



## **Sandwell Independent Admission Appeals Panel**



# **School Appeals Panel Applicant Information Booklet**

Sandwell's School Appeals Team would like new volunteers to join as an Independent School Appeals Panel Member. Members of the panel make a valuable contribution to the appeals service with their informed decisions. Being a panel member can be a rewarding experience for those who wish to contribute to their community.

Being a panel member is a position of responsibility, as the appeal panel performs a judicial function and must be transparent, accessible, independent, impartial, and operate according to the principles of natural justice.

If you like to make a difference and have some spare time, we would love to hear from you!

If you are interested in becoming a Panel Member, please read the information in this booklet **before** completing the application form.

### **What's involved?**

Due to the limited availability of school places not everyone is successful in securing their child a place at their preferred school/academy. When this happens parent's/carer's have the legal right to appeal against the admission authority's decision to refuse their child a place at their preferred school/academy. School appeals are heard by an independent panel consisting of three individuals. As a panel member, you will read the case papers in advance of the hearing, actively participate in the appeal hearing and decide whether to uphold or dismiss the appeal.

### **Where do appeals take place?**

School appeals are normally heard virtually using Microsoft Teams; therefore, you can participate from the comfort of your own home. You must be in a private room where no one can overhear the proceedings.

### **When do appeals take place?**

School appeal hearings run throughout the academic year during school term time. Appeals panels sit more frequently during the months of May, June and July due to the high volume of appeals lodged for children entering Reception and Year 7 in September.

### **What is the duration?**

Appeal dates are set in advance, and you will be contacted via email to ask if you would be available to sit on the panel. You can choose how often you sit on the panel; however, we would ask that you sit on a panel a minimum of 4 times during the academic year to maintain your experience. During the busy months of May, June and July you may be required to sit on a panel for multiple consecutive days.

A panel will hear several appeals during the day, with the first appeal usually starting at 9:30am. You would need to join the hearing approximately 15 minutes before to allow for the preliminary business to be undertaken. The day is arranged to allow time for a morning break and a lunch break. Each appeal date finishes at a different time; however, we would advise you to expect to be needed until 5pm (at the latest).

### **What happens at an appeal hearing?**

The Panel will receive information from the admission authority explaining the reason why a school application was unsuccessful and the impact an additional child will have on the school/academy. You will then hear the parent's reasons as to why they want their child to attend their preferred school/academy. You cannot consider any appeal for a school/academy that you have or have had an interest in for example: you cannot hear appeals for the school your child attends. The panel must ensure that parents/carers receive a fair and transparent hearing.

The Panel must examine the decision to refuse admission to ensure procedures have been followed and, if necessary, go on to balance the parent's/carer's case against the school's/academy's case. The role of the panel is to decide if a child should be admitted to the preferred school/academy when admission has been refused by the admission authority. The Panel is supported by a Clerk who will provide procedural and legal advice during the hearing and whilst the decision is being made.

### Who can be a Panel Member?

Anyone over the age of 18 can be a panel member. To ensure our panel is inclusive, we are looking for people from all backgrounds with different experiences and skills.

### Who cannot be a Panel Member?

A person cannot be a panel member if they:

- Are a current / former employee or elected member of Sandwell MBC
- Are a current employee of a school/academy; other than as a teacher or teaching assistant
- Do not complete the mandatory training provided

### Any qualifications or experienced needed?

You do not need any specific experience or formal qualifications as full training will be provided.

### Is the role paid?

Being a panel member is a voluntary role, however, you may claim expenses.

### Skills needed?

To be a great panel member you will need to:

- Be empathetic
- Be able to communicate effectively
- Ask questions to obtain information
- Be a good listener
- Analyse information to make a decision
- Be courteous
- Be reliable
- Be able to work with others
- Be willing to take advice

### Contact Information

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Sandwell School Appeals Team at [DSU\\_SchoolAppeals@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:DSU_SchoolAppeals@sandwell.gov.uk) and a member of the team will be in touch.

### What's next?

If you would like to come on board as a Sandwell Appeals Panel Member, please fill in and return the application by email to [DSU\\_SchoolAppeals@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:DSU_SchoolAppeals@sandwell.gov.uk)

Following receipt of the application form, training will be arranged which you **must** attend. If you want to become a panel member after completion of the training, you will be invited for an informal meeting by Microsoft Teams which should take no longer than 1 hour. Once you become a panel member, the Clerks will provide additional support and guidance to help you put your learning into practice.

We look forward to hearing from you!