

2 October 2008

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Comprehensive Future responds to the DCSF consultation on a new School Admissions Code which ends today.

START

In the consultation the DCSF asked ' In what ways do these proposals contribute to achieving fair access to educational opportunities for all children from all social groups, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with disabilities?'

In reply Comprehensive Future said

This is an attempt to have a fairer system. However this attempt is fatally undermined by

- the retention of selection on ability and aptitude
- the proposal on ethos (ie to allow schools to select pupils whose parents support the schools ethos)
- the failure to bring academies and CTCs within all the provisions relating to maintained schools.

Secretary Margaret Tulloch said –

There cannot be a fair admissions system until selection on ability and aptitude are abolished. Furthermore I am amazed the Government want to return to covert selection by allowing schools to select on support for the schools' 'ethos'. This is unfair on parents and a retrograde step – we hope it is not implemented.

END

Notes

1. A summary of the response is given at the end of this Press Release or a copy can be obtained by emailing Margaret Tulloch mtulloch@poptel.org or phoning 020 8947 5758.

2. 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.

Summary of response to consultation on School Admissions Code 2 October 2008

Ending selection on ability and aptitude

The Government's aim for a 'system where all parents feel they have the same opportunities to apply to schools they want for their children' cannot be achieved while selection at 11 remains. Many children are taking entry test for secondary education and yet the Government does not have data on how many children this affects. So the new yearly local authority reports to the adjudicator must include the numbers of children taking entry tests on ability or aptitude for each school, the acceptance rate and the numbers of tests taken by children in the area.

Admission Forums

We support the role of the admission forum in considering the fairness of the arrangements including the effect on children and social segregation. It is important that local stakeholders have a means of considering local admission arrangements and that this consideration involves more than local councillors and officers. There should be proportionate membership which must include parents. No group should have the majority. Parent Governor Representatives which were introduced by the SSFA have been part of the membership and can act as a democratic voice for parents. It is essential that local schools, governors and parents are made aware of how to put items on the agenda and that their meetings are open and parents etc know where and when they are to take place.

Government should produce guidance for admission forums on their role which is distinct from that of the duty of local authority to report. We do not support forums being voluntary. It will not improve the effectiveness of admission forums if they are not required across the country. Parents should have the same entitlement regardless of where they live.

Role of local authority

We wish to see the role of the local authority in admissions strengthened
All decisions on order of priority ie which applicant meets the criteria should be determined by the local authority for all local publicly funded schools ie including all schools which are their own admission authorities. This is allowed by regulations and is done in some areas. It would reduce the burden on schools which are their own admission authorities. It would introduce more transparency to the procedure. It would be consistent with the coordinating and reporting role which is the responsibility of the democratically elected local authority.

As proposed parents should make applications to all schools, both in and out of their local authority, to their local authority and as proposed local authorities must be required to continue co-ordination after the offers have been made. Local authorities should co-ordinate consultation in their areas on proposed school admission criteria.

Publicly funded schools, maintained schools and academies

Throughout the document there are references to 'maintained schools' or 'schools'. This is an illustration of the complications created by setting up academies as a separate legally independent system of schools. It should be clear for any reference to 'schools' that if that is the case that academies are excluded, if not it should be clear that they are included.

It is complicated for parents that there is a different complaint system for academies. Academies and CTCs should be included within the remit of the adjudicator. Parents must have the right to object about the admissions to academies to the adjudicator. Local authority reports to the adjudicator must clearly include all publicly funded schools including academies and CTCs.

Supporting the ethos of the school

We strongly disagree with this proposal. It will undermine the good work which has been done to make the admission system fairer. We fail to see the need for this change to previously published Codes, there has been no case made for its inclusion which seems completely at odds with the purpose of the Code and the aim of clear, fair, objective criteria.

Similar criteria to this have been in the past used for schools to covertly select pupils. This should not be reintroduced. It is a retrograde step. It is asking parents to make a decision which they cannot in fairness do until their child is at the school and after some time may be in a position to judge what the 'ethos' of the school is.

In any case it is inconsistent with P 18 para 1.58 which rightly expressly forbids schools asking parents to sign a home school agreement before being offered a place.

Banding

Current plans allow for banding across those in a position to apply ie able to bring their children to the school for a test. Parents should not have to take their children to individual schools for banding tests, in the same way as requiring parents to collect supplementary forms is discriminatory and is expressly forbidden by the Code.

Instead of three reference groups ie those applying to one or two schools, local authority or national there should be only one reference group. Banding should only be across the local authority area and should not be used unless all schools participate using the same system based on tests taken by all children at primary school. It should not be up to the admission authority to decide which tests to use. There should be no more than three bands.