



Five Years On Open Access to Independent Education

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Foreword

When I came back to the UK in the mid-Nineties, the educational landscape had changed considerably. The proportion of state school students at my old university, Oxford, had fallen from around two-thirds when I was there in the late Sixties, to under a half; and my old school, Reigate Grammar, where all places had been free, was now - along with many other former grammar and direct grant schools - fully fee-paying, closed to the vast majority of children on its doorstep. It soon became clear to me that these examples were symptomatic of a wider and significant decline in the opportunities available to bright children from non-privileged backgrounds.

That was my motivation for establishing the Sutton Trust and joining with the Girls' Day School Trust to introduce Open Access, or needs-blind admission as it is known in the US, to The Belvedere School one of the GDST's 26 high performing schools. We wanted the School's first-rate teaching and ethos of excellence to be available to all girls in its local area, with every place allocated on the basis of merit alone, not ability to pay. More widely, we wanted to show policymakers and Government that it was possible to bridge the country's educational divide whilst maintaining high academic standards, and to do so cost effectively.

So I am delighted to be writing the foreword to this evaluation of the first five years of the scheme, and we could not be happier with the outcomes. Not only has the first cohort of Open Access girls achieved the School's best ever results by far at GCSE - and the best in Liverpool - but The Belvedere now has a broad social mix which reflects its area. Importantly, as the interviews conducted with pupils, teachers and parents show, it is also a happy place, in which girls of diverse backgrounds learn together and forge lasting friendships.

But more than anything, this evaluation shows what an impressive lever for social mobility the opening up of high-performing independent day schools would be. Open Access has enabled bright girls, many from very modest backgrounds, to build a solid educational base, from which they will go on to build further success at A-level, university, and in their chosen careers. Providing these opportunities is, I believe, as important now as it has ever been, with research funded by the Sutton Trust showing that social mobility in Britain has declined and it has become harder for children from less affluent backgrounds to make it to the top.

It has, therefore, always been our hope that Open Access would be taken up by the Government and expanded, initially to 12 - but ultimately to 100 or more - independent day schools, giving a significant boost to the life chances of many more children from non affluent homes. Unfortunately, despite a broad base of support, including from within the independent sector, this aim has not yet been realised. Nevertheless, we remain committed to the principle of Open Access and continue to put forward its case to policymakers on social, academic and economic grounds. The positive results of this evaluation reinforce my conviction that Open Access remains the only means of decisively ending the divide between the state and private sectors of our education system.

We also remain committed to The Belvedere itself and to our partnership with the GDST, who have embarked on a new phase of development for the School. As it enters this new phase of its pioneering history by becoming part of the Government's Academy programme, we are confident that the character and excellence of the School will be maintained and - crucially - that The Belvedere will continue to be open to all the children of Liverpool, whatever their background.

Sir Peter Lampl, Chairman, The Sutton Trust

Executive Summary

The Sutton Trust in collaboration with the Girls' Day School Trust commissioned the Centre for Education and Employment Research to evaluate the pilot Open Access Scheme introduced at The Belvedere School GDST, Liverpool, in 2000. This had as its main objective to show how the high quality education of leading independent schools could be opened up to children from low-income backgrounds. Five years on with the first entry taking GCSEs is an opportune moment to take stock. In addition to quantitative analysis, we have sought the views of the pupils themselves, their parents and the teachers.

Admissions

The Open Access Scheme rapidly became established, with in its first three years an average of 366 applications from 134 maintained schools, including three-quarters of the primary schools in Liverpool. About a third of the entrants had their fees fully paid by the Sutton Trust and the GDST, and a further 38 per cent had their fees partly covered. Comparison of the intake before and after Open Access showed that entries from middle and lower income postcodes increased appreciably. The proportion of the girls eligible for free school meals admitted in the five years of Open Access at 32.8 per cent was more than double the national average of 15.3 per cent for girls aged 11-15 in maintained secondary schools. The Cognitive Abilities Test administered annually by the School in Year 7 showed an increase, on average, of about nine percentile ranks in verbal, non-verbal and quantitative abilities following the introduction of the Scheme. The evidence indicates that the main objective of Open Access regarding admissions had been met.

Progress and Achievement

The GCSE results validated the entrance tests. The total score predicted GCSE performance overall and there were clear associations between, on the one hand, non-verbal and maths scores on entry and GCSE maths and science results, and, on the other, verbal and English scores on entry and English GCSE grade. The abilities of those winning places were independent of family income. Neither did differences with home background emerge in the Cognitive Abilities Tests as the girls progressed up the School.

The Belvedere School achieved its best GCSE results ever in 2005, becoming the top performer in Liverpool, with 99 per cent achieving five good GCSEs compared with an average of 49 per cent across the schools of the LEA. Girls from low-income homes did somewhat less well in the exams than the others, but they were as likely as the fee payers to have aspirations for further study or training. Those with their fees paid who were planning to move on tended to have different reasons - for more practical courses and/or because their friends were leaving.

Views of Pupils

All 65 girls who had entered in the first Open Access intake and had remained at the School to take GCSEs completed a questionnaire during class time. Only four of the intake had left, none of them 'fees paid'. Three-quarters were staying on at the School to take A-levels. Nearly all of the 65 (95.4 per cent) were hoping to go to university. The top five things they had most liked about being at The Belvedere were: the helpful/dedicated/friendly teachers; new friends; the environment/atmosphere; enjoyable lessons; and the extra-curricular activities. There were fewer negatives than positives, but the five things most disliked were: rules and regulations; what they perceived as favouritism; pressure to do well; school dinners; and particular teachers. The main differences they thought attending The Belvedere had made to them were: the better education; becoming more confident; more mature; more rounded; and the friendships.

Views of Parents

Of the parents who responded (23 from 65 homes), 87 per cent were ‘very pleased’ that their daughters had won a place at The Belvedere. Only one, a full fee payer, wrote to express disappointment. They liked particularly: the teaching; the high expectations held of the girls; the School’s reputation/ethos/environment; the small size/small classes; the discipline; the self-confidence imbued; and the friendships made. The only difficulties raised were peripheral: the time and cost of travel; catering; and the school uniform. Although it may have been mainly the positive parents who responded, the others seemed to have no burning issues that they wanted to raise through us.

Impact on School

Nineteen of the 41 teachers at The Belvedere School (including the headteacher) had been there from before Open Access. All kindly agreed to be interviewed. Most referred to a perceptible change in ability, skewing it upwards and reducing the tail, with a move towards science. The girls they found to be more questioning, more individual in their thinking, less conforming, and less able to express themselves through writing. Teaching had had to change with less reliance on ‘chalk and talk’, greater differentiation of material, more investigative work, but also more attention to the basics. Getting the girls to do homework and submit course work had become more difficult. A ‘Catch-Up’ club had been instituted. Pastoral support had also been firmed up, with an explicit policy on discipline.

The girls, too, had had to adjust, but most just ‘seemed to sail along’. This was attributed to the small size of the School and the small classes so everyone was able to get to know each another. The Belvedere ethos had proved resilient, but staff had had to work harder at it. A fall off in the interest and commitment of the girls to, and support from parents for, extra-curricular activities had been detected.

Some challenges had to be faced. A number of the staff were approaching retirement, the headteacher was moving, and there were concerns whether the Schools’ ethos would survive their departures. The School was encountering strong competition. The Blue Coat School, a distinguished maintained boys’ grammar had begun admitting girls. Nearby independent schools, unlike The Belvedere, were allowing pupils from their junior departments to progress automatically to the senior department.

But the teachers’ overall assessment was very favourable.

Evaluation

Judged against its internal aims, Open Access at The Belvedere can be counted a great success. It has achieved its main objective of opening up the School to high ability children from low-income homes. Pupils, parents and teachers have commented very favourably. Social mixing has been good, in contrast to what has been reported for a forerunner, the Assisted Places Scheme. Open Access has shown how the important resource of independent schools could be incorporated into a national system. However, the Sutton Trust’s formal proposal to Government to fund a larger scale trial of Open Access at a dozen schools, and the regular discussions with ministers that have followed it, have fallen on interested but, to date, deaf ears. The Trust continues to bring the project to the attention of politicians and policy thinkers of all parties, and to stress that dogma should not get in the way of the development of successful educational initiatives. For the moment, however, Open Access at The Belvedere School remains a demonstration of what could be achieved were there the will.

Latest Developments

At the Girls' Day School Trust we are delighted by the achievements of the Open Access Scheme at The Belvedere School. What was already an academically excellent school has improved still further, and is now the highest performing secondary school in the area. Importantly, The Belvedere's ethos - as a hard working but friendly place, which offers all its girls the opportunity to reach their full potential - has been maintained and developed over the last five years. This is testament to the tremendous efforts of the pupils, and to the hard work and dedication of the staff.

As we move forward, we need to consider how similar success can be secured on a sustainable basis over the coming years. When we embarked on the pilot project with the Sutton Trust, we of course hoped that the concept of Open Access would be taken up by Government, and not only continued at The Belvedere, but also rolled out to other independent day schools. This has not materialised, and in the short term we needed to consider how the initiative's central idea bringing academic excellence to a broad social mix of pupils - could be integrated into the state system so that many more families can benefit.

We believe that the Government's Academies programme offers us the best way ahead. Although moving from private to state funding is a huge - and not uncontroversial - step, the Academy model offers us independence and flexibility in partnership with the maintained system. Crucially, it will allow the GDST, with its many years of experience of running high-performing schools, to maintain its stake in The Belvedere and for our expertise to inform its continued development. Once their initial questions were addressed, following the premature announcement of the early discussions on the Academy, staff, students and the school community as a whole have rallied in support of the proposal.

As the school that pioneered Open Access in the UK, it is also important to us that The Belvedere continues to pave the way for new initiatives, demonstrating what can be achieved when the Government and the independent sector work in genuine partnership. We certainly hope that The Belvedere Academy will encourage other independent day schools to consider joining the Academies programme.

Morale at the school is high and applications for places buoyant. There is a real sense of enthusiasm for the future. This is an exciting period for The Belvedere and one which I am sure marks the beginning of another successful chapter in the school's life.

Barbara Harrison, Chief Executive, Girls' Day School Trust

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Centre for Education and Employment Research, then at the University of Liverpool, was in 1999 commissioned by the Sutton Trust and the Girls' Day School Trust to evaluate the Open Access Scheme that they were about to pilot at The Belvedere School in Liverpool. We followed the 2000 admissions process through from initial enquiries to acceptances, and we were able to compare the 2000 intake with those of previous years. We also tracked the 2001 and 2002 entries, and at the same time recorded the progress of the first intake. Our annual reports (Smithers and Robinson, 2001, 2002 and 2003) were confidential to the originators of the Scheme as they sought to optimise its effectiveness, although some reference to the findings was made in two Sutton Trust publications (2001, 2004). Now that the first girls have taken their GCSEs, and the School is about to embark on a new phase in its development (as outlined in the postscript), it is a good time to take stock.
- 1.2 Open Access arose out of the Sutton Trust's concern to find a practical solution to the fact that the best schools in the UK, and indeed the World (OECD, 2001 and 2004), with more and better qualified teachers (Smithers and Tracey, 2003), were open only to the seven per cent of the population willing to pay the fees. It was intended that the Scheme, if successful, should provide a blueprint for opening up these schools on the basis of merit, not ability to pay. Discussions with several of the leading educational foundations led to a partnership with the Girls' Day School Trust, the largest group of independent schools in the UK, and the selection of The Belvedere School GDST in Toxteth, Liverpool as the pilot for the project. This had the advantage of being an excellent school in a poor district of Liverpool to which significant numbers of fee-paying children from outside the neighbourhood went, but children from the immediate vicinity generally did not.
- 1.3 The Scheme was designed to break new ground by allocating all places on merit. Both Trusts provided the financial help necessary to enable admissions to be on a needs-blind basis. A sliding scale was introduced whereby the fees were fully met for parents on very low incomes through to no reduction at all for those well able to meet the costs. The GDST had been a significant partner in the Assisted Places Scheme, and was thus well placed to build on the positive aspects of that scheme whilst avoiding some of its pitfalls. The resulting means test for Open Access took into account assets as well as income.
- 1.4 A comprehensive admissions procedure was drawn up which would, as far as possible, create a level playing field for girls who had not had the benefit of a prep-school education and the two-years-attainment difference, on average, that it represented. Alongside English and maths tests, verbal and non-verbal reasoning tests were introduced, and considered in relation to a detailed reference from the primary school attended.
- 1.5 It was clear that for the Scheme to reach those it was most intended to help there would need to be targeted outreach to provide information for, and support to, local families. A full-time recruitment officer visited local schools to speak to children, parents and teachers, and hosted Saturday master classes at The Belvedere to provide academic enrichment for local girls and boys, and to place the school at the centre of its local community. She also helped families on a confidential basis with

the finance forms, and provided a point of contact for any questions and queries relating to the Scheme.

1.6 The specific objective of the Access Scheme has been:

to open up high quality independent school education to pupils on merit irrespective of parental income or assets;

and it is against this criterion that the Scheme will be evaluated.

1.7 In Chapter 2, we look at the admissions process and describe who applied in 2000 and who took up places. We compare the characteristics of the entrants that year with those of the previous year. We also show how the admissions process developed in 2001 and 2002. In Chapter 3, we compare the GCSE results of the 2000 intake with those of previous years. We set them in context by comparing The Belvedere's results with those nationally, and with those of other independent and maintained schools in Liverpool. We consider the GCSE results in relation to the entry scores in 2000 and progress scores when the girls had reached Years 7 and 10, and ask how well did the admissions tests identify the capabilities and what is it possible to predict from the assessment of abilities at age 11.

1.8 But education is about more than test and examination results. In Chapter 4 we look at what the girls themselves made of the experience. The girls who continued through to GCSE were asked for their views, and the School provided information on the four - only four - who had dropped out or moved. We explored with the girls still at the school their future plans including whether they were aiming to continue on to the sixth-form. If they were not, we asked why and where were they going. In Chapter 5 we explore with the parents whether sending their daughters to The Belvedere had lived up to expectations.

1.9 The Open Access Scheme could be expected to have affected not only the girls, but also the School itself. We assess the impact on the School in Chapter 6. In 2005 there were 19 teachers - including the headteacher - who had been in post before the Scheme was introduced. All kindly agreed to be interviewed on their perceptions of how the School had changed. In a concluding chapter we draw the threads together to make an overall assessment, not only of the Scheme in action at one school, but its potential to bridge the independent/state divide.

2. Admissions

2.1 The Centre for Education and Employment Research has been able to observe the Open Access Scheme from the beginning. We were there on the 8 January 2000 when several hundred 11-year-old girls from Merseyside and beyond came to The Belvedere School to take the entry tests, and we were there in the summer of 2005 in the run-up to the GCSE examinations. In all, in the first year 367 families filled in application forms, including the 25 whose daughters were already attending The Belvedere junior school but who would have to compete for the places. Of the applicants, 304 (82.8 per cent) actually took the tests, coming mainly, as Chart 2.1 shows, from maintained schools.

Chart 2.1: Applications and Acceptances by School Type, 2000

School Type	Applied	Test	Offered	Accepted
Belvedere	25	25	19	19
Other Independent	23	21	10	3
Voluntary Aided/Controlled	147	121	39	20
Community	172	136	45	27
Total	367	303	113	69

2.2 Chart 2.1 also shows the acceptances (from an initial list plus reserve). Of those sitting, 37 per cent received offers and, of these, 61 per cent accepted. There were, however, differences with school type. The proportions offered places and accepting from maintained schools - 85 per cent of the total candidates - not surprisingly are close to the percentages overall. But of the applicants from The Belvedere junior school, 76 per cent were offered places and all accepted. In contrast, while 43 per cent of the candidates from other the independent schools were successful less than a third accepted, perhaps indicating that the tests were being taken by this group as insurance against not getting a place at another school.

2.3 In this report we are focusing on the 2000 intake, but as the first year it might be thought to be unusual. It is interesting, therefore, to compare it with those of the two succeeding years, which were also monitored. Chart 2.2 shows that the pattern in 2000 held also in 2001 and 2002, with in all about a fifth of the applicants admitted.

Chart 2.2: Applications and Acceptances by Year

Stage	2000		2001		2002	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Applied	367	100.0	389	100.0	343	100.0
Tested	303	82.6	302	77.6	285	83.1
Offered	113	30.8	96	24.7	118	34.4
Accepted	69	18.8	71	18.3	71	20.7

2.4 Approaching a fifth of the girls for whom applications were made did not take the entrance tests, and just over a third receiving an offer did not accept. In 2001 we explored the reasons. Chart 2.3 shows that the major reason given by parents for their daughter not taking the test was financial (31 per cent) followed by those having second thoughts, perhaps because of a preference for another school (15 per

cent). About 12 per cent decided after the practice test that their daughters would not get through, and 14 per cent said either their daughter was ill or they were on holiday. Another 12 per cent gave a wide variety of other reasons, including personal circumstances, moving away, the distance involved, the paperwork, having another commitment, and one cheerfully admitted to forgetting.

Chart 2.3: Reasons for Applicants Dropping Out

Stated Reasons	Applicants Not Taking Test		Not Accepting Offered Place	
	N	%	N	%
Financial	27	31.0	13	52.0
Other School	13	14.9	10	40.0
Practice Test	10	11.5	-	-
On Holiday	6	6.9	-	-
Ill	6	6.9	-	-
Other ¹	10	11.5	1	4.0
No Reason Given	15	17.2	1	4.0
Total	87	100.0	25	100.0

1. 3 personal, 2 moving house, 2 distance, 1 paperwork, 1 other appointment, and 1 forgot; and offer of place came too late.

2.5 Finance was also given as the major reason by over half the parents of the successful candidates not taking up the offer of a place. Even with the generous support of the Sutton Trust and the Girls' Day School Trust they still did not think they could afford to accept. The other main reason - given by 40 per cent of those turning down a place - was preference for another school, half going to other independent schools and half to maintained schools.

Schools Participating

2.6 Crucial to the success of the Scheme was to get it widely known and for the maintained primary schools to co-operate. It was widely publicised and a recruitment officer was appointed to The Belvedere School to make contact with, and provide support to, interested primary schools. Chart 2.4 shows that in this the Scheme exceeded expectations.

2.7 Even in the first year, girls came forward from two-thirds of the primary schools in Liverpool, itself, and also from 34 schools in neighbouring boroughs. By the second year, applicants came from over 80 per cent of Liverpool's primary schools, and from 60 other state primaries. At the outset, some schools tended to be over-optimistic about how many could win a place. In the first year, 20 schools in Liverpool supported five or more candidates, with one encouraging 14 to apply. In all, 367 girls from 122 schools (including The Belvedere and other independents) applied for about 70 places. In 2001, of the 158 maintained schools with girls applying only three had three girls admitted and five, two, with 36 others having one success. Over a hundred of the schools (114), including 65 in Liverpool itself did not have anyone get through.

Chart 2.4: Schools Participating in Liverpool LEA¹

Applications Per School	2000		2001		2002	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Five or More	20	16.7	14	11.7	13	10.8
Two to Four	36	30.0	40	33.3	47	39.2
One	25	20.8	44	36.7	30	25.0
With Applicants ²	81	67.5	98	81.7	90	75.0
No Applicants	39	32.5	22	18.3	30	25.0

1. Of 120 maintained primary schools.

2. In addition, there were applications from girls attending schools in Knowsley, Sefton, Warrington, Halton, St Helens and even further afield. In 2000, these applications came from 34 schools, in 2001 from 60 schools and in 2002 from 39 schools.

2.8 As the schools became more familiar with the process, Chart 2.4 shows that they became more cautious. By the third year only 10 per cent of the Liverpool primary schools put forward five or more candidates and the number of schools began to stabilise. Chart 2.4 attests to how quickly and firmly the Scheme became embedded.

Chart 2.5: Admissions

Sector	1999		2000		2001		2002	
	Schools	Girls	Schools	Girls	Schools	Girls	Schools	Girls
Maintained	32	42	42	47	44	55	44	51
Independent ¹	3	26	3	22	3	16	4	20
Total	35	68	45	69	47	71	48	71

1. Including admissions from The Belvedere junior school of girls who had succeeded in the Open Access scheme. They took the entrance tests on the same basis as other applicants and were eligible for the same support in paying fees.

2.9 The Scheme shifted the balance of the intake away from prep schools to maintained primary schools. Chart 2.5 shows that, in 1999, the year before Open Access, 68 girls were admitted, 26 (38 per cent) of whom came from the independent sector, including The Belvedere junior school. In the first year of the Scheme the proportion from the maintained sector rose to 68 per cent and by 2002 it had reached 72 per cent. The number of maintained schools from which girls won places had increased by 38 per cent.

2.10 The largest contingent still came from Belvedere junior school. But like all other entrants they had to score well in the entrance tests and they did not, as they had done in the past (unless there were good reasons to advise against), progress automatically. The number transferring from the junior school dropped from 24 in 1999 to 17 in 2002, partly as a result of performance in the tests and partly through parents not taking up offered places. (In 2002, the Liverpool Blue Coat School, a maintained boys' grammar school with a strong academic tradition, began taking girls, and it has proved attractive especially to parents liable for full fees at The Belvedere.)

Fee Status

2.11 The decisive influence on the changes to The Belvedere's intake has been the availability of financial support. In 1999, as Chart 2.6 shows, three-quarters of the intake paid full fees and only about 10 per cent had free places (out of the existing bursaries). With Open Access, although with some variation from year to year,

about a third had their fees fully remitted in the period 2000-2002, trebling the proportion in 1999.

Chart 2.6: Financial Support

Fees Status	1999		2000		2001		2002	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Fees Paid	7	10.3	25	36.2	25	35.2	18	25.4
Fees Part Paid	10	14.7	24	34.8	31	43.7	26	36.6
Full Fees	51	75.0	20	29.0	15	21.1	27	38.0
Total	68	100.0	69	100.0	71	100.0	71	100.0

- 2.12 The availability of financial support was also an important factor in parents' decisions whether to accept the offer of a place. Chart 2.7 shows that of the 121 in total turning down offers in 2000-2002, over half (54 per cent) would have been liable for full fees and only 12 per cent had had the opportunity of the fees being paid by the Trusts (the main reason for these girls turning down a place was wanting to go to the same school as friends).

Chart 2.7: Successful Applicants Rejecting Places

Fees Status	2000		2001		2002	
Fees Paid	6	13.6	3	12.0	5	9.6
Fees Part Paid	14	31.8	11	44.0	17	32.7
Full Fees	24	54.5	11	44.0	30	57.7
Total	44	100.0	25	100.0	52	100.0

Ability

- 2.13 The Open Access Scheme aimed to enable high ability girls from low-income families to go to The Belvedere. The entrance process included tests of verbal and non-verbal abilities, English and maths papers, and also school reports. In the next chapter we examine their predictive power. But in order to assess how far the intake has changed we here concentrate on the results from the Cognitive Abilities Test which the School routinely administered in the first term of Year 7, since we can compare those coming through Open Access with those entering before.
- 2.14 The Cognitive Abilities Test is a test battery devised by the National Foundation for Educational Research (which also prepared the verbal and non-verbal components of the entrance test) which assesses pupils' abilities in three areas: verbal, non-verbal and quantitative. As a standardised test it is possible to convert the scores to national percentile ranks. Chart 2.8 compares the average percentile ranks for the 1999, 2000 and 2001 intakes (in 2002 the School switched to Durham University's MidYIS test so direct comparisons are no longer possible). It is clear the ability of the intake, on average, in all three areas rose substantially following the introduction of Open Access and there were further improvements in 2001. Verbal ability was up by 8 percentile ranks, non-verbal ability by 10 percentile ranks and quantitative ability by 9 percentile ranks. The Scheme has, therefore, succeeded in its aim of attracting high ability pupils.

Chart 2.8: National Percentile Rank

Abilities	1999	2000	2001
Verbal	72	78	80
Non Verbal	68	74	78
Quantitative	74	83	83
Number of Pupils Tested	67	69	71

Social Background

- 2.15 But the objective is also to enable pupils to attend The Belvedere School irrespective of ability to pay. We have been able to assess the Scheme's effects by reference to both postcode and father's occupation.

Chart 2.9: Postcodes Grouped by Typical Residents

Affluent Achievers	High income families living in detached houses in the 'stockbroker belts' of the major cities.
Thriving Greys	Older but still retaining a prosperous way of life, living and owning detached or semi-detached homes.
Settled Suburbans	Families well established in semi-detached suburban homes, with fathers employed mainly in white collar and middle management positions.
Nest Builders	Thirty something white collar workers with young families.
Urban Venturers	Cosmopolitan, multi-racial group living in areas of major cities which are undergoing gentrification but still with poorer quality housing.
Country Life	Rural, living and working in the countryside, often on farms or in tied cottages.
Senior Citizens	The elderly with a high proportion of lone single female pensioners living in small, possibly sheltered accommodation.
Producers	Relatively affluent blue collar workers living in terraces or semis purchased or still rented from the council.
Hard-Pressed	Living in council estates, and working in unskilled manufacturing jobs, on government schemes, or unemployed.
Have Nots	Single parent families, living in cramped, overcrowded flats and terraces, and moving often. Many are on income support, and those who can find work are in low paid, unskilled jobs.

Pen Pictures of the ten postcode categories compiled by Dr. Peter J.B. Brown, Technical Director ESRC-URPERRL, Department of Civic Design, University of Liverpool, the originators of the postcode technique.

Postcode

- 2.16 In the postcode analysis we were fortunate enough to be able to draw on the most sophisticated method available at the time, which had been developed by the Department of Civic Design at the University of Liverpool and is widely used (for example, by the Higher Education Funding Council for England in its postcode analysis). The programme groups postcodes into ten categories, summarised in Chart 2.9, where they are labelled by their typical residents. It is based on the full six-digit code so goes right down to streets. In essence, it is a scale of affluence and autonomy, running from the most prosperous at the top to the poorest at the bottom.

2.17 In Chart 2.10 we can see that applicants to the Open Access Scheme are pretty much in line with the distribution of the postcode categories on Merseyside bearing in mind that this is derived from the 1991 Census. The apparent over-representation of ‘nest builders’ and ‘urban venturers’, and under-representation of ‘thriving greys’ and ‘settled suburbans’, can be put down to the differing likelihood of there being 11-year-old girls in the household. But, importantly, Chart 2.10 also shows that the two least affluent groups are fully represented, so the Scheme has succeeded in its aim of attracting interest from low-income families.

Chart 2.10: Applications by Postcode¹

Postcode Category	Merseyside ²	Percentage By Postcode		
		2000 (N=330)	2001 (N=362)	2002 (N=319)
Affluent Achievers	9.8	10.9	8.3	11.0
Thriving Greys	7.8	6.1	5.0	5.0
Settled Sururbans	14.7	12.7	13.2	12.6
Nest Builders	15.3	18.2	17.1	16.9
Urban Venturers	1.5	4.9	4.7	5.1
Country Life	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.3
Senior Citizens	3.6	3.1	2.5	2.2
Producers	9.1	9.4	5.8	6.0
Hard-Pressed	9.8	8.5	11.6	11.9
Have Nots	28.4	24.9	31.4	29.2

1. Programme can handle ‘L’ postcodes only.

2. 1991 Census.

2.18 In Chart 2.11 we can trace in detail the fate of the applications from the various postcode groups in the first year of the Scheme. The sharpest contrast is between the two ends of the scale. Girls from ‘affluent achievers’ postcodes were more likely to have been successful in the entrance tests than those from ‘have-nots’ or ‘hard pressed’ backgrounds, but the reverse is true when it comes to taking up offers of places. Girls from the less affluent postcodes were more likely to accept than those from more prosperous neighbourhoods. This can be attributed in part to differences in eligibility to have the school fees met, but also because the children from more affluent homes were likely to have had more choice.

2.19 Of the other groups, the ‘nest builders’ and ‘producers’ tended to be more likely to turn down places and the ‘urban venturers’ to accept them. Again, this could be a school-fee effect. The former two categories may have found themselves unexpectedly liable for part-fees. But, overall, the postcode analysis does underline the importance of the Scheme in opening up the School to children from low-income homes.

Chart 2.11: Applications and Acceptances by Postcode¹, 2000

Postcode Category	Merseyside ²	Applied (N=330)	Tested (N=271)	Offered (N=96)	Accepted (N=59)
Affluent Achievers	9.8	10.9	12.4	16.7	11.9
Thriving Greys	7.8	6.1	5.6	8.3	8.5
Settled Suburbans	14.7	12.7	12.7	16.7	16.9
Nest Builders	15.3	18.2	19.9	20.8	18.6
Urban Venturers	1.5	4.9	4.5	3.1	5.1
Country Life	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
Senior Citizens	3.6	3.1	3.0	3.1	3.4
Producers	9.1	9.4	9.0	9.4	8.5
Hard-Pressed	9.8	8.5	7.9	6.3	8.5
Have Nots	28.4	24.9	25.1	15.6	18.6

1. Programme can handle 'L' postcodes only.

2. 1991 Census.

2.20 Comparison of the postcodes of those entering before and after Open Access as in Chart 2.12 shows that the main beneficiaries appear to have been girls from the middle range of postcodes. Notwithstanding the tendency to turn down offers, girls from 'nest builder' and 'producer', as well as those urban 'venturer', postcodes comprised about a third of the intake in 2000 compared with just 13 per cent the year before. Entries from the more affluent areas ('affluent achievers' and 'settled suburbans') fell back. More girls from the poorer postcodes were accepted in 2000 but the proportion was still well below that living in those areas.

Chart 2.12: Acceptances by Postcode¹

Postcode Category	Merseyside ²	1999 (N=45)	2000 (N=59)
Affluent Achievers	9.8	20.0	11.9
Thriving Greys	7.8	6.7	8.5
Settled Suburbans	14.7	24.4	16.9
Nest Builders	15.3	8.9	18.6
Urban Venturers	1.5	2.2	5.1
Country Life	0.1	-	0.0
Senior Citizens	3.6	13.3	3.4
Producers	9.1	2.2	8.5
Hard-Pressed	9.8	4.4	8.5
Have Nots	28.4	17.8	18.6

1. Programme can handle 'L' postcodes only.

2. 1991 Census.

Employment Status

2.21 The postcode analysis is borne out by social class, as indicated by father's occupation. Chart 2.13 shows that girls from professional-managerial homes were more likely to be successful in the tests, but less likely to take up offers. In contrast, children of the unemployed, on average, did not do so well in the tests, but those getting good results were more likely to accept a place.

Chart 2.13: Applications and Acceptances by Father's Occupation, 2000

Occupational Category	Applied		Tested		Offered		Accepted	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Prof. Managerial	81	40.1	75	42.1	40	47.6	22	40.0
Ass Prof. Tech	14	6.9	12	6.7	3	3.6	2	3.6
Clerical	22	10.9	18	10.1	7	8.3	4	7.3
Craft	24	11.9	20	11.2	9	10.7	6	10.9
Operatives	15	7.4	11	6.2	4	4.8	2	3.6
Labouring	8	4.0	5	2.8	3	3.6	3	5.5
Self Employed	5	2.5	5	2.8	3	3.6	3	5.5
Unemployed	24	11.9	23	12.9	8	9.5	7	12.7
Other ¹	9	4.5	9	5.1	7	8.3	6	10.9
Total ²	202	100.0	178	100.0	84	100.0	55	100.0

1. Includes retired, disabled, student, house person and chronically sick.

2. Applicants were not required to provide this information and not all did so.

2.22 Nearly all the girls from the low-income homes offered places accepted. Sixteen out of the 18 places won by daughters of labourers or those not employed were taken up. In contrast, this was true of only 22 of the 40 places going to professional-managerial homes.

2.23 Further evidence comes from the eligibility for free school meals, which the School makes available (and in complete secrecy as far as the girls are concerned) on the same basis as maintained schools. In 2005, 23.3 per cent of the Year 11 girls, the first admitted under Open Access, qualified for free lunches compared with 13.6 per cent of the 15-year-old girls in maintained secondary schools (DfES, 2005). In contrast, the proportion of girls eligible in the upper sixth (admitted on the old arrangements including assisted places) was only 6.7 per cent, not very different from the national average of 5.2 per cent. Of the Year 7 group, the latest entering via Open Access, 51.7 per cent qualified, more than three times the 16.4 per cent of girls of that age in maintained schools. It is evident that Open Access has had considerable impact in widening access.

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2.24 The Open Access Scheme rapidly became established, with in its first three years an average of 366 applications from 134 maintained schools, including three-quarters of the primary schools in Liverpool. About a third of the entrants had their fees fully paid by the Sutton Trust and the Girls' Day School Trust, and further 38 per cent had their fees partly covered. This opened up the School to high ability girls from low-income homes. Comparison of the intake before and after Open Access showed that entries from middle and lower-income postcodes increased appreciably. The proportion of the girls eligible for free school meals admitted under the five years of Open Access at 32.8 per cent was more than double the national average of 15.3 per cent for girls aged 11-15 in maintained secondary schools. The Cognitive Abilities Test administered annually in Year 7 by the School showed increases, on average, of about nine percentile ranks in verbal, non-verbal and quantitative abilities following the introduction of the Scheme. The evidence indicates that the main objective of the Scheme had been met.

3. Progress and Achievement

3.1 In 2005 the first intake to the Open Access Scheme took their GCSEs. Chart 3.1 shows that 62.7 per cent of entries passed at grade A*/A, the highest ever for the school. Nearly all the passes (98.2 per cent) were at grade C and above. Performance of girls from The Belvedere School has always been well above the national average, but even though grades generally have been improving, in 2005, the difference for A*/A grades between the school and nationally was 44 percentage points, up by six percentage points on the previous year.

Chart 3.1: GCSE Results by Entries of The Belvedere School¹

GCSE Grade	2001		2002		2003		2004		2005	
	%Bel	%All	%Bel	%All	%Bel	%All	%Bel	%All	%Bel	%All
A*	18.2	4.9	20.8	5.0	20.2	5.1	28.3	5.6	24.9	5.9
A	34.3	11.2	30.9	11.4	31.0	11.6	27.6	11.8	37.8	12.5
B	29.0	16.9	27.9	17.4	28.1	17.3	25.2	17.3	25.1	18.0
C	13.8	24.1	13.1	24.1	17.4	24.1	16.0	24.5	10.4	24.8
D	3.8	18.3	5.3	18.1	2.3	17.7	2.8	17.3	1.7	17.3
E	0.9	12.1	1.6	12.0	0.7	11.7	0.2	11.3	0.0	10.5
F	0.0	7.1	0.4	6.7	0.2	6.8	0.0	6.6	0.1	6.0
H	0.0	3.3	0.0	3.2	0.0	3.3	0.0	3.2	0.0	2.8
U	0.0	2.1	0.0	2.1	0.0	2.4	0.0	2.4	0.0	2.2
Entry ²	71	5.63M	63	5.66M	57	5.73M	62	5.88M	75	5.74M

1. The Belvedere results provided by the school; overall results from Joint Council for Qualifications.

2. M=million.

3.2 The improvement in The Belvedere's results is also brought out by the time course of the DfES' published performance tables shown in Chart 3.2. The percentages here differ from those of Chart 3.1 in two important ways. First, they refer to percentages of pupils not entries, but, secondly, the DfES bases its percentages on 15-year-olds only, not including those older or younger. On this basis, the improvement under Open Access shows up even more sharply with seven per cent more girls reaching the criterion level of 5 A*-C in 2005 than 2004[†].

3.3 Chart 3.2 also shows the impact of the abolition of the Assisted Places Scheme in 1997 on the GCSE results of the independent schools in Liverpool five years later. All except Merchant Taylors' showed a dip, and for Liverpool College and St Mary's this has continued. But Open Access has taken The Belvedere's results to the top. Among the maintained schools, the Blue Coat, a former boys' grammar school admitting girls from 2002, achieves similar results to the leading independents. But schools in Liverpool generally - which, as Chart 3.2 shows, are below the national average - had about half the success rate of The Belvedere in 2005, with only St Edward's and King David, two mixed comprehensives getting 90 per cent or more of the pupils to at least five good passes.

[†] The Belvedere's 2004 results emerge as less impressive in the DfES' figures because they were more uneven than in 2005 with some girls doing brilliantly and some not getting five good GCSEs, and also because some of the good results of Chart 3.1 were obtained by out-of-age children in DfES' terms.

Chart 3.2: GCSE Results by Pupil¹ of Selected Liverpool Schools

School ²	Per Cent Achieving 5 GCSE Grades A*-C							
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
<i>Independent</i>								
Belvedere	100	93	100	96	89	92	92	99
Merchant Taylors'	100	100	98	100	99	99	99	98
Liverpool College	93	89	90	97	93	94	94	88
St Mary's College	95	90	88	92	89	98	95	88
<i>Maintained</i>								
Blue Coat ¹	95	97	98	93	99	96	98	98
St Edward's	95	90	89	93	94	92	94	93
King David	72	76	84	84	77	83	82	90
St Hilda's	65	65	74	76	80	73	83	76
Archbishop Blanch	60	69	71	72	63	77	71	72
Liverpool LEA	31	32	35	35	39	41	45	49
England	46	48	49	46	52	53	54	56

1. Results from DfES performance tables.
2. Of the independent schools, Merchant Taylors', like Belvedere, is for girls, and Liverpool College and St Mary's are mixed. All the top performing LEA schools are voluntary aided. The Blue Coat was a boys' grammar which began admitting girls at age 11 in 2002. St Edward's and King David are mixed comprehensives, and St Hilda's and Archbishop Blanch are girls' comprehensives.

3.4 Of the 69 girls admitted by Open Access in 2000, 65 continued through to take GCSE in 2005. The loss of four girls in five years is remarkably low. The four leavers transferred to comprehensive schools, one early on, and the other three during Key Stage 4. Without being too specific for fear of breaching confidentiality, we can say that they left for a variety of personal difficulties, and not because they did not like the School. None had had their fees fully paid. Three were part payers and one a full fee payer. Eight girls joined the year group having moved into the area or transferred in from other schools, and they are included in the School's published results shown in Charts 3.1 and 3.2. The overall results of the joiners were similar to those of the Open Access entrants, slightly below in English, but above in maths and science.

3.5 In Chart 3.3 we track the 65 Open Access entrants from the outset to GCSE. On entry, although there was some variation, there were no statistically significant mean differences between the three groups according to fee status, either in the test component or overall. Neither did differences show up in the Cognitive Abilities Tests administered by the School in Years 7 and 10. The girls admitted to The Belvedere in 2000 were of equivalent abilities irrespective of their parents' capacity to meet the fees. But in the GCSE results a difference was detected. In terms of GCSE results overall the girls from low-income homes (those with their fees fully paid) did less well than either the part or full fee payers. Differences in this direction also emerge in the English, maths and science GCSEs though not reaching statistical significance in the individual examinations. Quite why a group of similar ability to two other groups should fare less well at GCSE requires further investigation. At this stage, we can only speculate. It could be due to differences in the girls' aspirations or to their home circumstances.

Chart 3.3: Performance by Fee Status

Test ¹ /Exam ²	Fees Paid (N=25)	Part Fees (N=21)	Full Fee Payers (N=19)	Significance
Entrance				
Verbal	114.1	114.7	108.8	0.218
Non Verbal	109.4	113.0	111.9	0.603
English	58.6	54.3	52.5	0.457
Maths	59.4	66.4	59.2	0.190
Overall	341.5	348.3	332.4	0.407
CAT 2000				
Verbal	80.4	81.5	81.6	0.812
Non Verbal	73.3	73.5	72.3	0.664
Quantitative	52.1	51.7	49.6	0.081
CAT 2003				
Verbal	80.5	79.6	79.4	0.840
Non Verbal	72.4	72.4	71.0	0.469
Quantitative	50.2	50.5	48.7	0.426
GCSE				
English	6.6	6.9	6.8	0.489
Maths	6.3	6.9	6.6	0.115
Science	13.7	16.6	16.6	0.070
Total	61.4	68.1	67.1	0.024*

1. Raw scores.
2. GCSE results scaled from 8 for A* through to 1 for G. Science score is a total for the science grades whether one, two or three grades were obtained. Total score is the total for all GCSEs taken.

3.6 We can learn something about the importance of aspirations by looking at the girls' intentions post-GCSE as they had reported them to the School. Chart 3.4 shows that about three-quarters were planning to stay on into The Belvedere sixth form. Of the leavers, eight were from the 25 whose fees were all paid and five from the 19 paying full fees. It was the part fee payers who were least likely to look elsewhere.

Chart 3.4: Intentions¹ Post GCSE

Plans Post GCSE	Fees Paid		Part Fees		Full Fee Payers		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Belvedere Sixth Form	17	68.0	19	90.5	14	73.7	50	76.9
Leaving	8	32.0	2	9.5	5	26.3	15	23.1
Total	25	100.0	21	100.0	19	100.0	65	100.0

1. As discussed with the School.

3.7 The reasons the two groups gave were rather different. Without going into too much detail, finance had become a problem for some of the parents paying fees and their daughters were transferring to other sixth forms. Another reason the girls gave was wanting to study alongside boys. Most of the eight intending leavers whose fees had been fully paid were also planning to stay in education or training, but they were tending to aim for more practical subjects or day release training. Several said they were leaving because their friends were leaving.

3.8 We can also shed some light on the role of home background through factor analysis, a technique which summarizes bodies of data in terms of the underlying dimensions identified by intercorrelation. Conveniently, GCSE performance loads on all three factors extracted. Chart 3.5 shows they can be readily interpreted as showing the associations with GCSE performance of:

- I non-verbal and quantitative abilities;
- II social background;
- III verbal abilities.

Chart 3.5: Factors¹ in Progression and Performance

Variable	Factors		
	I	II	III
Overall Entrance Score	.692		.348
Father's Occupation		.896	
Postcode	.316	-.929	
Fee Status		.612	
Verbal 2000			.828
Non Verbal 2000	.789		
Quantitative 2000	.743		
Verbal 2003			.850
Non Verbal 2003	.799		
Quantitative 2003	.792		
GCSE Score	.495	-.422	.442
Per Cent Variance	30.4	20.7	17.1

1. Varimax rotation. Only loadings above 0.3 displayed.

3.9 The two ability strands can be distinguished even more sharply by feeding into factor analysis the English, maths and science GCSE results separately. The patterns are very similar to that of Chart 3.5 so we do not show them, but clear threads are revealed running through the non verbal and maths entrance tests to the maths and science GCSE results, and from the verbal and English entrance tests to English GCSE. These results validate the entrance measures, and also underline the wisdom of including measures of both verbal and non-verbal abilities. But our principal interest for the moment is the associations with social background. Interestingly, the lower income postcodes do load on the factor linking non verbal abilities to good GCSE performance. The main relationship is, however, with relatively poor GCSE performance. The way the variables are scored suggests that it is the children from lower income homes who tend to do less well, bearing out the finding in Chart 3.3.

3.10 Factor analysis reveals the closeness of associations, but not the strength of the impact on GCSE performance. We can gain some insight here by multiple regression on GCSE score as the dependent variable. Chart 3.6 shows that using the measures of Chart 3.5 we can explain just over half the variation in GCSE scores. The variable with most predictive power is the entrance test which accounts for 14 per cent of the variance. But after that comes fee status which accounts for 11.6 per cent, with the children from low income homes doing rather less well. Beyond these two variables, verbal and quantitative scores make separate contributions.

Chart 3.6: Multiple Regression

Variable¹	Per Cent Explained Variance²
Overall Entrance Score	14.2
Fee Status	11.6
Quantitative 2000	8.2
Verbal 2003	6.5
Total (R ²)	52.0

1. Variables making statistically significant contributions out of those fed in - see Chart 3.5 for full list.
2. Variance partitioned by multiplying the beta weights by the product moment correlations with the dependent variable.

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- 3.11 Taken together, these patterns show that the entrance test is a good guide to subsequent GCSE performance, with the total score predicting GCSE performance overall and clear associations between, on the one hand, non-verbal and maths scores on entry and GCSE maths and science results, and, on the other, verbal and English scores on entry and English GCSE grade. Ability on entry was independent of family income. Neither were there differences with home background in the tests as the girls progressed through school.
- 3.12 But a difference did emerge in GCSE results with, on average, girls from low-income homes doing somewhat less well. This, however, has to be seen in the context of The Belvedere School achieving its best GCSE results ever, and the school emerging in 2005 as the top performer in Liverpool, with 99 per cent achieving good GCSEs compared with an average of 49 per cent for the LEA. It is likely, therefore, that the girls will have done considerably better than had they not taken up their places. They were no more likely to leave at the end of year 11, but those who were planning to do so tended to have different reasons from the fee payers - for more practical courses and/or because their friends were leaving.

4. Views of Pupils

- 4.1 In addition to the numerical picture, we have also asked the pupils, parents and teachers about their experiences and perceptions. These, of course, are what is believed to be true, social facts not necessarily objectively true, but important because they bear on actions and behaviour.
- 4.2 In this chapter, we look at Open Access and the School from the pupils' viewpoints. A questionnaire was administered to pupils in class time in May 2005, just before GCSEs. It explored whose idea it was to try for The Belvedere, what the girls liked and disliked about the School, what they intended doing after GCSE, and whether they were hoping to go to university. All 65 girls responded. In recollecting whose idea it was to go to The Belvedere, Chart 4.1 shows that about two-thirds said 'parents', with about 15 per cent of those whose fees were partly or wholly paid recalling that teachers had taken the initiative.

Chart 4.1: Whose Idea to Go to Belvedere?

	Fees Paid		Part Fees		Full Fee Payers		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yours	0	0.0	3	14.3	3	15.8	6	9.2
Parents	19	76.0	12	57.1	12	63.2	43	66.2
Teachers	3	12.0	4	19.0	1	5.3	8	12.3
Other ¹	3	12.0	2	9.5	3	15.8	8	12.3
Total	25	100.0	21	100.0	19	100.0	65	100.0

1. Yours and parents; yours and parents and teachers; parents and teachers, friends; family; don't know.

- 4.3 We also asked the girls about their plans post-GCSE. Their replies, shown in Chart 4.2, corresponded closely with what the School had told us (Chart 3.4). The only difference was that two of those paying full fees who the School had down as staying reported themselves to us as unsure.

Chart 4.2: Intentions Post GCSE

Plans Post GCSE	Fees Paid		Part Fees		Full Fee Payers		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Belvedere Sixth Form	17	68.0	19	90.5	12	63.2	48	73.8
Another School/College	7	28.0	1	4.8	5	26.3	13	20.0
Don't Know	1	4.0	1	4.8	2	10.5	4	6.2
Total	25	100.0	21	100.0	19	100.0	65	100.0

- 4.4 In the event, all but one of those who were unsure left. The exception was a girl whose fees were paid. So, overall, three-quarters (48) of the 65 stayed on, with the percentages ranging from 90.5 of those with their fees partly paid, through 72.0 per cent of those with free places (including the don't know who stayed), to 63.2 per cent of those on full fees. About a fifth of the first Open Access intake were planning to go to another school or college. The major reason - given by eight of the 13 who had made up their minds at the time - was that The Belvedere does not offer the subjects or courses in which they were interested. Two wanted graphic design, and one each, product design, psychology, accountancy, hairdressing, and fashion and clothing (one was not specific). Two, were switching for financial reasons, and two wanted a change, in one case to a mixed sixth form.

4.5 All were planning to go to university whether continuing at The Belvedere or studying elsewhere, except for three of the 25 whose fees had been fully paid. Of the 62 hoping to go to university, as Chart 4.3 shows, ten were aiming for medicine and nine law (together over 30 per cent of the total). Ten were wanting to read traditional subjects such as the sciences, languages, history, and geography, and 13 newer subjects such as psychology, design, journalism and IT. Six had accountancy and business studies in mind, two were considering architecture, and one each nursing, engineering, education and art. Four said they were undecided, and four offered no response.

Chart 4.3: University Plans

Subject	N	Per Cent
Medicine/Medical Sciences	10	16.1
Law	9	14.5
Psychology	5	8.1
Sciences	4	6.5
Design	4	6.5
Accountancy	3	4.8
Business Studies	3	4.8
Languages	3	4.8
Other ¹	13	21.0
Undecided	4	6.5
No Response	4	6.5
Total	62	100.0

1. Architecture 2; journalism 2; information technology 2; history 2; nursing 1; engineering 1; education 1; geography 1; and art 1.

4.6 Two of the key questions asked were ‘what three things had the girls most liked about being at The Belvedere’ and, conversely, ‘what three things had they most disliked’. The girls found it easier to list things that they had liked.

Chart 4.4: Liked Most About Belvedere School

‘Liked Most’	N ¹	%Girls
Helpful/dedicated/friendly teachers	38	58.5
New friends	34	52.3
Environment/atmosphere	21	32.3
Enjoyable, good lessons	19	29.2
Extracurricular activities/sport	16	24.6
Respected as an individual	12	18.5
Small school/classes	9	13.8
Longer holidays	6	9.2
Other ²	15	23.0
Total	170	65

1. Each girl able to offer up to three things. Two girls did not enter anything.
 2. Girls’ school, 3; multicultural, 3; better facilities, 2; no response, 2; opportunities, 1; people, 1; pastoral care, 1; quality of treatment, 1; fund raising, 1.

Box 4.1: What the Girls Most Liked About Being at The Belvedere

Helpful/Dedicated/Friendly Teachers

"Some of the teachers are really approachable and will go through a subject any number of times." (Fees Paid)

"The staff are helpful and do all they can to help pupils obtain good results." (Part Paid)

"The friendly nature of the teachers who encourage you to work yet enjoy school as well." (Part Paid)

"The teachers interact closely with pupils and do a lot to help." (Full Fees)

New Friends

"Making new friends from different areas of Liverpool." (Fees Paid)

"The pupils, everybody is very friendly and willing to help each other out." (Part Paid)

"Good chums who have helped me to enjoy my school life." (Part Paid)

"I have a sound friendship group and fond memories." (Full Fees)

Environment/Atmosphere

"A calm and friendly working atmosphere." (Fees Paid)

"Friendly atmosphere both teachers and girls making it more relaxing." (Fees Paid)

"Being made to feel part of a community/family." (Part Paid)

"The environment is hardworking and friendly, both the pupils and teachers help this to happen." (Part Paid)

"It is a nice school with none of the usual major problems like bullying." (Full Fees)

Enjoyable, Good Lessons

"The best education I could have received." (Fees Paid)

"The varied methods used by teachers in the lessons." (Part Paid)

"I have enjoyed the lessons as the staff are dedicated and respect our opinions." (Full Fees)

Extracurricular Activities/Sport

"Taking part in various sports teams." (Fees Paid)

"The freedom to join as many clubs as you wish and the variety that is offered." (Part Paid)

"The Duke of Edinburgh Scheme has given me many fond memories of being at The Belvedere." (Full Fees)

"Being involved in music - the choir, orchestra and string ensemble, and also in sports." (Full Fees)

Respected as an Individual

"The freedom given to everyone to make their own decisions." (Fees Paid)

"Given freedom to grow and make decisions." (Part Paid)

"Being treated and valued as an individual." (Part Paid)

"Treated an individual by teachers. My views are listened to." (Full Fees)

Small School/Classes

"Being in smaller classes and year groups so that everyone is close." (Fees Paid)

"Small class sizes, allows the teacher to explain things more clearly and spend time with individual people." (Fees Paid)

"Small school so I know everybody. Small year group so class sizes are small." (Part Paid)

"The fact that there is a small number of people in the school and also small classes which helps you to get to know everybody around you." (Part Paid)

- 4.7 In all, 63 girls provided 168 responses about what they had liked. The relative frequencies are shown in Chart 4.4 and verbatim quotes are given in Box 4.1. Two girls did not put down anything and these have been treated as deliberate omissions in calculating the percentages, since as we shall be seeing in subsequent paragraphs one or two had some hard things to say about the School.
- 4.8 Over half the girls put the **teachers** among the three things they had most liked and almost as many listed **new friends**. The girls were also very appreciative of the **calm atmosphere** in which they felt part of a community and were free of bullying. Nearly 30 per cent specified the **lessons** and about a quarter the **extracurricular activities** including sport. A number of the girls said that they liked the School because the teachers **respected them as individuals**, and because it was a **small school**, in which it was easy to get to know people.

Chart 4.5: Disliked Most About Belvedere School

'Disliked Most'	N ¹	%Girls
Rules and Regulations	21	32.3
Nothing	17	26.2
Favouritism/differential treatment	16	24.6
Pressure to do well	14	21.5
School dinners	7	10.8
Particular teachers	7	10.8
Other ²	12	18.5
Total	94	65

1. Each girl able to offer up to three things.
2. Long journey, 2; high-turnover of staff in one department, 2; old-fashioned teaching, 2; disputes in classes, 1; PE, 1; assembly, 1; difficulty to find somewhere to work, 1; poor facilities, 1; no football, 1.

- 4.9 The other side of the coin was what they most disliked. They found fewer things to say in response to this question. Chart 4.5 shows that the 65 girls provided 94 dislikes, which are illustrated in Box 4.2. A quarter said they had disliked 'nothing'. The main complaint, put forward by about a third, was the **rules and regulations**, including the dress code, having to stay in the school at lunch time, having to do homework in the 'Catch Up' Club, and the fuss that was sometimes made about minor infringements. About a quarter perceived some form of **favouritism**. Not being picked for the school team and differential treatment by teachers were mentioned. For some, the differential treatment was that they perceived the academic pupils to be favoured, but for others it was girls apparently getting away with not doing the work they had been set.
- 4.10 About a fifth of the girls said that they disliked the pressure to do well. Several felt that this was more to do with the School's image rather than for their benefit and others that the high standards make school stressful and competitive. School dinners attracted complaints from 10 per cent of the girls - apparently little choice and expensive. Another 10 per cent of the girls had gripes about particular teachers to do with discipline and the way they felt they were perceived.

Box 4.2: What the Girls Most Disliked About Being at The Belvedere

Rules and Regulations

- "The fact that we have to stay in school at lunch time." (Fees Paid)*
- "The uniform - too concerned over rules eg. earrings and hair bobbles." (Fees Paid)*
- "Some of the rules, for example wearing a blazer in summer when it is hot, appear pointless and tedious." (Fees Paid)*
- "Being made to go to Catch Up Club." (Part Paid)*
- "Occasionally too concerned over minor rules, eg. bag colour, earrings." (Full Fees)*
- "Can't eat in the classrooms." (Full Fees)*
- "Minor troubles can be highly dramatised." (Full Fees)*

Favouritism/Differential treatment

- "Favouritism for the more academic pupils." (Fees Paid)*
- "The teachers are not used to the type of people coming in on the Open Access Scheme. They are hypocritical." (Fees Paid)*
- "Favouritism - not being picked for teams when tried out." (Fees Paid)*
- "Some teachers appear to dislike certain pupils." (Part Paid)*
- "Some teachers treat people differently which is unfair." (Full Fees)*
- "Pupils that don't work or are disobedient don't get punished and get treated as if nothing had happened." (Full Fees)*

Pressure to do Well

- "The school image is valued more than the people." (Fees Paid)*
- "The amount of pressure put on pupils causes unnecessary stress (not me personally but I have seen a lot of my friends get upset when they have got 'only' a 'B'." (Fees Paid)*
- "The high standard of work expected can be too much." (Fees Paid)*
- "The pressure to do well." (Part Paid)*
- "Everything revolves around hard work. It is really stressful and competitive." (Full Fees)*

School Dinners

- "The new school dinners as we should be able to choose what we want to eat." (Fees Paid)*
- "Some of the canteen food and it is also expensive." (Fees Paid)*
- "Expensive canteen food." (Part Paid)*
- "The current canteen food. There is never any choice and we are never given very much." (Full Fees)*
- "Canteen food is too expensive." (Full Fees)*

Particular Teachers

- "The way in which some teachers will not explain things more than once and make pupils feel inadequate and embarrassed." (Fees Paid)*
- "How with some teachers a whole class gets shouted at and when not everyone is at fault, even when someone has owned up." (Part Paid)*
- "Not being listened to by some teachers." (Full Fees)*
- "Some teachers often make pre-judgements without allowing a chance for improvements." (Full Fees)*

4.11 A third question we put was ‘what difference do you think coming to The Belvedere has made to you?’ Chart 4.6 presents the replies and Box 4.3 some of the comments. The question was open-ended (no specification of up to three as in the ‘liked’ and ‘disliked’ questions) and, in all, the 65 girls provided 91 responses, which were nearly all positive. Almost half the girls said they thought they had received a better education than they would have done in a local comprehensive and that they had been able to **realise their academic potential**. Some, particularly those receiving help with their fees, made explicit comparison with state schools.

Chart 4.6: Difference Made by Belvedere School

‘Difference Made’	N ¹	%Girls
Better educated/realised potential	30	46.2
More confident	13	20.0
More mature	11	16.9
More rounded	11	16.9
Friendships	8	12.3
Good opportunity for future	3	4.6
Not much difference	3	4.6
No response	8	12.3
Other ²	4	6.2
Total N	91	65

1. Each girl able to offer up to three things.
2. One each: ‘more positive about work’, ‘easier to communicate with adults’, ‘fostered interest in new subjects’, ‘confirmed my disagreement with private education’.

4.12 The other main area of perceived benefit was in personal development. Becoming **more mature, more confident** and **more rounded** have been treated as separate categories highlighting the different emphases. But they could have been lumped together, when as a group they would have come above academic matters. About 12 per cent singled out the **friends** they had made that would stand them in good stead for life.

4.13 Just three were thinking of the **future** in the sense that they had learned enough about themselves to know what they Wanted to do, or more pragmatically that having been to The Belvedere would look good on the CV. Three girls thought going to The Belvedere had **not made a lot of difference**, and eight offered **no response**. Among the included in the ‘other’ group, one girl, a full fee payer switching to a maintained school, said the main difference that going to The Belvedere had made was “to confirm my disagreement with private education.”

Resumé

4.14 All 65 girls who had entered in the first Open Access intake and had remained at the School to take GCSEs (only four had dropped out) completed a questionnaire during class time. Two-thirds said it had been their parents’ idea to go to The Belvedere and three-quarters were staying on at the School to take A-levels. Nearly all of the 65 (95.4 per cent) were hoping to go to university.

Box 4.3: What Difference Has Being At The Belvedere Made?

Better Educated/Realised Potential

"A safe environment in which to learn. There are fewer distractions than in state schools and I feel if I had not come here I would not have got the grades I'm predicted." (Fees Paid)

"My learning has far excelled that of my sisters in state schools." (Fees Paid)

"I've found interests in subjects I didn't know I liked." (Fees Paid)

"Provided me with an education I may not have got at local comprehensive." (Part Paid)

"I am confident and seriously feel my academic potential has been reached." (Full Cost)

"It has made me achieve the best I can." (Full Fees)

"I have learned to express myself properly as I have realised that you will never be taken seriously unless you do this." (Full Fees)

More Confident

"More confident and appreciative of the education I receive." (Fees Paid)

"I have found it easier to talk to adults." (Part Paid)

"It has made me more confident as the teachers are encouraging and the pupils are kind." (Part Paid)

"I have become more confident and sociable." (Full Fees)

More Mature

"It has made me more mature, and I have learned many things so I have a different perspective on things." (Fees Paid)

"It has made me consider all aspects of different situations and learn to control my feelings when necessary." (Fees Paid)

"I have become more independent, responsible and reliable." (Part Paid)

"Made me more independent and responsible." (Full Fees)

More Rounded

"It has made me a more rounded person in general." (Fees Paid)

"It has made me a better person because I have been mixing with lots of good people." (Fees Paid)

"The encouragement to do well has helped me to strive. The Belvedere School also teaches you to be a polite and well-mannered woman." (Part Paid)

Friendships

"I've met some people I know I'll be friends with for life." (Fees Paid)

"It has allowed me to mix with people that are similar to myself." (Part Paid)

"It has given me the opportunity to meet new friends and take an interest in new things e.g. sports." (Full Fees)

Future

"It has helped me to make some definite decisions as to my future and what I want to do with it." (Fees Paid)

"I have been given a good opportunity and will be able to impress people e.g. employers and universities by saying I have come to The Belvedere." (Fees Paid)

Not Much Difference

"Not a lot really." (Fees Paid)

"Nothing much." (Part Paid)

4.15 The top five things they had most liked about being at The Belvedere were: the helpful/dedicated/friendly teachers; new friends; the environment/atmosphere; enjoyable lessons and the extra-curricular activities. There were fewer negatives than positives, but the five things most disliked were: rules and regulations; favouritism; pressure to do well; school dinners; and particular teachers. The main differences they thought going to The Belvedere had made were: being able to realise potential; more confident; more mature; more rounded; and friendships.

5. Views of Parents

- 5.1 A questionnaire was sent to the homes of the parents/guardians of the girls at the end of the summer term. Replies were received from 23 out of 65 possible, all but two from those staying on in the sixth form. The very favourable tone of the comments has to be interpreted against this background. But if the non-respondents had different views they did not feel sufficiently strongly to tell us. All of those receiving help with the fees (either fully or partly) indicated on a five-point scale that they were 'very pleased' that their daughter/ward had been to the school, including one who was leaving. She was switching to a maintained school, because *"financial help has reduced over five years which has affected rest of the family."* Those paying full fee payers were either 'very pleased' or 'pleased', except for one who was disappointed. Overall 87 per cent of the respondents indicated that they were 'very pleased'. Parents, like their daughters, were also asked to list the three things they most liked about the School and the three things they most disliked.

'Most Liked About the School'

- 5.2 Chart 5.1 lists the parents' 'likes'. Their comments were generally more extensive so we have woven them into the text rather than creating boxes. Two thirds mentioned the **teaching**:

"The School lived up to our expectations. Our daughter would not achieved what she has without the encouragement and support of her teachers." (Fees Paid)

"Teachers are 100% committed to the pupils wanting them to achieve the best they possibly can." (Part Fees)

"Brilliant Teachers." (Full Fees)

- 5.3 Over half said **high expectations**:

"I like the way they push our daughter to her limits to bring out the best in her." (Fees Paid)

"Standards are high, atmosphere one of mutual respect." (Part Paid - Leaving)

"The School has brought out my daughter 's potential to succeed." (Part Paid)

- 5.4 About half also referred to the **reputation/ethos/environment** of the School:

"Very good reputation and the fact that my daughter would never have had a chance to go it had not been for the Open Access Scheme." (Fees Paid)

"The School's ethos has made her into a more individual young lady, positive and outgoing." (Part Paid)

"Safe, secure and caring environment in which to study." (Part Paid)

"The School is like a large family - caring and responsible." (Part Paid)

"Our daughter is shy and quiet and it was reassuring to me that she would be in a good environment." (Full Fees)

Chart 5.1: Most Liked About the School

'Most Liked'	Per Cent¹ (N=23)
Teaching	65.2
High Expectations of Girls	56.5
Reputation/Ethos/Environment	47.8
Small Classes/Small Size	30.4
Discipline	21.7
Developed Confidence	21.7
Friendships	21.7
Other ²	17.3

1. Percentages do not sum to 100 since each parent offered up to 3 'likes'.
2. Two parents liked the school because it was same sex; one liked the extra-curricular activities, and one the reporting back by the school to the parents.

5.5 A particular feature of the environment the parents liked was the **small classes/small size**:

"Small numbers and the teachers having time for pupils." (Fees Paid)

"Size of school intake leading to teachers being more aware of individual girls."
(Part Paid)

"Small size school, person - not just a number." (Part Paid)

Nearly a third included this among the features they listed. They also commented on the **good discipline** of the School:

"The teachers take a firm, but fair attitude to discipline." (Fees Paid)

"Well taught manners and morals, promoting independence." (Fees Paid)

"The style of teaching and the discipline." (Part Paid)

"The overall behaviour of the girls has been good." (Part Paid)

5.6 About a fifth of the parents in each case listed the development of self-confidence and the **good friends** their daughter had made as among the three things they liked most about the School:

"Daughter has gained confidence and self-esteem through friendship, support and teamwork." (Fees Paid)

"My daughter has gone from strength to strength, she is so confident, and we now know she will be successful in her chosen career." (Part Paid)

"She's made lovely friends." (Full Fees)

"Our daughter has had great fun at the School and has made some great friends."
(Full Fees)

- 5.7 A variety of **other** features were mentioned by one or two parents. Two parents liked the School because it was single sex, one liked the extra-curricular activities, and another the reporting back by the school to the parents:

“An all girls school provides a more dedicated education with no distractions.”
(Fees Paid)

“Has flourished and enjoyed fully extra curricular activities to high standards also.” (Part Paid)

“Feedback from teachers keeping us informed of school news is good.” (Part Paid)

“All girls.” (Full Fees)

‘Disliked Most About the School’

- 5.8 In order to explore the other side of the coin we asked parents ‘what three things they had least liked about the School?’ In contrast, to the ‘liked’ item many of the parents found it hard to come up with anything. One spoke for many when she said,

“I cannot honestly think of anything I have disliked about the School. My daughter is happy and is doing well. I have not met with any problems whatsoever.” (Part Paid)

Chart 5.2: Disliked Most About the School

‘Disliked Most’	Per Cent¹ (N=23)
Nothing	34.7
Travel	17.4
Catering	17.4
Uniform	13.0
Lack of Contact with Boys’ School	8.7
Facilities	8.7
Other ²	26.1

1. Percentages do not sum to 100 since each parent could offer up to three ‘dislikes’.
2. One mention each for: the effects of Open Access; workload; lack of subject choice in the sixth-form; reduced financial support; scramble at parents’ evenings; and lack of social events for parents and pupils.

- 5.9 Chart 5.2 shows that about a third of the parents said nothing and others left the item blank. Only one of the respondents seemed seriously disappointed. His daughter was leaving. In response to the invitation to list dislikes he offered:

“1. Teaching standards - in one subject she had seven teachers in Year 10.

2. Discipline - not as good as it was made out to be.

3. Homework - we were promised lots but it did not happen.”

- 5.10 The only general concern was to do with **travel**. In addition to the four parents who included it among their ‘dislikes’ another five brought it up when we asked, “have you encountered any difficulties in sending your daughter/ward to The Belvedere?” Two parents referred to it twice. None of the full fee payers raised it as an issue. Travel came up both in relation to distance and cost.

“A long day for her from getting up at 7.00 am until getting home after 5.00, then having homework until bedtime. A good work ethic, but punishing at times.” (Fees Paid)

“Travel by private bus expensive.” (Fees Paid)

“Although a 45 min bus journey to and from school, it is not a problem unless the bus refuses to stop due to full capacity.” (Fees Paid)

“The distance away from home that has to be travelled each day.” (Part Paid)

“We have had an excellent travel service who has now been dismissed due to the new service being enlisted.” (Part Paid)

“Because school is private LEA do not provide school bus passes.” (Part Paid)

“There have been difficulties in the past re school transport, but this seems to have been resolved by parents/school collaboration.” (Part Paid)

5.11 The only other points to be mentioned by three parents or more were to do with the **catering**, and the **uniform**:

“Only quibble, overpriced and not very nice school lunches. The children should be able to bring a packed lunch if they so wish.” (Fees Paid)

“Catering but has since been changing.” (Fees Paid)

“Sixth formers without uniform.” (Part Paid)

“Get rid of the school winter coat. My daughter (and her friends) have refused to wear the school issue for five years.” (Full Fees)

5.12 Only one of the parents, a full fee payer, expressed reservations about Open Access, but he was ‘pleased’ that his daughter had won a place:

“The type of girl entering the School changed slightly in the first year of Open Access. One particular girl caused a lot of problems for my daughter and others and despite complaints nothing appeared to be done. I got the impression that because the child had entered under the Open Access Scheme that there was no way she could be excluded until after GCSEs. This does not apply to the fee-paying girls. Any Open Access girl should be excluded at any time their behaviour cannot be controlled.”

Resumé

5.13 Although only just over a third of the parents took the opportunity to comment on their daughter’s/ward’s experience, it is evident that few had burning criticisms that made them want to respond. Only one, a full fee payer, wrote to express considerable disappointment. The parents who did respond were very pleased that their daughters had won a place at The Belvedere. They liked particularly the teaching, the high expectations of the girls, the School’s reputation/ethos/environment, the small size/small classes, the discipline, the self-confidence the girls developed and the friendships made. The only difficulties raised were peripheral; to do with the time and cost of travel, the catering and the school uniform. One parent paying part fees who wrote at length seemed to get to the essence of Open Access:

“I have a very high regard for the teachers of The Belvedere. All of our children have and are benefiting tremendously from the education there. Unfortunately for so many bright children from their primary school their parents refused them the opportunity to sit the exam and the result is apparent. As a parent who did not take GCE, leaving school at 15, I have tried to instil the value and fun of education into my children and the results are now showing (a bit of a proud mum - sorry).”

6. Impact on the School

- 6.1 In this chapter we turn to the teachers in the school for their assessment. To obtain an authentic picture only those staff who had worked in the School prior to the introduction of the Scheme in 2000 were asked for their views. All 19 teachers (including the headteacher), nearly half of the staff, kindly agreed to talk individually to us in confidence. Most of these teachers had been in the school a long time. Their average length of service was 18 years. Three of the 19 had also been pupils at the school. Each had experience of the Assisted Places Scheme, which accounted for about one third of the entrants before it was phased out from 1997. Their teaching covered the spectrum of subjects including also pastoral and senior management responsibilities. The interviews took place over a two-day period in the summer term 2005 before the GCSE results were known. Each lasted about 30 minutes and was taped.
- 6.2 The interviews took the form of a discussion exploring a number of themes. A key question we put was whether the overall ability and behaviour of the pupils had changed and, if so, whether teaching, discipline and pastoral care had had to be adjusted. Of interest too was the impact of the Scheme on the level of parental support, on extra-curricular activities and on the ethos of the school. Some discussion was given over to future recruitment including also the impact of the Scheme on The Belvedere junior school. The teachers were also asked to sum up their views.

Ability

- 6.3 The great majority of teachers spoke of a perceptible change in ability, skewing the range upwards and reducing the length of the tail. A teacher of languages described the impact:

“We have a larger number of very able girls. The Scheme has not entirely weeded out the poorer ones but there isn’t the long tail there used to be. Prior to the Scheme we used to get exam results in my subject as low as 7 per cent. This doesn’t happen any more. The lowest are now in the high thirties.”

And similarly teachers in the sciences and the humanities:

“At the top end there are no more brighter pupils but we haven’t got the tail we used to have. We don’t have so many that really struggle. There is a more even balance in terms of ability.”

“It has gone up. The Open Access Scheme is bringing in bright girls from lower income groups.”

- 6.4 But some, were less certain:

“I’m not sure. Everybody will say a lot brighter. Probably a bit more, but there are some weak ones in my subject. Although I am sure there are measures which say they are a lot brighter. But it is relative I haven’t taught very weak pupils for a long time.”

“To be quite honest, I don’t think so, not in a huge way. We are getting just as many good, bright girls. But admittedly the ‘tail’ isn’t as long as it used to be. I used to

wonder personally how some of them got through the entrance exam. What we are getting now is a bigger range of social background. Even the Assisted Places Scheme didn't draw from such a wide social background."

- 6.5 An indirect result of the change in the ability profile of the entrants has been the impact on subject choices. The teachers described science as 'just booming', with more girls opting for physics, chemistry and biology rather than general science. In the current Year 10, reportedly more able than the 2000 intake, for the first time more girls had opted for the separate sciences over the double award, by a ratio of three to two. In Year 9 the trend is even more pronounced, with a ratio of three to one in favour of the separate sciences. Greater numbers studying the sciences at AS level are also expected. The increased demand has meant an extra science teacher has had to be taken on.
- 6.6 Changes in the intake had brought with them different learning styles. In the teachers' view the girls were more questioning, more individual in their thinking, less conforming, but were less able in writing things down. One teacher identified the key issue as a 'skills gap', others 'lack of general knowledge' and, more specifically, 'an impoverished cultural background'.

"The girls are bright but they don't know how to put it down, how to put it across. Some of it is a skills gap and some of it is they don't have a quiet place to work at home."

"The top set are a lot more questioning. They need to know how things work and discover things for themselves."

"The girls are very bright in discussion, but don't have quite the same ability to write it down."

"Their comprehension skills are very good. They are very quick on the up-take. The downside is many of the girls don't have a cultural background at home. Some are desperately keen to imbibe the new culture, to get involved. Others are not, and see it as a middle class culture and not really their thing. So there is a bit of a battle going on there."

Teaching Methods

- 6.7 The teaching has had to adapt. Teaching, in any case, evolves and develops in response to changes in subject specifications and new technologies, as for instance with the teaching of science following the recent installation of interactive white boards. But a number of teachers, across all subjects, described how they have had to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of a different intake, for example in the sciences and mathematics:

"I have had to change the way I introduce lessons, how I present the subject because the style of the girls' learning has changed. The top end are more individual thinkers, more questioning, before they were more uniform. The girls are more challenging to teach."

- 6.8 The strategies adopted included less reliance on 'chalk and talk', greater differentiation of material, more investigative work, but also more attention to the basics. A teacher from the humanities explained:

“Teaching styles have changed. This is not necessarily a bad thing. It is part of normal professional development. But older colleagues with a more didactic approach have had to change considerably.”

Teachers on the science side commented:

“We don’t use instruction sheets as much as we used to. Now we have quite complex work sheets. The girls are good on verbal reasoning. We do more short problem solving. They are less good if the problem is staged. They don’t follow instructions as well. Sometimes the ‘spark’ is very much on the surface without the follow through.”

“We are probably getting through more. The girls pick it up quicker”.

“Their general knowledge is a bit less good. So teaching the basics is required a bit more than in the past. Sometimes we have to teach a skill not learnt in primary school.”

“We do a lot more investigative work; before the girls were quite happy just to accept a formula and learn how to use it.”

and on the arts side:

“The pupils are a lot more demanding. I have to think of ways to keep them focussed. Before we could do a long translation in class allocating sentences to individual girls now I have to think of ways of ‘sexing it up’.”

“Although we have more bright girls there is considerable variation among those at the top end. Now we have those that don’t like working hard, but do it quickly and get bored. Then there is a group who want it absolutely right and take ages about it. Then there is the middle range and the slower ones, so our teaching has to be geared to this.”

Homework

- 6.9 In the discussion about learning and teaching the teachers interviewed frequently referred to what they described as the ‘work ethic’. They were able to articulate it best in relation to the attitude to homework and also to GCSE coursework. Opinions varied. For some teachers since the onset of the Scheme there had been few discernible changes. They pointed out that there had always been a handful of girls who had had to be chased for work. Others spoke of a general trend, of changes in society with more pressures on young people from outside resulting in less inclination to do homework. For them measures such as the introduction of the homework or ‘Catch-Up’ club in the dinner hour and after school, which the School has now introduced would most likely have been necessary with or without the Open Access Scheme.
- 6.10 But others were less sanguine and described getting work in on time as ‘a continual problem’, and coursework deadlines as ‘a nightmare’, that it was ‘a lot worse now’ and there was ‘more catching up to do and more chasing.’ They saw the problem as ‘a bit more specific to the Open Access girls.’ Some of the girls were described as ‘less self-organised’, and not ‘as disciplined at sitting down and doing homework’, and ‘that the parents were supportive but did not have the background themselves to know what was expected and provide encouragement.”

- 6.11 In sharp contrast another teacher explained that the school had always had girls with a non-academic background, so in terms of getting work in, at least in her subject, there was *'no difference and generally speaking the standards have been better.'* Somewhere in between was the teacher who judged that since the introduction of the Scheme:

"Probably staff had to be a bit firmer about homework and course work, but the main problem was where the girls could work at home".

Behaviour and Discipline

- 6.12 Just as the 'Catch-Up' or homework club was introduced to help support academic development, the pastoral side has had to be firmed up. Of particular importance is a more explicit policy on discipline. According to one member of staff this used to be *'more ad hoc, with Open Access policies have been tightened up.'* In discussion senior management emphasised that there are clear lines of acceptable behaviour from pupils.
- 6.13 The teachers were divided about the impact of the Scheme on pupil behaviour and discipline. At the outset the staff had had some considerable misgivings, but according to one Head of Department *'it turned out not as bad as we expected it to be'* (the staff had been prepared through behaviour management training). At one end of the scale, some teachers reported that behaviour had *'deteriorated'*, that there were some *'very difficult girls'*, that there was *'a lot less care of the furniture and fabric of the building'* and that *'some of the girls were impervious to rebuke'*.
- 6.14 Other teachers acknowledged some changes in the behaviour, but believed the impact had not been detrimental. But it did mean that staff had had to work harder and be more persistent in reinforcing standards. One of the teachers in this group explained that *'discipline has always been hard won and it is not any worse after five years of the Open Access Scheme'*. Another said that more time had had to be spent on behaviour, and that *'the pupils needed more direction about what appropriate behaviour is'*.
- 6.15 Some of the teachers in this group attributed the need to reinforce discipline more overtly to changes in society in general, that children were now more vocal and less likely to know where to draw the line when dealing with staff:

"The girls tend to be more open and frank in their conversation with staff and that this could come over as being cheeky. Some of the older staff had had trouble with the 'chirpiness' of the girls."

"We have to spend more time on behaviour and explain 'this is the way we behave in lessons'. The girls can come across as cheeky. They don't mean to be, it is just that they are more frank and open with you. They are not so aware of you as a teacher. You are just a person. I have to impose how I want them to behave in lessons, such as not wandering around the room, not shouting and by putting their hand up and holding the door open for people."

Pupil Adjustment

- 6.16 Teachers have had to change but so have the pupils, particularly the girls arriving as the only entrant from their primary school. The staff agreed without exception

that, overall, the intakes since Open Access had settled down very well. Just one or two girls each time found the transition more difficult, but most *'seemed to just sail along'*. It was remarked that, not surprisingly, those from The Belvedere junior school tended to adjust more quickly, and that they were more confident because they knew what was expected of them.

- 6.17 The staff attributed the ease with which the girls adjusted to the fact the School is compact and traditionally a very friendly place. The classes and tutor groups are small, so everyone, pupils and staff, knows everyone, and staff are very approachable. The tone was set in assemblies where the importance of social and ethnic tolerance was carefully explained to the girls. The spread of girls from the junior school across the three forms each year has also helped in the formation of new friendship patterns. Realistically, as one teacher commented, *'after all they all meet in the town, they share the same bus, they mix well'*. Another commented:

"The girls are very open in their friendship in school, the patterns cut across social backgrounds."

Clearly, within the School social mixing has been good. But there could, on occasions, be some tension with friends from outside.

Parental Support

- 6.18 In taking into account the process of adjustment since the Scheme first started the interviewees were also asked about the level of parental support. All agreed there had been some change but in a limited way. The expected fall-off in attendance at parents' evenings had not occurred to any great extent:

"With the widening of the social mix there hasn't been a huge change in the attendance at parents' evenings, we still see most parents."

- 6.19 Instead the issue was one of communication. Several staff remarked on the difficulties that some of the parents had found in understanding what was required of them. This perception is encapsulated in the comment:

"We have as good attendance at parents' evenings as we always used to but there is a higher proportion of parents who are not terribly aware of what their daughters are doing, or what is expected of them."

The point was made that *'belligerent and assertive parents can come from any social background.'* One or two of the members of staff commented that some of the fee-paying parents could be difficult with the attitude, *'I'm paying for a service'*.

- 6.20 A change in the level of parental support has perhaps been most keenly felt by the 'Parents and Friends Association' which is struggling to get helpers. It was said that the some of non-fee-paying parents may have felt uncomfortable mixing with the *'monied group of parents'*, and that *'they do not come to social gatherings because it was outside their social sphere.'*

- 6.21 Open Access had made a bigger difference than the Assisted Places Scheme. It was suggested that since those parents had had to find out about AP for themselves they were generally interested and knew what was involved. But with Open Access the

impetus was coming from the primary schools, and though supportive these parents could find themselves just swept along.

Extra-Curricular Activities

- 6.22 More concern was expressed about the impact over the last five years on extra-curricular activities. Staff were described as *'very worried'* about the fall-off in the interest and commitment of the girls, particularly in musical activities such as the orchestras and choirs, and fielding the Saturday sports teams. Various reasons were given, such as the wider geographical catchment area of the intake and the difficulties of transport. For matches the parents used to organise the transport, now the School is doing it. It may be more of the parents just don't have the resources to provide transport to school events and sports activities. But teachers also perceived it to be the case that more parents than a few years ago *'don't see the value of such activities and don't look ahead.'*

Ethos of the School

- 6.23 A wider perspective of the impact of the Scheme is provided by the teachers' perception of the general ethos of the School and whether it has changed or not. They were in agreement that it had not but with some provisos. Senior management put this stability down to the inherent strength of The Belvedere ethos:

"The School ethos is very strong because it is inherited from the buildings, the ambience, representing the School in uniform. The girls have gradually accepted this and absorbed the standards expected."

One head of department focussed on measures the School has taken:

"More provision has had to be made for the wider social mix, but the basic philosophy of the School and what it is about has not changed."

And similarly from another:

"We always had a bit of a mixture. I think it is a lot nicer. In the past we had quite a lot of 'little princesses'; we seem to have got rid of those. I think we have a nice mix."

But some teachers were more trenchant and attributed the resilience of The Belvedere ethos to the efforts of the staff:

"The ethos, I hope, has survived, but that is very much down to the staff who drive that ethos. It may take a little longer but that is what we are constantly for, so that by the end of their time here they turn into the 'Belvedere Girl' with all the qualities she should have."

"Fortunately not a great deal yet. We still have a hold on it. Perhaps because they see it as a privilege and for a lot of these girls it is the first rung on the ladder."

The staff has been long serving and a number are approaching retirement. One teacher did wonder whether the ethos would survive their going:

"There hasn't been a noticeable change in ethos, however in the near future a number of staff are due to retire and others will come in with different ideas and that could bring about a change."

The Future

- 6.24 In addition to impending staff retirements, other issues were raised about how the school would fare in the future. A common concern was the level of pupil recruitment. A head of department feared that entries would be down by about 15 per cent in 2006 compared with the Scheme's first year. But following the prospect of the School becoming a government-funded academy (see Barbara Harrison's, Chief Executive of GDST, 'Latest Developments', page iv) acceptances have climbed back to target.
- 6.25 A number of teachers attributed the fall in intake to the emerging competition from other schools in the area. A nearby independent school guarantees automatic progression from their junior school. Some parents were preferring this to the uncertainty and added stress of the entrance exam. The initial impact of Open Access on the junior school was variously described as 'huge' and 'devastating' and 'initially did cause some damage', as intake dropped substantially. It was suggested that parents wanted their daughters to be with other fee payers and were voting with their feet. But now, under new direction, and with a boost from the nursery voucher scheme, it is seeing something of a revival.
- 6.26 Acceptances dropped somewhat in 2002 when the Blue Coat School - a boys' grammar school - began admitting girls to Year 7. Not only was the education free to those who could pass the entrance test, but also it did not have associated with it the fear that universities were being encouraged to discriminate against applicants from independent schools.

Overall Assessment

- 6.27 Despite the misgivings about future recruitment when asked to draw their thoughts together to give an overall assessment of the Scheme, with one or two exceptions, the teachers responded very positively. The only dissenting voices brought up the perceived lack of balance in the intake as the middle income range of parents has been squeezed, and on the viability of the junior school if open access assessment were continued. One teacher grudgingly accepted the Scheme as a way forward following the withdrawal of Assisted Places.
- 6.28 The great majority commenting favourably mentioned the benefits not just for those girls with fee remission but also for the whole intake, and as teachers, they believed they too had benefited:

"The Scheme is giving an opportunity for girls from all sorts of backgrounds to be in an environment in which everybody works hard and where to work and succeed is seen as a positive thing. In many schools to work is not seen as 'cool' whereas it is here."

"It is definitely for the good. Undeniably there are girls here who will achieve who in a large comprehensive school would just 'sink'. We do well not just with the very bright but also the middle of the road ones, who wouldn't necessarily achieve elsewhere."

"There are, many, many advantages. There are some extremely able girls here, who make exceptional use of the facilities we can offer and they give a lot to the school"

and they are getting an education they otherwise would not have got. There are advantages for the fee-payers too by being in a richly diverse school.”

“We are raising aspirations and expectations and lifting them out of a culture that would have been detrimental.”

“The philosophy of it is fantastic. I totally agree on the meritocratic principle.”

“I am totally in favour. I have enjoyed teaching the Open Access girls just as much as I did before and in some ways more.”

- 6.29 Teachers have been forthright in their views. They pinpointed where the impact has been felt most keenly and where changes have had to be made. For some it has been more difficult than for others, but the consensus was:

“The school has not changed irretrievably the academic core value is always there. When the Assisted Places Scheme stopped we recruited lower down the ability range. Now the Open Access Scheme has given us bright girls and just different challenges.”

They were very ready to endorse the principles behind the Scheme and the benefits it had brought:

“For the girls it is brilliant - if they are prepared to work. It is making a difference to these girls and to their own families, it is raising expectations.”

Resumé

- 6.30 All nineteen teachers (out of 41) who had been at The Belvedere before Open Access kindly agreed to be interviewed. Most pinpointed a perceptible change in ability, skewing it upwards and reducing the tail, with a move towards science. The girls they found to be more questioning, more individual in their thinking, less conforming, and less able to express themselves through writing. Teaching had had to change with less reliance on chalk and talk, greater differentiation of material, more investigative work, but also more attention to the basics.
- 6.31 Getting the girls to do homework and submit course work had become more of a problem. A ‘Catch-Up’ club had been instituted. Pastoral support had also been firmed up with an explicit policy on discipline. The girls had had to adjust, too, but most just ‘seemed to sail along’. This was attributed to the small size of the school and the classes, so everyone was able to get to know one another. The Belvedere ethos had proved resilient, but staff had had to work harder at it. A fall off in the interest and commitment of the girls to extra-curricular activities had been detected. The level of parental support has also dropped (including ferrying the girls to and from sports, orchestras, choirs etc), perhaps because some of the low-income families had not felt at ease mixing with the well off.
- 6.32 The teachers had some concerns about the future. A number of long-serving teachers were approaching retirement and the headteacher was moving, leading some to wonder whether the school ethos would survive their departures. Intakes were also being affected by competition from the distinguished Blue Coat School, a maintained boys’ grammar which had recently gone coeducational, and from

nearby independent schools which allowed automatic progression from the junior to senior departments.

6.33 But the teachers' overall assessment of Open Access was very favourable.

7. Evaluation

- 7.1 Assessed against its internal aims, Open Access at The Belvedere School has been highly successful. England's independent schools are an important national resource. International studies conducted by the OECD (2001, 2004) show them to achieve the best results of any group of schools in the world. It makes no sense to want to undermine them. But the problem is that they are exclusive, open to only those willing to meet the fees. The Sutton Trust has drawn attention to the huge gulf between independent and maintained education in England (Sutton Trust 2001, 2004) and has looked for ways of bridging it.
- 7.2 Building on the experience of the Assisted Places Scheme, which ran from 1982 to 1997, Open Access was conceived as a way of enabling entry to independent schools irrespective of parental income and assets. In partnership with the Girls' Day School Trust one of their 26 schools, The Belvedere School in Liverpool, was chosen for a trial run. It is a former direct grant grammar school which took the decision that it would like to become independent, like many others of its kind, in response to the policy changes of the Wilson government in the 1970s. Since then it has been a high quality fee-paying school in a poor neighbourhood attended by few local children. The Scheme enabled the School to open its doors to all comers, with the allocation of places being decided solely on merit. Parents who thought they might be eligible were encouraged to provide the Trusts with details of their income and assets, and admissions were facilitated on a needs-blind basis.
- 7.3 Open Access rapidly became established at The Belvedere. Within the first three years, applications were being received from girls at three-quarters of the primary schools in Liverpool, on average 90, with half as many again from other local authorities. Comparison of the intake before and after Open Access showed that entry from low-income homes, measured by postcode area, increased appreciably. Ability also rose. The Cognitive Abilities Test administered annually by the School in Year 7 showed overall increases, on average, of about nine percentile ranks in the three domains - verbal, non verbal and quantitative - in the two years following the introduction of the Scheme.
- 7.4 When the first intake took their GCSEs in 2005, The Belvedere School obtained its best results ever, with 99 per cent achieving five good GCSEs compared to an average of 49 percent for the Liverpool local authority. Although there were no differences in the mean ability of the three groups - fees paid, part paid, fee payers - either on entry or in the Cognitive Abilities Tests in Years 7 and 10, there was a difference in overall GCSE performance, with the fees-paid girls doing somewhat less well. Whether this is due to home background, differences in aspiration or some other factor awaits further investigation. Power, Whitty and Wisby (2006) have also found that Assisted Place holders (the national scheme phased out from 1997) from working class backgrounds did less well than might have been expected.
- 7.5 Under Open Access girls whose fees had been paid were just as likely to stay on into the The Belvedere sixth form and to want to go to the university as the full fee payers. But those who did leave tended to for different reasons - for more practical courses not on offer at The Belvedere, or because their friends were leaving.

- 7.6 Not only does Open Access at The Belvedere seem a success statistically, but also all those involved spoke very warmly about it. The top five things the girls liked most about the school were: the helpful, dedicated, friendly teachers; the new friends they had made; the safe and caring environment; the enjoyable lessons; and the extracurricular activities. They found fewer things to say they disliked, but the main ones were the rules and regulations, some instances of favouritism (real or imagined), the pressure to do well, and the school dinners.
- 7.7 Parents largely echoed their daughters. Nearly all (87 per cent) of the 23 respondents were 'very pleased', on a five-point scale, that their daughter/ward had won a place at The Belvedere. Only one, a fee payer, expressed disappointment, and his concerns seemed to be that the School was not tough enough. It is possible that we heard mainly from the parents who were favourably disposed, but it is clear that the others did not feel sufficiently strongly to make this widely known through us. The difficulties raised were largely peripheral. Travel proved a problem for some of the girls, with a few who lived relatively far away having to come to terms with very long days. The girls had obviously complained to their parents about the school dinners and some aspects of uniform and these were passed on to us.
- 7.8 Interviews with all the 19 teachers (of 41) who had been at The Belvedere from before Open Access provided a window on its impact on the School. They referred to a perceptible change in the ability range, raising the average and greatly reducing the former tail. There had been a shift towards the sciences. They had found the girls to be more questioning and less conforming, but also less practised at expressing themselves through writing. There had had to be changes in teaching styles with more attention to the basics, more differentiation of material and more investigative work. Getting in homework and course work had become more difficult and the School had had to set up a homework club on the premises. Discipline had had to be tightened through explicit policies and the staff had had to receive extra training. The School ethos had proved resilient though the staff had had to work harder at it.
- 7.9 Social mixing has been good, with no indication that those from the lower income groups felt they had been looked down on, as Power, Whitty and Wisby (2006) found in their study of Assisted Place holders. This could, in part, stem from the small size of the School so that everyone could know everyone. Pupils, parents and teachers all commented that this was one of the great attractions of The Belvedere. But another important factor is likely to have been that in the Belvedere experiment all girls had entered on the same basis, whereas under Assisted Places the holders were differentiated.
- 7.10 The staff drew attention to some of the new challenges that the School was facing, in particular, competition from other schools. The Blue Coat, a distinguished boys' grammar, had been taking girls since 2002. It, too, sets entry tests, but has the great advantage to potential fee payers that it comes free. Some parents also preferred its coeducation. Neighbouring independent schools had adapted and had been emphasizing to parents that children admitted to their junior schools would normally progress to the senior school, whereas at The Belvedere they would have to take entry tests on the same basis as all other girls, with the risk of having to find another school at age 11. The junior school had responded well and nursery vouchers had eased the situation, but there had been an impact on fee income.

- 7.11 However, ‘warts and all’, The Belvedere Scheme can be counted as a great success intrinsically. It has achieved its main objective of opening up the School to high ability children from low-income homes. Pupils, parents and teachers commented very favourably on the Scheme in action. It has demonstrated how the important resource of independent schools could be successfully incorporated into a national system.
- 7.12 But The Sutton Trust’s formal proposal to Government to fund a larger scale trial of Open Access at a dozen schools, and the regular discussions with ministers that have followed it, have fallen on interested but, to date, deaf ears. Open Access has many attractions: it is successful, cost-effective, and has the support of parents and schools, both, in practice, in Liverpool and, in principle, more widely. It does, however, cut to the heart of Labour Party ideology in two ways. First, it requires the academic selection of students at age 11. Secondly, it would involve the state paying for students to attend private schools.
- 7.13 That having been said, the progress of education policy over the course of the Open Access pilot project might have led one to believe that these were not quite the shibboleths they once were. Selection at age 11 has been protected at the remaining grammar schools and increased through various means, including the right of specialist schools to select up to ten per cent of their intakes (admittedly on aptitude, not ability, but what is the difference?). With parental choice some schools are inevitably going to receive more applications than they can accept, and there has to be selection of some kind. Voluntary-aided, foundation and faith schools which control their own admissions operate oversubscription criteria which define the particular forms they use. And the state now pays for sixth form students to attend A-level classes at their local independent schools in subjects which are not offered by their own institution, such as classics or further maths. Furthermore, the Government’s Independent/State school partnerships programme, founded in association with the Sutton Trust, has put several million pounds into initiatives linking the sectors and offering reciprocal arrangements.
- 7.14 Nevertheless, the sort of fundamental, far-reaching and transformative partnership envisaged under Open Access appears to remain a bridge too far for the current administration. The Sutton Trust continues to bring the project to the attention of politicians and policy thinkers of all parties, and to stress that dogma should not get in the way of the development of successful educational initiatives. For the moment The Belvedere Scheme remains a demonstration of what could be achieved were there the will.

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