

March 2017

Response to Consultation on the Admissions Policies for 2018-19

The consultation process in respect of JCoSS ran from 5 December 2016 to 20 January 2017. The proposed policies – for Year 7 entry and Year 12 entry – were published on the school’s website, together with details of how to respond. The School contacted all the schools, synagogues and individuals who had contributed to previous years’ consultations to draw their attention to this year’s process.

Summary of outcome

The arguments for and against adding Eden as a feeder school were finely balanced; likewise the arguments for and against feeder schools more generally.

Our original intention for the proposed changes was to safeguard the pluralist intake of applicants to JCoSS, as we believed there would be surplus places in the community for September 2018. The position regarding place provision in the community for 2018 remains uncertain, but Governors are obliged to set a policy using the best information they had at the time of their decision.

On balance, therefore, Governors did not feel that this was the right time to make any significant changes to our admissions criteria which could be perceived as either entrenching or disposing of feeder schools generally. Governors felt the same about proximity places. Therefore, for now, the three existing feeder schools will retain their status as in 2017/8 but we will not be adding Eden. The proximity places will not change. We will however continue to monitor the position and consult accordingly.

The changes that were proposed

The Year 7 Policy put to consultation proposed:

1. The addition of 5 feeder places for students at Eden Primary School
2. The reduction of proximity places from, 18 to 12
3. Priority places for the children of members of staff
4. A change in the eligibility for sibling places

The Year 12 Policy put to consultation proposed:

5. Changes to the entry requirements for 6th form courses in line with new GCSE grading arrangements.

The Governing Body’s key reasons for the proposed changes were as follows:

1. Feeder Places

At the time the consultation began, two applications had been made for Free Schools of a modern orthodox Jewish character. Given the known and increasing shortfall of places Governors believed it was likely that one of the schools would be successful in its application to open. The expectation was that this would create significantly more places across the community and in such a situation, Governors felt it was necessary to take steps to safeguard the pluralist intake of applicants to JCoSS.

The proposal was therefore to retain our existing feeder schools (Akiva, Clore Shalom and Clore Tikva) which we have previously been phasing out, and to add Eden on the same basis, given that it has the same commonality of ethos as the existing feeder schools. This reversal of our previously declared 'direction of travel' was justified by the predicted overcapacity; the expected increase in the supply of places meaning that we could honour the desire for feeder school applicants for continuity of ethos without materially disadvantaging applicants from other schools.

2. Reduction of proximity places

Governors acknowledged, however, that adding feeder places would entail reducing the number of JCoSS places available by random allocation. There was also evidence that the proximity places were being offered to an expanding radius beyond what might be thought of as "proximate". The purpose of these places was to enable those for whom JCoSS is within walking distance to have a guaranteed place, but evidence suggested that most of those gaining proximity places were in practice beyond walking distance. There was therefore an argument that a deficit in random allocation places could be offset by a reduction in proximity places.

3. Priority for children of staff

In view of well-known national recruitment and retention issues, Governors also proposed to give priority places (just ahead of the random ballot) to the children of members of staff, as a way of encouraging good applicants to apply for jobs and to stay with us once appointed. This is common practice in many schools.

4. Change to sibling eligibility

Governors proposed to extend the time that can elapse between a student leaving JCoSS and their younger siblings qualifying for a sibling place from 1 year to 3 years. This proposal would bring us in line with other Jewish schools and reflect a more inclusive understanding of "family".

5. 6th form entry criteria

The structure of GCSE grades is evolving from 2017 onwards, so that grades are awarded from 9 to 1 rather than A* to G, with a good pass being regarded as a Grade 5 or above. The proposal revised the entry criteria to JCoSS 6th form courses to reflect these changes.

The response to the consultation

A large number of submissions were received, both from those supporting the proposed policy (generally, though not exclusively, from those with children at Eden) and from those opposed to it (mainly from those who opposed Feeder schools generally and a reduction in proximity places specifically). Responses came in the form of individual written responses, letters with multiple signatories, and online petitions. While what follows is only a summary of submissions, Governors did read and take note of all that they received.

Feeder Schools:

There was, as in previous years, strong feeling on both sides of the feeder school issue. Families connected to Eden, as well as the leadership of the school, warmly welcomed the proposal. Many connected to Alma also expressed the hope that they would be added as a feeder on the same basis when there are children of the relevant age. The ethos connection was affirmed, and the move seen as being rightfully consistent with the existing feeder schools.

Opposition to this proposal was also strongly expressed. Families who felt a strong ethos connection to JCoSS but who had either chosen a non-Jewish primary school on principle, or not got a place at a Jewish school, felt that adding another feeder school would make it even harder for them to get places. This was experienced by some as a betrayal of the inclusive vision of the school. Some felt that the predominance of children from a few schools was potentially unhelpful to dynamics at JCoSS, others felt it helped secondary transition to have such strong peer groups.

Others objected to feeder schools on principle, arguing that they are divisive of the community. The argument was made that they discriminate against orthodox children who might be just as supportive of the JCoSS ethos or indeed more so: attending a feeder school was not in itself a sign of any particular commitment to JCoSS, whose ethos is moreover pluralist rather than progressive.

Many respondents felt that the reversal in the previously stated 'direction of travel' to remove feeder schools was not justified by the new context. Several respondents were unmoved by the argument that there would be more places, in the absence of certainty about where these places would be. News that both Free School applications had so far been unsuccessful was cited in support of this.

Proximity Places

This proposal also attracted strong views, overwhelmingly negative. Those living close to the school – some of whom had taken account of the admissions policy in choosing the area – felt that the reduction ran counter to the desire of the school to make links to its geographical community. Some respondents – including Barnet Local Authority – noted that overall the changes would take places away from local children (likely to be Barnet residents) and give them to children further away (likely to be Haringey residents). This was felt to be unsound on environmental, health or traffic grounds, and on the basis that JCoSS is a Barnet school. The Local Authority submission included the observation that, officially, walking distance is set at 3 miles.

Priority for Staff Children

The proposal attracted a smaller number of responses. JCoSS staff welcomed the change, and some other respondents acknowledged the advantage of it. A similar change has been proposed by Barnet Local Authority for all schools that follow its generic admissions policy.

Change to Sibling Eligibility

A small number of comments were received, some rejecting the notion of sibling places on principle, others objecting to any change that takes places from the random ballot, and others welcoming the change.

6th form entry criteria

No comments were received in relation to this proposal.

The decision

During the course of the consultation, news was received that both the Free School applications had been unsuccessful at the first hurdle. At the time the policy had to be set it was unclear whether revised applications might be made. Meanwhile, however, discussions amongst existing schools have resulted in plans to provide an additional 90 places by 2018. (This is separate from the firm decision by JCoSS to offer 30 additional places in 2017). Although these additional places are subject to capital funding, logistical considerations and consent from all stakeholders, if they materialise they will meet the projected increase in demand without providing surplus capacity.

Governors are obliged to set a policy by the end of February using the information they have, and their judgement is that there is unlikely to be a surplus of places in 2018. Rather, supply will probably rise in line with demand (this may include additional places at JCoSS), which means that the context will remain broadly similar.

The stated basis for the proposals regarding feeder schools and proximity places thus remains unclear and therefore Governors do not now feel that significant changes to our admissions criteria are warranted at this point. Given all the factors it is more appropriate for now to leave the policy broadly as it was. Any additional places on offer at JCoSS in 2018 will be offered on the basis of random allocation.

As a consequence the decisions for 2018 are as follows:

1. **There will not be guaranteed feeder places for Eden.** Feeder places will remain for 2018 at 5 places per Year 6 class for the existing feeder schools, in view of the historical connection. While Governors recognise that on ethos grounds Eden has a similar claim to feeder status, they do not feel it is justifiable in the current climate to add additional feeder schools or feeder school places.
2. **The proximity places will remain at 18**, as at present. Governors accepted the arguments advanced against this proposal and noted that since feeder numbers are remaining unchanged, a large part of the justification for reducing proximity places is removed. Although JCoSS has never sought to be a local community school, seeking rather to serve the Jewish community as a whole, the value of proximity places is affirmed.
3. **The change to sibling eligibility** will go ahead. The numbers involved are likely to be very small, and the consultation did not change Governors' judgements on this issue.
4. **Priority for staff children, and the changes to 6th form entry criteria** were broadly uncontroversial and these proposed changes **will go ahead**.

Governors are grateful to all who contributed to the consultation process and continue to value the support for the school that is evident from all responses. They reiterate their hope that applications will come from all sections of the community including feeder and non-feeder school applicants. They will continue to engage positively in ongoing discussions about the provision of places at Jewish schools in the coming years.