

We're aware that the time constraint meant that a number of important topics raised in the initial list of possible questions did not get much of an airing. The following notes are provided in case they are required for reference:

- **Please provide a brief overview of the Kent Test selection process, its purpose, and how it operates.**

*The process is described in detail elsewhere. Given that some schools admit by reference to academic ability its purpose is to try to ensure that we assess applicants correctly so that they are appropriately placed. It applies in the same way to all who opt in: once consultation sessions have been held parents make the decision as to whether their child will be tested, all children take the same tests, their results are age standardised, a common threshold is applied to the results and the score-based assessments of children who did not qualify can be referred to a local panel so that other evidence can be taken into account as appropriate.*

*Once the process has run, qualifying pupils' access to individual grammar schools is determined by each school's admission criteria, which may vary.*

- **What are the reasons for the difference in the percentage of FSM children who take the Kent Test in comparison to non FSM children?**

*There could be a number of reasons. They are a smaller group than non-FSM children, but the same possibilities would apply to both groups. Those who do not opt in may not be in the upper half of the ability range, they may not favour grammar school (travelling distance, ethos, single-sex education) or may favour a strong local school / faith school where older siblings may already attend.*

- **Are there barriers within the Kent Test selection process which are disadvantaging academically high achieving FSM children?**

*Given that it is open to all and applied to all in the same way, we hope there are none within the selection process.*

- **What changes has Kent made to improve fair access for low income families to grammar schools? For example, testing, test preparation, outreach, admissions or collaborations. And, what impact have these had?**

*Kent endeavours to provide a fair test for all candidates. It publishes the same information for all children interested in taking part, including a familiarisation paper on the website. It does not endorse test preparation, but takes care to commission tests which should be accessible without it, and encourages all schools to raise attainment for FSM and non-FSM pupils. It advises grammar schools setting their admission criteria so that they meet the legal requirements and take account of the effect of any changes on local pupils. Within the co-ordinated admissions system it enables schools to apply criteria such as FSM. Outreach and collaborations are at the discretion of the schools themselves.*

*It would be difficult to attribute any change to a specific measure. Pupil Premium payments will act as an incentive to schools pay attention to recruitment from this group, and that can be expected to have an effect. The pace at which schools are able to close the achievement gap for low income pupils will be a key factor in changing the mindset and aspiration of these learners.*

- **Is the solution to increasing the number of FSM and CIC attending Grammar schools and providing a more level playing field, to ensure free test preparation for all high achieving primary school pupils?**

If its objective is to increase the numbers of FSM / CIC attending grammar schools, the Committee's investigations so far will have identified that there are diverse factors to take into account. The point has been made that closing the gap / raising curriculum achievement will benefit all pupils and that increased engagement of disadvantaged pupils with the school community will serve to support aspiration for all.

If the Committee's enquiries suggest that the access of FSM / CIC candidates to grammar school is compromised in some way by the way selection is delivered, the source of the difficulty needs to be explained to officers to enable careful consideration of how it might best be addressed. Given that all selective Authorities commission tests designed to identify high-achieving pupils and that KCC has been widely reported as having made recent changes to counter a test preparation culture on the grounds that it undermines the selection process, a proposal to provide free test preparation to all high-achieving pupils would be diplomatically delicate.

In summary:

Two of the three tests used in Kent's process are curriculum based. Participating children who achieve highly in English and Maths should therefore be picked up by those tests. If they are known to be academically able but are behind in key skills, primary schools should be identifying how best to support their learning, regardless of their expected secondary school destination.

The Reasoning test includes sub-tests designed to look at reasoning ability, including non-verbal measures which the publishers recommend to those wishing to avoid cultural ( ethnic or socio-economic) bias. Achieving the necessary level for a grammar assessment in this test should not require preparation.

Taking a step which suggests that high achieving pupils need preparation in order to do well in selection tests might simultaneously suggest that the Council does not have confidence in the effectiveness of its own process and add weight to the vigorous marketing already undertaken locally by providers of private tuition. Notwithstanding anecdote, national figures still imply that three quarters of families do not pay for any extra tuition during their children's entire school education.

Selective Authorities generally discourage test preparation, as Kent always has. Defining "preparation" (as opposed to providing curriculum enrichment or to coaching or teaching to the test) is likely to be as hard as ensuring that any formally-sanctioned test preparation is delivered in the same way to everyone taking part, whether in the state or private sector and inside or outside Kent. It would not prevent those who are able and willing to pay for extensive programmes of coaching from exceeding anything put in place for all children, or providers of test preparation from offering extra, paid-for support.

- **How does Kent County Council work with schools to promote engagement with children and parents around applications for a Grammar school place where suitable?**

Primary schools are encouraged to consult with all parents of Y5 pupils about their future schooling before test registration opens. A grace period is allowed so that those who fail to register for testing in time can be chased up. Once tests are complete and the scores are

known, there is an opportunity for a school to refer cases to the local panel with more evidence relating to the individual child. The Admissions team offers assistance to schools and parents who want individual test papers checked, or concerns and complaints followed up. As well as the advice given on the website about selection, admissions and appeals, officers spend a good deal of time supporting parents through the admissions process via e-mail and telephone calls. Grammar schools always have access to advice about any proposed changes to oversubscription criteria and the Council's officers will encourage schools to use their own websites (as some now do) to draw parents' attention to the possibility of Pupil Premium and how it can be used to support children.

- **To what extent are parents of academically high achieving FSM children less likely to appeal compared with their non FSM peers?**

We do not have access to enough information to give a sound answer to this question.

- **To what extent do Grammar schools' individual selection processes including additional tests (i.e. Folkestone/Dover tests) and oversubscription criteria make it easier or harder for FSM children to access a Grammar school place in differing parts of the county?**

As regards oversubscription criteria, it will be apparent that schools can adopt a Pupil Premium criterion which could make it easier for FSM children to gain a place. At present, it looks as if most grammar-eligible FSM pupils get the school they want without any exception being made. The latest report from the Schools Adjudicator (November 2015) mentions reported reactions to FSM criteria.

As regards additional selection processes, where they increase the number of children deemed suitable for admission to a named grammar school, one might expect a proportional increase in FSM pupils. An important point to bear in mind is that the number of FSM candidates living in a local area will also be reflected in the intake for certain schools (so, where a school is heavily oversubscribed and principally serves a very restricted local area, an additional test which increases the number of qualifying pupils will not necessarily increase their access to the school). Popular schools in expensive residential areas which prioritise pupils for admission taking account of siblings and distance may have fewer FSM pupils unless they adjust their criteria to favour them. Where they do, there is a potential disadvantage to non-FSM siblings and local residents. In such a situation, prioritising FSM pupils within each criterion is seen as the most balanced approach.

### **What are the outcomes for children on FSM in schools that have adopted this approach?**

The only Kent evidence so far available relates to Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School in Faversham, where pupils offered places under the FSM criterion would also have qualified without that concession.

- **How can KCC influence the proportion of FSM and CIC children accessing Grammar schools given that individual schools, and particularly Academy Grammar schools, have their own admissions policies?**

Where it is not the admission authority Kent can only advise, support and attempt to encourage a school to consider the interest of these groups, but it can seek to ensure that they are considered when admission arrangements are consulted on. While the Council is currently required by the School Admissions Code to refer only those arrangements which are illegal to the Schools Adjudicator, it can remind schools of the obligation set out under paragraph 1.8 of the School Admissions Code 2014:

1.8 Oversubscription criteria **must** be reasonable, clear, objective, procedurally fair, and comply with all relevant legislation, including equalities legislation. Admission authorities **must** ensure that their arrangements will not disadvantage unfairly, either directly or indirectly, a child from a particular social or racial group, or a child with a disability or special educational needs, and that other policies around school uniform or school trips do not discourage parents from applying for a place for their child.