

Appendix H

Dear Sir/Madam,

We are writing to raise concerns regarding the School Admissions over-subscription criteria applied by Swansea Council. You will obviously be familiar with this, but we have included an extract below for ease of reference in this email:

If more applications have been received for any school than there are places available, the following order of priority will apply:

- 1. Children who are in the care of a local authority i.e. looked after children (LAC), or are previously looked after*.*
- 2. Children who live within the school's defined catchment area. There is no guarantee of a catchment place. If there are more applications than places, the places will be allocated in distance order with those living nearest (shortest available walking route) receiving priority**.*
- 3. Children who have a brother or sister of statutory school age attending the school at the date of their admission.*** If there are more applications than places, the places will be allocated in distance order with those living nearest (shortest available walking route) receiving priority**.*
- 4. Other children for whom a place has been requested for whom criteria 1 to 3 above do not apply. If there are more applications than places, the places will be allocated in distance order with those living nearest (shortest available walking route) receiving priority***

We have recently been through the application process for a Reception place in which the school was over-subscribed with all applicants (including ourselves) living within catchment. The above criteria were correctly applied, and our [REDACTED] was initially declined a place due to our distance from the school. We have another child currently in [REDACTED] at the school, but this did not factor in the decision-making process based on the above criteria. Fortunately, a place at the school has since become available, and we are very grateful to the admissions team for co-ordinating the process so that our [REDACTED] can now attend the same school as [REDACTED].

Having extensively researched school admissions criterions it appears that Swansea is very out of step with the rest of Wales and England (over 300 Local Authorities). During our research, we have established that all other Local Authorities in Wales and England prioritise an attending sibling over simple distance to school. The only exception is Neath Port Talbot which has the same criteria as Swansea, but this is unsurprising given the likelihood of the two authorities to have established the policies with close consultation with each other. The criteria of all other Local Authorities appear much more reasonable and appear to consider the impact of the policy on the children involved. This raises valid concerns over the suitability of the current policy in Swansea. We would respectfully request that this be considered, and the policy reviewed. We have attached the Carmarthenshire information for parents document as just one example of this difference (over-subscription criteria on page 19), but having reviewed all Local Authority policies in Wales and England (over 300) we believe all others are in line with that of Carmarthenshire.

As further support of these valid concerns is that the admissions policy of Swansea is not in keeping with Welsh Government guidance as per the School Admissions Code (document 005/2013).

- *2.36 -Giving priority to children who have siblings who will be at the school when they join may support parents of young children. Admission authorities should give*

consideration particularly to the needs of younger children at primary schools, where parents may have problems with transporting children placed at different schools.

- *2.38 Particular difficulties may occur if schools can admit a child but not his or her siblings, and parents may be deterred by the prospect of taking children to two or more schools.*

In Annex B of the School Admissions Code, guidance is given on over-subscription criteria which places children living within catchment with a sibling in attendance as the first priority after children in care of the local authority. We appreciate that this is given as an example of oversubscription criteria only. However, this in combination with points 2.36 and 2.38 above, make it obvious that the intention is that Local Authorities should be sensitive to the issue of separating siblings, especially those so young as our children. It again raises questions as to why the admissions policy of Swansea does not adhere to this guidance, and if this is a deliberate decision it questions whether it is appropriate, or whether there may be an unintentional oversight in the application of this policy.

When all applicants live within the catchment of a school the application of this criteria means that admission is simply a matter of who lives closest to the school and the subsequent points are irrelevant. The presence of siblings at the school is irrelevant (this only becomes a factor in allocating places if the very last places (child 30 and 31) were tied on distance, both living exactly the same distance from school, something which is statistically implausible). This has the very real impact of separating children from each other as was very nearly the case with our family and must happen to other families.

We believe that it may not be the conscious intention of Swansea Council to needlessly split up a family unit in this way but instead be a genuine error/oversight in the technicalities of how the policy is implemented. We propose that it may be possible that the use of distance from school was intended to be used as a final tie-break criterion (as proposed in the School Admissions Code and utilised by other Local Authorities) applied after all other previous criteria are applied, rather than be applied to each individual criteria before considering others, thus making further criteria null and void.

The separation of children because of the admissions criteria implemented by Swansea has the potential to cause immeasurable damage to children and the family unit in a number of ways. E.g.

- Damage to the children's mental health due to the anxiety and stress of separation
- Negative impact on the children's education due to logistical impossibilities of transporting young children to different schools, meaning late attendance will be unavoidable
- Increased travel times meaning that children will be deprived of after school activities due to logistical impossibilities (in our case the travelling time to two schools would have increased our commute time by 1 hour 10 minutes every day). Similarly, there will be less time available to do homework/learning etc, further impacting their education.
- Increased costs to parents due to the inevitability of having to pay to use breakfast and after-school clubs to care for children as they are unable to drop off or collect from two schools on time.
- Negative impact on the environment and road use due to increased commute time. We currently walk to school so do not use a car most days for school runs, but this would not have been possible had we had to transport children to two schools. This would have been a direct result of Swansea Council policy and seems

to go against so many of their own and the Welsh Government wider policies for safer roads and a greener environment.

It is not only our own opinion of the above, but that of everyone that we have spoken to on this matter. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] This is of grave concern and we would urge the Admissions Authority to consider the impact this policy has on children and urgently review it.

The over-subscription policy which has the potential to split up a family unit has so many negative effects, and absolutely no benefits. It clearly does not consider the welfare of children and families, nor consider logistics and the impact it will have in real life situations. Furthermore, it is completely unnecessary as is demonstrated by the fact that no other Local Authorities adopt such a policy.

We would respectfully request that consideration be given to our points raised above and that an unbiased review of the Swansea School Admission over-subscription criteria be made, particularly in light of the Welsh Government School Admissions Code guidance, and knowledge that Swansea is so out of step with all other Welsh and English Local Authorities. We do not believe that it can genuinely be considered appropriate to apply these criteria in this way based on these facts and sincerely hope that you are able to reach the same conclusion and amend the policy to be more in line with other authorities and be less damaging to the children and families involved.