

[Kent County Council Response to my 'Laying down the Gauntlet' in the Radio Kent Interview, 30th July 2020](#)

Kent County Council is delaying the Kent Test by around one month in recognition of the impact of Covid-19 on schools and pupils. The test will now take place on Thursday, October 15 for pupils who attend a Kent school and from Saturday, October 17 for all other students. Kent parents will also be offered two additional preferences on their child's secondary school application this year, an increase from four to six, to account for the later release of Kent Test results.

"Richard Long, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, confirmed agreement to these arrangements after very careful consideration, and we are pleased that they are in line with the non-statutory Department for Education (DfE) guidance issued at the end of last week.

"The main area of difference from the DfE guidance is the mid-October date where the guidance suggests late October/November. The guidance is very broad and does not account for the individual differences in approach between schools and councils. It will cover individual schools and consortia which test far fewer children, and can set a later test date without significantly obstructing the co-ordinated admissions process. As Kent County Council expects to test 17,000 pupils (potentially over a longer timeframe than usual) and holds the Head Teacher Assessment (HTA) after tests have been marked, we have had to set a slightly earlier date.

"We aim to assess the 17,000 pupils who have registered for the test this year in as fair and consistent a way as possible, wherever they are educated at present.

[Letter from Matt Dunkley, CBE, Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education for Kent County Council, to Adam Holloway, MP for Gravesham, dated 30 July 2020](#)

Thank you for forwarding the correspondence you have received from your constituent Mr Peter Read and inviting our comments.

The first part of the enclosed text is perhaps better addressed to the BBC as the body responsible for the news coverage of which he complains. We recognise the widespread concern being expressed about the extent to which children from disadvantaged backgrounds, often demonstrably some way behind their peer group academically, will have lost further ground as a result of the time spent out of school as a consequence of lockdown. It is an issue rather broader than learning loss for those hoping to transfer to grammar school at the end of Year 6, though there is understandably a particular interest in this group because they will be taking part in a selection process in the new term, well ahead of National Curriculum SATs.

We have recently agreed to delay testing as far as is consistent with the successful operation of the secondary school admissions process for children in Kent and neighbouring Local Authorities. To address the potential disadvantage of a consequent delay in the release of results, it will be offering Kent residents the opportunity to name six preferences instead of four, so that they can complete the Secondary Common Application Form by the nationally-prescribed deadline of 31 October without losing access to a range of school

types. Non-Statutory Advice very recently issued by the DfE helpfully recognises the practicality of this approach.

We are familiar with Mr Read's lively and interesting commentary through his website on many issues relating to education in Kent, but we are disappointed to learn that he does not feel that the changes will help families or that the testing process is fit for purpose. Consultation with our schools was online and within a restricted frame because of the limitations arising from Covid 19, but they showed strong support for the plan, which helped inform the decision made on 22 July.

Approximately 17,000 children have been registered for testing this year, nearly 6,000 of whom do not attend primary schools in Kent, which would make the provision of a fair and objective alternative to testing to assess the majority extraordinarily problematic. It is noted that Mr Read proposes using the tests to select a smaller proportion of the cohort than usual, and an alternative assessment method to identify other suitable pupils for grammar school, whether or not they have been tested. The Chairs of Kent's Head Teacher Panels do not believe that the Head Teacher Assessment stage will be undeliverable in the Autumn, but might reasonably demur at the Council increasing the burden placed on them and on their primary colleagues in this difficult year by asking them to look at a wider range of pupils than usual. Demonstrating fairness and consistency in respect of candidates for whom available data is likely to vary substantially would also raise fairness issues. Schools and Panels have for some years been encouraged to give particular attention to candidates whose circumstances may have had a negative impact on their attainment.

Everybody understands that among those taking part in the Kent Test in October 2020 there will be pupils who have experienced widely differing access to teaching during lockdown. There will be the opportunity to take this into account before results go out, and - through the statutory appeal process - after school places have been offered. It is recognised that Mr Read's concern for the interests of able pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds who may do less well in tests than others who have secured extensive preparation is genuine and heartfelt. He may find it reassuring to reflect that it is more widely shared by teachers and by us than he appears to believe.