



## Meopham School, Grammar School Consultation

September 2016

### Rationale:

In response to the national debate regarding the expansion of Grammar School provision as stated by Secretary of State Justine Greening:

*"...look at how we can relax the rules on expanding selective schools, allow new ones to open and non-selective schools to become selective where there is a demand."*

Meopham School's standards of attainment have risen significantly in recent years and results for 2016 place the school as one of the top performing non selective schools in Kent.

Swale Academies Trust ("Trust") recognises that this is a potentially contentious issue. However, it is important to stress that this proposal is at the very earliest stages of development and that the Trust is actively interested in ensuring a thorough and balanced discussion over what is right for the school and the community prior to any decision being taken.

### Context:

- Meopham School currently has a very high number of bright and able pupils who are already being challenged and pushed to perform at and, in many cases, exceed that which would be expected in a Grammar School setting.
- Meopham School will have a completely new and exciting set of building currently being build ready for occupation in February 2018. This will include high quality specialist provision catering for the most-able.
- Information gathered from the local community that there is a need for additional Grammar school places in the area.
- Many parents would welcome the opportunity to have a local mixed Grammar School provision as an alternative to the current single sex Grammar Schools.

### Guarantees:

- If proposal was to occur, students that are currently in the school who have not passed the Kent selection test would continue to be taught and supported to achieved their full potential.
- Entrance from 2018 would be via the Meopham Selection Test.

### Actions- September 2016:

- Press Release 15.09.2016
- Public Consultation opened 15.09.2016, closing date 28.09.2016
- Article published on Trust website 15.09.2016
- Information/ letter published on School website 15.09.2016

*Seeking views on converting Meopham School to a mixed entry Grammar School for new entrants from September 2018. Specifically asking whether public/parents would*

- a) Support in principle converting Meopham to a full mixed sex Grammar School status from September 2018 subject to the necessary legislation being enacted and further more detailed consultation to follow.*
- b) Oppose the proposal.*

- Staff Consultation opened 15.09.2016, closing date 28.09.2016
- Pupil Consultation opened 15.09.2016, closing date 28.09.2016

## **Initial Results of Consultation- November 2016**

### **Data**

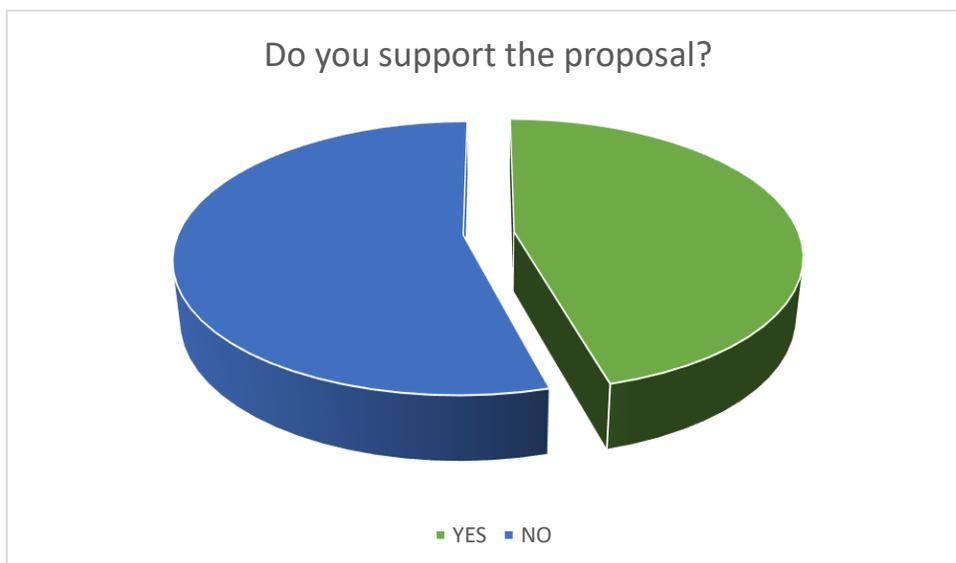
#### **Public (parent)- responses 302**

*Q1. Do you support, in principle, the conversion of Meopham School to a full mixed sex Grammar School from September 2018?*

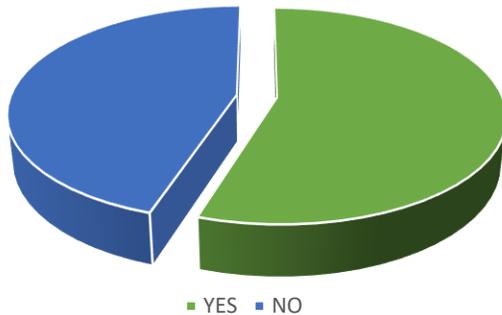
*Q2. Do you oppose the proposal?*

*Q3. Comment below (optional)*

*54% of people do not support the proposal that Meopham School should start the consultation process of becoming a Grammar school by 2018, where 46% agree that Meopham School should research further into becoming a mixed sex selective Grammar School.*



Do you oppose the proposal?



55% of people oppose the proposal of Meopham School consulting on becoming a Grammar School, where 45% of people do not.

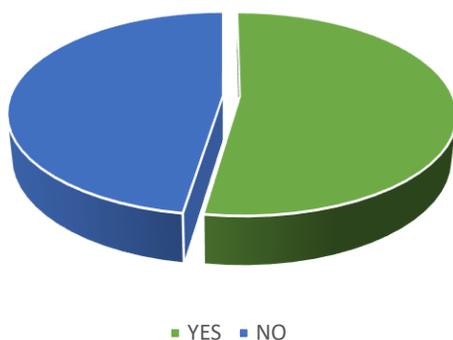
## Staff- responses 40

Q1. Do you think Meopham should become a Grammar School?

Q2. If Meopham did become a Grammar School, do you think it would change?

Q3. Your views

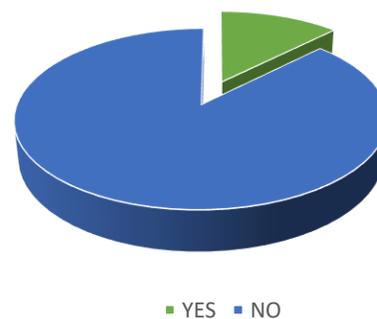
Should Meopham become a Grammar School



51% of teaching and support staff at Meopham School believe that the school should not become a Grammar School, with 49% agreeing that the consultation process should begin.

87.5% of the teaching and support staff at Meopham felt that there would be limited change if the proposal would go ahead, with 12.5% disagreeing.

Do you think the proposal would change the school?



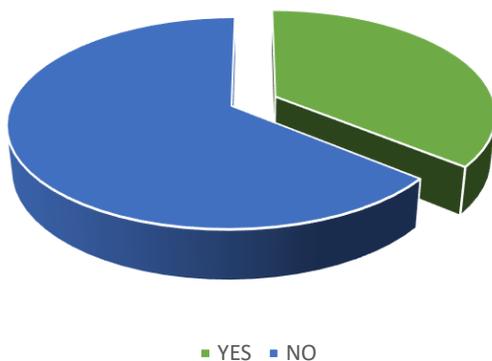
## Students- responses 39

Q1. Do you think Meopham should become a Grammar School?

Q2. If Meopham did become a Grammar School, do you think it would change?

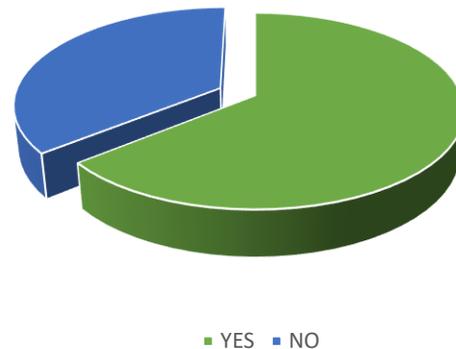
Q3. Your views

Should Meopham become a Grammar School?



64% of current students felt that they did not want Meopham to become a Grammar school and 36% felt that they would.

If Meopham became a Grammar School, would it change?



36% of current students felt that if it was to become a Grammar School it would not change, however, 64% of students disagreed with this statement.

## Student Views

*I personally don't think there's any real need to turn Meopham School into a Grammar School. After all, grammar schools are selective so I don't think it would be very fair for students who didn't do well in their 11+ but still had the potential to improve to not be able to get into Meopham School.*

*I think that the time I have spent at Meopham has been enjoyable and many useful and helpful changes have taken place. I feel Meopham has sufficiently excelled in improvement year by year and I feel that it is at a stage where it can and should be accepted as a grammar school.*

*I would be pleased if it did become a grammar school.*

*Amazing idea, should be pursued.*

## **Anonymous Views and Comments from Public Consultation:**

### **For Meopham School Grammar Proposal**

*"I would fully support Meopham School being converted to a mixed Grammar School as I feel it will only enhance the education my son receives."*

*"I am more than happy for the school to become a Grammar School."*

*"I would be delighted if this suggestion was to happen."*

*"I am in favour of Grammar schools I have children at Grammar School and at Meopham. I would prefer an excellent comprehensive like Meopham and perhaps have a formal grammar stream instead of a full conversion - I am sure however that the school would be full in minutes and house prices in Meopham would rocket."*

*"Assurances are needed so that the current children would still be taught by good and outstanding teachers and that their education would not be compromised in order for the Grammar children to excel. Equally any able children from the current cohort could be Grammar streamed, would this only be for 2018 students onwards?"*

*"Very good idea."*

*"I fully support this proposal. There is a strong need for a mixed Grammar in the local area plus additional Grammar places especially in a rural setting."*

*"Everyone benefits from children being well educated and stretched academically, not just the individual children and their immediate families. I fully welcome this opportunity for Meopham."*

*"I am very encouraged by this proposal, I hope to see more of a focus on academic achievement with current pupils too. I would also like to see the current year 11s entered into A levels and the evening and weekend classes continued to make sure that they get as much of a push as is possible to achieve the best grades and the school is sending a good proportion of the 6th formers to Russell Group Universities."*

*"With regards to this year's GCSE results, I feel that the current children will benefit from this change and future children also."*

*"Fantastic idea."*

*"My son was deemed of Grammar School ability this year - but the school was full. I therefore, 100% support this proposal."*

*"No to the proposal, but Yes to the Grammar Stream."*

*"I think it would be a great idea especially being a mixed Grammar School."*

*"You have our full support."*

*"Fabulous proposal."*

*"I have a younger son I just hope he can pass the test so he can attend the school after 2018."*

*"I'm more than happy for changes as long as the education standards don't change for my son who is currently at the school. Just don't want him forgotten about as I choose this school on its reputation."*

*"My daughter was short by 2 points to get a grammar place. Would love this school to receive this status, new buildings as well and in such a lovely setting. I am 100% voting for this change."*

*"Fantastic opportunity for the school therefore in total full support."*

*"Too many children being bused out of area that could walk to school."*

*"This would result in the children of Meopham who do not pass the 11+ to access a high quality local school."*

*"I feeling that Meopham school should maintain its unique position of being a mixed sex non selective school that is achieving excellence for all of its students. Meopham is able to offer a wide range of subjects and gives equal weight to arts, sports and academic subjects. The smaller setting and smaller class sizes create a pastoral atmosphere which gives all students a less pressured environment in which to learn and achieve their best. I went to a grammar school and passed exams easily but went down a creative arts path. My husband went to a comprehensive and did the same. We both got the same 2:1 arts degrees."*

*"A Grammar stream would serve the community better."*

*"Most definitely required for local area."*

*"It is a good opportunity to support all pupils to aim high and achieve better; every child has potential."*

*"I would welcome a change with a grammar option only, on the basis that Meopham continues to stay with the non-selective mixed academy option also, providing future children/parents the fair choice, should children not be able to achieve the grade for grammar only entry. It would be such a shame to lose that option of, what is now a high achieving non-selective school, in the Gravesham area. There is also the SEN/pastoral care; what would happen to this if the entire school were to become grammar only? This is about the education of children after all, not a status choice for the school."*

## **Against Meopham School Grammar Proposal**

*"It's a fantastic secondary school & feel it needs to continue this way."*

*"My daughter is very bright and was one of the school's top 10 performers in Year 9. She would not be at Meopham if a selection test had been in place, but she is predicted to achieve very high grades. I think Grammar is very unfair to able students. This area already has Grammar Schools. Where can children go if they don't pass the test? I have two more children and Meopham is our local and preferred school, but not if it becomes a Grammar."*

*"The whole ethos of the school is a small rural community school & I feel by making it a Grammar School it would lose this & that was the reason I chose the school for my child. Also there aren't enough good secondary schools in the area & by making this a Grammar School you will be narrowing the choices even further for those who don't pass the entrance test."*

*"No more grammar schools! We need great state schools, and Meopham is a good school so has good foundations already!"*

*"This proposal is absolutely and completely unnecessary in the county of Kent, which one of the highest constitutions of grammar schools in the country, including mixed and single sex."*

*"How can you teach grammar abled children and secondary school children under one school? Surely the ones who are less bright will suffer education wise."*

*There are 4 Grammar Schools in the area so another one is not needed, if this goes ahead where will the non-Grammar children go?*

*"There are no other schools in the Meopham area which would force children living in Meopham who do not pass the 11+ to go much further afield for their education. If a child passes the 11+ they have a choice of which school to attend, if Meopham becomes a Grammar school the choice of going to a school in Meopham is removed for a vast majority of the children living in the village."*

*"There are limited spaces in this area and this would just add to the problem. Meopham would be far better continuing its progress in its present form. Please don't become selective."*

*"Meopham School is an excellent example of a mixed comprehensive school why change it. I feel the level of my daughter's education would suffer as a result of "selective" students being given priority in 2018 over existing hard working students. Does this come down to funding? If it is just kudos, then why fix something which is not broken and why follow a trend which all comps could follow negating any positive differentiation. If I had wanted my daughter to attend a Grammar School, I would have pushed for it at age 11."*

*"No to this - the school is doing brilliantly as it is and needs to be kept as a community school."*

*"One thing that Meopham School is proud of is it's a rural community school. How will be converting to a Grammar keep this ethos? If a mixed Grammar is needed, why not build a new Grammar school? Meopham is successful in its own right and I'd like to see a breakdown on positives and negatives for the school, pupils and the local community."*

*"As a resident in Meopham with young children, living in a rural area it is best for the school to remain as it is so the majority of children in the area would go to a school local to them. if they are lucky enough to pass the 11+ then parents still have a choice if to send to mainstream or grammar depending on where they live. I would suggest a grammar stream to the school as a compromise."*

*"There is a need for good/excellent schools for all in the area not just a select few!"*

*"Meopham School should be a school for all abilities not just select few!"*

*"Meopham is a great school accessible to all. Where would all the local children go that were not successful in passing your test? If it is not broke don't fix it!"*

*"Although I wholeheartedly support the availability of Grammar School education for those who have both the academic ability and application to make a success of the opportunity...there are children who are certainly very bright, but for whom the structure, discipline and workload of a Grammar School would be overwhelming and would certainly result in failure. They are not unintelligent or unable to learn but simply cannot offer the huge commitment that Grammar education demands. There is a need for local, high quality and aspirational secondary education for those who wish to*

*be successful, but who would not cope with the perpetual academic pressures that Grammar school education requires. Meopham School changing to a Grammar School would remove local access to these children, who will either struggle in a learning environment that they cannot cope with or not realise their potential in schools that do not offer sufficient challenge. Meopham School offers a unique balance with both accessibility and a truly aspirational outlook to education and if the change is approved, it will be a loss to the local community and a dis-service to those who it could have helped the most. I have 2 children, one at Grammar School and one at Meopham School and I have experienced the trials of both as they made their way through their respective educations...one is academic and one is creative, but both equally intelligent. They went to the right schools in relation to their outlook on learning and their dedication to homework, but they will both be successful simply because they had the choices available to suit them...please do not take away the ability to choose for children such as these. Schools should serve the community that they are in and we need a high quality secondary school and not another Grammar School for the select."*

*"I do not support the proposal to turn Meopham School into a mixed Grammar as we have already options for both Girls and Boys in the area already. My children are not 11+ students and need the option of an Excellent non Grammar school in the area."*

## **Further Discussion points to consider:**

*How will this affect children already enrolled within the school?*

*It is a small community school that is improving. Where would local children go whose parents want them to walk to school in their community? What about siblings who if it converted couldn't go to school with their older siblings? What about families who can't afford to tutor their kids to pass the 11+? Why not carry on doing well by all the students not just cherry picking for those who already have lots of opportunities. It's an improving school - keep it up for the whole community!*

*How will this impact my children currently at the school?*

*Is this the reason why the school is being rebuilt?*

*I am supportive of grammar schools however in Meopham there would no alternative for those who didn't pass the test. Maybe apply to build an annex or Grammar extension rather than convert the whole school.*

*What measures are being put in for the disadvantaged children in the Borough? They will be even more of a minority!*

*The school is brilliant as it is; have a grammar stream perhaps; would this full proposal restrict local community who don't meet the school's selection criteria?*

*I'm concerned that the small rural feel to the School will be lost. At present I feel one of Meopham's major successes is the small numbers in each class. I feel that the focus will then be turned to the talented grammar students rather than those less academic*

*This will place a restriction on the availability of options in the area for children to attend good schools. Some years ago Gravesend tried a mix Grammar School however it was closed. They are currently providing a level that helps the local are we could end up with out of area children putting additional pressure on places. The talk of the change has already had an effect on my child who attends the school he feels that he will not be wanted and will lose the teaching support he currently has.*

*Meopham is a good school for all abilities, our son narrowly missed out on passing the 11+ but even if he had passed, we would still have chosen Meopham. He is thriving and loves the school, our worry is changing it to a grammar would destroy the feel and whole ethos of the school. Our second concern is our second son who is currently in year 4 and we were confident in his future at Meopham however if he failed the test, where would it leave him? We chose Meopham for both our children and specifically as it wasn't 'grammar' style. It would be of no benefit to anyone to change, surely push the more-able children, improve results but at the same time continue supporting the less able and ensure the continued success of Meopham.*

*Really unsure as my children would not have been able to come to Meopham had it been a grammar school as they didn't pass the 11+*

## **Actions- November 2016:**

- Report created
- Report and results delivered to Board of Directors January 2017
- Discussion over points raised during initial consultation
  
- The Trust was pleased to report on the extremely positive response to the school and the proposal
- The school to place a trial Grammar Stream group into current Year 7 January 2017 for English/ Maths and Science
- If the trial is successful, for the school to consider placing a Grammar Stream into Year 7 September 2017
- No selection text to be introduced into the school's admission. The group will comprise of the most-able students who the school has in this particular year group.

## **Actions- January 2017:**

- Introduction trial of Grammar Stream into Year 7 January 2017
- Press release/ letter from Meopham School (sent out to parents and displayed on school website)

## **Next Steps:**

- Review success of Grammar Stream in trial group (Year 7) at Meopham School
- Gather ongoing feedback from students and parents through parent evenings, student council etc.
- Introduce Year 7 Grammar Stream group for September 2017