



Admissions & Transport Team,
Surrey County Council

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Response to consultation on proposed admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools for September 2022.

I am writing on behalf of the Governing Body of Trinity Oaks School concerning the proposal to remove the use of 'nearest school' as a criterion at the majority of community and voluntary controlled schools in Surrey. We support the removal of the criterion, but are of the view that it should apply across all community and voluntary controlled schools, and at Langshott school in particular. We note that the criterion does not form part of the arrangements of the majority of academies, foundation, trust and voluntary aided schools in the county.

We note that the LA has reviewed the policy because it is considered to be inconsistent with the objectivity and clarity required by the School Admissions Code, following a determination by the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) on the use of this criterion elsewhere. In carrying out the review, we note that the LA has identified the number of applicants in the past two years who would have been adversely impacted if the nearest school policy had been removed.

It appears from the consultation paper that the sole purpose of the review is to remove the criterion for schools at which it has zero or minimal impact on outcomes. It is our view that whilst this is a laudable aim in terms of reducing unnecessary complexity in the admission arrangements at those schools, it falls short of reviewing the effectiveness of the policy at schools where its removal is likely to have a greater impact. Having done the work to extrapolate the data, it seems reasonable for the LA to assess the fairness of the criterion within the overall policy in the remaining schools, before deciding to retain it. The arguments relating to removal – insufficient objectivity and clarity – presumably apply to all schools. So where it is retained, the LA should provide some assurance that it is fair, clear and objective as required by the Code. The consultation paper does not address this.

Our principal concern is with the non-removal of the nearest school criterion at Langshott Primary school. Trinity Oaks C of E school is situated within a large housing development (The Acres). It is a one form entry school with up to a third of its places offered to those who meet faith criteria within a two kilometre radius. After the admission of EHCP, LAC/Previously LAC, Social/ Medical need and Siblings, there are relatively few places remaining for local residents who do not meet the higher criteria for Open Places. The threshold distance for Open places in 2019 was a mere 0.118km, and in 2020, 0.157km.

Trinity Oaks is the nearest school for residents of 'The Acres'. The next nearest school is Langshott (one kilometre from our site). Both schools are situated in north east Horley. It is a reasonable expectation of residents of 'The Acres' who are unsuccessful in securing a place at Trinity Oaks, to be able to secure a place at Langshott. However, because of the nearest school criterion at Langshott, and the non-inclusion of Trinity Oaks in the LA's list of schools excluded from the nearest school criterion, applicants receive lower priority than those living elsewhere for whom Langshott is the nearest

school. Consequently, they are often unable to secure a place. This potential 'double whammy' for some residents of our local community is of great concern to the Governing Body of Trinity Oaks.

Although we are unable to provide evidence, we are aware that this is a real problem for unsuccessful applicants for our school who refer to it at appeal hearings. Because of this, we raised the issue informally with the LA in July 2019, but were advised that a review of the policy would not be practical at that time. The LA also advised that the nearest school policy was the fairest approach for some families who live rurally, some distance from their nearest school.

We are now raising the matter formally because the LA has carried out a review and has the necessary data. This apparently shows that at Langshott, the number of children unplaced under the distance criterion despite living closer than those allocated under the nearest school criterion was 19 in 2019 and 25 in 2020. We note that, that in two of the last three years, no places were offered under the distance criterion. Further, data on the LA website shows that in 2020 at Horley Infants (the next nearest school to The Acres after Trinity Oaks and Langshott), the furthest distance admitted under the distance criterion was less than the distance to the school from The Acres. The data also show that in 2020 Meath Green Infant School (at which it is also proposed to retain the nearest school criterion), and Manorfield school did not admit any children under the distance criterion.

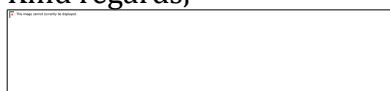
These figures indicate that in 2020, in the case of a child living on the Acres who was unsuccessful in obtaining an Open place under the distance criterion at Trinity Oaks, the next nearest school which was accessible under a distance criterion was Westvale Park Academy. This is some 2.5km from 'The Acres' as the crow flies.

In terms of ease of access and walk to school initiatives, these figures are worrying. We would therefore like to see an address breakdown of the children who obtained a place under the nearest school criterion at Langshott, in order to assess how many would have a shorter distance to an alternative school than applicants from The Acres who were refused a place. It is our belief that children living on 'The Acres' are being displaced in favour of children living further away but who have alternative options within a more reasonable walking distance.

If the LA is not inclined to remove the nearest school criterion from Langshott, the problem could be easily addressed by the inclusion of Trinity Oaks in the LA list of schools excluded from the nearest school criterion. It is our view that the non-inclusion of Trinity Oaks is unreasonable given the very limited number of Open places available under our distance criterion. In our view, there is little difference between the limited availability of non-faith (Open) places at our school and the circumstances of schools which are rightly included in the LA list because they offer all places on faith-based criteria if oversubscribed (e.g. Catholic schools).

It is our view, that having identified these figures, action needs to be taken to address any potential unfairness. We believe that the LA's data shows that residents of 'The Acres' would be better served by the removal of the nearest school criterion at Langshott in particular and at Meath Green Infants. In the interests of our local community we respectfully request the Local Authority to either remove the nearest school criterion at these schools, or to include Trinity Oaks in its list of excluded schools.

Kind regards,



Graham Carter (Chair of Admissions Committee)

On behalf of the Governing Body of Trinity Oaks C of E Primary School