Board of Trustees Decision on the CFS Admission Consultation

Consultation Process

The consultation opened on 6th October, initially running for 6 weeks but extended for a further 2 weeks due to an error in the email address provided in the consultation document. It closed on 1st December 2025.

The Admission Authority proposed this change to the policy:

- The fifth oversubscription criteria (and tie-breaker in the other four categories should they be over-subscribed) will become distance from school, measured in a straight line from school to home using Ordnance Survey address point data from a central point in each building. This would replace the current criteria which is a random draw of applicants.

The consultation was shared with the required parties as set out in the Admissions Code. Trustees are grateful to those who engaged with this formal consultation.

An 'informal' engagement exercise had also been carried out in the Spring of 2025 which elicited more responses than this statutory consultation. Trustees considered that interested parties who had responded to the informal survey may not have realised that they needed to respond to the statutory one in order to have their views 'officially' considered.

Consultation Responses

There were 76 responses to the consultation. Of these, 8 supported the proposal, 66 disagreed with it and 2 raised no objection. For context, there are approximately 140 staff at CFS and around 900 families with children currently attending the academy. The informal engagement exercise in the Spring elicited 124 responses. The requirement to send an email (rather than complete a simple tick-box survey) may have discouraged some participants who had views but were less motivated in taking the extra step to respond by email.

Common Themes for Disagreement (ordered by how frequently they were mentioned):

1. **Fairness, Equality and Inclusion**
   Respondents felt that the lottery system provided all families with an equal chance of securing a place. It is viewed as the only system that ensures equality of access regardless of faith or postcode.

2. **Upholding Founding Principles**
   Respondents referred to the school's ethos with the proposed change being viewed as undermining its founding principles. CFS is valued as providing a genuine alternative to other schools whose admissions are based on distance/catchment areas.

3. **Protecting Socio-economic and Geographical Diversity**
   Respondents were concerned that a distance-based policy will make access dependent on where a family can afford to live, believing this would lead to reduced diversity.

4. **Traffic and Travel**
   Some respondents commented on logistics, saying that the school is easily accessible for people living further away (South Coast) due to a direct bus route while people who are technically closer may have a more difficult journey.

5. **Impact on Local Schools**
   Some respondents expressed concern about the impact on other local schools, referring to the falling birth rate/decline in pupil numbers and the impact this has on school budgets.

Common Themes for Agreement (ordered by how frequently they were mentioned):

1. **Prioritising Local Families**
   Respondents believe the current lottery has failed to serve local families and that the distance policy would allow the school to better support its local community.

2. **Reducing Traffic and Logistical Issues**
   Respondents felt that the number of families travelling by car causes traffic and travel issues and negatively impacts the environment. Pupil mobility is high due to the longer journeys which some families can't sustain long term.

3. **Addressing Disadvantaged Pupil Numbers**
   One response notes that the percentage of disadvantaged pupils at the school is well below the national average and does not reflect the school's deprivation index.

Board of Trustees Decision

Having deliberated on the consultation feedback, the Board of Trustees notes that while the response rate was low in the context of the total community population, the proportion of objections was high. In light of this, the current Admissions Policy will remain unchanged.

The Board is unanimous and remains aligned with the Executive Principal's view that a distance-based tie-breaker is the most equitable method for allocating places. Consequently, the Board will keep this matter under active review.