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Report shows admissions are getting fairer . . .

The first Annual Report of the new Chief Adjudicator, Dr Ian Craig, reported that overall, because of the new School Admissions Code, admissions are getting fairer.

There were fewer objections to the admission arrangements proposed by admission authorities. He again called for key definitions to be set out by the DCSF, eg on siblings – a point made by the previous Chief. He also looked at twins and random allocations. On fraudulent applications Ed Balls has now given the ball back to him to make recommendations by the end of February.

Speaking at the CSN admissions conference recently, Ian Craig mentioned that the office was looking at how ability and aptitude can be distinguished. The report is available to download from www.schoolsadjudicator.gov.uk/report.cfm or telephone 0870 001 2468, fax 01325 391 313 or email OSA.Team@osa.gsi.gov.uk for a printed copy.

. . . but more changes should be made!

Research by Anne West and Philip Noden of the London School of Economics was published in early December. It was commissioned by the Research and Information on State Education Trust (RISE) and can be downloaded from the RISE website at www.risetrust.org.uk

The researchers looked at five local authorities and interviewed officers, members of admission forums and headteachers. They found a wide variation in the activities of the admission forums. One had obtained the intake data on all local schools and encouraged cross local authority banding; others were less proactive.

Analysing the effect of several legislative changes required in reporting local admissions, West and Noden conclude that more compliance requirements in the Code might make more schools fall foul of regulations. Also problems can arise as schools take action which the Code allows, ie stepping out of locally agreed catchment areas. Instead they suggest that stronger local action is needed by giving the Admission Forums the role of coordinating all oversubscription criteria in the area and extending to all local authorities the role of administering the process of deciding which applicants fit the oversubscription criteria for all schools.

Another new Code and another new Bill

Another School Admissions Code is on its way. It has been laid before Parliament and will apply to admissions from September 2011. It incorporates changes to the school starting age recommended by Jim Rose. Paragraphs 2.65 and 2.69 of the Code have been amended to require admission authorities to provide for the admission of all children in the September following their fourth birthday. It will also require admission authorities to make it clear to parents that they may request part or full-time classes for such children until they reach compulsory school age.

Links to this on the DCSF website at www.dcsf.gov.uk/sacode/index.shtml

Meanwhile the new Children, Schools and Families Bill is expected to have its second reading on January 11 2010. The steering group is looking into the possibility of lobbying for amendments about admissions.

The Bill introduces parent and pupil guarantees and the parental responsiveness surveys. These require local authorities to survey parents' views on local provision of secondary education during the admission process. If there is dissatisfaction, local authorities will have to produce a plan. If this still does not meet parents' views then there can be an appeal to the adjudicator.

For a summary of the Bill and information on its progress go to the parliamentary website: services.parliament.uk/bills/2009-10/childrenschoolsandfamilies.html

Some of our activities during the past year

In December, members of the steering group met Richard Brooks, special adviser to Ed Balls, to discuss our aims. We were encouraged to respond to the forthcoming consultation on 21st century schools, which we did. We also responded to the Ofsted consultation on wellbeing.

In February, an Early Day Motion calling for an end to 11-plus selection and KS2 tests was initiated by David Chaytor. It attracted 44 signatures. Fiona Millar spent some time in Northern Ireland making a programme on the 11-plus. In April, Margaret Tulloch met the NUS to discuss support for the campaign.

In June, Fiona Millar spoke at *The Spectator* debate 'Grammars are best', with Simon Jenkins and Charles Clarke MP. During the Summer, as a result of the publication of Alan Milburn's report on social mobility (which did not call for a return to grammar schools), there was increased media interest in selection. Fiona Millar was on the *Today* programme in July, Francis Beckett and Margaret Tulloch appeared on BBC TV's *Big Questions* and there were several letters in the newspapers from supporters in response to articles by Toby Young and Baroness Warnock.

We are very pleased that during the year we enlisted

the support of four patrons, Demetri Coryton, Lord Kinross, Sir David Melville and Baroness Williams. We hope to engage with them more in the year to come, their time permitting.

Our major work this year has been the production of our pamphlet *Ending rejection at 11-plus*. We are very grateful to Chris Storr, who produced the original draft. We went on to include valuable contributions from many people before it was extensively discussed and revised and 5,000 copies printed. Publication was on September 3 and copies were sent to the media, supporters, all MPs, schools in the 15 most selective areas, Cabinet members, Directors of Children's Services and Chairs of Admission Forums in all local authorities with grammar schools. The NUT paid for the circulation to schools in 15 local authorities and MPs. We are very grateful indeed to the NUT for this help. We could not have achieved this wide circulation without them. Melissa Benn had an excellent article about it in the *Guardian*.

Our Labour party conference fringe was based on the pamphlet and was well attended. The speakers, Melissa Benn, Aaron Porter (Vice President, NUS) and Vanessa Everett (Headteacher at Mascalls School, Kent), were very well received.

Main points from seminar speakers

Here are some points raised at the parliamentary seminar after the AGM.

Sue Roberts (Headteacher, Haddenham Community Junior School).

Selection in Bucks defeats the aim of community cohesion. It will never be achieved in a selective system. Grammar schools in Bucks have about 1% of their children eligible for free school meals. Primary education should be enjoyed but instead many children are being coached for the 11-plus from age 7. Selection has many other complex consequences. Most children will fail and need to be encouraged.

Phil Karnavas (Principal, The Canterbury Campus, Kent) set a test on selection for the audience. Some of the questions: "All primary schools are comprehensive. All secondary schools are not. Explain." "Either selection is right or it is wrong. It, therefore, cannot be right for some areas and wrong for others. Discuss."

Tim Boyes (Head, Queensbridge and Moseley Schools, Birmingham). "Smoke and mirrors" seems to typify much of the rhetoric surrounding secondary education and simple truth is often lost. In the context of Birmingham's several grammars, a recent visit to a three-form entry primary school revealed all 90 Year 6 pupils wanting to get to a grammar school. This was at a school where no children had gone to grammars in recent years. There are increasingly ghettoised communities in big cities like Birmingham. If we have an education system based on separation it will compound that separation.

Sir Peter Newsam (Formerly Chief Education Officer, Inner London Education Authority, Director of the Institute of Education of the University of London and Chief Schools Adjudicator). It is not true that all grammar schools provide high or better academic standards, eg an A-level points score of 1,000 plus (as at Winchester), than institutions in non-selective areas. The performance tables for 2008 should dispel the illusion. Farnborough Sixth Form College in Hampshire, for example, recruits from non-selective 11 to 16 schools, with a few refugees from the independent sector. Its average A-level score of 1,043.6, for 1,383 students, is higher than that of most grammar schools and all but one of the 33 in Kent. The transition from an 11 to 18 grammar school to a sixth form college need not be hugely expensive or disruptive. A new, post-16, role for many of the best grammar schools would have a profoundly beneficial effect on local primary and other secondary schools.

Full reports of the seminar and the fringe meeting are on the website.

Steering group

The AGM elected members to the Steering Group as follows: Chair, Fiona Millar; Vice Chair, Paul Holmes MP; Secretary, Margaret Tulloch; Treasurer Malcolm Horne. Members: Francis Beckett, Melissa Benn, Martin Carroll, David Chaytor MP, Janet Dobson, John Edmonds, Adrian Elliott, John Fowler, Richard Harris, Graeme Hitchen, Saeed Malik, Peter Mortimore, Chris Storr, Sue Sturgeon, Bob Tutton.

Next meetings: January 19th, March 9th. Please get in touch with any issues for us to discuss.

Get in touch

Our website is regularly used by the media and others needing information on selection. We need more stories of the effect of selection on local communities.

We are very grateful indeed to Brian Tomlinson, our webmaster. Over the Summer the website was extensively changed and new material added. We now also have around 300 Facebook supporters and a *Comprehensive Future* presence on Twitter.

Please donate!

We rely entirely on donations and everyone volunteering their work. Please send a donation, cheques payable to *Comprehensive Future*, or take out a standing order by downloading a form from the website www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk