

COPY

**From: Howard Dilley**  
**(Chairman of Chevening Parish Council)**



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Allbrook  
High Street  
Chipstead  
Sevenoaks  
Kent TN13 2RW

Rev Chris Smith  
Chairman of Governors  
Chevening C E Primary School  
Chevening Road, Chipstead  
Sevenoaks  
TN13 2SA  
12<sup>th</sup> November 2013

**Dear Chris**

Following our meeting regarding admissions to Chevening (St Botolph's) Primary School I write to confirm our request, on behalf of the Parish, that you consider some changes to the current policy. Currently we understand admissions are done in the following order:

- 1) Children in local authority care.
- 2) Siblings of current pupils.
- 3) Children of regular attendees at St Botolph's Church.
- 4) Children of regular attendees of other Christian churches.
- 5) Other children on the basis of who lives nearest the School.

We articulated the concern of a number of parishioners that in certain years children who live very close to the School cannot get a place whereas some children who attend either St Botolph's or another Christian school and who live some distance from the Parish do get places.

We realise that the School is partly funded by the Church of England and that it is primarily for children of attendees of St Botolph's Church. However if local children whose parents do not attend St Botolph's but still want to go to the School were placed higher in the list we feel it would lead to a more cohesive community in the Parish.

We think the Parish would be very grateful if you and your governors would consider reversing the order of criteria 4 and 5 so that our local children come before children of attendees of churches outside the Parish?

**Yours sincerely**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "H Dilley".

**Howard Dilley**

# Chevening

(St Botolph's) C.E. (VA) Primary School

Chairman of Governors: Rev Chris Smith

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10<sup>th</sup> February 2014

Mr Howard Dilley  
Chairman  
Chevening Parish Council  
Allbrook  
High Street  
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Dear Howard,

Thank you so much for your letter raising questions from the Parish Plan about the difficulties some village families are having accessing Chevening Primary School. The School Governors have most carefully considered your suggestion for a change to the oversubscription criteria (reversing categories 4 and 5) and have asked me to reply to you on their behalf. We would all like to take this opportunity to welcome the Parish Plan project and to thank all those involved for their hard work.

The governors feel there is a degree of misunderstanding about the school's admission policy and welcome the opportunity to dispel some myths.

Perhaps the first thing to state is that in most years anyone from the village who wants their child to come to Chevening School will succeed. People who don't succeed are disappointed and understandably more vocal, but they are certainly a very small minority. In 3 of the last 4 years any child in the village wanting to come to the school could come and as I write there are 3 spaces in the Reception class. It is simply a myth that Chevening is always oversubscribed, indeed we always welcome applications. The governors have expanded the roll from 70 to 210 over the last 20 years to make sure there are enough spaces; however we feel traffic problems prohibit further expansion at present.

Second, many people are unaware that the school receives funding in direct proportion to the number of pupils enrolled - roughly £3300 per pupil per year. For the financial health of the school it is vital that we run as close to capacity as possible. Sometimes people go off to work overseas for a few years and take their family with them. When they return some have an expectation that there will still be places for their children at the school and complain if they have been filled. We feel this expectation is unrealistic. We can only hold a place for 6 weeks and other children would suffer due to the financial strain on the school if we didn't fill those places.

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Third, all schools sometimes face an intake that includes many younger siblings of children already at the school. For example a couple of years ago 21 out of 30 places were taken by siblings. To avoid multiple drop-offs these siblings take priority, rightly in our view. This happens in all schools occasionally and there is very little that can be done. Of course some people are disappointed and we understand that but no change to oversubscription criteria will fix this as siblings will always take priority. Initial indications are that this unfortunately will be a problem for the 2014 intake.

Fourth, sometimes people forget that Chevening School is a church school. Yes, it is there to serve the local community but the church founded it; the church owns the land and buildings, and many church members volunteer at the school and serve as governors (who are still responsible for 10% of any capital costs). In this sense the school isn't a 'county school', nor just a 'village school', but is a 'church school'. To repeat though, we do seek to serve the local community and do want local children to come to the school.

Fifth, lots of parish families actively do not want their children to come to Chevening School. Last year in the parish 43 children applied for primary school places. 31 put Riverhead first with 2 choosing other schools. Only 10 families put Chevening first. Of the 317 children living in the parish who attend primary school 78 have chosen Chevening, whereas 204 have chosen Riverhead and Amherst. These figures are from KCC and show that it is something of an exaggeration to say that 'many people in the village want to go to the school'. In fact last year a large majority (77%) of parish families did not choose Chevening.

Sixth, although 42% of the school's children live in the parish, 184 or 89% of the children live within 3 miles of the school. This is the government's definition of 'local'. As you will be aware our parish is an odd shape – you only have to travel ¾ of a mile from the school to be out of the parish. 'As the crow flies' is a more usual measure and when this is applied it indicates that the vast majority of the children at the school come from local families.

The suggestion of putting 'distance' above 'children from other churches' sounds like a sensible idea. But in the last four years it would have made a positive difference in only one child's case. Negatively this change would have seriously affected our ability to market the school. The school's church ethos is not only at the core of what the school is but it is also what distinguishes us from other schools and attracts many families. In the years where there is less pressure on places we need the support of church families or we wouldn't be full, at great cost to the school. Many would also see the suggested change as watering-down of our church ethos and would think that we were 'downgrading' our good friends at the Baptist Church in the parish, something we certainly would not want to do. So while we appreciate the hard work of the committee we feel that this suggestion has more downsides than upside and we do not propose to change the criteria.

It may also be worth noting that the church more generally is trying to do something about the popularity of church schools (which by the way is a very good problem to have). We have expanded at Chevening, Lady Boswell's is in the process of doubling in size and of course many of us have put a huge amount of time and effort into founding the non denominational Trinity school.

If you could try and pass on to people the message that the school is listening and has expanded; that actually in most years local children will get into Chevening; and that in the sibling bulge years regrettably there is very little that any school can do, we would be very grateful.

Thank you again for being in touch and please pass on our thanks and support to the committee.

With best wishes to you all.



Rev Chris Smith,  
Chairman of Chevening School Governors



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7<sup>th</sup> March 2014

Dear Chris

Thank you for your letter of 10<sup>th</sup> February replying to our letter of 12<sup>th</sup> November and thank you also for the trouble you went to in giving us such a full reply. I am sure that having the position clarified so clearly is good for everyone.

Naturally we are disappointed that the governors did not see fit to change the admissions policy in response to the concerns about lack of school places that was demonstrated in the Parish Plan. When an admissions policy was first introduced during the 1960's, in response to a rising number of applicants there was no consideration of church attendance in the criteria. The school was thought of as a Village school rather than a Church school; it was an integral part of the community.

As it has now changed to being primarily a Church School as your fourth point makes clear, it might be made even clearer if the word "Chevening" was dropped from the School name and it was just called, for instance, St Botolph's Church School.

Your Archbishop Justin Welby and others have said quite recently that they thought the Church Schools should be more for the community and we attach some of the articles for ease of reference. Those comments gave us some hope that your governors might change things.

However thank you for your reply we will put the letters on our web site as agreed and leave it there. The Parish may approach the subject again in the future but for now at least we have got clarity

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Howard'.

Howard Dilley