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Lobbying politicians to put over our point of view

Earlier this month a group from *Comprehensive Future* met Jim Knight, Schools Minister. We are following up with a letter.

We welcomed the moves to end covert selection but said that this emphasised the central contradiction in government policy which allows the retention of, and indeed an increase in, overt selection as increasing numbers of children face tests on ability and aptitude in order to decide entry to secondary education. A parliamentary question David Chaytor asked just before the meeting revealed an increase in numbers of children in grammar schools from 128,712 in 1997 to 155,458 in 2006. We made the point that selection affects those rejected too and that ending this selection will not happen under current legislation and requires political will. We asked that information on the number of children taking tests on ability and aptitude should be collected. We reminded the Minister of the commitment to a review of the grammar schools legislation given to the select committee some time ago.

We suggested that pilot schemes for local authorities to administer admissions for schools which are admission authorities should be encouraged by financial incentives.

The draft of the Code said all admission authorities must not use listed prohibited criteria; in the final version this was changed to admission authorities of maintained schools. We raised our concern that this could exclude academies. The Minister said he would write to us regarding this paragraph (2.13) on prohibited unfair oversubscription criteria, confirming that this applies to academies.

There is now all-party agreement that selection is not the answer. What remains is agreement to ending existing selection. We will be seeing Liberal Democrat spokesperson Sarah Teather and the Conservative education team shortly.

What happens locally? Please contact us

From time to time the press ask for local contacts in areas where selection has an effect. In the areas where there is selection into grammar schools one or more contacts would be really useful so we can pass details on straight away. Following an email request to supporters, several people have offered to be local voices for *Comprehensive Future* if the media want a local view. Please let Margaret Tulloch know if you are willing to add your name to the list on 020 8947 5758 or mtulloch@poptel.org

Also we are keen to know what is happening locally in all areas on this issue of admissions.. The new Code is now in force. Download from www.dfes.gov.uk/sacode/docs/DfES%20Schools%20text%20final.pdf or send £16 to The Stationery Office for a printed copy. (It was previously free!) It is much improved from the draft Code, withdrawn before the last Education Bill went to Parliament resulting in the Education and Inspections Act. Many covert means of selection are prohibited. We now need to monitor activity, so please let us know what is happening in your area, for example on admission forums, local consultations on admissions criteria and arrangements, and contact with the adjudicator.

Our website has local stories too so please email if you can add a report to the section *What selection means for my area*.

Public support for a non-selective system

Early in the New Year the Centre for Policy Studies produced a report calling for a network of selective schools across the country (*Three Cheers for Selection*, £7.00, Centre For Policy Studies, 57 Tufton Street, London SW1P 3QL Tel: 020 7222 4488; Web: www.cps.org.uk/latestpublications/).

Although press coverage for the report indicated selection was popular, in fact the ICM survey published on behalf of the CPS showed the opposite. For example, the survey showed an overall majority (51%) thought children in secondary schools should be taught in mixed ability classes, compared with 47% who thought they should be taught alongside those of similar ability.

Some 51% thought "schools which mix pupils by ability provide the best opportunity for those from poorer sections of society to attain better qualifications and better jobs than they would otherwise".

There was also agreement from 54% that "Selective

schools are bad because those who do not get into the top schools are made to feel like failures". The survey found 60% disagreed with the statement "mixed ability schools are bad because able children in poor neighbourhoods are held back".

While 39% said they would choose a selective school if offered a place, 58% would choose a mixed ability school.

When asked which ways academic pupils can maximise their potential at secondary school only 36% supported schools selecting pupils on ability or aptitude.

Interestingly, in response to reports about the CPS study, the BBC news website (2/1/2007) quoted a DfES spokesperson saying: "Increasing academic selection would not bring about change for the better. It will entrench inequality, limit social mobility and would do nothing to boost the numbers staying on in school." We couldn't have said it better ourselves.

Conference and AGM November 2006

Sir Alan Steer, headteacher of Seven Kings, a comprehensive in Redbridge, was the guest speaker at the *Comprehensive Future* Annual Conference in November. Sir Alan chaired the practitioners' group which produced the report, *Learning Behaviour*.

Speaking from his long experience as a headteacher he said:

"In the great majority of cases comprehensive schools can be proud of their achievements over the last 30 years. They have contributed to Britain enjoying a better educated population and having a more civilised and inclusive society. I have been proud to have been the head of a comprehensive school during this period.

"The need to focus continually on individual achievement and development is a constant for schools, as it is for parents. The concept of continuous improvement may be a pressure for teachers, but it is also exhilarating. Comprehensive schools will change and develop and that should be welcomed. In a climate where educationalists accept the citizen rights of all children they will continue to flourish."

Comprehensive Future Chair David Chaytor MP (Bury North) said lobbying by *Comprehensive Future* had been instrumental in changing the agenda. Admissions had been at the forefront of debate over the White Paper and the Education and Inspections Bill. We had not achieved all we had hoped for but when we compared the current draft School Admissions Code to what had been proposed there have been great improvements. However selection and the pecking order of schools remain. The issue of faith schools has to be addressed. There is a lot more work to do.

Members elected officers and steering group for 2006–7.

IPPR supports local authorities running admissions

A forthcoming report from the Institute of Public Policy Research will focus on the social segregation resulting from schools controlling their own admissions. It will call for changes to enable local authorities to administer admissions and area-wide banding for all schools, including faith schools.

Fair choice – choosing a better admissions system, by Sarah Tough and Richard Brooks, is expected to be published later this month. Contact the IPPR at 30-32 Southampton Street, Covent Garden, London, WC2E 7RA; Tel: 020 7470 6100; Web: www.ippr.org.uk/pressreleases/?id=2588

The final act or a fresh start?

Included with this mailing is information about what will be a very useful conference taking place on March 24 at the Institute of Education in London.

The theme of the conference is *Final Act or Fresh Start – What Government should do to ensure a good local school for every child*.

Comprehensive Future is one of a number of organisations supporting the event. Several *Comprehensive Future* supporters will be amongst the speakers at what should be a very interesting day.

Membership

A new membership leaflet has been produced. If you would like some to use for local recruitment please let us know.

Website

We would welcome comments about and contributions to our website, which is at www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk Please get in touch.

Diary dates

Here are some *Comprehensive Future* meeting dates for you to add to your diary:

May 16 Parliamentary Seminar
October 13 National conference and AGM

Details to follow.