

Select Committee - Grammar Schools and Social Mobility

22 February 2016

Biography

Conor Ryan – Director, Research and Communications, Sutton Trust

Conor leads on the Trust's communications, policy and research work. 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.

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Hearing 7: Monday 22nd February 2016

Witness Guide for Members

Below are suggested themes and questions. They have been provided in advance to the witnesses to allow them to prepare for the types of issues that Members may be interested to explore. All Members are welcome to ask these questions or pose additional ones to the witnesses via the Committee Chairman.

Themes and Questions

Conor Ryan – Director, Research and Communications, Sutton Trust

- Please introduce yourself and provide an outline of the roles and responsibilities of your post.
- Why do you think children eligible for free school meals are currently underrepresented in grammar schools?
- What do you think are the barriers for FSM children and what can be done to address them?
- Do you think grammar schools aid or hinder social mobility and what more can be done to have a positive impact?
- The school admissions code allows academies to give preference to pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium. Are there good examples where this has happened and what impact it has had?
- The Poor Grammar report found that, in selective local authorities, high achieving FSM children were less likely to attend grammar school than their similarly academic non FSM peers. What reasons are behind this significant difference in high achieving pupils?
- One important factor, which the Sutton Trust identified, was the use of private tuition. What could be done to ensure this does not provide a barrier to disadvantaged children?
- Sutton Trust research reported grammar school head teachers felt that primary schools play an important role in encouraging parents from disadvantaged families to consider sending their children to grammar schools. What more could primary schools do to encourage their higher achieving pupils to apply? And are you aware of any good examples where this is happening?
- What good examples are you aware of where primary schools are successfully using Pupil Premium to support high achieving FSM children to access grammar schools?
- What, if any, is the impact of school partnerships or Multi-academy Trusts on the educational journey of children? For example does having a grammar school in the partnership or Multi-academy Trust incentivise FSM children to access grammar schools?
- Sutton Trust research found parents from disadvantaged backgrounds often associate their schools with tradition, middle class values and elitism, creating a social rather than an educational barrier that makes them reluctant to send their child to the local grammar. What more could primary and grammar schools do to engage with parents? And are you aware of any good examples where this is happening?

- Are there ways that grammar schools as a whole and / or individual grammar schools can make a difference to the proportion and performance of disadvantaged pupils in their schools?
- What other changes to the admissions process have been considered by grammar schools, such as changes to testing, lower pass mark for FSM children and changes to over-subscription criteria?
- The Poor Grammar report found that pupils who live further from a grammar school are significantly less likely to gain admission to one. To what extent is the cost of travelling a barrier for poorer pupils?
- Are there any other issues that you would like to raise with the Committee?