

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive (People)
to
Cabinet

on
20th June 2017

Report prepared by: Amanda Champ, School Improvement
Group Manager (interim)

**Agenda
Item No.**

Grammar School Strategy

Executive Councillor: Councillor James Courtenay

A Part 1 Report

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report sets out the intentions of the Council to fulfil an ambition to enable more Southend Residents to attend one of our four Grammar Schools. This will be achieved over a period of time by implementing a strategy to enable more residents to apply for; sit the assessment; pass and attend one of these schools.
- 1.2 The strategy considers what Southend Borough council and partners can do in order to further improve access to grammar schools for young Southend residents. There is already a considerable amount of work undertaken by both Secondary and Primary schools to advise and support parents and learners in both the decision to apply and preparation for the assessment. This strategy will sit alongside that existing provision. It sets out actions that, when implemented in coordination with the Consortium of selective schools in Essex, Secondary and Primary schools and other partners, will ensure that all young Southend residents who would thrive within a grammar school setting, get the necessary support to access and take up a grammar school place should their parents deem this the most appropriate educational choice for their children.
- 1.3 Southend Borough Council has a long held and passionate belief that more Southend pupils, including those identified as deprived, should directly benefit from the outstanding education provided by our four Grammar Schools. As a result of this initiative, the Council will work alongside schools and families directly to support a greater number of Southend pupils to make an informed choice to apply; to sit the assessment fully prepared; to meet the pass mark and then to take up a place and ultimately succeed in their chosen school.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 To inform Cabinet of the outline proposals for the strategy.
- 2.2 For Cabinet to note and give broad approval to the types of actions set out in Appendix One that will form the basis of the strategy.;

Background

2.3 This matter has been the subject of debate and action over a number of years with several initiatives having been tried previously. Conversations with the leadership at the four schools has already taken place, as aspects of any plans will rely on the consortium who will have the ultimate ability to make changes in certain areas.

2.4 The matter is complex and deep rooted, and subject to a set of conflicting and interwoven beliefs. The responsibility for the three levels of **applying, sitting and passing** the assessment sits with the family and child, influenced by a number of factors:

- the degree of active promotion and aspiration by the school they attend;
- locality and deprivation factors;
- the availability of other secondary good or outstanding provision being accessible to the pupils.

It is clear that the current arrangements, for whatever reason, have not resulted in a greater number of Southend resident pupils attending Grammar Schools. Therefore, a different approach is now proposed, if the aspiration of the Council is to be achieved.

2.5 Considerable data already exists on historic patterns of application and attendance, including a breakdown of the number of pupils attending the four schools from inside the Southend area. This percentage varies in some degree between the four schools. The data itself will form the backdrop to the proposals.

2.6 It cannot be stressed too strongly, that this initiative **is not to the detriment of other schools in the borough**. The Council's stated ambition is for all schools to be good or outstanding. This initiative relates to the opportunities for individual children to access an appropriate educational pathway should it be in their best interests.

2.7 This initiative recognises that it is a parent/carers right to make an informed choice of school that best suits the needs, talents and aspirations for their child. Therefore, it should also include and ensure the promotion of educational pathways for **all** of our secondary schools, and continue to work with all schools to achieve our aspiration that parental choice is **only** based upon a choice between either a good or an outstanding school in Southend. Work through the Education Board will be undertaken to support this intention.

2.8 As part of the project, Southend Borough Council acknowledges the need to work more closely with grammar schools in Southend to open up these schools to more able children from low income families by overcoming educational, financial and social barriers and perceptions.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 Southend's secondary school offer provides real choice for parents seeking a school that suits their child's abilities and needs. We recognise that schools of

various types in the borough, including grammar schools, faith schools, comprehensive and special schools provide choice for parents in selecting the best education for their children.

- 3.2 The remit of this strategy focuses on what can be done to improve the representation of Southend residents, including those children from disadvantaged backgrounds, so that they can benefit from a selective education if it is suitable for their particular abilities. This includes ensuring that academically able children from poorer backgrounds in our high deprivation wards have the same access to selective education as their more affluent peers.
- 3.3 Southend has a large number of academies. As such, the actions outlined within this strategy are intended as recommendations – none of them can be imposed on schools who are not under Local Authority control. However, this strategy is written with the intent that all Southend Borough Council primary and grammar schools work together to support the most academically able pupils and in particular, supporting those from poorer backgrounds, so that no child is denied an education that is best suited for their talents and abilities.

4. Other Options

The only other option would be to do nothing. This Strategy is a key priority of the Administration.

6. Corporate Implications

- 6.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities
This directly supports the Council's aims relating to prosperous and excellence.
- 6.2 Financial Implications
Cabinet have previously approved the funding for this project through the school improvement budget for a period of two years.
- 6.3 Legal Implications
None
- 6.4 People Implications
None
- 6.5 Property Implications
None
- 6.6 Consultation
Not required formally, although dialogue with all schools will take place throughout implementation.
- 6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications
The project includes the most able pupils in receipt of free school meals or other measures of disadvantage such as children in care or children supported by the Pupil premium and provide appropriate support to enable these children to

benefit from the education provided by our Grammar schools as part of the strategy.

6.8 Risk Assessment

There will be a need to ensure that the clear message given by this proposal is one of parental choice, and that the Council is determined to promote and support all secondary schools with the Borough.

6.9 Value for Money

None

6.10 Community Safety Implications

None

6.11 Environmental Impact

None

7. **Background Papers**

None

8. **Appendices**

Appendix 1: (This list is taken from a working document that will shape the strategy over time).