

# **BSP Enrolment Policy 2016**

Approved by Patron at The BSP AGM 25<sup>th</sup> May, 2016

## **Q & A**

(revision 26/05/16)

There will be many questions regarding the new policy and its implications. We endeavour to answer as many of these as possible below and will add more to this document as they arise.

If you have questions not addressed here please email them to:

[chairbom@brayschoolproject.ie](mailto:chairbom@brayschoolproject.ie)

## **General Questions about the Policy**

### **1. Why is the policy being changed?**

At the Bray School Project AGM, 2015, the previous Board of Management indicated that it would set up an Enrolment Policy Review Working Group to research and report on difficulties with the current Admissions and Enrolment Policy and procedures, for both the school and families.

It also asked that the AGM support the calling of an EGM should the proposed Education (Admission to Schools Bill), 2015 be enacted.

The Working Group (consisting of staff members, previous enrolment Officers and parents) and the current Board of Management researched the school's current issues and the proposed legislation extensively. It was concluded that this proposed policy would offer many improvements, and would be the most pragmatic solution to ongoing concerns.

The recommendation is for a combined policy based on an enrolment period, age, siblings and random selection. With this new policy, the school hopes to:

- Create an enrolment policy that is in line with the current educational / social / legislative landscape.
- Create a more constructive age profile in our classrooms (from the perspective of teaching; learning; and the new ECCE pre-school provisions).
- Create opportunities for newcomers to the area to apply to the school.

- End the pressure to put names down at birth- and give opportunity to those not aware of this system to apply.
- Address the practical and emotional needs of the majority of families applying (those with more than one child).
- Create a sense of a welcome, child-centredness and family friendliness for existing members of the school.
- Foster a sense of participation, loyalty and community in the school.
- Maximise the potential for volunteerism and fund-raising in the school, for the benefit of all children.

## **2. What are the main changes being implemented?**

The key changes are:

- The introduction of an older minimum age for entry into Junior Infants. Currently, children can start in Junior Infants as soon as they turn four. The new proposal is for children to have reached the age of four by 30<sup>th</sup> April of the year of entry.
- The discontinuation of the 'First Come, First Served' policy for Junior Infants. Instead, it is proposed to have a one month enrolment period, in the October of the year before the child is due to start school. (*i.e. October 2016 for 2017 start*)
- The introduction of a priority based system based on age and siblings. The system would have the following categories, in order of priority:
  1. Children with a sibling in the school and who are four before December 31<sup>st</sup> of year before entry
  2. Children with no sibling in the school and are four before December 31<sup>st</sup> of year before entry
  3. Children with a sibling in the school and are four before April 30<sup>th</sup> of the year of entry
  4. All other children who were born before April 30<sup>th</sup> of the year of entry
- Introducing a random selection process in the event of oversubscription in any of the above categories.

## **3. What is the Education (Admission to Schools Bill) 2015? How would it affect the school?**

Currently, Boards of Management are obliged to publish enrolment policies but there are few regulations around their content and implementation.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill, 2015 was proposed during the last government in an aim to regulate school enrolment policies and make them more 'more open, equitable and consistent'.

The elements of the proposed legislation which are most relevant for the current BSP Admission & Enrolment policy are:

- The prohibition on offering places based on date of application ('first come, first served').
- The derogation allowing schools to prioritise siblings.
- The requirement to set out characteristic spirit and objectives of the school.
- The obligation to set out an admission statement, oversubscription criteria, criteria for admissions to classes other than Junior Infants and the position on children with disability/special educational needs.
- The obligation to comply and include complete references to relevant equality legislation.
- Specific regulations regarding the application process and procedures (timing of enrolment period, notification of offers etc).

Other elements of the Bill have been subject to public debate (derogations in relation to religion and past pupils), but in general, the Bill is a welcome welcome step for school governance.

Unfortunately, due to political changes, there were delays in the implementation of the Bill.

The recently announced Programme for Government includes the intention to publish new School Admissions and Excellence legislation based on the proposed Bill for the 2017/2018 academic year.

With this new BSP Admissions & Enrolment Policy, the school will be in a good position of compliance when this new legislation is enacted. Any further review at that point should be straightforward.

More information on the Bill can be found at:

<http://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Information/School-Enrolment/>

More information on the Programme for Government on Education can be found at:

[http://www.into.ie/ROI/NewsEvents/LatestNews/Downloads/ProgrammeforGovernment\\_Education.pdf](http://www.into.ie/ROI/NewsEvents/LatestNews/Downloads/ProgrammeforGovernment_Education.pdf)

#### **4. Why are you removing the 'first come, first served' policy?**

The 'first come, first served' policy in BSP at first glance it appears to be a fair and equitable system. However, as identified by draft government legislation

and related submissions, the system has in fact several inevitable biases and consequences.

The current size of the school and oversubscription level means that with 'first come, first served' only those who pre-enrol their children from birth or soon after are likely to be offered a place for Junior Infants. This situation means that an applicant's chances of receiving a place are determined by month of birth, foreknowledge of the system and being resident in the locality four/five years prior to a child starting school.

With this new policy, the Board of Management attempts to address these consequences and improve equality of access, in line with the legislation of the Education (Admission to Schools Bill) 2015.

The alternative system of a strict random selection process for all was considered but rejected in favour of an enrolment period with age and sibling criteria, and random selection only within these criteria. This option was seen to take into account the actual context and needs of applicants and not subject everyone to the stress of a lottery system.

## **5. Why are siblings being given priority?**

For Junior Infant applications, the new policy gives preference to older siblings, before older non-siblings and younger children. The applicant sibling must have a sibling already enrolled in the school, at the time of applying and at the time of starting Junior Infants. The term 'sibling' includes a step, half or fostered brother or sister.

Given the high level of oversubscription in the Junior Infant intake and the fact that BSP is the only non faith-based school in Bray, the current Board of Management recognizes the extra pressure and stress on families with more than one child, which a policy of strictly 'first come, first served' for all creates.

The rationale for the principle of giving priority to siblings is to create a policy that is:

**Practical and logical** - the obvious need of parents/guardians to have their children attend and commute to the same school (in terms of travel arrangements, school calendars, in-school events, extra curricular activities, fundraising and finances, parental involvement.)

**Child-centred & family-friendly** – the benefits for younger/older siblings and their families in terms of settling into school, family relationships, school/life balance. 'Buddy system' enhanced.

**Respects parental wishes** – a survey by the National Parents Council (Primary) in 2010 found that the vast majority of parents favoured a system based on geographical area (not a relevant factor in BSP) and sibling priority

**Fosters school community** – sense of security and welcome to incoming families who have/may yet have younger siblings.

Increased parental involvement/volunteering/fundraising, as loyalties are not divided between different schools

**Specifically supported by:** Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission; National Educational Welfare Board; the National Parents Council, The Irish Traveller Movement; Joint Managerial Body, Irish National Teachers Organisation, Irish Primary Principals' Network and the Teachers Union of Ireland; [As outlined in submission documents to the DES during the consultation period for the Education (Admission to Schools Bill), 2015 - "Discussion Paper on a Regulatory Framework for School Enrolment"].

Educate Together allow schools under its patronage to apply to introduce a sibling preference to the default First Come, First Served. This has been done by the majority of ET schools who are oversubscribed and single stream.

Education Equality, and the Green Party have also stated support for sibling preferences.

**In line with the majority of other similar schools** – most oversubscribed, single stream, urban schools in Ireland give preference to siblings in some way.

**In line with current DES regulations** - and also proposed regulations set out by the (Admission to Schools Bill), 2015.

The current Board of Management has looked at the sibling issue in the context of national concerns as well as our own school community.

The ongoing demand for places in the school causes stress for all families applying. The Board is implementing a pragmatic system which addresses the extra pressure on families with siblings, but in the context of age and in conjunction with the statistical fairness of random selection.

## **6. Wasn't the sibling policy phased out recently?**

The existing BSP Admissions & Enrolment policy was implemented in 2011. The main change at that time was the removal of the sibling priority from the 'first come, first served' system, which was phased out over a number of years. This was done from an egalitarian point of view, with concerns for equality of access for individual applications.

Given the lack of national discussion and guidance on enrolment policies at the time, and debate within Educate Together on the sibling subject, these concerns were understandable. However since then, there has been extensive research, consultation and professional submissions made to the DES on the topic of enrolment policies. As outlined in the previous question, many of the submissions support the practice of giving preference to siblings from a practical point of view. The resulting Education (Admission to Schools) Bill, 2015, reinforces the principle of maximum accessibility and obliges compliance with Equality legislation, yet allows for sibling priority.

In 2011, the sibling priority was removed, but the system of 'first come, first served' was retained. However, the current proposal is a system that addresses the need for a place in the context of the child's family and age, whilst addressing the natural biases of 'first come, first served'.

With this new combined policy, the Board of Management hopes to improve equality of access and support its founding principles of a multid denominational, co-educational, child-centred and democratically run school.

### **7. Why are you giving priority to older children? How were the 30<sup>th</sup> April and 31<sup>st</sup> December cut-off dates chosen?**

The ongoing oversubscription situation in Junior Infants, means the school must choose criteria on which to base the allocation of places. As discussed above, the conclusion given the current size of the school, was a combined policy based on an enrolment period, siblings, age and random selection.

The age criteria was chosen from a practical and point of view and with the best interests of children and their families in mind.

We looked at several factors when deciding on cut-off dates including: legal school starting age requirements; age profile currently in the school and on pre-enrolment lists; eligibility and likely outcome of the extra free pre-school year (ECCE scheme); staff input; and national trends and recommendations for children to start school later.

For 2017, over half the children on the pre-enrolment list were born before December 31<sup>st</sup> 2012 and these children would not be eligible for the ECCE scheme in Sept 2017. On the other hand, children born January 1<sup>st</sup> 2013 or later would be able to remain in the ECCE scheme for the 2017/18 academic year.

Data (birth date ranges) were run through mathematical models to ascertain what the knock-on effect of selecting specific dates would be and to obtain predictions for different birth dates to avoid excluding a cohort of children from having a chance of a place. The date ranges finally agreed upon were to avoid excluding a cohort of children born after 'nth' date. That is, that those children would have 0% chance of being offered a place.

Many other schools have a similar minimum age. For example, for St. Patrick's in Bray a child must be aged four by 30<sup>th</sup> April of year of entry.

### **8. If my child turns 5 in January/February of the year they enter school - will they be too old for Junior Infants/out of line with other local schools?**

Legally, children can be enrolled in primary school from the age of 4 upwards and must have started their formal education by the age of 6 years. So a child who is aged 5 in January/February is in the normal school starting age

range. (There are already children in the school who turned 5 in January/February and started Junior Infants that year).

Nationally, the number of children starting school at the age of 4 is falling, with 65% of children starting school at age 5 in 2015, for example. In addition, with the introduction of the second free pre-school year of the ECCE scheme, the current government intends to "help prepare young children further for starting school, raising the school starting age to 5 years".

In the new policy, a child who turns 4 in January/February *is* eligible to apply for that year. However, they would only be offered a place after those who turn 4 on or before 31<sup>st</sup> December have been offered places. One of the reasons is that these children would lose their eligibility for the ECCE scheme for the following academic year, and thus are seen to have a greater need to start school.

## **Questions on Policy Implementation / Application Procedures if ratified**

### **9. When does the new policy come into effect? Who does it apply to?**

The policy comes into effect as soon as notification is given to existing applicants and it is published on the school website (effectively immediately - within two days of the AGM). All applicants will be informed of any new procedures during the transition period which would affect them. Places already offered and accepted for 2016 are secured.

The policy comes into effect immediately and applies to all applicants **except**:

- Those who have already been offered places for September 2016.
- Those on the waiting list for Junior Infants 2016.
- People who received a place but have deferred from 2016 to 2017 before 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2016

### **10. I've already received an offer of a place for September 2016, does this apply to me?**

If you have received an offer for any class for September 2016, your place is secure and you do not need to do anything.

### **11. What if my child's name is already on a list?**

We will contact all families on existing pre-enrolment / waiting lists and inform them of the new policy, how it affects them and what they need to do, if anything.

**a. My child's name is on the waiting list for Junior Infants September 2016. Does the new policy apply to me? Do I have to do anything?**

If you are on a waiting list for the Junior Infants 2016/2017 school year, the old policy will apply and you do not need to do anything.

If a place becomes available over the next few months, offers will be made to the next on the list, in accordance with the 'first come, first served' policy. Your child can start school once they turn 4 on or after the start of school.

If you do not receive a place by 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016 and you wish to apply for *Junior* Infants the following year (2017/2018), the new policy will apply to you. Therefore, you will need to apply online in October 2016, and the sibling/age priorities will affect the child's application.

If you do not receive a place by 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016 and you wish to apply for *Senior* Infants of the following year (2017/2018), the new policy will apply to you. You can apply online using the Senior Infants-6<sup>th</sup> Class Application Form, at any time.

**b. My child's name is on the waiting list for Senior Infants or 1st-6<sup>th</sup> Class for September 2016. Does the new policy apply to me? Do I have to do anything?**

If you are on a waiting list for Senior Infants – 6<sup>th</sup> 2016/2017 school year, the old policy will still apply and you do not need to do anything.

**c. I already pre-enrolled my child for Junior Infants 2017 (or a later year), does the new policy apply to me? Do I have to do anything?**

The new policy applies to applications for the Junior Infants 2017/2018 year and later.

If you previously submitted a Pre-Enrolment Form (on the school website or on paper) for the **2017/2018 school year or later**, **your application will no longer be valid.**

**You will need to re-apply**, following the procedures outlined in the new policy.

The new online Junior Infant Application Forms will be made available on the school website in the October prior to the year intending to start.

The exact open/close date of the October Enrolment Period will be published on the school website each September.

You must submit the application on or before the **closing date**.

*Example: If you previously pre-enrolled your child for Junior Infants 2019, you must now wait until October 2018 and apply using the online Junior Infants 2019 Application Form. This will*

*only be available on the school website at that time. You must submit the application on or before the closing date, which will be at the end of October 2018.*

**d. My child is on the waiting list for the classes for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, does the new policy apply to me? Do I need to do anything?**

There is no major change to the enrolment policy for children with ASD and you need not do anything.

As outlined in the Admission Statement of the Policy we will consider class size and other factors in determining entry for children on the waiting list for these classes.

\* Every October, the school will up-date the waiting lists for each class. Parents/guardians will be contacted by e-mail and asked to confirm if they wish for their child's name to be moved to the waiting list for the next class.

**12. What happens to the data I submitted with the old Pre-Enrolment Form?**

We will use the contact data to contact all families to inform them of the changes to the enrolment policy. For every year that we currently have children already pre-enrolled for Junior Infants, we will remind the relevant families of the new policy and that they should apply during the appropriate October Enrolment period.

**13. What if I miss the enrolment deadline?**

Unfortunately, if you miss the enrolment deadline, you will have to wait until the following year to apply again.

**14. I have recently moved to the area and have a place for my children in fifth and first class, but all places have been filled for Junior Infants and I have a child that needs to start school this year – Can anything be done?**

You can avail of the places for the older children and re-apply the following year for the Junior Infants place (If the child will not be too old to start school). Or you could start the child in Junior Infants in another school and apply for a place in Senior Infants in BSP.

**15. My eldest child will be in sixth class when I intend to apply for my youngest child in Junior Infants. Will he/she be able to avail of the sibling priority?**

The school gives priority to children who have siblings enrolled in the school at the time of applying **AND** at the time of starting Junior Infants. Therefore, in this case, the sibling priority will not apply, as the older sibling will have left the school by the time the younger has started in Junior Infants.

The sibling priority exists for the practical need of parents/guardians, to have all their children attend the same primary school.

**16. Does the school / board have any discretion with regard to supernumerary places?**

No. Discretion for supernumerary places was removed in 2011. Places are only allocated as stated in the policy.

**17. Why are all of the changes being introduced at one time...Can the changes not be made incrementally?**

The changes seek to rectify all of the weaknesses of the previous policy in a unified manner. They take into account the wider context of each application whilst allocating places as fairly and impartially as possible. In line with the ethos, they redress the exclusive elements of the existing policy as outlined above. The preference to siblings is being balanced by the enrolment period, the age criteria and random selection element. This combined model is intrinsic to the spirit of the policy and therefore is intended to be implemented as a single policy change, rather than incrementally over a period of years.

The Board of Management acknowledges that the new policy is a significant departure from a familiar system. However, in the face of the ongoing and increasing demand for places, the school cannot accommodate all those who are on waiting lists from birth (there are currently waiting lists up until the year 2020) therefore some criteria must be applied. It is this combination of sibling, age, enrolment period and random selection which is the most equitable and pragmatic solution.

**18. Why is the school so oversubscribed ... What can be done?**

The Board of Management acknowledges that the difficult choices around the enrolment policy have to be made because of the ongoing demand for places as a single-stream school and the only non faith-based school in Bray. The school would like to engage with its community on this issue and explore possible solutions and discussion will take place in the near future. Expertise, suggestions and engagement will be very welcome.