

Press release: Annual report of the Chief Schools Adjudicator for England

The annual report of the Chief Adjudicator Ms Shan Scott, to the Secretary of State for Education, covering the period 1 September 2016 to 31 August 2017 is published today (8 February 2018). The report records the progress made by admission authorities in England in complying fully with the [School Admissions Code](#) and achieving fair access to schools for all children.

In her report, Ms Scott states that the main admissions rounds for entry to schools works well and serves well the interests of looked-after and previously looked-after children, those with disabilities and special needs or who are vulnerable for other reasons. She is less confident that the needs of children who need a place outside the normal admissions round are so well met and is concerned that some children, particularly the more vulnerable, spend more time out of school than they should.

Concerns about admission arrangements continue to make up the largest part of the work of the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) and accounted for 100 of the total of 163 new cases of all types referred to OSA.

The Chief Adjudicator reports many positives in achieving fair access to schools for all children while highlighting areas in which admissions procedures can be strengthened. She notes that:

- local authorities report that fair access protocols typically work well and do much to support timely admission to school
- more schools are giving priority in their oversubscription criteria to children eligible for the pupil premium and service premium and these cover all age ranges, rural and urban schools, large and small schools and different categories of schools
- clarity and fairness are at the heart of sound admission arrangements. Clearly written admission arrangements that parents understand are least likely to be the subject of successful objections

The Chief Adjudicator said:

In this my second annual report as Chief Adjudicator, I have been particularly pleased to report that the main admissions round is working effectively and to recognise some good practice seen by adjudicators in the course of our work. It remains the case though that some school admission arrangements fail to comply with what the law requires.

The total number of cases referred to the OSA was lower than in recent years and objections to admission arrangements continue to form the largest part of our work. As in previous years, parents were the single largest group of objectors, accounting for about

half of all objections.

I am grateful for the work done by adjudicators, our administrative staff and legal advisers, and for their support. The OSA aims to consider each case referred to us impartially, honestly and objectively and in full accordance with the legislation that governs our powers and duties and I am confident that all my colleagues have done everything possible to meet that aim. I am confident too that in their dealings with parents, schools, academy trusts, religious bodies, local authorities and others, adjudicators and OSA staff appreciate how important the matters raised are to those concerned and that they deal sensitively and fairly with all.

1. Read the [OSA 2016 to 2017 annual report](#).
2. Ms Shan Scott was appointed as an adjudicator in 2013 and to the post of Chief Adjudicator on 4 April 2016.
3. There are currently [10 adjudicators](#), including the Chief Adjudicator. All are part-time and paid only for the work they are asked to undertake.
4. Adjudicators resolve differences over the interpretation and application of legislation and guidance on school admissions and statutory proposals concerning school organisation.

In relation to all state-funded schools, adjudicators:

- rule on objections to and referrals about determined school admission arrangements

In relation to maintained schools, adjudicators:

- decide on requests to vary admission arrangements
 - resolve disputes relating to school organisation proposals
 - resolve disputes on the transfer and disposal of non playing field land and assets
 - determine appeals from admission authorities against the intention of the local authority to direct the admission of a particular pupil
5. The Chief Adjudicator can also be asked by the Secretary of State to provide advice and undertake other relevant tasks.
 6. The Office of the Schools Adjudicator is a tribunal and was supervised by the Administrative Justice and Tribunals Council until its abolishment in August 2013. Once published, decisions can only be challenged through the courts.
 7. Adjudicators do not deal with complaints from parents whose child has not been offered a place at a particular school.