

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SELECT COMMITTEE - GRAMMAR SCHOOLS AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

MINUTES of a meeting of the Select Committee - Grammar Schools and Social Mobility held in the Swale 3, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Friday, 5 February 2016.

PRESENT: Mrs J Whittle (Chairman), 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

ALSO PRESENT:

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D Firth (Policy Adviser), Ms S Annan-Vetch (Policy Advisor), Ms C A Singh (Democratic Services Officer) and Miss L Adam (Scrutiny Research Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

8. Gillian Cawley, Director of Education, Quality and Standards (KCC) (Item 1)

1. Gillian Cawley joined Kent County Council in May 2015 as Director, Education Quality and Standards. Her remit covers Early Years, Schools, 14-24 Skills and Employability and Community Learning and Skills. Prior to Kent, Gillian held a number of posts in Hertfordshire County Council latterly Assistant Director Commissioner for Education Services. Previous roles in Hertfordshire included Assistant Director – School Improvement, Head of Learning, Training and Research and Principal Adviser, Teaching and Learning. Prior to working for a Local Authority, Gillian was an experienced, successful teacher and senior leader in schools.

2. **Q** - How do attainment levels differ between FSM children and non FSM children in primary school?

Ans - Primary Level – There were still gaps in attainment in reception. There had been improvement through significant work. There had been some narrowing of the gap in attainment but not in the higher levels.

3. **Q** - Are more children on FSM getting Level 5?

Ans - It gets harder. We want attainment gap to narrow at an accelerated pace. There was improvement at Level 4 but not at Level 5.

4. **Comment** – A proportionate number of children eligible for FSM are not getting into Grammar schools. This is a bigger issue than the Kent Test. It was about making sure that all the children were performing at the highest possible level. KS2 in writing was pleasing FSM children narrowed for the third year but level 5 attainment is widening and there were fewer FSM. Mathematics – Level 5 decline in overall attainment.

Ans - Key indicators in Sutton Report are that they achieve a higher level in mathematics. Need to raise attainment going to grammar on issue. Achievement at the higher levels in mathematics is seen, according to the Sutton Trust, as a key indicator/determinant of entry to grammar schools for FSM pupils. It is therefore important that we support primary schools with increasing level 5 attainment in mathematics for this group.

5. **Comment** – The Kent wide picture varies from community to community. In some areas FSM eligible children are a minority and in other areas there are much more FSM eligible children.. For example areas such as Sheppey or Ramsgate have high levels of FSM eligible children.

Ans –FSM pupils in schools where either they are in the majority or very small minority are seen to make most progress. It is those in the middle of these two opposites that seem to make least progress. Ms Cawley gave the example of Newington school in Ramsgate that was doing well with its allocation of Pupil Premium (PP). Ms Cawley highlighted things that make difficulties in schools as follows:

- a) Parental Engagement – The school can do a lot to engage parents to support their children’s learning
- b) Really good leadership where no child is left behind.

6. **Comment** – Generally in a school with large FSM Children do better because they have experience of how best to use the pupil premium and experienced /management.

7. **Q** - What percentage/number of FSM children attend a good or outstanding school?

Ans – Ms Cawley advised that she would be able provide this information to the Select Committee outside the meeting. She advised that the Virtual School look at which schools Children in Care (CIC) attend and would also have data.

84% of schools in Kent were good or outstanding. In 2012 the figure was below that. There had been significant improvement in Primary schools. Focus on individual pupils and employing the best staff was key. Governors also had a crucial role. Some schools had a governor allocated for PP. The governor ensured that the needs of FSM children was advocated and held the leader of the schools to account.

8. **Q** – Did all children get access to information on the Kent Test.

Ans – Ms Cawley advised that she would expect information on the Kent Test to be available to parents through their schools.

9. **Q**- Are schools spending PP effectively?

Ans – The local authority does not manage the spend around Pupil Premium (barring Pupil Premium plus). She advised that there was strong evidence from the Sutton Trust report on how to most effectively use the Pupil Premium. They had produced a Framework with a range of interventions and what they cost. Many schools were spending money on teaching assistants which was an expensive option and the degree of expertise was crucial. The two most effective interventions for FSM pupils are:

- the quality of feedback for pupils from teaching staff
 - the teaching of independent learning skills
10. **Q** – Was that because the FSM child was less likely to get feedback at home?
Ans – Ms Cawley advised that the Sutton Trust report shows that the quality of feedback was crucial. Every child would benefit from that as well as small group teaching, one to one tuition and active parental involvement in learning.
11. **Q** - Is the solution to increasing the number of FSM and CIC attending Grammar schools and providing a more level playing field, to ensure free test preparation for all high achieving primary school pupils? The Member referred to a school in his electoral division that did not have the Kent Test so the parents would know about the Test unless they attended school meetings. Preparation for the Kent Test could cost parents a small fortune for a private tutor which was not always affordable.
12. **Q** – What can primary schools do to increase the numbers of FSM eligible children applying for Grammar school?
Ans – Ms Cawley considered that Grammar schools could do more. If there was a strong relationship between primary schools and grammar schools, not just for the summer term but an ongoing relationship this would help. There could also be gifted and talented classes with specialisms, sport etc to enrich the curriculum. This would help to break down myths for parent and children about grammar schools and have lots of gains. Pupils could go into the grammar school where they could be offered learning opportunities. This would help break down barriers.
13. **Q** – Mr Latchford advised that he had not seen the Sutton Trust report and requested that he was sent a copy. He asked if some felt that grammar schools were ‘not for them’ and if so what we could do about it.
Ans - Ms Cawley advised that greater engagement of primary schools with Grammar school would help break down barriers and misunderstandings.
14. **Comment** – The Chairman commented that Multi academy trusts included those with and without grammar schools.
15. **Q** - Do attainment levels and destinations at Year 11 and beyond differ between FSM children and non FSM children once in Grammar school?
Ans – Ms Cawley advised that there is an attainment gap between disadvantaged young people and their peers as they move into post 16 Education. We need to ask “what are we doing to ensure those pupils have the right pathways” and support schools
16. **Comment** – For children on PP there was a big problem with aspiration but also resilience. They were used to life offering them hard knocks. There needed to be more work on resilience.
Ans - Parental support is key, as is resilience, quality of intervention, learning from failure and emotional well-being was important. Grammar schools worked on this as well as mental health. Support from the Early Help Team was important for schools in this field.

17. **Q** - Who is ringing the schools re PP asking how many children are at level 2, 3 etc and who can go on to higher level?
Ans - Ms Cawley advised that this was carried out through the School Improvement Advisor (SIA) who worked with the Governing body and Headteacher. If the school was in difficulty SIAs make more visits with a key focus on data. This data can go down to the individual child. The SIA looks at whether the children are making the expected progress and ensuring that challenge is there.
18. **Q** – Would KCC be working directly with parents?
Ans – Ms Cawley advised that it is the schools that work with parents to raise aspiration.
19. **Q** - Are there any other issues that you would like to raise with the Committee?
Ans - Ms Cawley reiterated the importance of supporting and challenging all schools to raise attainment and in promoting greater liaison between grammar schools and primary schools.
20. Ms Cawley agreed to forward the Annual Performance report with the overall achievement of FSM and the percentage and number of FSM and CIC attending a good or outstanding schools.

9. Keith Abbott, Director of Education Planning and Access (KCC)
(Item 2)

Keith Abbott (Director of Education Planning and Access, Kent County Council) was in attendance for this item.

The Chairman welcomed Keith Abbott to the meeting and invited him to introduce himself to the Committee. Keith noted that he joined Kent County Council in 1982; in June 2015 he took up his current post of Director of Education Planning and Access which included school place planning, SEND, admissions and transport.

Q – Is the increased numbers of free schools and academies in Kent having any bearing on parents and children choosing selective or non-selective education?

Keith explained that there was no hard evidence to show this but recognised that it may affect parent choice; free schools were able to have a different approach to the curriculum which may be attractive to some parents. He noted that there had been anecdotal evidence that academy trusts, with primary and secondary schools, were encouraging parents to continue their child’s secondary education with the Trust. He stated that good and outstanding schools were able to expand their Published Admission Number without consultation which, in the case of Grammar schools, had resulted in an increase in Grammar School places up to 28.3% of the total secondary school places compared to around 25% five years earlier. He reported that free schools were not allowed to be selective and could only be established at the discretion of the Secretary of State for Education. He noted that since the election, the Government had been working more closely with local authorities in aligning free schools to meet school place need. He reported that there had been positive experiences with Kent based trusts and KCC were keen to develop these relationships in establishing local Multi-Academy Trusts rather than with regional chains where experience had been mixed. He noted that the Education Funding

Agency was providing support to enable standalone trusts to expand. He stated that new schools would be required in areas of population growth such as Ebbsfleet which may require existing Grammar Schools to expand to meet demand.

Q – How can we ensure that socially disadvantaged children are able to take advantage of the growing numbers of Grammar school places available in the county?

Keith explained that Kent County Council's aim was to raise attainment and close the Free School Meals gap in all schools. He noted that the increased number of Grammar School places had led to a slight increase in the number of Free School Meals pupils in going to Grammar School. He acknowledged that since the introduction of the pupil premium, some Headteachers had been more proactive in encouraging parents to apply for Free School Meals for their children which had increased the total number of children assessed as eligible for Free School Meals.

Q – How does Kent County Council advertise the Kent Test to parents? How does this differ to an opt-out system like in Buckinghamshire?

Keith confirmed that, in line with common practice, there was an opt-in system for the Kent Test and details about the Kent Test were sent directly to schools to distribute to parents.

Q – What are the barriers to Free School Meals children and their families in applying to Grammar Schools?

Keith explained that transport may be a significant barrier. He noted that Kent County Council did provide free school transport to low income families where the family was located between 2 and 6 miles from the school (or between 2 and 15 miles for faith schools) and the combined annual income was no more than £16,190. He stated that this was available but may require further publicity. He acknowledged that the cost of uniform had also been identified as a barrier by some and costs varied between schools.

Q - Does the location of Grammar Schools and the competition for places in the west of the county impact on the ability of Free School Meals children to access a Grammar school place? Which schools in this area are being proactive in attracting more Free School Meals pupils and how successful have they been?

Keith noted that The Skinners' School and Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for Boys had changed their admission criteria to prioritise Free School Meals pupils; an additional two Grammar Schools in other parts of the county had also done this. It had only increased the number of Free School Meals pupils slightly, by five students in one school for example. He stated that there was more competition from children who had been privately educated in West Kent and assumed that they had probably benefited from better pupil-to-teacher ratios.

Q – Which out-of-county schools do you write to about the Kent Test? What is the legal requirement to advertise the Kent Test?

Keith stated that schools in Bromley and Medway were written to about the Kent Test. He undertook to find out about the legal requirement to advertise the Kent Test and to check if schools in East Sussex and Surrey were notified by Kent County Council about the Kent Test.

Q – Do supplementary tests in East Kent make it easier for Free School Meals pupils to access a Grammar School place?

Keith explained that there was no specific data to support this but noted that the supplementary tests brought more pupils into Grammar Schools which would, in theory, increase the number of Free School Meals pupils.

Q – What are the outcomes for Free School Meals pupils who attend Grammar Schools?

Keith explained that he was not able to provide this information.

Q – What can Kent County Council do to promote social mobility in accessing Grammar School?

Keith stated that Kent County Council should work with Grammar schools to improve their outreach to all primary schools. He noted that a number of Grammar Schools did provide outreach, such as sixth form mentoring, but in most cases only to their local primary schools. He explained that the Special Schools outreach model had worked well. He also noted that Kent County Council should raise awareness of the Free School Transport and work with the Governing Bodies of Grammar Schools to prioritise Free School Meals pupils on their admissions criteria. In response to a specific question he stated that Gillian Cawley was responsible for school improvement which covers outreach and he was responsible for admissions and transport.

Q – What is the percentage of out-of-county children in West Kent Grammar Schools?

Keith explained that he was not able to provide this information but undertook to find out.

Q – There are non-selective areas in Kent; does the proximity to a Grammar School make a difference to Free School Meals pupils?

Keith stated that the Homewood School, Tenterden, in a non-selective area, provided its own transport to increase access to pupils from rural areas which was clearly an influencing factor for some families when determining which school they might choose.

Q - What one thing could Kent County Council do to promote social mobility in accessing Grammar Schools?

Keith stated that increasing outreach from Grammar Schools could help promote social mobility in accessing Grammar Schools.