

SELECT COMMITTEE - GRAMMAR SCHOOLS AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

MINUTES of a meeting of the Select Committee - Grammar Schools and Social Mobility held in the Medway Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Friday, 12 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, Mr R Truelove and Mr M J Vye

ALSO PRESENT:

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

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Emma Hickling - Executive Headteacher - Kingswood, Leeds and Ulcombe Primary Schools (Item 2)

The Chairman welcomed Emma Hickling to the meeting of the Select Committee and asked Ms Hickling to introduce herself and outline her responsibility. In response Ms Hickling informed the Committee that she was the executive Headteacher of three primary schools (Kingswood, Ulcombe and Leeds and Broomfield), a Kent Leader of Education for the Local Authority and sat on the West Kent Board of the Kent Association of Headteachers. She also informed Members that she had served as an Ofsted inspector from 2013 to 2015 and had a role in training new headteachers through the national college of leadership.

Q -Why are disadvantaged students, who are eligible for free school meals, less likely to enrol in a grammar school despite the fact that they may be academically high achieving?

Ms Hickling first highlighted the academic aspirations of parents influenced whether their children would enrol in a grammar school. She also suggested both the perceived and real cost of transferring to grammar school could be considered a barrier by the parents of these children. Private tutoring was raised as limiting social mobility as availability of this gave children from families who couldn't afford tutoring a disadvantage in the Kent Test. Ms Hickling attributed most Kent Test passes to the assistance of private tutoring.

Q - Are parents having a perception that Grammar Schools aren't right for a child (based on cost or the perception of the school) stopping children taking the Kent Test?

Ms Hickling stated that this did happen in some cases.

Q - Perhaps, the perception that there is more homework too?

Ms Hickling emphasised that in her view the biggest issue was the disparity between those who can afford private tutoring and those cannot.

A Member explained he had seen a different system used in Bexley where they do not base whether a Child qualifies for Grammar School on one test and that this could perhaps be a different option.

Q - And what would be the best way of challenging this? Do you believe Headteachers having more of an input would help?

Ms Hickling expressed a view that there would be dangers to empowering Headteachers in a role to determine who should qualify for Grammar School, such as simply their different opinions of students. She emphasised such a system would require moderation to be reliable. She also suggested that the submission of actual class work should have greater value in deciding who qualifies.

Q - In regards to the relevance of the Kent Test to KS2 is the test improving and becoming more relevant?

Ms Hickling confirmed that it had greater alignment with the Year 6 curriculum. Despite this the Kent Test was taken so early in Year 6 that much of the content was still irrelevant to what the children had been learning and under the new curriculum schools were not able to 'accelerate' children through.

Q - As a Headteacher how do you find your rapport with Maidstone Grammar Schools?

Invicta was confirmed to have good outreach with primary schools but she had found the others not so accessible.

Q - And is that the fault of these Grammar Schools or does some of that responsibility lie with you?

Ms Hickling explained that responsibility for this was shared to some extent. She also explained that her three Primary Schools were very different and would have different relationships with the Grammar Schools.

Q - How do you help parents of high achieving FSM children?

Ms Hickling explained that she personally meets with the parents to discuss their child's education. All plans are followed up and those that Ms Hickling believes should qualify for Grammar School are encouraged to take the Kent Test. She also makes use of pupil premium to purchase internet revision tools to help FSM students.

Q - I realise the number of disadvantaged students is different for each school, does this impact the Kent Test/ appeals process?

Ms Hickling explained that it was her observation that most children on free school meals get through on appeals as opposed to passing the Kent Test.

Q - Do you attend all parental appeals?

Ms Hickling stated she attends all parental appeals that she supports.

Q - Does the Kent County Council school improvement advisors role involve advice on preparing for the Kent Test?

It was confirmed that currently they only advise on the national curriculum.

Q - Do you find that a fear of failure has filtered down from parents?

Ms Hickling stated that this depended on the school.

Q - Can you provide tutoring?

It was indicated to Members that it was a KCC policy that you may not coach/tutor.

Q - And were that restriction to be removed would you be capable of providing tutoring and be interested in such a chance?

Ms Hickling stated that she could and would of course be interested in this policy being removed.

Q - Schools that are just beyond Kent County Council boundaries in either Medway or Bexley, is there any way they can be expected to adhere to this policy?

The Chairman stated both Medway and Bexley's policy in this area needed to be noted in future.

A Member expressed a view that Headteachers opinions vary on this subject and the result of a consultation would be of great interest.

Q - There are children who go to Grammar School and are then inclined to leave, do you just find out or does there liaison with the Grammar School before that happens? What is your perception of schools in Maidstone keeping you informed of this?

Ms Hickling explained that she has only found out where children had stayed in touch with their primary school. In regards to Maidstone schools efforts in liaising with primary schools she expressed a view that she was often not informed.

Q - Liaison between schools is extremely valuable, do you have no feedback?

Ms Hickling confirmed that she received no feedback. She did confirm that Invicta do have their Year 7s visit their primary schools, but this was the closest example to liaison she was aware of.

Q – Please discuss how you use the Pupil Premium and whether this has had an impact on the number of FSM and CIC children obtaining a Grammar school place?

A paper on Ms Hickling's use of pupil premium had been brought and was shared amongst Members. The Committee thanked Ms Hickling for this.

Q - Would a different approach help? Perhaps an opt out test, as in Buckinghamshire?

Ms Hickling explained that it would help greatly if there was less hype and pressure around the Kent Test. She also stated that it was those who were just above the benefit cap who were struggling the most.

Q - Is the cost of uniform great?

Certain suppliers were said to cost more. Ms Hickling confirmed high schools were less prescriptive than grammar schools.

Q - What percentage of students you support through the appeal process get through to grammar school?

100%.

Q - In our place what recommendations would you put forward to change the current system in Kent for the better?

Ms Hickling stated she would pursue a level playing field through preventing tutoring influencing who qualifies for grammar school as much. Further to this she explained she did not believe the decision should lie with a headteacher, but that a system of moderation assessed by teachers from other schools could be effective.

The Chairman thanked Ms Hickling for her answers and for participating in the Committee's discussion.

3. Matthew Bartlett - Headteacher - Dover Grammar School for Girls

(Item 4)

Matthew Bartlett (Headteacher, Dover Grammar School for Girls) was in attendance for this item.

The Chairman welcomed Mr Bartlett to the Committee and asked him to give an overview of his school. Mr Bartlett began by noting that he was only the Headteacher of Dover Grammar School for Girls and not the Harvey Grammar School as stated in the Agenda pack. He explained that his school was one of the few remaining community Grammar Schools in Kent. He stated that being a community school, rather than an academy, was an important part of integrating with the local community; academies were not viewed positively in the local area. The school's catchment area was 6.1 miles and included Dover, Capel, Walmer and parts of Deal. He noted that Dover had had its own selection test for over twenty years: of those children sitting the test 34% of pupils did the Kent Test only; 50% of pupils did both the Dover and Kent Test; and 26% of pupils did the Dover Test only. He reported that the Dover Test was a major lever for ensuring a greater outreach to Free School Meals children.

Mr Bartlett highlighted that 333 girls sat the Dover Test in Autumn 2015 and 214 girls met the required standard; out of the 214 girls who passed the Dover Test, 200 had put Dover Girls Grammar School for Girls as their first choice. He noted that the school had increased its Published Admission Number (PAN) from 120 to 130. He explained that the school encouraged students to do both tests in case they had a bad day; the Dover Test took place on the Saturday after the Kent Test on Thursday. He reported that the percentage of Free School Meals students was variable across

the year groups; 14.2% of Year 8 students accessed Free School Meals in comparison with Year 11 whereas 7.6% students accessed Free School Meals. He noted that Free School Meals was only one indicator of deprivation used by the school; indicators included the number of jobs parents had to support their family and the Ever Six measure which included students who had accessed Free School Meals over the past six years. He stated that the Ever Six measure increased the percentage of students from a deprived background by 4%.

Q – How is the Dover Test different from the Kent Test?

Mr Bartlett explained that the Dover Test, partly provided by GL, included a verbal reasoning paper, a non-verbal reasoning paper, a Maths paper, a multiple choice comprehension paper and an essay. He stated that the essay was a key part of the selection as it was a strongest indicator of potential particularly for girls; he noted that an essay was not part of the Kent Test. He reported that on entry to the school, students were ranked the third lowest for performance in Kent Grammar Schools and by Year 11 the school was ranked twelfth out of 34 Grammar Schools in Kent for GCSE results.

Q - What are the main barriers to Free School Meal students in going to Grammar School?

Mr Bartlett stated that the biggest barrier in Dover was at times the poverty of expectation and aspiration which was difficult to solve. There were no large employers and many did not travel far which led to cultural and economic poverty. He noted that parents often had a poor experience of education and this might lead them to be reluctant to engage. He stated it was important to get parents into the school and breakdown the myths about Grammar Schools.

Q – How do you engage with Free School Meal parents?

Mr Bartlett explained that Dover Grammar School for Girls ran a primary enrichment programme two days a week, using its own staff, for students in Year 4 . Parents were invited to attend an award ceremony for their children at the completion of programme and were able view the work completed. The programme included English, Maths and Science. VI Form students went into primary schools to engage students with Latin and Sport. Sixth Form students worked with children in mainstream and special schools as part of the Sport Leadership programme. He stated that it was important for the school to have a high profile and be part of the local community. He reported that a significant amount of time was spent by staff to think of ways to explain and declutter the barriers to and engage with a Grammar School education.

Q – What is the impact of Multi-Academy Trusts with primary and secondary schools in influencing the destination of students to secondary schools?

Mr Bartlett explained that it was unusual for the two Grammar Schools in Dover not to be Academies. He noted that there was one Multi-Academy Trust in Dover; he reported that one of the primary schools, which was a member of the Multi-Academy Trust and linked to a poorly performing secondary school, had the lowest numbers of students who were entered and gained places at grammar schools in Dover. He stated his praise for primary school head teachers at schools serving areas of deprivation who were aspirational for their students; he noted that he had been

contacted by primary heads with requests for specific children to be part of the of the enrichment programme and support for a potential student whose mother had special needs and had asked that their community support worker accompanied them on an open day.

Q – How do you look after Free School Meals students at school? How many stay onto Sixth Form?

Mr Bartlett stated that there was an expectation for all students to stay on into Sixth Form. In Year 11, 110 students had indicated that they would be joining the Sixth Form and nine would be going onto vocational courses; only one of the nine was a Free School Meals student. He noted that it was expected that all students achieved 5 A* - C GCSEs including English and Maths. He noted that Free School Meals students were one of a number of key groups tracked by the Leadership Team which included students with a different cultural background and with English as an additional language. He explained that the Leadership Team met formally three times a year post tracking to review performance and put in additional support for these students if required but that this was a continuous process of oversight.

Q – Is there a fund to help Free School Meals students with uniform and transport costs?

Mr Bartlett explained that parents in receipt of benefits or with a low income were able to apply to the School's general and voluntary funds for assistance with uniform; parents were asked to fill in a form and attach a copy of their P60 or benefit award notice as evidence. He stated that the uniform was modestly priced at around £150 and there had been no increase to the cost for three years. He noted that the school spent well in excess of the £63,000 it received to support students who were eligible for the pupil premium.

Why are the numbers of Children in Care who apply and get into grammar schools so low?

Mr Bartlett explained that his school had one Child in Care who had joined the school in the Sixth Form. He reported that up until last year there was a student who was a Child in Care, and was now studying at university. He noted that the student had the drive and intellectual capacity to succeed; many Children in Care were often vulnerable, isolated and were not able to access support or information about applying for grammar school. He stated the importance of primary head teachers in encouraging and supporting disadvantaged children to apply for grammar school.

Q – What is the role of Primary School Governors in identifying Free School Meals students who could apply and get into Grammar Schools?

Mr Bartlett stated that he was a Governor at two Secondary Schools. He did not think that Primary School Governors were identifying Free School Meals students who could apply and get into Grammar Schools. He noted that he was scrutinised by the Governors at his school on how effectively the pupil premium was spent. He reported that he was aware of Governors at a primary Faith School who were seeking to discourage students moving to Grammar Schools.

Q – How do you encourage Free School Meals students to apply for Grammar Schools when the Headteacher is not supportive of selective education?

Mr Bartlett stressed the importance of outreach and engagement with primary schools. He explained that he believed in the most suitable education for all students. Headteachers should not prevent children from accessing a Grammar School education if they were suitable. He noted that he was aware of pockets of resistance and underperformance in Ashford and Thanet. He stated that he was concerned about Multi-Academy Trusts influencing the destinations of its students. He reported that Grammar Schools should engage with all primary schools and not just individual schools they were linked to.

Q – What is the survivability of Grammar Schools as community schools?

Mr Bartlett explained that if his school was forced to become an academy, his view and that of his Governors was that it should become a single Academy. He expressed concerns about the impact on primary students if they were not selected to go to the main school, Dover Grammar School for Girls, for their secondary education if it was part of a Multi-Academy Trust. He stated that his area of expertise was selective education; he stressed that it was important to have a mix of selective and non-selective schools in Kent. In addition to Multi-Academy Trusts, he stated that super-selective schools also posed a threat to access and excluded Free School Meals students.

Q – Should there be a quota for Free School Meals students in Grammar Schools?

Mr Bartlett stated that there should not be a quota for Free School Meals students in Grammar Schools.

Q – What is your one recommendation to the Select Committee?

Mr Bartlett explained that the development of Multi-Academy Trusts should be stopped. He stated that he thought there was regrettably a move towards Multi-Academy Trusts despite there being no evidence that Trusts improve performance. He noted that a number of Academy chains were underperforming.

Q – Are Multi-Academy Trusts becoming a downscaled version of local education authorities?

Mr Bartlett noted that the system of local education authorities delegating powers to schools had worked well. He stated that economies of scale achieved by running multiple schools were counteracted by the cost of salaries for Executive Headteachers and Heads of Schools.