

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

BRIEFING NOTE – No. 1/23

Date: 13 February 2022

Briefing paper to: All Members of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Purpose: To provide information on a proposed extension to the School Place Planning Principles set within the School Place Planning Strategy 2022-27 to include principles to cover the selective sector and the selection process in more detail.

School Place Planning Strategy Update: Principles on Selection

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Medway has twenty secondary schools, six of which are selective. Selective schools take an average of 29% of the total year 7 cohort. Currently, there are two boys' school, three girl's schools and one co-educational.

Following appropriate consultation we await the decision of the Regional Schools Director in February/March 2023, on the proposals that from September 2024 three of the single gender schools (Holcombe Grammar School, Fort Pitt Grammar School and Chatham Grammar school) will move to co-education.

There are a number of pupils at Medway selective schools who come from outside the authority. On average six percent come from within 2 miles of the authority boundary. A further 15% come from more than 2 miles away. The proposals to change three schools to co-educational will result in a reduction in the number of more distant out of area pupils able to acquire a place at a Medway Grammar School.

Having a set of underpinning principles for selection will help guide decision making on selective schools. The following principles are proposed to be added to section 3.6 of the School Place Planning Strategy 2022-27:

- An inclusive selective education is an integral part of the wider education system in Medway. All pupils in Medway have the right to apply for and sit the Medway test and have access to a Medway selective school if they pass.
- Establish and maintain provision that meets parental preference and ensure an appropriate balance of places between selective and non-selective schools. It is expected currently that approximately 25% of the Medway secondary aged pupil cohort attend selective education.
- Increasing the number of Medway pupils attending a selective school in Medway, thereby reducing places being filled by out of area pupils, provides Medway pupils with greater opportunity to attend their school of choice. To achieve this the percentage of Medway pupils who pass the test will increase to 28% from the current maximum of 25% (subject to the RSD approval of the co-educational proposals).
- Inclusive selective education is available for all pupils based on their academic ability. Medway will work with selective schools to broaden the range of pupils who access selective education and increase opportunity for pupils from all backgrounds to fulfil their potential including pupils from lower economic backgrounds or those with SEND.
- To increase accessibility to selective schools for pupils with an EHCP through the establishment of Resourced Provisions within the selective sector. Currently 0.3% of selective schools' pupils have an EHCP, compared to 2.2% of non-selective pupils.
- To support the appropriate expansion of grammar schools to meet demand, including the establishment of provision to the west of the River Medway where currently no selective provision exists but from where demand is increasing, and is expected to do so with the advent of further housing in the Hoo, Peninsula and Strood areas. Currently, 1,261 Medway pupils travel from west of the river to attend a selective school.
- To update the Medway Test process to provide a fair and modern process reflecting the current education and social arena. This will include making the test registration process more transparent and user friendly, ensuring the special arrangements process is fair and meets pupils needs as well as the inclusion of a Non-Verbal Reasoning element to the test itself, to broaden the

range of subjects to provide an opportunity for a comprehensive range of abilities to do well in the test.

Officers will work with the grammar school headteachers to design the test into one that is fair, relevant and reflects the curriculum today, this may result in further changes to the test which will be consulted upon through the admissions process.

The full report will be presented to the Cabinet in April 2023 and adapted subject to the RSD determination of the coeducational changes, for formal approval to add the principles to the School Place Planning Strategy 2022-27.