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Will White Paper offer fair admissions or foul play?

• Comprehensive Future Annual Conference

Fair Admissions or Foul Play? — Selection and the Schools White Paper

The *Comprehensive Future* annual conference takes place on Saturday, November 5 in Birmingham. This is a really important conference for all who support Comprehensive Future's aim of ending selection and bringing in fair admissions. It will coincide with the White Paper on schools, which is expected to make extensive changes to the education system. To book a place please fill in the form below now and send it to Comprehensive Future, PO Box 44327, London SW20 0WD

The meeting will be chaired by David Chaytor MP, Chair of *Comprehensive Future*.

In the morning we will hear two high profile speakers on school admission:

- Chief Adjudicator Dr Philip Hunter, who leads the team of adjudicators making decisions on complaints from parents and admission authorities on the admission policies of local schools and on school organisation.
- Professor John Coldron of Sheffield Hallam University, who researches school admissions. His work has included research for the DfES and giving evidence to the select committee on admissions.

Participants at the conference will discuss a position paper on fair admissions currently being drawn up by the *Comprehensive Future* steering group. The paper will be sent with the conference papers to everyone booking to come. We intend, after consultation, that this will be a statement which will gather wide support. Our reactions to the White Paper are also likely to be a major part of our discussions.

In the afternoon we will decide the future organisation of *Comprehensive Future*, including a draft constitution and plans to extend our supporter base to supporters of all political parties or none. This will also be an opportunity to discuss your ideas for furthering the campaign.

The conference will be held at Carrs Lane Church Centre, Carrs Lane Birmingham B4 7SX (www.carrslane.co.uk) from 10.30am to 3.30pm. Coffee and registration is from 10.00am, with lunch from 12.15pm to 1.00pm.

**Comprehensive
Future**

PO Box 44327
London SW20 0WD

mtulloch@poptel.org

020 8947 5758

Booking form for Comprehensive Future conference, November 5

Tea, coffee and a sandwich lunch will be provided. Please make a donation (minimum £5) to the costs of the conference. Cheques payable to Comprehensive Future. Send to: PO Box 44327, London SW20 0WD

Name

Address

Phone Email

Response to the draft code of practice on admissions

The White Paper might affect much of what was proposed by the consultation on the Draft Code of Practice on School Admissions. Nevertheless, *Comprehensive Future* has responded to the Draft Code. The full response will be on our website, www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk

General points made in the response were:—

- *Comprehensive Future* wants to see 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.
- Children matter. The Government has recognised this in its Every Child Matters agenda. Admissions legislation must operate in the interests of all children, not in the interests of institutions keeping their place in what has become a pecking order of schools.
- *Comprehensive Future* supports admissions arrangements which allow local parents to send their children to local schools.
- The major weakness of the Code is that it requires admission authorities only to 'have regard to' its advice. A code which sets a clear framework ensuring fair admission policies in all publicly funded schools is urgently needed, along with a change in primary legislation to require admission authorities to act in accordance with it.
- The opportunity for some schools which are admission authorities to choose their pupils should be removed.
- An independent body (e.g. the LA) should administer admissions for all local schools, including the publicly funded 'independent' schools (i.e. academies and CTCs).
- In many places the Code uses the term 'poor practice'. This is too weak. The Code should be clear that certain criteria are not to be used and list unacceptable criteria, for example: priority to pupils of teachers and former pupils; terms such as 'suitability for the ethos of the school' and reports from the child's primary headteacher. The requirement that criteria are clear, fair and objective must be applied to all criteria.
- We welcome again the priority given to looked-after children. We hope the Department is carefully monitoring the application of this requirement.
- The Code, in attempting to ensure fair admissions, relies too much on those able to make objections doing so. Unfair practices do not become fair if there is no objection. The role of the adjudicator must be strengthened to allow investigative action; currently action can only be taken in response to objections.

Comprehensive Future at the Labour Party Conference

Our fringe meeting at the Labour party conference was very well attended.

Angela Smith MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, talked about the situation in Northern Ireland. We had excellent union support.

John Dunford (SHA) and Gerry Bartlett (NASUWT) spoke from the platform and Steve Sinnott (NUT) and Mary Bousted (ATL) from the audience. All supported the need for real comprehensive education.

A full report is on our website.

Caroline Benn Lecture

The Socialist Education Association is holding its annual Caroline Benn Memorial Lecture on Saturday November 26 at the Institute of Education in Bedford Way, London WC1.

Professor Geoff Whitty will chair the event at which Melissa Benn and Fiona Millar will speak on the theme *Campaigning for the modern comprehensive; building confidence in the alternative argument*.

The lecture starts at 2.30pm in the Clarke Hall and all are welcome.

Please make a donation!

We are very short of funds. Please make a donation or send a banker's order request to your bank. Bank details are:—

Comprehensive Future, Barclays Bank, Wimbledon SW19 7LA
Sort code: 20 96 89
Account no: 40008869

Comprehensive Future Annual Conference

Fair Admissions or Foul Play? — Selection and the Schools White Paper

Saturday November 5, 2005

10.30am–3.30pm

Carrs Lane Church Centre, Carrs Lane, Birmingham B4 7SX

Coffee and registration 10am — Lunch 12.15pm–1.00 pm

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www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk