

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 Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 24 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

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms S Annan-Vetch (Policy Advisor), Mr D Firth (Policy Adviser), Mrs C Wade (Democratic Services Officer), Mrs J Medhurst (Democratic Services Officer) and Mr A Tait (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Michaela Lewis, Headteacher - Upton Junior School, Broadstairs and Cliff Stokes, Headteacher - Newington Community Primary School, Ramsgate
(Item 2)

1. Mrs Whittle welcomed Headteachers and members to the information sharing session to discuss possibilities for improving social mobility through increasing the numbers of FSM children within grammar schools. She invited the Headteachers to briefly describe their respective roles and responsibilities.
2. Qus. Why are disadvantaged students, who are eligible for FSM, less likely to enrol in a grammar school, despite the fact that they may be academically high achieving?

Mr Stokes explained that Primary school have children 18% of their lives- home influence is paramount. Linguistic ability is determined by the age of 3-parental engagement is key.

3. Qus Please expand-what is preschool provision for primary school intake?

Mr Stokes - The Children's Centre attached to Newington Primary does not service local families. If the Headteacher was given free rein he would like to incorporate the CC into the overall offering and would hence have far more potential to engage with all of the estate families and impact the under 3's which was crucial.

4. Qus Is the Children's Centre intake from the Estate?

Mr Stokes - No, parents drive through, they use the CC and then move on

5. Qus Do you have an outreach policy?

Mr Stokes - FLO support. We mainly work with children enrolled in school. When necessary we force engagement by making repeated 'phone calls, knock doors, distribute story sacks, instil self-regulation and enforce parental responsibility.

6. Qus We have evidence of Childrens Centres that do work well, classes run to teach parents how to read and write-do you have in-house education for parents?

Mr Stokes - Yes, daily e.g. story time sessions with all parents invited,(some parents work daytime)but still major issues reaching hardest 10%.It would be far more efficient if the HT ran the Children's Centre. He could see no reason why this would not be possible.

7. Qus Do you try and engage with Children's Centre?

Mr Stokes - Yes. I would close and reopen for the benefit of the Estate children.

8. Qus What do Children's Centre say?

Mr Stokes - Due to funding cuts they are only able to open 60% of time. Schools with a nursery attached reach 3-5 year olds more successfully and do help narrow the gap in inequality with more success than nurseries in the private sector.

9. Qus What do you think about parents perception that there is too much pressure on primary age children, what can be done to alleviate concern and foster a more positive attitude?

Mrs Lewis - Upton set homework throughout whole school, Years 5 and 6 are in preparation for secondary school, whichever school they move onto. Most primary schools provide homework clubs at the beginning or end of the school day.

Mrs Lewis - 43% of Upton children go on to grammar schools. They often coast during year 7 and grammar schools need to "up their game" to accommodate the more able students.

10. Qus Do you encourage aspirations in the deprived areas?

Mrs Lewis - Have a display in reception area-Hope and Dreams, talk about values, hard work can result in a University place.

Mr Stokes, a concentration on 'core values' such as grit.

11. Qus Is it difficult to inspire aspiration in an area where the economy is slow?

Mrs Lewis - We reinforce to parents daily that school can equip children for jobs we don't even know exist-they need the education to facilitate good life choices. Further reading key and parental aspiration.

Mr Stokes - Every assembly questions what can be done to gain higher achievement. It is a big world , not bound by the estate where they live.eg a trip to London can enthuse learning and widen horizons-life is exciting!

12. Qus. Is there evidence that greater aspirations increase 11+ take up?

Mrs Lewis - Primary schools have to get pupils Secondary ready, not Grammar ready.

Mr Stokes - At Newington, on average 6 children will go on to a selective education and 54 will not. The reaction/impact on the children will remain with them for life. Secondary school choices are lifelong reaching.

Mrs Lewis The appeal process is very dependent on the parents ability to articulate well and present a persuasive case to the Independent Panel. ML always writes a letter of support, not wanting to have the final responsibility of the child's placement. Upton has 10% pupil premium, the majority are working parents who will put energy into their appeal and evidence gathering.

13. Qus. If parents are not competent would you as HT attend appeal?

Mrs Lewis never been asked. Deputy has attended and found the whole experience very daunting (in relation to her own child).

14. Qus A, Could Members recommend/assist those with less parental encouragement-deprived backgrounds through the appeals process? Should there be ancillary assistance eg years school work?

Mr Stokes It is possible to coach for any test, could be identified in Year 5 e.g. 10 hours coaching for all to give equal access.

Mrs Lewis - 4 years ago, Upton began hiring out 2 classrooms at the weekend for coaching and parents pay £25 per 2 hour session. 120 attend with a waiting list. This is a growth market. In Thanet parents feel there is no choice other than Grammar, as parent choice for High School does not offer them with a selection of 'Good' school choices. Also over subscription criteria mean that places in the more successful High schools are difficult to obtain.

Mr Stokes PESE should not just be a snapshot on one day- there needs to be backups for those who do not perform.

Mrs Lewis - Results arrive in school before published and HT can lodge appeal. Upton appeal for approx. 30 children- to give them a chance. The process is very arbitrary, with little common criteria applied to the process, which is applied to all- not just pupil premium pupils.

Mr Stokes - I do not agree with process and do not take part. Grammar education is denied to 82% of Thanet children. They should not be segregated at age 11 and can be irrefutably harmed for future life choices.

Mrs Lewis - In Kent 11+ taken at beginning of Year 6, most of Upton children are coached throughout the 6 week summer holidays between year 5 and 6. Some parents prefer move at 13. To make fair to all, whole process must be open to all equally. Now pressure of league tables/Government targets encourage High schools to resist transfer of more able pupils and they can refuse to support parents at casual appeal later in the child's school career.

Mr Stokes Remedy is for ALL schools to be graded outstanding. Children in a Grammar school are much more likely to go to an outstanding school and children who go to a non-selective school are much more likely to attend a school which has a cause for concern. Every child should be given the opportunity of coaching financed by KCC, not through pupil premium.

Mrs Lewis - Not possible to fund from dwindling school budgets, Upton encourage parents to coach. It is possible to teach towards a test, all encouraged to enter test, give best chance. All parental meetings from Year 5 will be concerning the Kent test. Upton parents are desperate to gain a grammar place for their child. Newington, 10 minutes distance are not.

15. Qus Can Grammar schools help? Evidence of Opening Doors Project, Birmingham

Mr Stokes Do give familiarisation, Children at age 3 are so far behind, they cannot catch up at age 11. Need to consider short and long term. 0-3, 3-5 year provision, which factors work towards narrowing gap to make the start base line closer.

16. Qus Is there evidence some children refuse a Grammar place and opt to attend a High school with their friends?

Mrs Lewis No, not at Upton.

Mr Stokes 3 or 4 in my career, perception can be that High schools have superior pastoral care facilities .

17. Qus to Mr Stokes. The 11+ is a tried and tested system, why do you believe it is wrong?

Mr Stokes Tried and tested for affluent families, in general a child's life chances are defined in one day at age 11. Years 7,8 9 are wasted years in secondary school, the primary model should be continued, with assessment/selection at age 14 when children are emotionally and socially more mature.

18. Qus. Should Kent return to 13+?

Mrs Lewis Does Kent do something so special that other none-selective counties do not and therefore attain higher results? If yes, the system works, if not, is it time to try another system?

19. Qus. Is problem perception of varying school standards in Kent?

Chair-all agree every child should have access to a good or outstanding rated school.

Mrs Lewis Parents do not have the choice of every High school in Thanet being rated 'Good' or better in Thanet. Top 25% of pupils have been creamed off to grammar sector-, High schools are judged on attainment as key factor and it is not a level playing field.

If all schools were at least 'Good' then parents would have a choice but with 25% academic students in grammar then High Schools will find attainment criteria much more difficult to meet for Ofsted Good criteria, certainly for Outstanding'.

20. Qus Does coastal deprivation impact on the education in Thanet?

Mrs Lewis - In Key Stages 1 and 2 Sat's are a different type of measure to the Kent Test. How do they transfer to GCSE scores? Grammar school take most of the children scoring 4 or 5 in Sat's which cater for the top 25%.

The Chairman thanked both HT's for their input. She expressed concern about Mr Stokes views regarding the Children's Centre in Ramsgate and the lack of partnership. The Chair asked if a meeting with Mr Leeson would be helpful and Mr Stokes agreed to investigate and then contact her.

2. David Anderson, Headteacher - Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, Faversham and Andy Williamson, Headteacher - Wilmington Grammar School for Boys
(Item 3)

1. Interview with David Anderson, Headteacher, Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, Faversham & Andy Williamson Headteacher, Wilmington Boys Grammar School.
2. The Chairman welcomed David Anderson & Andy Williams to the meeting.
3. David introduced himself and gave an outline of the responsibilities of his post. He explained that he had been Head at QE since 2008, he had studied D & T at the University of London, Goldsmiths College and worked at 4 Kent Grammar Schools. He explained that QE had been a tremendous experience with a very mixed intake. As part of his responsibilities he had a national role in giving policy and advice, supporting teachers and Government Committee's etc.
4. Andy introduced himself and explained that he was Headteacher at WGSB which was a small village on the Kent border with a mixed catchment area. He had previously been Deputy Head at Hartsdown in Margate and previously at an inner city school in London. What are your FSM intake levels?
5. Andy replied that it was 2.3% in 2010 and now 9.1% overall intake; this had increased incrementally.
6. David advised that across the main school it was 6% but in years 7 and 8 it was approaching 10%.
7. Andy explained that there were other Grammar Schools in the area and they were super selective and had re-written their admission criteria so that entrance was dependent on pass mark of the Kent Test
8. David advised that the figures would continue to rise; he explained that eligibility for free school meals was top of their admission criteria. He explained that they had received 500 applications for 140 places. Priority was free school meals (over

location) and a number of students had confirmed that they were choosing QE because of this.

9. Andy went on to advise that parents who were claiming free school meals at Primary school sometimes didn't claim at grammar school as there is some stigma attached to this.

10. Would anyone be aware of FSM status?

He replied that in fact they wouldn't. He advised that a liaison officer would speak to the families concerned to allay such fears but went on to advise that parents dropping off children in Range Rovers will often come to the school gates but those in the older vehicles will drop off around the corner. He explained that this image is often reinforced in the school with perhaps Latin on a board in the Reception area. Some parents find this off putting and it is a massive part of perception of what a Grammar School is like.

David explained that he tried to make his school more accessible and carried out a lot of functions in school with Primary Schools, particularly around literature, drama and Science, trying to break down the perception that Grammar schools are too elitist.

What is the involvement like with Primary Schools? Mr Hotson stated that some schools appear to have been good and some just started in terms of outreach, he asked the two Heads how long they had been involved with Primary schools?

David advised 7/8 years and Andy replied that he had been involved for 10 years but there was always the issue of funding.

Mr Hotson asked whether this meant that they would have to cut down?

David replied that he relied on good will and a small amount from budgets for materials etc.

Andy explained that there was a huge amount of pressure and accountability and that funding needed to be prioritised. Although the use of budgets in this way is very important in terms of social inclusivity it is not measured in league tables. He went on to advise that with the focus on mandatory subjects it was often difficult to find the time for practical subjects which reduced choice. Often Pupil Premium students would choose practical subjects over foreign languages for example.

11. Were FSM student's aspirations lower? How do you use pastoral care to maintain aspirations?

David advised that it was a case of silently monitoring and knowing every student. Also, there was a Committee set up to look at aspirations and run a host of activities, competitions, visits and art exhibitions. He worked to ensure that all pupils had access to this. Recently one PP student had been to the Sahara Desert and this had been subsidised. Through the curriculum the school sought to ensure the students were performing. He advised that the school had a fantastic track record with 85% of students going onto University, a high proportion of them

being the first in their families to do so and one FSM student had gone on to study at Oxford.

12. Was there an equal % Year 7 -11 going on to years 12 and 13?

David confirmed that there was and all students had a high potential, 6/7 going on a visit to Oxford University tomorrow including PP students.

Andy agreed regarding aspirations and felt that resilience is probably higher than the average for those on PP. He gave an example of a parent falling out with his office staff and withdrawing both of his son's from WGSB . He advised that he went round to the home and persuaded the parent not to take the boys from the school. He explained that he didn't know how many other Headteacher' s would have actually done this but because he had worked in this type of community he felt that it was necessary in order to break down the social barriers.

13. Engagement is more and more common, do you find it works the other way too with senior pupils interacting with Primary Schools?

David explained that his pupils worked with local schools on a Wednesday afternoon, some primary schools worked more closely with the grammar than others. Twenty students in years 11, 12 and 13 went into Primary Schools to help with sports, teaching maths, literacy and reading.

14. Do all primary schools engage?

David explained that there were two local schools from one he would get 1 student a year and the other with a PAN of 25 he would get 18 students. There needs to be proactive relationships between Heads of Grammars and Heads of Primary Schools. He went on to say that man power in Grammar Schools is cheap (i.e. working with pupils for their mutual benefit). Grammar school students going out has also helped them to develop confidence.

15. Was there anything that the Committee could do to help network schools?

David advised that with the deregulation of schools to Academies there were fewer opportunities to come together.

Andy explained that it was different in Dartford with the DAFSCO (?) every Primary was signed up and most Grammar Schools although two had dropped out (super selectives). He advised that they met every 6 weeks and also attended conferences so therefore he was in contact with 20/30 Headteachers and learnt from them. It was self-generated in the Dartford Area. He went on to explain that there were problems within Trust Arrangements, often pupils were directed to a High School especially if there was not a Grammar School within that arrangement. .

16. They were asked about Pastoral care?

David advised that it is possible that a student may have a difficult environment at home therefore the school ran a homework club every day until 6.00p.m.

Andy advised that often many students' parents had high flying careers and didn't give their children that much time and parents of PP often give more.

Does the MAT structure, particularly where a grammar school is not included, reduce the chances of pupils (particularly FSM) to access grammar school education? Andy replied that he didn't think there was anything that could be done.

David said that some managed relatively intelligently but others don't.

Mr Bowles raised the issue of home to school transport and the fact that if a pupil wasn't attending the nearest available school then they wouldn't be eligible for transport and consequently may not attend the Grammar School. David agreed it does discourage parents.

Andy was asked if he managed to sustain the tradition of a technical college within his curriculum now that some of the other Grammar schools in Dartford were super selective? Was the specialism likely to attract some parents?

Andy replied Dartford Boys Grammar took students with a DA1 Postcode so therefore if they hadn't met the requirement of super selective then they would appeal for places in WGSB. A lot of parents just wanted a Grammar School. Lot of students travelled from Essex and London Boroughs too.

17. How much engineering is there in the curriculum?

Currently a whole day for GCSE and A level but Andy explained that he wasn't sure how long he could maintain that. 90% of students now studying 'The International Baccalaureate.'

David explained that he maintained choices as much as possible and pushed creativities.

Andy explained that because Ebacc was now the focus it didn't leave much time for other activities ie engineering

18. Have Super Selective Grammar's raised the bar and FSM figures lowered?

Could FSM children who have passed the Kent Test be prioritised in super selective schools?

Andy felt that whoever you are there should be equal entitlement. In West Kent you have to be within a catchment and in EK there is availability in the schools. Unfortunately this type of selection has been going on for decades.

Do you find a large discrepancy in ability and politics in the Primary sector? You touched on inbuilt resistance and disinterest.

David advised that there were exceptions, he was struggling to form a relationship with one school close by to him and there had been some hostility.

Andy advised that some were good and some were bad but catholic schools usually kept children within the Catholic system. .

We have met with the Open Doors Project in Birmingham; they carry out 4x 2 hour sessions and then a mock test on the 5th week. Is this anything that can be done in Kent?

David and Andy considered that it was something that could be looked at and could be interesting. Some schools tutored and some didn't. If more were involved work could be carried out on social mobility.

19. They were asked about the Kent Test Format?

David said it wasn't 100% reliable but was convenient and now shorter.

Andy felt that the new version was better.

Was it fairer?

Andy agreed it was

Andy went on to complain to the Committee about the injustice of those children taking the test from outside of the County. They carry out the test on a Saturday morning in his school. He receives a list of 250 boys names but there is no identification process. He is aware that cheating is taking place and the only way of proving it is to check handwriting against the creative writing test. This needs to change.

20. Governors have a role to play. Your views?

David confirmed that there was a good sharing of expertise and a definite benefit. Andy confirmed that the Governors were the driving force behind the school. If there was one thing that you could do to keep FSM inclusive what would it be?

David said raising aspirations in all primary schools.

Andy said to make Grammars more welcome places and not to be put off by social stereo type.

The Chairman thanked both Head Teachers for attending.

3. Alice Witty, Headteacher - Pilgrims' Way Primary School, Canterbury

(Item 4)

(1) Mrs Alice Witty is the Head Teacher at Pilgrims' Way Primary School in Canterbury which is part of the Village Academy. This is a multi-academy Trust which consists of 7 autonomous primary schools, each with its own approach and ethos. She has also held a leadership position at a local catholic primary school and worked at Bysing Wood Primary School in an area of deprivation in Faversham.

(2) Pilgrims' Way primary School is situated in an area of social deprivation. Sixty per cent of its pupils receive the Pupil Premium (15% Service Premium and 45% Free School Meals).

(3) **Why are disadvantaged students who are eligible for FSM less likely to enrol in a grammar school despite the fact that they may be academically high achieving?** This is very much a question of parental perception. There is a difference in perception from those from the larger estates and those from areas where there is a greater socio-economic mix. At Pilgrims' Way, many parents simply believe that a grammar school education is not for their children. Work is needed to help parents understand the value that a grammar school education can bring.

(4) We are able to identify children with grammar school potential at an early stage in their school careers. We talk to the parents and offer a presentation by the Family Liaison Officer.

(5) Our School puts on a great number of events for parents of pupils. These are normally very well attended. This is not the case on those days when we explain the Kent Test. Attendance at these meetings is very low, even though we go so far as to personally invite some of the parents. They do not believe that a grammar school could be more suitable for their child than a high school.

(6) The parents had an expectation that their children would go on to attend the Chaucer School. When it closed, we had to provide support to many parents who were worried that their child would need to take a bus to The Spires School. Even thinking about a grammar school is a step further than this.

(7) Our approach to engaging with and raising expectations amongst parents has been to provide enjoyable activities for parents to attend with their children. This has led to more events and higher attendance. Examples of events that have taken place on parents' days are phonics and cyber bullying. We also invite parents to come in and sit in on classes. Before we started this programme, many parents would not even come onto the playground. We feel that if we continue to drip feed the positives to parents, we will find more parents willing to put their children forward for the Kent Test. At present, though, many parents would find it difficult to walk through the gates of a grammar school.

(8) **We recently had a session where we learned about the Opening Doors Strategy in Birmingham which aims to increase awareness of opportunity and address issues of access and affordability. Do you believe such a strategy aimed at the most vulnerable cohort be of value?** Such a programme would be a very positive development for the children. I am not sure whether this would translate into greater numbers taking the Kent Test. Parents have held their views about grammar schools since they were born. These views will have been reinforced because they will never have seen their friends and acquaintances from the estates in which they live going to a grammar school.

(9) **Are Grammar Schools doing enough Outreach work?** Not a lot. The reason for this is that they will, understandably, prioritise those schools which usually provide the greatest proportion of their intake. Unfortunately, this does not help those schools where the number taking the Kent Test is particularly low.

(10) **Could you tell us about the approach to the Kent Test adopted by Gurkha families?** The Gurkha families are very keen to take the Kent Test – even when it is not really appropriate for them to do so. A large number of the parents who attend our Kent Test sessions are from a Gurkha background. Now that the barracks have closed, we are no longer seeing the MoD effect (movement of families every two years), although we still see financial support from the MoD which enables people to settle well after their military careers are over.

(11) **Are you getting support from *Virtual School Kent*?** We have not seen any evidence of this for Children in Care.

(12) With regard to CiC and FSM children, it would certainly help if Year 7 and 8 children could come to our school and talk positively about grammar schools. Our children have responded positively when pupils from local comprehensive schools have come to speak to us.

(13) **You say that you have some pupils from a more mixed socio-economic background. Do their perceptions differ from the others?** Our intake comes predominantly from two estates. There are also some FSM pupils who live just outside Canterbury and near Faversham. Their parents seem to be more likely to consider working with their children to take the Kent Test. Those who live on the estates sometimes appear to have lower expectations. They will often say that they prefer a high school because they want their child to be happy. They also express the concern that their child might get bullied if they were seen wearing a grammar school uniform.

(14) **Do you feel that Kent would be better off if it adopted the Buckinghamshire system where everyone takes the Test?** Yes. We have to put in a lot of work to try to convince parents to take the Kent Test. The barriers of perception would no longer be there if everyone simply took the Test. The parents certainly trust our school not to put undue strain on their children. At the moment, the act of signing the form can be a very significant decision indeed. This is particularly true if the child does not actually succeed.

(15) Taking and passing the Kent Test are very different issues. It would be useful to develop a scholarship scheme. I have worked in a number of schools including catholic schools which do not agree with the Kent Test. I have not, however, come across hostility to the grammar schools themselves. In my view, many primary schools which have similar circumstances to Pilgrims' Way tend to prioritise rapidly improving attainment throughout the cohort whilst hoping that some pupils will gain a grammar school place.

(16) **How can FSM children be supported when they gain admission to a grammar school?** The pupils would need support when they got to grammar school. This would include the homework ethos and more academic support. An example of the work that this would entail is that Pilgrims' Way has a major programme aimed at extending its pupils' vocabulary. This would need to be maintained through mentoring. I believe that this mentoring support should be available to many of our former pupils for at least a year. One of the possible reasons that parents are reluctant to put their children forward for the Kent Test may well be that they feel that they would not be able to offer the academic support that their children would require. I agree with those who say that Homework Clubs are beneficial to both FSM children and those who come from career-orientated families who may also be unable to offer the necessary level of support.

(17) **Would it help if you were allowed to coach FSM pupils in the Kent Test?** I feel that a positive discrimination approach would be most effective in increasing the numbers of pupils applying for the Kent Test – pupils would see peers attending grammar school. Many pupils are privately tutored in preparation for the Kent Test. Should positive discrimination not be suitable, allowing schools to tutor, an 'opt out' system and/or a scholarship system would create a much more level playing field. Whether or not coaching/tutoring supports pupils in passing can be debated, however I believe that the very act of preparing a child over a period of time would give that

child the belief, and the desire, that they could go to a grammar school. The most important thing we need to do is to empower children to believe “I can do it.”