



(c) crown copyright

*Printed for the Cabinet. April 1955***SECRET****Copy No. 60****C.P. (55) 6****20th April, 1955****CABINET****SECONDARY EDUCATION****MEMORANDUM BY THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION**

As the 11+ examination is likely to be an election issue, my colleagues may like to know how the argument stands.

2. There are just over 2 million boys and girls of secondary school age in schools maintained by Local Education Authorities or otherwise assisted from public funds. This number will rise to 2.7 millions by 1961.

3. The 1944 Act provided that these children should receive, without the payment of fees, an education suited to their ability and aptitude. This was taken to mean that there should be three types of secondary school—grammar (for about 20 per cent.), technical (for about 5 per cent.), and modern (for about 75 per cent.).

4. The selection of the school to which a child goes is determined by an examination at 11+. It was hoped that the modern schools would attain "parity of esteem" with the grammar schools, and that as a result the disappointment and jealousy felt by parents when their children failed to qualify for a grammar school would disappear. But this has not yet happened, and the resentment appears to be growing.

5. Mr. James Griffiths has said that the next Labour Government will abolish the exam altogether by doing away with the three kinds of secondary school and substituting comprehensive schools, each of which will take all the children from a determined area.

6. If a comprehensive school is to provide an education comparable with the three separate secondary schools it must contain some 2,000 pupils, since the grammar school element must be at least 400 strong to provide a satisfactory sixth form. It may be possible to hand-pick the staff for one or two such schools. This is what the L.C.C. are doing at Kidbrooke. But in my opinion Kidbrooke is an exception that will prove the rule that the difficulties of organisation are too great to be overcome.

7. I have told Local Education Authorities that I will approve a comprehensive school only when no existing good school is to be swallowed up in the process, and that I will not agree to a complete network of comprehensive schools in any area. My predecessor approved 10 new comprehensive schools, and I have added 2.

8. Although the comprehensive school is certainly not the right answer, we cannot leave the 11+ examination where it is. The anxieties and jealousies are too easy to play on. If we copied the United States of America we should treble our Universities, and send to them, via much enlarged grammar schools, a far higher proportion of the population than goes to them to-day. But the standards of our Universities and grammar schools could not be diluted in this way without changing their whole character. Our policy must be to construct an alternative route to high qualifications and well-paid jobs via secondary modern and technical schools and technical colleges, and to encourage more transfers at 15 or 16 to and from grammar schools.

9. Circumstances help us. We have to build something like  $\frac{3}{4}$  million new secondary school places, and can, therefore, influence the pattern of schools without disturbing what exists. Furthermore, the public, aware of the increasing demand for technicians and skilled workers of all kinds, is taking kindly to the offer by secondary modern schools of special courses with a clear vocational interest. I am encouraging Local Education Authorities to distribute these courses over as many secondary schools as possible. This has the great advantage that each school will be able to offer something special that cannot be had elsewhere in the area. Where this is already happening, Local Education Authorities are finding that complaints from parents about the selection procedure are strikingly reduced.

10. To sum up: the feelings aroused by the 11+ exam, both justified and unjustified, force a move either towards selection for nobody or towards selection for everybody. Selection for nobody means comprehensive schools with grammar schools abolished and parents' choice practically ruled out. The Socialists support this policy on the principle of fair shares for all. Selection for everybody means developing in each secondary school some special attraction and giving parents the widest possible choice.

11. I hope that my colleagues will think that selection for everybody is the right policy. It appeared at the Scarborough Conference of the National Union of Teachers, which I addressed last week, that a big majority of the teachers is now against comprehensives and in favour of building up secondary moderns.

D. E.

*Ministry of Education, W. I.  
18th April, 1955.*

*[Faint, mirrored text from the reverse side of the page is visible through the paper, appearing as bleed-through.]*