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Chief Adjudicator sets out concerns on admissions

The Annual Report of the Chief Adjudicator, Dr Elizabeth Passmore, published last month, contains some strong messages for local authorities and own admission authorities. Dealing with objections to admissions arrangements makes up the largest part of the work of the Office of the Schools Adjudicator. There is a continuing concern that “despite the mandatory requirements of the Code and comments in previous annual reports, we have again found admission authorities that are not meeting the requirements for consultation, determination and publication of their arrangements. This results in parents and others being unable to consider the arrangements and, if necessary, object as permitted by the Code. It also leads to late objections when eventually parents do see them.”

Paragraph 14 of the Code says: “In drawing up their admission arrangements admission authorities must ensure that the practices and the criteria used to decide the allocation of school places are fair, clear and objective. Parents should be able to look at a set of arrangements and understand easily how places for that school will be allocated.” Paragraph 15 sets out how admission authorities must determine and consult upon admission arrangements.

The report makes clear that since the 2012 Code is a more concise document than earlier Codes there is no excuse for any admission authority not to comply. It says either some authorities had not read the Code and had inadvertently failed to comply or had not understood that the Code sets mandatory, not optional, terms that must be met. The report says this must change and all admission authorities must check their arrangements against paragraphs 14 and 15 of the Code. Local authorities should take firmer action with admission authorities to ensure they meet these requirements.

Local authorities in England are required to prepare an annual report to be sent to the Adjudicator by June 30th and published locally. There has been an improvement in that this year; 151 of the 152 local authorities prepared and sent their report to the OSA, not all on time, but more quickly than in previous years. One authority, Lambeth, has not complied.

The report says that most schools work well through their fair access protocols with their local authority in ensuring a place is available, but “a few schools, a small minority, do not co-operate fully and delay or resist unjustifiably the admission of a child”.

The OSA also found that too many admission arrangements for admission to sixth forms fail to comply with the requirements of the Code. Again, local authorities should ensure that they play their part and meet in full the requirement in the School Information (England) Regulations 2008 to include the arrangements for admission to sixth forms in a composite prospectus. There are clearly some problems in finding admission arrangements on school websites. The report says that admission authorities need to be more responsible in publishing their admission arrangements once determined and local authorities should make checks to ensure this happens.

The report says that the DfE should ensure that there is clear guidance for new schools – and those that change their status to become their own admission authority – about the requirements and timetable to be followed concerning admissions matters.

www.education.gov.uk/schoolsadjudicator/about/a00199754/

annual-report-of-the-chief-schools-adjudicator-for-england

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New Year Resolution! We know there are lots of people out there who support comprehensive education and want to see an end to selection. *Comprehensive Future* needs their support. Please recruit a friend by directing them to the website to join there or asking them to send their details to our address.

More evidence of need to end selection

Although comprehensive Finland has given way at the top of the table to other systems, evidence from the latest PISA report again supports our aim of ending selection in England.

Chapter 1, page 38, says: "a school system's performance overall is not better if it has a greater proportion of academically selective schools. In fact in systems with more academically selective schools the impact of the socio-economic status of students and schools on student performance is stronger." So ending selection could help close the gap.

www.oecd.org/pisa/

A recent Sutton Trust report shows that grammar schools take a disproportionate number of children who attended private prep schools. Poor children – even those high-scoring at KS2 – are less likely to be admitted. Chair Sir Peter Lampl calls for more state-funded tutoring and places in private schools for disadvantaged children saying that all politicians accept that grammars are here to stay. We will continue to campaign for the alternative – an end to selection.

Poor Grammar: Entry into Grammar Schools for disadvantaged pupils in England, Sutton Trust (2013).

Sevenoaks decision awaited

It may be that by the time you read this Michael Gove will have decided on the two bids from two Kent grammar schools to open an annex to their schools in Sevenoaks. It is likely to throw up some legal issues. Letters from the DfE to *Comprehensive Future* set out the situation. They are on our website and we referred to them in the August newsletter.

Pressure is rising as Kent County Council has produced plans for a grammar annex on the preferred site and local MP Michael Fallon has written to Michael Gove urging a decision. An FOI request to see the legal advice upon which Kent advised that these applications to open an annex could be made has been refused. Clearly a decision to allow such an "annex" could open up the possibilities of other grammars expanding to sites some distance away. UKIP has a policy of more grammar schools (although no mention of more secondary moderns) and, in the London Borough of Merton, UKIP councillors have started a petition to set up an annex from a grammar in neighbouring selective boroughs Kingston or Sutton.

Genetics and late bloomers

In October an adviser to Michael Gove produced a long paper which received a lot of publicity as he seemed to suggest that a child's performance has more to do with its genes rather than education. The *Guardian* reported that the adviser, Dominic Cummings, had said there is "strong resistance" in the education world to "accepting scientific evidence on genetics" and complained that, despite research showing that up to 70% of a child's performance is related to his or her genes, there has been little interest in the issue. As a result he had invited geneticist Professor Robert Plomin, of the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London, to the DfE to discuss his research.

This, along with Boris Johnson's support for the reintroduction of grammar schools and Sir John Major's concern about social mobility, seemed to present even more openings to those who, along with UKIP, support selection at 11. However, in November, in response to the Johnson speech, Professor Plomin (who comes from the US) was quoted in the *Guardian*, saying he was grateful not to have been put through the highly selective old 11+ system as he might not have survived. "I was very much a late bloomer, developmentally, in terms of schools," Plomin said. "I was very lucky we had a public education system in the United States which allowed me to go on. If there had been an 11+ [exam] I might not have been selected for it."

Comprehensive Future clearly has a job to do to continue to remind anyone who will listen that a significant number of English children still are put through the "highly selective old 11+ system"! But, nevertheless, thank you Professor Plomin – we hope all politicians listen to that advice.

Can admissions ever be fair?

At our November AGM a lively debate followed contributions from our speakers – Professor Peter Mortimore and Richy Thompson of the Fair Admissions Campaign. The major part of the discussion, which could have gone on for much longer had time allowed, focused on the pros and cons of faith admissions and random allocation. The text of their contributions will be on our website soon.

The new steering group for 2013-2014 is:

Chair – John Edmonds,

Vice Chair – Janet Dobson,

Secretary – Margaret Tulloch,

Treasurer – Michael Sterne.

Group members – Melissa Benn, Nic Dakin MP, Adrian Elliott, John Fowler, Alan Gurbutt, Richard Harris, Paul Holmes, Fiona Millar, Lisa Nandy MP, Richy Thompson, Chris Storr, Bob Tutton. At our meeting in December we co-opted Ian Mearns MP.

Our next meeting is on January 16th.

Books for supporters of comprehensives

Education under siege. Why there is a better alternative, by Peter Mortimore, www.policypress.co.uk

This wide-ranging and very readable book tackles where education policy has gone wrong and makes a strong case for alternatives, including on admissions and the role of politicians.

Comprehensive Achievements. All our geese are swans, edited by Tamsyn Imison (former headteacher), Ruth Heilbronn and Liz Williams.

This inspiring book sets out the achievements of a successful comprehensive school, Hampstead School, between the years 1980 and 2000 with accounts from stakeholders – the students, teachers, governors, and parents.

As former pupil Zadie Smith says, it is "... essential reading for anyone who cares about state education".

Mapping schools' intake

The Fair Admissions Campaign has published a map that details the proportion of pupils in each secondary school who can be selected on faith, how many pupils at the school are eligible for free school meals by comparison with its local area, and how many speak English as an additional language. It is based on data from five main sources and hundreds of admissions directories.

Users are able to see profiles for individual schools, and compare and rank different schools in their area and nationally. It can be viewed at <http://fairadmissions.org.uk/map>