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**National Grammar Schools  
Association Meeting with  
Secretary of State  
for Education**

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**Wednesday 12th February 2003**

# **Agenda for Meeting**

1. Introduction
  - Brian Wills-Pope
2. Evidence of performance in Selective Systems
  - Nick Seaton
3. Admissions/Adjudicator/Discrimination against parents
  - John Harris
4. Destructive effects of current campaigns
  - Nigel Briers
5. Discussion
  - Brian Wills-Pope

## 2. Evidence of Performance in Selective Systems - Nick Seaton

The government's 'Statement of Values in Education and the Community' says: '**We value truth, freedom, justice and human rights**'. So why do education ministers and their civil servants ignore this commitment?

Speaking to the House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Skills on 11 December 2002, Secretary of State Charles Clarke said the argument about academic selection should not need to be, nor should it be, '**a purely ideological argument...it should be an argument that is founded entirely on standards, on a real assessment of what is happening to educational standards.**' The Secretary of State also said that 'selection inhibits opportunities for significant numbers of people' and that LEAs with selective schools should look at their own practices self-critically – '**education standards have to be tested in this area**'.

The NGSA agrees about the importance of standards over ideology. But results from secondary modern schools and other evidence contradict Mr Clarke's assertion that 'selection inhibits opportunities for significant numbers of people'. This statement is simply not true. The NGSA therefore wishes to draw the attention of the Secretary of State, and other policy-makers and opinion-formers, to the following:

On 17 January 2003, Mr Clarke told *The Times* that his Department had found that 'the top 25 per cent of pupils in comprehensives achieved better results than children in grammar schools'. This was a misguided repetition of so-called 'evidence' produced by the Department for Education's Analytical Services, which was published in the House of Lords on 6 April 2000. Education ministers had published these figures in support of an earlier claim by Baroness Blackstone that the brightest pupils do better at comprehensive schools than at grammar schools. They were so obviously flawed and manipulated to disadvantage grammar schools, they should have carried a government 'health warning'.

**The DfEE's Analytical Services had made basic errors, which most bright 16-year-olds would have spotted. The Department's statisticians did not compare like with like. Instead, they compared results achieved by only the top 25 per cent of comprehensive pupils with the results of ALL grammar school pupils. Because 5 or more grade A\*-C GCSEs were taken as the benchmark and 45 per cent of comprehensive pupils reached this level, any calculation based on any proportion of their top pupils which was under 45 per cent was bound to show 100 per cent success. (Using the same 'logic', because the top 33 per cent of secondary modern pupils achieved 5 or more grade A\*-Cs, if ONLY the top 25 per cent of their pupils were considered, they too would show 100 per cent success.)** And because most schools of whatever type have some pupils who, for a variety of reasons, fail to get a higher grade, by including all the grammar school pupils and comparing them with only the highest achievers (ie the top percentage) in other types of school, civil servants ensured that the grammar schools were very unfairly disadvantaged in their calculations.

As Fred Naylor has pointed out, if ministers and their officials genuinely wanted to compare the performance of the highest achieving 25 per cent of pupils in the selective and comprehensive systems, they would have concentrated on 5 or more GCSE A\*-B grades which, in the year 2000, were achieved by 27.1 per cent of the cohort.

Figures for 15 year-old pupils in maintained schools were:

	<b>5+ GCSE grades A*- B</b>
Grammar schools	82.6%
Secondary modern schools	10.6%
Comprehensive schools	22.7%
<b>England (total)</b>	<b>27.1%</b>

**On this basis, grammar schools are clearly performing way above the national average and comprehensive schools are performing below it.** So unless the objective is equality of result (ie ideological) rather than equality of opportunity, **to expand the comprehensive system at the expense of grammar schools, or to undermine selective schools or systems, cannot in any way be justified on the grounds of improving educational standards.**

If, moreover, we look at the percentage increase over time among 15-year-old pupils in the maintained sector achieving 5-plus grades A\*-C GCSEs (or equivalent), the figures are as follows:

	<b>1967</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>Percentage increase 1967-1999</b>
Grammars	65.6	96.4	47*
Secondary moderns	2.1	32.8	1,462
Comprehensives	13.6	45.0	231
<b>National</b>	<b>17.8</b>	<b>46.6</b>	<b>162</b>

\*N.B. The grammar schools are subject to a 'ceiling effect', because it would be logically impossible for them to have recorded a percentage increase of more than 53 per cent.

**It can be seen that the secondary modern schools exhibit far and away the greatest improvement. This means, of course, that better exam results in recent years cannot be the product of ending selective education – if that were so, why is the largest improvement in the secondary modern sector?** This is confirmed by the fact that a very similar overall rise (c. 1,000%) has been attained by the secondary modern schools in Northern Ireland over the same period, suggesting the greatest improvements are in selective areas.

The superiority of the selective system is again confirmed if we look at 5-plus A\*-Cs for 2002:

**Data for GCSE for 2002 (Statistical First Release 26/2002. 17 October 2002)**

<b>School Type</b>	<b>%5+A*C</b>	<b>Pts/Pupil (8 best)</b>	<b>Pts/Pupil (All)</b>
Grammar	97.3	52.4	63.5
Secondary Modern	38.6	30.6	34.1
Comprehensive	48.4	33.9	39.0
Selective System	58.2	37.9	43.9

Here, on the basis of 5-plus A\*-Cs, it can be seen that the selective system is performing around 10 per cent better absolutely than the comprehensive system. The percentage gain in the selective system when compared with the comprehensives system is more than 20 per cent. Furthermore, it is quite wrong to suggest that those who support grammar schools fail to consider pupils at secondary modern schools. Fred Naylor has noted that **today's secondary**

**moderns achieve nearly twice the success rate in 16-plus exams as did the whole of the maintained sector in 1967.**

As Dr Marks has noted, secondary modern school pupils in England achieve GCSE results which are only slightly below those for comprehensive school pupils. However, their results are particularly good for English and Mathematics, where they are, on average, better than those for about 900 comprehensive schools, a third of the total.

In Northern Ireland, where selective schools have been retained until now, many more pupils achieve 5 or more grade A\*-C GCSEs than in England. Using Department for Education statistics, Dr Marks concludes year after year that **'selection is better for all pupils, not just those selected to attend grammar schools'**. Yet against such evidence, the Government has recently endorsed the destruction of Northern Ireland's grammar schools.

Dr Marks also notes that **wholly comprehensive LEAs have more pupils leaving school with no GCSEs than is the case in LEAs that have some grammar schools**. Also that when the main subjects are considered, 'selective schools taken together, compared with comprehensive schools, perform 37% better in Mathematics; 27% better in English Language; 28% better overall in all the Science subjects; 32% better in History; 37% better in Geography; and no less than 70% better in French. **Averaging over all the main subjects, the advantage is about 35% in favour of the selective schools, taken together, as compared with comprehensive schools.'**

In the performance tables based on 5 or more GCSE grades A\*-C published in January 2003, Kent LEA, whose performance, because it is largely selective, Mr Clarke has chosen to question, is 37<sup>th</sup> out of 150 English LEAs. If he genuinely wants to raise standards, why isn't Mr Clarke concentrating his efforts on improving results in some of the 100-plus LEAs not doing as well as Kent, as any competent manager would do?

Practically all the anti-grammar school 'evidence' published has been challenged in print by respected researchers such as Dr John Marks, Fred Naylor, Professor S.J. Prais and others. Indeed, **we have yet to see any research favouring the comprehensive over the selective system that is not, in some way, either manipulated or flawed**. Notable in this questionable category are the works of Professor David Jesson, much of which is funded with taxpayers' money by the DfES (see, for example, 'Anti-grammar school data was wrong', D. Telegraph, 21 May 2001). Much of the 'evidence' quoted in the 'Burns Report', too, which was aimed at abolishing Northern Ireland's grammar schools is also dubious, to say the least (see Naylor, below).

It should also be noted that value-added results are obviously open to manipulation, especially when raw results are not published alongside. Value-added is equivalent to judging the winners of a 4-lap race on whoever is fastest on one particular lap, rather than the whole race – surely it is the results at 16-plus that really matter? Value-added takes no account of slow starters or fast finishers.

PANDA grades (a DfES, not an OFSTED measure) are also questionable because they are based on estimated eligibility, rather than actual take-up, of free school meals.

Parents and others are becoming aware of all this, as evidenced by the fact that **many grammar schools now get 10 or more applicants for the 11-plus exam for each available place. These are fierce odds, which many parents and their children face voluntarily.**

The NGSA does not wish to deprive those seeking comprehensive schools of their choice. But nor should those seeking selective schools be deprived of their choice. If diversity is really the objective and, of course, high standards, there are indisputable reasons, based on factual evidence, why selective schools, and grammar schools in particular, should be part of that diversity.

6 February 2003/Compiled by Nick Seaton mainly from:

*The Betrayed Generations: Standards in British Schools 1950-2000*, John Marks, CPS, 2000.

*Grammar Schools in the Twenty-first Century*, NGSA, 2001. (See also 'Research' at [www.ngsa.org.uk](http://www.ngsa.org.uk))

*Comprehensive Ideology: Burns and the Betrayal of Two Communities*, Fred Naylor, CRE, 2002.

'Grammar Schools' Achievements and the DFEE's Measures of Value-Added: an attempt at clarification', S.J. Prais, *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2001.

### **3. Admissions/Adjudicator/Discrimination against Parents - John Harris**

NGSA draws your attention to a number of serious flaws in this Paper that affect parents seeking admission to all types of Secondary School.

#### **1 Consultation Period and Range**

*The Consultation was issued on 16 September.  
Responses were required by 11 October.*

#### **Comment**

This goes against the Governments' own Code of Practice on "good government" which recommends a minimum period for consultation of 3 months.

*Consultation has been limited and arbitrary*

*Few schools and few professional or other organisations were consulted..*

*Organisations such as the Foundation and Aided Schools National Association are describing the proposed structures as "unworkable" and "an accident in the making"*

<p><i>Why is this being rushed through with so little consultation with responsible bodies?</i></p>
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*We cannot afford another debacle such as followed the rushed introduction of A/AS Level changes*

## **2 Admissions at 16**

A Planned Admissions Number to Year 12 is proposed. (para. A.45)

### **Comment**

This innovations cuts across the flexibility of pupils moving to appropriate post GCSE Courses offered within the range of opportunities offered by different schools in an area..

*What discussion has taken place with LEAs, Foundation and Community Schools and Colleges?*

## **3 Office of the Adjudicator**

Adjudicators are un-elected appointees remote from complex local arrangements. There appears to be no requirement on them to consult or take proper account of the views of all local parties affected by their decisions.

Any school or group of schools may complain against another's admission arrangements.

There is no appeal (other than prohibitively expensive and time wasting Judicial review).

### **Comment**

*The system as proposed is open to manipulation and abuse.*

*Adjudicators may hear objections on any aspect of schools' admissions policy.*

*If unanimous agreement is not met locally the Secretary of State can impose his own scheme.*

*Para 8 permits objections to be raised by 10 parents.*

*This may enable very small pressure groups to continually challenge local arrangements.*

*It will parallel the continuing attempts to raise discriminatory Ballots on Grammar Schools which remain on the Statute Book, scandalously diverting resources, money and time away from education on ideological grounds?*

## **4 Reliance on arbitrary decisions by Adjudicators in areas where Grammar and other specialist schools operate together. (Para 3.5)**

Arbitrary and perverse decisions have been made to force parents to make choice of Secondary Schools BEFORE they know the outcome of assessment for Grammar Schools (or Tests administered for entry to schools such as Technology Schools).

These decisions are causing immense confusion among parents and all types of schools.

They have led in Kent to some Secondary Schools drawing up two-tier admissions lists; parents are forced to choose between entering their children for Grammar School assessment (which may best suit their child's aptitude) and losing out on first choice of a preferred High School.

In Devon, applications for grammar schools have already fallen because parents fear to take the risk.

**Bewildered parents are forced to choose blind and are threatened with denial of access to their preferred choice for their children's best interests.**

### **Comment**

*To delay Preference until all such tests are completed. would not disadvantage parents seeking only a place at a non-selective school*

*Therefore forcing parents to state preferences before they know the results of test is clearly an ideological not a practical decision.*

The Adjudicators' role in its current operation works against fair and equal treatment of parents and is clearly denying equal opportunity to many. It should be urgently challenged and reviewed before it makes further decisions damaging to parental rights.

## **5 Banding of pupils in Primary Schools**

These are proposed in Northern Ireland to produce balanced intakes for all secondary schools (despite 64% of parents voting against such abolition of Selection) and is being considered in Kent as a possible alternative to a Year 6 Test in the continuing pattern of Selection at 11.

Such an arrangement lacks the objectivity of a common Year 6 Selective Test. *Without clear definition of the A,B,C,D Band Assessment, the system would be open to many variables and manipulation.*

### **Summary**

*There is grave concern that this rushed and underhand form of "Consultation" will lead to an unworkable system and damaging restriction on the rights of*

*parents to choose the philosophical system under which their children are educated.*

*Urgent review of the role of the Adjudicator is required.*

*Further thought needs to be given to protect the powers of individual Foundation, Community, Grammar, Religious, Specialist Schools and LEAs themselves.*

*The proposals highlight conflict with Government policy to increase individual school decision-making*

*They undermine equal opportunities for access to appropriate specialist Secondary Schools that continue to be developed.*

Such proposals conflict with the Statement by the Secretary of State (page 3) that:

*“We are wholly committed to... offering a diverse, high quality education based on the needs of the child”*

## **4. Destructive effects of current campaigns - Nigel Briers**

Mr Clarke, I recently retired as the Headteacher of a Grammar School (Caldy Grange Grammar on the Wirral, Merseyside) where I had worked for 15 years. Prior to that I had been the Head of a Comprehensive School in Cheshire having previously worked for 20 years in a number of inner city and challenging Comprehensive and Secondary Modern Schools. I believe that I am sufficiently close to the chalk face to express my concerns with a real degree of knowledge and expertise. I believe that both you and your predecessor are concerned about standards, and I read with interest and some enthusiasm your speech on 11th November to the 10th anniversary of Ofsted. Here you pointed at the outset that every parent wants their child to go to a school that provides a high standard of education, encourages good behaviour and cares for each pupil. You went on to outline your ideas of 'earned autonomy' for schools where they are both well managed and are good performers.

It is part of our contention that most of our member schools are both well managed and good performers, but are in effect being threatened with closure. The current campaign against the Grammar Schools by several groups is going to undermine the morale and effectiveness of teachers and managers in our schools. The campaign led by Mr Dobson, the STEP campaign, the IIP report on London, and the recent attack upon the Kent Grammar Schools, will mean that attention will be focussed on political campaigns and not upon the job of teaching the children. The ability by groups to orchestrate a campaign for a ballot every year against the Grammar Schools is like the Sword of Damocles, and may well be damaging. The

uncertainty that these ballots provide is both damaging and unfair as they only apply to a portion of the schools.

If education is to be best served by regular ballots then they should apply to all schools. If Grammar Schools are to be removed by ballot or by legislation, as requested by Mr Dobson, it is important to note that there will not be a seamless change from one system to another. I have been through a changing system where there was enormous disruption. There will be huge costs as amalgamations and re-building will need to take place, many parents will move their children into the private sector with the loss of some able children and articulate parents from the state schools. The current autonomy of schools in financial and other areas will lead to redundancies as re-deployment will be impossible. There will be a curriculum impact with some loss of Modern Languages, fewer separate Science subjects taught. There will be several other serious results which will combine to lower standards and further depress the opportunity of the Government reaching its targets.

The recent Annual Report from Ofsted has spoken of the great challenges still in many of the schools. I do not believe that the closure of the Grammar Schools will make the slightest contribution to raising standards, indeed there will be a decline in standards in those areas affected. We are really looking to be part of the solution and not perceived as part of the problem. We would like to be party to future discussions about the Grammar Schools. I am organising an inaugural conference of Grammar School Heads in June at Church House Westminster and would like to invite you to address the meeting at this important time in our future.