and the final report was provided to Welsh Government on 23 November 2022. The report was published, in both English and Welsh, to the BCBC website in accordance with the requirements.

4.2 - EG reminded members of the requirement for every admission authority to consult on its arrangements for a determination year between 1 September and the 1 March, with the arrangements being determined by 15 April. The determination year begins two years before the school year in which the arrangements actually apply (2025-2026).

EG clarified for the forum that for the VA primary schools, there is a need to consult with the maintaining local authority, every local authority whose area joins the relevant geographical area and the governing bodies of all the other primary schools within Bridgend. The VA secondary school must consult with all the schools in Bridgend and not just the other secondary schools in Bridgend. These arrangements then need to be determined by 15 April, and the requirement for notification to all the bodies who have been consulted, within 14 days, to inform that the arrangements have been determined.

EG has sent a reminder to the VA schools of these requirements and was waiting for responses to the status of their arrangements.

AH confirmed policy for Archbishop McGrath Catholic High School had been sent to the local authority for consultation. EG informed that a response from the local authority had

been returned and offered any assistance to other VA schools should they need further clarification on the consultation process.

EG confirmed that the admission arrangements for the local authority were on track in terms of compliance with the requirements. The local authority's proposed Admission Policy 2025-2026 was circulated to the clerks of all governing bodies, neighbouring LAs and the Roman Catholic and Church in Wales dioceses on 08 January 2024 with a deadline for response as the 2 February 2024. EG confirmed that BCBC generally consults for a minimum of one month.

CC confirmed that RCT would also consult for a minimum of one month.

EG advised that the emails had been to all VA schools providing comprehensive explanations of the requirements (sent 16 January 2024).

AR confirmed that she had been in contact with the VA schools within the dioceses regarding the consultation process.

At the deadline date, two responses to the consultation were received.

The first response was a request regarding a minor point of clarity in relation to section 3.1 of the School Admission Policy 2025-2026. An amendment was made to the title to remove the reference to voluntary aided schools, for which the local authority is not the admission authority.

The second response provided some contextual points for consideration. These were assessed and no amendments were required.

EG advised that the proposed policy would be submitted to Cabinet in March 2024.

4.3 – EG advised that the draft Starting School Prospectus 2025-2026 (Attachment C) required further updating once more information was available, for example the requirement to wait for the availability of the PLASC data, admission appeal data etc

EG advised that the emails to all VA schools to request details of the admissions literature and information produced/published for parents/carers each year and also how and when it is made available. Request made to supply copies or provide web links for the documents/publications you have made available for 2025/2026. Feedback so far was that admissions literature is published online in order to keep costs down.

Section 4.4 – EG advised that the annual report that had been submitted and the attached admissions report (attachment D) provides a range of admissions-related information and serves to assist the forum to discharge its responsibilities, which include monitoring compliance with the arrangements for school admissions as detailed in policy.

EG highlighted that the information in the report related only to schools for which the local authority is the admission authority.

EG highlighted the following points:

- Regarding changes in the number of Part-time Nursery places available for January and April 2023, EG explained that variation year-on-year is inevitable given the factors that determine the number of such places.
- The data provided for the Reception, Junior and Year 7 admission rounds details provides a snapshot of on time and any accepted late applications for Offer Day. There are implications of applications that are received late, which are a small percentage, as this increases the number of applications received but not the number of spaces available. This can lead to an increase in refusals as schools reach PAN and an increase in appeals coming in after the deadline for the admission round appeals. Late applications can be due to families moving into the area, or from those who have simply missed the deadline. EG assured the forum that all admission dates are clearly advertised by the local authority and are also in schools' communications to parents/carers. Contact has also been made with the schools, before the closing date, by Pupil Services to inform of children who are on roll and have yet to apply.
- Submission of applications via the online facility remains high. Parents are encouraged and supported to complete online applications, although hardcopy, versions are available for those who require them.
- Despite the potential implications of only recording one school preference being outlined in the application forms, a stubborn percentage of parents/carers do not record the maximum number of school preferences.
- Parental preference enables a parent/carer to express a preference for any school, but if the preferred school is not the catchment, or nearest suitable schools in terms of Welsh-medium, there are implications for those children if there is oversubscription.
- Regarding applications where the first preference school was a Welsh- medium school, the second preference, where recorded, was not a Welsh-medium school.

Reception, full-time Nursery and part-time Nursery applications, for consideration on Offer Day, where a first preference Welsh-medium school had been recorded, over 50% did not record a second preference Welsh-medium school.

- EG referred to the local authority being regularly challenged as to why parents/carers who applied for an oversubscribed Welsh-medium school and a place had been refused, then opted for their children go to an English- medium school. EG highlighted that parental preference applies, and parents/carers often request that the expressed second preference, English-medium school, is processed, rather than give consideration to any other Welsh-medium schools with available places.
- There was continuing oversubscription at Bryntirion Comprehensive School.

- There continues to be a small percentage of Year 7 applications where the request is for transition from a Year 6 Welsh-medium school to a Year 7 English-medium secondary school. Year 7 applications, for consideration on Offer Day, where the Year 6 school was Welsh-medium, 2.5% of applications were made to a first preference English-medium school.
- Applications received from those residing out of county can have an impact on the number of places available:
Year 7
English-medium school applications totalled 3.4% of available places.
Welsh-medium school applications totalled 1.8% of available places.

Reception

English-medium school applications totalled 1% of available places.
Welsh-medium school applications totalled 1.2% of available places.

Full-time Nursery

English-medium school applications totalled 0.9% of available places.
Welsh-medium school applications totalled 1.9% of available places.

- The number of admission appeals had increased over the previous five years, both for admission rounds and in-year admissions, due to an increase in the number of oversubscribed schools.
- EG queried with members if they wish for information in relation to the Mainstream Fair Access Panel to be added to future reports, to provide data in relation to applications for vulnerable and hard to place pupils. Members of the forum agreed that it would be beneficial to receive data in respect of this.

5. ADEW (Association of Directors of Education in Wales) Admissions Group update

EG advised the members of the following items of discussion at the ADEW Admissions Group meeting on 26 January 2024:

Permanent Exclusions

- It was highlighted that there is an increase in the numbers of permanent exclusions that many local authorities are currently experiencing. There seemed to be some differences in how local authorities were processing admissions of twice excluded pupils.

Concerns were also raised around the practice where parents whose children were at the risk of permanent exclusion were transferring out of the school for a short period of time to avoid this, and then re-apply to transferring back to the original school.

EG along with MT have expressed an interest in attending a meeting to discuss concerns with Welsh Government on twice permanent learners. Feedback will be provided to forum when available.

AH raised concerns around the admission of permanent excluded learners, especially those excluded from other local authorities. EG confirmed that the admission authority has a duty to comply with parental preference if a learner only has one permanent exclusion, regardless of which local authority the excluding school is under. In respect of twice excluded learners, the local authority is not required to comply with parental preference for a school place for a period of two years from the first school day of the second exclusion.

EG informed the members that applications in respect of permanent excluded learners are discussed at the Mainstream Fair Access Panel.

Co-ordinated School Admission Arrangements

- EG informed the members that the Consultation for Co-ordinated school admission arrangements opened at the end of November 2023 and the link was shared with the forum members by email, with a request for feedback to be returned by the 12 January 2024. There were no submissions returned.

The consultation response to WG is 23 February 2024. The proposed timeframe is that for the first qualifying scheme must be formulated and adopted by local authorities by 1 January 2025 and by 1 January for all subsequent years. The first qualifying scheme will apply to admission arrangements in the 2027 to 2028 school year.

Members of ADEW reported many different practices across Wales, with some local authorities already having co-ordinated school admission arrangements. Some local authorities receive all the admission applications, then share with VA schools who process applications and send the outcome letters and then inform the local authority of the outcome so that it can be logged.

It was noted that in order to work within the co-ordinated admission arrangements any application for would need to reflect the additional questions and supplementary information required for the VA schools.

Although the consultation references the admission round process, questions were raised if it should also be used for in-year/transfer applications. One LA (Powys) confirmed that this is already practice with them.

RD queried if are there co-ordinated admissions arrangements across LA's. CC confirmed that there was no official co-ordinated admission arrangement with other LA's and RCT but that this is more of an informal discussion had around applications received.

RD raised concerns around data sharing if there were co-ordinated admission arrangements across LAs and that if this were to happen there would be a need to seek Legal advice and update Privacy notice.

JT confirmed that sharing information between the VA schools as the admission authority and the local authority as an admission authority meant that any data shared would not be going outside of BCBC.

Parental Disputes

It was noted that there has been an increase in the number of applications where there are parental disputes around the application. ADEW have asked for more clarity on processing applications where there is a parental dispute.

There seems to be different practices as some local authorities process the first application received, as others process the application from the person with child benefit. If a resolution can't be found applications are put on hold while further legal advice is sought. Concerns raised regarding issues of safeguarding if a child is not currently in a school.

KJ questioned admission practice where parent applies without the knowledge of others with PR. EG confirmed that if a dispute came to light after an admission had been made, there would not be a withdrawal of that place. The expectation would be for the parents to resolve the dispute or provide a Court order.

JT queried if Pupil Services check if all parties with PR consent to the application and that clarification should be given in the School Admissions Policy that applications would be put on hold. EG confirmed that this is not current practice. Applications are accepted from 'applicants' as detailed in section 13.1 of the School Admissions Policy 2023-2024, and that the local authority will not intervene in disputes between parents/carers over school applications and will expect that these are resolved privately. If parents/carers cannot agree and a Court order stating who should be making the application and what the school preference/s should be, has not been obtained, the local authority will proceed to accept the application from the parent/carer in receipt of Child Benefit for the child.

RD suggested that seeking approval from all parties with parental responsibility could be looked at for the 2026-2027 policy, with the suggestion that a tick box added to the application form to say that all parties with parental responsibility agree to the application.

RD sought opinions from the forum regarding the number of meetings held in a school year. EG confirmed there is a requirement to hold a minimum of two meetings a year. The forum was in agreement that there should continue to be three meetings a year.

6. Any other business

No items were raised.

7. Date of the next meeting

4 June 2024 2-4pm via Microsoft Teams