



2016-0006471POSoS

Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP
Secretary of State

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Rt Hon Fiona Mactaggart MP
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22 February 2016

Dear Fiona

Thank you for your email of 1 February, enclosing an example of correspondence from a number of your constituents, about my department's proposal to allow only parents and local authorities to object to a school's admission arrangements.

I want to ensure that every child is able to attend a good local school, and that bureaucracy is reduced wherever possible to enable schools to focus on delivering an excellent education to their pupils. As part of my department's forthcoming consultation on the School Admissions Code, we will be proposing a number of changes that are intended to reduce the burden on schools. Many of the changes that we are considering relate to the functions of the Schools Adjudicator, as we are aware that it can be time consuming for schools when an objection about their admission arrangements is referred to the Schools Adjudicator.

I also want parents to be confident that the admissions system works for them. Where a parent has concerns about the fairness of the admission arrangements of their local school, it is important that they can refer these to the Schools Adjudicator. I want to ensure that the Schools Adjudicator is able to focus on such concerns, and is not impeded by the need to also consider large numbers of objections that have been referred by interest groups from outside the area.

Dr Elizabeth Passmore, the Chief Schools Adjudicator, raised concerns in her recent annual report that, in some instances, groups and individuals appear to have referred objections in an attempt to influence Government admissions policy, rather than due to concerns about the admission arrangements of a school that they wish their child to attend. One of the recommendations of the Chief Schools Adjudicator's report was that the Government should consider limiting the groups and individuals who are able to make an objection. Further details can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/ixymmqr>.

As your constituents may be aware, many parents already refer objections to the Schools Adjudicator. Under the new arrangements, parents would not be prevented from seeking the support and advice of a relevant organisation in submitting an objection if they wish to do so.

Local authorities play an important role in ensuring that the admission arrangements of the schools in their area are fair when considered collectively. That is why we are proposing that only local parents and local authorities should be able to refer objections about a school's admission arrangements. We are also proposing to provide parents and communities with a greater voice in local admissions by requiring admissions authorities to consult on their admission arrangements every four years, rather than every seven years as at present.

The proposal will be subject to full public consultation and parliamentary approval. I would like to assure your constituents that we will give their concerns careful consideration during the consultation process.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

Nicky Morgan
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