



Consultation on changes to Skinners' School's admissions arrangements: rationale behind the consultation

I thought it would be helpful to outline why we are proposing to change the school's admissions criteria.

Why change admissions criteria?

In essence this proposed change responds to two factors: firstly, Kent County Council's urgent need to provide more school places in Tunbridge Wells, and their obligation towards children from Kent; secondly, the school's urgent need to provide more and better facilities for its pupils.

At Skinners' we do not propose to go to six forms of entry (and, to be honest, nor do I wish to - I like the fact that the school is relatively small). Nevertheless, the basic need to provide for our expanded school roll (the move to five forms of entry still has two more years to run) entitles Skinners' to basic needs funding from KCC. Basic needs funding is underpinned by KCC's obligation, as the provider of school places, to make sure that all school pupils are accommodated.

A capital boost would allow us to build in the very near future. We have a plan, about which most parents will be aware, to demolish the Old Gym and to construct a new building that would house a Sixth Form Centre, a new School Library and seven new classrooms. With help from an appeal, that vision could be realised by September 2019 but without basic needs funding from KCC, it could not. In turn we, as a school, would have to be prepared to shift our admissions criteria to prioritise, in principle, children from West Kent.

What are basic needs?

KCC's basic needs rationale is to provide grammar school places where there is a deficit - hence the proposed admissions criteria include defined parishes where there is a shortage of grammar school places and not, for example, parishes further east of Tunbridge Wells which are served by Cranbrook and the Maidstone schools. I have received some responses from parents whose children live in parishes that are not included in the West Kent area and feel that they will not be well served by grammar school provision as a result. I will present those responses, along with all others to the governors (and KCC) in February.

What is the impact of this change?

We have tried to minimise its impact.

Firstly, we have set an academic 'pass mark' - 360 in the Kent test (320 is the grammar school assessment mark), ie. about the same as our lowest point of entry over recent years. I hope that this will preserve high academic standards and allow all pupils to thrive academically in exactly the same way as they currently do. Secondly, the inclusion of an outer area will continue to allow access to the school from East Sussex. We average about 20 pupils a year from Sussex and in reality the number we take is unlikely to change significantly.

Will Skinners' only be accessible to the immediate environs of Tunbridge Wells?

No. Certainly our 'catchment' would shrink but not by that much. We would still recruit from outside Kent as well as from the parishes included in the inner area. We would expect the number

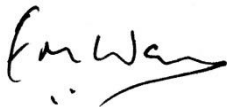
of pupils from the wider Sevenoaks area, for example, to remain unchanged. This change will undoubtedly affect potential pupils who live much further afield, however, and the school will become very difficult to access for those in the London boroughs of Bromley / Orpington (outside KCC's reach as an LEA).

What about siblings?

For those who have asked, please note that the sibling priority would trump distance. So if you live further away but have a brother in the school, a younger brother with a qualifying score (360 in the first instance), would get in as a priority. The definition of sibling for this purpose is a younger brother of a pupil at the school at the time the younger brother started here. We feel that this is an important priority that sits in line with our values as a school. Under current arrangements we are unable to have a sibling preference.

This proposal undoubtedly makes our admissions arrangements more complex than they are at present, but I hope this letter helps to explain the proposal more clearly. As stated before Christmas the consultation closes on Wednesday 31st January. I will hold a parents' forum at school at 6.30pm on Wednesday 24th January in the School Hall at which further views can be gathered. All feedback will be considered by the governors before they determine admissions arrangements for September 2019.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edward Wesson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Edward Wesson
Headmaster