



School Admission Appeals (for Belfairs Academy)

Guidance for parents / carers

March 2014

Introduction

This booklet tells you what will happen if you are refused a place for your child to attend Belfairs Academy.

Belfairs is an Academy and different arrangements apply for **academies, foundation** and **voluntary aided** schools, where instead of the admissions authority, the individual school governing body is responsible for arranging appeals. A list of the different types of school is shown on page 12 of this booklet. Please note that any reference to "parent" in this booklet refers to whoever has parental responsibility for the child.

We hope that most of the questions and answers are self-explanatory. If however, you require any clarification or help please contact us:

Belfairs Academy Notice of Appeal Forms are available from

Mrs H Inglis
Admission Appeals Administrator
Belfairs Academy
Highlands Boulevard
Leigh-on-Sea
Essex
SS9 3TG

Tel: 01702 509000 ext 236

Or on the school website www.belfairs.southend.sch.uk

What legislation relates to school admissions and appeals?

The School Admission Appeals Code (2012) which has been issued under section 84 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (SSFA).

When did this code come into force?

The code came into force on 1st February 2012 and applies to all appeals lodged on or after that date.

For what reasons can an admission authority refuse an application for a school place?

Admission authorities must comply with a parental preference except in certain limited circumstances namely:

- where to admit the child would prejudice the provision of efficient education or the efficient use of resources. Admission authorities may not refuse to admit children to any year group in which pupils are normally admitted to the school on these grounds unless the number of applications for places in that relevant year exceeds the school's admissions number;
- where the school is wholly selective by high ability or by aptitude, and the admission of the pupil would not be compatible with such selection under the admission arrangements. However, partially selective schools, and those which operate banding must admit up to their published admissions numbers. Schools which are partially selective - sometimes referred to as "bilateral schools" or as having "grammar school streams" may not keep selective places empty. Only schools that are wholly selective by high academic ability or by aptitude can keep places empty if they do not have sufficient applicants of the required standard. In Southend this only applies to the 4 grammar schools;
- where another place has been offered under co-ordinated admission arrangements;
- where the child has been permanently excluded from two or more schools a parent can still express a preference for a school place, but the requirement to comply with the preference is removed for a period of two years from the last exclusion took place. The twice excluded rule does not apply:
 - 1) to children who were below compulsory school age at the time of the exclusion;
 - 2) to children who have been re-instated following a permanent exclusion (or would have been had it been practicable to do so) or;
 - 3) children with SEN statements;

In addition to the above, in exceptional circumstances an admission authority may decide to refuse to admit a child with challenging behaviour although there are places available in the school. This will only normally be appropriate where a school has a particularly high proportion of pupils with challenging behaviour or previously excluded children. In these cases the school governing body must refer the case to the Local Authority for action under the Fair Access Protocol.

If I am refused a place at my preferred school how do I appeal?

If you are refused a place at any school you indicated as a preference, you have the right to appeal against the decision to an independent admission appeals panel (IAP).

In considering whether to appeal you should refer to the Council's Secondary School Admissions booklet which will give you information regarding admissions during the previous academic year. This information will include:

- the admission limit for the school;
- the number of preferences received for admission (including the number of 1st preferences);
- the number of places offered;
- the number of appeals lodged;
- the number of appeals heard;
- the number of appeals upheld;
- the admissions criteria of the last child admitted.

Please consider carefully all relevant information before you decide to appeal. Even if you are intending to appeal we always advise parents to accept any place currently being offered. Accepting a place does not prevent you appealing for a place at your preferred school. Often parents are not successful in their appeal and accepting any place offered gives you the security of a school place.

How quickly do I need to appeal?

Once you have been notified that your application has been refused you will need to submit your appeal within 20 school days.

What forms will I need to complete?

A Notice of Appeal for Belfairs Academy form should be completed and returned to the school. Forms are available from school reception or may be downloaded from www.belfairs.southend.sch.co.uk

What is the purpose of the Notice of Appeal form?

The purpose of the appeal form is to ensure, as far as possible, that all the relevant facts are available to the panel and to give you a chance to explain, in your own words, the case you wish to make. The law requires that the grounds for the appeal must be set out in writing. It may be that you have already expressed your reasons for wanting a place at your preferred school following previous correspondence with the admission authority, in which case you may refer to that correspondence and ask that copies be circulated to the panel members. Prior to the hearing the appeal panel will be given a copy of the admissions authority's case for refusing your preference and a copy of all papers you have presented as your case. Both you and the Belfairs Academy's presenting officer will also be sent a copy of all the papers sent to the appeal panel.

Once I have submitted my appeal form how quickly will the hearing take place?

As confirmed earlier, the Council is responsible for arranging admission appeals for community schools whereas academies, foundation and voluntary aided schools are responsible for arranging their own appeals. However all appeals must be heard within the following timescales:

- primary and secondary admissions – for applications made in the normal admissions round appeals must be heard within 40 school days of the deadline for lodging appeals;
- for late applications – appeals should be heard within 40 school days from the deadline for lodging appeals where possible or within 30 school days of the appeal being lodged

- for applications to sixth forms, appeals must not be heard before confirmation of the exam results on which the offer of a place depends. They must be heard within 30 school days of being lodged. Where the offer of a place is not dependent upon exam results, appeals must be heard within 40 school days of the deadline for lodging appeals;
- for applications for in-year admissions, appeals must be heard within 30 school days of the appeal being lodged;
- appeals submitted after the deadline must still be heard, but this can be done to a timescale set by the admission authority.

School days refer to the days in a school term when pupils are required to attend.

In Southend, IAP hearings are not held during the school holiday periods.

How will I be told about the hearing?

Parents must receive written notice of the date their appeal will be heard at least 10 school days in advance of the hearing (unless they have indicated on the appeal form that shorter notice is acceptable). Where a parent fails or is unable to attend the hearing and it is impractical to offer an alternative date the panel may decide to go ahead with the appeal and make a decision on the written information submitted.

Who will actually hear my appeal?

For all schools in the Borough the panel is constituted by the School Admissions Appeals Code and must consist of either three or five members from the following categories:

- a) lay people, that is someone without personal experience in the management of any school or provision of education in any school (except as a school governor or in another voluntary capacity);
- b) people who have experience in education, who are acquainted with educational conditions in the local authority area, or who are parents of registered pupils at school.

In Southend appeals panels generally consist of 3 members.

Are any people disqualified from membership of an appeal panel?

The following people are disqualified from membership of an appeal panel:

- a) a member of the local authority which is the admission authority or in whose area the school in question is located;
- b) a member or former member of the governing body of the school in question;
- c) any person employed by the local authority or governing body of the school in question other than as a teacher or teaching assistant;
- d) any person who has, or at any time has had, any connection with the authority, school or any person in sub-paragraph c) above which might reasonably be taken to raise doubts about that person's ability to act impartially;
- e) any person who has not attended training required by the admission authority arranging the appeal panel.

Where will the appeal be heard?

The clerk to the appeal panel will let you know when and where the hearing will be held. Venues for appeal hearings should be accessible to all appellants and have a suitable area for appellants and presenting officers to wait separately from the panel before and between appeals.

Appeal hearings for places at Belfairs Academy are generally held at the Academy.

Do I have to attend the hearing?

Parents should make every effort to attend so that they can explain their case in person. You can however elect not to appear in person and to have your appeal considered on the basis of your written evidence only. If this is your intention, you should indicate this at section 14(a) of the Notice of Appeal form.

If you indicate on the Notice of Appeal form that you wish to attend the meeting of the panel but then, having failed to give a reasonable explanation do not do so, the appeal panel will proceed in your absence and make their decision on the basis of your written case.

Can I bring someone with me to the hearing?

You may, if you wish, bring with you a friend or representative. The idea of having a "friend" is that you may feel more at ease with this support when putting forward your views. If this is your wish please show the name of the person at section 5 of the Notice of Appeal form and indicate whether they are supporting or representing you in a legal capacity e.g. a solicitor.

If you decide to be legally represented, the school may wish to be similarly represented and hence the need to know your intentions. If it transpires at the hearing that you are legally represented without prior notice being given, the presenting officer will be asked if the school also wishes to be so represented and this is likely to lead to an adjournment of the hearing. The Secretary of State has said that he expects that legal representation will seldom be necessary or appropriate. If you are legally represented you will, of course, be responsible for any costs you may incur.

If you are disabled or need an interpreter to help you at the hearing please ensure you complete section 6 of the appeal form.

What is the role of the Belfairs Academy presenting officer at the hearing?

The presenting officer will generally not be contesting the circumstances of your case. He / she will be attempting to satisfy the panel that the admission authority has filled the available places at Belfairs Academy in accordance with the published admission criteria and that the number of places it has filled has achieved the annual admission limit to ensure efficient use of resources and the provision of efficient education. It is for you to explain to the panel why you feel that the admission of your child should be allowed. This procedure may sound somewhat complicated but it is the intention that appeals panel hearings will be conducted in as informal an atmosphere as possible with every opportunity for questioning and discussion of issues.

Can anyone else accompany the Belfairs Academy presenting officer?

The panel chair must ensure that only one representative acts as the presenting officer at the hearing. One additional representative e.g. headteacher or school governor, may accompany the presenting officer to assist proceedings, for example by answering detailed questions raised by the panel or appellants about the school.

What will be the procedure on the day of the hearing?

- once you arrive at the place where the hearing will take place, the Belfairs Academy presenting officer will introduce him / herself to you;
- once the panel is ready to hear your case the clerk will take you and the presenting officer to the room where the panel is meeting;
- the chair of the panel will introduce the panel members and the clerk. the procedure will then normally be:
 1. the case for Belfairs Academy;
 2. questions by the panel;
 3. questions by the appellant;
 4. the case for the appellant;
 5. questions by the panel;
 6. questions by Belfairs Academy;
 7. summing up by Belfairs Academy;
 8. summing up by the appellant.

Once this procedure has been completed you and / or your representative and the presenting officer will leave the room.

If there are a number of appeals for the same year group at the same school are the procedures the same?

Where there are a number of appeals for the same year group the school will probably decide to arrange these as grouped multiple appeals. In this case all of the appellants are invited to a meeting and the school's presenting officer will present the case in respect of the school once to all those present. The panel members, all of the appellants and any representatives who may be attending with them are then able to question the case presented by the school.

Once this process has been completed you will then be invited to a separate meeting of the appeal panel at which you will have the opportunity to present your individual reasons for wanting a place at Belfairs Academy. At your individual hearing you will not be able to question the school's case again.

Should I bring my child(ren) to the hearing?

No, the panel does not need to meet or see the child(ren) and there are no facilities available for looking after child(ren).

Will the panel take into account my child's position on the waiting list for the school of my choice?

When hearing appeals, panels must not take into account where the admission authority has placed a child on the waiting list or of the fact that appeals have or have not been made in respect of other children on the waiting list. In addition when making decisions on appeals, panels must not determine where a child should be placed on any waiting list.

What decisions can the appeal panel make?

The panel must either uphold or reject an appeal. It must not uphold an appeal subject to any specified conditions.

The School Standards & Framework Act and the Admissions Code confirm that a panel's decision that a child shall be admitted to a school is binding on parents, the local authority in the case of a community school appeal and on the governing body in the case of an academy, foundation or voluntary aided school.

When will I be informed of the decision?

The appeal panel must communicate the decision of every appeal, including the reasons for that decision, in writing to the parents and the admission authority. If your appeal is one of a number for the same school the panel will not make decisions until all of the appeals have been heard. In these circumstances it may not be possible to advise you of the outcome of your appeal for some time. If your appeal is the only one for a particular school the clerk will write to you within 5 school days.

What will the decision letter tell me?

The decision letter must contain a summary of relevant factors that were raised by the parties and considered by the panel. It must also give clear reasons for the panel's decision, including how and why any issues of fact or law were decided by the panel during the hearing.

Is there any further right of appeal?

No, the decision of the appeals panel is binding on all parties.

If my appeal is turned down when can I appeal again?

Appellants do not have the right to a second appeal in respect of the same school for the same academic year unless, in exceptional circumstances, the admission authority has accepted a second application from the appellant because of a significant and material change in the circumstances of the parent, child or school but still refused admission.

If a second appeal is granted the panel must be made up of different members from the first.

Appellants may apply for a place in the same school in respect of a later academic year and will have a further right of appeal if that application is unsuccessful.

If I feel there was maladministration by the panel in the way they dealt with my case who should I contact?

If your admission appeal was in respect of an academy and after your appeal, you are concerned that the appeal did not comply with the Code or was set up wrongly, and that this affected the outcome of your appeal, you can complain to the Education Funding Agency (EFA). The EFA will investigate the complaint on behalf of the Secretary of State. Further details regarding the EFA can be found at www.education.gov.uk

If the EFA finds that the appeal arrangements have breached the Code, the academy may be required to establish a fresh appeal to hear your case if EFA finds that any breach may have affected the outcome of the appeal.

Complaints to the EFA about the appeal panel process should be submitted by sending a completed complaint form by email to academyquestions@efa.education.gov.uk or by post to:

Admission Appeal Complaints, Academies Central Unit, Education Funding Agency, Earlsdon Park, Butts Road, Coventry CV1 3BH

Can anyone else provide me with further independent advice about admission appeals?

The Advisory Centre for Education (ACE), a long established independent national charity provides advice to parents on educational issues. ACE may be contacted at:

Advisory Centre for Education (ACE), The Busworks, United House, North Road, London N7 9DP

General advice line 0808 800 5793

The ACE information leaflet "Appealing for a school" may be downloaded from the website www.ace-ed.org.uk

Glossary of abbreviations and terms

Academy - Schools funded directly by Central Government, where an Academy Trust is established which owns the land and employs the staff. The operation of the school / academy is overseen by the governing body.

Admission authority - The official body that decides how pupils will be admitted to a school.

Community schools – schools wholly funded by the Council, where the Council employs the staff and is the admissions authority.

Council - Southend on Sea Borough Council who are the Local Authority. In most cases the function of the Council will be undertaken by the Pupil Access Team within the Department of Children & Learning.

Department for Education - a central government department responsible for education matters.

Foundation schools – schools funded by the Council where the governing body employs the staff and is the admissions authority.

Governing Body – Community schools - a group of individuals who are responsible for promoting high standards of educational attainment, the conduct of the school and managing the school budget.

Governing Body – Academies, Foundation and Voluntary Aided schools - a group of individuals who are responsible for the school admission arrangements, promoting high standards of educational attainment, the conduct of the school and managing the school budget.

Independent Appeal Panel - A group of 3 or 5 people who decide whether a child that has already been turned down for a school place by the admission authority should be given a place.

Normal round of admissions - Under the Southend Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme, the normal round of admissions refers to admissions to Reception, year 3 and year 7 up to the end of the first week of the autumn term.

Voluntary Aided schools – schools set up and owned by a voluntary body, usually a church body, largely financed by the Council. The governing body employs the staff and is the admissions authority.