

Question to Regiate and Banstead Local Committee Meeting June 21st 2010

Subject: Provision of junior school places to residents of Netherne on the Hill

Question: Could the district council ensure that families from Netherne enjoy the same right to choose a local primary school as other residents in Surrey?

Supporting information for the benefit of the councillors:

The majorities of families living in Netherne that applied for a reception place at a primary school were unable to access a school of their choice in 2010. This contrasts with families across Surrey as a whole.

Information provided via Freedom of Information request from Surrey CC:

- Numbers of children in Netherne that applied for a reception place to start school in September 2010: 14.
- Numbers of children that received their first choice school place: 5 (27%)
- Percentage of children across Surrey that received their first choice school place: 83%
- Percentage of children from Netherne that were accepted at any of their named choice of schools: 33%
- Percentage of children across Surrey that were accepted at any of their named choice of schools: 96%

I am aware that the majority of children in Netherne were offered a place at Marden Lodge School in Caterham. This school has a poor reputation and would not need to receive children from Netherne were it able to attract them from its own catchment area. The council is now committed to transporting a large number of children to another district to a poorly performing school, with all the cost, environmental and road congestion issues this brings.

There are several reasons why the Netherne residents are being discriminated against in relation to choice of schools:

1. The council did not secure section 106 funding to support improvements to schools during the development of the later phases of building in Netherne. The failure to plan adequately for school provision over the past few years has put considerable pressure on school placements in the area.
2. The council measures "as the crow flies" distance to determine a catchment area, which makes it impossible for Netherne residents to access a place at any local Surrey School. There will always be children living closer to the primary schools due to the position of Netherne in the middle of greenbelt land. This also applies to schools in Croydon, where Netherne residents are considered even less of a priority.

As Netherne residents, we consider the failure to plan by the council and the resultant prioritisation of families in other parts of the district to access their school of choice over residents in Netherne means that Surrey County Council is in breach of its statutory duty to promote equality.

There are many possible solutions to this issue. We would ask the councillors to support the following:

1. To clarify which local school has the capacity to accept Netherne children. Currently, by travel distance the three most local schools are:
 - a. St Peter and St Paul – 2.7 miles, 7 mins off-peak travel time
 - b. Merstham – 3.1 miles, 9 mins off-peak travel time
 - c. Woodmanstone 4.7 miles 14 mins off-peak travel time

Marden Lodge is 9.1 miles, 16 mins off-peak travel time. However, this is likely to underestimate the time to reach the school as any school bus would need to travel via the M25 or through Coulsdon which would greatly increase peak-time travel.

2. To ensure that Surrey CC revises its policy on admission criteria, recognising the specific issues faced by Netherne residents, to ensure equal opportunity for all families to access a local school of their choosing. We ask that this happens ahead of the start of applications for the 2011 school year.

Yours Sincerely

Nick Powell (via email)