

## **Submission to Runnymede Trust on Faith Schools and Community Cohesion Consultation.**

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. Our aim is to end selection on ability and aptitude. Our members have encouraged us to have a policy on admission policies for faith schools but this has not been debated and decided.
3. There is a need for data. For example data is needed on the composition of faith schools in relation to their local communities and the ethnic composition of faith schools. Comprehensive Future has commissioned a small amount of work on the composition of faith schools in London and their admissions policies. It will be published in May 2007. We will be pleased to welcome representatives of the trust to the seminar to launch this. We will provide the evidence from our study as soon as it is available.
4. We will be considering our policy on faith schools admissions during this year. Although we have not as yet decided our policy we welcome this opportunity to put a few points to the consultation from the Runnymede trust.

### **Background issues**

5. Faith schools have been part of the English state education system since its inception. However it is clear that there are strongly held views over whether or not this should continue, in particular now because of their impact on ethnic segregation.
6. The project will no doubt consider the purpose of faith based schools. If the aim of faith schools is to offer parents a particular choice of schools and a distinctive type of education to the community it is difficult to see why they then should select pupils only of the faith. If the basis of faith schools is to educate children in the faith and exclude others not of the faith but to operate within the state system it is difficult then to argue against the claim that all faiths should have public funding to do so. Similarly this should include public funding to ensure that non-faith based schools are available for parents to 'choose'. It could be argued even if faith based schools were open to all, parents should still have an alternative to a faith based education.

7. In some areas parents' choice is reduced as faith schools form the majority of secondary schools in an area. It would be useful if the project were to map the areas so that it is clear which 'choices' are available in each area. In some areas, perhaps particularly in rural villages the local church primary may be the only school available but virtually indistinguishable from a community primary and operate its admissions as such.
8. Being educated together is a powerful lever to encourage understanding between different communities. It is difficult to see that a faith school which selects children of a faith which is virtually unrepresented in the neighbourhood is contributing to community cohesion.
9. The project will also need to consider what happens to new arrivals in the UK. There is and will continue to be a sizeable annual inflow of asylum seekers, and labour migrants. If for example Polish children are admitted to Catholic schools and Muslim children into community schools this again would exacerbate division. The more schools with a faith designation the less the flexibility in the system and this is particularly important in areas of high mobility where there are new arrivals from all parts of the world.
10. These are difficult issues which the project will need to address.

### **Admissions**

11. In relation to admissions this question of the purpose of faith schools becomes more focused. Any consideration of faith schools and the promotion of social cohesion must consider the effect of their admission policies.
12. The project will no doubt consider the debate on admissions to faith schools which took place during the last stages of the Education and Inspections Bill and the subsequent discussions between the Secretary of State and the representatives of the churches.
13. Before the Bill came to parliament there was a debate on admissions to faith schools in the House of Lords. (8 February 2006). Lord Baker of Dorking, a previous Secretary of State for Education expressed concern about the possibility of more faith schools. He suggested that all faith schools should take at least a third of their intake of students 'from other religions'. Other Peers spoke of concerns about social segregation. In replying to the debate from the Government Lord Adonis stated that 17% of secondary schools were faith based, a lower proportion than when the 1944 Education Act came in. In regard to admission practices he said 'there is a wide diversity of practice to meet local circumstances'. He also said 'It is not the Government's view that such a policy of giving absolute priority to members of one faith or another is of itself incompatible with a community commitment and cohesion' He went on to say however that he welcomed what seems to be an 'increasing trend' of schools not to adopt this policy.
14. The requirement that faith schools might be required to take children of all faiths and none was raised too late in the process of the Bill to allow a proper debate. However it served to highlight the strongly held views on all sides. Since the Bill became law there has been advice to schools from the religious bodies about their admissions policies which no doubt the enquiry will consider.
15. There is now a new School Admissions Code (TSO 2007). It remains to be seen what effect this will have. It has specific sections in relation to admissions to faith schools (Section 2.41). Its stated aim is for a system *where all parents feel they have the same opportunities to apply for the schools they want for their child*. The Code gives a specific duty to local authorities requiring them to refer to the adjudicator any admission arrangements which seem to encourage social segregation.

16. In the case of academies presumably the adjudicator would have to refer any complaints to the Secretary of State. Many of the new legally independent but publicly funded academies are faith based, but there have been assurances from some of the sponsors that there will not be selection on faith. Others however are selecting a proportion of their intake on faith adherence.
17. Some faith schools are also academically selective. Selection results in huge social divisions in secondary education and thereby in communities. Rejection at 11 is bound to affect children considering themselves to be valued members of the community. 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, evidence number 234. July 2004)
18. Similarly recent work by West and Hind looking at the composition of students from different ethnic groups in London grammar schools found 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)
19. There is no doubt that schools select on faith will be selecting pupils from a particular home background. Clearly faith schools will segregate by different religious and ethnic groups, they may also segregate within ethnic groups by social background and achievement. A socio economic analysis of the intake into faith schools will need to be part of the work of the project.

#### **Do faith schools get better results?**

20. NFER research (Schagen, I. and Schagen, S.(2005). 'Combining multilevel analysis with national value-added data sets - a case study to explore the effects of school diversity', British Educational Research Journal, 31, 3, 309-28).seems to indicate that when social background is taken into account faith schools do not perform significantly better than non faith schools.

#### **Effect of segregation on standards**

21. Segregation does affect standards overall. Government has encouraged the provision of more faith schools as part of its commitment to encourage diverse types of schools as it is claimed that diversity is said to be a lever to raise standards although the evidence of this is unclear. The project will no doubt investigate this.
22. The evidence that segregation lowers standards overall is clear from international evidence. 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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## ***Comprehensive Future***

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