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Support for grammar schools is high and growing

An overwhelming majority of the public support the autonomy and continued existence of England's 164 grammar schools and the 68 in Northern Ireland.

An opinion poll carried out by ICM for the National Grammar Schools Association (NGSA) has found 70% of those questioned support the retention of the 232 grammar schools in England and Northern Ireland as self-governing state schools and additional, voluntary choice for parents. 19% oppose the idea and 10% don't know.

Asked if they would support the introduction of some new state grammar schools, especially in urban areas where there currently are none, 76% support the idea, 17% oppose it and 6% don't know. Support for grammars is strong across all age and income groups with a remarkable 85% of 18 to 24 year-olds (first time voters) wanting more grammar schools.

Similar questions put by ICM for the NGSA in March 2006 found that 61% opposed attacks on grammar schools by politicians and 70% would like to see new grammar schools introduced in England.

'The popularity of politicians is at an extremely low level and a general election is due very soon', said Robert McCartney QC, the chairman of the NGSA. 'It's unbelievable that none of our three largest political parties seriously supports either existing grammar schools or the idea of opening new ones where there's parental demand. If they want our votes, they should offer what the public wants.'

In the absence of top-level political support, the effectiveness and existence of many of England's grammar schools are threatened by various initiatives. These include 'federating' with a less successful, non-grammar school; merging grammar and non-selective schools to form a comprehensive academy; and 'federating' two single-sex grammar schools to form one co-educational school. Such measures usually mean that fewer 11-year-olds are offered the opportunity of a grammar school education.

Politicians have attempted to ban academic selection in Northern Ireland using regulations but this year, the grammar schools there have produced and administered their own tests. At just under 14,000, the number of voluntary applicants for the tests in Northern Ireland has barely fallen below last year's levels, when the tests were officially regulated.

***Further information or comment from: Robert McCartney, Tel. 02890 424006.**

Note for editors: ICM interviewed a random sample of 1015 adults aged 18+, by telephone between 5 and 7 February 2010. Interviews were conducted across the country and the results have been weighted to the profile of all adults. ICM is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Further information at www.icmresearch.co.uk

National Grammar Schools Association

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