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More changes proposed to admission rules

Consultation ends on 2 October 2008 on a revised School Admissions Code, School Admission Appeals Code and relevant regulations. The revised Code will come into force in 2009 for admissions in 2010. Some of the changes included are already in the Education and Skills Bill currently going through parliament, namely the duty on local authorities to report to the Adjudicator on admission arrangements in their areas and the extension of the powers of the Adjudicator to take action without a complaint being made.

One of the unfair aspects of admissions in the past was the use of a requirement to support the ethos of the school as an admission criterion – a subjective judgment which many thought allowed schools that were admissions authorities to pick and choose their intakes. Now, unless the Government backs down, it seems likely to return. Schools will not be allowed to ask for money or other practical support but parents could be asked to sign up to a statement of ethos. This seems likely to lead to all sorts of unfairness and complications and should be abandoned.

The role of Admission Forums is being reconsidered again in the light of the requirements on local authorities to report. There is to be greater emphasis on parents being able to respond to consultations on proposed admission criteria. There are many other detailed changes. Of course if selection on ability and aptitude were ended the Code would be much clearer, simpler and slimmer.

Please look at the consultation document and let us have any comments by 15 September when the *Comprehensive Future* steering group will meet to consider its response. Email info@comprehensivefuture.org.uk or write to our address. The numbers of responses are important so please respond directly as well.

The consultation documents on the new Admissions Code are available as hard copies from DCSF publications at PO Box 5050 Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham; Email: dcsf@prolog.uk.com; Tel: 0845 6022260. The document references are:

Consultation document: 00449-2008BKT-EN

Draft School Admissions Code: 00450-2008DOM-EN

Draft School Admission Appeals Code: 00451-2008DOM-EN

Draft Regulations: 00452-2008DOM-EN

Fringe meetings on fair admissions

After our meeting at the Liberal Democrat conference last year two fringe meetings are planned for this year's Labour and Conservative conferences.

Labour – Monday 22 September, 7.30pm, Friends Meeting House, Manchester, (joint event with the Socialist Education Association). *Time to End Selection*. Speakers: Professor Richard Pring (President, SEA), Fiona Millar (Vice Chair, Comprehensive Future). Chair: David Chaytor MP (Chair, Comprehensive Future). This is outside the secure area so you will not need a pass to come.

Conservative – Monday 29 September, 5.45pm, Exec Room 8, International Conference Centre, Birmingham. *What is a fair admissions policy?* Speakers: Nick Gibb MP (Shadow Minister for Schools), Fiona Millar, Demetri Coryton (Editor, Education Journal). Chair: Baroness Perry of Southwark. Passes needed.

Meeting lets members put our points to Ed Balls

Ed Balls had a meeting with some members of *Comprehensive Future* in July. In a meeting lasting about an hour we made several points:

- We welcomed some of what had been done by the Government on admissions but said that allowing selection to remain is a barrier to the Government's efforts to raise standards and extend opportunity.
- Although the Code has improved admissions in comprehensive areas it has caused and continues to cause problems in the many areas where selection remains. This is because allowing the test to be set and results known before parents express a preference and stopping schools giving preference to those who put them first means that non-selective schools in these areas have far less chance of a balanced intake.
- The issue of 'fair banding' must be addressed. Where one school does it in isolation it has the effect of creaming off the more able from other schools. It can mean that the school bands across those applying. So the school is able to band across the children of parents organised enough to bring their children to the school to take the test. If banding is to be introduced it should be for all schools across the ability range of the area. The admission forum could have a role here.
- The effect of the National Challenge has been to demoralise schools which, given their intake and CVA, are doing a good job.
- Two major weaknesses of the grammar school ballot system are that parents do not have a proposal for school reorganisation to consider and there is no official information about the effects of selection and outcomes of non-selective education to counter arguments about the need to retain the status quo. Government must confront selection head on and deal with selection, which is a structural cause of segregation, by inviting local authorities to bring in alternative structures which are non-selective. The existing policy requirement for local determination could still be kept by reversing the current situation so that a petition and ballot would have to be organised if parents wished to vote to *keep* selection.
- *Comprehensive Future* read the Secretary of State a letter from a parent in Salisbury illustrating the unhappy position many comprehensively educated parents find themselves in when, assuming selection has been outlawed everywhere, they go to live in an area which they then discover retains selection. This parent of a five year old child described how other parents of children are being stressed about whether their five year olds will pass the 11 plus and both children and primary schools are put under pressure.

Conference, AGM and elections

Details are enclosed of this year's Annual Conference. It will be held in Mander Hall, in the HQ of the National Union of Teachers, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1 on Saturday 11 October. We are really grateful to the NUT for their support. The venue is within a few minutes' walk of Euston and Kings Cross stations. There is no charge but donations are strongly encouraged! Please register as soon as possible so that numbers can be finalised. This is a really good opportunity to help plan the campaign and hear some excellent speakers.

The AGM will be held during the National Conference on 11 October. Nominations are invited for Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and up to 15 members. These will be elected at the AGM. Please send in your nominations (you may nominate yourself) for these posts. Nominees should provide a short personal statement of up to 75 words for circulation before the AGM to those planning to attend. Please send nominations and personal statements to the Secretary, Margaret Tulloch, at Comprehensive Future, PO Box, 44327, London SW20 0WD or email mtulloch@poptel.org to arrive by 20 September 2008.

Official data on selection

A recent statistical bulletin published by the DCSF has a great deal of information of interest to campaigners to end selection, for example:

- The percentage of pupils in grammar schools has increased from 4.2% in 1997 to 4.7% in 2007, i.e. an increase of more than 28,000 pupils. This shows that more and more children are taking entry tests and failing them. Assuming the ratio of success to failure is 1 to 3 then roughly 15% of pupils have their aspirations lowered by failure at 11.
- Grammar schools have a lower than average incidence of pupils eligible for free school meals and pupils classified as SEN. FSM rates in grammar schools were not representative of their local areas. Black African, Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean and Pakistani pupils were under-represented in grammar schools compared to the local areas.
- All selective local authorities have net inflows of pupils from other LAs. On average selective LAs gain above average pupils in year 7 and lose low attaining pupils.
- Levels of FSM segregation in secondary schools are more associated with the proportion of pupils in grammar schools in the LA than any other LA characteristic.

The 178-page bulletin is only available online at www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SBU/b000796/index.shtml

National Challenge

On 10 June 2008 the Secretary of State launched the National Challenge as a 'programme of support to secure higher standards in all secondary schools so that, by 2011, at least 30% of pupils in every school will gain five or more GCSEs at A*-C, including both English and mathematics'.

Unsurprisingly around a third of the 638 National Challenge schools are in the 15 mainly selective local authorities and many more are in the other 21 authorities which have some fully selective schools. A 'secondary modern strategy' is expected in the Autumn. *Comprehensive Future* has said that the best strategy would be to end selection. www.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalchallenge/

Labour policy forum

Labour members of the steering group contacted union leaders and others involved in the July Labour National Policy Forum to urge support for amendments to include a policy commitment to end selection.

Although the issue was raised, the amendments did not get sufficient support from those attending to overcome encouragement from Ministers to keep the status quo.