

Appendix 8 – Consultee comments and officer responses

Table 1 - Comments from consultees who approved

Comment	Officer response
Mixed education is better for boys' development	Having a mixed environment can help both boys and girls learn about the opposite gender, develop mutual respect, and promote inclusivity and how to work with and respect them
Schools are co-educational at sixth form	All three schools already have mixed sixth forms, and so have both genders already present. This means that the schools already have experience of co-educational education, and already have some facilities required for the whole school becoming co-educational
Transition to single sex is unfamiliar and stressful	All Medway primary schools are co-educational, and education after age 16 is co-educational. Therefore, pupils have to transition to a single sex environment for five years, and then transition back to mixed afterwards. This will provide a seamless educational journey for Medway's pupils
Single sex environment can increase some forms of bullying	There is the potential for bullying in all schools, and all schools have anti-bullying and behaviour policies and procedures to ensure the wellbeing and safeguarding of all pupils
Co-educational schools have a more balanced culture, social and relationship benefits, insight and understanding	As they teach a wider range of pupils, co-educational schools will similarly have a wider range of opportunities for pupils to experience
Single sex does not reflect the world/work environment	There are few single sex environments outside of secondary education, so pupils in single sex schools are not as experienced in working with the opposite gender compared to co-educational schools, which can in some cases impede social mobility
Co-educational would be helpful for those who identify as transgender or non-binary, reduces pressure to choose	While schools work hard to support pupils who identify as transgender or non-binary, this can be complicated in a single sex school, where there may be few, or no other pupils of the same identity.
Equal opportunities to attend, fairer system	The proposal will create a more equitable system, meaning that more places are available to Medway's boys and girls, and in turn will allow more Medway pupils to attend a selective school
Allowing children to mix teaches respect, removes novelty	Co-educational schools allow pupils to learn and grow alongside the opposite gender, aiding social interaction.
Will allow siblings to attend same school	Normally siblings of different genders would not be able to all attend the same single sex school. The change to co-educational would allow this, and so would be beneficial to parents and families
Nearest co-educational is far away, local grammar schools	The only selective co-educational school is in Rainham, which is a long distance for pupils who live in Strood, Cuxton, and on the peninsula. Having selective co-educational schools more centrally in Medway will help with travel and choice.
Should abolish grammar schools	The Council does not have the power to abolish grammar schools
Pupils can find best school for them	The proposals will make a wider range of schools available to a wider range of pupils, and so more pupils will be able to find a school which matches their learning style

Makes system flexible	The change to co-educational would make places available for either girls or boys. If there are higher numbers of either gender passing the Medway Test, then there will be places available for them.
More places for Medway pupils will improve out of school socialisation	Pupils will be attending schools more local to them, which will improve out of school socialisation, as well as local community engagement.

Table 2 - Comments from consultees who objected

Comment	Officer response
Single sex empowers girls, and makes them more confident	Single sex schools do not always enable pupils to develop a more rounded understanding of the opposite sex, as there are no pupils of the opposite sex to interact with. Absence of the opposite sex can encourage stereotypical ideas about them.
Would attract more out of area boys	The proposals would mean that the increasing numbers of Medway boys coming through from primary schools would have greater opportunity to access a place, resulting in less out of area boys
Would impact school spirit and community, could cause disruption	If this were to be the case, we would expect it to be short lived. The change to co-educational would be phased as pupils join in Year 7 each year. If approved, the first mixed classes would start in Year 7 in 2024. It would be 2028 before these pupils reached Year 11, and the whole school would be co-educational. Each of the three schools are good and outstanding provisions. Schools will need to make certain adjustments to policies but will work with new pupils, as they do with all new starters, to make them welcome, to introduce them to the school ethos, and manage their transition successfully from primary to secondary school.
Out of area boys at Holcombe weakens argument	The number of out of area boys currently accessing Medway's grammar schools will decrease as they are replaced over time by higher numbers of Medway boys as a result of these proposals.
Single sex reduces distractions	All the schools involved already have mixed sixth forms, so pupils of the opposite sex are already present. The schools will take measures to ensure appropriate social integration across all age ranges to ensure the best learning experience for all pupils.
Co-education does not celebrate girl's achievements	Co-educational schools work hard to celebrate all pupils' achievements, regardless of gender
Single sex overcomes stereotypes associated with certain subjects	Co-educational schools are able to teach pupils about stereotyping and teaching both genders together can demonstrate that stereotypes are not valid. Schools will be able to positively overcome stereotypes through mixed teaching
Girls are put under pressure by boys	Children and young people can be put under pressure by their peers in a variety of circumstances. All schools will have strategies in place to promote inclusivity and equality to provide the best learning experience for all. Co-education supports mixed gender interactions and friendships to create a better understanding of gender norms and in turn tackle inequalities and reduce discrimination.

Boy's schools should expand	Boy's schools have neither the physical capacity nor the funding to add the number of additional places necessary.
Girls are overlooked at co-educational schools	Schools have to teach a range of pupils at both single sex and co-educational schools, and so teachers are able to identify which pupils need more time to develop or express themselves and to encourage full engagement. The schools, in their letters of support for the proposals, have stated being fully inclusive as one of the driving factors behind the proposals
Co-educational schools face problems of sexual harassment	Any school could potentially face problems of sexual harassment, and safeguarding pupils is a priority for all schools. Schools will be fully inclusive and promote mutual respect to reduce potential for this issue
Single sex is more relaxed	There is no evidence to support this
Girls learn at a different rate	Pupils learn at different rates, and schools adjust their teaching methods to ensure all pupils are catered for. These schools have excellent records for teaching and learning and we fully expect that the proposals will result in better outcomes for all pupils
Co-education would be detrimental to both sexes	There is no evidence to suggest that this will be the case. Co-education allows pupils of both genders to learn about each other and avoid forming stereotypical ideas. At the end of their secondary education pupils at single sex schools may suffer a sudden transition to mixed gender higher education or work after spending the last 5 to 7 years working in a single sex environment.
Removes choice	There would still be six single sex schools in Medway, two selective, and four non-selective. The proposal increases the number of schools that parents of boys and girls can state a preference for
Single sex schools would all be in Rochester	This is true, but the proposal will make it easier for pupils to attend a grammar school local to them.
Increased pass rate would dilute value of grammar/standards	The three schools involved are all rated good or outstanding by Ofsted, and already teach a range of pupil abilities. The majority of pupils who would benefit from this will have only missed passing the test under current circumstances by a few marks, meaning there would be a small difference between those who just pass now, and just pass in the future.
Destroys history	The three schools involved are all proud of their histories and will continue to celebrate them, but they are looking to the future to provide education for the modern era.
Should stop offering places to out of area boys	The admissions regulations do not allow discrimination between pupils depending on their local authority, where they have applied appropriately. However, the proposal would increase the number of Medway pupils eligible to apply for a place, who would acquire a place on distance, and this will in turn reduce the number of out of area boys.
Single sex schools will be oversubscribed so pupils will miss out on places	This may be the case, but the system will provide sufficient places for Medway pupils to acquire a place in a grammar school. In recent years Rainham Mark Grammar School, the only mixed gender grammar school currently in Medway, has been either first or second most oversubscribed school for first preferences.
Affects pupils already at those schools	Pupils already at the three schools will continue to be taught in single sex classes as the proposal will only take place in year 7 in 2024, and so disruption to those pupils will be minimal

Boys are disruptive	Both boys and girls can be disruptive. All schools have behaviour policies to deal with any potential disruptive behaviour from any pupils. New pupils of the opposite gender would join in Year 7 and, as with any new pupils, would have a managed transition from primary to secondary to help them settle into the new school environment.
Wanted an all-girls school	If the proposal is approved there will still be all-girls schools available in Medway, one selective and two non-selective. The current pupils at Fort Pitt and Chatham Grammar will still be taught in all-girl lessons. It would be the new intakes from 2024 that would be co-educational.
Should ask staff at the schools their opinions	This consultation has been sent to every Medway secondary school to allow their staff and pupils the opportunity to respond. Letters received from the three schools indicate very strong support for this proposal
Should be enough places in non-selective schools with new academies recently opening	Non-selective schools are heavily oversubscribed, and the two new academies are meeting current demand, with little spare. Forecasts indicate that demand will continue to rise for school places. The proposal would reduce the number of out of area pupils in selective schools, allowing more Medway pupils to take up places.
Should alter Medway test to be less biased towards girls	The test is prepared by education professionals based upon the curriculum taught in the schools. However, Medway Council will be consulting on introducing a non-verbal reasoning element to the test which will contribute to making the overall test more equitable
What would changes to toilets and changing rooms entail?	Appropriate facilities would be provided for all pupils, working with each school individually to ensure that this occurs within the individual environments. The schools all have mixed sixth forms, so facilities already exist for both boys and girls at that level.
Should build a new school instead	There is insufficient funding to build a new school. Currently there is legislation in place that does not allow for new grammar schools.
Want single sex for cultural/religious reasons	There would still be single sex schools available for boys and girls. Pupils already at the three schools in the proposal would continue to be taught in a single sex environment. Sixth forms at the three schools are already mixed gender

Table 3 - Comments from consultees who were neutral

Comment	Officer response
Equal opportunity is important	The proposal will equalise the number of places available to both boys and girls and will in turn provide a more equitable opportunity for more Medway pupils to attend a Medway grammar school.
Distance criteria in admissions will affect Peninsula pupils	The proposals will ensure that sufficient places are available for all Medway pupils, and each school operates its own admissions criteria
Co-educational schools have more poor behaviour incidents	All schools can experience occurrences of poor behaviour, and all schools have behaviour policies to manage this.
Will change the dynamic in the schools	The change to co-education will be phased in over a number of years, as mixed classes start in Year 7 and work their way through the school. This will allow the schools to manage the change gradually and ensure continuity of their ethos. The dynamic in schools is ever changing as new pupils start each year and old ones leave and managing this is an ongoing part of a school's role.
Will reduce quality	The three schools involved are all rated good or outstanding by Ofsted, and already teach a range of pupil abilities, achieving excellent results and outcomes for their pupils. This would not be expected to change.