

9 December 2016

This open letter has been sent today to Prime Minister Theresa May MP and Justine Green MP, Secretary of State for Education, from 33 Headteachers of Kent's state secondary non-selective schools and academies. Included is a list of those Kent School Headteachers who have signed to this letter.

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Hon. Prime Minister, Theresa May MP  
10 Downing Street  
London  
SW1A 2AA

Rt. Hon. Secretary of State for Education, Justine Greening MP  
Department for Education  
Ministerial and Public Communications Division  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

Dear Prime Minister and Secretary of State

We are writing to voice our deeply held, vehement opposition to the government's proposals to expand selection in Kent and expand nation-wide a selective, segregated, two-tier state funded system of education, as outlined in the government consultation 'Schools that work for everyone'. Joining as one professional voice as Headteachers of Kent's non-selective schools and academies we are committed to the urgent need to highlight the fundamental philosophical and systematic flaws in the proposals to expand selective education, and suggest that instead selection in Kent and other local authorities should be abandoned.

It is moral purpose that has led us to become Headteachers and moral purpose that has compelled us to write to you. We offer an alternative to the expansion of selection, one born from experience, based on educational research, and the best education systems in the world, and that has shown it can work in our country. The introduction of country wide selection would be a paradigm shift. It is the norm that significant paradigm shifts result from a tide of research that points to the direction of the required shift. We are therefore deeply concerned as there is no research that demonstrates that selection at age 11 benefits all students (instead of only those selected), or that demonstrates that all students make progress at the same rates and pace from birth to age 11 and beyond. Furthermore, it is well understood and accepted that the best education systems in the world are based on a culture of strong educational research and a moral purpose which creates a culture of developing a taste for achievement in both children and adults. We are sure you are aware that the education system of Finland is often seen as one of the best, and many would argue that **its success is a direct result of the birth of the comprehensive school system which came from the national abolition of selection.** The resulting comprehensive system has thrived, driven partly by the paradigm shift which ended selection.

**Are you really convinced that the idea of the expansion of selection is based on a wide range of international contemporary research that provides consistently sound arguments for the benefits to all of selection at any age? What quality research proves that all children make progress in a straight line from birth to age 11 and beyond, and therefore justifies a two tier system?**

So what does the selective system achieve in Kent? It certainly serves to erode self-confidence, to limit aspirations and **develop a culture of 'second best' that good leaders in non-selective schools then spend time undoing so that they can unlock the students' true potential.** The advantages to those students in the selective schools may be obvious; the social construct of educational 'selection' provides a confidence boost and sense of success or winning to those selected; it serves to provide parents with those same rewards; it provides students with a peer group of aspiration focused students with self confidence in their academic ability; it provides the students with a culture of high expectations where only the highest grades at GCSE and A level are acceptable; it provides them with a culture and history of progression to top universities.

What does the selective system provide those students 'not selected' that is 'better' for them than being at a comprehensive school in a system with no selection? This is a much harder question to answer, and one that is rarely asked. It often provides a sense of second best; the reality is that the students were NOT selected - this is a clear message and one that is hard to take and even understand for an eleven year old; it may provide alternative curriculums for those students who may be facing challenges that mean traditional school settings are not appropriate at that time, or who need extra support with their learning, but this type of provision could and should be provided by all schools.

We challenge the government to provide convincing evidence to parents, school leaders and children that not being 'selected' aged 11 will motivate any child to make better progress than before.

**There are many schools in non-selective authorities that have proved that a truly comprehensive system can deliver excellent outcomes for students at all stages of the social spectrum. With 27 of the 29 Local Authorities with 90% or more of their secondary school judged as 'Good' or Outstanding' by Ofsted being non-selective<sup>1</sup> it is difficult to suggest that a model of selection provides good or outstanding schools for all. Thus it is the comprehensive model that should provide a paradigm shift to those local authorities that are still selective, not the reverse.**

**The experience of school leaders in Kent should be valued and heard. Kent has one of the widest gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students. The very existence of a two tier selective system is the biggest cause of this inequality. In fact if you use the DfE performance tables to rank secondary schools in Kent by the percentage of disadvantaged students you see a perfect correlation between selective status and fewer disadvantaged students, with all grammar schools appearing below all non-selective schools<sup>2</sup>**

To quote from the recent open letter to the government from Surrey Headteachers:

"The arguments for selective education fail to withstand rigorous challenge, when hard evidence around social mobility and outcomes for students in selective and non-selective areas is considered. The recently published (ii) Education Policy Institute report entitled 'Grammar Schools and Social Mobility'; highlighted the flaws in a selective education policy;

- There is no significant positive impact of selective systems of education on social mobility
- Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are under-represented in grammar schools
- Once prior attainment and pupil background is taken in consideration, there is no overall attainment impact of grammar schools, either positive or negative.
- In a comparison of high attaining pupils in grammar schools with similar pupils who attend high quality non selective schools, there are five times as many high quality non selective schools as there are grammar schools. These schools are much more socially representative than grammar schools, admitting close to the national rate of FSM pupils (12.6% versus 13.2% national and just 2.5% in grammar schools). They also admit close to the national share of children with special education needs."

The formal issue of this open letter and its statement of opposition to the keystone government policy of segregated post 11 education based on ability, represents a very significant step for Headteachers. However, Kent's non-selective secondary school Heads have committed to adding their voice to those of the many school leaders across England, who feel so driven to publicise their opposition to selective segregation in education.

This letter has also been sent to Rt. Hon. Angela Rayner, MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Education, Neil Carmichael MP, Chair of the House of Commons Select Committee for Education, with circulation to local and national media outlets.

*Issued on behalf of the undersigned Headteachers of Kent secondary schools and academies.*

<sup>1</sup> The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2014/15

<sup>2</sup> DfE School and College Performance Tables March 2015

Headteacher signatories to this Open Letter:

Stephen Adamson, Executive Headteacher, St Gregory's Catholic School & Ursuline College  
Stephen Carey, Headteacher, Saint George's C of E School  
Kate Greig, Headteacher, King Ethelbert's School  
Philip Karnavas, Executive Headteacher, Canterbury Academy  
Nicki Mattin, Principal, Spires Academy  
John McParland, Principal, The John Wallis Church of England Academy  
Claire Owen, Principal, Herne Bay High School  
Chris Russell, Executive Headteacher DOYMS & CEO Astor Academy  
Tracey Savage, Headteacher, Sandwich Technology School  
Matthew Tate, Headteacher, Hartsdown School  
Brendan Wall, Headteacher, St Simon Stock Catholic School  
Michael Walters, Headteacher, St Anselm's Catholic School  
Jon Watson, Headteacher, Canterbury High School  
Sam Williamson, Principal, Dover Christ Church Academy  
Mike Wilson, Headteacher, St Edmund's Catholic School  
Alan Brookes, Headteacher, Fulston Manor School and CEO of the Fulston Manor Academies Trust  
Jane Hadlow, Headteacher, New Line Learning Academy  
Wayne Barnett, Principal, Mascalls Academy  
Sally Lees, Principal, Homewood School and Sixth Form Centre  
Jason Feldwick, Principal, St Augustine Academy  
Mike Cater, Headteacher, Wrotham School  
Matthew Wright, Executive Headteacher, Wrotham and Aylesford Schools  
Patrick Hannaway, Executive Headteacher, Holmesdale and Malling Federation  
Richard Billings, Headteacher, The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre  
Anne Davis, Headteacher, Dartford Science and Technology College  
Catrin Woodend, Headteacher, The Abbey School  
Warren Smith, Principal, The Folkestone Academy  
Steve Carey, Headteacher, Saint George's C of E School  
Chris Norwood, Headteacher, Northfleet School for Girls  
Harry Ingham, Thamesview School  
Matt Barron, Headteacher, St John's Catholic Comprehensive  
Natalie Wilbourn, Headteacher, Orchards Academy