



## North Somerset authority leading the way with online admissions

North Somerset was one of the first local authorities to offer applications online and has been using Capita Children's Services' (Capita CS) **One Admissions & Transfers Online** to manage the process.

**One** of the most interesting features of the government e-Agenda is the aim to have citizens interacting with government departments via the internet on a regular basis. This has been reinforced by requirements for certain authority services to be offered online, such as the application for a school place. From September 2006 all local authorities must offer parents the option of applying for a school place via the web. North Somerset was one of the first local authorities to offer applications online and has been using Capita CS **One Admissions & Transfers Online** to manage the process. The results have been excellent and in the first year an impressive 38% of all secondary school place applications were made online; smashing the government's own target by an astounding 33%.

North Somerset co-ordinates the admissions for 76 schools within the 145 square miles surrounding Weston-super-Mare. The area has a population of 188,000, of which 28,000 are children of school age, and the authority has been using Capita CS integrated **One Admissions & Transfers** system for a number of years to help manage the whole process of school admissions smoothly and efficiently.

**"One Admissions & Transfers Online enables the electronic applications we receive from parents to be automatically saved onto the system, whereas our paper-based applications are individually entered by hand."**

**Sally Varley, School Admissions Manager**

The online applications facility was introduced in September 2005 and is contributing towards the authority's efficiency targets by helping to reduce the administrative burden of traditional paper-based applications on their Admissions team.

"The security of data is maintained at all times as parents are issued with a user name and password and can only access information relating to their child."

Applying for school places online is easy and there is no risk of paperwork getting lost or damaged. Parents in North Somerset applying for secondary school places are issued with their secure password and simply log on to the authority's website from any computer, accessing an online application form that can be completed immediately, or saved to be filled in at a later date, as required. The system guides parents through the electronic application step-by-step and their attention is automatically drawn to any errors or inconsistencies in data before the form can be submitted; potentially saving time for the authority's Admissions team at a later stage in the process.

"The online admissions process reduces the likelihood of us receiving incomplete applications and limits the need for us to engage in correspondence with parents about missing information."

If the online application is saved and not submitted immediately, emails are automatically sent to remind parents that they still need to complete the application process by submitting their form. If required, multiple preferences can be included on a single application and, for secondary admissions, parents can also apply for a place in a school outside their own area if they wish.

# CASE STUDY

## One Admissions & Transfers

Key to the success of North Somerset's online admissions project was the launch of an impressive marketing campaign designed to encourage parents and carers to apply online for their child's school place in the forthcoming academic year.

In July 2005 schools sent leaflets directly to parents of Year 5 students publicising the availability of the service; letting parents know how and when they could submit online applications. Advertisements were placed in local newspapers and magazines, on the radio and even on local buses; which created interest and got parents talking about it. Wording on the admissions booklet itself was amended to promote the new online admissions procedure and open days were held where computers were made available to assist those who did not have internet access in submitting their applications online.

"The direct mail campaign gave parents all the information they needed, enabling them to feel confident about submitting their applications electronically and was a great success in terms of investment; costing just 9% of the total marketing budget for the project." 53% of those who applied online did so because of the direct mail shots.

North Somerset uses **One Admissions & Transfers** to ensure the next stage of the admissions process also runs as efficiently as possible. Allocating school places can be a complex procedure, attempting to match thousands of students with their preferred schools and possibly sharing student data with authorities all over the country. **One Admissions & Transfers** simplifies this process by enabling the authority's Admissions team to manage the details of all electronic and paper-based applications.

Information from all school place applications can then be exchanged with other admissions authorities electronically, if necessary, through the Department for Education and Skills' (DfES) S2S website. The **One** system collates all the school and student data and then systematically, considering all preferences, allocates school places, repeating the process until all students have been offered a place in the highest possible school of preference.

During the allocation process as frequently as necessary details of offers are exchanged between all relevant authorities via the S2S website. At the end of the allocation process North Somerset is then able to produce letters advising parents of which school their child has been offered a place at. Those parents who have applied online can also receive email notification of their child's school place allocation that is available to view through their secure site. Students' data can be passed directly onto their new school electronically, ensuring the information received is accurate and saving administrative time for receiving schools.

"**One Admissions & Transfers Online** helps us to deliver an improved service to parents, as they receive confirmation via email that their application has been received and is being processed; giving them complete peace of mind."

**Sally Varley, School Admissions Manager**

Although not yet used in North Somerset, it is also possible to ease the administrative burden of managing the appeals process by utilising **One Admissions & Transfers** and **One Admissions & Transfers Online**, freeing time for appeals staff to spend on other tasks. Appeals can be submitted online, and their progress monitored, allowing parents to get all the information they need without having to spend time calling authority staff. Any notes or correspondence relating to the appeal can be stored electronically in one place, making them easily accessible to all relevant parties.

Another benefit resulting from the introduction of online admissions at North Somerset has been the opportunity for the authority to support schools in developing and improving their websites. The Admissions team has supported the delivery of courses on how schools can use their websites more effectively to improve communication, helping to strengthen links with parents and the wider community.

North Somerset is currently working in close partnership with schools and other authorities to ensure the school admissions process runs smoothly across the region. The Admissions team are currently looking at ways in which they can support the community further by offering more parents the convenience of applying for school places and submitting appeals online.