

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Peter Weir, Minister
Rathgael House, Balloo Road
Bangor, BT19 7PR

Doug Beattie, MLA
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont

12 March 2020
AQW 2735/17-22

Doug Beattie, MLA has asked:

To ask the Minister of Education whether he has seen a formal constitution of the Dickson plan system of academic selection; (i) will he make that constitution publicly available; and (ii) if there is no formal constitution can he begin the process of establishing one in consultation with stakeholders.

ANSWER

The Education Authority, Managing Authority for the Controlled schools included in the Dickson Plan has provided my Department with historical papers in relation to its establishment. These include the original Dickson Plan scheme dated 5 February 1965, a paper written by W.J. Dickson, Director of Education at that time and a copy of the former Ministry of Education's decision dated 15 February 1967, in relation to the reorganisation of secondary education in the Craigavon area.

I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.



Peter Weir MLA

Assembly Library Document

AQW 2735/17-22

Tabled by: Doug Beattie MLA
Constituency: Upper Bann
Political Party: Ulster Unionist Party

Question: To ask the Minister of Education whether he has seen a formal constitution of the Dickson plan system of academic selection; (i) will he make that constitution publicly available; and (ii) if there is no formal constitution can he begin the process of establishing one in consultation with stakeholders.

STRUCTURE OF SECONDARY AND FULL-TIME FURTHER
EDUCATION IN THE LURGAN/PORTADOWN "NEW CITY"

AREA

1. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

It is important that the Education Committee should decide fairly soon on the structure of secondary and full-time further education in the Lurgan/Portadown "new city" area because:-

- (a) provision must be made for the raising of the school leaving age to 16 by 1970 and the kind and amount of accommodation needed must be determined soon;
- (b) the amount, variety and type of full-time courses need to be decided for the new Regional Technical College so that the schedule of accommodation may be made to enable instructions to be given soon to the Architect if the Technical College is to fulfill its role to meet the existing and future needs of the area, to play its part in the attracting new industry and to harmonize with the Government's economic plans;
- (c) preliminary decisions will have to be taken fairly soon on the provision of new schools to meet the targets in the "New City Northern Ireland" Report and to keep abreast or ahead of the developments visualised in that Report.

2. THE BACKGROUND

The examination of the educational needs of the "new city" area should, perhaps, be made against the general background of -

- (a) the recommendations of the Advisory Council for Education in its Report on "Secondary School Organisation" (Cmd. 471);
- (b) the policy of the Government as indicated in the White Paper on "Educational Development in Northern Ireland 1964" and Parliamentary Debate thereon;
- (c) the view expressed in the "New City Northern Ireland" Report on the development of education in the area.

The Advisory Council in its Report has expressed the opinion that the Ministry should be asked to encourage local education and voluntary authorities to consider the possibility of dispensing with selection by providing, for example, common secondary schools which would offer a full course to all children of the area or campus schools or schools on a "two-tier" system like that established in Leicestershire, and has stated that the Portadown/Lurgan "new city" area might be considered particularly suitable in this connection.

In the White Paper the Ministry states its policy to encourage experiments designed to dispense with the necessity for selecting pupils for different types of secondary school and refers to the retention of Technical High Schools, associated with institutions of further education to which transfer could be made on the completion of a Junior High School course in a "two-tier" arrangement. It also refers to the necessity "to build up for the future the best possible relations between the secondary schools and the institutions of further education".

In the "New City" Report it is stated "..... the number of new schools required will, together with the kind of pre-planning envisaged, offer good opportunities of experimentation and for developing the new kinds of schools or complexes of schools required by the new technological era".

3. SOME DRAWBACKS OF THE PRESENT SYSTEM:

It would seem that the "Qualifying Examination" and its effects loom large in the public mind for the White Paper states:

- (a) "The most serious educational problem at the present time is that underlying the continuing criticism of the "Qualifying Examination": the question which lies at the root of the criticism is whether the existing system of education should be continued"
- (b) "The present basis of selection, the Qualifying Examination, is being subjected to an ever increasing measure of criticism. This is not so much on the ground that it does not act as a reasonably efficient method of prediction of success in a grammar school, but rather that it is feared to have serious side effects: the subjection of children to undue strain and a serious back-wash influence on the curriculum and teaching methods in the Primary Schools".

It must be stressed, however, that the present form of selection is to be replaced by one which, it is hoped, will prove to be more acceptable: but selection will remain at 11.

It is freely acknowledged that a completely accurate classification of children, either by level or type of ability, is not possible at 11 years, and that it is difficult to prognosticate what a later growth of intelligence, parental backing in a good home and dogged qualities of character will do for a young person three years or so later.

There seems to be a feeling that 11 is too early an age for a decision which may have important consequences on the educational future of a child. Criticism has been made of the social effects of selection and segregation at 11 and it has been suggested that there is a feeling that segregation at an early age is out of tune with the times. It seems to be generally accepted that selection at 11 is a cause of parental anxiety and failure to be selected is alleged to have ill effects on some children.

The present tripartite system - secondary intermediate, technical intermediate and grammar - with the possibility of parallel courses being provided in three types of school, and four or more schools in a small area, is potentially wasteful of accommodation, equipment and, above all, teachers especially those suitably qualified for advanced work. Such a system may tend to discourage co-operation between different types of school and to breed competition with some undesirable consequences.

The drawbacks of the present system point to some of the changes and improvements needed.

It is desirable to have a scheme which:-

- (a) while abolishing or deferring selection is founded on good educational principles, promotes the well-being of the child and of the community and commands the confidence and respect of the public and the teachers;
- (b) gives more weight to parental choice and safeguards the right of parents;
- (c) removes undesirable strains on the children, the primary schools and the parents;
- (d) is based on the retention of existing schools and the preservation of their traditions;
- (e) makes the most economic use of resources - including teachers, equipment and accommodation.

4. SCHEME:

This is tentatively put forward as a suggestion and not as a panacea to solve all educational problems in the area.

The main outlines of the Scheme are:

- (a) All children to be educated in schools in the scheme will transfer from primary to secondary education at about the age of 11, special provision to continue for younger children, and will remain at the secondary school (which might be designated "High School") for three years.
- (b) During this time pupils will follow courses suited to their ages, aptitude and abilities under the close surveillance of their teachers and, at the end of it, those pupils whose parents wish them to do so and who show the requisite ability will transfer either to -
 - (1) the Grammar School for an academic course leading to the General Certificate of Education; or
 - (2) the Technical College for an "Industrial" type General Certificate of Education (i.e. a higher content of practical subjects), the Ordinary National Diploma in Building and/or Engineering, Pre-Vocational and Vocational courses in Commerce, Household Management, Pre-Catering, Pre-Nursing, Pre-Apprenticeship and Pre-Agriculture and the like.
- (c) There would be later transfer between the grammar and technical colleges.
- (d) Some of the slower learning children might transfer to the Technical College after a four or five year course.
- (e) The grammar school, the technical college and the 'feeding' secondary (High) schools would form a unit within which there would be the closest possible co-operation.

5. ADVANTAGES OF THE SCHEME:

- (a) The abolition of selection at 11 with all its undesirable effects.
- (b) The deferring of a decision about the most suitable type of schooling until children are three years older and have had more time to show their abilities, aptitudes and qualities of industry, perseverance and the like and until their teachers are in a better position to give sounder advice to them and their parents.
- (c) The increase in the prestige of the Secondary Intermediate (High) School which would cater for the whole range of ability of pupils in the first three years of secondary schooling.
- (d) The provision in grammar schools of a more adult conception of staff/student relationship than might be possible with an age range of 11 - 18 and possibly the better use of highly qualified staff.
- (e) The formation of a strong base of full-time work for the Regional Technical College to enable it to meet adequately the needs of the community by providing the optimum conditions for a wide variety of full time and part time vocational courses, as well as leisure time pursuits.

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(f) No greater modifications than under the existing scheme and, indeed, perhaps less, would be required to school buildings.

6. CONSULTATION:

If the Education Committee decides that the scheme is worthy of consideration then before views have begun to harden there should be close and early consultation with teachers, parents, school management committees and, at an appropriate stage, with the Ministry of Education.

7. PROCEDURE:

If this scheme, or a modification of it is adopted, the implementation will need to be most carefully phased in the interests of the children and the schools and to cause the least upset to teachers and ensure continuity of employment.

8. PARENTAL CHOICE:

The selection procedure will continue for children not in county schools in the "new city" area and it is considered imperative that any parent in the area who wishes his child to go to a grammar school outside the proposed system should be permitted to enter his child for the selection procedure (new form of Qualifying Examination) and, if the child is successful, to send him to the grammar school of his choice. It is suggested that travelling expenses should be paid in full on the basis of attendance at the nearest suitable grammar school.

W.J. DICKSON,

Director of Education.

WJD/GL.

5th February, 1965.

REVISED SUGGESTED SCHEME

Original

Revised

(a) All children to be educated in schools in the scheme will transfer from primary to secondary education at about the age of 11, special provision to continue for younger children, and will remain at the secondary school (which might be designated "High School") for three years.

(b) During this time pupils will follow courses suited to their ages, aptitude and abilities under the close surveillance of their teachers and, at the end of it, those pupils whose parents wish them to do so and who show the requisite ability will transfer either to -

(i) the Grammar School for an academic course leading to the General Certificate of Education;

or

(ii) the Technical College for an "Industrial" type General Certificate of Education (i.e. a higher content of practical subjects) the Ordinary National Diploma in Building and/or Engineering, Pre-Vocational and Vocational courses in Commerce, Household Management, Pre-Catering, Pre-Nursing, Pre-Apprenticeship and Pre-Agriculture, and the like.

(c) There would be later transfer between the grammar and technical colleges.

(d) Some of the slower learning children might transfer to the Technical College after a four or five year course.

(e) The grammar school, the technical College and the 'feeding' secondary (High) schools would form a unit within which there would be the closest possible co-operation.

(a) All children to be educated in schools in the scheme will transfer from primary to secondary education at about the age of 11, special provision to continue for retarded children to transfer later and for younger more able children to transfer earlier. All will remain in the secondary school for three years.

(b) During this time, pupils will follow courses suited to their ages, aptitudes and abilities under the close surveillance of their teachers and at the end of it will transfer either to -

(i) grammar schools for a course leading to the General Certificate of Education examinations;

or

(ii) technical colleges where a wide variety of courses will be available, e.g. G.C.E., the Ordinary National Diploma in Building, Engineering and Sciences, Pre-Apprenticeship, Pre-Nursing, Pre-Catering, Pre-Agriculture, Commerce, Household Management, General Education and perhaps Apprenticeship.

At the transfer stage much weight should be given to parental choice made in the light of teacher advice based on the pupil's school record and perhaps, in the initial stages, on the results of an external examination.

(c) No change.

(d) Not now applicable as all pupils will transfer after a three year course.

(e) No change.

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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION,
DUNGONALD HOUSE,
UPPER NEWGARDH ROAD,
BELFAST, 4.

Our Ref. S.1919/12
6,1929/9

15th February, 1967.

Ascending Development Scheme for Secondary Education

County Schools - Craigavon Area

Sir,

I am directed by the Minister of Education to refer to your Committee's proposals, in its Ascending Development Scheme for Secondary Education dated 19th October, 1965, relating to the re-organization of secondary education in county schools in the Craigavon area.

In the light of subsequent correspondence and discussions which have taken place between the Ministry and the Committee, and with particular reference to the assurances as to the retention of the technical colleges and their associated technical high schools contained in your letter of 18th February, 1967, the Ministry has decided, subject to the conditions below, to approve the proposals in the Ascending Scheme, i.e. a two-tier system of secondary education which will involve -

- (i) the continuance of Portadown and Lurgan Colleges as grammar schools, with recruitment to the secondary departments at 14+,
- (ii) the transformation of the four secondary (intermediate) schools concerned into non-selective schools providing a three-year course, and
- (iii) the establishment of two technical high schools recruiting at 14+ and conducted in association with the technical colleges.

The conditions on which this approval is given are -

- (i) no expansion of the preparatory departments in the grammar schools will be undertaken, and their continued retention will be reviewed by the Committee in five years' time;
- (ii) the Committee accepts the fact that admission to the senior schools, so long as they remain grammar schools, of pupils as qualified (i.e. non-fee paying) pupils will be governed by a selection procedure approved by the Ministry;
- (iii) on the assumption that a new agreed formula will be devised as a means of declaring pupils qualified on the results of the new Junior Certificate Examination, then that formula will apply for determining the entry of qualified pupils at 14+ to Portadown and Lurgan Colleges and any further grammar schools in the Craigavon area;
- (iv) the Committee may, in addition, admit as free-paying pupils unqualified pupils up to 2% of the number of pupils admitted each year to each school as qualified pupils under (iii), (i.e. not more than 2% of the total admissions at 14+ each year shall be unqualified);
- (v) these arrangements shall be reviewed five years after the date of their introduction, or earlier if the Junior Certificate Examination should be discontinued;