Annual conference will set the course for the future

The Comprehensive Future Annual Conference and AGM takes place on Saturday 11 November at the University of London Union, in Malet Street, London.

Our AGM will be an important and timely opportunity to discuss the future work of Comprehensive Future, including the response to the new School Admissions Code. It will also will choose our first elected steering group and agree our constitution. We are delighted that Sir Alan Steer, head of Seven Kings High School – an all ability school in Redbridge – will be our speaker. He chaired the Practitioners’ Group on School Behaviour and Discipline, whose report, Learning Behaviour, has been very widely welcomed.

Enclosed are details of the conference and a booking form. Please register as soon as possible. There is no charge for the conference but we welcome donations on the day to help meet costs. However we do need you to register to plan numbers for coffee, lunch etc so please send in the form ASAP. AGM papers will be sent to you before the conference. Details of elections to the steering group are on the enclosed leaflet.

The conference will run from 10.30 am to 1.00 pm, with coffee and registration from 9.45 am and lunch at 1.00 pm. It is being timed to allow attendees to go on to an important public lecture after lunch. The lecture is being given by Professor Peter Mortimore, formerly director of the Institute of Education, who has been working for the OECD. He will speak on Comprehensive Schooling: Current Trends in England and the Nordic Countries at the Institute of Education, which is just behind ULU. This is the Caroline Benn Memorial Lecture organised by the Socialist Education Association.

Are you a member? – Yes!

If you are receiving this newsletter you are a member of Comprehensive Future. It was agreed at the last annual meeting in November 2005 that all supporters at that date were deemed to be members and that we are an all-party organisation. Since then new members have joined, either on line or by letter, by signing up to our aim of a comprehensive secondary school system in England with fair admissions criteria to all publicly funded schools, guaranteeing an equal chance to all children and an end to selection by ability and aptitude. There is no membership fee, but donations are encouraged! We need more supporters – please encourage your friends to sign up.

School admissions codes published for consultation

The new School Admissions and School Admission Appeals Code are now out for consultation until 1 December 2006. Available on www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations or 0845 6022 260 or dfes@prolog.uk.com (ref 03853-2006PCK-EN). Following the AGM Comprehensive Future will be doing a response. If you wish, please copy your response to us.

All party agreement on selection – but still it remains

Before Parliament went into recess, debates on the Education and Inspections Bill and the Education Order ending selection in Northern Ireland (unless the Assembly meets in time to halt the change) have meant that there have been many statements about selection in the Commons and the Lords. Turn the page to read the words of David Willetts, Baroness Williams, Lord Rooker and Lord Adonis.
The Bill will make its final appearance in the House of Lords when Parliament resumes in October. Amendments could still be promoted at Third Reading. The status of the School Admissions Code had already been agreed by Government as a result of protests by a number of Labour MPs before the Bill was published. Below is a brief summary of what has happened so far in relation to the other aims of Comprehensive Future.

**Thoughts on the subject of selection**

"I fully recognise that my party’s approach to the issue of selection has changed. In the process of forming a consensus on the best way of reforming education, we have abandoned any idea of a grammar school in every town. We have abandoned any idea of bringing back the 11-plus in grammar schools. We have recognised that our focus should be on how we can best raise standards in all relevant to today’s needs. They distort the primary school curriculum; those who can afford it can pay for extra coaching; and they constitute a high-stakes process that puts unacceptable pressure and anxiety on pupils, parents and, of course, teachers. The result is a system that leaves the majority of pupils feeling like failures, of failing to meet the standards set, of failing to be successful, of not being able to cope, of being perceived as failures, as failures at the age of 11. Rather than providing a ladder out of disadvantage, there is a significant bias against the less well-off in the test results themselves, which is compounded later in public examinations. . . . It is simply not right that a child’s future should be determined at age 11, nor is it right to segregate children into two discrete groups at that age. The Government are committed to ending academic selection in Northern Ireland and to a new system that involves parents choosing schools rather than schools selecting pupils."

Lord Rooker, 10 July 2006

"We are not seeking to change the comprehensive admissions philosophy, which we believe is right for this country, but we want to enable greater diversity in the management, ethos and character of schools within comprehensive bounds, all focused on the enlargement opportunities and the best possible results for pupils."

Lord Adonis, 12 July 2006