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Crucial time in campaign for fair admission policies

Comprehensive Future is campaigning for fair school admission policies in England. We want to see a comprehensive secondary school system, 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.

The next few months are crucial in the campaign. The debate over the White Paper has focused attention at long last on admissions and selection. A group of MPs has proposed a refocusing of the proposals and CLPs are being encouraged to make their views known (details below).

So there is chance of a change – please take action now:

- If you have a Labour MP urge him/her to support *Shaping the Education Bill – Reaching for Consensus*.
- Contact the Education Commission to say you want an end to selection by ability and aptitude.

The White Paper – ‘no return to the 11-plus’ – BUT

Page 46 of the White Paper, *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All*, published in October, has the now oft repeated assurance – there will be no return to the 11-plus. (www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/schoolswhitepaper/)
BUT:

- Many thousands of children in England have not left the 11-plus and the damaging effects of selection. The Government is rightly concerned about our low staying on rate post 16. Where the majority of children (and their parents before them) are given such a message at an early stage is it surprising that they might want to leave education at the earliest opportunity? There is selection both in grammar schools and in schools with partially selective admission policies. Of the 150 English local authorities, 15 (Bexley, Bournemouth, Buckinghamshire, Kent, Kingston, Lincolnshire, Medway, Poole, Reading, Slough, Southend, Sutton, Torbay, Trafford and Wirral) can be considered fully selective with about one in five of secondary places selective. Another 21 have one or more grammar schools (Barnet, Birmingham, Bromley, Calderdale, Cumbria, Devon, Enfield, Essex, Gloucestershire, Kirklees, Lancashire, Liverpool, North Yorkshire, Plymouth, Redbridge, Stoke on Trent, Telford and Wrekin, Walsall, Warwickshire, Wiltshire and Wolverhampton).
- Provisions in the White Paper would allow all schools to become foundation or trust schools and able to set their own admission criteria and therefore allow them to select 10% of their intake on ‘aptitude’ claiming that they have a specialism. Regulations allow selection on PE or sport, performing arts, visual arts, modern foreign languages and design and technology or IT. Although there are plans to stop selection on one ‘aptitude’ – technology – the Secretary of State supports children having to take selective aptitude tests on the basis that it supports the ‘school’s specialist ethos’. Aptitude is defined by the Government as ‘being able to benefit from teaching in a particular subject or demonstrating a particular capacity to succeed in that subject’. Most people would find that definition very difficult to separate from ability! Surely all children are meant to benefit from teaching, that is what school is for! If all schools start to select on aptitude children will face more selection.

Reaching for a consensus on the new Education Bill

On December 14 many Labour MPs, led by former Secretary of State for Education Estelle Morris and former ministers John Denham, Nick Raynsford, Alan Whitehead and Angela Eagle, published a document, *Shaping the Education Bill – Reaching for Consensus*, which highlights their and others' concerns regarding the proposals contained in the Government's Schools White Paper. It can be read on www.compassonline.org.uk/educationdebate/index2.asp

You can support it online and add comments. Its recommendations on admissions are:

- All publicly funded schools should be required to comply with a revised statutory Code on School Admissions.
- Local Authorities should monitor and ensure compliance and coordinate the admissions process for all schools.
- The Revised Code should provide a clear definition of fair access and list the criteria considered acceptable in a fair and non-selective admissions policy.
- Admissions Forums should become responsible for approving the suitability of local admissions policies in the context of the broader interests of all children within the local authority's jurisdiction.

These recommendations are very much in line with the aims of *Comprehensive Future*.

Support for comprehensive education

A new Compass discussion pamphlet, *A Comprehensive Future – quality and equality for all our children*, by Melissa Benn and Fiona Millar, is being published. It will be the focus of an event at 6pm on Thursday 19 January, 2006 in Westminster.

The event entitled, *Can we have a comprehensive future for education?* will be chaired by Neil Kinnock, with Melissa Benn, Fiona Millar, former Secretary of State for Education Estelle Morris and the NUT's Steve Sinnott.

To book a place please email your full name to gavin@compassonline.org.uk. Compass members will get a free copy. Otherwise the pamphlet costs £5.00, including P&P, from Compass, 3rd Floor, Magdalen House, 136 Tooley Street, London SE1 2TU

Forthcoming Conference

A Good Local School for Every Child – Will the Education Bill Deliver?

Saturday March 25, 2006

10.30am-4.00pm

Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1

Registration from 10am

Booking details from *Comprehensive Future*

Supported by:

Campaign for State Education • Centre for the Study of Comprehensive Schools • *Comprehensive Future*

English Secondary Students' Association • Human Scale Education

National Association for Primary Education

National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations • National Governors' Association • National Union of Teachers • New Vision Group.

Fringe meeting at Blackpool conference

There will be a fringe meeting at the Labour Spring Conference in Blackpool on the subject *A good local school for every child – the way forward*.

Organised by the NUT and TEN (The Education Network) it takes place on Saturday 11 February from 6.30 to 8.00pm in the Churchill Room at the Imperial Hotel.

Speakers will include David Chaytor MP, Chair of *Comprehensive Future*, Steve Sinnott, Gen Sec NUT, and Martin Rogers, TEN.

Conference on Education Bill

Plans are underway for a major conference, *A Good Local School for Every Child – Will the Education Bill Deliver?* which will take place on Saturday March 25 at the Institute of Education in London.

The event is supported by *Comprehensive Future* and many other parent, teacher and governor organisations.

Details are available from *Comprehensive Future*.

Making your voice heard

The Labour Party's Partnership in Power process allows all members to participate in policy making.

Contact the Education and Skills Policy Commission at The Labour Party, 16 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP with your views as soon as possible.

You can also send an email to Pip3.education@new.labour.org.uk. Call for an end to selection by ability and aptitude for all schools.

Donations please!

During the next few months it is vital for us to be able to lobby MPs and others with briefings.

Please send us a donation to support our work in ending selection.

Cheques should be made payable to *Comprehensive Future*.