

GENERAL SYNOD**PRIVATE MEMBER'S MOTION****Schools Admissions Code****Summary**

Those moving to or from tied accommodation as part of their employment or appointment have an unintentional structural disadvantage when it comes to their children's schooling. This is recognised and ameliorated in the case of military families but not for others required to live in tied accommodation. This private member's motion proposes that General Synod call on the Secretary of State to include such provision in the School Admissions Code when it is next revised, and calls on admissions authorities to do what they can within the current regulations to take this into account in the meantime.

The National Picture

1. School Admissions is an emotive subject. Acquiring a good education for our children is of paramount importance to parents, and our wider society. When choosing a place to live, anyone who has young children or is hoping to start a family will check on the local schools, and some families with larger incomes will move near to good schools primarily for this reason.
2. Under the last Labour government, the Department for Education revised the way that school admissions worked, offering more choice for parents to be able to send their children to schools other than their nearest. It was felt that more choice would increase quality in education, as the schools would have to improve to attract students.
3. This meant that there was more competition for school places at good schools, as children living within the area of a well thought of school would compete for places with children from outside the local area.
4. If a school has more children applying than places available, it becomes oversubscribed. At this point all the children are ranked in terms of criteria set by the "admission authority".
5. The "admission authority" differs depending on the type of school. Academies and Multi Academy Trusts are their own admission authority, as are Voluntary Aided Church of England schools and most faith schools, but others come under the local authority in which they are situated. Where a school has a catchment area, living within it will be a very highly scored criteria, which still means that families with the financial means to have moved to the catchment area will have a better chance. Many admissions authorities measure the distance to school from the child's residence when they are allocating places.
6. School applications for reception are due seven months before the beginning of the school year for Primary schools and for year 7 eleven months before for Secondary schools. Confirmation of places are sent out in April and March respectively. If children are changing schools having begun their primary or secondary education they will be putting in an "in year application".
7. Most moving into a new area with school age children will be putting in a late application, as they are unlikely to know which school they will be applying for so long before a move. Even those parents who know which area they would be moving to a

year beforehand will not be able to use residence in the new area as a criterion, and will therefore be unlikely to get a place in an oversubscribed school. This also applies to those putting in “in year applications”.

8. In certain parts of the country, population increase has not been matched by an increase in school places, and so some families find that there are no school places anywhere close by, and children have to commute long distances to find the nearest school with a space for them.

The situation facing those in tied accommodation

9. Tied accommodation is by and large a huge privilege and benefit to those for whom it is part of their remuneration, but in general it is also a requirement of their employment or terms of service.
10. There is a structural disadvantage for those living in tied accommodation, because moving employment or post also entails changing their residence. This means that any application for a school place in the new area will be a late or “in year” application.
11. Currently, an admissions authority is under no obligation to consider the imminent move when determining place of residence.
12. Where a school is oversubscribed an application before the move could be considered to come from the current place of residence, which means the child is extremely unlikely to receive a place. If waiting until after the move to apply, the delay will mean the child has no school place at all in time to resume their schooling, and they may have lost out on any spaces that have become available in the meantime.
13. This is recognised as an issue by the School Admissions code, which has special provision for military families and for civil servants moving home from an overseas posting.
14. In both cases an admissions authority is required to accept applications based on a future address in advance of the family moving to the area. For military families the quartering address can be given as the place of residence and for civil servants an application can be made with a best guess of where the residence is likely to be, though in due course confirmation of exact place of residence will be required.
15. Admissions authorities are expected to be flexible with what they will accept as confirmation of residence. They cannot use lack of residence as a reason not to offer a child in this situation a place.
16. This exemption is not extended to others who are required to live in tied accommodation, who are subject to a postcode lottery as to whether or not the admissions authority they are dealing with will choose to accept a letter of employment or appointment as proof of residence ahead of the move.
17. Where a family not living in tied accommodation might need to move for reasons of a new job for one or more adults in the household, the move can sometimes be timed sensitively, and for a short period the family might continue living in the old residence for the purposes of finishing schooling while the employee commutes on a daily or weekly basis to the new job where finances allow. Those in tied accommodation don't have this flexibility, as they have to leave their residence when the old job or post comes to an end, and they have to move into a new residence when the new job or post begins.

Why is this a matter for General Synod?

18. There are more than eight thousand Church of England stipendiary and house for duty

clergy, and many of these have school age children. Alongside ministers of other denominations and faiths, farm workers and those in the hospitality trade, they make up a large proportion of those affected by a school admissions system which is so strongly based on geography and benefits those who do not have to move residence when there is a change in employment or post. Some in tied accommodation have little choice about when they have to move from one area to another.

19. Disruption to schooling is given as a major reason for potential ordinands to delay discernment or training for ordination. Women in particular tend to prioritise their children's education above their own sense of vocation, which is anecdotally one reason given why women on average present themselves for discernment later.
20. In conversations with clergy with school age children and members of churches school admissions difficulties are one of the key problems encountered for clergy moving post.
21. Although incumbents usually have a degree of freedom about when they move posts, those attending residential colleges for training and doing a stipendiary curacy will sometimes have to move their children 3 times within 5 years. If a child is placed in a school which is inappropriate for whatever reason upon moving to a new post, there could potentially be a further change when a school place at the local school does become available.
22. A particularly challenging situation is that the school at which the children are unable to get a place is a church school at which their clergy parent is ex officio foundation governor, or another local school with which the church has close links. There is an assumption from the wider community that the family have chosen not to send their children to the school (as would be their right), which causes ongoing problems for the local priest. Dispelling such assumptions is challenging, and is often met with incredulity that a church school would refuse to give a place to clergy children.
23. Many schools give priority to the children of staff, which is allowed under the admissions code, but giving priority to the children of governors is not.
24. Most admissions authorities for church schools give some priority to children who have been regular attenders at a local church. Ironically, even this wouldn't apply to clergy families moving into the area.
25. When clergy raise these issues with their diocese they are told that there is nothing that a bishop or diocesan board of education can do. Sometimes this is done with understanding and sympathy, but not always. This issue is also increasingly faced by bishops who have school age children too, or who understand the difficulties of school placements on behalf of their clergy. It is notable that a number of bishops have added their signatures to this PMM, and bishops not on General Synod have expressed their support for it.
26. The House of Clergy voted in February 2017 to support paper HC(17)1 on Clergy Wellbeing, which mentions the challenges that the families of clergy often face, and point out that the children of clergy have not chosen the "vicarage lifestyle". It also envisages the Military Covenant as a model for the Church of England in terms of assuring the wellbeing of clergy and their families. Schooling is a large part of this.

What should the General Synod do?

27. It has been suggested that General Synod should call on the Secretary of State to amend the School Admissions code to allow or require admissions authorities to give clergy children automatic spaces in church schools or academies. This would be seen as overly preferential and unfair on other families seeking a good education for their

children. Admissions policies of Church of England schools can be extremely controversial in today's education climate, and are highly scrutinised by various independent bodies which disagree with any selection based on religious observance.

28. However General Synod can raise the issue that faces all those working in tied accommodation not only Church of England clergy. This is also not specifically about admissions to Church of England Schools. In doing so it would send a clear message to clergy or potential ordinands with school age children that a major issue they face is seeking to be addressed by the wider Church of England. It would also be using its voice to address this issue on behalf of the many other workers who have to move into tied accommodation as a condition of their employment or office.
29. The General Synod can make the modest step of calling on the Secretary of State to amend the School Admissions Code to grant those in tied accommodation the same rights to apply from a prospective address for their children as is currently granted to military families and civil servants moving to the UK from a posting abroad. This does not mean that they would be able to choose any school they liked, but it would prevent admissions authorities from refusing children a place on the basis that they do not currently live in the area they are moving to.
30. Alongside this, General Synod can call on individual admissions authorities to treat letters of appointment or an official letter from an employer or other evidence of a move into tied accommodation as proof of residence before a move takes place, so that a family can begin the application process a few months earlier.

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