

## **The High School Leckhampton**

### **Admissions Consultation**

#### **Response from The Balcarras Trust**

The Trustees would like to thank everyone who engaged with the recent consultation on the draft admissions arrangements for The High School Leckhampton. We received over 170 responses. Not surprisingly these responses reflected a range of conflicting views. We understand that school admissions is an emotive issue but unfortunately it not possible to satisfy everyone's wishes. The following is the trust's response to the various issues that were raised during the consultation.

#### **Availability of secondary school places in Leckhampton/Naunton Park**

We received over 50 positive comments relating to the decision to put in place a priority area that included Leckhampton and Naunton Park. Respondents in this area were pleased that the draft admissions arrangements meant that the so called 'Leckhampton Triangle' issue would be far less likely to occur in the future and that children in this area would now have the very real prospect of attending a local school.

#### **Concerns relating to the Western/Northern boundary of the Priority Admissions area**

We received just below 50 comments relating to the northern edge of the priority admissions area and concerns from parents in Warden Hill and Hatherley that this precluded them from gaining a place at the school. We want to make it very clear that we welcome applications from families living in Warden Hill and surrounding area and we anticipate that many students living there will gain places at the school. The only reason we drew a priority area in the first place was to ensure that families living in the so called 'Leckhampton triangle' area had a realistic chance of gaining a place at one of the three schools operating in the south of the town. If we had decided not to put in place a priority area there was a chance that some families would continue to miss out on a place at a local school. We have deliberately sought to keep the priority area small so that there will, in all likelihood, be plenty of places available to students on the final criteria which relates to proximity to the school.

#### **Concerns relating to Murvagh Close**

We received over 50 responses relating to Murvagh Close. Many residents here were concerned that they were just outside the priority area but remained highly unlikely to get into any of the other local schools. They argued that Murvagh Close in effect represents the apex of the Leckhampton triangle and The Trustees were sympathetic to this argument. It was agreed to adjust the Priority Admissions boundary slightly to include Murvagh Close.

#### **Concerns relating to Charlton Park**

We received a small number of responses from people who were worried that Charlton Park was not included in the Priority Admissions Area. We reviewed this carefully and concluded that residents in Charlton Park were included in Balcarras' priority area and Bournside's. With the new school drawing students from the Leckhampton area this is likely to reduce demand on the other two schools so we predict that Charlton Park is unlikely to be an issue going forward.

## **Concerns relating to Badgeworth, Shurdington, Salterley Grange and Coberley**

We received over 10 responses from people living in the villages listed above. All of these concerns related to the fact that The High School Leckhampton would be their closest school but if demand was high from the Cheltenham area, these students would be unlikely to gain entry on the final criteria. The Trustees were very sympathetic to this line of argument. However, we are simply not in a position to guarantee everyone a place at the school because the number of spaces is finite. The school is being provided to meet a shortfall of places in the South Cheltenham area rather than to re-organise historic arrangements concerning the catchments for secondary age children who live outside Cheltenham.

## **Decisions Made in light of the consultation**

### ***1. Murvagh Close***

The Trustees made the decision to include Murvagh Close in the priority area.

### ***2. Change to the Sibling Clause***

The Trustees decided to remove Priority 2 from the Admissions Policy which is listed below:

*Children living in the school's area of priority (see map) who have a sibling attending the school where the sibling is or has been a member of Years 7-10 and who will continue to be on the school roll when the applicant's child is admitted.*

Instead this will be replaced with:

*Children who have a sibling attending the school where the sibling will continue to be on the school roll when the applicant's child is admitted*

The Trustees did this to reassure parents in Warden Hill/Hatherley that we welcomed their children in to the school and that any subsequent children would in all probability gain a place by virtue of the sibling clause without it being related to the priority area. This move was made to underline the fact that the only reason we had decided to put in the priority area was to solve the 'Leckhampton Triangle' issue.

## **Decisions made in light of advice received by the Department for Education**

### ***1. Clarification relating to the signing of a funding agreement***

New schools do not technically exist until a Funding Agreement is signed between the Secretary of State for Education and The Trust which will run the school. This is normally done in the 6 months before opening. It is usual practice for schools to receive applications for entry through the local authority process and that will be the case with The High School Leckhampton. However, the DfE asked that our Admissions Policy draws attention to the fact that any places offered are subject to the signing of a Funding Agreement, and that if one wasn't signed the authority would use the other preferences that the parent listed. The DfE asked that we include the following:

*Offers will be made on 1 March 2021. If we have not entered into a Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State opening this school by that date, they will be conditional offers and will be confirmed once we have a signed Funding Agreement.*

We would like to stress that we view the addition of this clause as a formality. Everything is on track for The Trust to sign the Funding Agreement at the earliest possible opportunity.

### **Concluding Comments**

We are delighted that there is so much interest in The High School Leckhampton. Making decisions around its admissions arrangements has not been an easy task and we certainly do not want anyone to feel disenfranchised. The High School Leckhampton will, like its sponsor Balcarras, be an inclusive and welcoming comprehensive school. It is not in our nature to want to turn anyone away. Although we cannot predict the level of demand, there is the chance that the school might be over-subscribed. For this reason we felt that there was the need to include a small priority area to limit the chance of 'pockets' or 'gaps' emerging in such a situation. Keeping the priority area small will mean that a significant proportion of the school's students should come via criteria 5 (straight line distance).

The consultation is now closed and unfortunately The Trustees will not be able to enter into any further dialogue on this matter.

The Trustees September 2020