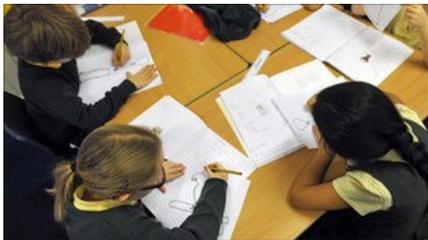


Who will benefit from the new school admissions code?

Heather Sharp



So is the school admissions system in England being turned on its head - and if so, which way? The changes are likely to raise some middle-class hackles, especially among those who take on big mortgages to buy homes in catchment areas in the hope of getting their children into popular schools. Journalist Toby Young, who is setting up one of the first free schools, said the admissions changes would "enable successful free schools and academies to ensure children from low income families aren't crowded out by sharp-elbowed, middle class parents". But the proposed rules have not gone down well among some advocates for comprehensive education who demand to know why the proposal should not be extended to all state schools. After all, times are lean and there is money at stake - £430 a year goes to the school for every student on free school meals that it takes under the newly introduced "pupil premium". But even so, the ASCL said this wasn't much, given the cost of supporting some pupils from the most deprived backgrounds.

Random selection

However, there are already school and local authority mechanisms which keep the doors open to the disenfranchised (or undermine aspirational home buyers) like academic banding systems. Currently state schools - apart from grammar schools - are not allowed to select on the basis of academic ability. But they can, and some do, use "ability bands" to ensure a balanced intake - by testing pupils' ability, and then admitting a proportion from every level or band. But banding can, in theory, work both ways - ensuring a high proportion of high, or low, performing children. This is because schools are allowed to band to represent the national picture, the local picture, or

the range of applicants. Thus if a school in a locality full of high-performing children bands in line with the national average, it could end up turning away bright pupils who live nearby in favour of less well performing ones from further away. But if the same school banded on the basis of its locality, it would take a larger proportion of high performing children, perhaps at the expense of children likely to achieve lower grades. This system remains largely unchanged in the new code. Another issue has been lotteries, where random selection is used, either by individual schools or local authorities, to allocate places. Drawing lots gives everyone a chance, but it also undermines middle-class parents' chances of securing a place in a popular school by buying a home nearby. In the new code, the government is to ban lotteries across whole local authority areas - although they were not widely used anyway - saying these can leave pupils having to travel large distances if chance allocates them a school far from home. However, individual schools will still be allowed to hold lotteries.

'Not unhappy'

Education Secretary Michael Gove argues that allowing good schools to expand will create more good school places, and so increase choice. However, there are also concerns that the admissions code changes will work the other way, hitting struggling schools and therefore the children who attend them, who are often those in deprived areas. Some teaching unions fear that by removing the requirement for schools to consult with the local authority, which manages school places across an area, expansion in one school might hit others as pupils move elsewhere with little warning, taking "per pupil" funding with them. Russell Hobby, of the NAHT, said he was "not unhappy" with allowing schools to expand. "I just want to make sure its coordinated so you're not kicking other schools in the teeth as you do it". He is also concerned about the removal of the stipulation that, when drawing school catchment areas, schools "must not exclude

particular housing estates or addresses in a way that might disadvantage particular social groups" - and that choices of feeder school should not "unfairly disadvantage children from more deprived areas". The new code says only that catchment areas should be "reasonable" and "clearly defined". Academy trusts, and the governing bodies of some faith schools, act as the school's own admissions authority, so can set their own catchment areas and feeder schools. Mr Hobby said the new wording created the opportunity for schools to "manipulate" catchment areas, "drawing the lines on the right side of the tracks, not the wrong side". There's little disagreement that the fairest thing is a school system where every child, regardless of background, has access to a good school. But how this should be brought about - and how to make things as fair as possible in the meantime - remains hotly debated. **BBC**

Every Child Matters



Every Child Matters is a set of reforms supported by the Children Act 2004. Its aim is for every child, whatever their background or circumstances, to have the support they need to:

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- **E**ntertain and achieve
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- Phoenix High School
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From East London to West Berlin

Xina Moss



I'd expected a contrast between SE1 in Tower Hamlets and SE2 in Germany...but hadn't realised the full extent to which the school would be different! To start with, Berlin itself is quite different to a capital city in many ways; the cost of living being the main example (my rent was €150 a month, although I was in a Studentheim, sharing a kitchen with 19 others!). Also, the seemingly fresh air there contrasts starkly with the pollution of London (have to say I'm not enjoying being back in the Smog much!).

The school itself then, the Berlin British School, is in a forest, next to a lake at the bottom of a hill! The main difference that I had anticipated, and which was realised is the size of the school: there are less pupils in each year group at Berlin British School than there are in a form group at my first school, Morpeth - a total student population of around 130 compared to 1200! The size of the classes to teach was also noticeably reduced to an average of 12. This has an immediately obvious impact upon the teaching environment with each pupil getting on average more attention, but also in a more subtle way of the learning environment being different without so many students to bounce ideas off of each other. Whilst a quiet classroom can demonstrate a hard-working group, a noisy room does not necessarily represent a problem; and I felt that I really missed the vibrancy that you get with larger class sizes.

One thing that I was particularly surprised about was the number of native German speaking pupils there are at the school. Whilst the school is far from exclusively for British pupils, I was surprised by just how many native German speaking students there were. There are far fewer native English speakers than I had anticipated. Whilst some German families prefer to send their children to an English speaking school to encourage bilingualism, others from the upper class choose to pay to send their children to a private school when they are unlikely to get a

place at a respected Gymnasium (German Grammar School). It is socially acceptable for them to pay for an education at Berlin British School whereas sending their children to a comprehensive school would be considered socially unacceptable. Therefore - and this is something that I had not been expecting - whilst not exclusively, there is a prevalence of native German speaking children in amongst the weaker students in each class.

Overhearing playground (and some classroom) conversations and not being fluent in German gave me an ongoing opportunity to realise how difficult it must be for those students who are not fluent in English to understand what is being said to them both in and outside of lessons. Until my experience in Berlin, I don't think I had fully appreciated how difficult it is for new speakers of English. This realisation is of course relevant to EAL pupils at all schools, not exclusively the Berlin British School, and is indeed relevant to many other situations in life. The staff are supposed to insist on English in lesson time, but I tended not to for two reasons: A - if someone was explaining a mathematical procedure to a non-native speaker it made more sense for this to be done in German, and B - for my own interest (although my German improved very little during my two months there!)

At Berlin British School there are none of the behavioural issues that are rife at many schools in inner-city London, and most pupils whilst being occasionally cheeky will demonstrate good if not excellent behaviour the vast majority of the time. There is however, a different essence of disrespectful behaviour demonstrated by some of the pupils. Through no fault of their own, and indeed perhaps unknowingly, through their upbringing punctuated with many servants at home, they see teachers as an extension of this service provision. There is therefore in some instances, a subtle underlying disrespect by students of their teachers. The students would often be quite demanding, insisting on you doing something for them IMMEDIATELY!

One thing I really enjoyed during my time at the Berlin British School was getting back into some proper maths again in the form of the International Baccalaureate (so much harder than A-level! And likewise IGCSEs contain material that I don't remember from degree level: matrices to describe shears?!)

If you get the chance to spend some time on the international scene in the future then I highly recommend that you take it: I've certainly gotten the flavour of the idea of working here, there and everywhere...but am doing the sensible thing and doing my NQT year first, so am UK bound for at least 12 months! **CM**

Student Voice



I hope you are enjoying a chance to catch your breath after a hectic end to the first half of the summer term! As we head back to the Institute after the break there is plenty to be getting on with including A-level workshops, key-note lectures, the fieldtrip and finishing off any outstanding PLP tasks! There are two further the opportunities to feedback your experience of the IOE PGCE firstly through your tutor group representative on Tuesday the 7th June and/or through Xina and I who will be attending the final Subject Reps meeting on Wednesday 15th June. If you have any feedback or comments you would like us to make please do let us know.

NOTES:

