



## Children & Young People's Directorate

### SECONDARY ADMISSIONS - LECKHAMPTON AREA, CHELTENHAM

#### **Background**

The two secondary schools in the South of Cheltenham (Balcarras School and Cheltenham Bournside School) are both foundation schools which predominantly allocate places to children based on the straight line distance from their home address (after siblings have been offered a place). Due to the location of the two schools, the circles that are created when straight line distances are used to allocate places, results in a 'corridor' around the Leckhampton area where children often fail to get in to either school.

#### **2010 Admissions**

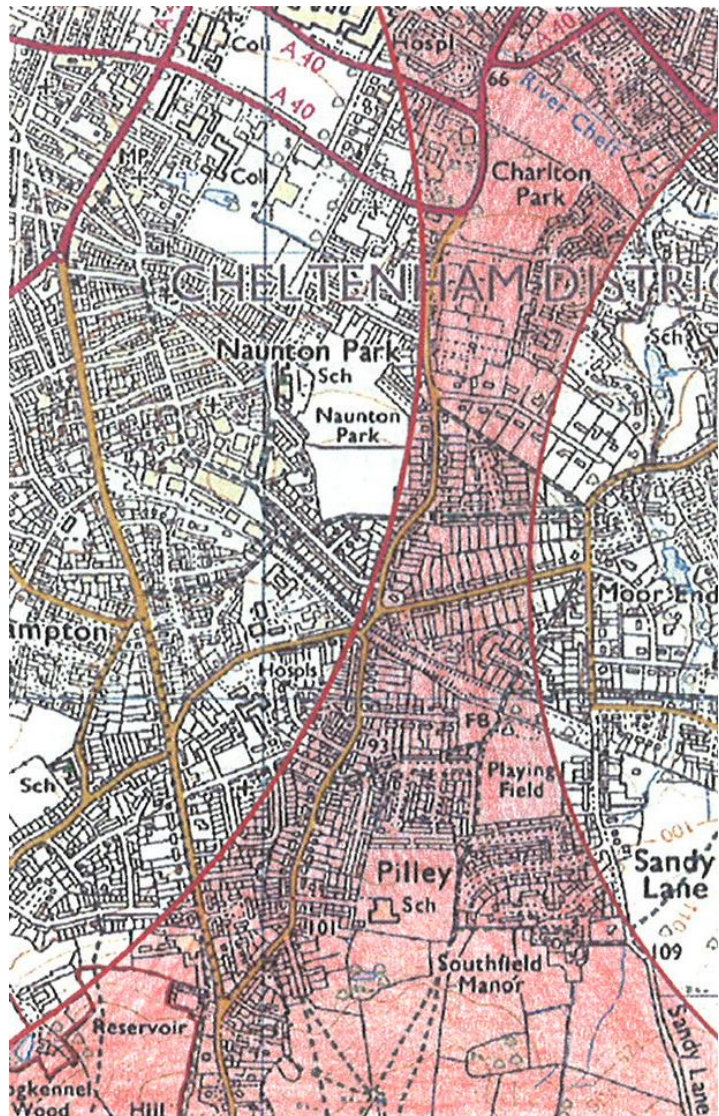
For September 2010 children in the Leckhampton/Naunton Park area who stated either school as a high preference received the following offers of school places:

- 11 children were offered Balcarras as their 1<sup>st</sup> preference school
- 12 children were offered Bournside as their 1<sup>st</sup> preference school
- 15 children were offered Bournside as their 2<sup>nd</sup> preference school
- 2 children were offered a lower preference grammar school
- 11 children were not offered a school of their preference and were allocated an alternative school by the Local Authority. This was another school within the Cheltenham Borough district.

The last child to be offered a place at Balcarras School lived 0.93 miles from the school.

The last child to be offered a place at Bournside School lived 1.279 miles from the school.

The resultant 'circle' around each school is depicted to the right which highlights



the 'corridor'.

Some concerned parents and residents living in the Leckhampton area, have indicated to the Local Authority that they believe other parents whose children have been offered a place at Balcarras School, have submitted misleading applications i.e. they have rented a property in Charlton Kings to secure a place at the school, and then returned to their previous home in the Leckhampton area after the place has been allocated. No information received has named specific individuals.

### ***Misleading Applications***

In order to treat applications fairly and according to the same criteria, all allocations for school places are made based on the child's permanent home address as of the closing date for applications (4<sup>th</sup> December 2009 for the 2010 admissions process). Where applications indicate a child's change of address, we will confirm this with their current school and request proof of residence from the parents.

Should any concerns be raised regarding the validity of a child's address, by any party during the admission process, further proof can also be requested from the parents. Due to the information received from Leckhampton residents, the Local Authority is currently undertaking a 'spot check' to request proof of address for all children who have been offered a place at Balcarras under the distance criteria, and attend a maintained primary school more than 1 mile away from the School. This is a specific response to the allegation that whilst parents were using a temporary address for admission purposes, their child was still attending the same primary school some distance away from the new address in Charlton Kings. Any parents indicating that they believe misleading applications have been made, have been asked to provide further information about any specific cases they feel should be investigated in more detail – no information has as yet been received.

Should any investigation reveal that a child who has gained a school place based on false information, the Local Authority will, of course, take the appropriate action. In agreement with the Governing Body of the school, and in accordance with the School Admission Code, places can be withdrawn from children who have been offered a place unlawfully through the provision of misleading information.

Due to the specific concerns raised this year regarding the admissions process, particularly in relation to short-term tenancy agreements, the Local Authority will also be revising guidance for parents in future years in an attempt to counteract any benefits achieved from moving closer to a preferred school for a limited period of time. This will allow the Local Authority to investigate cases where a child offered a place at a popular school moves address once that place is secured, particularly if the move is to a former family home. This will assist the Local Authority in proving that a house move was made for the sole purpose of gaining a school place and can therefore be considered as unlawful practice.

Unfortunately the Local Authority is unable to insist on rental agreements for a period longer than six-months as this is a standard timescale for assured tenancy.

### ***Admission Arrangements***

Where a school is oversubscribed it must have a lawful method for determining which children can be accommodated. The difficulty children in Leckhampton experience in gaining a place at Balcarras and/or Bournside through their current admission arrangements, was referred to the School's Adjudicator, the organisation responsible for enforcing the mandatory requirements of the Admissions Code.

During last years objection, and in the ruling of 21<sup>st</sup> October 2009, the School's Adjudicator determined that the admission arrangements for both Schools were lawful, and acknowledged that whilst alternative arrangements could be introduced, they would be likely to result in creating a different problem for other families.

Since this determination, however, the Schools and the local authority have continued to consider whether any alternative arrangements would be possible to remedy the position, whilst not breaching the School Admission Code in relation to other families.

The Local Authority has considered alternative admission arrangements that have been presented by a number of different parties. However, analysis of these arrangements has shown them to be highly complex and therefore unlawful under the current School Admission Code. Further, many do not provide a solution without either exacerbating the problem for local children or creating a different problem for other families. The Local Authority is currently preparing to undertake a further detailed investigation into an alternative model for the area and will ask for the School Governing Bodies to consider any other options identified.

The Governing Bodies at Bournside and Balacarras have carefully considered the recommendations from the School's Adjudicator when determining their proposed admission arrangements for 2011. Bournside have specifically taken steps towards reducing their sibling intake. It is the intention of both Governing Bodies to hold a public consultation meeting shortly to discuss their admission arrangements for 2012 - the Local Authority will be fully involved.