

EDUCATION FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY : REPORT BY THE POST-PRIMARY REVIEW BODY

Response of the Southern Education & Library Board

1. Introduction

The Board welcomes the Report as a timely analysis both of the needs of young people as they enter and progress through second-level education and the school system and structure which will support learning and teaching.

The Board values the opportunity given to it to contribute to the consultation process. Individual members have taken advantage of hearing at first hand the observations of members of the Review Board while as Governors of schools they have taken part in the generation of school responses.

In addition, this response has been informed by the opinion of Principal teachers of nursery, primary, special and post-primary schools and of Board officers, both orally and in writing.

2. Features Of Provision In This Area

At the outset it may be useful to look at the secondary school structure as it relates to issues identified in the Report.

There are 53 post-primary schools. They are listed in Appendix 1

In effect provision is of four types:

Comprehensive (all-through) by intention (12)

Brownlow College
Cookstown High
Newry High
Drumcree College
Holy Trinity College
Lismore Comprehensive

St Catherine's College
St Ciaran's High
St Patrick's High (Keady)
St Paul's High (Bessbrook)
New-Bridge Integrated College
Integrated College Dungannon

Comprehensive (all-through) by development (4)

Fivemiletown High
Kilkeel High

Markethill High
Newtownhamilton High

Comprehensive (11-14) by deferred selection with selection at 14+ (6)

11-14 schools

Clounagh Junior High
Killicomaine Junior High
Lurgan Junior High

Tandragee Junior High
*St Mary's High (Lurgan)
*St Paul's High (Lurgan)

***In these schools pupils not transferring to the St Michael's Grammar School remain in their schools.**

14-16 or 14-18 schools

Craigavon Senior High
Lurgan College
Portadown College

Selection at age 11 (28)

There are 13 grammar schools, (12 voluntary and 1 controlled). 15 non-grammar (6 controlled and 9 maintained) are tied into the selection process to greater or lesser extents.

3. General Educational Considerations

- 3.1 There is a wide range of provision in the Board total area.
- 3.2 Overall a smaller number of pupils sit the present Transfer Tests than in other Boards; in 2001 it was 47%. Of course, some children, it is not known how many, do not sit the Tests because their parents decide they are satisfied with non-grammar places. However, the opposite also happens; after a child secures a grade which would warrant a grammar school place the parents may choose a non-grammar school. This applies also in non-selective areas so more primary schools enter pupils for the Tests than might appear to be warranted by the incidence of non-selective schools.

- 3.3 Changes in the nature of parental preference can be seen to influence structures over a relatively short time-scale, eg the increasing retention of pupils of all abilities in Newtownhamilton High, Aughnacloy College and most recently in Drumglass High School. These examples are from the controlled sector only and take no account of similar developments in the maintained sector.
- 3.4 The recently published report by the Northern Ireland Audit Office confirms the high standards obtained in non-selective schools in this area. In part this reflects the number of all-ability schools in the sector but the standards are also due to the quality of teaching and leadership of the schools. It could be claimed with justification that many parents have good reason to be satisfied with local provision. Parental anxiety tends to be concentrated in the few areas where selection predominates.
- 3.5 We believe there is a need for change on personal, social, economic and moral grounds. This is not to dismiss the opportunities the grammar schools have given to children from diverse backgrounds to achieve high academic standards and to pass examinations which opened up access to university and professional careers.

For some young people academic study remains intellectually satisfying and they gain great personal satisfaction from the stimulation of studying in an environment which is intellectually challenging and in the company of others of like mind. On social and economic considerations there must always be academic rigour in courses of study and this legacy of grammar schools must be perpetuated either as a distinctive strand in post 14 provision or, as increasingly meets the need, as an option which can be combined with a more vocational stand.

We believe that the focus on the academic career path only is no longer appropriate, that society and the economy value skills and knowledge which are more widely based than previously and that the present highly structured selective system does not recognise the different paces at which young people develop.

- 3.6 We believe that selection at age 11 on academic criteria must end. When the selection process appears to make more children "losers" than "winners" in terms of public opinion society is damaged and the individual child left with diminished self-esteem not just at age 11 but possibly throughout his/her life.
- 3.7 We believe that opportunities to pursue various programmes of study should not have the appearance, as at present, of a lottery where a child in one area has to get Grade A for a grammar school place while, at no great distance away, a place may be available to a child with Grade D or no grade at all.
- 3.8 We look for continuity of education programmes from the first contact a child has with formal education, possibly as young as 3 years to the end of secondary education at ages 16, 17 or 18. For this reason we welcome the latest proposals for Key Stages 1 and 4 which are out to consultation.
- 3.9 We urge a still greater role for careers education in schools, both as a means of ensuring young people are acquainted with career options and as an assurance that decisions about education pathways in and between schools are made by the young person.
- 3.10 We welcome the expression of the value of each child and the parity of esteem which each child deserves. Recognising differences is an issue and we wish education opportunities to be as varied and flexible as possible with support for those who need above average assistance and encouragement for those with particular talents whatever they may be.
- 3.11 We believe in parity of esteem also for the different paths which young people may take with equal appreciation for all types of vocational education whether in academic or other skills terms. We also believe in parity of esteem for the qualifications which are attained.
- 3.12 We hope that changes in provision will encourage all parents to take a lively and informed interest in the personal development and education progress of their children. Accordingly, we support ways in which parental preference can be pursued.
- 3.13 We wish to see formal opportunities for children and young people to express their wishes both as to choice of school and pursuit of an education programme. We are convinced this is feasible by year 10 (14 years). Accordingly, we believe that where choice for a 14-year-old pupil is concerned his or her

preferences should be given major consideration. The same should apply when a pupil wishes to transfer from an 11-16 school to pursue a course at an 11-18 or 14-18 school.

4. Comments On Proposals In The Report

We wish to respond particularly to the 3 main strands in the Report:

- (i) The ending of the Transfer Tests and of selection by solely academic criteria.
- (ii) An alternative transfer arrangement including the use of the pupil profile.
- (iii) The Collegiate System.

(i) The Ending Of The Present Transfer Tests And Of Selection By Solely Academic Criteria

1. Our views on these matters have already been expressed in this response. We wish however to point out that in consultations with primary principals there was little support for an interim arrangement. There is widespread speculation as to which year will be the end of the present system. Uncertainty is having the unwelcome effect of giving voice to those who say that the absence of a decision and its corollary of an acceptable and workable alternative makes the present Tests and their outcomes an acceptable situation. We ask for an early decision and information about change.
2. The Craigavon Two-Tier system is supported by the Board and indeed may be held as a template for other areas. At present selection at age 14 is on academic grounds although increasingly the young people are making up their own minds as to the school to which they wish to transfer.

When the system was conceived high priority was to be given to the wishes of those transferring and this persisted until recently when open enrolment imposed intake numbers. Assessment of pupils in the junior high schools is on the basis of their performance in all subjects taken. The rarity of appeals

suggests most young people and their parents are satisfied with the process.

Nevertheless it is acknowledged that for some pupils "deferred selection" is "deferred disappointment" and ways should and can be found to ameliorate this.

We conclude that the two-tier system must remain, not least because of the support it commands in the community but also from primary school parents, teachers and principals. It allows the pupils in these schools the enjoyment of 7 years of education without apprehension of a selective assessment, it protects the primary school curriculum from the "skewing" of preparation for the tests and it encourages, as research has shown, higher general achievement at age 11 by these pupils as compared with the achievements of pupils in areas where selection prevails.

3. It is demonstrably the case that transfer from 11-16 to 11-18 schools to pursue academic programmes of study should continue to be on the basis of academic aptitude. The pursuit of this more closely should result in wider access to schools offering 'A' levels for pupils from 11-16 schools.

At present 11-18 schools may consider they owe it to their own pupils to permit them to continue to 'A' levels even if pupils from other schools with equal or greater evidence of academic ability are rejected.

4. The present arrangements should remain for children who have formal statements of special educational need, who are attending 'mainstream' schools and whose parents wish a placement for them in a grammar school. The current system is that an educational psychologist will assess the child in his/her P7 year and then make a recommendation with regard to a post primary school placement. Children so placed are deemed to be additional to the usual enrolment numbers. This procedure is not unlawful under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and has been tested in the Courts.

(ii) An Alternative Transfer Arrangement Including The Use Of The Pupil Profile

1. Given the promise of pupil benefit from records of achievement we suggest that these are further refined as would be necessary for transfer purposes rather than start from afresh.

There is great and widespread concern that the completion of pupil profiles will place teachers and pupils under pressure, both because of the amount of work entailed and from parents who will regard the profile as the passport to admission to their favoured school even if it is not to be seen by the Principal of the receiving school. Realism suggests that some parents will push their children to reach higher goals from an early age especially if the pupil profile replaces the present Key Stage 1 assessment. As places in certain schools become more desirable than ever to such parents they will wish to convince the primary Principal and teachers that an academic programme is unequivocally suitable in the belief that this will count for admission purposes. There is a belief, not attributable to cynicism, that secondary school Principals will be shown surreptitiously the profiles of pupils to be considered for admission to their schools.

2. The absence of even a template for the pupil profile makes one wonder how it would achieve the objectives set for it. Although it is generally regarded as likely to be "a good thing". It is hard to put confidence in it while it remains an idea. A pilot scheme for the operation is desirable.
3. There is a view among some primary teachers that if the Pupil Profile replaces the present Key Stage 1 and 2 Assessments the area of assessment on curricular content may be reduced. It will be important that standards of achievement are recognisable within the profiles and that they have the quality assurance, as far as it can be provided, which moderation offers.
4. It is difficult to have the confidence that all parents will see the profile as a developmental tool and as indicating their child's education pathway and that they will be content with the

school where the provision seems to match the child's interests and aptitudes. On balance it would seem better for the Principal of the school to which application has been made to see the profile, not to deter or woo but to act as the fourth Party in the decision making process, the other parties being the pupil, the parents and the primary school Principal.

5. Given the common curriculum it is natural to expect that new arrangements should give access to more and more varied education programmes as the pupil matures. As far as possible the first 3 years of post-primary education should give pupils a uniform learning experience and enable informed choices at age 14.

We realise that the postponement of decision making from age 11 to age 14 bring us back to the issue of choice of school at age 11, in areas where selection operates at present.

6. Since the development of the pupil profile may take 3 years to develop, pilot and implement this timescale might allow the evolution to admission on non-academic criteria. Three suggestions are offered:
 - (i) A weighting and score approach with initially a high weighting for academic achievement derived from KS2 Assessment and other elements given proportionate weightings. These would include pupil and parent preference, primary Principal's advice, possibly the assessment of the Principal of the post-primary school and other considerations. Over a period of time the relative weightings would change to give the highest weightings to pupil/parents preference. (See Appendix 3).
 - (ii) Current grammar schools would be able to offer 90% initially, then in the subsequent 2 years 80% then 70% of their places on academic grounds using Transfer Test results. The remaining places would be filled by the Boards using non-academic criteria. The actual placement would be the decision of a group under Board aegis but representative of the managers of all types of school. The group would use non-academic criteria which would be

common throughout Northern Ireland. After 3 years non-academic criteria would apply completely.

- (iii) In anticipation of the exercise by a group of post-primary schools of more extensive functions substitute in (ii) above the Principals of the schools. As totality of funding would not be distributed by pupil numbers competition should not be foremost.

- 7. There is much debate about the criteria. We believe uniform criteria should apply. Experience of the present criteria both in grammar and non-grammar schools suggests that parents cannot see logic in the criteria used by different schools or the justification for changes in a school's criteria from one year to the next.

The Report describes the role of parents variously as "choice" and "preference" but the distinction between the two is not clear and the public seem to have arrived at the view that the illusion is "choice" but the reality is "preference". There is a widespread opinion that former grammar schools may be as heavily over-subscribed in general as at present. Some criteria are regarded as discriminatory eg the pupil being the child of a member of staff but, more controversially, the proximity of the home to the school. Rural communities are distressed at what appears to be their disadvantaged position. Moving house and convenience addresses are possible responses when parents want to increase the admission chances of their children.

Personal circumstances is seen as the present "special circumstances" in another guise.

The greatest censure is reserved for the criterion of "brother or sister of a pupil at the school or first child." It is viewed as grossly unfair that, at least for a number of years, pupils will be refused on the basis that when academic selection applied an older child was not admitted to a former grammar school.

Some commentators take the detached view that whatever criteria are approved for applications in an over-subscribed circumstance they must be compatible with human rights legislation and intentions and be able to withstand legal challenge.

(iii) The Collegiate System

We welcome an end to unhelpful competition among schools and encouragement to schools in an area to liaise more closely and to plan and deliver in a collaborative way for the benefit of the young people.

The success of this approach requires, we believe:

- A smaller grouping
- Schools of all management types in a group
- The inclusion of special schools and further education colleges, the latter possibly linking into more than one group
- A voluntary basis for membership albeit with financial and practical inducements
- Proper acknowledgement of management arrangements and of the roles of Boards of Governors
- Links with primary schools in the area, possibly curricular rather than strategic

We understand the concerns of those who see the collegiates as described in the Report as increasing bureaucracy, pitting the strong against the weaker even in the name of collaboration and leading to indefensible movement of teachers and pupils.

Rather than repeat the criterium of collegiates we wish to commend the concept of local schools cooperating and we believe the schools should be encouraged to do so.

It is understandable that targeted funding would be an inducement so we suggest to the Minister that additional resources are sought to encourage the schools to plan and deliver strategically. The decline in pupils numbers should not be seen as a threat to the existence of small secondary schools but the money released should be given to the groups under financial management arrangements to improve provision in the less-regarded schools in the group. A corporate sense of responsibility for all the children in the community school should be engendered so that each school acknowledge a sense of being "his brother's keeper."

Where true specialisms exist or are developed there should be pupil/teacher movement to enhance choice.

At this point, we bring in a difficulty arising from the proposed structure of collegiates. The Report proposes that pupils should attend schools in their collegiate. There are some parts of the Board's area, notably Fivemiletown, where a large number of pupils who live in the area of another collegiate attend the post-primary school in the neighbouring collegiate because it is the nearest secondary school to their homes. Problems will also arise in Rathfriland where those pupils who do not transfer to their local school attend Banbridge Academy which will be in a different collegiate. While these potential difficulties are mentioned at this point the Board's response is deferred until the discussion of collegiates.

We seek clarity on the related transport issues.

RESOURCES

If schools are allowed flexibility in their development, ie a uniform structure of comprehensive schools is not imposed throughout the Province the resources needs are difficult to calculate.

An attempt might have the following features:

1. Teacher Staffing Costs

Closer pupil-teacher ratios in schools currently designated as grammar with those in non-grammar schools where the PTR tends to be lower.

2. Re-Training Of Teachers

In any event this will be necessary to reflect changes in the curriculum as now proposed. Some additional training costs would be envisaged.

3. Release Of Teachers

If significant changes for some schools were contemplated Government might wish to "ease out" teachers who no longer felt committed to the character of their school.

SCHOOL STRUCTURES

Throughout this response the emphasis has been on evolution of post-primary school provision.

Changes in school structures in this Board's area should not be forced because of difficult provision in other parts of the Province.

We encourage structures which emerge with the following aspects:

- (a) The retention of existing 11-18 comprehensive schools.
- (b) The retention of the Craigavon 2-tier system with some changes in selection at age 14.
- (c) In those areas where academic selection at age 11 applies an increase in intake on other than selective grounds with common 11-14 programmes and differentiation thereafter. For some group of schools this might mean a 2-tier arrangement, for some schools wider post 14 programmes of courses of study delivered entirely within an individual school or through co-operation with another school or schools and, possibly, in tandem with a review of Further and Higher Education Institutes, 11-16 schools with a Sixth Form College.

APPENDIX 1

GRAMMAR SCHOOLS (Controlled)

Banbridge Academy

SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS (Controlled) (Grammar)

Lurgan College
Portadown College

SECONDARY SCHOOLS (Controlled)

Aughnacloy College
Banbridge High
Brownlow College (Integrated)
City of Armagh High School
Clounagh Junior High
Cookstown High
Dromore High
Drumglass High
Fivemiletown High
Kilkeel High
Killicomaine Junior High
Lurgan Junior High School
Markethill High
Newry High
Newtownhamilton High
Rathfriland High
Tandragee Junior High

SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL (Controlled Non-Grammar)

Craigavon Senior High School
Portadown Campus
Lurgan Campus

(Voluntary)

Christian Brother's Abbey Grammar School
Our Lady's Grammar School
Royal School, Armagh
Royal School, Dungannon
Sacred Heart Grammar School
St Colman's College
St Joseph's Convent Grammar School
St Louis' Grammar School
St Michael's Grammar
St Patrick's Academy for Boys
St Patrick's Academy for Girls
St Patrick's Grammar School

THE CRAIGAVON TWO-TIER SYSTEM

1. Arrangements

Controlled: Lurgan and Portadown

Age 11

Pupils transfer without selection to junior high schools (Lurgan, Clounagh, Killicomaine and Tandragee)

Maintained : Lurgan

Age 11

Pupils transfer without selection to junior high schools (St Mary's and St Paul's)

Age 14

Internal school examinations. Pupils selected to transfer to Craigavon Senior High School and Lurgan and Portadown College.

Age 14

Internal school examinations. Pupils selected to transfer to St Michael's Grammar School or remain in their current schools.

2. Views Of Pupils, Parents, Teachers and Governors

2.1 Pupils

Pupils like to transfer at 11 years without sitting a transfer examination. They enjoy holding positions of authority in 11-14 schools. They worry about their initial class placing determining their destiny to transfer at age 11 to a grammar school. They may be concerned at being separated from friends at 14+ but they may also enjoy the experience of a new school and new friends. At age 16 pupils leave Craigavon Senior High School and join UBIFHE in large numbers.

2.2 **Parents**

Parents appreciate that their children are not worried at age 11. Parents see the placement of children in classes by year 3 in the school as indicating whether or not a child will transfer to a grammar school

Controlled:

Parents esteem all the schools.

Parents and pupils are increasingly choosing at age 14 between Craigavon Senior High School and Lurgan or Portadown College. Parents from outside the areas are seeking admission of their children particularly to Lurgan Junior High School and then to Craigavon Senior High School. Parents see the system in its totality as acceptable. While fewer pupils than formerly transfer out of the area at age 11 some go to schools in Banbridge and Lisburn. At age 14 some transfer to Armagh and Banbridge schools to which they may live nearer.

Maintained:

While parents esteem the schools there remains a sizeable and historical transfer from Lurgan to Newry schools. Parents are satisfied that if their children are not selected for St Michael's Grammar School they remain at St Mary's and St Paul's.

2.3 **Teachers**

Generally teachers value the system, irrespective of where they teach.

Some junior high school teachers feel their prospect of securing posts in 11-16 or 11-18 schools is limited by their experience of teaching only at Key Stage 3.

Teachers in Craigavon Senior High School have to re-motivate some children who have been disappointed in their aspiration of transferring to a grammar school.

2.4 **Governors**

Governors are committed to their schools and, generally, to the system.

APPENDIX 3

Transfer Arrangement: "weighting and Scoring"

1st Year of Operation

Key Stage 2 Achievements in English and Maths

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Working below level 4 | = 1 |
| Working at level 4 | = 2 |
| Working at level 5 | = 3 |
| Working above level 6 | = 4 |

Multiply score by factor 4

Preference Of Parent And Child

| | |
|----------------------------|-----|
| 1 st preference | = 3 |
| 2 nd preference | = 2 |
| 3 rd preference | = 1 |

Multiply score by factor 3

Recommendation Of Primary Principal

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| Strongly support | = 3 |
| Supports | = 2 |
| Would recommend a different school | = 1 |

Multiply score by factor 2

In the 2nd and 3rd years of operation the multiplying factors would change to give greater weight to parental and pupil performance and less to Key Stage 2 attainment.