

## Submission to the Conservative Party Policy Review on Education March 2007

1. We are very pleased to be given the opportunity to submit evidence to the Conservative party policy review on education.
2. **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. There is more information on our website [www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk](http://www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk) 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.
3. In the earliest days of changes to comprehensive systems across the country Conservative local authorities were among those supporting the end of the 11 plus and bringing about comprehensive systems. For many involved in education support for selection at 11 was not the left/right issue that it seemed to become in the 1990s. We welcome the fact that selection at 11 is not now supported by all three main political parties in England and that Conservative policy now is not to call for a grammar school in every town. We particularly support the recognition that gaps in achievement related to home circumstances open up long before 11 and that dividing children on that basis is socially divisive. We hope that there could be all party support for ending selection where it still remains and that all can support the aim that schools can be excellent with high aspirations for all their pupils without selecting their intake.
4. In England selection at 11 remains an important influence on secondary education. 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. In the Appendix there is evidence of the effect of selection on children, its unfairness and impact on social cohesion.
5. 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.

6. Out of 150 local authorities in England 36 have one or more fully selective schools. 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 them then travel these miles each day to attend the schools.
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. As well as fully selective schools some schools designated as comprehensive select partially on ability. These are schools which were selecting before 1997. A parliamentary answer (8 Feb 2006) indicated that 35 schools select partially on ability but these are only the ones known to the Government. The answer showed of the 17 local authorities where there are 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.
10. 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. As research on London schools has shown schools that are admission authorities are more likely to select. It found 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)
11. Like the majority of those who have commented Comprehensive Future does not accept that there is a distinction between ability and aptitude. In 2003 the Education and Skills select committee for example 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) .A recent adjudication ruled that a school which had been using a test for 'aptitude' in fact was testing on achievement. (Office of the School Adjudicator, decision ADA 000854, 20 July 2006).
12. 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. Inevitably the introduction of 10% selection on aptitude reduces parental choice for all local parents whose children who are deemed not to have the 'aptitude' and who might otherwise have got a place. If parents want their child to have access to particular facilities, sport facilities for example they can express a preference for the school, this gives parents the choice instead of schools. All children deserve a well resourced, broad and balanced curriculum taught by well qualified and highly motivated teachers.
13. Government policy introduced by the School Standards and Framework Act allows selective entry into grammar schools to remain unless a majority of local eligible parents

vote for it to change or grammar school governing bodies decide to change their admission policies to admit children of all abilities. The latter would be an alteration which would be subject to a public consultation. Unsurprisingly no governing bodies have made this decision.

14. Before a ballot can be held 20% of eligible parents in the areas concerned must sign a petition calling for a ballot. To require all of the 164 grammar schools in England to take children of all abilities would need 47 petitions and ballots. Firstly list of eligible parents are have to be compiled. By 2005 this mechanism had already cost £2,346,193.40 (Parliamentary Answer 24 Mar 2005). There would have to be 10 area ballots where all parents would be able to vote and 37 ballots relating to groups of grammar schools or single (stand alone) grammar schools, where only parents whose children attend primary 'feeder' schools are entitled to vote.
15. In only one place, Ripon, have sufficient signatures gathered to trigger a ballot. It was held in March 2000. It failed. However the campaign succeeded in showing up the bizarre effect of the ballot regulations. Private school parents were hugely over-represented making up a quarter of the electorate, although a parliamentary question at the time revealed that only 4.6% of primary children in North Yorkshire were in private education (Written reply, House of Lords, 22 February 2000, Baroness Blackstone). The second largest group were parents in a school 10 miles away, while some Ripon parents who would have had a strong interest in the school taking all local children could not vote.
16. There are many practical reasons why a change is not possible under these arrangements – collecting thousands of signatures for example. A fundamental reason is that, even before signing a petition, parents want to know what their local comprehensive system would look like - a question campaigners cannot answer. Any other school reorganisation plans produced by local authorities would have detailed proposals and require local consultation.
17. At national level Government provides no leadership, funding or supporting evidence to encourage an organised change to a local comprehensive system.
18. In addition to the grammar schools many English secondary schools are partially selective either on ability or aptitude. To end partial selection there has to be a successful appeal to the adjudicator (DFES Admissions Code 2007). Where there had been partial academic selection before 1997, for example in Wandsworth and Hertfordshire, parents can appeal to the adjudicator. However selection on aptitude cannot be appealed against by parents, unless it is over 10% and existed before 1997. Adjudicators have not removed all partial selection but there have been some successful appeals.
19. The new School Admissions Code is stronger than previous codes in trying to eliminate covert selection, so highlighting the contradiction in Government policy on overt selection. Since the Code only came into force in February 2007 it is too early to see its effect but it is an improvement on previous codes. However it cannot change selection on ability and allows selection on aptitude. School Admissions Code The Stationery Office 2007
20. England will never have a fully comprehensive system and fair admissions unless there are changes. We want to see all children having the opportunity to attend a local school if their parents wish, within the inevitable constraints of transport, location and buildings. The Government should ensure that admission policies and practices are fair to all parents and children and that high quality schools are available in all our communities. There should be parity of esteem between schools however diverse and, as far as possible, balanced intakes in all secondary schools in terms of ability.

21. 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. Partial selection (by ability or aptitude) can be ended by complaints to the adjudicator but this is rare.
22. Government should accept that selection affects pupils and their aspirations and that this is an important factor in English education and end selection on ability and aptitude. This would remove the barrier to learning which selection puts before children at an early age. Currently few schools have taken up the 10% selection on aptitude option but as more schools become admission authorities it likely that aptitude selection will increase, unless it is stopped now
23. Unless there are changes it is likely more and more schools will become admission authorities. However new regulations allow for the administration of all admissions to be carried out by the local authority, that is the administrative decision on whether an applicant meets the admission criteria even if these are set by the school. This should be a requirement. If admission criteria set by the school are objective, fair and clear why should a school object to the local authority administering the application process?
24. Supporters of banding show that it can lead to more balanced intakes in terms of ability. However, banding can result in children being unable to attend a local school. Parents in some areas face very complicated banding arrangements. The Government should to look carefully at the effects of banding and revise its position. If banding is introduced it should apply to all schools across an area and should be across the ability range for the local authority intake, not applicants to an individual school. The admission forum is the obvious place for area wide banding to be decided.
25. Currently admission forums and schools are not obliged to object to the adjudicator if local admission arrangements appear unfair. This should be a requirement. Local authorities are required to object. It remains to be seen how this will work out.
26. There is clearly a need for an independent system to monitor and intervene on admissions. The role of the Adjudicator should be extended to promote fairness by monitoring and intervention. Adjudicators can only act if there is a complaint. Unfair practices do not become fair if no one complains.
27. Academies and CTCs as legally independent schools are not tied in to the Code in the same way as maintained schools. Although required by their funding agreements to meet the Code the levers to ensure that happens rest entirely with the Secretary of State. These schools should be brought in line with other schools.

## **Appendix**

### **1. The unfairness of selection**

2. The idea that children can be tested for school 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. 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. 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. Retaining selection conflicts with the Government policy of encouraging more young people to stay on in education post 16.

3. 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. Research on the transfer test in Northern Ireland found it to be neither reliable nor fair (Testing the Test, Gardner and Cowan Queens University Belfast 2000). 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.
4. Atkinson, Gregg and McConnell compared selective and non selective local authorities.. They found that the net effect of selection 'is not substantive' but they did find it resulted in gains for (the few) selected and slight disadvantage for those not selected (the majority). They found able children eligible for free school meals were unlikely to get into selective schools. (Working paper 06/150 Centre for Market and Public Organisation April 2006)
5. The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 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. (First Results from PISA 2003, Executive Summary, Paris, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2004)

## **6. The effect on children**

7. Far too little attention has been paid to the effect of selection on children. 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. The 11 plus adds another stress to children already facing SATs.
8. 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, Northern Ireland 2001)
9. The London Children's Rights Commissioner conducted research into the views of children on school admissions in 4 London primary schools. They identified 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)

10. 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)
11. Even children not taking the test can be affected. Selection can force 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 grammar schools.* (Tim Brighouse Affirming the Comprehensive Ideal. . Pring and Walford. Falmer 1997)
12. 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.
13. A school which has a high proportion of children officially labelled as failures at 11 faces the immediate prospect of rebuilding their self esteem and motivation. Schools where children arrive without that label have more chance of being a good school.
14. 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*'. Another head described the research done on the intake into her school, which illustrated the damaging effect of failing the 11plus. Although in fact the cohort was above average ability it scored lower than expected on perceived learning capacity, attitude to teachers, work ethic and confidence in learning.

## **15. Social cohesion, segregation and mobility**

16. Selection divides families and children from their friends and results in huge social divisions in secondary education and thereby in communities. This is bound to affect the likelihood of children considering themselves to be part of society.
17. Where schools select social segregation increases. This is particularly important in light of the role in encouraging community cohesion which schools are encouraged to take following the Cattle report. Schools will always have different pupil populations, if only because of geography, but selection exaggerates these differences and makes it hard for some schools to flourish. Changes in admissions to encourage a more balanced intake in all schools would help to level up standards across the board. Admission policies with a local emphasis make it easier for schools, parents and local communities to develop a strong relationship.
18. Selective schools are not escape routes from poverty. Compared to their local communities selective schools take far fewer children eligible for free school meals. They also take differentially from ethnic minorities. A report from Slough local authority to the Commons Education and Skills committee is an illustration of this. In 1999 17% of white

children in Slough transferred to grammar schools, 1% of Pakistani pupils and 29% of Indian pupils. (Education and Skills Committee Secondary Education:school admissions Volume 11 July 2004 ev 234 ).

19. 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).
20. Some claim that grammar schools were a route for social mobility. A paper by the London School of Economics is often quoted in support but this paper did not attribute the slow down to ending selective education (Blanden, Gregg and Machin, Intergenerational Mobility in Europe and North America LSE 2005 ). A pamphlet from the Centre for Policy Studies claim that those going from the bottom 25% to the top 50% has fallen from 40% to 37% at a time coinciding with the move from grammars to comprehensives (Three Cheers for Selection, Blackwell, CPS 2006). But for this argument to stand up, the majority of those 40% would have to have gone to grammar schools. In 1962 only 20% of children went to grammar schools so it is highly unlikely that any more than 10% of the bottom quartile would have gone to grammars. Grammar schools were not therefore responsible for the 40% mobility.
21. The LSE paper showed that the most socially mobile countries are the comprehensive Scandinavian countries. Changes in mobility are more likely to be due to initial rapid but now slower growth in room at the top because of massive expansion of white collar jobs and reduction in manual jobs in the 1950s.

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