



Reading School

Leighton Road, Reading, RG1 5LP

16th December 2013

Mr R Wilson MP
Reading East
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Your ref: JGRW14249

Dear Mr Wilson,

Thank you for your letter dated 21st November 2013. As you will be aware, we have been communicating with [redacted] for many months.

I can confirm that from 2014, the entrance tests for 11+ will be outsourced to a third party examining organisation and Reading School will be using that company's recommendations on scoring.

With regard to the exam papers, I can confirm that these are designed and verified by specialist staff within the school and that some of the questions, are at times, recycled. However, very tight security is used in our admissions processes to ensure that no paper has ever been released to any third party or tutor.

The Governing Body is committed to ensuring that the admissions process is accessible and fair to all applicants and this is one reason it has made the decision to outsource the entrance tests. Unfortunately, we will never be able to eliminate private tutoring; however, we will continue to work to ensure that no child is disadvantaged.

Regarding the suggestion of a 'proximity weighting', I can only assume that [redacted] wishes our oversubscription criteria to include that those children who live near to the school and who achieve the pass mark are given priority admission to Reading School according to a formula which includes distance from the school.

The Governing Body has examined the issue of the designated area many times. The designated area is published on the School's website and in the admissions documentation. The designated area is defined by postcode and thus has the advantage of being well defined. The School considers that the arrangements are easy for parents to understand and that having a catchment area consisting of specific areas provides clarity and transparency.

The School's policy is to offer day places to applicants who meet the academic selection criteria and who reside within the catchment area. If places do arise (for example, through too few qualified candidates within the catchment area) the School will consider admitting candidates who live outside the catchment area based on nearness to the School.

Furthermore, in a previous appeal Reading Local Authority noted that, although the School catchment area is larger than the area of the Borough, the use of the postcode system ensures that the catchment is clearly defined thereby enabling parents to understand whether they are in the catchment area

There are a number of selective, comprehensive and academy schools within the borough and in neighbouring Local Authority areas. The Admissions Code is clear: parents may express a preference for any state funded school regardless of whether or not it is in the Local Authority area where they live and for this reason the Local Authority provides information about schools and contact points for the School admission teams in neighbouring areas.

There is nothing in the Admissions Code which provides for parents to be certain that places will be made available at a selective school, nor does the Admissions Code specify how an admissions authority must design its catchment area. As the Code says in paragraph 1.10, it is for each admission authority to decide which criteria within their arrangements are most suitable for the school and the local circumstances.

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The Governing Body considers the use of postcode areas provides a degree of certainty which enables parents to make a well founded assessment of their son's chances of gaining admission. The arrangements, in the matter of the catchment area, are both transparent and clearly defined. Schools are not required to use any particular system when drawing up a catchment area and we do not accept that the catchment area of the School has been drawn up in such a way as to be unclear for parents. In fact the reverse is true, in that parents have absolute certainty about the boundaries of the catchment and can thus make an assessment of the likely outcome of an application for admission.

In fact the conclusion of the schools adjudicator in this matter was to support the school saying:

'In drawing up the catchment with reference to postcode areas, the governing body has in my view produced arrangements that are transparent, reasonable and which are clearly defined to enable parents to understand easily the likelihood of making a successful application for admission. The boundary is clearly defined and covers a very wide area and has been used consistently for the past seven years'.

We have a tie-break procedure in our admissions policy as follows:

The tie-break situation

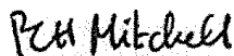
The following criterion will be used to allocate places as between borderline candidates who cannot be distinguished in terms of academic ability.

With regard to the historic links with the Borough of Reading, eligible boys living nearer to the School will be accorded a higher priority in the allocation of day-boy places. Distance is measured on the straight line between Ordnance Survey data points for the home address and the school using Reading Borough Council digital mapping software.

Although a tie-break has not arisen for some years, it is more likely that it will be used in the future given the nature of the new testing which will be introduced in 2014.

We recognise the disappointment of an unsuccessful candidate and his parents. Considering the number of applicants applying for 100 day places, there will always be a large number of disappointed families. Our Pupil Admission Number for day places is 100 and this year we had over 700 applications for entry in 2014.

Yours sincerely,



Dr PCH Mitchell
Chair of Governors