

S.R.M.P.

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Academic aptitude test for entry into secondary schools

Allocation of Primary Six pupils into secondary schools will in future depend on their performance in three internal assessment examinations and a new public examination, the Director of Education, Mr Kenneth Topley, said yesterday.

The new allocation procedures, disclosed by the S.C.M. Post in earlier reports, will replace the Secondary School Entrance Examination to be abolished in 1978.

The new public examination, known as the academic aptitude test, will be taken by all Primary Six pupils each December. The first will be held next year.

It will consist of two papers, a verbal reasoning test and a numerical reasoning test. The Director stressed that the aptitude test was primarily a monitoring device to ensure a

fair basis for allocation of pupils to secondary schools.

"It will differ from other school and public examinations such as the SSEE in that it will measure academic aptitude not attainment, in lay terms, intelligence not industry," he said.

"Pupils will not be required to study for the aptitude test as they do at present for the SSEE, and this should remove the pressure of the public examination which is felt by so many to be intolerable.

"Nor will the aptitude test distort teaching in the last years of primary schools as the SSEE is claimed to do.

"There will be no syllabus for the aptitude test which will be devised and conducted by the Education Department."

Internal assessment will follow the format

proposed by the Working Party on the Replacement of the SSEE.

This will be based on two school examinations in the primary six year and one at the end of the primary five year.

Commenting on the overall scheme, Mr Topley said: "The key things in the new allocation procedure will be pupils' attainment over a period of time measured by teachers in individual schools and monitored by a public test; and parental choice of secondary schools within regions."

He described the new system as a compromise solution.

The introduction of the aptitude test is the single major modification to the proposed scheme made by the Working Party on the Replacement of the SSEE.

In introducing the new examination, the Director said he was very conscious of the extremes of opinion provoked by the recommendations of the working party.

Some bodies called for selection completely by random, others for the retention of the SSEE.

Between these extremes, he said, lay an awareness of the value of internal assessment balanced in some way to provide a basis of allocation which would be fair both to the pupil and to the school.

The new procedure, which will be reviewed in 1980, he believes would be fair.

It is widely believed that pupils' attainment should be gauged over a period of time rather than measured in one afternoon as is the practice with the SSEE.

But it is also felt that Topley added, that

teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment may be subjective and open to wide variation from primary school to primary school.

Accordingly, he said, an objective monitoring device becomes necessary to scale down the subjective elements and variations of internal assessment, hence the aptitude test.

Results of the test will be used to scale the school marks to produce marks which can be compared with those given by other primary schools in order to produce an overall order of merit.

Schools which perform better will clearly obtain a higher rating on this order of merit which in turn will give their pupils a higher priority in the selection of secondary schools.

No child's individual performance will directly affect his allocation to a secondary school but it

is necessary for pupils to be identified for the purpose of monitoring the reliability of school assessments.

In this respect the aptitude test will also act as a check against any irregularities or carelessness on the part of the primary schools as the computer will compare individual marks in the test with school assessed marks.

Moreover, with a public test primary schools will be kept on their toes and the feared deterioration in standards if all primary schools were to be guaranteed equal treatment, as proposed by the working party, should not materialise.

One of the defects of the working party's proposal was that it would create an

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unpredictable degree of mixed ability in schools which with the new monitoring device, however, could be controlled.

Other recommendations made by the working party have been accepted by the Director.

This means that allocation to secondary schools will be on a regional basis permitting parental choice of secondary schools within school 'nets; there will be district councils as suggested to see fair play, and there will be a modification of the feeder school system which will take effect in 1983.

Mr Topley said he had consulted a wide cross-section of educational opinion, including the major school councils, heads of schools and the Board of Education before deciding on the new allocation procedure.

His comments on the report of the working party were carefully studied before he made further proposals to the major school councils and educational organisations.

In the light of this further consultation Mr Topley was able to go to the Board of Education on Monday afternoon where his recommendations, which had been endorsed by the majority of the school councils and associations, were accepted. It is advised, however, that these interim measures be actively reviewed at the end of three years.