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When is a grammar school not a grammar school?

At the end of March, Kent County Council voted to create an additional 120 places in a grammar school annexe in Sevenoaks. It followed a petition signed by 2,600 people and the relaxation of a restriction on extending grammar schools, which the Labour government introduced when making it easier for other schools to expand. Reports indicated that a boys' and a girls' grammar school in Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells might be the schools which will "expand".

Kent councillors were told by officers before the vote that Michael Gove had said: "Kent is experiencing a significant increase in population overall and it has been accepted by the last government, as it has been by this one, that if you have population growth in an area where there is selected provision, you should allow schools in that area to expand to take account of it."

Councillors were also told that: "DfE advice suggests the conditions for expansion would be the same catchment area or reasonable distance from the main school, such as two to three miles." Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells are about 10 miles from Sevenoaks.

How the building is to be funded, reported to be at a cost of £12 million, is unclear. Kent CC has to publish a statutory proposal for expansion, with consultation. Some bodies, for example the local diocese, have rights then to object to the Adjudicator. The right of parents and others to object to school expansion is specifically excluded in the School Admissions Code.

The Council voted overwhelmingly for the proposal with Labour councillors voting against. Supporters of selection, such as Graham Brady MP and the National Grammar Schools Association, greeted the change enthusiastically, indicating that this opened the doors to the expansion of other grammars across the country.

No main political party supports introducing new grammar schools and we believe this is contrary to their policies. It is very important that there is a response to this.

Please write to your MP now and to Secretary of State Michael Gove MP and shadow Secretary of State Stephen Twigg MP.

Looking for comprehensive headteachers

We are often asked for spokespeople in support of comprehensive education and, as you may have seen, we have several who are very effective. However, it would be good to have more headteachers able to talk about the value of a comprehensive education. Often the media use grammar school heads as spokespeople. If you are a headteacher willing to speak up please let us know that you would like to join our list. Or perhaps you know a head who might become a supporter and be willing to speak. Please ask them to get in touch.

Comprehensive
Future

PO Box 44327
London SW20 0WD

info@
comprehensivefuture.org.uk

020 8947 5758

Can your next newsletter be an email?

You will have read about the big increase in postage costs due shortly. A second class letter will cost 50p to post. This will have a very serious effect on our costs. If you are willing to receive our newsletter by email please let us know as soon as possible by emailing info@comprehensivefuture.org.uk or Margaret Tulloch at mtulloch@poptel.org. We do not charge a membership fee but ask for donations or standing orders. We are very grateful to supporters who have recently taken out standing orders. We continue urgently to need your support to continue lobbying for fair admissions and an end to selection. A standing order form can be downloaded from the website at www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk/support.htm

New Admissions Code is now in force

The latest Admissions Code came into force on 1 February 2012. Admissions for the September 2013 intake will be the first to be operated under the new arrangements. A new “national offer day” for primary schools will be introduced on 16 April 2014. Secondary school offer day is on or around 1 March.

In response to lobbying, the Labour opposition “prayed against” the regulations upon which the Code is based. The Sixth Delegated Legislation Committee on 22 February debated the School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012.

Kevin Brennan MP for Labour raised the issue of changes made to the Code after consultation that restricted the right of objection to the Adjudicator. These points were not specifically addressed by Nick Gibb MP in reply.

Admissions procedures in the new Code are:

- Admission authorities must determine their admission arrangements annually by 15 April, publish them on their website and notify the “appropriate bodies”, which include local schools, parents of children between two and 18, other admission authorities and local governing bodies. They must also send a copy to the local authority by 1 May.
- If there is no change, consultation does not have to take place for seven years. If changes to admissions arrangements are proposed there must be consultation. Consultation must take place between 1 November and 1 March of the academic year before the arrangements are due to take place. There is a list of bodies that must be consulted and a full copy of the proposed arrangements must be on the website of the admission authority for the whole of the consultation period.
- Oversubscription criteria must be reasonable, clear,

objective, procedurally fair and comply with all relevant legislation, including equalities law. The Code lists what admission authorities must not do in setting criteria.

- By 1 May, local authorities must publish the proposed admission arrangements for all new schools, including academies, in the area and where the admission arrangements for all schools can be found. The local authority must also give information about how objections can be made.

- Objections can be made to the School Adjudicator by 30 June. Any person or body who considers that any maintained school or academy’s arrangements are unlawful, or not in compliance with the Code or relevant law relating to admissions, may object. But objections which relate to removing selection, increasing the planned admission limit or variations for an academy agreed with the Secretary of State – or are similar to ones ruled about in the past two years or are anonymous – are not allowed. The School Adjudicator’s decisions are “binding and enforceable”.

- Local authorities must refer an objection to the Adjudicator if they believe the admission arrangements of other admission authorities are unlawful.

- By 8 August all admission authorities must provide information to the local authority as by 30 September the local authority must publish a composite prospectus for parents in the offer year, ie for admissions in the following year.

Please check out your local schools’ admission arrangements to see whether they are published on their websites and comply with the Code. Let us know.

The Code is available at <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/s/school%20admissions%20code%201%20feb%202012.pdf>

The evidence for ending selection

A new section on the website tackles some of the many claims made for selection at 11, for example that there was a golden age when grammar schools were the route for the working class out of poverty or that intelligence is fixed and children can be separated by a test at 11. Please let us have your comments.

Goldsmiths debate

Comprehensive Future supporters are invited to a debate at Goldsmiths College between Melissa Benn, Fiona Millar and Francis Gilbert on contemporary UK schools from 1-2pm on May 18. Register free at www.gold.ac.uk/gleu/futuretense/

Follow us on Twitter

We now can be followed on Twitter @comp_future. Please find our tweets and retweet to your friends. Our Facebook group has been archived, losing several contacts. So we hope to set up another page shortly.

Labour consults on a middle tier

Concerned about fragmentation and the democratic deficit, Stephen Twigg is consulting on the need for a middle tier in education. Responses are invited from everyone, including non-Labour Party members. The paper says that: “There is a range of powers and functions which a middle tier will need to be endowed with, in order to carry out the functions outlined above. This may include enforcing fair admissions.” The deadline for responses is 10 July 2012.

Enquiries to the Office of Stephen Twigg MP, adam.mcnicholas@parliament.uk 020 7219 7103

PQs reveal some interesting facts

Some recent answers to parliamentary questions asked by Lisa Nandy MP have provided interesting information.

For instance:

- 23.7% of pupils in grammar schools live outside the local authority in which the grammar is situated.
- The percentage of pupils aged 16-18 (1.8) eligible for free school meals in grammars is lower than those aged 11-15 (2.7%), indicating that the schools’ sixth forms are even more socially

selective.

- In the 36 local authorities with fully-selective schools, the percentage of selective places as a proportion of all secondary school places ranges from 1.8% in Devon to 41% in Buckinghamshire.
- Since 2005, 131 grammar schools have registered an interest and applied to convert to academy status. As of February 2012, 119 grammar schools have become academies.