

UKIP Motion – Strategic Theme – Education

Submitted by Councillor Suzanne Evans, Cllr Richard Hilton, Cllr Rod Scott

This Council recognises that demand for secondary school places will start to increase in 2014/15 and that there will be considerable pressure on secondary school places by 2015/16. Council further recognises it will have to build a new secondary school in the borough to meet demand and fulfil its responsibilities under Section 14 of the Education Act 1996.

At their peak in 1964, there were 1298 Grammar schools in the UK. Today there are just 164 despite:

- A 2010 ICM poll for the National Grammar Schools Association in which 76% of adults and 85% of 18-24 years olds said they supported the introduction of new state grammar schools, especially in urban areas where there currently are none.¹
- A YouGov poll of Greater London residents in June 2013² concluding 66% of Conservative and 62% of Ukip voters agreed the government should encourage more schools to select by academic ability and build more grammar schools, and more Labour and Liberal Democrat voters wanted to either maintain or expand Grammar schools than didn't.

Regrettably, David Cameron is opposed to allowing any more new Grammar schools to be opened, however The Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, has voiced his support for Grammar schools, saying academic selection is right for some pupils at some point in their education.

The former Chief Inspector of Schools, Chris Woodhead has expressed his view that “grammar schools have contributed more to social mobility than any other institution this country has ever known.”

In neighbouring Sutton, Liberal Democrat MP Paul Burstow has said he believes that the five Grammar schools in his constituency should be able to take in more pupils. Just over 1,600 pupils sat the initial entrance test for a place at Sutton Grammar School for Boys this year, for instance, more than 13 for each available place.

At present, just 5% of secondary school pupils nationwide are now educated at Grammar schools, and 50% of those who pass Grammar entrance exams are unable to secure a place. Parents in Merton often express dismay to Councillors of all political parties that they have to send their children out of the borough to get the quality Grammar school education they want for their children.

¹ <http://www.icmresearch.com/70-support-retention-of-grammar-schools>

² http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/m4pxoy7gza/YG-Archive-Pol-Sunday-Times-results-210613.pdf

This Council wants to see an end to 'selection by house price', where richer parents can buy properties by good schools. Instead it should encourage selection by ability, so pupils from low-income families can escape poverty and gain a high standard of education. It is not fair that bright students whose parents cannot afford to send them to fee-paying schools or buy houses close to good schools should be held back.

This Council believes that Grammar schools should not be the preserve of the lucky few who happen to live in areas where they exist currently but should be available wherever residents want them.

Council therefore requires Cabinet to:

1. Make a direct approach to the Secretary of State for Education asking him to reconsider new Grammar schools as part of a commitment to increasing school choice and diversity;
2. Open a public consultation on whether Merton should have Grammar Schools for girls and boys;
3. Enter into immediate talks with neighbouring Grammar Academies in the boroughs of Kingston and Sutton to explore options for opening satellite Grammar Academies in Merton and;
4. If the outcome of the public consultation is in favour of Grammar schools for Merton, to implement the most appropriate options identified under 3, above, as soon as possible.