

Royal Borough of Greenwich

School Admission Arrangements

for

Community Nursery, Primary and
Secondary Schools, including Sixth Form

Guidance on the Medical and Social Care Criterion

February 2024

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1. Background and Introduction

- 1.1 School Admissions Code 2021 (the Code) sets out what admissions authorities must consider to ensure that their admissions arrangements are compliant with relevant regulations and legislation. This is to ensure that admissions practices and processes are procedurally fair, clear and objective.
- 1.2 Paragraph 1.16 of the Code permits admissions authorities to have social and medical need as an oversubscription criterion in their admissions arrangements. Royal Borough of Greenwich has adopted this criterion in its arrangements so that children and families with chronic medical conditions and significant social care needs are not disadvantaged when applying for a school place.
- 1.3 This guide is to provide clarity on how applications under Royal Greenwich's chronic medical and social care criterion are assessed to ensure transparency as well as serve the following purposes:
 - a. To support parents who are considering applying for a school place under the chronic medical and social care criterion to make an informed decision on the prospect of their application. Here, parents will have clarity on the nature of the conditions likely to be successful and the evidence required to make a successful application under this criterion.
 - b. To guide members of the medical and social admissions panel on how applications under this criterion are to be assessed to ensure a clear and consistent approach in the assessment process.

2. The overarching principle

- 2.1 There is a high bar / threshold for qualifying under the Royal Greenwich's chronic medical and social care criterion. This has been intentionally set to ensure that only those children and families who are mostly in need benefit from being given priority over other children under this criterion. Therefore, only under **proven exceptional circumstances**, where the educational needs of children (with or without a formal diagnosis of special educational needs) without an

education, health and care (EHC) plan will applicants be awarded priority admission over other children under this criterion.

- 2.2 In this regard, the working principle of the assessment process will be that the needs of most children without an EHC plan can be met in any mainstream school in the borough. Therefore, to successfully apply under the chronic medical and social care criterion, an applicant must demonstrate that they meet the high threshold criteria set for admission under this criterion. To fulfil this, an applicant must demonstrate that admission to a particular school is absolutely necessary due to the proven medical and / or social care needs, failing which there would be a significant risk of the child being disadvantaged or being unable to reach their full educational potential if they attend another school.
- 2.3 When considering an application under this criterion, panel members must base their assessment on the evidential facts provided by the applicant and ensure that their decision is based upon **professionally supported exceptional** chronic medical and social care needs of the applicant.
- 2.4 To meet this high bar threshold, applicants must provide independent evidence from relevant professionals that sets out the reasons why a particular school is the most suitable for the child or affected family member, and the difficulties that would ensue if the child had to attend another school. As individual circumstances vary, the nature of the evidence required would vary but must focus on the risk to the child or affected family member, should another school be offered.

3. Royal Greenwich's Medical and Social Care Criterion

- 3.1 The medical and social care criterion in the Royal Borough of Greenwich's arrangements for admission to mainstream primary and secondary schools give priority to children or their immediate family member(s) with **chronic medical condition or social care needs** for a particular school.
- 3.2 Details of the criterion are as below:

Definitions:

Chronic medical condition means a long term or persistent health condition requiring ongoing medical attention.

Social care need means a condition requiring one or some or all of physical, emotional, mental and social care support/intervention to help the individual live or achieve a fulfilled life. This also includes children and/or family members known to social services with a social worker assigned.

Rationale:

Royal Greenwich recognises that individual circumstances vary, and in most cases, medical and / or social care needs can be met in any mainstream school. Where the need relates to another family member, that family member must live at the same address as the child. Parents and carers with a specific medical or social care reason (as defined above) where they believe that these needs can be best met in a particular school **must** state this clearly in their application, providing **all** the following:

- a. Evidence of the medical condition or social care need. This must be in the form of a professional medical diagnosis or a statement from a medical or social care professional;
- b. Reasons why the child should attend a particular school, stating the consequences for them or family member(s) if they have to attend an alternative school;
- c. Documentation from relevant professionals, such as a health or social care professional (e.g., doctor, social worker, etc.), which support their application for a named school on the grounds evidenced under a) and b) above. This must be based on the professional's own opinion rather than on the basis of what the applicant has told them or asked them to say.

Assessment:

Applications under this criterion will be assessed by a Medical / Social Admissions Panel consisting of educational, medical and social care professionals, as well as experienced admissions officers from the local authority.

The panel will meet or consider all applications or requests under this criterion before a decision on an offer is made and make decisions based on the merits of individual cases.

Applications will be assessed against the following factors:

- a. Whether there is overwhelming medical or social care evidence that the school applied for can best meet needs.
- b. Whether there are no alternative places elsewhere where the child's needs can equally be met.
- c. Whether the benefits of offering a place at the school applied for outweigh the disadvantages of not doing so for the child and/or their immediate family.

4. Assessment Guidance

Application screening process:

- 4.1 When an application is received under the chronic medical / social care criterion, admissions officers must screen the application to ensure that it meets the minimum standards for assessment.
- 4.2 The screening process must be done by assessing the application, including the documents provided against the following questions:
 - a. Has the applicant provided evidence of medical diagnosis or a professionally certified document with details of the medical and / or social care need?

If the answer is 'Yes', admissions officers should proceed to b. below.

If the answer is 'No', admissions officers should consider the application as 'not meeting the minimum standards' for assessment and should discontinue the screening of the application.
 - b. Has the applicant provided a statement within their application, explaining the reason for their request to be considered under the chronic medical and / or social care criterion?

If the answer is 'Yes', admissions officers should proceed to c. below. Otherwise, the application should be considered as 'not meeting the minimum standards' for assessment and should not be considered further.

- c. Has the applicant provided documentation from relevant professionals, such as a health or social care professional (e.g., doctor, social worker, teachers, etc), supporting their application for a named school on the grounds evidenced under a. above?

If the answer is 'Yes', admissions officers should proceed to process the application to the medical and social admissions panel members. Otherwise, the application should be considered as 'not meeting the minimum standards' for assessment and should not be processed further under the chronic medical and social care criterion.

- 4.3 Admissions officers may request additional information from the applicant, where they have already provided evidence of diagnosis of the medical condition and / or a professionally certified documentation of social care needs. Where admissions officers deem it appropriate or necessary to request additional information, the applicant should be given a deadline for providing the requested information.
- 4.4 For an in-year application, the deadline for providing additional information should be **maximum of 5 school days** from the date of the request. For a planned application, the deadline should be the same deadline date set for applications made late with good cause during the applicable planned rounds.
- 4.5 Where the applicant is able to provide additional information within the applicable deadline, admissions officers should follow the screening process outlined in paragraph 4.2 above.
- 4.6 Where an application has passed the test outlined in paragraph 4.2, it should be sent securely using a secure email system, to the panel members for assessment, given the sensitive nature of the information likely to be contained in the application. Where a panel member has no access to a secure email system, they may be sent a password protected application using an unsecure email system but with the password information provided under a separate email cover.

Composition of the medical and social admissions panel

- 4.7 The medical and social admissions panel must have at least four members for it to constitute a **valid panel**. Membership of a valid panel must consist of at least one person from at least three of the following categories of people:
- a. People who practise in the medical profession, who are acquainted with the assessment of medical conditions as practitioners. This must comprise of current / practising doctors or nurses with a valid work contact including a work email address.
 - b. People with experience in protecting vulnerable people from harm or abuse or supporting people to live independently. This must comprise of current / practising social workers or people with professional connections with social services who have a valid work contact including a work email address.
 - c. People who have experience in education, who are acquainted with the local education sector and conditions. This must comprise of current headteachers or teachers or other persons in the teaching profession working in local schools who have a valid work contact including a work email address.
 - d. People who have experience and knowledge of the national and local government policies and procedures relating to school admissions, who are acquainted with the operational mechanism of the local admissions arrangements. This may comprise of current senior admissions officers who are not the officer responsible for processing the applications being considered.
- 4.8 No panel member must have a connection with the applicant or application being assessed. Where an application is for a school where a panel member is a member of staff, that panel member must recuse themselves or be excluded from the decision being made on the application. Similarly, where an applicant is known to a panel member through their professional activities, e.g., as a doctor, nurse, social worker, etc, that panel member must recuse themselves or be excluded from the decision being made on the applicant.

- 4.9 At all times, the panel must be conversant of any potential for conflict of interest and must take reasonable actions to prevent it, to ensure fairness and transparency in their decision-making process.

Application assessment process

- 4.10 The assessment process for applications submitted under the chronic medical and social care criterion should be moderated by an allocated admissions officer or a senior admissions officer, who must ensure that the assessment process is fair, transparent, and consistent with the overarching principles outlined in 2.1 – 2.4 above.
- 4.11 When assessing applications under the chronic medical and social care criterion, each member of the medical and social admissions panel must do the following upon receipt of the application packet:
- a. Check the paperwork and evidence to ensure that every information provided by the applicant has been received.
 - b. Read and understand the applicant's statement / rationale for applying under this criterion.
 - c. Consider the evidence available against the criteria outlined under the assessment factors in paragraph 3.2 above.
 - d. Make an individual decision based on the merit of the details provided by the applicant.
 - e. Record their decision on the decision coversheet, including comments on the rationale upon which their decision is based.
 - f. Return the decision coversheet to the allocated admissions officer, preferably via a secure email. This should be done without including other panel members in the email.
- 4.12 On receipt of the decision coversheets from medical and social admissions panel members, the allocated admissions officer must collate the decisions and notify the applicant of the outcome of their application as soon as practicable, where the applicant has not secured a place at their preference school.

- 4.13 Where there is a split, without a majority decision, the allocated admissions officer must convene a panel meeting to review the decisions so that there is either a final unanimous or majority decision, to be communicated to the applicant as soon as practicable, if they have not secured a place at their preference school.
- 4.14 Where a large number of applications are being considered together, e.g., during the co-ordinated admissions round ahead of the national offer day, the allocated admissions officer must convene a panel meeting to moderate the assessment process. At the panel meeting, the panel must collectively review each application to agree an outcome. Where there is a split without a unanimous decision, the final decision on each application must be put to a vote and be based on the majority vote.

Panel decision making process

- 4.15 To decide on whether an application is to be given priority over other applications on the basis of an applicant's or their immediate family member's chronic medical and / or social care needs, each panel member must:
- a. Consider whether the applicant's condition is in line with the definition of either or both chronic medical condition and social care need as provided in paragraph 3.2 above. If the applicant's condition does not meet either or both definitions, the application must be considered as 'not meeting the threshold' for priority over other applicants under this criterion and must not be progressed further.
 - b. Consider whether there is overwhelming evidence that the school applied for can best meet needs. As individual circumstances vary; likewise, the evidence likely to be provided, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to making this judgement. Instead, panel members are required to use their own professional judgement in making a rational decision but should **not** consider the following as valid arguments or justifications for a particular school:
 - i. Any application predicated upon a school having a resource unit (i.e., designation special provision – DSP), which an applicant considers as being suitable for the child unless it is supported by the SEND Assessment and Review Service. When deciding, panel members must take note of the SEND admissions process for school resource units or DSPs and the

fact that students cannot secure a place at a DSP through the normal admissions process.

- ii. Any request solely based on the child's special needs diagnosis. For example, having moderate learning difficulties, such as delayed speech and language or dyslexia should not be considered as a valid reason.
 - iii. Any request based upon family or friendship support network being available at the preferred school which is **not** connected with or justified by a professionally established medical condition and / or social care need evidenced within the application.
 - iv. Any request predicated upon the availability or lack of childcare arrangements or work commitments.
 - v. Any request predicated upon the curriculum of the school applied for being the most suitable for the child. This may come in the form of applicants citing the interest developed in the school as a result of attending school's open events.
- c. Consider practical alternatives to the school applied for, where the applicant's needs can equally be met, based on individual circumstances. This should include logistical factors such as distance to the school applied for, time and ease of travel, accessibility, social risk factors including the applicant's safeguarding, mental health and wellbeing factors, etc. For example, where a case is being made for a school further away over a school nearer to the applicant's home address, the practical and logistical reasoning would suggest that the school nearer to the applicant's home address could better meet needs subject to other individual circumstances.
- d. Consider whether the benefits of offering a place at the school applied for outweigh the disadvantages of not doing so for the child and / or their immediate family member. This should be done by first identifying any associated benefits and risks with the school applied for and weighing against the identified benefits and risks of the available alternatives. This should include any applicable safeguarding factors likely to impact on the child's ability to flourish or otherwise, at the preference and / or alternative school(s).

- 4.16 Once panel members have reached a decision, they must complete the decision coversheet and return to the allocated admissions officer as described in 4.11 f.
- 4.17 The onus is on the applicant to provide sufficient information required by the panel to make an informed decision but where panel members feel the need to request for additional information, they can do so. Where additional information is required, this must be requested through the allocated admissions officer. Under no circumstances must panel members contact applicants directly to request additional information.
- 4.18 When additional piece of information has been obtained from the applicant after the original application has been shared with the panel or after the application has been decided, the allocated admissions officer must log this additional piece of information separately and share it with **all** panel members as soon as practicable.
- 4.19 Where panel members have already made a decision before receiving the additional piece of information, they must reconsider their decision to ensure that the additional information is considered for a final decision to be made on the application.

5. Consideration of ‘reasonableness’

- 5.1 The threshold for awarding the medical and social care criterion has been intentionally set high to ensure that only children and families with most needs are given priority over other applicants under this criterion. Therefore, the medical and social admissions panel must ensure that decisions made are reasonable, rational, and supported by the merits of the evidence provided by the applicant.
- 5.2 At all times, the panel must be fair in its decision and consider whether it is such that any reasonable decision maker would have made under the circumstances.

6. Right of appeal and other important information

- 6.1 There is no right of appeal against the decision made by the medical and social admissions panel. However, applicants can request for a reconsideration of their request where there is new information which may not have been considered in the previous assessment of the application under the medical and social care criterion.
- 6.2 Applicants' right to appeal against a decision not to be offered a place at a preference school will not be affected by the consideration under the medical and social care criterion.
- 6.3 The award of priority under the medical and social care criterion does not guarantee a place at the school applied for. A place will only be offered when the child reaches the top of the waiting list, and a place becomes available at the school.
- 6.4 Waiting list positions are subject to change and an applicant who may have previously been on top of the waiting list before a place becomes available may not be the one on top of the waiting list when a place becomes available.
- 6.5 Applicants' have the right to complain about any aspect of the assessment of their request for consideration for medical and social care criterion. They should do this in writing to school-admissions@royalgreenwich.gov.uk or through the formal complaint process on the Council's website.
- 6.6 When a complaint is received, Royal Greenwich School Admissions Service will respond to the complaint following the Council's formal complaint process.