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New school admissions code is published

A revised School Admissions Code was presented to Parliament on 6 December. Subject to this procedure it will become law in February 2009 and will apply to admissions in September 2010. It can be found at www.dcsf.gov.uk/sacode/

In our response to the consultation on the draft Code in October we called for:

- An end to selection on ability and aptitude and that the new, yearly, local authority reports to the adjudicator should include the numbers of children taking entry tests on ability or aptitude for each school, the acceptance rate and the numbers of tests taken by children in the area.
- Admission Forums to be retained. Parents should have the same entitlement regardless of where they live. There should be proportionate membership, which must include parents. No group should have the majority.
- All decisions on order of priority, ie which applicant meets the criteria, should be determined by the local authority for all local publicly funded schools, ie including all schools which are their own admission authorities.
- Academies and CTCs should be included within the remit of the adjudicator. Parents should have the right to object about the admissions to academies to the adjudicator.
- The proposal allowing schools to ask parents to support the 'ethos' of the school when applying should be abandoned.
- Banding should only be across one reference group – the local authority area – and should not be used unless all schools participate using the same system based on tests taken by all children at primary school.

A fuller summary of our response is on the website.

Perhaps not surprisingly, few of our comments were taken up but we are not discouraged. Some points from the new Code:

- Consultation with local parents and other groups with an interest is to be strengthened with greater efforts to inform parents.
- Schools are to be allowed to include a 'factual statement' about the school's ethos. Schools cannot give priority to parents who offer 'practical support' but presumably can to those giving 'moral support'. It remains to be seen how this fudge plays out.
- Admission Forums are to stay, with a wide remit including considering the fairness of local admissions, including the power to report and to contribute to the Local Authority Report to the adjudicator (now required by law). This replaces the power to report to the now departed School Commissioner. Incidentally it remains to be seen if there is a fair access report from the Commissioner in Spring 2009 as promised. Membership of the forum is to be restricted to 20 people and is to include faith, school, parent and community representatives. This is particularly welcome in that there are signs that Admission Forums are beginning to take on a role in ensuring fairness. A recent adjudication supported Northamptonshire Admission Forum, which had complained about the creaming of their schools from Warwickshire's selective schools (date of decision 24 October 2008).

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Welcome to new patrons

We are really delighted that Lord (Neil) Kinnock, Sir David Melville, Chair of Lifelong Learning UK, and Demitri Coryton, Editor *Education Journal*, have agreed to become patrons of *Comprehensive Future*. More details in the New Year on the website.

Durham University publishes report on effects of selection

A team at Durham University has published a lengthy report on *Evidence on the effect of selective systems*. In its conclusion it says, 'It would be quite possible to accept all our findings and yet argue logically and consistently against selection.'

The report does not call for an end to selection but the researchers did not investigate the damaging effect on children of facing selective entry tests.

There are many interesting findings. For example:

- The effect of selection is widespread. It is not possible to define local authorities as selective or comprehensive. About 20% of grammar school pupils are from a different LA from the one in which the school is situated. Only 28% of secondary schools are not creamed to some extent by admissions into grammar schools. Across England as a whole 33% of the wards have at least one household with a pupil in a grammar school.
- Pupils doing well at grammars were doing well at primary schools.
- Some other schools are as socially selective as grammar schools.

The research was funded by the Sutton Trust, which published its own summary of the findings. As previously the Trust calls for more encouragement for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to apply and be admitted to grammar schools.

The research can be downloaded from www.suttontrust.com/annualreports.asp

The Office of the School Adjudicator

Comprehensive Future has argued for some time for adjudicators to be able to intervene without a complaint being made when schools are not following the Code and this is now the case.

The recent Annual Report received wide coverage as it included the result of the investigation into admission practices across the country. It found widespread failure to follow the rules, but much of it by mistake. The report makes the case for some standardisation of terms – for example parents and siblings – and other recommendations to encourage transparency.

Copies of the report can be obtained from the Office of the Schools Adjudicator on 0870 001 2468, email: OSA.Team@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk or from the website www.schoolsadjudicator.gov.uk

Admissions to faith schools

The Runnymede Trust, an independent policy research organisation, in its report *Right to Divide?* has called for admissions to faith schools to be open to all. The report is the culmination of two years of research.

The Trust says that if faith schools are convinced of their relevance to society, then they should offer that equally to all children.

The report can be downloaded from www.runnymedetrust.org
Runnymede Trust, 7 Plough Yard, Shoreditch, London EC2A 3LP
020 7377 9222

Opening faith schools to all children is one of the aims of ACCORD, which was established a few months ago. ACCORD is a coalition of civil society organisations – trade unions, religious organisations, charities and campaigning groups. *Comprehensive Future* is not one of those organisations as ACCORD's aims go much wider than our focus on admissions. However we are sure many of our supporters will want to support ACCORD.

If so go to their website to sign up: www.accordcoalition.org.uk/index.php/take-action/sign-up/

ACCORD has told us that it urgently needs financial support. Cheques payable to ACCORD coalition should be sent to 1 Gower Street, London WC1E 6HD or payments can be made via their website.

Looking ahead at conference

Alan Parker, a schools adjudicator, gave a fascinating speech to members at the Annual Conference on 11 October just at a time when admissions were in the news. Notes of his speech are on the website.

Steering group member Francis Beckett provided a good send off at the end of the day with a typically robust assessment of the state of English education politics.

Everyone at the AGM which followed expressed their thanks to David Chaytor MP, retiring Chair, for his outstanding commitment to the cause. He was elected onto the steering group. Fiona Millar was elected as Chair, Paul Holmes MP as Vice Chair and Margaret Tulloch and Malcolm Horne remain as Secretary and Treasurer respectively.

Plans for campaigning were discussed. These included the possibility of lobbying for amendments to the forthcoming Education Bill (Children, Skills and Learning Bill), the need to focus on the regulation which allows selective schools to decide to admit children of all abilities, the need to bring MPs together to focus on ending selection and the need to plan for the possibility of a change in government.

Choice advisers

Research now published on the DCSF website suggests some success for this initiative but some problems over reaching some parents. Parent Partnership services seem best placed to do an effective job.

The briefing can be downloaded from the DCSF website www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RBW072.pdf

Choice advice: an evaluation.

November 2008 DCSF RBW072

Northern Ireland

The 11 plus has ended in NI. However it is unclear what will happen to what is known as post-primary education. Some grammars have decided to set their own tests. You can follow events on the NI education department website www.deni.gov.uk

Your support needed!

Please !

- Encourage everyone you know, both individuals and organisations, who support our aims to join by going to the website, phoning 020 8947 5758 or sending an email to info@comprehensivefuture.org.uk
- Send us a donation – we rely on donations to campaign. Cheques payable to *Comprehensive Future*.