



Slough and Eton Church of England Business and Enterprise College

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Slough Borough Council Scrutiny panel December 5th 2013

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Introduction

The secondary Headteachers in Slough work more collaboratively than any group of Headteachers I have known in thirty two years of teaching. The Slough Association of Secondary Heads (SASH) was established when Slough became a unitary authority and I have no doubt that its work has contributed to the community cohesion that exists in Slough and the high position it enjoys in secondary league tables.



Business & Enterprise

SEBMAT has been established to provide help and support for schools in Slough and the adjacent proximity. Colnbrook Primary was placed in Special Measures in October 2012 and joined SEBMAT in June 2013. SEBMAT offers bursarial and financial advice to a number of schools in Slough.



Response to Scrutiny Panel Questions

With grammar schools reaching high levels of attainment and the non-selective schools improving year on year, what do you see as the most important factors for ensuring high attainment across the education spectrum in Slough going forward?



To ensure educational success across Slough elected members need to provide the necessary support from Council officers to service schools and to encourage an integrated approach from the various services that work with young people (Police, Health, Social Services etc). They also need to ensure that the recent change in the Slough funding formula for education, with a shift of resources towards primary education, provides the right foundation for success for our young people.



However, as this question is asked in the context of grammar schools in Slough and young people from Slough having access to them, I feel the Council has two options to ensure educational success in Slough:



1. Stick with the status quo.

Slough is a unique authority for education. To my knowledge no other authority has a similar population profile and has grammar schools. Slough currently has eleven mainstream secondary schools and four of them are grammar schools. Slough is one of the few places left in the country that has a selective system with only 5% of secondary schools being grammar. The current pass mark set by the Slough grammar schools, the proximity of the town to another selective area in South Bucks and the existence of a girls school means that the non-selective schools have a heavily skewed intake. This has meant that every non-selective school in Slough has experienced major problems at one time or another. At some point in time nearly every non-selective school in Slough has been 'the sink school', the one that parents did not want to send their children to.





We are now in a position that the non-selective schools are doing very well and have made an enormous contribution to Slough's rise up the league tables (in the top 10 out of 154) . However, they are all more vulnerable than other schools in non-selective authorities and small changes, either at government or local level, can have a significant impact on their success. If there were a move to lower the pass mark for grammar schools to below 111 then I am convinced that this would create sink schools in Slough, thus hindering the life chances of the young people those schools serve and the economic success of the town.

Slough is a very difficult place to recruit high quality staff. The high cost of housing, the proximity to higher paying areas in London and the wider public perception of Slough makes it difficult enough already to recruit. Not many teachers want to work with lower ability pupils all of the time, preferring a balance across the ability range. Currently grammar schools in Slough take the top 30% of the ability range. By lowering the eleven plus pass mark this could mean the top 40% or more. This means that the non-selective schools are left to work with the lower 60% of the ability range. Creating schools that only catered for the lower 60% of the ability profile will be a major deterrent to recruiting quality staff and this will lead to schools being unsuccessful and parents not wishing to send their children to those schools. From the point of implementing a lower pass mark for the grammar schools I would estimate that it would take five years or less for sink schools to start appearing in Slough.

Government floor standards are constantly rising. Non selective schools have to work especially hard to stay above these targets. Lowering the grammar school entry pass mark would mean that any non-selective school would find it almost impossible to achieve these floor standards and this would bring with it scrutiny from Ofsted and the DfE, schools 'Requiring Improvement' and 'Special Measures'.

I would recommend that the 11+ pass mark for Slough is not lowered.

2. Move to a comprehensive education system.

The 11+ examination is a divisive assessment. I have worked in two non-selective schools in Slough and have experienced numerous examples of families being split by the 11+ results. For many pupils that have taken the test and not passed they enter secondary school feeling second best and with lower self-esteem. If each of the mainstream secondary schools in Slough had a normal distribution of the ability range entering their schools it would avoid this situation and allow everyone to start on a level playing field.

I know that other non-selective school Heads agree with the views above.

I hope this paper has been helpful.

Yours faithfully

Paul McAteer
Executive Headteacher

