

# **PaJeS**

## **Partnerships for Jewish Schools**

### **Secondary School Admissions 2016/17: Frequently Asked Questions**

The process of applying for secondary places can be stressful and those going through it are often anxious, especially as key deadlines approach. We hope the information below will be helpful in understanding the process.

#### ***When are offers made?***

The first round of offers for all London state schools takes place each year on 1st March. You will be told by your Local Authority which school your child has been allocated on that day. If you have applied online you will be notified as to when the system is available for you to view your offer.

#### ***Who makes the decisions – the school or the local authority?***

The formal offer of a place comes from your local authority. The school sets the admissions policy, and confirms which applicants have satisfied the Jewish practice criteria, but plays no part in the selection process. Nor do schools know where parents have put them on their list of preferences.

#### ***I know many Jewish schools are oversubscribed. What should I do to maximise my child's chance of a place?***

The best and only advice is to list the schools in the order you genuinely want them, and then sit tight and remain hopeful. The system allocates places on the basis of the preferences parents put on their Common Application Form. If you try to play the system, or put a school you don't really want higher up because you think you have a better chance, you do not get any advantage and it simply distorts the process for you and for everyone. This is one of the main reasons for delays and unhappiness in the admissions system. Once your form is submitted, there is nothing further that you can or need to do.

#### ***I've heard about several "rounds" of offers. What does that mean?***

After offers are made on 1st March, there is always some 'movement'. Some families decide to go to private schools, or go abroad, or move house, and this frees up the place they were allocated. This means that this place can be offered to someone who put the school as their first preference but who was allocated their second choice school, for example. This, in turn, means there is a space at the second choice school that can be offered to someone who put this school as their first preference but was allocated another school. As a result, there are often quite a few places that arise after 1st March as all this shuffling happens – and these are the additional 'rounds' of offers.

#### ***When are the "rounds"?***

Schools tend to make a fresh round of offers every few weeks, if there are places to offer, however this varies between local authorities. It is quite common for 30 or more places to become available in this way for each school. If the offer you receive is from a school you put lower down your list, your child's name can remain on the waiting list of your first choice of school automatically.

#### ***How does the waiting list work?***

The schools and their local authorities maintain a waiting list for places that become available after 1<sup>st</sup> March. The first round of offers have to be accepted or rejected by 15<sup>th</sup> March. When the local authorities receive this information they update each child's status on their system. Each school cross-checks their list

of available places with their local authority and then offer places according to the school's admissions policy to those on the waiting list. If your child's name is not selected it will remain on a school's waiting list into September unless you tell the school otherwise. Schools will usually try to update you from time to time on the status of the waiting list.

### ***Can I change my mind about the order I put schools in?***

You can do this via your local authority in certain circumstances, but they may insist on having a concrete reason for the change. It is important to get the list right first time because that – and only that – is what the computer uses to allocate places. If your child is a sibling at one school and you put another school first, but then change your mind and decide you would prefer the sibling's school, you do not have an automatic place but would be offered the first available one.

### ***Why do some people who put a particular secondary school second get places ahead of people who put it first?***

The system gives your child a place at the highest school on your list that has a place. If your first-preference school cannot offer a place, the computer automatically treats the next highest school on your list as your first preference, and tries again there. The system is run for all schools and applicants simultaneously so that all applicants have equal chance to be selected within a given criteria. It may seem frustrating and baffling for those who listed a particular school first and don't get places, but it does mean that the school that they are offered is as high up their list as possible.

### ***So there are children who get school A who really want school B and people at school B who really want school A? Surely the schools should talk to each other, match them up and arrange swaps?***

That is exactly what the computer system is designed to do automatically. It's not perfect but if there was a fairer system then local authorities would be using it. It would quickly cause far more chaos and grief if individual schools operated a separate "matchmaker" process, and if we did there would be no guarantee that the right swaps would happen.

### ***Is it worth an appeal?***

Everyone has the right to appeal against their allocation. The appeal process is designed for cases where you think the system has operated unfairly or where your child's situation is so acute that the school they have been allocated is totally unsuitable for them. It is not designed for cases where you simply don't want the school you have been allocated, or where you disagree with the admissions criteria. Each case is heard by an independent panel and considered on its merits, but appeals do not succeed where the grounds are simply that you wanted a Jewish school and haven't got one, or that your child is really distressed not to get the school they wanted. The process is professional and humane, but emotionally demanding for parents as well as children. Statistically the proportion of appeals that are upheld is small.

### ***The system seems so inefficient and unfair – isn't there a better way?***

The system operated by the local authorities is as efficient and fair as it can be, but that doesn't mean that everyone can get the school they want, or sometimes any of the schools they want. If all the schools on your list are heavily over-subscribed, there is a chance that you will not get any of them. That will *feel* unfair (why has my child not got a place anywhere when all her friends have?) but that doesn't mean it actually *is* unfair. It may be bitterly disappointing and unpleasant, but that is not quite the same thing.

### ***It's clear there aren't enough places at Jewish schools. Can't one of the schools expand?***

There probably are enough places at Jewish schools at the moment, but they are not perfectly distributed in line with the demand. PaJeS is looking at ways to improve the situation, which might include extra places at some schools. We are commissioning extensive research to inform this discussion.