

## **Scrutiny Briefing Note: Improving Choice in Education - Supplemental Information**

1. This note has been prepared in response to the questions raised following the call-in of the Improving Choice in Education paper. Each of the questions has been addressed in turn below.
2. **A Selective School or a selective stream**
  - 2.1. Under the Admissions code a selective school is one where the admission arrangements apply to all pupils equally with the main criteria involving a ranking system based on the results of an entrance examination.
  - 2.2. Those same regulations enable schools to admit a proportion of their places based on the aptitude of the applicants, typically sport or music. A selective stream foresees the potential for future regulations to allow this type of partial entry based on academic aptitude or entrance examination. This is already being combined with low income status at some selective schools to create a positive opportunity for disadvantaged pupils.
3. **The extent of proposed delegations**
  - 3.1. The ambition of the recommendations is to allow officers to explore innovative ideas with any school or education provider, ahead of specific government regulations, which creates an opportunity to further improve the range and quality of education within the borough. This report does not delegate any financial resources to any scheme and it is expected that any proposal which requires such support will be subject to existing procedures for such commitment.
  - 3.2. If any proposals for the provision of new selective school places, either as a wholly new school or the addition of a selective stream, do come forward then any consultation will need to assess the arguments for and against with reference to the specific details of the proposal.
  - 3.3. In considering or responding to any proposal(s), the Royal Borough will want to consider particularly the impact on existing comprehensive schools and the Free School Meals attainment gap. Consideration would need to be given to what measures could be introduced to offset these impacts (e.g. limiting the proportion of selective places; making places specifically available to children from disadvantaged backgrounds; using a test that can measure ability, but can't be practiced or tutored for; allowing entry to grammar schools at different ages).
4. **Options for increasing choice**
  - 4.1. In recent years the proportion of families securing their first choice of school has been below the national average. The Royal Borough has a policy of attempting to create 10% excess school place capacity to enable choice to operate more effectively. The Royal Borough is already investing £30m in the expansion of secondary school places to create the environments the schools need to deliver high quality education.
  - 4.2. The 13% of our residents who apply for a grammar school have less chance of securing their places as they are additional to the needs of the home authorities for the current grammar schools. Some families will only consider local schools which takes grammar schools out of their choice because of the current school locations. A local selective option will increase their choice.
  - 4.3. The borough is already well served by schools of other types including single gender and Christian faith as well as offering both two- and three- tier options.

## 5. The arguments for and against selective education

5.1. There is ongoing debate about the advantages and disadvantages of selective education. Some of the main points made for and against are briefly summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1 – some of the arguments made for and against selective education**

Some arguments made in favour of selective education:	Some arguments made against selective education:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grammar schools achieve better academic performance.</li> <li>• Grammar schools allow 'bright' children from disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve their full potential.</li> <li>• Intelligent children can be challenged and stretched, due to a more equal level of ability in class.</li> <li>• Children in grammar schools are less likely to be bullied for wanting to achieve academically.</li> <li>• Many parents want their child to go to a grammar school.</li> <li>• Other kinds of selection already happen – e.g. selection by 'house price'.</li> <li>• Grammar schools are beacons of excellence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having grammar schools leads to lower overall academic performance in the area.</li> <li>• Selective areas have a higher 'attainment gap' than non-selective areas.</li> <li>• Wealthier parents can afford tutoring so that their children have a better chance of passing the 11+.</li> <li>• Selection at 11 inevitably results in some children not passing, effectively branding them as 'failures'.</li> <li>• The 11+ is too early.</li> <li>• Primary schools end up prepping pupils for the test, rather than the National Curriculum.</li> <li>• Comprehensive schools suffer, becoming secondary moderns, with lower attainment, a narrower curriculum and so on, thereby perpetuating the divide.</li> </ul>

5.2. There have been a number of studies about the impact of selective education. One of the most authoritative is Evidence on the effects of selective educational systems, for the Sutton Trust. Although this dates from October 2008 it is still cited, and by both sides of the debate. The report is relatively non-committal, saying both "pupils in grammar schools do a little better than similar pupils in other schools, with the difference between zero and three-quarters of a GCSE grade per subject" and "these same pupils were already making more progress from KS1 to KS2...there are good reasons to be cautious in describing this as a grammar school effect". The Executive Summary (containing both these quotes) is attached to this paper.

5.3. A more recent study Grammar schools and social mobility for the Education Policy Institute, published in September 2016, states "At a national level...there appears to be no overall impact of selective school, either positive or negative". The study also notes, however, that "only 30.1 per cent of pupils on free school meals in wholly selective areas achieved 5 A\*-C grades (including English and Maths) compared to 33.3 per cent in non-selective areas". In addition, "positive grammar school effects on attainment decline as the proportion of pupils attending grammar schools rises...in the most selective areas [there is] a small negative effect of not attending grammar schools". These quotes are again from the Executive Summary to the report, attached to this paper.

5.4. Both reports focus on the KS4 rather than KS5, and also don't investigate some of the other implications – e.g. selection by house price or any psychological impacts arising from not passing the 11+.

### Consultation response process

5.5. The consultation responses have been drafted by the Council's education officers with reference to public materials, such as the reports by the Chief Inspector of Schools and other reputable sources, which provide general evidence such as the impact of leadership on school quality, the prevalence of SEND in grammar schools.

5.6. The draft answers were then reviewed at a Lead Councillor Briefing prior to wider circulation as per the documentation history in section 18 of the main report.