

# **SCHOOL ADMISSIONS SECONDARY ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION ERROR**

Services for Children and Young People



**PLYMOUTH**  
CITY COUNCIL

## **Content**

Who received online communications?

What form of electronic communication?

What happened?

Why did it happen?

What we did to resolve the issue?

How can we prevent it happening again?

## **Appendix**

1. Secondary School Admissions webpage amendment
2. Secondary School Admissions webpage amendment
3. Secondary School Admissions webpage amendment
4. Secondary School Admissions webpage amendment

### **Who received online communications?**

Parents can apply for their school place online or by paper. For those applying online:

- The terms and conditions that they agree to has a default check box to receive allocation notification by email. Those that leave the box as it is and who do not change their email address will receive an electronic communication of their allocation. Not all parents will find the email as some home PCs will treat the mail as unsolicited and either put it in the junk folder or automatically delete it. Emails are issued after 8am on 1 March.
- Provided they can recall their email address and password used in the original application, parents can sign into their online account after midnight on 1 March to view their allocation.

### **What form of electronic communication?**

- Email.
- View allocation within the online application.

### **What happened?**

School place allocations are carried out using a purchased computer package called ONE, supplied by Capita. ONE has a 'back office' used by LAs and an online application accessed by parents.

Within the ONE Online system, there are data input fields which then translate onto the webpage under the online application form.

ONE is subject to system updates which occur due to system improvements or migrations to alternative system platforms. These updates are provided by Capita and received by the LA.

There was a change in the 3.41 update which was not acted upon. Essentially, this update meant that a data input field which had previously only translated to applicants without a first, second or third preference allocation (so received an allocation at the nearest school with a vacancy) translated to all applicants.

### **Why did it happen?**

An update in a system release was missed which impacted upon the electronic communication system.

- System updates are notified to the LA by Capita and received in the IISaM (Implementing Information Sharing and Management) team. The notification contains a brief summary and directs to the location of release notes. The IISaM team has restructured and reduced in number. Previously there was staffing in place to read the release notes and brief module users of the content, there is no current provision within IISaM to do this.
- The update disk is sent to ISD who have responsibility for loading updates and maintaining access, they do not read the release notes. There is no dedicated support to the ONE module within ISD.
- ONE user group meetings have become spasmodic following the IISaM restructure. As a result, module users are not aware of impending updates or the location of release notes.
- Module users are not resourced to read all release notes to determine whether any of the system update relates to their module. In many cases, module users may not have the technical knowledge to understand the implication of release updates.
- Capita issue alerts to the IISaM team where significant change is anticipated. There was no alert for this change. The input field for this change is not mandatory and not all LAs populate the field. It was probably not therefore viewed as a significant change.

### **What we did to resolve the issue?**

The error was notified at 8.30am on 1 March and was notified by a parent. Investigations then began into who was affected and why the situation had occurred.

- All phone lines were active within the School Admissions Team in order to respond to parental queries during office hours
- The Secondary Admissions web page was updated with a news item to explain to parents
- The PCC home page was updated with the news story (to run until close of business on 2 March)
- PCC switchboard and Windsor House reception notified of the situation and directed to the webpage for more information
- Press releases arranged for local radio stations and the local newspaper
- Online system amended so that parents accessing their account after the amendment on the afternoon of 1 March would receive the correct text prevent a similar occurrence for primary allocations due to be issued in April and to ensure that parents accessing their online account
- Article arranged for the School room (2 March 2011)
- Article arranged for the Members room (2 March 2010)

### **How can we prevent it happening again?**

Review the process by which the LA receives and handles ONE system updates.

## **Appendix:**

### **1. Secondary School Admissions webpage amendment**

#### **Urgent news**

For parents who have received a school allocation email or looked at the allocation online:

We have been made aware of a fault with the electronic communication. In the preference information, if one of the three preferences shown has 'Place Offered' against it under the 'Offer Status' field, this is the school that has been allocated. Please ignore the next paragraph which then states that we have not been able to allocate a place at any of the schools requested in your application form. This paragraph only applies if the 'Offer Status' shows 'Not Offered' under all of the preferences. We are sorry for this confusion and are currently investigating the cause. Letters will be sent out to all applicants by first class post today to confirm the allocation.

### **2. PCC home web page insert**

#### **Technical issues with school place allocation system**

Pupils across Plymouth can now discover which secondary schools they are to attend from September this year.

Plymouth has bucked the national average, with nine in 10 students getting their first choice place.

Details are now available online but unfortunately bugs in the system mean some parents may still not be seeing their child as having been allocated a place when in fact they have.

If you have received an allocation email or looked on the website and are confused by what's listed you need to pay most attention to the preference information.

If one of the three preferences shown has 'Place Offered' against it under the 'Offer Status' field, this is the school that has been allocated. Please ignore the next paragraph which then states that we have not been able to allocate a place at any of the schools requested in your application form.

This paragraph only applies if the 'Offer Status' shows 'Not Offered' under all of the preferences. We are sorry for this confusion and are currently investigating the cause. Letters will be sent out to all applicants by first class post today to confirm the allocation.

More information about how the process works can be found in our [Parent's Guide](#).

### **3. School room article**

## **Allocation of secondary school places**

For parents who have received a school allocation email or looked at the allocation online yesterday:

We have been made aware of a fault with the electronic communication system. In the preference information, if one of the three preferences shown has 'Place Offered' against it under the 'Offer Status' field, this is the school that has been allocated. Please ignore the next paragraph which then states that we have not been able to allocate a place at any of the schools requested in the application form. This paragraph only applies if the 'Offer Status' shows 'Not Offered' under all of the preferences. Letters were sent out to all applicants by first class post yesterday to confirm the allocation. Anyone looking at their allocation online today will find that the statement has been amended to read correctly. Every applicant resident in Plymouth has been allocated a school place for September 2011 and 94% of parents received a place at their first ranked preference school.

We apologise for this error in the communication system and recognise the confusion that it must have caused to parents and the additional work that will have been incurred by school staff in dealing with parental enquires.

### **4. Members Room email**

## **Allocation of secondary school places**

For parents who have received a school allocation email or looked at the allocation online yesterday:

We have been made aware of a fault with the electronic communication system. In the preference information, if one of the three preferences shown has 'Place Offered' against it under the 'Offer Status' field, this is the school that has been allocated. Please ignore the next paragraph which then states that we have not been able to allocate a place at any of the schools requested in the application form. This paragraph only applies if the 'Offer Status' shows 'Not Offered' under all of the preferences. Letters were sent out to all applicants by first class post yesterday to confirm the allocation. Anyone looking at their allocation online today will find that the statement has been amended to read correctly. Every applicant resident in Plymouth has been allocated a school place for September 2011 and 94% of parents received a place at their first ranked preference school.

We apologise for this error in the communication system and recognise the confusion that it must have caused to parents and the additional work that will have been incurred by members and school staff in dealing with parental enquires.