

Response to the Consultation on Admissions to Skipton Girls' High School

Thank you to those who responded to our consultation on admissions which closed on 16th December 2016. At Skipton Girls' High School (SGHS), we received 19 responses to the consultation with all responses raising questions or objections.

The rationale for change

The main reasons we feel we need to adjust our Admissions Policy at this point are:

- A firm belief that grammar schools can be part of an education system that works for all and should do more to encourage able children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds to take the entrance tests;
- A strong commitment to challenging the view held by some that grammar schools are 'bastions of privilege' and 'stuffed full of middle class children', (Sir Michael Wilshaw, Chief Inspector of Schools) by ensuring fairer access for disadvantaged pupils. Governors feel that SGHS has a particular and specialised role to play as part of a diverse system of educational provision in which schools are distinguished, not just by examination outcomes, but by ethos, philosophy, and approach to continuous school improvement.

Response to points raised

One question was raised in relation to the Admissions Policy put out for consultation.

Removal of Siblings from the oversubscription criteria

Governors feel that giving priority to sisters of students attending the school in the oversubscription criteria is unnecessary and creates an unfair bias and a lack of equality and equity for all girls who apply and thus we have removed this from our final 2018 determined policy.

The main objections raised were in relation to the proposal to **increase** the Published Admission Number (PAN) in 2018 from four forms of entry to five forms of entry.



For clarity, SGHS is its own Admissions Authority and an Admission Authority's decision to admit above PAN does not trigger a requirement to consult, nor indeed does a decision to formally increase the PAN as clearly stated in the **School Admissions Code, December 2014.**

1.3 Own admission authorities are not required to consult on their PAN where they propose either to increase or keep the same PAN.

Nevertheless, in the context of transparency we chose to include our intended expansion in the consultation. We made it very clear that a permanent expansion would be dependent on the receipt of an EFA Condition Improvement Grant and/ or Government Grammar School Expansion funding to develop the existing school accommodation and provision.

As Governors are still awaiting these decisions we are not taking any action with regard to permanent expansion pending these outcomes. As a result, we will not be determining an increase to the PAN at this stage.

All points raised (shown in bold) have been grouped and are addressed below:

Demographics – no need for extra secondary places in the Craven area as many responders stated that there were vacancies at The Skipton Academy.

It is imperative that parents and students be free to choose the best learning environment for them. SGHS is highly oversubscribed and continues to provide strong educational outcomes for its pupils. The Governors consider that these factors are strong reasons to expand, not as a sign that people should be discouraged from going there.

Governors believe it is not their place to publicly comment on any aspect of The Skipton Academy's Admission arrangements.

Published Secondary School age Demographic data for Craven would suggest that pupil numbers over the next five years are on a slow decline. However, ALL Craven secondary schools are drawing from outside their designated catchment areas including from Bradford and Lancashire Local Authorities. The published demographic data for Bradford is growing rapidly. We also note that significant numbers of students travel from Skipton to schools in other parts of the Craven district and beyond for a co-educational comprehensive school experience. Many parents choose SGHS for its single-sex education and excellence in progress and achievement for all groups of students.

Governors also recognise that most grammar schools do not have a catchment area. We have chosen to retain this so as not to disadvantage girls in the north of our catchment area, who live some 15 miles north of Skipton.

The expansion of SGHS is Discriminatory (Equality Act 2010) and will lead to a gender imbalance in other Craven schools.

Governors have found no evidence to substantiate this claim. SGHS has been a girls' school since 1886. We are not directly linked to the determination of another school's PAN and in particular, Ermysted's Grammar School (EGS), which is a separate school entity and its own Admissions Authority. We note that EGS is also consulting on its admissions arrangements and an increase to its PAN to 120.

Expanding SGHS will have a detrimental effect on other local secondary schools – notably Skipton Academy in the opinion of responders.

Governors, whilst recognising the local situation is unique and complex, firmly believe however that citing the growth of SGHS as having a potentially negative influence on the academic success and achievement of another school is fundamentally wrong and unsubstantiated. In our work as an outward-facing Teaching school we have also supported The Skipton Academy in many ways over the last three years.

Traffic/parking/Health and Safety issues on Gargrave Road – no off street drop off facility – effect on local residents.

Governors wholly agree that Gargrave Road can at times be congested, particularly as there are five schools situated on the road, many local businesses of varying sizes and the road is used by residents for parking and the general public, as it is convenient for the local council offices and town shopping. We also recognise that if The Skipton Academy was at full capacity (published PAN of 835) there would be a significant increase of students travelling on this road. As it stands a significant number are travelling out of Skipton to Settle College and Upper Wharfedale school.

SGHS will be taking the initiative to launch an Urban 20 Campaign through the organisation BRAKE. We intend to work with the community and the local MP and councillors to address the road traffic issues. Senior Staff from SGHS religiously police the road in our vicinity every school day morning and evening. SGHS is highly pro-active in communicating with parents about road-related issues and regularly communicates with the relevant transport companies and the Safer Neighbourhood Police.

A comprehensive bus survey has been completed to ascertain bus availability for increased numbers. Bus companies confirm that there is capacity on buses. All Keighley buses confirm that they do not pick up at The Skipton Academy, their students either walk down to SGHS or EGS or into town. Only the Thornton in Craven bus stops at The Aireville campus. The Aire Valley Train route is used well by our students and has capacity and it is anticipated that some of our potential additional students will use this route.

We believe Skipton Town Council need to implement a holistic plan to support the traffic issues pertaining to Gargrave Road and as such we would be keen to work with the local community and council to find positive and sustainable solutions.

Extra places will be for out of catchment area students.

Governors are satisfied that extra places will be open for all students. As our current catchment area ends three miles south of Skipton (Bradley) and the demographic directly outside of this demarked area is on a sharp increase (Silsden – new Primary, Keighley, Bradford and further afield Colne) it may be that students will come from out of catchment area.

Widening of Social Divide – increased and excess of mobility of students travelling to school – reference to coaching issue.

To address any perception of social divide SGHS will further develop its current outreach programme to include masterclasses (led by staff and sixth-form students), cultural opportunities and familiarisation sessions, all of which will be designed to make families from disadvantaged areas feel confident that their child can fit in and thrive in our unique learning environment.

Alleged lack of transparency concerning our admission arrangements.

SGHS strictly adheres to the directives set out in the School Admissions Code. Governors are entirely satisfied that the information regarding the admission arrangements are published in a clear, detailed, and transparent manner. All admissions information found on the SGHS website thoroughly explains the determined admissions arrangements, process for selection testing and provides all necessary and relevant advice for parents and students, in line with all other Grammar Schools within the Northern consortium.

Concern over lowering of standards of admission.

Academic standards of admission to SGHS have not and will not be lowered as a consequence of expansion. SGHS will continue to demand the same level of academic excellence to be eligible for entrance to the school.

We hope this has covered all the points raised.

Further advice and guidance around 2018 admissions will be available on the school website shortly.

Mr H Culter
Chair of Governors

Mrs J Plews
Headteacher

20th January 2017