

## **CABINET**

**5 APRIL 2022**

### **PROPOSALS TO CHANGE THREE GRAMMAR SCHOOLS FROM SINGLE GENDER TO CO-EDUCATIONAL PROVISIONS**

Portfolio Holders: Councillor Mrs Josie Iles, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services  
(Lead Member)

Councillor Martin Potter, Portfolio Holder for Education and  
Schools

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#### **Summary**

This report outlines the rationale and process for three Medway grammar schools to change their admissions arrangements from single sex to co-educational provisions. It requests Cabinet approval for the Council to consult on the principle of this change, and act as a co-ordinator for the process. It also requests Cabinet approval for funding to provide necessary building modifications to ensure appropriate facilities are available.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

1.1. Medway Council has a statutory duty to provide sufficient school places. The proposed change will also help meet the Council Plan Priority of 'Supporting Medway's people to realise their potential', and the outcome of 'All children achieving their potential in schools'. The proposal, if approved, would require funding through the Education Capital Programme. Therefore, this is a matter for Cabinet.

#### **2. Background**

2.1. Medway has six selective schools, only one of which is currently co-educational. The remaining schools are single sex, two are for boys, and three for girls. In September 2021, this resulted in 383 year 7 boys places, 475 girls places, and 235 co-educational places.

2.2. The gender split among Medway pupils at primary age is 51% boys, 49% girls, which matches the England average for children aged 4 to 11. The split in mainstream secondary school places is 45% boys, 55% girls.

- 2.3. Therefore, the gender split in secondary selective school places does not match the split in the population and cohorts of pupils coming through the primary school system who will require a place in secondary selective schools in the near future.
- 2.4. The Medway test admissions process currently allows for 23% of the Medway Year 6 cohort to attend selective schools. This is limited to 23% by the current capacity of boys' places. However, this means available girl's places cannot be offered through the Medway test admissions process to Medway girls and are consequently filled by out of area pupils. Medway has place capacity in its selective schools to cater for up to 28% of the pupil cohort population.
- 2.5. Expanding current boys' selective schools to balance the places would require an additional 90 places per year group. This is not feasible financially or in terms of physical space at boys' school sites. There is also not the place planning need.
- 2.6. As part of a joint ambition with Medway Local Authority to address the inequality, Holcombe Grammar (boys), Fort Pitt grammar (girls), and Chatham Grammar (girls) are proposing to change from single sex to co-educational admissions. The three schools propose to change their admission arrangements simultaneously to avoid any under or over provision resulting from the changes. This would give 685 co-educational places in total, with 203 boys' places and 205 girls' places at the remaining single sex schools. This would give an approximate 50/50 split in boys' and girl's places overall.
- 2.7. This change would, in time, allow for an increase in the Medway test pass percentage from 23% to a maximum of 28%, and to enable more Medway pupils, boys and girls in equal numbers, to attend their local selective school.
- 2.8. This will ease the pressure on non-selective schools, providing Medway with more sustainable and equitable overall secondary provision, which should negate the need for further bulge classes allowing those schools that are admitting pupils over PAN to consolidate places and make best use of their resources and facilities.
- 2.9. The Trusts that operate the three schools, which are all academies, have requested that the Council act as the co-ordinator of the process, to ensure that the full and appropriate processes are followed and to provide transparency and fairness in the process. The Council would carry out, in partnership with the academy trusts, an informal public consultation on the change, lead on the preparation of the business cases at the end of the consultation and provide funding to assist with any necessary physical changes to the schools as the makeup of the school populations adjust from single to mixed sex.

### 3. Analysis and advice

- 3.1. The change from single sex to co-educational is classed as a significant change by the Department for Education. The three schools are

academies, and so they must each complete a full business case to support the proposed change. The Council will provide information and assistance with these where necessary.

- 3.2. The final decision on the change from single sex to co-educational lies with the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC). Before the RSC can approve the proposals, the schools will also need to carry out a formal consultation on changing their admissions arrangements. This is a separate consultation carried out by each school, in accordance with the school admissions code. The Council will support the schools in this element of the process as necessary.
- 3.3. It is proposed to implement the changes in September 2024 starting with the year 7 intake and filling as a co-educational school year by year after that. For clarity, the incumbent year groups in the schools that are single sex, will remain so for their journey through the school.
- 3.4. Implementing this proposal will result in more selective school places for Medway children, which will in turn help to reduce demand in non-selective places and ease the pressure on those places.

#### 4. Benefits

- 4.1. One expected outcome of the changes proposed, would be an increase in Medway pupils accessing a selective school place and in turn, a reduction in out of area pupils.
- 4.2. More pupils would be able to access their local selective school and reduce unnecessary travelling.
- 4.3. If the three schools change to co-ed, this will improve the balance of boys and girl's places in Medway from 45% boys, 55% girls, to 50% of each. It will also improve the geographic distribution of boys' and girls' places, with the schools proposed to change highlighted in the map below.

5. Figure 1 - Current distribution of selective schools

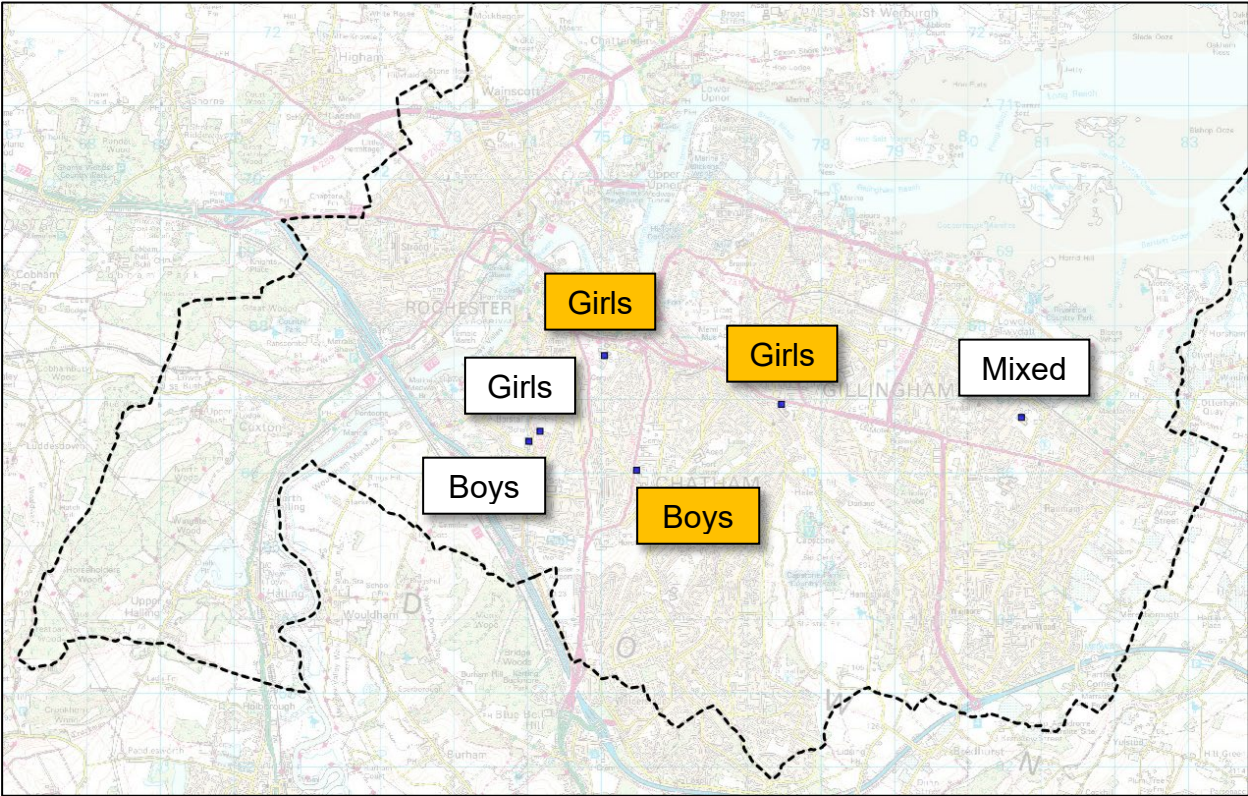


Figure 1 – current distribution of selective schools

- 5.1. There is no recognised evidential evidence that a school being single or mixed gender has a significant impact on attainment.
- 5.2. It is more important that schools provide good quality education with a variety of outstanding learning opportunities and support for their pupils. All three schools are rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.
- 5.3. Rainham Mark, the only mixed grammar school currently in Medway, is always oversubscribed and regularly enjoys the highest number of first preferences of any Medway Grammar School.
- 5.4. All of Medway’s primary schools are mixed, as is higher education, and nearly all work environments are mixed.
- 5.5. Medway’s School Place Planning Strategy 2018-2022 states, at section 6.2.5, that the Council will ‘extend co-educational places when new schools are established’, highlighting the Council’s commitment and preference for co-educational settings.

5.6. Indicative timeline (subject to change)

Cabinet	5 April 2022
Informal consultation on the proposals	May/June 2022
CYP Overview and Scrutiny	28 July 2022
Cabinet – outcomes of consultation	23 August 2022
Consultation on admissions arrangements	6 weeks starting October 2022
Schools submit business case to RSC	December 2022/ January 2023
Implementation if approved	1 September 2024

## 6. Climate change implications

- 6.1. No climate change implications arise directly from this report, however if any modifications are necessary at the three schools, designs and construction methods will consider such impacts and look to contribute to the Council's climate change agenda.
- 6.2. By distributing boys' and girls' places more widely across Medway, it will provide more opportunity for pupils to access a local grammar school and therefore it is expected that there would be a reduction in car journeys across Medway which will reduce any impacts upon air quality.
- 6.3. Pupils are encouraged by schools to walk or cycle to school, and this becomes more achievable if the provision is local.
- 6.4. For any physical changes which are required for the schools, officers will look to utilise methods, local contractors and materials to help reduce the carbon footprint.

## 7. Risk management

- 7.1. There are no risks resulting directly from this report, however the following would be assessed as risks should recommendations from individual proposals flowing from this report not be implemented.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Action to avoid or mitigate risk</b>	<b>Risk rating</b>
The Council's statutory duty to provide sufficient good quality school places	If insufficient school places are made available to meet demand, the Council would be failing to meet its obligations.	Implement proposals to provide sufficient good quality places in the areas of demand.	C1
That insufficient funding is available to fund proposals to provide sufficient places	Basic need funding is limited, and the extent of the emerging need may mean that unless additional funding can be sourced, projects to provide places may not be able to be implemented, which could mean that the council fails to meet its statutory obligation.	Explore options to fund projects including bidding for funding initiatives. Look at cost effective ways to supply places. Utilise section 106 funding to create new and improved school places	B1
That the level of forecast pupils fails to materialise	Should the expected numbers of pupils fail to materialise, then any funding committed could have been better spent elsewhere.	Continue to monitor births, migration and housing developments and accuracy of forecasting.	D3

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Reputational damage to the council if there is strong objection to the consultation	There will be a group of stakeholders who are in favour of single sex education and will challenge and not welcome any changes	The consultation process is lengthy and will work to consider all views. Current pupils in years 7 and 8 are the only ones who will see this change when they get into year 10 and 11. New admissions to schools will be made aware of Co-ED intentions as part of the admission process and can consequently select the single sex options at that stage	C2

## 8. Consultation

- 8.1. If approved by Cabinet, Council officers will carry out an initial coordinated informal public consultation on the proposed change to co-educational on behalf of the three schools. This consultation is not statutory for the Council but will enable the stakeholder parties to gauge views and opinions, which in turn will inform the statutory consultation in the autumn and an integral part of the business case that each of the schools must submit to the Regional Schools Commissioner.
- 8.2. If the Regional Schools Commissioner approves the change, the individual schools will need to show within their business cases that they have also consulted formally, which is recommended to be undertaken alongside their admissions consultation for 2024 during the autumn of 2022.
- 8.3. A Diversity Impact Assessment will be prepared following the consultation period and presented to Cabinet with the Outcomes of Consultation report in August 2022.

## 9. Financial implications

- 9.1. Any physical modifications required to the three schools as a result of the changes will be funded through the Children and Adults' Capital Programme. Funding implications for proposed projects will be assessed during the Spring of 2022 and included for approval within the subsequent report to Cabinet in August, highlighting the outcomes of the consultation period.
- 9.2. Where appropriate, developer contributions will be sought from new housing schemes to assist with the provision of school places.
- 9.3. Currently no basic need funding is provided by central government to Medway Council to provide additional places, therefore funding of projects

is reliant upon section 106 receipts, or Council borrowing in advance of future developer contributions due to the delay in receiving funding through this avenue.

9.4. The Council will support the schools in bidding for a grant from the Selective Schools Expansion Fund (SSEF), which may assist in funding the capital works. However, at this time it is unclear whether any future opportunities to bid through this route will be made available by central government.

9.5. Occasionally, additional funding sources and initiatives become available such as free school waves or targeted basic need initiatives. Where possible the Council will seek to make use of those opportunities to reduce the demands upon the limited funding currently available.

## 10. Legal implications

10.1. Changing an academy from single sex to co-educational is classed as a significant change and requires the approval of the Regional Schools Commissioner. The academy also must carry out a consultation on changing its admission arrangements, in accordance with the school admissions code.

10.2. While the proposed consultation is not a statutory requirement for the Council, there is a strong expectation on Local Authorities to consult interested parties to develop their proposals as part of their duty under public law to act rationally and consider all relevant representations.

10.3. The Regional Schools Commissioner is the decision maker on any proposals made by an academy to change from a single to mixed sex provision.

10.4. Where a significant change involves a school changing between single and mixed sex, the decision maker must consider whether the change complies with equalities legislation.

10.5. Where an admissions change is proposed at an academy it falls to the academy trust to carry out any appropriate statutory consultation.

10.6. All decisions on funding approval for the individual projects will follow the Council's procurement procedures.

10.7. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) attached as Exempt Appendix 1 between the four parties (three academy trusts and Medway Council) has been drafted to set out the roles and responsibilities to ensure the success of this collaborative venture. This will require agreement and signature within the Council.

## 11. Recommendations

11.1. The Cabinet is asked to approve the consultation on the three schools changing from single to mixed sex, to enable the schools to submit applications at the appropriate time to implement the change from 1 September 2024.

11.2. The Cabinet is asked to agree in principle to funding the appropriate physical changes to the schools to enable a co-educational arrangement subject to costings, as set out in paragraph 8.1, with the formal decision made when costs are known and reported in the outcomes of consultation report (expected August 2022).

11.3. The Cabinet is asked to approve the Memorandum of Understanding (attached at Exempt Appendix 1) and authorise the Director of People, Children and Adults' Services to sign the agreement on the Council's behalf.

## 12. Suggested reasons for decisions

12.1. By approving the recommendations in section 11, the Cabinet will be ensuring that the Council meets its statutory duty to ensure sufficient good quality school places are available, and that the appropriate informal and statutory processes have been undertaken.

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### Background papers

School Place Planning Strategy 2018-22  
<https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=42617>

### Appendices

Exempt Appendix 1 - Memorandum of Understanding