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 Phoenix Academy
 Tudor Academy
 Turnham Academy
 Westbridge Academy
 White House Academy

Gonville Road
 Thornton Heath
 Surrey CR7 6DL

Tel: 020 8684 4006

Email: info@stepacademytrust.org
 Website: www.stepacademytrust.org

STEP CEO: Mr M Ducker OBE
 STEP Deputy CEO: Mr P Glover

9 November 2020

Dear All,

Proposed changes to the admissions arrangements for Benedict Academy (the ‘Academy’), part of STEP Multi Academy Trust (‘STEP’) for entry in September 2022

STEP is the Admission Authority for all of the academies in our Trust.

We, the STEP Board of Trustees, are proposing to make changes to Benedict Academy’s admissions arrangements for entry in September 2022 and are seeking your feedback in respect of the proposed changes in line with the Admissions Code of Practice 2014 (the ‘Code’).

What is this consultation about?

We are consulting on making the following changes to the admissions arrangements for the Academy:

1. Reduce the Academy’s Published Admissions Number (‘PAN’) from 60 to 30, moving from a 2 Form Entry to a 1 Form Entry school.

The Academy’s PAN was set at 60 as we expected to see a corresponding demand for pupil places. However, for a number of years, the actual intake has fallen well short of the PAN and anticipated demand has not materialised. We are not confident that the situation will change in the foreseeable future, and therefore it is in the best interests of the community and pupils at Benedict to have a provision more closely aligned with presenting need.

Academy pupil numbers have been significantly below the Academy’s existing PAN of 60 for a number of years, as demonstrated in the below table:

Year	PAN	Number of children allocated/forecast a place	Difference between PAN and number of children
Up to 2019/2020	60	27 on average	33 on average
2020/2021	60	25	35
2021/2022	60	23 (forecast based on Nursery admissions)	37 (forecast based on Nursery admissions)

Therefore, in order to ensure the financial viability and future of the Academy, a reduction in PAN is required as soon as possible. This is because all infant classes are allowed a maximum of 30 pupils. However, the Academy still has to employ enough staff for 2 classes if we receive more than 30 applications, even if the number of pupils in the second class is significantly below 30. This would have a significant impact on the Academy’s finances as there would be a heavy financial burden on the Academy to provide classes for small numbers of children which may also inadvertently have a detrimental effect on the school experience for our pupils.

As a result of the above, we propose a reduction to the Academy’s PAN, subject to the outcome of this consultation.

2. Oversubscription Criteria

In addition to the above, the changes being proposed for the Academy's oversubscription criteria for the 2022 intake can be summarised as follows:

Benedict Academy	
2021 Intake	2022 Intake
1) Looked after and previously looked after children	1) Looked after and previously looked after children
2) Special reasons	2) Children with a medical need to attend the academy
3) Children of staff	3) Children with a sibling at the academy
4) Siblings	4) Children eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium who attend the academy's nursery
5) Proximity	5) All other children The order in which places will be allocated in the categories above will be by reference to the distance the child lives from the Academy in accordance with our below 'Distance Measuring' section, with those living closest to the Academy receiving highest priority.'
<p>Benedict Academy was part of Chapel Street Schools Academy Trust until 1 May 2020 when it became part of STEP Academy Trust. The statutory timetable within the Code provides for admission arrangements to be determined some eighteen months before children are admitted, which means that Merton Local Authority had already determined the admission arrangements for the September 2021 intake before Benedict became a STEP Academy on 1 May 2020.</p> <p>Now that STEP is the admission authority for Benedict Academy, we propose to change the admission arrangements to bring them in line with all other STEP academies which have been tried and tested over recent years, using much simpler criteria which is fair, reasonable, transparent and easier for parents to understand.</p> <p>Within each of the oversubscription categories, places are allocated by reference to the distance between the child's home address and the academy, ensuring that those living closer to the academy receive higher priority. STEP believes that no child should lose out on a place to a child living further away in the same oversubscription category.</p>	

2.1) Children with a Medical Need

The criteria within this category makes it clear that only children with a compelling reason for attending that particular academy, and no other school or academy, because of their own or their parent's medical need, will meet the criteria. Children who come under this category are given the highest priority (after looked after and previously looked after children) over and above all other children.

A compelling reason will no longer be based on social need or inconvenience. This change is being made because this category has been found to be open to misuse by parents who simply prefer their children to be admitted to that academy, rather than there being a compelling reason why this is absolutely necessary. Those who express a preference for their child to attend the academy will be considered within the next applicable criterion.

It has been made clear that the necessary supporting medical evidence must be provided on or before the application deadline for the child to fall within the category – failure to do so will result in the child being placed in the next category that applies. This is to ensure that the admission process runs smoothly. There must be a clearly stated cut-off point to ensure that the admissions process is fair to all children.

We have assessed this proposal and consider this amendment to be fair and reasonable in the circumstances.

2.2) Removal of Children of Staff

The reason that the Children of Staff criterion has been removed is that there is no demonstrable need for this at Benedict Academy and therefore there will be no unfair disadvantage caused by the proposal.

We have assessed this proposal and consider this removal to be fair and reasonable in the circumstances.

2.3) Clarification on Definition of Sibling

We have included children of cohabiting partners who have been cohabiting for at least one year within the definition of "sibling". The purpose behind this amendment is to ensure that couples who have chosen not to get married are not disadvantaged, however the purpose of the one year cohabitation condition is aimed at preventing possible abuse of this criterion by parents looking to obtain a higher priority for a child's admission at the Academy on the basis of proximity of the child's home address (as defined by this policy).

We have assessed this proposal and consider this amendment to be fair and reasonable in the circumstances.'

2.4) Addition of Children Eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium

The reason for Category 4 is to encourage, in particular, the parents of disadvantaged children who are eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium to take advantage of nursery education for their children at the academy's nursery, which will improve their education, provide continuity for them throughout their early years and help them to settle into Reception Year faster, where they do not already have a sibling at the academy. As the number of children attending the academy's nursery is less than the number of places in Reception Year, this will not mean that parents will feel obliged to send their child to the academy's nursery in order to achieve a place in Reception Year at the academy, and that places remain available for other local children.

We have assessed this proposal and consider this addition to be fair and reasonable in the circumstances.

2.5) Definition of "Child's Home Address"

The definition makes it clear and makes parents aware that they may be required to provide documentary evidence and/or the times that the child has spent at the home address in a three month period immediately preceding the application deadline. The reason for this amendment is to try to prevent fraudulent address claims made by parents looking to obtain a higher priority for a child's admission at the Academy on the basis of proximity.

We have assessed this proposal and consider this addition to be fair and reasonable in the circumstances.

2.6) Distance Measuring

The way in which distance will be measured has been simplified and made clearer. Distance will be measured in a straight line measurement from a point at their home address which is pre-defined by the local authority's distance measuring software to the same point at the academy, and that all children living within a multi-dwelling block will be regarded as living an equal distance from the academy, with the tie breaker being applied.

STEP has noted that some local authorities give priority to children based on how near they live in a building to the ground floor or, in some cases, based on their name in alphabetical order, and does not agree that this is a fair way to determine which children will achieve places. Random lottery is, in STEP's view, the only fair way to determine this where children live at different addresses within the same building, as is the case with children who do not live in the same building but just happen to live exactly the same distance from the academy.

We have assessed this proposal and consider this amendment to be fair and reasonable in the circumstances.

Proposed arrangements

The Academy's proposed Admission Policy for entry in September 2022 and accompanying documents are available on the Academy website and on the STEP Academy Trust website:

<https://www.stepacademytrust.org/admissions/>

For a paper copy of the arrangements or if you have any questions relating to this consultation, please contact the Trust directly - admissions@stepacademytrust.org.

Who is involved in the consultation?

We will be consulting with various groups in accordance with the Code; to include:

- parents of children in the locality of the Academy between the ages of two and eighteen;
- other persons in the area who in the opinion of STEP have an interest in the proposed arrangements;
- all other admission authorities within the local area;
- the local authority; and
- any adjoining neighbouring local authorities.

When is the consultation?

The consultation period will open on **9th November 2020** and will end on **21st December 2020**.

If you would like to comment on the consultation, you must submit your response during this period.

How to participate in this consultation

Written feedback can be sent in the following ways:

- by email to: admissions@stepacademytrust.org. Please note 'Benedict Academy Admissions Consultation 2022/2023' in the subject header;
- by letter addressed to: Company Secretary, STEP Academy Trust, Gonville Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey, CR7 6DL.

All responses received by the end of the consultation period will be carefully considered, further to which, we will:

- decide on the Academy's admission arrangements for the school year 2022/2023;
- notify you and all appropriate bodies of the outcome; and
- publish the new admission arrangements on the Academy website by 15 March 2021.

If you would like this document in a different format or if you have a question about any aspect of these arrangements, please contact admissions@stepacademytrust.org or write to: Company Secretary, STEP Academy Trust, Gonville Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey, CR7 6DL.