



Admission of Pupils through Gateshead's Fair Access Panel

Over the last few years many parents and pupils have noticed the arrival of children, usually outside of the normal admission round, into school. There are two reasons that children can join St Thomas More Catholic School: the first being that they are awarded a place after going through the Admissions Appeal process; the second being through Gateshead's Fair Access Panel.

Admission Appeals

If a parent applies for a place in a year group that is full, the school has to inform the parent that the school is full and a place cannot be offered. The parent has the option to appeal against this decision. In a normal school year, outside of appeals for Year 7 places, there are usually between 5 and 10 appeals for places in years 7 to 10. It is rare for applications for places in Year 11. This process is driven by parental desire to gain a place at St Thomas More Catholic School. This might be due to moving into the area, transfer from a Middle School at the end of Year 8, or some other reason.

The success or failure of the appeal depends on the decision taken by the appeal panel in which they weigh up the impact of the extra child on the effective working of the school, against the impact on the child of not gaining a place. The appeals panel are independent of the school and members are selected by Gateshead, who are retained by the school to administer our admission appeals, from a list provided by the Diocese.

Fair Access Panel Allocation

It is a matter of Law that all Local Authorities should have a Fair Access Panel whose remit is to allocate children to a school who do not already have a school place. This will include pupils who have been previously excluded from another school, or have just moved into the area and have been unable to secure a place by applying directly to a school.

Once the Fair Access Panel awards a place at a school to a child who has been referred to the panel, the decision is binding on the school.

The Gateshead Fair Access Panel also considers referrals from a school or from a parent where either behaviour has become very challenging and the child is in danger of permanent exclusion, or, in some way, relationships have been broken down. These children are usually offered a managed move. This is a period usually between six and twelve weeks in duration, where the child has to prove that they are making a fresh start in the new environment and the school has the option, should the child's behaviour not be suitable, of the pupil returning to their original school.

An extract from the Admission Code, included below, provides the framework of the Fair Access Panel. They were introduced to stop challenging children all ending up in a few schools which then are in danger of becoming sink schools. In years gone by, if a child was not keen on doing homework and the parents were not keen on supporting the school in getting their child to do homework, the parent would often simply take their child out of the school and get them a place in another one. This meant that any school with places was in danger of filling up with other schools' "cast offs". This no longer happens in Gateshead with school populations becoming more stable.

FAP Pupils allocated STM places since 2011:

2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
3	8	10	9	2*

*as of 28/09/2015

Some of these pupils were on managed moves which failed and so the pupil went back to their original school.

As a school, we have always had the view that we do not shy away from permanently excluding children. There is oft quoted research suggesting that excluded pupils are virtually guaranteed not to succeed at school and so there is a good deal of pressure on schools not to permanently exclude. We would suggest that there is confusion here between cause and effect: pupils who misbehave so badly that they are permanently excluded are unlikely to succeed academically because of the behaviour that caused the exclusion, and not due to the act of permanent exclusion.

Extract from the School Admissions Code 2012

3.9 Fair Access Protocols - Each local authority must have a Fair Access Protocol, agreed with the majority of schools in its area to ensure that - outside the normal admissions round - unplaced children, especially the most vulnerable, are offered a place at a suitable school as quickly as possible. In agreeing a protocol, the local authority must ensure that no school - including those with available places - is asked to take a disproportionate number of children who have been excluded from other schools, or who have challenging behaviour. The protocol must include how the local authority will use provision to ensure that the needs of pupils, who are not ready for mainstream schooling, are met.

3.10 The operation of Fair Access Protocols is outside the arrangements of co-ordination, and is triggered when a parent of an eligible child has not secured a school place under in-year admission procedures.

3.11 All admission authorities must participate in the Fair Access Protocol in order to ensure that unplaced children are allocated a school place quickly. There is no duty

for local authorities or admission authorities to comply with parental preference when allocating places through the Fair Access Protocol.

3.12 Where a governing body does not wish to admit a child with challenging behaviour outside the normal admissions round, even though places are available, it must refer the case to the local authority for action under the Fair Access Protocol. This will normally only be appropriate where a school has a particularly high proportion of children with challenging behaviour or previously excluded children. The use of this provision will depend on local circumstances and must be described in the Local Authority's Fair Access Protocol. This provision will not apply to a looked after child, a previously looked after child or a child with a statement of special educational needs naming the school in question, as these children must be admitted.