

## **Submission to the Good Childhood Inquiry 15 December 2006**

### **Introduction**

1. *Comprehensive Future* is the campaign for fair school admission policies in England. The campaign is non party political and open to all. By lobbying Government, providing evidence, informing the media and supporting local campaigns on admissions we aim to bring about 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. Our individual supporters include school staff and governors, parents, members of both Houses of Parliament, local councillors, academics and other public figures who share a commitment to equality of opportunity within our education system. We also have support from organisations such as union branches and local political parties.
2. We welcome this opportunity to put points to the The Good Childhood Inquiry. We believe that the effects of secondary transfer on children and in particular the effect of entry tests for secondary education deserve further study. There is no good reason why English children, already some of the most tested in the world during their time at school, should face divisive entry tests for secondary school entry. And yet the fact remains that for a significant number of young people in England this is the situation they face. Selection gives an official message of failure to young people at an early age. It therefore impacts strongly on young people and their self belief. Several of the questions asked arising from the survey of young people are relevant to the issue of selection for secondary education in England.
  - How can we ensure that children are treated fairly and with respect?
  - How can we provide a high quality of education for all young people?
  - How can we ensure a healthy balance between enabling young people to achieve their full potential and not placing excessive pressure on them?
  - How can we better understand and minimise the impact of poverty on young people?
  - How can we enable young people to have a positive attitude to life and a sense of purpose?
  - How can we tackle the issue of young people's mental health and reduce their feelings of depression, stress, worry and anxiety?
3. Far too little attention has been paid to the effect of selection on children. Having an education system in which selective tests for entry to secondary education is a major factor means that large numbers of children receive a message of failure. When selection is part of the education system far more pupils are affected than just those who pass the test, as many more are rejected. Inevitably these children will label themselves failures when only half way through their education. Similarly selecting 10% of places on aptitude

may seem minimal, but far more than 10% will be rejected. Selection divides families and children from their friends

### **In England selection at 11 remains an important influence on secondary education.**

4. Throughout the debate on the recent Education and Inspections Act the Government repeatedly made promises of 'no return to the 11plus'. In fact thousands of English children and their parents unlike their Scottish, Welsh and soon Northern Irish counterparts continue to face entry tests for secondary education and the reduction in parental choice, de-motivation of children and social segregation that selection brings. Parliamentary answers indicate that data on the number of children sitting entry tests is not collected. Anecdotal evidence indicates that many children sit tests often for several schools.
5. By 2008 there will be no selection by ability or aptitude for entry to secondary schools in the rest of the UK. Wales and Scotland are fully comprehensive. In Northern Ireland, the Government is taking action to phase out the 11plus by 2008. This has followed publicly funded research and consultations.
6. In England selection can only be ended by a complex procedure of petitioning and balloting or by the governors of selective schools deciding on change. Ending partial selection by ability or aptitude (see below) can be ended by complaints to the adjudicator but this is rare.
7. 15 Local English Authorities (out of 150 ie 10%) have **fully selective systems** where places in selective schools are around 20% of the places - Bexley, Bournemouth, Buckinghamshire, Kent, Kingston, Lincolnshire, Medway, Poole, Reading, Slough, Southend, Sutton, Torbay, Trafford and Wirral.
8. Another 21 have one or more **selective schools** - Barnet, Birmingham, Bromley, Calderdale, Cumbria, Devon, Enfield, Essex, Gloucestershire, Kirklees, Lancashire, Liverpool, North Yorkshire, Plymouth, Redbridge, Stoke on Trent, Walsall, Warwickshire, Wiltshire, Wolverhampton, The Wrekin.
9. Therefore out of 150 local authorities in England 36 have one or more fully selective schools. Furthermore the influence of selection extends beyond these areas as many schools select from a wide area. Children travel many miles to take entry tests, and if they pass travel these miles each day to attend the schools.
10. As well as fully selective schools some schools designated as comprehensive **select partially on ability**. These are schools which were selecting before 1997. An answer to recent PQ (8 Feb 2006 ) indicated that 35 schools select partially on ability but these are only the ones known to the Government for, as the Minister said, *This information is not collected centrally as admission arrangements are set locally, after an annual consultation process. However, I have listed below those schools we are aware of which operate partial selection by ability or aptitude which it would not now be lawful to introduce. This is not a definitive list.*
11. Of the 17 local authorities listed in the answer with schools selecting from 10 to 33 % on ability 10 are local authorities which also have fully selective schools, so here partial selection adds to the burden of entrance testing which many children will be facing in these areas.

12. Furthermore all secondary schools are allowed to **select on aptitude**, setting entry tests for admission. This burden of testing may increase as more schools become admission authorities. Professor West's research on London schools showed that more voluntary aided and foundation schools (13% and 12% respectively) were selecting on ability or aptitude in a particular subject areas than community schools (3%). (*Secondary School Admissions in London* . Hazel Pennell, Anne West and Audrey Hind. Centre for Educational Research, Dept of Social Policy LSE. February 2006)
13. Like the Education and Skills select committee which said '*We are not satisfied that any meaningful distinction between aptitude and ability has been made and we have found no justification for any reliance on the distinction between them*'. (Education Select Committee 2003) few commentators believe there is a difference between aptitude and ability. Aptitude selection, just like academic selection, involves children sitting entry tests. Even if only 10% of places are reserved for pupils with a particular aptitude, many more children will be put through the test. Parents living locally will be concerned that their children might not get in and might be tempted to put them in for the test 'just in case'.

### **The unfairness of selection**

14. Testing children for entry at 11 is fundamentally flawed. It subjects children already facing more tests than in most other countries to another set of hurdles to jump. It divides communities. It passes a message of failure from one generation to the next. It widens the gap between the achievement of the poor and the better off.
15. Retaining selection runs completely counter to the ideal of an education system with high aspirations for all children, keeping doors open to provide opportunities for lifelong learning. Selective systems are based on setting up most children to fail. The long - term effects on pupils failed by the system are rarely quantified. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the rejection resulting from 'failing the 11 plus' stays with children into adulthood. Recent evidence given to *Comprehensive Future* from headteachers of all ability schools in selective areas, drawing on their dealings with young people who were not 'selected' indicates the damaging effect of selection. As one head said to us of selection and what we put children through '*in any other area we would be guilty of child abuse*'.
16. Retaining selection also runs counter to Government policy on social cohesion and the need to encourage more young people to stay on in education post 16. Selection passes on message of failure from generation to generation as parents who failed the 11plus as children pass on the message to their children that education is not for them.
17. The case for dividing children at 11 was shown to be flawed when selection ended for most communities in England, this remains the case now. Why should children be divided by a test on or before 11 years of age and furthermore because of the outcome of the test have to be educated in different institutions? IQ testing is known to be unreliable and related to past experience rather than future potential. There is no reliable test of potential. Selection takes no account of the fact that children develop at different rates. It assumes that ability is fixed at 10+. Much brain research shows that development occurs in spurts and is subject to many influences. The basis of testing is inevitably unfair. Children whose parents can afford coaching are more likely to pass the test. So poor children are unfairly affected.

## Effect on children

18. The 11 plus adds another stress to children already facing SATs. A review body carried out an extensive study of the effect of the 11 plus in Northern Ireland. It concluded– *We were particularly impressed by the views of young people about their experiences of the Tests and their effects on themselves and others. We have been left in no doubt that the Tests are socially divisive, damage self-esteem, place unreasonable pressures on pupils, primary teachers and parents, disrupt teaching and learning at an important stage in the primary curriculum and reinforce inequality of opportunity.* The report went on to say - *the selection (and separation) of pupils on a narrow academic basis, at such an early stage in their education career, is both inappropriate and unsustainable. In reaching this view, we have had regard also to the implications of the European Convention on Human Rights.* (Education for the 21st Century. Report of Post Primary Review Body Department of Education) There are fewer children in Northern Ireland in selective schools than in England. (46,268 pupils in grammars in NI 2003 -4, 111,500 2004 England (PQ 19 May 2004)
19. The London children's commissioner conducted research into the views of children on school admissions in 4 London primary schools. They found the bad effect on children when local secondary schools selected in various ways- *The pupils experience of this is entirely negative - more selection processes, more rejections, more anxiety and a divisive force within the classroom .* (Changing Schools. the impact of the school admission process on children. Hood and Templeton. Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner for London 2002)
20. Save the Children investigated the effect of taking the entry tests for secondary education on children in Northern Ireland. Its report concluded *The views and experiences of the children spoken to in the course of our research suggests that testing has a far more detrimental effect on children than government is often willing to admit. The level of fear and anxiety that children admitted to was frightening..* (Children's Voices in Education. Save the Children. November 2001)
21. In wholly selective areas the effect of selection is strongly felt in the primary schools. As well as preparing children for SATS schools also have to cope with the effect of the 11plus. An OFSTED report on Kent (a wholly selective LEA) in January 2003 found that both at KS1 and KS2 results at primary schools were lower than similar LEAs. (Kent Local Education Authority Paper by OFSTED January 2003)
22. Even children not taking the test can be affected. Selection forces primary schools to concentrate on getting some of their children through the 11 plus rather than aiming for the best for all the children. As Tim Brighouse wrote in 1997 *Secondary grammar schools I realize beget primary crammer schools.* (Tim Brighouse Affirming the Comprehensive Ideal. . Pring and Walford. Falmer 1997)
23. Entry tests at 11 inevitably result in the lowering of motivation for the majority of children in selective areas who 'fail' the selective tests. Demotivating children at this age should not happen if we want all children to aim to do well. Motivation is increasingly seen as being as important as so-called ability but we do not quantify motivation.

## **Social inclusion and segregation**

24. Selection results in huge social divisions in secondary education and thereby in communities. This is bound to affect children considering themselves to be part of society.
25. Selective schools are not escape routes from poverty. Compared to their local communities selective schools take far fewer children eligible for free school meals and from some ethnic minorities. A report from Slough local authority to the education and Skills Select committee is an illustration of this. It reported that 17% of white children in Slough transferred to the grammar schools, 1% of Pakistani pupils and 29% of Indian pupils. (Education and Skills Committee Secondary Education :school admissions Volume 11. July 2004)
26. Recent work by West and Hind looking at the composition of students from different ethnic groups in London grammar schools found a statistically significant differences between grammars and local 'comprehensives' in their ethnic composition. There was a lower proportion of Black students and a higher proportion of Indian and Chinese/other Asian students in grammar schools. (Secondary School Admissions in London . Hazel Pennell, Anne West and Audrey Hind. Centre for Educational Research, Dept of Social Policy LSE. February 2006)
27. This is particularly important in light of the role in encouraging community cohesion which schools are encouraged to take following the Cattle report.
28. The significance of segregation in terms of differing social intakes between schools is highlighted in the reports of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). This large-scale study of the knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds was conducted in 2000 and again in 2003, on the latter occasion involving 41 countries. On each occasion it was shown that countries with more divided school systems perform distinctly less well, in terms both of overall standards and the spread of attainment, than those which are based on a more integrated and comprehensive approach. For example, "*In countries with a larger number of distinct programme types, socio-economic background tends to have a significantly larger impact on student performance such that equity is much harder to realise*" and "*The analyses reveal that countries with greater socio-economic inclusion tend to have higher overall performance*" In other words integration, equity and excellence tend to go together. (OECD (2004, First Results from PISA 2003, Executive Summary, Paris, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.)

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