

SELECT COMMITTEE - GRAMMAR SCHOOLS AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

MINUTES of a meeting of the Select Committee - Grammar Schools and Social Mobility held in the Swale 1, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 4 February 2016.

PRESENT: Mrs J Whittle (Chairman), Mr A H T Bowles, Mr L Burgess, Mr E E C Hotson, Mr R A Latchford, OBE, Mr R A Marsh, Mrs P A V Stockell, Mr R Truelove and Mr M J Vye

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms S Annan-Vetch (Policy Advisor), Mr J Reilly (Strategic Business Adviser), Mr A Tait (Democratic Services Officer) and Mr J Cook (Scrutiny Research Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

6. Scott Bagshaw, Head of Admissions and Transport and Gay Reay, PESE Manager (KCC)

(Item 1)

(1) The Chairman welcomed Mr Bagshaw (KCC Head of Admissions and Transport) and Mrs G Reay (KCC PESE Manager).

(2) **Please provide a brief overview of the Kent Test selection process, its purpose, and how it operates.** We ask Schools to speak to the parents during Year 5 in order that they can identify their best options in the light of their child's observed attainment and any other relevant considerations. In June/July that year, the parents have the responsibility of registering for the Kent Test, if they wish to do so. We check the names with the schools and also gather information on any disability or SEN. In exceptional circumstances, we can add a pupil to the list of those taking the Test.

(3) The pupils take the Kent Test during the month of September of Year 6. This examines English Comprehension, Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation, Maths and Reasoning. This version of the Test has been in operation for the past two years. The pupils are also given 10 minutes to plan and 30 minutes to produce a written composition, which is not marked.

(4) The tests are marked to produce a raw score which is standardised through age-weighting. The threshold for attendance at a grammar school is 25% of the cohort. We set it at 21% in respect of the pupils who gain automatic admission through their standardised scores. The pupils have to achieve a minimum score in each subject, regardless of their overall scores. The Primary Head Teachers are then allowed to provide more evidence. A range of the pupils' work is then considered by Panels of Head Teachers, mainly drawn from Grammar and Primary Schools (although attendance is open to all). The Panel can change a pupil's assessment but not the score itself.

(5) **Can a test become invalid?** This can happen if, for example, there has been a fire alarm which has disrupted the Test. It is also true to say that, even though we try to mitigate this, certain disabilities lead to pupils underachieving.

(6) **There have been some modifications to the format of the Kent Test. Have these led to an increase in FSM children taking the Test?** We do not have the data for FSM children and would not be able to find out how many FSM children took the Test 5 years ago. We expect that the numbers will have increased. Overall, the participation levels have remained constant. The matching analysis that is undertaken is through the Census. This is not particularly reliable as people's FSM status, income and addresses can change quite easily. This means that there will be between 3 and 4% of the pupils who have taken the Test where we simply do not know whether they were FSM children or not.

(7) **Is a Level 5 SATS score taken as a model for a Grammar School pupil?** The Maths Test is based on the curriculum that the brighter pupils ought to have covered. We do find that pupils with Level 4 SATS scores are able to pass the Test.

(8) **To what extent do the schools' oversubscription criteria make it more difficult for FSM children to get into a grammar school?** KCC is compelled by Law to apply the stated oversubscription criteria for admission. In 2015, Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School introduced an FSM priority into its criteria. This was the first occasion when a low income had been a factor. KCC is only responsible for three grammar schools' admission criteria. These three were consulted on the possibility of introducing a Low Income premium as a criterion behind that of Children in Care. Only Tunbridge Wells GS for Boys showed interest in doing so. There was a fair amount of local resistance to the idea on the grounds of local preference. As a result, a Local Income premium was introduced within each of the individual criteria.

9) **What is the percentage of children who gain admission to grammar schools?** On National Offer Day 2015, the percentage figure was @ 28%. This figure increased as some schools offered additional places (as they are now entitled to do without formal consultation). Upheld appeals was also a factor.

10) As a result of the lifting of restrictions on schools deciding to offer additional places, the percentage figure for grammar school admissions has gone up from 25% in 2010 to 28.5% in 2015. This equates to some additional 500 grammar school places.

11) **What has been the effect of the introduction of the current Home to School Transport Policy, particularly in rural areas?** Parents have the right to express a preference for any school. If they do, the oversubscription criteria is applied as before. The Home to School Transport Policy can be seen as a barrier in the sense that parents may be put off from actually making an application. KCC has therefore put measures in place for Low Income Families to receive free transport. Nevertheless, families can move in and out of the Pupil Premium criteria and can, for a time, move above the Income Threshold, losing their free transport entitlement under the policy. We do not have any data which will inform us how many pupils do not apply to go to a grammar school for economic reasons as opposed to simply wishing to attend a school nearer to where they live.

12) **It would be iniquitous if two children achieved the same standardised score but that only one of them was able to attend a grammar school simply because of the Home to School Transport Policy.** It is KCC's policy to provide free transport to the nearest available grammar school for Low Income families if a grammar school is appropriate for them. In addition to the financial support given to Low Income families, the schools themselves are also able to offer support. Some grammar schools provide busses for children who live in rural areas.

13) **Head Teacher appeal success rates vary between Canterbury (10%) and Shepway (3%). Is there any reason for such a discrepancy?** This arises because Head Teacher Panels consider the circumstances, including the places available, in their own areas. They tend to uphold more appeals in areas where there are more grammar schools available than their colleagues in areas where more pupils are successful.

14) **What changes has KCC made to improve access to test preparation for FSM and Children in Care?** There is a test preparation document (Kent Familiarisation Booklet) which is placed on the KCC website in May. We contact the schools (including schools outside Kent) in order to direct them to the site.

15) **Would it be possible to target FSM pupils in order to explain how KCC can support their attendance at grammar schools?** The first problem is that it would be nearly impossible to avoid missing some pupils out, particularly as the most complete way to identify such pupils would be through the Census, which becomes out-of-date very quickly. The message would therefore need to be on a general level.

16) Great care would need to be taken in respect of the language of any such correspondence. Some 75% of pupils will not attend grammar schools. It is also very important to ensure that children who attend non selective schools are positive about the opportunities available to them, including academic opportunities.

17) **Do you have any suggestions for how KCC could do more to ensure that those FSM children who would be appropriately educated at a grammar school are given every opportunity to do so?** We could lobby grammar school governing bodies to raise the profile of the FSM issue. We would also suggest breaking down barriers by facilitating closer working ties between grammar and primary schools. This would be part of a strategy to influence grammar schools to become more involved with local communities.

18) It should be noted that the overall proportion of FSM children attending all grammar schools can be a misleading statistic because there is considerable variation in numbers between the individual grammar schools. The most helpful thing that every grammar school can do is to remind parents that their children will be very much valued within their school.

19) It also need to be noted that not all parents will regard grammar schools as appropriate for their child, even if they have demonstrated that they have reached the required standard. Some will exercise a preference for Faith Schools whilst others will decide that they do not wish to send their child to a single sex school, which most grammar schools in Kent are.

(20) **What one thing do you think we as a Committee should recommend to increase the number of FSM children attending grammar schools in Kent?** The Committee could work with grammar and primary schools to break down the barriers through local partnership working, lobbying governing bodies of grammar schools to raise the profile of FSM children in their oversubscription criteria and could consider a recommendation to raise FSM in the oversubscription criteria in those schools for which KCC are the admissions authority.