14 November 2018

To Principals of Primary Schools and Nursery Schools and Managers/Leaders of Pre-school Providers participating in the Pre-School Education Programme.

Dear Principal/Manager/Leader

DIGITAL ADMISSIONS – UPDATE NO. 2

Further to the letter from Mrs D Allen, Assistant Director Pupil Services and Procurement, dated 22 October 2018, please find below a further update on the Digital Admissions Project. It is the Education Authority's (EA's) intention that updates between now and the Go-live date will serve two purposes:

   i.   to keep you informed of progress on the project generally which will include addressing questions being raised by schools and providers; and

   ii. to ensure that you have accurate and up to date information to be able to respond to queries from parents.

1.   Admission Timetables

     As published in the Department of Education Circular 2018/17: Open Enrolment in Nursery, Primary and Post Primary Schools – Timetables applications for admission to pre-school and primary one will open on Wednesday 2 January 2019 at 10.00am and close for punctual applications on Thursday 31 January 2019 (midnight).

2.   Communications

     The EA is establishing a Digital Admissions Online Resource Hub to create a central repository of support materials that parents and schools/providers can access to find out about the new pre-school and primary application process. More information will follow on this.

3.   Testing of Parent and School Portals

     Testing of both portals is continuing. Those schools/playgroups who expressed an interest in assisting with testing have been invited to attend one of two events taking place this week and next. These events will take the form of a drop-in session, where schools/playgroups will be able to see screen recordings of the user journeys on both the Parent Portal and School Portal. In addition each setting attending will have the opportunity to work through registration and log in

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to the test system where representatives will be able to view and manage digital applications and most importantly to provide feedback on the test School Portal.

4. Training on use of the School Portal

The precise format of the training which is scheduled to take place week commencing 26 November 2018 will be further informed by the School Portal testing. I will write to you with further details in due course. In the meantime I would encourage you to view the screen recordings of a user journey through both the Parent and School portals which will allow you to decide whether you need to attend the training. The recordings can be accessed by clicking on the following links:

- Parent Portal screen recording: https://bit.ly/2T8psEg

- School Portal screen recording: https://bit.ly/2T7Ap93

Over the coming weeks these screen recordings, a handbook on use of the School Portal including exemplar screenshots, and a set of FAQs etc. will be made available in the resource hub.

5. Provision of paper application forms

The EA is taking a digital first approach to transacting with its stakeholders, this means that digital (online) will be the first option to be explored/offered. Whilst seeking to encourage parents to apply online, as outlined in the Equality Screening document a paper application form will be accepted. However, the EA will not be providing a bulk supply of application forms as in previous years. A PDF version of the application form will be issued electronically to schools/providers for printing off in response to specific requests for a paper application where a parent cannot access the online system or chooses not to. Consequently, the EA would encourage you not to distribute copies of the paper application at your open day. The PDF version will be provided to coincide with the Parent Portal opening for applications on 2 January 2019. The application form will not be published on the EA's website and you are asked not to publish it on your school/pre-school website.

Parents applying to Irish medium settings will be able to do so through the online portal. However, if they wish to complete their application in Irish, they may obtain a copy of a translated application form which will be supplied to Irish-medium schools/playgroups as outlined in the Equality Screening document.

6. Verifying documents

You will note from the Department's published timetable that a parent applying online will be advised that birth certificates and any verifying documents specified in admission criteria should

be submitted to their first preference setting on or before 12 noon on Friday 8 February 2019. The introduction of digital admissions does not change the practice of schools/playgroups with regard to duty to verify nor the onus on parents to ensure that their supporting documentation is provided to the school/provider listed as first preference by the specified date.

Separate communication will be issued to pre-school providers with regard to verification of Social Disadvantage.

7. Open days – Support Materials

The EA is developing support materials for use with parents. These will include a range of materials to help parents apply online. It is planned to release these over the coming weeks.
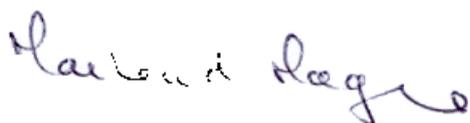
8. Assisted Digital Support

The responses to the published Equality Screening document have confirmed that the actions outlined address the needs of the various stakeholders identified in the exercise. As outlined in the document the EA is developing a range of materials, offered through various channels to support people who need to use the digital service but do not have the skills or access to do so. I would highlight that the online facility is not dependent on broadband width and access will be available via various channels including mobile network.

9. Advice on Admission Procedures

As is normal practice the School Admissions Officers will be issuing guidance on the individual admission procedures. This guidance will cover matters such as how to make returns for digital and paper applications and will be issued to schools/pre-school providers in January 2019.

Yours sincerely

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