

NOTE TO SCHOOL SECRETARIES: Please forward this newsletter to your head, deputies, and chairmen of governors and parents' associations. Thank you.

Admin matters

With access to emails now almost universal, we hope we shall soon be able to communicate entirely by this method. To do this, we must ensure that our emailing lists are, and remain, fully up-to-date. So please help us by sending the names and email addresses of your head teacher, chairman of governors and chairman of parents' association (and any 'activist' parents who may be interested) to Barry Clouting at b_clouting@tiscali.co.uk

Admissions to grammar schools and universities

Please ensure your head teacher or chairman of governors completes and returns the one-page admissions survey form, which accompanies this newsletter. It will help NGSA accurately to assess the effects of current admissions policies (see below). Thank you.

Annual conference/AGM

On 16 April, the NGSA held an informative conference on surviving in a hostile environment. (The conference itself took place in a very friendly environment at the Ramada Hotel and Country Club on the outskirts of Gloucester!)

Professor Chris Woodhead, chairman of Cognita Schools and Sunday Times columnist, was the keynote speaker. Among other things, he emphasised that grammar schools are defending education in its fullest sense, because they have not been infected by the intellectually corrupt ideas prevalent elsewhere in the state system.

Councillor Jackie Hall explained how she and her colleagues, although in the minority, had managed to thwart Labour and Lib-Dem plans to close at least one of Gloucester's four grammar schools and/or to reduce the number of places they could offer.

Miles Bailey, chairman of Save Our Schools, one of the pro-active local parents' groups, then explained how they operated; and all the solid work that local parents had put in to protect their schools. Use of emails and the internet had played a key role in their campaign.

Stephen Elliott, chairman of the Parental Alliance for Choice in Education, Northern Ireland, was unfortunately involved in a car accident, while travelling to Belfast airport on his way to the conference. Luckily, no-one was badly injured but he did not make it to Gloucester. Full reports of all the speeches, however, are at www.ngsa.org.uk

These talks and discussions were followed by a short Extraordinary General Meeting to agree changes to the constitution, which are intended to focus our work more directly on promoting and protecting grammar schools. The Annual General Meeting elected one of NGSA's co-founders, Fred Naylor, as a vice-president. Stephen McMillan from the Forest of Dean was welcomed as a new national committee member. Otherwise, the national committee was re-elected en bloc.

Good to report, too, that in May's local elections, Gloucestershire Conservatives campaigned on clear promises not to undermine or reduce admissions to local grammar schools, unlike the governing Labour/Lib-Dem coalition, which seemed determined to close or undermine good schools. As a

result, the Conservatives won control of the County Council. Councillor Jackie Hall, a stalwart supporter of parental choice and grammar schools, is now in charge of education in Gloucestershire.

Applications for grammar schools places fall

Following the introduction of the government's new admissions arrangements for secondary schools, complaints about the system and requests for advice from parents to the NGSA have significantly increased.

Most of the problems are caused because parents are being forced to specify their preferences for secondary schools before they know the result of their child's 11-plus test. This, combined with a requirement by many comprehensive schools that they will only offer a place if they are named as the 'first preference' school, has put parents in a very difficult situation: if their child does not reach the required standard in the 11-plus and they have not specified a reasonable comprehensive school as 'first preference', their child may go to the bottom of the list and end up in a 'sink' school.

Many parents have therefore played safe by naming a comprehensive school as their first choice and a grammar school second, as insurance against 'failure'. In some cases, children may have been forced into a comprehensive, even though they have passed the 11-plus for a grammar school. As expected, all these discriminatory measures have caused applications for places in grammar schools to fall in some areas – exactly what the enemies of choice in central government and Local Education Authorities (LEAs) want.

The requirement that 'preferences must be expressed before test results are known' is stated in the DfES's *School Admissions: Code of Practice* because, it is claimed, schools adjudicators have ruled that grammar schools should comply with that principle. However, an adjudicator's judgement against Calderdale LEA (7 July 2005, see below) clearly acknowledges that this is 'less than satisfactory for parents'. (Adjudicator's determinations are at www.schoolsadjudicator.gov.uk) And, of course, only a committed ideologue would seek to penalise families, simply because they voluntarily make the effort to get a place in the best possible school for their child.

It should also be noted that nfer/NELSON, who produce and mark 11-plus tests for many LEAs and individual schools, send back the results within about 2-weeks of receiving the completed tests. Some schools, who set their own 11-plus tests, are equally efficient. And as 11-plus tests are usually taken in October or November of the year prior to entry, there is no logical reason why parents shouldn't know the results of their child's 11-plus before they state preferences for secondary schools. This would allow grammar school pupils to be sorted out by Christmas and LEAs would still have up to 7 months to complete their remaining allocations.

Adjudicators, too, have been busy with complaints. In almost all cases, they seem to have ruled in favour of LEAs and against individual schools – perhaps an indication of how the balance of power is being shifted away from schools and back to the bureaucrats. But in the Calderdale determination mentioned above, the adjudicator is clear that the LEA must discontinue its 'first preference' system and stop undermining parental choice. Earlier this year, Graham Maslen, the head of North Halifax Grammar School, one of the complainants, had called on Calderdale's chief education officer publicly to apologise for the distress and heartache caused by the system. Parents even considered a legal challenge (*Yorkshire Post*, 21 March).

Tim Dingle, head of the Royal Grammar School, has also criticised his LEA (Buckinghamshire), which is forcing him to accept pupils based on catchment areas, rather than 11-plus scores. Here, the adjudicator has ruled in favour of the LEA and against the School.

Problems in Kent, too. There, the adjudicator will allow Dover Grammar School for Boys to continue to run its own 11-plus tests (which enable the School to offer more places to children from under-privileged homes) alongside the LEA's tests for at least another year. But in accordance with the LEA's wishes, the adjudicator has refused to allow Folkestone Grammar School for Girls to do the same. Meanwhile, in Tunbridge Wells, the LEA seems to be hostile to the idea that the local grammar schools should provide sufficient places to accommodate all the youngsters who have passed their 11-plus.

Grammar schools increase their share of 3 straight As

A Parliamentary Question from James Clappison MP has produced some interesting statistics. Between 1995 and 2004, the number of students achieving 3 A-grade A-levels has increased from 12,698 to 23,953.

In 2004, 16.4 per cent of youngsters achieving this level came from England's 164 grammar schools, 37.7 per cent from independent schools and 27.5 per cent from comprehensives. A further 18.4 per cent were from the FE sector. However, the grammar schools were the only type of school significantly to increase their share of 3 straight As – up from 12.9 per cent of the total in 1995 to 16.4 per cent in 2004.

When *The Sunday Telegraph* reported this on 26 June, the leader highlighted the stupidity of the government's legislation encouraging parental ballots on closing grammar schools and preventing the creation of new ones. It continued: 'The latest A-level figures show that parents and pupils deserve just the opposite: not fewer grammar schools, but more of them, and an application system that encourages bright children to reach for the top. Few of Labour's policies are genuinely wicked, but its treatment of grammar schools is undoubtedly one of them.'

Top state schools undermined by university bias

On 29 May, *The Sunday Times* exposed a confidential 44-page list of schools, which had been circulated to admissions staff at King's College, London. King's College is a top-ranking university with an annual intake of 3,200 students, 70 per cent of whom are from state schools. To increase this percentage to 76 per cent, in order to meet government targets, the King's College list ranks each school according to how its pupils' average A-level score differs from the national average. Using this list, 'notional' bonus points awarded to applicants from under-performing schools can lift their A-level scores by the equivalent of five grades across three subjects. Many top grammar schools appear on the list, and their applicants are presumably marked down, or passed over, so King's can reach its targets for admitting applicants from under-performing schools.

The Sunday Times also noted that Cambridge, Exeter, Leeds and York universities have all made numerical pledges to the government's 'access regulator' to 'improve' their admissions. Pure social engineering, of course. It will undermine standards; and it will encourage complacency in under-performing schools.

And finally...

Discriminatory admissions procedures, discriminatory adjudicators, discriminatory head teachers' unions, discriminatory value-added tables, discriminatory university admissions, discriminatory regulations against expansion – the grammar schools take it all and still come out on top! They remain an extremely popular and over-subscribed choice. So isn't it time their enemies in central and local government concentrated their efforts on improving under-performing schools and left the good ones to get on with their job?

National Grammar Schools Association – Admissions Survey

Parents have the right to choose an education for their child ‘in accordance with their own religious or philosophical convictions’ (ie a selective education). Is this being thwarted by new school admission arrangements? Also, it has been reported that a number of universities have admission schemes which favour less qualified applicants from under-performing schools over candidates with top-grade A-levels from selective/high performing schools. Has this affected you?

This survey is intended to discover the degree to which recent changes to school and university admissions are undermining choice and standards. If we receive sufficient responses, we shall make representations to the government. So please complete and return this form as soon as possible, and let us know if you have any suspicion that your school or your pupils are being discriminated against by value-added performance tables, the LEA, the school admissions forum, the adjudicator, Learning and Skills Councils, any university, the Office for Fair Access (to universities) or any other official body. Thank you.

1. School admissions

- a) Suspicions?
- b) Evidence (if any)?

2. University admissions

- a) Suspicions?
- b) Evidence (if any)?

Other remarks if any?

Willing to go public? Yes/No

Signed:

Head teacher/Chairman of Governors

Name of school:

Telephone:

Email:

Date:

Please return as soon as possible to: NGSA Survey, Milbourne House, 3 Deerhurst Close, Mill Lane, Calcot, Reading, Berkshire RG31 7RX.