

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 Monday, 22 February 2016.

PRESENT: Mrs J Whittle (Chairman), Mr R H Bird (Substitute for Mr M J Vye), Mr A H T Bowles, Mr L Burgess, Mr E E C Hotson, Mr R A Latchford, OBE and Mr R A Marsh

ALSO PRESENT: Mr C Ryan, Mr D Ramplin and Mr P Read (for minute 3

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms S Annan-Vetch (Policy Advisor), Mr D Firth (Policy Adviser), Ms C A Singh (Democratic Services Officer), Mrs A Hunter (Principal Democratic Services Officer) and Mrs L Whitaker (Democratic Services Manager (Executive))

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies

(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Mr Truelove and Mr Vye. Mr Vye was substituted by Mr Bird with the agreement of the Select Committee.

2. Conor Ryan, Director - Research and Communications, Sutton Trust

(Item 2)

1. Conor advised that he was the Director of Research and Communications at the Sutton Trust. The Sutton Trust commissioned 15 pieces of work per year, to influence Government education policy for Early Years to university. The report "*Poor Grammar: Entry Into Grammar Schools Disadvantaged Pupils In England*" was commissioned three years ago as Grammar schools were considered an important agent for social mobility.

2. Conor was senior education adviser to Prime Minister Tony Blair from 2005-2007 and was David Blunkett's special adviser from 1993-2001, covering education policy and media relations in government and opposition. Conor is a trustee of the National Foundation for Educational Research and a director of a multi-academy trust. In 2015-16, he is a member of the Scottish Commission on Widening Access. Before joining the Trust, Conor was an independent writer and consultant, working with many education organisations, writing for national newspapers and advising senior education figures.

3. Why do you think children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) are currently underrepresented in grammar schools?

Conor considered the following reasons that needed to be addressed:

- The attainment levels for FSM in Primary schools

- The extent FSM were encouraged by the school and parents to sit the Kent Test
- Perceptions of fitting in a grammar school environment
- There was a challenge around private tuition for the Kent Test

Conor advised that there was evidence to show that four times more prep school children were going to grammar school than FSM children.

4. A common thread that the Select Committee had heard in many of its meetings was the role that the primary schools play. The Sutton Trust research also refers to the primary schools playing a role. What could Primary schools do? Are there good examples?

Conor advised that the King Edward Foundation had been working with schools and Outreach to engage with Primary schools actively for them to put forward their children showing them that they would fit in at a grammar school. Conor gave the example of Parkfield Community School, Birmingham, which was awarded with the National Pupil Premium Award. The school had provided the following through the Pupil Premium:

- Two mathematics Specialist Teachers
- Developed computer applications in mathematics
- Mathematics focused breakfast club

This extra tuition resulted in good results at Key Stage 5. Conor considered that this could only have been achieved in partnership with primary schools and the grammar schools.

Children needed to have familiarity of the Kent Test that included tests on spatial awareness and Non-verbal reasoning.

5. Did Birmingham City Council make a political decision to change its Policy or did the school do this on its own?

Conor advised that this was a decision taken by King Edwards Foundation and as far as he was aware Birmingham Council was not involved. Nationally there had been a change to the Policy on the Admissions Code which allows schools to give preference to Pupil Premium children. There had been varying reactions from Grammar School Headteachers, but the Grammar School Heads Association was supportive of the change in the code. This meant that there could be a lower threshold for pupil premium and this led to an increase in the number of FSM being admitted into some Grammar schools.

6. What percentage of Grammar schools support Primary schools?

Conor advised that no survey had been carried out on this, however, research with Grammar School Headteachers and the National Association of Headteachers did show that they were open to further outreach..

7. As Members how do we respond to parents who ask us why they shouldn't spend their money on extra tuition for their child?

Conor said that test preparation was an area that the Trust potentially disagreed with headteachers. The Trust used the words “Test familiarisation” in its recommendation. Within their report they suggest ten hours entitlement of test familiarisation which would be provided by the Primary school. He considered that it was not about condemning parents who what to do their best for their child it was about providing a level playing field, to give those children a fighting chance on ability and not on the ability to pay.

8. There appeared to be a wide divergence in opinions of Headteachers regarding the Kent Test.

We look at the system that exists and look at the social mobility issues in Comprehensive schools too. Opinions could be changed by fusing relationships between Primary schools and Grammar schools and parents eg holding Open days and other outreach.

9. At what time should this outreach take place?

Conor advised that this was something that the Trust had not looked at, but he considered that the earlier the better and suggested at Key Stage 2 Year 4.

10. An observation on coaching was mentioned by a Select Committee Member where children had been over coached. They managed to cope in years 7 and 8 but at GCSE they were not at the 5 A* level.

Conor advised that when you give a chance to a child who had not been coached they can be successful but we are suggesting familiarisation. Over coaching can be counterproductive.

11. There are schools that have not done anything to support children into grammar school how do we break this?

Conor advised that there was no magic wand this came down to having the right links such as Outreach and with the right partnerships and engagement.

12. Where you are successful in getting a FSM child through to grammar school would they struggle once in the school, is there evidence of this?

Conor advised that the Trust did not have evidence of this but considered that it was important that the support from Outreach continued after a child got into grammar school. Those children would need support for school transport and ensuring that they were not excluded from activities because their family did not have financial means.

13. The Chairman advised that as a County Member she had not been aware that Free School Transport was given to FSM attending Grammar school. This needed to be promoted.

14.

Conor advised that the change in the legislation, Education Act 2006, changed the position. Pupils who were entitled to Free School Meals were entitled to Free school transport, but this was not actively publicised.

15. A Member commented that a Multi-academy Trust, with two Academies and one Free Primary School, had 53% of children in year 7 received Pupil Premium and asked whether there was any evidence that Multi-academy Trusts were not promoting the 11 plus to keep children in their schools to assist with the schools income?

Conor advised that there had been no specific research on this but he could see the potential of a grammar school being attached to a Multi-academy Trust as this would be a useful way to breakdown any misconceptions.

16. Was there evidence of a Primary school using the Pupil Premium to assist pupils getting into grammar school?

Conor advised that there was no specific research on this but most Pupil Premium was used for one to one teaching and small group tuition. He did not know whether this led towards a child gaining a grammar school place. He added that the Pupil Premium should not exclude the use for gifted and talented pupils.

Conor confirmed that Ministers had given an assurance to the Sutton Trust that the PP would not be ring fenced or only available to tackle low achievement.

17. Do you think Grammar Schools aid or hinder social mobility?

Conor explained that the evidence was mixed, of the top 25% in grammar school a portion were gaining grade A*s and grades As and Bs. It was about the relationship those students would have entering lead universities. The number of State children getting into the leading universities was lower than proportions from private schools.

18. A recommendation from the Sutton Trust was “Familiarisation”. Coaching is currently banned in Kent schools. How do we implement this?

Conor explained that this depended on how many children were in the school were FSM as there was an economy of scale i.e. the more FSM children the more funding. There was a “tool kit” for the use of Pupil Premium.

19. The Chairman commented that the cost of school uniform could also be an issue for parents when grammar schools used a sole outfitter. Some Grammar schools had addressed this issue by providing a school badge that can be sewn on to blazers and use outlets such as Asda.

20. Do you have any recommendations for the Select Committee?

Conor suggested looking at the Pupil Premium, guarantee from grammar school allied with Outreach to break down barriers.

3. Denis Ramplin - Director of Marketing & Communications, The Schools of King Edward VI Birmingham
(Item 3)

1. Mrs Whittle invited Mr Ramplin to introduce himself.

Mr Ramplin said that he had joined the Schools of King Edward VI Birmingham three years ago in response to research into the perception of

grammar and independent schools in Birmingham. The organisation he worked for was a charity which supported eight schools across the city: two independent schools; five grammar schools; and an all-ability academy at Sheldon Heath. Research had indicated that the general perception among parents was that the city's five grammar schools were fee-paying, they were not affordable and "were not for their children".

2. The King Edward VI grammar schools in Birmingham generally reflected the ethnic diversity of the city but their intake did not reflect economic disadvantage. The governing body of the Schools of King Edward VI wanted to return to their original mission of providing education for all in the city and to do that the following actions had been taken:
 - The capacity of the grammar schools had been increased by 20%
 - Their admissions policies had been changed to encourage pupils receiving free school meals to apply
 - Agreement was reached with the five grammar schools to lower the score required in the 11+ test for pupils that qualified for the pupil premium
 - Significant engagement with primary schools and the parents of primary school children to dispel myths about grammar school.
3. Primary schools were willing to engage.
4. Primary head teachers had found that, in some instances, when parents were advised that their children had the ability to benefit from a grammar school education, they still chose a local comprehensive and often failed to see the opportunity offered by a grammar school education. This was a particular issue among white working class parents, who often lacked awareness of the opportunity and considered transport, uniform and other expenses to be unaffordable.
5. The Opening Doors Strategy was developed to increase awareness of opportunity and address issues of access and affordability. A familiarisation programme aimed at primary school children had been developed consisting of five 2-hour sessions (four of which took place at grammar schools during the week and the fifth on a Saturday). These sessions included a tour of the grammar school, a talk by the head teacher and activities for primary school children as well as an opportunity to meet students attending the grammar school. Pupils participating in the familiarisation programme also received a non-verbal reasoning booklet from a range of publishers.
6. Invitations to attend a familiarisation session were sent to primary school head teachers. The head teachers were asked to select pupils who would benefit by attending. Some schools used the pupil premium to provide transport for the children to the mid-week sessions which were very well attended. In addition, if asked, the Foundation paid for transport. There was a fall-off in attendance for the Saturday sessions as children might have been busy with clubs and attendance had not been prioritised. However a decision had been made to continue with these sessions to replicate, as closely as possible, the conditions under which the 11+ test was taken.

7. The familiarisation sessions challenged the parents' perception of cost and issues relating to transport. Many parents did not want their child to spend an hour on a bus when he or she could attend a local comprehensive. The King Edward's Promise provided a free bus pass, £50 towards the cost of school uniform, essential academic equipment and a compulsory school trip in year 7.
8. Comments had been made that the Schools of King Edward VI was offering this support in an effort to get pupil premium money but in reality the support was morally driven as the cost of the programme was far greater than any potential income from the pupil premium.
9. The Foundation was now preparing for a third year of familiarisation visits and at this point, every grammar school had a co-ordinator who appointed internal trainers and was responsible for up to 200 children going through the familiarisation programme.

10. Who pays the costs of co-ordinators and internal trainers?

The Foundation has met costs for the first three years.

11. Are there other grammar schools in Birmingham that do not belong to the Foundation?

Yes. There are three more. Some have embraced the objective of widening access and others do "their own thing".

12. Do you have to continue to re-educate primary school teachers? Would it be possible for grammar schools to go directly to pupils receiving free school meals and invite them to events and sporting fixtures so that young people would be able to re-educate parents about the opportunities provided by grammar schools?

Involving business in the scheme was important and about eight months ago a partnership was formed with Birmingham Airport resulting in the old viewing area being turned into the Learning hub. Birmingham Airport sees this as a community venture and does not charge. The Learning Hub is used as a venue for teachers' professional development, activities for children and activities for children and parents. It is also underpinned by a virtual learning environment developed with FROG (a powerful and fully integrated learning platform). At the end of three years it will be important to demonstrate a degree of sustainability and it is hoped that primary schools will make a contribution towards the continuation of the widening access strategy.

13. Having a uniform is less of a barrier than not having a uniform in that it is usually cheaper to buy uniform than branded clothing. How can parents' concern about the cost of uniform be overcome?

The Foundation is currently in a period of consultation with regard to becoming a multi academy trust.

14. Has the attendance of pupils, entitled to free school meals, increased at the grammar schools since the programme started?

Yes. The number of children entitled to free school meals attending grammar schools has increased from 3-4% three years ago to 25% at Aston, 20% at Camp Hill Boys, 20% at Fiveways, 15% at Handsworth School for Girls and 15% at Camp Hill Girls.

A lower score was set for children on free school meals.

There had been some negative feedback including from a Daily Mail reporter and from angry parents who felt their children had been “robbed of places”. However, as the schools had expanded by 20%, pupils had not been displaced. All those who had taken part in the familiarisation programme, even those who did not succeed in gaining entry to a grammar school, were better prepared for whatever secondary school they attended.

15. How do you ensure that you get pupils who are best able to benefit from a grammar school education rather than those who performed well in a test?

- The changes made had been relatively recent. The need to manage any gaps that might emerge as pupils progress through school is recognised.
- Grammar schools have undergone a significant cultural change and there is now more collegiate working between the five schools

16. Among some ethnic groups, parents and grandparents are often strong drivers for education. How can other parents be persuaded of the value of education?

There are a number of initiatives underway to encourage participation. For example:

- The Foundation encourages primary schools in a specific area to host a roadshow to which the brightest primary pupils in an area are invited.
- Two representatives from the Foundation present to the parents whilst pupils from the 6th Form Leadership Team at King Edward VI Five Ways occupy children with activities. The leadership strategy is seen as a key part in driving messages and opportunities via Saturday and holiday clubs

17. Are the grammars schools in Birmingham oversubscribed?

Yes by 9 to 1.

18. Would it be possible to commission a uniform that would be acceptable to all grammar schools instead of allocating £50 towards its cost?

It is hoped that there would be opportunities of commercial benefit should we come a multi academy trust. It is hoped that the cost of uniforms might be an area in which savings might be made.

19. Do you or your team meet with primary heads to discuss use of pupil premium to support pupils?

No. The Foundation asks head teachers to identify children who would benefit from a grammar school education. Communication with primary schools is difficult. The Foundation does not contact primary schools via their generic "enquiry at" email addresses and the importance of a named contact where possible is recognised.

20. Tell us one or two particularly key items

Do not under-estimate the time and cost of running a Widening Access programme.

4. Peter Read, Kent Independent Education Advice
(Item 4)

Mr Hotson was not in attendance for this session.

Mrs Whittle, Chairman of the Committee welcomed the witness for the session, Mr Peter Read of Kent Independent Education Advice and asked members and officers present to introduce themselves.

1. Please give us some background on your experiences around grammar school access and working with disadvantaged pupils who are considering applying to grammar schools?

Mr Read reported that his website currently had 1000 subscribers and over 100,000 visitors annually, many of whom were seeking advice and guidance in relation to grammar school applications and appeals. He also worked directly with schools, making visits to give advice to parents and had been successful in attracting many families that otherwise may not have accessed his or other services as part of this work, particularly in areas with a lower grammar school uptake such as Swale and Dover.

He felt that internet forums populated by parents in West Kent were misleading for those in the East of the County and may actually discourage parents from pursuing grammar school places for their children.

In addition to the services described, Mr Read reported that he also ran a telephone counselling service which provided low cost advice for parents wishing to appeal school place allocations. He reported that many of the calls relating to grammar school issues were from parents from an ethnic minority. He commented on the obvious aspirations of the parents who contacted him for their children to achieve and the positive and determined attitude of both the parents and the children. This was borne out by the figures in North West Kent where the number of Sikh children attending grammar school was higher than would be expected when set against the statistics for the general population.

He explained for committee members the three ways by which a pupil might obtain a place at a Grammar School in Kent. The majority of pupils would be offered places based on the results of the Kent Test. A further smaller percentage would be recommended by the Head Teacher assessment route and a finally a percentage would be allowed via the appeals system. Of the three methods, the debate around the Kent Test was well established and had been widely discussed, instead Mr Read focused on the Head Teacher assessments which he believed were skewed against children receiving free school meals. He was concerned that the attributes that Head teachers would look for were less obvious in those children from low income families and in particular the aspirational qualities mentioned previously. Even at the independent appeal panel stage there might still be unintended bias against those children receiving free school meals and as an example he referred to the often mentioned 'widely read child' who, he felt, was not likely to be in receipt of free school meals.

2. Supplementary and alternative testing was conducted in some areas of the County, what do you consider to be the impact of this?

Mr Read reported that in Folkestone and Dover where supplementary testing had been introduced over half of those children attending grammar school were not considered to be of grammar school ability according to the Kent Test.

Several of those schools however, were extremely high performing, in particular he noted the success of Dover Grammar School for Girls and Folkestone Grammar School for Girls, in the case of the latter a further proportion of pupils were selected through the appeals process after not scoring highly enough in the test. When asked to speculate as to how this was possible for schools with a high intake of pupils who would not be deemed to be grammar school suitable in other areas of the county he proposed that the key was in two areas. Firstly, the leadership provided by the head and other teachers and governors, and secondly, the aspirations of the teachers for the pupils were high and they were matched by the families.

3. Primary Schools seemed to have varied opinions of, and approaches to, the Kent Test and grammar school education, some of which seemed to be motivated by the political or ethical considerations; had Mr Read found this to be the case?

Yes, he had witnessed such varied attitudes and found it concerning that some primary schools were intrinsically opposed to grammar school education and therefore did not encourage children to enter for the Kent Test nor did they utilise the head teacher selection places. Furthermore, at these schools it was very difficult for parents to access help with the application process, where schools were opposed in this way the number of children, including those in receipt of free school meals, who would apply for places was very much reduced.

Of course, there were also children and parents who decided that a grammar school

was not right for them for a number of legitimate reasons, whether in receipt of free school meals or not. He agreed with comments made by the select committee members that such choice for parents and children was necessary and right but that it was concerning that only 51% of children in receipt of free school meals went to grammar schools compared to 71% of those who were not. If the reasons for choosing not to go were not socio-economically influenced there should be no difference based on the criteria of income.

Following a suggestion from a member of the Committee Mr Read said that he did not believe it would be possible to impose on primary schools a target for grammar school applications, or places awarded to students, as many were no longer local authority controlled and that those that were may resent such an intervention by the Council and pursue another route to maintain their independence such as moving to academy status.

4. Referring to a comment made previously, were the parents utilising Mr Read's services motivated and aspirational?

Yes, and this was crucial to the success of the children in securing places. Primary Schools, even those that were supportive of grammar schools, could only do so much and were officially banned from coaching for the Kent Test, although some did offer additional classes to pupils and while not coaching, were supportive and achieved good results.

5. A previous Select Committee had considered applications and take up of apprenticeships in the county and aspiration had been a common theme in those discussions too. It had been noted there too that ethnic minority families who fell in to lower socio-economic groups were more aspirational than their English counterparts. Did Mr Read have a view on this?

Yes, it was a phenomenon he was aware of, particularly occurring in East Kent. He believed that grammar schools in the East Kent area were working harder to attract pupils from all backgrounds but in West Kent engagement with different socio-economic groups was less prevalent perhaps owing to the over subscription of many of the schools. Following comments from the Committee Mr Read acknowledged that he might add Maidstone to the East Kent phenomena despite its location to the west.

6. What if we improved take up and pass rates for the Kent Test significantly, would there be places available for all those children that qualified?

Mr Read reported that 10 of the 32 grammar schools in the county had vacancies after the first round of allocations in 2015. Key to encouraging more pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds would be encouragement for them and their families. Currently some parents and children were daunted by the process and

those grammar schools that engaged with, and offered support to, low income families had had some success in increasing the number of pupils on roll that were in receipt of free school meals. However if the number of Free School children admitted to grammar school increased this would be mainly at the expense of the highly coached. Following comments from the committee Mr Read reported that Invicta in Maidstone had undertaken such work but that the other three schools had not, he believed, been as proactive.

7. Are Free School Meals (FSM) children and their parents dissuaded from applying for a grammar school place based on barriers such as school expenses, travel time and cost? What support could be provided to encourage high achieving FSM children to apply to grammar schools in greater numbers?

Mr Read made the following suggestions for schools who wished to attract FSM children:

- Schools should be aware that glossy prospectuses could compound some families feelings that a school is not for them
- That in promoting their schools on open days etc., grammar schools should be aware that such things as trips to America may be a selling point for some parents but that they may make others feel that the school will be expensive to attend.
- That governing bodies must be encouraged to support head teachers that want to attract children from low income families. Currently they can stifle such activity with demands on performance and attachment to traditions.
- That the council should advertise more widely the exception to the KCC Home to School Transport Policy which means that FSM children can receive free transport to a Grammar School even where it is not the nearest school, if it is their nearest grammar school (and other criteria are met). Many parents, he believed, were not currently aware of this.
- That the information produced by the County Council should be available in hard copy to families on low incomes who would be the least likely to access information online. He reported that some primary schools have downloaded and printed the information for all parents at their own cost but that this relied on a supportive attitude within the primary school.

8. What in your opinion are the effects of coaching?

The new Kent Test is supposed to make coaching pupils more difficult. It scores pupils in three areas: English, Maths and Reasoning. It is not a bad thing to 'coach' children in Maths or English because this is additional learning which would not hurt any child. He believed that coaching in reasoning was more questionable as it was easier to coach for and any teaching was geared toward passing the test and not to improving a child's knowledge or education.

Some schools used their pupil premium to offer support to pupils in relation to the grammar school applications and this often took the form of additional classes. This

returned the committee to the issues raised earlier about the support or otherwise of Primary Schools. Those that did not support grammar schools would not use their pupil premium for the purpose of additional lessons geared toward encouraging grammar school selection and would therefore not offer the children in attendance the same opportunity as some others to apply for, and secure, a place at a grammar school in the county.

Mr Read said he was aware some children as young as five starting to prepare for the Kent Test; this had occurred mainly in the West of the County and, he believed, was driven largely by the super-selective schools in that area. In reality he believed that some additional lessons starting at the beginning of Year 5 would be sufficient to allow those pupils that had the potential, to have all the learning that they needed to be able to pass the test.

End of Witness Session – 1.33pm

The Chairman thanked the Committee for their attendance and considered questions and comments. Mrs Whittle also thanked the witnesses for their invaluable input. She also reported to the Committee that:

- i. The Kent Education Network had produced a report which in the interests of a fully rounded picture for members, would be circulated outside of the meeting.
- ii. That all members would be contacted regarding dates for future meetings by officers in Democratic Services in due course, and the final report would be agreed in the week commencing 11 April.
- iii. Scott Bagshaw, Head of Admissions and Transport had forwarded additional information to the Chairman which would be circulated to all members.