

## The consultation response from the 8 Minutes to Oxted Campaign Group

### Part One - Objection to option 3

**We object to the proposal** by Surrey County Council "SCC" to amend its policy for admissions for children applying to attend Oxted School from 2009 where it recommends that the catchment area be redrawn and that the tie-break revert to "straight-line distance". The revised area removes the bottom 3/4 miles of the area, thereby excluding Lingfield and Dormansland. It also removes Godstone and Bletchingly on the West side (option 3).

We recognise that there are more applications for Oxted School than there are places and that amendments have to be made to admissions criteria. However we object to the exclusion of Lingfield and Dormansland under a number of principles.

1. The proposal recommended in the Officer Report to the Executive Committee recognises that excluding Lingfield and Dormansland from the catchment area for Oxted School will effectively mean that no children from these areas will gain admission to Oxted School. Consequently, around 50 children will have to find an alternative secondary school. The report states that for some pupils the measurement to the nearest alternative school is to an out of county school, i.e. Sackville and Imberhorne schools in West Sussex. It states that although these Surrey pupils are not within the West Sussex schools' catchment areas they still have opportunity to gain a place due to their proximity.

Both West Sussex schools give priority to applicants from within their catchments and then use distance from school as the tie- breaker for other applicants. Lingfield and Dormansland children are both out of county and outside the catchment areas of both of these schools. Given the relative distance of our villages from both schools it is very unlikely that Lingfield and Dormansland children will displace many other applicants. (Indeed, in the absence of any coordination or consultation with West Sussex, it is entirely possible that Sackville and Imberhorne schools will simply amend their admissions policies to exclude them.) At the end of 2007 admissions, Imberhorne had no places and Sackville had 10. It would not have been possible for these two schools to have accommodated the applicants from Lingfield and Dormansland. For the majority of Dormansland and Lingfield families this would leave Oakwood as the only school that may have spare places.

It is unlikely that there will be significantly more places at these schools going forwards than there have been in the past. With the current and planned housing developments in East Grinstead, none of which include any provision for additional secondary school places, the situation can only get worse in the future. For example, is SCC aware that West Sussex is planning to relocate Imberhorne Lower School to the Upper School site to make way for a housing development of 210 homes? (see their website). This will increase the demand for places and, at the same time, move the school further away from Lingfield and Dormansland.

**This means that Surrey County Council's (SCC's) proposed admissions scheme for 2009 (Option 3) does not comply with section 14 (3A) of the Education Act 1996 (inserted by the Education and Inspections Act 2006) because it fails to "secure diversity and increase opportunities for parental choice",**

2. This supposition in the Officer's Report to the Executive that Lingfield and Dormansland Children would be likely to gain a place at Imberhorne or Sackville **is also in breach of section 14 of the Education Act 1996.**

Under this legislation, SCC has a mandatory duty "to secure that sufficient schools for providing secondary education are available for their area". This arguably means that SCC must provide sufficient Surrey schools for Surrey children and therefore cannot rely on out-of-area provision such as Sackville and Imberhorne schools in West Sussex.

Even if SCC believes that it is at liberty to discharge this duty by taking account of out-of-area schools, SCC has still not complied with the legislation because it has failed to take sufficient steps (e.g. by consultation with West Sussex) to ensure that that provision will in fact be sufficient for Lingfield and Dormansland children.

There are Surrey schools in the north of the district which are closer to many addresses in the Oxted catchment area than even these out of county schools are to Lingfield and Dormansland. For example children at St Johns' school live an average of 1.4 miles from De Stafford School whereas children in Dormansland who live the closest to Imberhorne School in West Sussex live on average 2.1 miles from Imberhorne. We have also been informed by an executive member that De Stafford School has the facilities and space to increase its PAN.

Some children in these northern areas have the choice of not one but up to three Surrey Schools as well as Oxted as do other areas of the catchment e.g. The Warwick, St Bedes and De Stafford are all closer to St Catherine's primary than Oxted. The proposal effectively removes the nearest Surrey school for Lingfield and Dormansland pupils who would then be allocated places at schools in the areas that happen to have places and effectively not have any degree of choice. Therefore would it not have been more appropriate to recommend a redrawing of the catchment area in the north where there is more choice and more available places so that SCC could reduce the catchment area and still be able to discharge its obligations under section 14 of the Education Act 1996 on both counts of parental choice and provision of school places.

3. Lingfield and Dormansland have historical links with Oxted School and are rural communities. The importance of these links has been recognised by SCC itself (ref the 2006 consultation). It approved the equal preference system with the county wide admissions criteria (see Officers Report) but recommended that special cases could be made to incorporate criteria "to protect schools' traditional admissions priority areas". This

wording was specifically approved by the whole Council in April 2006 and to ignore it now is irrational.

SCC has a mandatory duty under the Code paragraphs 1.64-67 to ensure that its practices and criteria are equitable and do not disadvantage a child from a particular social or racial group. However under the new policy a whole group of children from a rural area would be excluded despite their wishes and their historical links with Oxted. .

4. The exclusion of Lingfield and Dormansland children from Oxted and lack of capacity in West Sussex means that the majority of families in Lingfield and Dormansland will be presented with only one choice, Oakwood in Horley. The straight line distance to this school is further than to Oxted School for the vast majority (over 75%) of Lingfield and Dormansland families. Distance is only a crude indication of the time, expense or difficulty of the journey to/from school which is what actually matters. In these respects, there are very significant differences in the journey from Lingfield or Dormansland to Oxted and Oakwood.

Oxted is a short train ride from Lingfield and Dormansland, whereas Oakwood is all but inaccessible by public transport. Transport options to Oakwood would be by private car and/or taxis which would add to the existing pollution and congestion, or have our children suffer the ordeal of a lengthy ride in a school bus touring the area along the way to collect everybody. The latter option would result in Lingfield and Dormansland children being disadvantaged through not being able to take part in after school activities. This would be contrary to the current government position on Extended Learning and Study Centres where it is expected that every child by 2010 will have opportunities to participate in a variety of after school activities.

Paragraph 2.31 of the School Admissions Code states that "Admissions authorities should take account of the time it will take to travel to school, and the availability of public transport in establishing their oversubscription criteria", and paragraph 2.33 states that "It is good practice to give priority to children who could reach one school (but not others) by public transport, or to children who would have a disproportionately long journey to another school if denied admission to their nearest school."

In failing to promote the use of "sustainable modes of travel", **Surrey County Council's (SCC's) proposed admissions scheme for 2009 (Option 3) is in breach of section 508A of the Education Act 1996 as inserted by section 76 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.**

5. The Adjudicator ruled for 2008 that the exceptional inclusion of a defined catchment area fails to secure reasonable confidence for children living in Lingfield and Dormansland. Lingfield and Dormansland are out of county in the case of Sackville and Imberhorne in West Sussex, and around 7 miles on average from Oakwood. Being at the very bottom of the priority list of all three schools, most Lingfield and Dormansland parents will very obviously not be able to assess whether they have a reasonable likelihood of gaining a place at any one

of these schools. Therefore excluding Lingfield and Dormansland from the catchment area does not provide secure any more confidence - in fact there is even less certainty of a school place. Most if not all, Lingfield and Dormansland parents would rather have some chance of gaining a place at Oxted than none at all. Given that in 2007 only 8 applicants from Lingfield and Dormansland did not gain admission to Oxted via the waiting list, the proposal to remove such a large area of the catchment seems illogical and unnecessary. The result would be that Kent pupils that live closer to Oxted than Lingfield and Dormansland pupils would instead get these places.

6. The Officer Report claims that the proposed new catchment area boundaries (for Option 3) have been drawn to avoid splitting communities. The community of Lingfield and Dormansland includes Crowhurst and children from Crowhurst and Bindley Heath attend Lingfield and Dormansland primary schools and currently move on to Oxted together. As, under the proposal, they are to remain in the catchment area the community is already split. The proposal will inevitably result in the remaining Lingfield and Dormansland children being used to 'mop up' any spare places at two out of county schools in East Grinstead and at Oakwood in Horley and possibly other schools. It is hard to imagine how Option 3 could do a better job of splitting the communities of Lingfield and Dormansland.

7. The Officer Report rejects the tie-break of straight line distance to nearest alternative school as an option stating that Lingfield and Dormansland are likely to continue to fail to gain a place at Oxted as they are much closer to secondary schools in East Grinstead. As stated in paragraph 4 (above) there are many other areas in the catchment that have alternative schools even closer to them than the East Grinstead schools are to our communities. We therefore feel that this nearest alternative school tie-break would indeed bring benefits to our community as recognised by the Adjudicator and would create a more level playing field across the catchment.