

SCHOOL TRANSPORT (1) DENOMINATIONAL TRANSPORT (2) PROPOSALS WITHIN THE EDUCATION & INSPECTIONS ACT 2006

PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

CABINET

14TH DECEMBER, 2006

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

This report answers the request to assess the impact of the introduction of charges for those pupils admitted to year 7 in St. Mary's RC High School and The Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat High School in September 2006 and secondly to inform Cabinet of proposals within the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision

Recommendation

- THAT (a) to note the introduction of charges has had no discernible impact on the popularity nor mix of students attending the two aided high schools; and**
- (b) to note the Education and Inspections Act 2006 has no clauses which would improve support for, or make radical changes to the transport arrangements for pupils in Herefordshire.**

Reasons

To advise Cabinet of the impact of the introduction of charges.

Considerations

1. In July 2005 the Cabinet resolved to introduce charges for pupils who occupy a denominational place and live further than the statutory walking distance from school. The charges set did not cover full costs, and dispensation was allowed for the third child attending school and for students from low income families. There was particular concern that admissions to the 2 aided high schools would be dominated by children from families who could afford the charges.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
George Salmon, Head of Commissioning & Improvement - Schools & Services on 01432 260802

2. Information on those attending these 2 schools for admissions over the last 3 years is set out in Appendix 1. This does not reveal any adverse impact either in terms of the overall popularity of the schools or in terms of the number of church places offered.
3. A further more detailed analysis of the family background of pupils is set out in Appendix 2. Categories A, B and C represent more affluent families. Year 7 pupils were admitted in September 06 (i.e. entitled riders subject to charge), Year 8 and Year 9 students were admitted in September 2005 and 2004 respectively when free transport was provided for entitled riders. No discernible pattern of increased numbers from affluent families and corresponding reduction of those from low income families is apparent.
4. The Education & Inspections Act 2006 contains a number of clauses on school transport. This would extend entitlement to students from low income households to free transport to any of the 3 nearest secondary schools to their home assuming they live more than 2 miles away and less than 6 miles away. Such is the distribution of schools in the Country that this would not increase entitlement to any significant number of pupils, beyond those already enjoying dispensation under the existing policy.
5. In addition pupils from low income households will be eligible for free transport if they choose a secondary school up to 15 miles away where this school is the nearest suitable school preferred on the grounds of religion or belief. This provision is already part of Herefordshire's denominational transport provision.
6. Also primary pupils from low income households will be eligible for free transport to their nearest school more than 2 miles from home. This is likely to affect a relatively small number of pupils
7. There are also proposals to allow authorities to pilot home to school transport schemes. This potentially could be of significant benefit to Herefordshire, and be used as a radical means to reduce road congestion and increase the use of sustainable transport. Unfortunately no significant funding accompanies such pilot schemes. Such schemes could involve offering all students subsidised bus fares but this could only be recommended if the Council wished to increase spending in this area.

Alternative Options

There are no alternative options

Risk Management

The information in this report does demonstrate the careful risk assessment in the agreed policy changes.

Consultees

The original consultees were in the policy changes. There have been no further consultations linked to this feedback report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Denominational Admissions & Transport Provision – Secondary Schools
Appendix 2 – Analysis of Family Background of Pupils at Bishop of Hereford’s Bluecoat School and St. Mary’s RC High School

Background Papers

None identified.