

## **TRANSFER 2010: Q & A for parents/children**

### **Q1. What has been announced?**

- After lengthy consultation with all involved the Minister had produced plans to replace academic transfer at 11 with informed election at 14. Her plans allowed for 3 years of transition in which grammar schools had the option of decreasing degrees of partial academic selection (bilateralism).
- The Executive has not agreed these plans and so the Minister has announced that she is withdrawing them. This means that she has also announced that she is withdrawing the test that had been commissioned from CCEA and that there will be no DE-provided test for the purposes of Transfer 2010.
- The Minister has also announced that the Department of Education has issued Guidance to all involved in admissions arrangements for Transfer 2010.

### **Q2. How will this Guidance give clarity to parents?**

- It will enable schools to develop their admissions criteria and then communicate these to parents and others.

### **Q3. Does this mean that children will need to sit tests for transfer in 2010?**

- This means that for the admissions of children into the 2010/11 post-primary school year, there will be no laws stating which admissions criteria post-primary schools can and cannot use. The use of academic criteria will not be prohibited
- There will, however, be no DE-provided test for the purposes of post-primary transfer.
- Guidance issued from the Department of Education recommends to post-primary schools the admissions criteria they should use.
- This Guidance does not recommend that post-primary schools use academic admissions criteria.
- Some post-primary schools have already published an intention to use academic admissions criteria.
- Any post-primary schools that remain intent on using academic admissions criteria will have to have regard to the Department's Guidance and will have to provide their own assessment or test and will have to communicate their intention to parents.

**Q4. Will my child have to sit more than one test. If so, how do primary schools prepare children for this?**

- The Guidance does not recommend that schools practice academic selection within their admissions.
- If, however, post-primary schools do choose to do this, they will determine what assessment or test is to be at the heart of their ability-based selective process.
- It is theoretically possible, therefore, that, as part of the process of applying to their preferred post-primary schools, a child will have to sit different tests as part of different applications.
- The Guidance is clear that the responsibility of primary schools is to deliver the primary curriculum to all of their children. This responsibility is defined in law. For this reason the Guidance strongly recommends that primary schools do not prepare their children for any entrance test's that some post-primary schools may choose to operate. Of course, within their statutory duties, all primary schools do and should prepare all of their children for their next phase of education and that should continue.

**Q5. Are post-primary schools obliged to follow the Department's Guidance?**

- Post-primary schools will be legally required to "have regard to" the Department's Guidance.
- This means that the Guidance should be a very important document for post-primary schools to consider in determining their admissions criteria.
- If the Department considers that a post-primary school has not had regard to its Guidance it may intervene to ensure that it does.

**Q6. Will a post-primary school be breaking the law if it uses academic admissions criteria?**

- The Guidance makes clear that there is no law preventing a school using academic admissions criteria.
- So a post-primary school will not be breaking the law but it will not be following the Department's Guidance – which will not recommend the use of academic admissions criteria.

**Q7. When will children in P6 and their parents know how admissions will work for the schools to which they wish to apply?**

All children and parents should be assured that the process of applying to post-primary schools will be the same as in previous years.

- Post-primary schools' admissions criteria will continue to be published at the same stage – for Transfer 2010 this will be in between December 2009 and January 2010.
- Post-primary schools will hold open nights up until February 2010.
- Primary school principals will help parents and children fill out their transfer form – on which they will list their choices of post-primary school.
- These forms will be submitted to the Education and Skills Authority in February 2010 and applications will be processed according to applicant's choices.
- Post-primary schools that have more applications than places available will apply their published admissions criteria to determine which applicants are to be admitted.
- Applicants unsuccessful in one application will then be considered for admission for their next choice of post-primary school.
- Final admissions decisions will issue to applicants towards the end of May 2010.

Any schools attempting to operate their own tests for the purposes of ability-based admissions will need to provide further detail.

**Q8. What else does the Guidance recommend?**

- The Guidance recommends that all post-primary schools use as their first criterion a measure that will ensure that applicants entitled to Free School Meals gain admissions at the same rate as all other applicants. For example, if 20% of applications are from FSME applicants, then at least 20% of the school's places should be allocated to FSME applicants.
- Thereafter, the Guidance recommends the following criteria:
  - Sibling;
  - Eldest Child;
  - Feeder/named primary school;
  - Parish (with nearest suitable school);
  - Catchment Area (with nearest suitable school);
  - Nearest Suitable School;

- Random Selection (tie-breaker)
- Definitions of the recommended criteria are included in the Guidance (paragraph 17).

**Q9. Are post-primary schools free to use these recommended criteria in any order?**

- The Guidance makes recommendations as to the use of geographical criteria (parish and catchment area) and recommends that all post-primary schools should use the Free School Meal Criterion as their first criterion.
- Other than that schools are recommended to use these criteria in any order they choose.

**Q10. How will the Free School Meal Criterion work?**

- The operation of this criterion will be within the standard applications process. Schools and parents will be given further information on this in due course.

**Q11. Why does the Guidance recommend the compulsory combining of geographical criteria with the “nearest suitable school” criteria?**

- If followed, this recommendation will ensure that outlying applicants to a school (for example, rural applicants) are not disadvantaged when schools use criteria prioritising local people.
- The school categories that would define school suitability for the purposes of this measure would be:
  - denominational grammar;
  - non-denominational grammar;
  - maintained secondary;
  - controlled secondary;
  - Irish-medium;
  - Integrated.
- All children would, under this recommendation, be considered equally local in applications to the school nearest to them in each of these categories.

**Q12. What is a tie-breaker?**

- In order to work properly, admissions criteria have to be capable of distinguishing between individual applicants.

- Schools have an obligation in law to use admissions criteria that are capable of distinguishing exactly the number of applicants that their capacity permits them to admit.
- For these reasons, a “tie-breaker” is an important part of all schools admissions. A “tie-breaker” is a criterion that, when applied, will distinguish between individual applicants.
- The Department recommends a “random selection” tie-breaker because it is commonly used already.
- The Department does not recommend the “distance to school” tie-breaker (which prioritises children according to the precise distance between their home and the school) because that would disadvantage outlying (e.g. rural) applicants.

**Q13. What implications does this Guidance have for the status of grammar schools? Will there continue to be grammar schools?**

- In legal terms, grammar schools are not grammar schools because they have used academic selection.
- Therefore, if a grammar school changes its admissions process it continues to be called, and regarded as, a grammar school (including for the purposes of children’s qualification for transport and the “nearest suitable school” admissions criterion).

**Q14. What provision will the new arrangements make for children who are considered to have exceptional circumstances?**

- In accordance with a 2006 legislative obligation, the Department of Education will establish a body, which, in respect of children with exceptional circumstances, will arrange admissions to suitable post-primary schools outside the standard competitive process. That body is intended to be for those children with compelling medical reasons to attend a particular school and for looked-after children. Further information will be provided in due course.

**Q15. What implications do the new arrangements have for children with a Statement of Special Educational Need?**

- Children in possession of a Statement of Special Educational Need will continue to transfer in the same way as before. The post-primary placement of statemented children takes place outside the constraints of the normal open enrolment arrangements to ensure that children are placed in a school best suited to meet their needs. The most appropriate placement for the child is determined through consultation involving the child, the parents, the Education

and Library Board and the post-primary school identified as being the most appropriate one. This ensures that the placement is based on as comprehensive a picture as possible of the child's needs and the school best placed to meet them.