

**Brief to Labour NPF
November 2003**

Comprehensive Future

**Campaigning for a change in Labour policy to bring about an end to selection
at 11 both by ability and aptitude**

**Comprehensive Future briefing to Labour National Policy Forum
Why change will not come through the existing system.**

Patron

Fiona Millar

Chair

David Chaytor MP

Secretary

Margaret Tulloch

Treasurer

Malcom Horne
Gen Sec SEA

1. Current Labour policy allows selection in grammar schools to remain unless a majority of local eligible parents vote for change or grammar school governing bodies decide to change (non have done so). To require all of the 164 grammar schools in England to take children of all abilities would need 48 parental ballots. Before a ballot could be held 20% of eligible parents would have to sign a petition.

2. The definition of an eligible parent differs depending on whether the ballot would be an area or feeder ballot. Area ballots would be needed in ten fully selective LEAs such as Kent, Lincolnshire and Bucks. Here all local parents would be eligible. For the other 38 feeder ballots only parents who have children in the feeder schools to the grammar schools would be eligible. Ripon was a feeder ballot. Here inevitably private school parents are over represented. Many local parents, even those sending their children to schools near the schools in question, are ineligible. In Barnet for example parents at a primary school next door to a grammar school were not eligible to sign the petition as not enough of the children at their school had passed the entry test.

3. Even before signing a petition parents want to know what a local comprehensive system would look like; a question campaigners cannot answer. Any other school reorganisations would be decided following local consultations on specific proposals. Instead parents do not have plan for a local comprehensive system to decide about and pro-selectionists get away with defending the status quo. The talk is of abolition and 'better the devil you know'. The effects of selection on children and their educational opportunities do not get the consideration they deserve. Government provides no encouragement, leadership, supporting evidence or funding to encourage an organised change to a local comprehensive system.

4. Before being able to collect signatures in feeder school areas campaigners need to know which schools are feeder schools. Both feeder and area petitioners need to know the 20% threshold number. This information is collected by the Ballot Administration Company by contacting all local schools. The trigger to collect this information is a letter signed by 10 people. A great deal of public money is required just to assemble the information for the petition. The process of collecting this information is very lengthy often taking several months into the year in which the signatures have to be collected.

**Comprehensive
Future**

PO Box 44327
London SW20 0WD

mtulloch@poptel.org

020 8947 5758

[CONTINUES]

Comprehensive Future briefing to Labour National Policy Forum (continued)
Page 2 of 2 Pages

5. For most ballots many thousands of signatures would be required even before parents could vote, for example 18,000 signatures would be needed to trigger a ballot in Bucks. All the signatures must be collected in one year. This is a huge task way beyond what a voluntary campaign can do. Campaigners have to contact all parents directly to ask them to sign a petition. It is difficult to get the parental lists as only parents from the particular school can ask for them. Many parents are frightened of putting their head above the parapet in this way. Collecting signatures door to door takes a great deal of time. The petition takes ages to fill in. Petitions cannot be sent out via schools. Petition signatures cannot be carried over from one petition period to another despite that fact that only one cohort of parents becomes ineligible each year and a new one eligible.

6. The system seems designed to ensure there is no proper debate. Discouraged by the regulations teachers and LEAs do not make their views clear. So, a 'neutral stance' from the professionals means in practice support for the status quo.

7. All schools with a specialism are allowed to select 10% of pupils on so-called 'aptitude'. A recent Education and Skills Select Committee reported that it could not rely on any distinction between ability and aptitude. **12th May 2003**. To end partial selection there has to be a successful appeal to the adjudicator. In most cases only schools and LEAs can appeal to the adjudicator. The adjudicators have not removed all partial selection. The adjudicator has no role over ending selection in grammar schools. Indeed a recent adjudicator's decision will allow an increase in grammar school places in Skipton.

[Click the BACK button on your browser to return to the Press Releases Index Page](#)