

Postcards to Premier in protest over schools

Parents of pupils attending Newcastle's four selective high schools will be asked today to send postcards to the Premier (Sir Robert Askin), urging him to "protect" selective schools.

The postcards will be distributed to pupils of Newcastle Girls' High, Newcastle Boys' High, Newcastle Technical High and Hunter Girls' High by members of the schools' P and C. associations.

Pupils will be asked to take the postcards home to their parents to send to Sir Robert Askin.

The P and C groups have started an extensive campaign to stop all high schools in the Newcastle area from becoming co-educational, multi-level, locality schools as planned by the Area Education Office.

The plan was first announced by the office last November.

In April, the scheme was further discussed at a meeting between the District Education Advisory Council and representatives of the Education Department.

Spokesmen for the P and C associations said they have sent several letters to the Minister for Education informing him of their desire to retain selective schools and asking him to attend a meeting in Newcastle to further discuss the proposals.

The letters were sent by certified mail to ensure their delivery yet no reply had been received, the spokesmen said.

Yesterday a list of 20 questions on the proposals was sent to the Minister.

The associations believe the plan to abolish selective schools will reduce the quality of education offered at some schools without en-

hancing that offered at other schools in the area.

They claim it would also restrict the number of subjects available, disrupt the schooling of the present and future generation of pupils, deprive children from working class backgrounds of the opportunity of the specialist education provided in selective schools, make access to university more readily available for wealthy families who can afford extra-curricular teaching for their children and involve a great deal of unnecessary expenditure.

Spokesmen claimed that at no time had the area office or department publicly made any statement about its exact policies nor defended its decision to give all schools identical status.

"Everyone keeps talking about the advantages of non-selective schools and co-education but no one has said why they are so good", the President of Newcastle Boys' High P and C (Mr G. Oliver) said.

"As far as we are concerned they are separate issues. We are strongly against the abolition of selective schools. Co-education is a different issue. Some see it as advantageous. Some are not worried whether it is introduced, and others see it as a great waste of money involving the duplication of existing facilities for its own sake."

While no official policy has been declared the P and C associations are believed to have decided to freeze P and C funds to the selective schools and cease fund-raising activities until the issue is resolved.

The associations say the alternative to selective schools of a combined senior school which was discussed by the area officer last year was simply a departmental ruse while policy to abolish the four schools was "bulldozed through."

A spokesman for the area office said yesterday that "a full, definitive statement" on the plans for Newcastle's high schools would be released next week.

This would outline how it was intended to change existing selective and non-co-educational schools into locality schools by 1976.

There would undoubtedly be some disruption to a few pupils in the changeover but this would be minimal. The argument that the number of electives now available to students would be reduced in the changeover was wrong.

As it was now the greatest number of electives was offered, not at the selective schools, but at the co-educational schools on the fringe of the area. If anything, the number of elective subjects would be increased overall, he said.