

Charity Commission Consultation on Draft Public Benefit Guidance

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.

Please find below our comments on the Consultation on Public Benefit Guidance. We hope to comment in the Autumn when the specific consultation on education takes place.

1. We believe that parents want a good local school. If the activities of fee - paying schools make that situation less likely to be achieved for all parents locally then we believe these actions cannot be of public benefit.
2. The consultation document page 31 mentions benefits to people on low incomes by offering scholarships to schools. Some fee paying schools offer free places to children subject to passing a selective entry test. Selection divides families and communities. It damages educational provision for the majority by rendering impossible the aims of an inclusive comprehensive education and of social inclusion. International evidence indicates that less segregated school systems produce higher overall performance. (First Results from PISA 2003, Executive Summary, Paris, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2004) Allowing more selection in the English system which unfortunately has a significant amount is not of public benefit as it will lead to more segregated schooling. There is now an all party consensus that academic selection between schools is not beneficial to children's education. It would be perverse if through this process selection was deemed to be of public benefit. We would be pleased to provide more information about the effect of selection or please go to our website: www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk
3. It is clear that fee paying schools cover a broad range. Fee paying schools and their public benefit claims will need to be considered case by case. An assessment of public benefit cannot be made of the sector as a whole. Some fee paying schools may be able to show that they are able to share resources with the rest of the community without any damage to the local system.
4. Some schools which cater for children with particular disabilities and where fees are paid by local authorities undoubtedly would have no difficulty proving that they are charities established for public benefit. But many others would not pass this test.

5. It may be that some activities of some of the schools, but not the major part, could be considered as meeting the test of public benefit, but that should not mean the entire activities of these schools should be deemed as of public benefit. For example sharing facilities to maintained schools are not the primary purpose of fee paying schools so cannot be used to support the claim that the school is established for public benefit. Indeed many maintained schools may do this through lettings.
6. There are cases where children with particular social needs can be helped by being offered a boarding place. Indeed there are state-funded boarding schools which offer this facility. However if, like some state funded boarding schools, these schools select their intake on ability our concerns at (2) apply.

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