

Banding Report and Consultation

Introduction

Lewisham LA has operated banding as part of its secondary school admissions arrangements since its inception as an education authority in April 1990. The purpose of banding is to ensure that over-subscribed schools in Lewisham have a balanced intake of children in terms of ability. Lewisham LA purchases the Optional Year 5 SATs test from the Standards and Testing Agency (STA). The cost for this test is currently £26K. The tests determine, in Year 5, which ability band a pupil falls into. Admissions arrangements in the borough then aim to ensure that an even number of pupils are accepted at a school from each ability band.

The STA has now ceased to produce the Optional Year 5 SATs papers. If Lewisham wishes to continue using banding for secondary admissions an alternative method of testing would need to be sought. Given that a new testing regime would increase costs significantly (to at least £40k), Lewisham's Admissions Forum decided that they should look at the pros and cons of continuing with our banding system and, having done so, that we should consult on whether or not we should continue to use banding as part of our secondary admissions arrangements.

This report provides a brief background to the national and local context to banding and sets out the purpose of banding. The report also provides recent data relating to the intake of pupils to Lewisham schools in 2014. The final part of the report seeks your views on whether we should continue banding children who are transferring to secondary school.

Historical and national policy context

During the 1980s through to the present date, there have been numerous education reforms that have impacted upon the admissions of pupils to schools, including the changes made through the School Admissions Code and the introduction of legislation that all schools should give top priority to children in local authority care.

The timetable to below sets out brief the developments relating to banding.

Year	Change
1972	All primary pupils in the ILEA assessed for banding on the basis of the headteacher's professional judgement and a verbal reasoning test
1988	London Reading Test used for banding
1988	New CTCs statutory required to admit pupils of all abilities
1988	Education Reform Act introduces more open enrolment
1994	Only Tower Hamlets, Greenwich, Lewisham & Hackney continue to use banding
1998	School Standards and Framework Act allow proportionate banding but does not allow new local banding
2003	School Admissions Code allows 'fair banding' which it defines as proportionate banding, but disallows local banding or banding based on the national ability profile
2004	Hackney stops using local banding
2006	Education and Inspections Act allows proportionate banding, local banding based on national ability profile
2007	School Admissions Code endorses banding as good practice
2010	School Admissions Code continues to allow banding

(Extract from LSE report – Banding and Ballots)

What is banding?

Banding was introduced to ensure that secondary schools receive a balanced intake.

The Lewisham position

Children who attend Lewisham primary schools sit the Optional Year 5 SATs in the May of Year 5 and are placed in one of 5 bands of ability. Lewisham's admissions arrangements require that all criteria (e.g. distance to school) are applied within each band so as to try to secure the same number of children being accepted at a school within each ability band. If, however, there are too few children from one band applying to the school, the school then fills up with children from other ability bands. Banding can only make a difference to the admissions of schools which are over-subscribed. Under-subscribed schools simply take all children, regardless of bands. Children from other boroughs who apply for place at a secondary school in Lewisham are not necessarily 'banded'. Only the Royal Borough of Greenwich uses the same test and banding arrangements as Lewisham. For those children who have not sat the Optional Year 5 SATs Lewisham obtains information about the child's level of ability from their primary school.

Primary headteachers are asked to provide:

- a) the child's raw score for the reading test and the mathematics Test A and Test B if the school also used the Optional Year 5 SATs or
- b) information about the child's current National Curriculum levels for English and Maths subdividing these levels into a, b or c or
- c) a teacher assessment bearing in mind that there are approximately 20% of children in each band.

For all other children where a banding assessment cannot be obtained Band 2A is given.

Lewisham currently has a situation whereby:

- 8 schools operate area wide banding. Area based banding uses the same banding regardless of school;
- one school operates area wide banding but offers faith and open places within this; (Trinity)
- one school operates school based banding using Lewisham's test results. School based banding puts just those children who apply to the school into different bands. Children are still offered places in proportion to the number of applicants in each band; (PHFC)
- The Haberdashers' Academies use school based banding based on a different test, and divide applicants into 9 bands, offering places in proportion to the number of places in each; and
- the two Catholic schools do not operate banding at all.

What does the evidence tell us?

In order to ascertain the effectiveness of banding and whether it still meets the purpose it was designed for 'ensuring a balanced intake' it is important to look at the educational attainment of children transferring to secondary school.

The Performance Team undertook some modelling using the 2014 secondary transfer data. They compared the outcomes based on banding with what the outcomes would have looked like if the offers had been made using distance to school. Both sets gave preference to Looked After Children and to siblings in the normal way. They also examined the children's actual results in the Year 6 tests with the banding that resulted from their results in the tests they took in Year 5. All the charts are attached at Appendix 1.

Chart 1 in Appendix 1 provides the outcome of the 2014 secondary transfer intake of pupils using the banding criteria based on parental preferences.

The data shows that banding has not been that effective in achieving a balanced intake across schools. This is most likely because over 30% of our Band 1 children apply for schools outside the borough. However, some over-subscribed schools do achieve more or less a balanced intake across the different ability bands e.g. Addey & Stanhope and Prendergast Vale College.

Chart 2 shows the outcome of the 2014 secondary transfer intake using the distance¹ criteria only based on parental preferences.

The results without banding do not show much difference in relation to balanced intakes.

However, they do show that significantly more children would go to a Lewisham school in a system without banding. This is because children who applied for local schools but whose 'band' was full with children who lived closer, would, under a distance only scheme, be more able to get into the school, regardless of their 'band'. It appears that many children would be offered a higher Lewisham preference under home to school distance than they would using banding. So, children who were offered a lower out of borough preference would receive a Lewisham offer instead.

Chart 3 provides details of the 2014 intake of pupils; their banding; and the result they actually achieved in the Year 6 SATs.

It is, of course, the case that, because achievement in Lewisham primary schools is now very high, children banded in the lowest band are still achieving at the national expectation. What Chart 3 shows, though, is that the tests used in Year 5 to band children are not that good at predicting the actual level of achievement for pupils at the end of Year 6. The data shows that many in the top bands do not achieve the top levels and the vast majority in the lower bands achieve at Level 4, currently the national expectation.

Because the achievement gap is closing in Lewisham, banding may not be as necessary as it once was.

Pros and Cons of moving to a distance only model

The pros of using distance only as the criteria are:

- more Lewisham children would be likely to receive a place in a school local to them at secondary transfer;

¹ * Distance only is based on the admission criteria for secondary transfer to Lewisham community schools as follows :Looked after children; Children with exceptional medical/social needs; Siblings; Home to school distance

- the data shows that removing banding would not create any more imbalance in school intakes than we have with our current system;
- the admissions process would be easier for parents and children to understand;
- Year 5 children would not need to sit a test, and schools and the LA would not need to administer the process;
- the LA would save £26k at a point when significant savings are still required.. If banding were retained, we would need to spend at least £40k for a new test as the National Admissions Code requires banding to be done on the basis of a test rather than on the basis of teacher assessment;
- Lewisham would come into line with the majority of authorities in London

The cons of using distance* only as the criteria are:

- as Lewisham LA is the admission authority for only five secondary schools, there would be a need for the VA schools and Academies to agree to adopt the same approach as Lewisham. Early indications, however, are that all schools would abide by any decision made by the Mayor on the advice of the Admissions Forum.
- current indications are that the Royal Borough of Greenwich, will not consult on whether to retain banding for admissions to schools in their area;
- the use of banding makes a clear statement that we are committed to over-subscribed schools having balanced intakes. While the data shows that banding does not currently achieve those balanced intakes, removing banding may inadvertently send a message that we no longer think it is important;
- while the data used for the modelling is indicative of what might happen if banding was removed, the parental preferences the modelling is based on were made in a 'banding' system. It is therefore not possible to predict how preference patterns might change in a 'distance only' system.

Consultation

In light of the information provided in this report, this consultation is seeking views on whether Lewisham should continue banding or not. The consultation will end on 3 January 2015. If a decision were to be made to remove banding, the Admissions Forum would need to monitor the outcomes of the new system to ensure it is as equitable as possible.

This consultation paper is being sent to:

Governors and headteachers of all maintained schools in Lewisham
 The boroughs of: Bexley, Bromley, Lambeth, Royal Greenwich, Southwark and Tower Hamlets
 Trades Unions within Lewisham
 Southwark Diocesan Board for Education (for CE schools) and the Archdiocese of Southwark (for Catholic schools).

And is available for any other interested party including parents of children between the ages of 2 years and 18 years old via Lewisham's website at www.lewisham.gov.uk

Other related reports:

Banding and Ballots – Secondary school admissions in England: Admissions in 2012/13 and the impact of growth of Academies

Research by Phillip Noden, Anne West and Audrey Hind, LSE (February 2014)
<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/56003/>

Lewisham Admissions Forum – Proposed admissions arrangements for 2016/17 – Banding (October 2014) – Lewisham.gov.uk

Outcome of Secondary Transfer 2014 (October 2014) – Lewisham.gov.uk

Admissions 2016/17 Consultation – Banding
Question
Do you think Lewisham should continue to use banding for the purposes of secondary transfer? Yes/No*
Please give your views:

Name (please print) _____

Designation _____

E-mail address _____

Please complete and return this form to:
 Linda Fuller
 Team Leader – School Admissions & Appeals
 3rd Floor
 Laurence House
 1 Catford Road
 SE6 4RU

Or email to Linda.fuller@lewisham.gov.uk Please title your email 'Admissions 2016/17 Consultation – Banding'

The consultation will close on **23 January 2015**