

Proposal to expand Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for Boys Consultation Summary

Public Engagement

1. Drop in session.

Held at Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for Boys, on 12 November 2019

1 person attended

2. Public Meeting

A full public meeting was hosted by the Weald of Kent Grammar School on the Wilderness site on 20 November 2019. It was chaired by Sarah Hamilton, Deputy Cabinet Member for Education and Skills. The Panel comprised:

- Ian Watts, Area Education Officer for North Kent, KCC
- Amanda Simpson, Head Teacher at Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for Boys
- Philip Drew, Chair of Governors at Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for Boys

62 people attended.

Consultation Responses

Summary of the responses received:

	In Favour	Undecided	Opposed	Totals	Percent
Governors	1			1	0.2%
Staff	3	1		4	0.7%
Parent / carer	352	4	17	373	77.0%
Pupils	2			2	0.4%
Other	52	10	15	77	11.4%
Totals	410	15	32	457	
Percent	89.7%	3.3%	7.0%		

Equality of provision

We received many comments in support of the proposal that said that the expansion of Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for boys into Sevenoaks would result in there being parity between Sevenoaks girls and boys who are seeking a selective education.

Comments from those not in support of the proposal were also received. Some examples are:

- We fully support the proposal to open a Sevenoaks-based annexe of TWGSB to enable boys from Sevenoaks and surrounding villages to equally benefit (as girls do) from a LOCAL grammar provision.
- The Sevenoaks region lacks enough provision for boys suitable for grammar.
- As a resident of Sevenoaks in close proximity to the Wildernesse site, I strongly agree that it is crucial that better Grammar School provision is made for boys in Sevenoaks, in the same way the Weald of Kent has provided for girls in the area.
- The Sevenoaks region lacks enough provision for boys suitable for grammar. My daughter has the opportunity of 5 schools in which we are in the catchment area of, two of which are super selective. However, my son will only have one grammar school option or two super selectives. This addition would make a huge difference to the lives of many parents and boys who do not want to move to get into catchment areas.
- I truly hope this goes ahead and we increase the number of grammar places available to boys in the area.
- I fully support this plan of an extension of grammar provision to include a boy's annex in Sevenoaks. I think it's awful for young children in the area who pass the 11+ to have to travel such a long way just to get to school. Leaving home at 7.15 to get the school bus to Tonbridge or further afield and arriving back home at 5pm as children in the village have to do, in order to be able to attend a grammar school is such a strain on them, and that's without them attending any after school clubs, which with the limited school bus options is extremely difficult. Sevenoaks is a big community, with 1000s of children, many of who pass the 11+ and to have all these children travel so far is crazy, local provision is required for our boys to benefit from in the same way that our local Sevenoaks girls have been able to do.
- It is unfair if boys have a more difficult time than girls getting into a school that is appropriate to their ability. This has been a long-term issue in West Kent, so I fully support the proposal to remedy it.
- Our village appears to be in something of a "black hole" for non-super selective grammar school education for boys. Despite being in the catchment area for Wilmington Grammar School for Boys, recently boys have been unable to gain a place there despite passing the Kent test. There is no other local non-super selective grammar school for boys in the area. Boys are at a distinct disadvantage to girls in this part of Kent and I believe this to be grossly unfair and quite discriminatory.
- Following the admission criteria changes in Skinners School in 2019, the shortage has been even more severe for boys from the Sevenoaks area. Comparing the admissions between boys and girls, there is also a clearly visible disparity (bordering on discrimination) based on the sex of the child. The proposed annexe would go some way to alleviating the problem.

- We would not be supportive of any expansion of the grammar school system as we believe that selective education essentially favours children who can be supported with the Kent Test process, impairs social mobility and is non-progressive. There are some parents who don't send their sons to grammar schools as they feel they are too far away and for these boys, it opens up new opportunities for them. It won't only benefit those who choose to go there – it will also free up some places for oversubscribed Sevenoaks secondary schools e.g. Trinity. I wholeheartedly urge the KCC to move forward with these plans.
- One of the reasons for the application by Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for Boys is that Sevenoaks boys who pass the Kent test should have the opportunity to attend a grammar school closer to them. Whilst this may seem commendable because Sevenoaks children may benefit from the new provision, it will have an adverse impact on children attending other schools in Tunbridge Wells and elsewhere in and out of the county. The places that will go to Sevenoaks children will inevitably reduce the number of higher attaining pupils entering the other schools/academies in Tunbridge Wells and consequently have a significant adverse impact on the results of those schools/academies can hope to secure, particularly given the weighting of top grades at GCSE favouring the most able students.

Bus Service

The consultation returned a significant number of comments that highlighted that the bus services were already overloaded and sought assurances that additional bus provisions would be laid on. For example:

- Students currently struggle to get on certain buses because Weald finishes later than Trinity and the buses then leave without them and won't wait. Discussions with the bus companies need to take place to ensure that the boys will actually be able to get to and from school.
- Need improved bus links from surrounding areas, specifically Eynsford, Edenbridge, Four Elms, Ide Hill to Sevenoaks.
- Will there be adequate buses to serve an additional school? The car park is very overcrowded at the moment, how will this be improved.
- Increasingly concerned about travel to schools by public transport. Apart from the wasted time, it's not appropriate for 11-year-old children to be spending such lengths of unsupervised time with older children. Already aware of issues of bullying and what with winter months travel happens in dark making long journeys risky for young children.
- Buses overcrowded with standing room only which surely is a huge safety issue?

- There is conflict between pupils at Trinity & Weald, particularly on the buses. They are overcrowded, as is the car park, so the addition of another annexe is a concern from a capacity perspective. The bus companies need to put on additional services.
- Shared schools' area very congested, buses overcrowded as full of Trinity pupils whose timetable ends at 3.30pm and Weald's at 3.40pm so concerned about safety.
- How do KCC propose to manage extra load to existing overloaded transport provision.
- Buses are congested to the point pupils refuse to get. Bus sailed past stop leaving a group of girls stranded.
- Request guarantee that additional bus services will be provide on all routes as current provision is inadequate and there is a dangerous level of overcrowding on some routes.
- The buses are packed to capacity and pupils can sometimes struggle to get on. One thing that perhaps could help would be to have a dedicated shuttle bus between Sevenoaks station and the Wildernesse site. This would provide easier access to the school for pupils who are travelling by train, without having to cram on to buses that are already full of pupils travelling from further away.

KCC Grammar Education Policy

This consultation returned some comments that were critical of national and KCC policies towards grammar education.

- The council appears to be offering a school system that breeds inequality. There is a progress 8 score of -0.31% in Kent High Schools and a progress score of +0.45 in Kent Grammar Schools. How can this be fair? KCC should address the fact that their selective school system is offering inequality of opportunity. The Council should not expand selective schools when there are clear evidence grammar schools suppress the performance of other local schools.
- Don't support this proposal because the evidence is that grammar schools do not improve education standards and because they create bigger divisions between advantaged and disadvantaged young people. The free school meals data alone makes this clear.
- Can't support a system that selects children based on one test they do on one day rather than a system that brings together children from all backgrounds for a high quality comprehensive education, which has been proven to work throughout the UK since most counties abolished grammar schools in the 1970s.
- It is highly likely that the proposed "annex" arrangement risks KCC being involved in an expensive legal challenge. The current Sevenoaks "annex" no longer complies with its commitment to operate as an integrated shared facility dual site school. The existing Sevenoaks "annex" is also vulnerable to a legal challenge

to continue operating as an academically selective school. The Schools Admission Code prohibits new schools adopting academic selection as part of its admission arrangements. The attempt to set up another “annex” can be seen as an attempt to circumvent the law, which prohibits new selective schools.

- Most Kent non-selective schools have sets and streams to meet high attainers needs. This dispels any need for an entire school system to revolve around divided 25/75 school places. The council is prioritising ‘parental choice’ rather than looking at this logically.
- Kent should halt spending on grammar school expansion until it can demonstrate that the Kent Test is supported by Kent residents.
- Figures provided by KCC show that TWGSB have for the last five years, consistently offered a significant number of places, via the appeals process, to boys who were not assessed as suitable for grammar. The admission of these non-grammar assessed boys has, on average, resulted in an additional class each year, with students who would have otherwise attended a non-selective school.
- The new reinvigorated push for illegal so called 'annexe or satellite' grammar schools is based on two criteria; snobbery and prejudiced educational apartheid. In my view, every child in the state system should have access to a non-selective, universally available education of an equal high standard.
- I believe that KCC should halt spending on grammar school expansion until it can demonstrate that the Kent Test is supported by Kent residents. A review of the test would help do that and should be carried out before any further money is spent.
- KCC supports damaging equal opportunities and social cohesion by promoting the segregation of children from the age of 10, many sitting the 11+ when they are 9 and a few weeks old.
- Oppose the proposal of introducing grammar schools by stealth. It is all about divide and rule for the Tory Party.
- It is absolutely disgusting in this day and age that grammar schools are still in existence, let alone being expanded (possibly illegally).

Availability of Grammar School Places in Sevenoaks

There were a couple of comments that highlighted concerns about the availability of sufficient selective places.

- I am the headteacher of a local primary school and am very concerned about the availability and allocation of selective places in North West Kent. Over the past few years it has become increasingly apparent that there are insufficient selective places, particularly for boys, in the Sevenoaks area. Our specific location, between Dartford and Sevenoaks/Tunbridge Wells, is out of most school catchment areas and this has been detrimental to several of our pupils who, having passed the selection test, have not been able to access a Grammar

school place, even after the appeals process. Last year NONE of our pupils were offered a place at Wilmington Boys Grammar School, despite having passed the selection test with scores well over the aggregate. The proposal to open a satellite, 3 form entry school, based on the former Wildernessee site, may go some way to providing a medium term solution to the problem, but it is imperative that more places are made available by September 2020 if we are not going to be faced again with the situation of selective pupils being placed in non-selective schools. This renders the entire process meaningless and removes any parental faith in the system.

- Acutely aware that spaces for grammar school are limited, more so for Sevenoaks applicants given the changes in entry criteria for Skinners that will actively disadvantage children living in Sevenoaks.
- Desirable but should be addressed via a separate grammar school being created, with its own headteacher and complement of teaching staff. It is not a good idea to run a school over two sites. This experiment has been tried by WoK and it is not working. The scheme should be changed to operate a mixed sex grammar school separate from both WoK and TWBG – leaving those heads free to concentrate on their already large and complex education facilities

Traffic

Traffic concerns featured several times, particularly from local residents. For example:

- As a local resident I understand there may be traffic issues, but this should be considered in the context of a reduction in commuting traffic for boys attending grammar schools outside the district.
- A good idea in theory to allow a boys grammar onto this site, due to the expansion of Trinity and the significant traffic problems this current site is causing to the area, I am against a further 90 boys being put on this particular site, and as such am against this proposal.
- The traffic lights outside the school by the A25 do not have a crossing on them for pedestrians so children wanting to cross the road have to run across when the lights change direction. This is not safe but if adjusted perhaps more children would walk to school.
- Seal Hollow road entrance & junction with the A25 is already very congested and surrounding roads with parents dropping off/picking up children, how will this be addressed?
- Need to work with Highways in relation to cycle paths as its certainly a viable transport option and all 3 schools would benefit from this.
- As residents we have on occasion been unable to get into our own driveway, without having to queue when it is school going home/pick up and set down times.

- Concerned with a third school joining the site would result in additional bus and car journeys to the site, adding further delays. The new bus drop-off and parking area (currently under construction) will remove the problem of buses crossing the A25 into Seal Hollow Road but will only shift the problem further down the road. How can you assure us that there will be no further impact?

Travel to School Time

This subject featured very frequently with respondents being generally supportive of anything that reduced the student travelling time. For example:

- Far too many boys have to travel out of the Sevenoaks area to attend school
- Boys from our village currently have to leave home at around 7.10am every day to get to the nearest non super-selective grammar school and often don't return home until after 5pm which is unacceptable at such a young age.
- I do not see how it is appropriate to expect children of 11 years and up to commute to Tunbridge Wells; this is further than many people commute for their jobs.
- Sevenoaks and Kent need to meet increased demand for secondary schools. Leaving aside the debate on selective education, this should address the ludicrous situation of children being forced to do a journey of up to 25 miles (up to three hours) every day. These journeys are dangerous, time-consuming, environmentally unfriendly, cause congestion, for students, parents and teachers.
- Expecting children to travel 2-3 hours per day, (dependent on often unreliable public transport) to attend school is unacceptable and should not be a barrier, as it currently is, for boys striving to achieve a place at a Kent grammar school.
- The requirement to travel from Sevenoaks to Tonbridge or Tunbridge Wells for grammar school provision seriously impacts the school day lives of affected boys (it reduces opportunity for extra-curricular activities, make them more tired, has safety consequences etc). It is right and fair that there should be a boy's grammar annexe in Sevenoaks.
- Commuting to Tunbridge Wells means my sons are up to 6.30am for the 7.30am bus and get back to the house around 5pm which is quite a long day considering that homework still needs to be completed, they need to eat, relax and prepare themselves for the next day!
- Whilst I fully recognize the argument that many boys have to travel at cost and time to Tunbridge Wells for secondary grammar education and can see the sense in the provision in Sevenoaks, my view is that there simply isn't sufficient space on the Wildernesse site for 3 secondary schools, let alone the local infrastructure or capacity amongst the community for another expansion.

Internal Facilities

There were several comments raised about the pressures on the internal facilities, and the positive and negative opinions of sharing outside social space.

- The lack of any additional space in the canteen, it is already full of long queues and the girls' school only have years 7-9 attending. They don't have enough space to eat, often having to sit on the floor to have their lunch! Sharing of the main hall will also be stretching the use of this space. Surely the boys school should have their own hall that they can use for their own activities and assemblies so as not to impact on the girls using this space and timetable conflicts.
- I would fully support the proposal if it was modified to ensure that each of the TW Grammar and Weald Grammar had their own separate cafeteria/dining area and separate school halls. The cafeteria/dining area at the Sevenoaks site is already very congested at lunch time. I'm concerned that having two schools sharing the lunch space would be disruptive. I also think it is important that each school preserves its own identity and culture through separate school halls and dining areas.
- I am a member of staff at Weald so I understand the logistics behind a dual site school but also believe it truly is one school. I therefore suggest the same model for TWGSB. Knowing the size of the dining room and canteen and hall at Weald Sevenoaks campus I do believe it is essential TWGSB are given their own dining room, but I do support some integration of girls and boys.
- In favour of the boy's grammar sharing the site with the girls grammar school as this will help their social skills and their personal development.
- Boys annexe should be entirely separate to the girl's school, so they remain single sex. The boys will need their own separate dining areas as there is already limited space.
- Having chosen a single sex environment, I do not wish there to be any shared spaces. Need separate dining space for the boys.

Sports and Outdoor Facilities

The provision of sufficient sports facilities featured in some responses. Other responses indicated concerns about how the facilities will be shared between all three schools.

- My concerns for the proposal are how the outside space will be shared.
- Outdoor space is already limited and share with Trinity. Will additional space be provided?
- The astro pitch is currently shared between Trinity and Weald. I am concerned that the demands of another school would impact on the availability of the facility for both schools. There should be a proposal to increase external play space on site.

- In order to accommodate the numbers and preserve the girls access to PE as an essential part of their education and health, a separate multi-use sports pitch should be made available for use of both schools.
- There couldn't possibly be all the clubs available in Sevenoaks for only 90 boys compared to what is available in Tunbridge Wells. But I feel that these are so important that there should be at least be some for the first boys to come through the school to attend, perhaps a choir and some sports clubs.
- The existing sports hall would presumably be shared between Weald of Kent and Tunbridge Wells Grammar. How would this managed to ensure that this is timetabled to provide unrestricted indoor sports facilities for both schools, separate changing facilities and that there is no security risk to personal possessions between pupils of different schools.

General comments and support

Lastly, many responses made more general comments about the proposal. These included messages of support, school management issues, local infrastructure and the distances between the two sites.

- I fully support this proposal; it makes absolute sense to have a Boys Grammar Annexe in Sevenoaks.
- I wholeheartedly support the proposal. It is long overdue in Sevenoaks to provide a grammar school for boys. Not only will this be better for the boys it will save families expensive fares and unreliable buses. It will be better for the climate as they will be able to walk to school and healthier for the boys.
- These proposals will have a number of positive impacts; reduced travel time for pupils, reduced travel costs, reduced pollution, reduced child safety risks. These are real benefits to real pupils. Child safety and welfare issues combined with environmental benefits must surely trump the politically motivated views of those trying to prevent access to grammar school education.
- Concerned that an annex in a town some distance away will take away resources and staffing from the Tunbridge Wells site. Since starting at TWGSB my son has been taught by a variety of supply teachers because of staff shortages so I think energy and money would be better improving the Tunbridge Wells site instead of siphoning away funds. Think school should just concentrate on the pupils they have already.
- Will construction noise be limited, especially during exam time, so as not to disturb the students.
- After witnessing the real growth & popularity of local schools, the demand for entry into infant & primary level must put pressure on local schools. With this in mind, satellite annexe departments if not 'whole secondary schools' are required.

- There is a large number of new homes being built in the area, Ryewood, Rye Lane, development of MoD site at Knockholt providing circa 1,000 new homes so we need more infrastructure to support.
- Chose WoK grammar due to excellent progress 8 score and GCSE/A level results it achieves but are concerned that the results of TWGSB not nearly as strong and appear on the decline; hence I would like reassurance that the teaching aspects of the schools will remain separate.
- Do not believe it is possible for HT to fully support two school sites which are geographically more than 10 miles apart.
- Teaching staff will need to travel to and from sites. This will be a waste of time and money as well as being harmful to the environment.
- Students at the Sevenoaks annexe will not feel that they belong to Tunbridge Wells Grammar School as they are too far away geographically. Sevenoaks students visiting the Tunbridge Wells site fortnightly is unlikely to be practical, as proved by the Weald annexe.
- Creating a shared campus for Trinity and two grammar annexes seems to make sense in a time of squeezed resources and limited availability of land and could offer further opportunities in the future for the schools to share resources that might not otherwise be affordable for three schools on separate sites.