



Members' Newsletter

Spring 2003

The Threat Remains

SKS was set up to counter the threat to the diversity of secondary schools in the Kent, Medway and Bexley education authorities introduced by the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998. Whilst the possibility of successful petitions and ballots locally appears to have receded, grammar schools are still under threat nationally. SKS remains ready to meet such challenges.

STEP/CASE repeats Meaningless Gestures

As with the previous year, in December 2002 grammar school opponents asked the ballot company to draw up "constituencies" of parents eligible to sign petitions and vote in any subsequent ballot. This caused unnecessary work for school staff and expense to the Government, when all along it appeared that they had no intention to actually start petitions. Instead, they have continued to act more covertly. We have responded where necessary and appropriate correspondence can be read on our web-site.

Review of Secondary Education in Kent and Medway

Last year, Dr Ladyman, MP for Thanet South commissioned Professor David Jesson to review the structure and performance of secondary schools. Their report, based on a single year's statistics, was critical of the selective system but did not stand up to close scrutiny. This was not surprising as both men have a long record of opposition to grammar schools. Our Press Release of 19th July 2002 about this report is on the web-site.

Important Request of Members

Your Committee is grateful for your continuing support, but to add weight to our cause we would ask everybody to recruit at least one new member. A flyer and an application form are enclosed.

Labour Plot to Abolish Selection

In January, a group of Labour MPs, led by David Chaytor MP for Bury North and Frank Dobson, launched an attack on grammar schools and Kent was singled out as an example of why the selective system does not work, citing a report written for the new Education Secretary. This had identified weaknesses in some high schools in the county, but they ignored the acknowledgement in the report that the more academic children achieved balance at the top end. It is the intention of this Labour Group to have a clause in the next Labour Manifesto about the abolition of selective education.

Child Poverty and Education

A paper recently issued by End Child Poverty, a charity supported by Save the Children and the NSPCC amongst others, has called for the Government to remove all types of selection within the maintained school system. Their argument is that the learning gap between children from rich and poor families is greater in areas where grammar schools survive. We would question that because we believe that selective education helps to alleviate child poverty because it fosters the principle of opportunity for all able children.

SKS Address and Telephone Number

Please note our new address as shown at the foot and our new telephone number of 01622 734098.

What does Charles Clarke really think?

We have to admit that the relatively new Education Secretary confuses us as his public announcements do seem to indicate a certain ambivalence towards selective education. He has been reported in the press as being supportive of both of the initiatives mentioned in the middle column and yet in a visit to Kent at the beginning of April he was reported to have said "Your grammar schools are safe". He is also reported to have had separate talks with grammar school heads and opponents of the 11 Plus, with both sides reportedly happy with the outcome of their discussions! As we said, we are confused and so we, too, have sought a meeting with Mr Clarke and this is due to take place on Monday 12th May. Hopefully, thereafter we will have a clearer understanding of any challenges we will need to meet in the future.

Support Kent Schools' Annual General Meeting

Members will find notice of this year's AGM, to be held on 22nd May, enclosed with this Newsletter.

SKS Web-site

Our web-site contains relevant recent information for members and those interested in joining us. It will be kept up-to-date as developments occur. Hopefully, it will prove to be a useful source of information for our members.

It can be found at:-
www.support-kent-schools.org.uk

Our newsletters are always published on the web-site. If you wish to be alerted by e-mail, rather than to receive paper copies, please write to sks@avery67.freereserve.co.uk, including sufficient information to identify your membership details on our register

Published by Support Kent Schools, P O Box 921, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 5WZ
Company limited by guarantee. Incorporated in England. No 3646851