

8<sup>th</sup> March 2007

Jim Knight MP  
Minister for Schools

Dear Jim,

Thank you very much for meeting us last week. We agreed to write to you about several points. I will contact our colleague in North Yorkshire about the recent decision of the adjudicator and the County Council's reaction to it.

1. Selection on ability and aptitude

We welcome the moves to end covert selection but this emphasizes the central contradiction in Government policy which allows the retention and indeed the increase in overt selection as increasing numbers of children face tests on ability and aptitude in order to decide entry to secondary education.

We made the point at our meeting that ending selection will not happen under current legislation and that it requires political will. Unless this will is there the social segregation and sense of failure for many young people which selection engenders will continue. We mentioned examples of this effect in Kent and Calderdale.

In our letter before our meeting we referred to the commitment given by the DfES to the Education and Skills Committee to a review of the grammar schools ballots legislation. You said that you believed there had been an internal review. Please could we have the details of this review and the outcome? It makes sense for us to take this into consideration when we discuss what we might suggest to you as a replacement for current legislation.

It seems that data on the number of children taking tests on ability and aptitude and their results is currently not collected. We would like this to be undertaken as a matter of urgency. Could you please respond to this? After our meeting it was suggested to us that this would be necessary in any case because of race relations legislation. Presumably this would be to ensure that there is no racial discrimination in numbers taking the test and the outcomes.

Also in our letter before our meeting we referred to our letter from Ruth Kelly about the draft code encouraging a system to ensure that parents had results of entry tests before expressing a preference. She said this was important where there were first preference first arrangements. First preference first is now not allowed. Could you explain why test results before preference continues to be encouraged when parents wishing for other schools are not given such

information? What effect is this likely to have on the timing of entry tests on ability and aptitude?

#### 2. Schools as admission authorities

After our conversation we remain unclear why schools should need to set their own over-subscription admission criteria. You mentioned faith schools. Could you please expand on the local circumstances which mean schools need to respond by setting their own criteria?

We were encouraged that you are hoping to have pilot schemes for local authorities to administer admissions for schools which are admission authorities. We suggested that this should be encouraged by financial incentives. Would you consider introducing this?

#### 3. Schools Commissioner and report on fairness in admissions

Could you tell us when you expect his first report?

#### 4. Choice advisers

You said that any redress due to parents because of advice would have to be met by local authorities. Could you confirm this? Additionally could you give us details of a current pilot scheme in Wandsworth supported by the DfES and the Sutton Trust?

#### 5. Academies and section of the Code

In responses to our concern about paragraph of the Code you said you would write to us re para 2.13 on prohibited unfair oversubscription criteria confirming that this applies to academies.

#### 6. Social mobility

We did not have time to reach this in our agenda. There are unfounded claims that the slow down in social mobility in this country can be attributed to the end of selection, such as it was. Is the DfES undertaking research to examine the relationship between social mobility and the education system?

We look forward to hearing from you. With best wishes,

Margaret Tulloch  
Secretary