

Submission to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion. 18 January 2007

Comprehensive Future campaigns for a comprehensive secondary school system throughout 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.

This submission concerns the role that school admission policies have in supporting cohesion and integration, or more particularly the effect divisive admission policies may have in encouraging social segregation.

The Commission is looking at 'what might be done to bring people together' and 'practical steps to make communities more cohesive and integrated places to live'. Clearly schooling has a vital role to play. Obviously children educated together have more opportunity to understand their different cultures. Parental attitudes of course are hugely influential but if a school can be a model of what a cohesive and integrated society can be then it is a basis upon which to build. Divisive admission policies at secondary level can destroy what may have been a fine example at primary level. Following the Cattle report schools have been set standards for Community Cohesion and no doubt the Commission will examine how schools are carrying out that role.

Selection in English education

The extent to which selection affects English education is often underestimated. In fact it is an important influence. 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. 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. 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)

Existing selection

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.

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.

Government policy 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. No governing bodies have made this decision. 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. Already this mechanism has cost £2,346,193.40 (PQ 24 Mar 2005) :

As well as fully selective schools some schools designated as comprehensive select partially on ability. These are schools which were selecting before 1997. Appeals to the adjudicator can change that. Furthermore all secondary schools are allowed to select on aptitude, setting entry tests for admission. This is likely to increase as an increasing number of schools are becoming admission authorities able to set their criteria for admissions.

Social inclusion and selection

Selection results in huge social divisions in secondary education and thereby in communities. Ending selection at 11 would promote social inclusion. Selective schools are not escape routes from poverty. Compared to their local communities selective schools take markedly fewer children eligible for free school meals.

Selection can also divide communities on racial grounds. A report from Slough local authority to the education and Skills Select committee is an illustration of this. It reported that NFER data showed that 17% of white children in Slough maintained primary schools transferred to the grammar schools, while only 1% of Pakistani pupils transferred, but the percentage of Indian pupils was much higher (29%).(Education and Skills Committee Secondary Education :school admissions Volume 11. July 2004)

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)

Recently published work by Allen and Vignoles from LSE found an association between LEAs with higher proportions of pupils in schools that controlled their own admissions or have explicit selection by ability and the level of FSM segregation ie social segregation. (What should an Index of School Segregation measure? Allen and Vignoles.Centre for the Economics of Education. LSE March 2006)

A comparison of the social segregation in England's secondary schools with other OECD countries by the Statistical Sciences Research Institute in Southampton showed that England is middle ranking in terms of social segregation. High ranking countries such as Austria, Holland, Germany and Hungary have selective school systems. Countries such as the Nordic countries and Scotland has less segregation than England and the researchers conclude this is because of their non-selective school systems. (Social segregation in secondary schools: how does England compare with other countries? Jenkins, Micklewright and Schnepf. Southampton S3RI I January 2006)

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.)

Children arriving from overseas

Many children arrive in the UK from overseas every year for a variety of reasons, such as parental employment, family reunion and asylum. Those joining primary and secondary schools after the normal age of entry may need particular support to settle in, learn the language and achieve their potential. Many new arrivals are admitted to the least popular schools because they have spare places. Such schools tend to have a high proportion of other pupils who have difficulties and disadvantages to overcome. This pattern of school intake is one which can contribute to resentment and hostility in local areas unless schools have, and are seen to have, the resources to meet the needs of both newcomers and existing pupils.

In the longer term, integration will be assisted if newcomers are able to gain full benefit from their education and move into appropriate employment. Those who have poor English and, perhaps, disrupted schooling stand little chance of admission on arrival to schools which operate some form of selection, yet their gifts and talents may be considerable. Access to comprehensive schools which are able to meet the needs of children of all abilities is crucial to them.

These issues have been widely explored, for example by Dobson et al and by the Department for Education and Skills, but it is not obvious that funding policy has responded to them. Difficulties around the placement of pupils who seek school places at non-standard times have been recognised by the DfES and School Admissions Code aims to encourage schools to share responsibility for 'hard to place' pupils, but this will need close monitoring.

(Pupil Mobility in Schools, Dobson, Henthorne and Lynas, Migration Research Unit UCL 2000; Mobility, Equality, Diversity: a study of pupil mobility in the secondary school system, Dobson and Pooley, 2004; Managing Pupil Mobility: Guidance, DfES 2003).

Faith schools

Comprehensive Future has not, as yet, included admission policies to faith schools in its remit. We intend to include a consideration of this during the coming year. Clearly debate on the proposed requirement that all faith schools should take 25% of children not of the faith aroused strong feeling. We urge the Commission, building on the work of the Cattle report, to consider the question of faith schools and the extent to which faith schools and their admission policies contribute or do not contribute to community cohesion.

Conclusion

Selective admission policies reinforce differences and inequalities in our society. We hope the Commission will include consideration of their effects in its work.

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