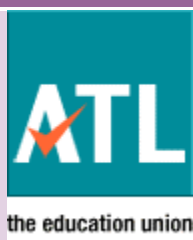


# *Comprehensive* **Future**

## **Fair enough?**

**School admissions - the next steps**

**Produced with support from :**



**NASUWT**



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# **Fair enough?**

***School admissions - the next steps***

Comprehensive Future's aim in producing this pamphlet is to encourage debate and put forward our proposals for the next stages of admissions reform. We are very grateful to all our contributors, many are writing in a personal capacity or on behalf of their organisations, not as Comprehensive Future. We are also very grateful to ATL, NASUWT and NUT for their financial support towards the production of this pamphlet.

This pamphlet can be downloaded from our website  
[www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk](http://www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk)

September 2007

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## **Comprehensive Future - our aims**

Comprehensive Future is the campaign for fair school admission policies in England. The campaign is non party political and open to all. By lobbying Government, providing evidence, informing the media and supporting local campaigns on admissions we aim to bring about a comprehensive secondary school system in England with fair admissions criteria to all publicly funded schools, guaranteeing an equal chance to all children and an end to selection by ability and aptitude.

England will never have a fully comprehensive system and fair admissions unless there are changes. We believe the wider objectives of Government policy should be to:

- ensure the availability of high quality schools in all our communities;
- encourage parity of esteem between schools however diverse and, as far as possible, balanced intakes in all secondary schools in terms of ability;
- provide the opportunity for all children to attend a local school if their parents wish, within the inevitable constraints of transport, location and buildings;
- ensure admission policies and practices are fair to all parents and children.

Specifically Comprehensive Future would like:

### ***1. An end to selection on ability and aptitude***

There is now all party acceptance of the adverse effect that selection has on children, on communities and on the aim to provide good schools for all. Despite this at present in England selection can only be ended by a complex procedure of petitioning and balloting allowing parents to vote for change or by the governors of selective schools deciding on change. We wish to see Government require local authorities in all areas where selection remains to consult on and implement plans for a non-selective system. Government should make capital funding available to ensure a smooth transition. To meet the Government's commitment that the decision to change should be a local one we want to see the current situation reversed. New regulations should be introduced to enable parents to sign petitions to trigger ballots to stop the change to a non-selective system should there be sufficient support. Currently few schools have taken up the 10% selection on aptitude option but as more schools become admission authorities it is likely that aptitude

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selection will increase. So, unless it is stopped now, more and more children will face entry tests. Few believe there is a difference between ability and aptitude. Partial selection on ability or aptitude should be ended. The only selection to be allowed should be area wide banding, if agreed locally.

### ***2. A stronger coherent role for local determination of admissions***

Changes brought about in the School Admissions Code are more strongly focused on local determination and monitoring, giving powers to local authorities and admission forums. It is too early to say how effective this will be in ensuring fair admissions. Academies and City Technology Colleges (CTCs) as legally independent schools are not tied in to the Code in the same way as maintained schools. Although required by their funding agreements to meet the Code the levers to ensure that happens rest entirely with the Secretary of State. We want to see these schools brought in line with other schools in the area so all local publicly funded schools operate under the same arrangements.

*Changes which we wish to see:*

- The School Admissions Code requires all admission authorities to set admission (oversubscription) criteria which are fair. Regulations allow for the administration of all admissions to be carried out by the local authority, that is the administrative decision on whether an applicant meets the admission criteria even if these are set by the school. This should be a requirement on all local publicly funded schools. This would relieve all schools of the administrative burden and bring more openness to the procedure.
- No school should set its own admission criteria in isolation. All admission criteria for all local publicly funded schools should be agreed by the admission forum. If there is to be banding, for example, it should be across the ability range for the local authority intake, not applicants to an individual school and all publicly funded schools in the area should have the same system agreed by the admission forum.

### ***3. The role of the Adjudicator changed***

There is clearly a need for an independent system to monitor and intervene on admissions but Adjudicators can only act if there is a complaint. Unfair practices do not become fair if no one complains.

- The role of the Adjudicator should be extended to promote fairness by monitoring and intervention.
- Currently admission forums and schools are not obliged to object to the adjudicator if local admission arrangements appear unfair. However local authorities are required to object. This should be a requirement on admission forums and schools.
- The roles of the Adjudicator in ensuring fair admissions in the light of complaints and that of the Schools. Commissioner in publishing a report on fair access will need to be co-ordinated, and perhaps revisited to avoid confusion.

*On page 47 there are details of how you can support our campaign.*

### **Fair admissions: a bit done, a lot more to do**

#### ***David Chaytor MP, Chair Comprehensive Future***

Which kids go to which school? How? And why? These are three of the most important questions for anyone interested in the long-standing inequalities of the English education system.

Forty years of revolution and counter revolution (from Harold Wilson's Circular 10/65 to Tony Blair's Education Bill of 2005) have seen successive governments struggle to balance equality of opportunity, academic excellence and high standards for all pupils in our state schools.

For most of the last twenty five years, however, the new orthodoxy of the British neo-cons (of both major parties) has told us repeatedly that:

1. The comprehensive ☐ experiment. was a huge mistake which left us with a legacy of large numbers of under-achieving pupils in failing inner city schools.
2. Local authorities systematically diverted resources from schools to feed bureaucracy and thus contributed to the continuation of low standards.
3. Financial and managerial independence, competition, choice and league tables provided the key to school improvement.
4. A school's capacity to compete was dependent on its power to determine its own admission policies and, therefore, to select what kind of pupils it preferred to teach.

The British neo-cons became intensely excited by the prospect of the demise of the 'bog-standard' comprehensive. (Incidentally, they showed less interest in the impact on teaching, learning and motivation of the 'bog-standard' national curriculum or its equally 'bog-standard' attainment tests). Their influence culminated with the 'beginning of the post-comprehensive era' marked by the launch of the 2005 Bill.

***Comprehensive Future*** was formed in 2003 to challenge this set of assumptions and specifically to argue that fair, equitable, transparent and nonselective school admissions policies are the prerequisite of a successful state school system with the capacity to develop the full potential of all young people. In the last two years the ground has started to shift. The 2005 Bill started life as a flagship of neo-con thinking and yet the 2006 Act entered the statute book with better regulation on school admissions and new strategic powers for local authorities.



It seems possible that a new consensus is now emerging which recognises that:

1. Many schools so casually described as 'failing' have experienced difficulties precisely because their intake and character is anything but comprehensive. Conversely, Britain's genuine comprehensive schools have delivered a steady rise in educational attainment over thirty years, and a striking increase in participation in higher education.
2. A private sector model of autonomous competitive institutions cannot fully respond to the integrated approach to young people's development as outlined in the Every Child Matters policy, nor to the diversity of the emerging 14-19 curriculum.
3. Quality of leadership, quality of teaching, flexibility of curriculum and attention to each pupil's individual needs are more important than institutional independence *per se* or the structure of ownership. Raw test scores provide only one of several criteria for assessing a school's quality.
4. All schools require a critical mass of able and well motivated pupils to help raise overall levels of achievement. The capacity of one school to select, by ability or the various proxies for ability, inevitably limits the possibilities of success for neighbouring schools.

**Comprehensive Future** welcomes the new attention given to admissions policies by the Government and the main opposition parties. The Government's new Admissions Code toughens the rules on selection by the back door. The Liberal Democrats have proposed important improvements to the transparency of the admissions process. Most recently, a Conservative Shadow Secretary of State has forcefully argued that selection by academic ability now acts as a block on social mobility.

This emerging consensus on school admissions is welcome and there is some progress to report. However, many difficult issues remain to be resolved. Not least of these are (a) the continuation of selection by academic ability, and some of its proxies, in many parts of the country, (b) the growing concerns about the impact on social cohesion of the exclusive admissions policies of some faith schools, (c) the tensions within a policy that encourages parents to choose schools but which in practice allows many schools to choose which children to teach and (d) the reconciliation of parental choice and social equity.

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In addition, our new Prime Minister must look again at the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. The most ambitious school building programme ever is in danger of entrenching existing inequalities. BSF provides a unique opportunity, not only to reflect the emerging 14-19 curriculum, but also to end the anachronism of the 11 plus examination.

This ***Comprehensive Future*** pamphlet is a contribution to the continuing debate about current admissions policies. It is designed to strengthen the emerging consensus on some key principles and to make proposals for the next stage of admissions reform. I should like to thank all the contributors, each of whom brings a valuable and distinctive perspective to these issues.

I should also like to thank the members of the ***Comprehensive Future Steering Group***, whose dedication and hard work during the last four years have helped ensure that there should now be no turning back from a policy of fair admissions.

***Quite a bit done, a lot more to do.***

## **What do parents want?**

***Melissa Benn parent, campaigner and writer***

***Fiona Millar parent, education journalist and  
Vice Chair Comprehensive Future***

What do parents really want? Much is said in our name but our views are rarely sought. Even the new rights to make representation to local authorities about school choice seem destined to be yet another meaningless paper exercise.

It is no longer a realistic option to say that parents should not have some say in how their children are educated. But the reality is that the English schools offer a very standardised education which takes place in institutions that are characterised less by what is taught than by status, intake and reputation.

Most parents are not faced by a simple 'choice' but by what Tim Brighouse, former London Schools Commissioner, memorably described as a 'dizzily steep hierarchy' of schools. Successive education reforms have left more schools 'free' to set their own admissions and choose the children most likely to succeed, the inevitable consequence of our crude league tables.

Parents instinctively know that there is a strict pecking order of eligible applicants. Places in the most popular and successful schools come at a high premium and the most knowing, affluent families are better at navigating the hidden rules.

In many urban areas children are 'sorted' by race, faith and class in the way that the equally insidious, but at least overt, 11 plus used to sort them by so called ability. As a society we may soon pay a high price for the inevitable resentment thousands of parents feel each year knowing there are schools beyond their reach and that many local schools are being asked to deal with a disproportionate number of social difficulties.

Yet all the available research point to a simple fact; most parents want a good local school which has the confidence of the local community. A survey by Which? in 2005 found that 95% of parents wanted a good school near to where they lived, with good teaching and discipline, strong leadership, good facilities and decent exam results.

The Which? findings are borne out by recent parent campaigns for new schools such as the Nelson Mandela School campaign in Lambeth which has involved hundreds of parents in public meetings over the past decade. At each of these open meetings campaigners have voted unanimously for a local

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comprehensive school which admits children from the local community regardless of faith or so called ability. Parents didn't want to have to choose between 'good' or 'bad' schools or indeed compete with other parents to get into the more popular ones, only to then face a long and often disappointing appeals process. Nor did they want to send their children miles on public transport every day. The kind of stress and anxiety produced by this version of parental choice is symptomatic of a system that is failing not succeeding.

Clearly many factors go into making that 'good' local school a reality; a clear vision, high expectations, good teaching, leadership, discipline and governance and close links with feeder primaries and parents. But pupil intake matters too. In some areas where the market in schools is already most active, parents are often faced with a popular school on their doorstep which they can't get into because of its selective admissions.

Alternatively the 'escape routes' that are open to a few parents, mean that the local school has been deprived of the most able and motivated pupils. If we want to give most parents what they want - a high quality local school, with fair admissions - we need further reform of the Admissions Code to build on changes that were introduced earlier this year.

The continuing use of the 11 plus needs to be stopped and more thought needs to be given to how some faith schools can be more inclusive. The 400 planned academies - that operate as independent schools, despite massive state funding - need to be brought back into the maintained legal framework that governs admissions for all other schools so parents, regardless of what 'type' of school their child is in, can exercise their rights in the same way.

Maybe we should go further and require that all schools' admissions arrangements be managed independently of the school and, in areas where intakes are unbalanced, use admissions procedures more proactively to achieve a better social, academic and ethnic balance?

Banding or operating feeder school systems may not be compatible with the right to go to a local school in rural communities where there is often just one local school. But in cities such systems could guarantee more balanced intakes for all schools.

Choice may have to play second fiddle to fairness but the result may be a secondary transfer process that is simpler and less emotionally charged than at present and an education system that genuinely offers most parents access to a good local school.

## **A young person's view**

### ***Jacob Hunt Stewart, youth representative on the Comprehensive Future Steering Group***

Other sections of this pamphlet deal with the structural issues around selection, so I won't do more than describe the system in which I was educated and a couple of memories I have of it. I've lived all my life in Birmingham, and attended school here. We don't have the same degree of selection as there is in some areas of the country, Kent and Buckinghamshire for example, but we still have it in many forms, grammar schools dotted around the city, private schools, in the main filled with middle class children who failed to pass the 11plus, faith schools and indeed foundation schools, some of which select 10% of their pupils by exam.

I'm struck when I think back to my secondary school education by a number of memories which I feel are relevant to the issues discussed in this pamphlet. For instance the time I was once asked by another student why I wasn't at the grammar school up the road, after all, he said, I did well in exams, what was I doing at a comprehensive? This strikes me as key to summing up one of the effects of selection, the effect it has on aspiration.

After all my school certainly wasn't the worst for results in the city, and the students certainly weren't the worst for ability, yet there seemed to be a belief that as people weren't at the grammar school, they were destined to fail, to do poorly. For me this memory sums up one of the key issues of selection, the effect on a child's aspirations. If a child doesn't believe that they can succeed attending their local comprehensive whilst they could if they attended the grammar school up the road, then surely they are going to hold back and not challenge themselves to achieve. This effect is unfair on a child, particularly if they come from a working class background with low aspiration, as some who attend comprehensives. In stark contrast are the majority who attend grammar schools, who are often from middle class, high aspiration backgrounds.

This leads onto another memory, of a discussion with one of the few middle class kids at my school, who was talking about attending our school as opposed to a grammar. He said that if we had gone to the grammar school we would have missed out on something important, the chance to get to know, to become friends with children from all backgrounds, not just the middle class who predominantly attended the grammar. And he was right, we didn't stay in a protective bubble of middle class children as can happen at a grammar school,

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we grew up with and became friends with children from different backgrounds and from different communities.

In a sense far from being sheltered from the world, I could see it in its harsh reality; though it could be argued that this was just a part of growing up. I would disagree for there was a real difference in the social make up of my local comprehensive with that of the grammar schools. If you compare the amount of children eligible for free school meals at comprehensives in Birmingham to those eligible at the grammar schools, it points to a segregation of the working class from the middle. In comprehensives on average 37.3% were eligible, whereas in Birmingham's grammar schools on average only 4.1% were eligible. The difference was noticeable.

I gained a lot from attending my local comprehensive, I didn't just learn from five years of study, I learned a lot more about the world around me and the community of which I'm a part and for that I'm grateful. But I also saw the effect selection can have on those who don't pass the 11 plus, the denting of their self-confidence and the lowering of their aspirations which this can engender.

***It strikes me as odd that we can still find this acceptable, for surely every child should have high aspirations, not just those who attend certain schools or are from a certain background.***

## **The effects of selection**

### ***Margaret Tulloch, Secretary Comprehensive Future***

Typically the media flurry about David Cameron and his party following David Willetts' speech focused on the institutions, grammar schools, rather than selection and children. Perhaps it is not surprising when UNICEF reports our children to be unhappier than many across the world that here debate about schooling seems to focus more on the schools rather than the effect on our children of deciding who goes to them.

When selection is part of the education system far more pupils are affected than just those who pass the test, as many more are rejected. In England selection at 11 remains an important influence on secondary education probably for about one in five of our children. Inevitably these children will label themselves failures when only half way through their education. Similarly selecting 10% of places on aptitude may seem minimal, but far more than 10% will be rejected. There is no good reason why English children, already some of the most tested in the world during their time at school, should face divisive entry tests for secondary school entry. The 11 plus adds another stress to children already facing SATs.

A review body carried out an extensive study of the effect of the 11 plus in Northern Ireland. Reviewers asked children for their views. It concluded - 'We were particularly impressed by the views of young people about their experiences of the tests and their effects on themselves and others. We have been left in no doubt that the tests are socially divisive, damage self-esteem, place unreasonable pressures on pupils, primary teachers and parents, disrupt teaching and learning at an important stage in the primary curriculum and reinforce inequality of opportunity.' The report went on to say - 'the selection (and separation) of pupils on a narrow academic basis, at such an early stage in their education career, is both inappropriate and unsustainable. In reaching this view, we have had regard also to the implications of the European Convention on Human Rights.' (*Education for the 21st Century. Report of Post Primary Review Body Department of Education, Northern Ireland 2001*)

Save the Children also investigated the effect of taking the entry tests for secondary education on children in Northern Ireland. Its report concluded . 'The views and experiences of the children spoken to in the course of our research suggests that testing has a far more detrimental effect on children than government is often willing to admit. The level of fear and anxiety that children

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admitted to was frightening.' (*Children's Voices in Education. Save the Children. November 2001*)

The London Children's Rights Commissioner conducted research into the views of children on school admissions in four London primary schools. It identified the bad effect on children when local secondary schools selected in various ways. It found the pupils' experience of this to be entirely negative . more selection processes, more rejections, more anxiety and a divisive force within the classroom. (*Changing Schools: the impact of the school admission process on children. Hood and Templeton. Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner for London 2002*)

Entry tests at 11 inevitably result in the lowering of motivation for the majority of children in selective areas who 'fail' the selective tests. This is ridiculous as clearly we need all children to aim to do well. At a time we need to encourage young people to stay on in education post-16, allowing this message of failure at 11 to continue is completely contradictory. A school which has a high proportion of children officially labelled as failures at 11 faces the immediate prospect of trying to rebuild their self esteem and motivation. At a Comprehensive Future seminar headteachers of all ability schools in selective areas gave examples of what we do to the future educational careers of children who receive this message of failure early on. A head described the research done on the intake into her school. Although in fact the cohort was above average ability it scored lower than expected on perceived learning capacity, attitude to teachers, work ethic and confidence in learning.

Supporters of selection argue that selection by mortgage is just as bad, that is that parents able to buy houses near some schools give their children an advantage. Regardless of whether this is the country-wide phenomenon some claim, are they not aware of the small fortunes parents pay for coaching to get their children through the selection tests when schools select? At least if their parents fail to buy a house in the right street the child does not feel a failure.

***It is time for Government to investigate how many English children, unlike their Welsh, Scottish and Northern Ireland counterparts, are affected by selection and end it!***



## **Grammar school selection and minority ethnic groups**

***Professor Sally Tomlinson Emeritus Professor, Goldsmiths College, London; Senior Research Fellow, Department of Education, University of Oxford and a member of the Comprehensive Future Steering Group***

From the early 1960s children from the Asian subcontinent, the Caribbean, African and East Asian countries entered a school system where overt selection for grammar schools was gradually disappearing. Where selection remained, minorities were less likely to be successful. In Birmingham, for example, during the 1970s only 1% of minority children were attending the city's 21 grammar schools. However, migrant parents always expected the education system to equip their children with credentials and gain access to good occupations. These expectations transcended social class position. From the 1990s there was widespread improvement in educational performance in all minority groups, much of it due to comprehensive educational reform. Differential patterns of achievement emerged more strongly, however, with pupils of East African Asian, Indian and Chinese origin achieving more academic qualifications than those of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Caribbean origin.

As the education system has become more competitive minority parents in all groups, especially Caribbean parents, have become increasingly anxious that schools are not able to equip their children with higher level academic qualifications. (*Richardson B (2005) (ed) Tell it Like it is: How our schools fail black children Stoke-on-Trent Trentham Books*) Unsurprisingly, minority parents have adopted similar strategies to white parents in searching for 'good' schools. In high minority areas where selection for grammar school remains, the schools are seen as better resourced and more likely to equip pupils for higher education. In these areas there is evidence of intense coaching and pressure on primary schools to equip children for success in the 11plus, particularly from middle class Asian and black parents. The success of the children increasingly depends on both ethnicity and socio-economic position. In Birmingham, Slough and Gloucestershire, for example, pupils of Indian origin are more successful, although as Abbas reported (*Abbas T (2004) The Education of British South Asians London Palgrave MacMillan 144*), 'Middle class South Asian parents acquire 'hot knowledge' to become more informed of educational opportunities through

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social networks rather than information provided by schools.'

Where a grammar school is situated in a high minority area and is thus highly visible, it is more likely to be requested by parents. Handsworth Grammar School, Birmingham, once a school where white children were 'bussed in', in 2004-05 took in 33% pupils of Indian origin, 25% Pakistani, 6.6 % black Caribbean and only some 18% white pupils. However, suburban Bishops Vesey's school, admitted some 8% Indian, 2% black Caribbean and over 74% white. In Slough, one grammar school takes in some 29% pupils of Indian origin and only 1% Bangladeshi.

For minorities the effect of selection, while benefitting individual children, is detrimental to the overall improvement for children in the surrounding schools who are not selected. While this is educationally unacceptable, it does not contribute to the social cohesion agenda either. There is evidence of resentment by parents whose children do not gain a grammar school place, especially where other parents are seen to pay for coaching and extra-curricula activities. There is evidence that although Muslim girls are more likely to be successful in selective examinations, overall Muslim pupils are less likely to obtain a grammar school place. However, there is also some resentment from parents who support selection on the grounds that perhaps at least one of their children will have an enhanced educational opportunity, and argue that abolishing selection will remove this opportunity. This has led to political ambivalence over selection in high minority areas where there are grammar schools, with local MPs arguing that they would lose political support by supporting non-selection. The MPs for Gloucester and Slough, despite having been respectively educated in a comprehensive school and a private school, have claimed this to be the case. The evidence would seem to show that the abolition of selective examinations does not have an effect on voting patterns. It should be of more concern that overall, social and ethnic segregation is increasing.

***While the support for a 'diversity' of schools has largely contributed to this situation, dividing communities further by selective schools is detrimental to the future health of a cohesive multiethnic society.***

## **Aptitude and ability**

***Professor Clyde Chitty, Department of Educational Studies,  
Goldsmiths College, University of London***

In February 2001, I used my Inaugural Lecture at Goldsmiths College to challenge the myth of 'fixed innate ability'. I expressed my deep concern that, after over fifty years of campaigning for comprehensive secondary education, we had still failed to demolish the idea that children are born with a given quota of 'ability' or 'intelligence' which then remains more or less constant both during childhood and in adult life. While not wishing to argue that all those who believed in the efficacy of intelligence testing or in 'fixed innate ability' were either 'racists' or 'eugenicists', I sought to demonstrate that the mental measurement movement in this country had its origins in nineteenth century concerns about racial purity and mental degeneracy.

I was aware that a very important research project designed to explore ways of teaching and learning free from determinist beliefs about so-called ability - the 'Learning without Limits Project' - had been set up at the University of Cambridge School of Education in 1999. Here the key idea was to bring together a group of classroom teachers who had rejected the concept of fixed ability or potential and to study their practice in order to identify the chief features that are distinctive of teaching free from atavistic assumptions about human mental development. This study was written up in 'Learning without limits' (2004). One reviewer, Professor Tim Brighouse, stated at the start of his paean of praise that 'here is a book that could change the world'. (*TES 4 June 2004*)

Sadly, despite the well-informed objections of a large and growing number of teachers and educationists, New Labour has been obsessed with the idea that children can be 'pigeon-holed' or 'classified' according to spurious notions of ability, innate or otherwise. A concern for promoting choice and diversity had reinforced the idea that different types of children should be educated in different types of school.

In 1997, David Blunkett as Secretary of State made it clear that the Blair Government would be continuing the Conservative policy of specialist schools, with the aim of 500 schools by September 2000. It was now that the term 'aptitude' came into frequent use. Specialist schools would be encouraged to 'play to their strengths' and recognise children's 'particular aptitudes'. Admission policies could then include 'a small degree of selection', based on these

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perceived aptitudes. According to the 1997 White Paper 'Excellence in Schools' 'We will ensure that schools with a specialism will continue to be able to give priority to those children who demonstrate the relevant aptitude, as long as that is not misused to select on the basis of general academic ability' (p 71). This was then enshrined in the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act allowing schools with a specialism to select up to 10% by reference to a pupil's aptitude in 'one or more prescribed subjects'.

This provision caused considerable disquiet among many teachers and educationists, arguing that in a class divided and highly competitive society specialisms could never be equal: they would rapidly become ranked in a hierarchy of status. At the same time it was not clear what 'aptitude' meant or how it could be distinguished from 'general ability'. In the Collins English Dictionary 'aptitude' is defined as 'inherent or acquired ability; ease in learning or understanding; general intelligence'. Yet Government's long term plans were based on the confident assumption that children could actually be tested for 'particular talents' rather than for 'general ability'. This Government thinking seemed to fly in the face of the large body of existing research evidence, a point emphasized by Professor Peter Mortimore, the then Director of the Institute of Education, London, in an article written for Education Guardian. (24 March 1998) He said that, except in music and perhaps art, it was simply not possible to diagnose specific aptitudes for most school curriculum subjects. Instead, what seemed to emerge from testing was a general ability to learn, which was often, but not always, associated with the various advantages of coming from a middleclass home. How, Professor Mortimore asked, can headteachers know 'if the 'aptitude' of a ten year old in German shows anything more than their parents. ability to pay for language lessons?'

Surely we need to dispense with the outdated and unhelpful concepts of 'aptitude' and 'ability'. Perhaps understandably, we tend to use these concepts to try to make sense of the differences in the attainments and responses to tasks and activities seen in young people of the same age. Setting aside these templates means adopting a radically new mind-set - a different way of making sense of what happens in classrooms - in a spirit of what the Cambridge researchers call 'transformability': seeking to discover what it is possible to do to enhance young people's capacity to learn, and intervening, whenever appropriate, to create the conditions in which this learning can prosper and flourish.

## **Selection, segregation, life chances and social mobility**

***Sarah Tough, Education Researcher, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)***

Our 164 grammar schools are the most conspicuous example of selection in our school system, but below the surface, and the detection of regulatory powers, lies a more widespread form of selection that affects large numbers of parents and pupils. In this article, I have chosen to focus on this 'back-door' selection, although the evidence can be applied to overt selection.

The current accountability and regulatory framework means school leaders are under huge pressures to achieve good results. One effective way of achieving this is by ensuring they have the best possible intake.

One way to examine how schools are covertly selecting their pupils is to look at the composition of schools compared to the area in which they are located. Research by IPPR shows that many secondary schools have an intake which is highly unrepresentative of their surrounding area. Commentators often suggest that segregation in our schools occurs because of longstanding geographical segregation in England. This does contribute but analysis demonstrates that schools are twice as segregated - by previous ability - than they would be if pupils attended their nearest school. This analysis cannot take into account the first 'school choice' made by many parents: the choice of where to live.

*But does all of this matter? What is the impact of selection and therefore segregation by ability on life chances and social mobility?*

Evidence shows that social mobility declined in Britain between those born in 1958 and those born in 1970. Although evidence suggests that this decline has now ebbed, social mobility in Britain remains low compared to many other countries. Much of the change in social mobility is likely to be due to changes in the types of jobs people do and the structure of employment. Although education is often referred to as the key to unlocking social mobility and it obviously has a role to play, it is perhaps not as important as many may think. With reference to selection, we need to ask - how much does the structure of the education system matter?

Recent research from Scotland looked at the impact of the education reforms in the 1970s which introduced comprehensive education. This showed that the change in schooling structure had no independent effect on social mobility.

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International evidence shows that countries that have low levels of school segregation often have high achieving school children. Countries that overtly segregate pupils do not have a higher average student performance but they do show larger variation, and the more selective schooling systems are, the more important the socio-economic background of the pupil is to their outcomes.

Selection, whether covert or overt, continues to segregate our children throughout much of our school system, without any benefit for overall attainment and social mobility. Whilst attainment should remain the main focus of schools' and teachers' work, schools can play a vital role in building social capital and community cohesion, as well as ensuring our youth socialise with others from a broad range of backgrounds. As well as cognitive abilities, personal and social skills are increasingly important in determining life chances, especially for the most disadvantaged. These are likely to develop more evenly across different groups where pupils can interact with a broad range of people from different backgrounds both in the classroom and through structured extra-curricula activities.

For this to happen successfully, schools must be more representative of their broader local community. So, how can this be achieved?

Although the recent developments around admissions, under our current market system and competition between schools, they are unlikely to do more than ameliorate the issues on the fringes of the problems inherent in a school choice system. Regular monitoring of reports describing the effects of local admissions procedures should be a requirement. If these show no substantial impact on segregation levels, all responsibility for secondary admissions should be taken out of the hands of individual schools and run by the independent local authority, thus removing a schools ability to covertly select.

***In the longer term, we should look to a system of fair banding across geographical areas. Pupils in a local area would be grouped into a number of different 'bands' according to their ability. Each school's intake must consist of equal proportions from each band thus ensuring that intakes across an area are broadly similar in terms of ability.***

## **The word 'comp'**

***Francis Beckett, journalist, writer and member Comprehensive Future Steering Group***

Politicians and marketing folk have been vandalising the English language for years. And education has been one of their main playgrounds.

Nothing in education is ever difficult, it's only challenging. There are no problems, only solutions. Sometimes we have a solution even before we have a challenge. Then the challenge is to find the challenge to which our solution is a solution.

Spin doctoring is the art of replacing meaningful words with feelgood words. And that's how they've got away with selective schools for so long.

Back in the late forties, they decided that there were to be grammar schools for brainy kids who would grow up to be middle managers and professionals. They would be almost as grand as the kids who went to fee-charging schools (which is what so-called 'independent' schools really are) and were destined to run the country.

Everyone else would go to schools specially designed for thick working class kids, destined to be at the bottom of the heap.

But of course, 'schools for thick working class kids, destined to be at the bottom of the heap' was not the way to sell them. Ministers had the brilliant idea of calling them 'secondary modern'. Then as now, the word 'modern' was thought to make anything attractive. It was not an accurate description; it was a feelgood description, like calling the poll tax a 'community charge'.

It never works for long. Horrifyingly fast, the words 'secondary modern' came to mean 'schools for thick working class kids, destined to be at the bottom of the heap'.

Frantic efforts were made to save the words. Teachers and education administrators were instructed to say, over and over again, that you did not 'pass' or 'fail' the 11 plus examination, which decided whether you went to a grammar or a secondary modern at the age of eleven. You were selected for 'a different type of school'. But parents and children knew they were being lied to.

Attempts to save the words 'secondary modern' have long since been abandoned. There is hardly a school left which calls itself a secondary modern. But the schools are still there. Today, the schools in selective areas, which teach the children the grammar schools don't want to teach, are generally called high schools.

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They are, of course, high only in the sense that public schools are public. Just as public schools are really private schools, so high schools are really low schools. They get the lowest level of respect, status, esteem and funding.

Not all secondary moderns are called high schools. The language has been so debased that some education chieftains, presumably trained by the Ministry of Truth, even call them 'comprehensives'. I've heard one administrator saying, unblushingly: 'Some children go to the grammar school and the rest to the comprehensive'. Which is a bit like saying: 'Some people are upper and middle class, but the rest of the population is completely classless'.

The spin doctors seemed uncertain whether to colonise the word 'comprehensive' or attack it: to steal its feelgood status, or hang ordure on it and hope it stuck. So while some of them were enhancing the status of secondary moderns by sticking on them the false label 'comprehensive', others were sneering at 'bog-standard comprehensives'.

This is the reverse trick. You make sure you never use the word 'comprehensive' without putting alongside it a phrase like 'one size fits all'. The idea is to make 'comprehensive schools' mean 'grey concrete monoliths, all run to a boring government template'.

This is what vandalises the language. At my local swimming pool in Finchley, north London, they have a really ugly and uncomfortable changing area, with horrible steel lockers, so they decided to label it 'the changing village'. But the place didn't suddenly become a rural idyll. Instead, slowly and ineluctably, they are making 'village' mean a hot, sweaty, smelly place with ugly iron lockers.

***People are not as stupid as some politicians and spin doctors think!***



## **A head's view**

***Dr John Dunford is General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders. From 1982 to 1998 he was head of Durham Johnston Comprehensive School. He writes here in a personal capacity.***

*I was proud to be head of Durham Johnston Comprehensive School for 16 years. I was proud because it was a good school, because it gave a wide range of opportunities to young people, and because it was comprehensive.*

Very few schools in England have retained the word 'comprehensive' in their name. The specialist schools movement has brought us technology colleges, arts colleges, business and enterprise colleges and much more in the pursuit of diversity and distinctiveness. School notepaper barely has enough space for the text of a letter among the massed ranks of badges that parade diversity.

Yet diversity between schools is inevitable and barely needs to be emphasised in the school name or on the notepaper. People in any town with two or more schools will be able to talk about the differences between them. This natural diversity between schools comes from the ethos of schools developing differently. It is part of a long tradition of professionally led institutions reflecting the priorities and interests of the leaders, staff and governors.

The true sign of a successful comprehensive school, however, is not the extent to which there is diversity between it and other local schools, but the extent to which there is diversity within the school - young people of many backgrounds able to take a wide range of courses, with resources that enable this diversity to be offered, both inside and outside the curriculum.

Like many a comprehensive school, Durham Johnston inherited its motto from the grammar school that was one of its antecedents. *Sapere aude - Dare to be wise*. We tried to include wisdom and daring in much of what we did. My personal motto as head teacher was *Creating opportunities for success*. I wanted every young person to have success in some field, perhaps in something that s/he had never tried before. So we had lots of different subjects and activities.

I remember reflecting one day on how important is the skill of public speaking. The English department took up the idea and gave every pupil in Years 7 and 8 the opportunity to learn how to make a speech. We had our own public speaking competition in which all the younger students took part. From

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that acorn grew a mighty oak, as the best public speakers turned to debating in Year 9 and began to win inter-school competitions. My proudest moment as head was when Durham Johnston won the coveted Observer Mace debating trophy, presented by an aged Quentin Hogg (Lord Hailsham). We had beaten Winchester and Westminster on the way to the final. Returning to Durham that night with £45,000 worth of silverware, I noticed that this would be the first time that the word 'comprehensive' had been inscribed on the Mace.

Through the 1980s and 1990s, schools were encouraged to compete - for pupils, for funding, for league table position. We did our best to co-operate, but it was not easy against the prevailing culture of the day. Now the system is thankfully moving from that culture of competition, in which one was encouraged to rejoice if one's own school benefited at the expense of another, to a culture of collaboration, in which there is much greater emphasis on partnership working. In this climate, another school's difficulty is more likely to be reason to pick up the telephone and ask if they want any help than to gain at their expense.

Although the diversity between schools with their different specialisms may be greater than it used to be, I believe that we still have a comprehensive system, in which schools continue to have both diversity between and diversity within. That is why I was, and remain, angry at the declaration that the days of the bog-standard comprehensive were over.

***They never were bog-standard and their days are certainly not over.***

## **Selection issues - four local perspectives**

### ***Kent - Becky Matthews Kent STEP (Stop the Eleven Plus) writes:***

Labour policy over the last ten years has done nothing to address the selective school system in Kent. Kent is the largest LEA and remains wholly selective. This means that primary school children sit the eleven plus exam in Year 6 and the results of this test mean they are deemed 'suitable' for a grammar education or a secondary modern school education. The independent appeals system ensures that if a family face a 'failure' on results day those who are wise to the system will get into a grammar through the appeals system - often employing solicitors and barristers to negotiate the process. In some districts in Kent over 40% of the cohort are 'selected' and the knock on effects to the secondary modern schools is catastrophic. Social segregation is entrenched, not least because tutoring, 11 plus coaching or private prep school education is frequently a way to passing the test. The consequences are life long - people here 'know their place' according to whether they're a 'grammar' boy or girl.

*What have Labour done?* The grammar school ballot act pretended to offer local decision making. However, before any ballot can be held, 20% of eligible parents have to sign a petition. Campaigners have little idea of who the 'eligible' parents actually are - the rules are complex. The petition itself is an A4 document for each parent including all personal details of the family, child and primary school. This has to be handed to a campaigner - who may well be a total stranger. In Kent, the petition alone would have meant finding 50,000 such parents before any ballot could be held. Add to that the 'gagging order' on teachers and headteachers, the outright lies from the local authority about the 'costs' of ending selection and the inability to suggest a blue print for the future to parents. As a result the Labour government has ensured that the grammar lobby remains secure and has gone from strength to strength.

There are falling rolls in Kent but the number of places in grammars has increased. Together with admitting 25% through the 11 plus, grammar schools admit children who fail the 11 plus using their own methods of selection - often cloaked in mystery. There are tales of grammar heads simply ringing 'appropriate' parents to let them know places are available - anything to ensure all places are filled. The secondary modern schools and the children who attend

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them are the victims in all of this. Heads of these schools face uncertainty every year about how many pupils will arrive to start Year 7 as the grammars have been busy picking them off over the summer. There is little that is fair in admissions in Kent and much that is far from transparent. Recent adjudications about Kent schools have been baffling and have actually increased the lack of fairness and transparency in the complex admissions process in this county.

***Every Labour Education Minister and Prime Minister for the last ten years has said they are against the 11 plus system - er, so that's all right then ...***

### ***Selective education in Buckinghamshire - Dr Ian Scoones, Secretary, Bucks Parents for Comprehensive Education writes:***

Following David Willetts' declaration that 'the chances of a child from a poor background getting to a grammar school are shockingly low', Buckinghamshire County Council has reacted by insisting that it is looking to open new grammar schools. However, the Deputy Leader of the Council admitted to the Bucks Free Press (20.7.07) 'Bucks children will never have a fair crack of the whip when it comes to the 11 plus exam'. Of the 2155 pupils who qualified for a grammar school place by scoring 121 or above in the 11 plus tests in 2006, 47% came from prep schools in Bucks or schools outside the county. The qualification rate for Bucks primary children was 24%.

The fully comprehensive system of primary education in Bucks delivers some of the best results in the country. More than 40% of children achieve Level 5 in Key Stage 2 SATs in Maths and English and more than 50% achieve Level 5 in Science. In most other local authorities these children would transfer to a comprehensive secondary school confident that they would flourish in their new setting. In Bucks large numbers of these able children transfer to upper schools (i.e. secondary moderns) having been told they are not suitable for a grammar school.

With so many very able children turned away from the grammar schools, selection produces not a two-tier system but a three-tier. A handful of upper schools attract the most able of the 11 plus rejects while the system scandalously creates a significant group of schools that hover around or fall

below the government's floor target of 25% of pupils achieving A\*-C including Maths and English at GCSE. Furthermore, while the qualification rate for Bucks primary children to grammar schools is 24% that for the largest ethnic minority group (children of Pakistani heritage) is 12%.

Bucks Parents for Comprehensive Education have campaigned strenuously for a change but we have found the existing petition and ballot process to be a barrier to local parental choice rather than a means of achieving it.

***Central government needs to act now to prevent Tory backwoodsmen in Bucks from continuing to entrench social advantage in favour of the few at the expense of the many.***

***Calderdale - David Helliwell, Chair of Education for Calderdale 1988-1990 writes:***

Eleven years after the fiasco at The Ridings School comes the news that it is to close within two years. The much publicised saga of the rescue of 'the school from hell' encapsulates the fraudulent arguments conducted in defence of stratified secondary education.

Secondary schooling in Calderdale from the 80s onwards is illustrative of how class-based education has become dominant and how this has limited educational opportunity and reduced social mobility for the poorest and least articulate. It is a failure of a system not of standards where success for some means failure for others.

Throughout the 1980s within Calderdale there was a drift from the Halifax selective system to the surrounding long established Calder Valley comprehensives with almost no movement the other way. The 1988 Education Act changed this; the grammars resisted reorganisation and Calderdale became the market leader for Grant Maintained Status, those schools opting for this status (now foundation) being able to set their own admission criteria. The drift reversed and the conditions to create a pecking order of schools were in place.

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The flashpoint came in 1996 because the conflict of national policies and local circumstances had established a clear hierarchy of schools. Parents scrambled to place their child at the highest possible point on what they now saw as the ladder of opportunity to social and economic success. The bottom rungs were occupied by 'the schools for other people's children' with The Ridings rock bottom.

This scenario was obvious in 1997 when the Blair government continued the policies of the Tories but with greater zeal. The despoiled landscape created by the accidental educational dissonance in Calderdale is to be re-created far and wide.

***All possible means to establish markers to develop a pecking order within every local authority are used, such as specialist schools and academies. Continuation of these policies will create more failed schools. Failure is intrinsic.***

### ***Did Ripon parents vote for selection?***

***Sue Royston a parent campaigner from Ripon writes:***

The only ballot which has taken place was in Ripon, North Yorkshire. The vote to retain selection was presented by the press with headlines such as *Parents in Ripon have decided to keep the Grammar School*. However it is very possible that the majority of parents actually resident in Ripon voted to end selection, and that the decision was driven by parents outside Ripon.

Just under 1500 parents voted for selection and about 750 against. However about 600 of the parents eligible to vote were from two large independent schools out of the catchment area. A further 550 parents were in the villages surrounding Ripon. Many of these parents, if their child doesn't get into the grammar school, send their child to the good comprehensives in the surrounding towns. Many of the villages are almost as near to them as Ripon. Parents in this group could keep what many saw as a good opportunity for their children with less risk of the disadvantages of selection.

Those most affected by the consequences of the vote were the parents in Ripon. Their children would in the main be the ones who would be educated within the selective system even if they failed the 11 plus, those who failed going to the only other secondary school in the town. The alternative (if they could afford the fares) a long and expensive journey each day (20 to 30 miles round trip) and being split from their friends in a school in a different town.

The result of the ballot in Ripon was determined in advance by the decision that the threshold to enfranchise parents from a particular school would be five children in the last three years going to the grammar school. A just solution would enfranchise parents from schools where a high proportion of children went to both secondary schools in Ripon.

***This decision assumes that only those who pass the 11 plus are affected by selection and enfranchised a large group of parents whose children went to a private school 20 miles from Ripon.***

### **Ending selection in Kent and Medway**

#### ***Chris Storr former Chair of the Kent Schools Organisation Committee***

When the decision was taken to end selection in Inner London in the late 1970s, one major worry was the size of the secondary schools in the Authority. Many were very small - three forms of entry - and there were concerns about how they would be able to offer an adequate curriculum, particularly at sixth form level, to an all-ability intake. Solutions were found, and the ILEA took the decision to proceed. Neither pupils already in the secondary schools nor their teachers were required to move. They all stayed where they were. In this way, disruption was avoided.

Much has changed since then. Two developments, in particular facilitate the ending of selection in Kent and Medway. The first is the introduction of the National Curriculum. It can now be taken as a given that all schools are either delivering this satisfactorily or at least have the capacity to do so. The second comes as something of a surprise. A casual assumption is that a potential stumbling block would be the small size of some grammar schools. Not so. Kent LEA's School Organisation Plan shows that some of the biggest schools are now the grammar schools. Only two (not grammars) may be too small to become genuinely comprehensive, and one, Oldborough Manor, in Maidstone, is to be closed. The other, Montgomery, in Canterbury, has a capacity of only 325, though it had 555 on roll in 2005. In Medway, all the secondary schools are big enough (the smallest is Chatham South Secondary Modern, with a capacity of 800 places).

What this means is that all it would take to end selection in Kent is short primary legislation to ban selection by ability from a given date. The capital cost would be a small enlargement that is clearly needed in any case at one school. Since it is all so simple, the implementation date could be as early as September 2009.

It would be essential to make statutory provision for an LEA-administered banding system such as that operated in the ILEA.

In return for the capital cost involved, the recurrent annual revenue savings would be substantial. The cost of administering the test and the subsequent endless appeals would clearly disappear. There would also be large savings in home-to-school transport. Anyone who commutes from where I live is familiar with the sight of hundreds of young people on Sevenoaks (where there is no



grammar school) station catching trains to Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells. Additionally, because the Tonbridge grammars are perceived to be the best of the bunch, the elite are taken at public expense by bus and train from Tunbridge Wells to Tonbridge. This sort of thing is replicated all over the county. Then there is the environmental cost of some parents driving their children from non-selective LEAs into Kent grammar schools, and others desperate in their attempts to avoid the sink secondary modern that is Kent's preferred option for their children who have failed the 11plus.

There have been suggestions that some grammar schools might go independent if they were compelled to become comprehensive. In the light of the capital investment that has taken place in recent years, there must be doubt as to whether any of them could afford to do so now.

In any event, three factors suggest that such a threat should be faced up to. The first is that the independent sector faces an uncertain future, with the prospect of many closures and amalgamations. Whether a thriving maintained school would want to risk its long-term survival by going down this route must be questionable. The second is that falling rolls mean there will be increased over-capacity in the immediate future, so the loss of some places will not matter. The third is that the threat is at its strongest in West Kent, where planning is complex because of the admission to Kent grammar schools of large numbers of pupils from East Sussex primary schools.

If Kent schools were to become comprehensive and had to adopt a geographically based banding system, the need to provide for these children would cease. They could take up places in East Sussex comprehensives that are now filled by children whose parents do not want Kent secondary modern schools.

### **School standards and social mobility**

***Extracts from a speech to the CBI by David Willetts MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, 16 May 2007***

As [children from poor families] go through school the attainment gap between them and the rest of schoolchildren doesn't get narrower it gets steadily wider.

Some say it is the abolition of grammar schools which explains what has been happening to social mobility. But the loss of grammar schools was just part of a deeper problem as traditional pedagogy lost out to progressive teaching fads that let down a generation of children. Those progressive fashions are slowly being reversed.

Many people, genuinely worried about social mobility, believe that grammar schools can transform the opportunities of bright children from poor areas. For those children from modest backgrounds who do get to grammar schools the benefits are enormous. And we will not get rid of those grammar schools that remain. But the trouble is that the chances of a child from a poor background getting to a grammar school in those parts of the country where they do survive are shockingly low. Just 2% of children at grammar schools are on free school meals when those low income children make up 12% of the school population in their areas.

This does not just affect grammar schools. Our best performing non-selective comprehensive schools have a much lower percentage of children on free school meals than in their area. In the areas where the best 200 comprehensives are located 12% of children are on free school meals. In those schools themselves it is 6%.

Why are grammar schools and other excellent secondary schools no longer the vehicles for progress for bright children from poor backgrounds that they probably used to be? I look back on my own experience as the beneficiary of an excellent and free education at a direct grant grammar school. I remember sitting in the rows of desks to do the 11 plus from my typical local primary school in Birmingham. Now 40 years later, the experiences children have had

by the age of 11 are so different that it is a fantasy that you can somehow fairly distinguish between them at that age. We all talk about family breakdown as if somehow it is evenly spread. We are not being honest with ourselves. The evidence assembled so powerfully by Iain Duncan-Smith's Social Justice Commission, is that poorer families are far more fragile.

Dr. Leon Feinstein measured the basic cognitive abilities of young children aged 22 months and tracked what happened to them. He found that the cognitive skills of a low ability child from a high income background gradually improved relative to the performance of a high ability child from a low income background. If you think of this as two curves, the performance of the high ability low income child declines while the performance of the low ability high income child improves. The two curves cross over long before the age of 11.

If the evidence were different and if grammar schools could still work as they might once have done, transforming the opportunities of many children from poor backgrounds then we would be obliged to look very seriously at the case for their introduction. But the fact is that grammar schools don't any longer work like that. It is not because grammar schools have somehow turned bad or sold out: it is because they operate in a very different environment. Serious reform has to take account of these economic and social changes.

This dense inter-connection of family investment and access to good schooling lies behind our low social mobility. It shows that the abolition of grammar schools and the creation of comprehensives failed to spread opportunities in the way that was hoped. But equally giving schools powers over their own admissions has not spread opportunity either.

We are catching up with mainstream education reform in other advanced western countries. There is a clear pattern. In fact it is one of the new rules of public service reform - you can have diversity of supply provided that the new suppliers can't choose who they serve. We are all familiar with the lists of countries that have the boldest and most effective education reform - some American states, Holland and Sweden, for example. They all have more per capita funding and greater diversity of provision and without allowing providers to select who they teach.

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We will have the advantage of international evidence of what works and of how it works. It is a basis for real education reform. And it must above all help those children in our poorer areas let down by the educational fashions of the past, and suffering from blocked opportunities in a stagnant society.

The full text can be found at:

[http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news'story.page&obj\\_id=136757  
&speeches=1](http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news%27story.page&obj_id=136757&speeches=1)

## **Increasing opportunities for every child**

### ***David Laws MP Liberal Democrat Shadow Department of Children, Schools and Families***

I was delighted to be asked to take on the new role of shadowing the Department of Children, Schools and Families for the Liberal Democrats. The department is responsible for some of the greatest domestic policy challenges facing our country.

There is, of course, an expectation that politicians, fresh into new responsibilities, will immediately produce a blueprint to solve all of the problems which have accumulated over the previous decades of setbacks and achievements.

So, I start by admitting that I don't have an 'off the shelf' answer to every policy dilemma, waiting to be rolled out. I plan to use my first months in the job to listen and learn - but I also plan to do this swiftly, and to sketch out directions of travel.

*Already, some of the challenges are all too clear.*

Today in the UK, your income and job at age 30 is determined more by your parents' income than in almost every other developed country. Britain is a meritocracy, but one in which the opportunities to acquire 'merit' are very unevenly distributed. This is unacceptable to any Liberal.

Many would have hoped that in the wealthier Britain that we have today, inequalities of opportunity would have reduced. But this has not been the case. Indeed, deprivation has become more greatly concentrated geographically . with significant consequences for school catchment areas.

School performance is highly correlated to the social backgrounds of the catchment area, though there is undoubtedly a crucial role also to be played by high quality teaching and school leadership. But the 100 top performing English secondary schools have 1.4% of children on free school meals, compared with a national average of around 15%.

As a Liberal, I am instinctively in favour of choice - including the delivery of public services. Of course, this is not always easy to achieve - not least in rural areas where choice will often be constrained. But the choice must belong to the consumer of public services, rather than to the producer. It is the parent and pupil who should be choosing, not the school.

If the provider - the school - is given the choice of pupils, by selection, aptitude or by any other proxy, there is a real risk that this will simply amplify the educational inequalities which are already inherent in catchment areas, because of concentrations of affluence and poverty.

This is why, as a Liberal, I am also instinctively unsympathetic to selection by ability into schools - which may work well for the minority which are 'creamed off', but not for the majority. Of course, this does not preclude setting or streaming within schools - and Head Teachers and Governing Bodies should be free to introduce such changes to their own schools.

How do we challenge the increasing concentration of deprivation and affluence, and the effects of this on school admissions - without ending up with some centralised piece of social engineering, which compromises parental choice?

The housing market is concentrating deprivation in geographic areas. As home ownership moves further from the grasp of families on low incomes and social housing is allocated on needs-based criteria, concentrations of deprivation have

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increased. In these circumstances local schools struggle to deal with the needs of large intakes of deprived children.

On the flip side, house prices have led to schools with a majority of middle class children which achieve better results. Parents with more money and higher aspirations can afford to, and know how to, get their child admitted to a good school that achieves better results. They can afford to move into the catchment area of a good school.

Part of the challenge is to develop housing policy in a way that breaks up the concentrations of deprivation - this is set out in our recent Liberal Democrat Policy Paper on Poverty and Opportunity. We also need to encourage higher performing schools to accept disadvantaged children while maintaining high standards, and to give further help to schools in deprived areas who are struggling to improve the attainment levels of their high needs pupils.

We have advocated a Pupil Premium to allocate increased funding to deprived pupils and this would follow the pupil to whichever school he or she attended. The extra funding would give schools the added resources to tackle the specific problems in teaching disadvantaged pupils while providing an incentive for higher performing schools to admit children from deprived backgrounds.

We would initially allocate £1.5bn to the Pupil Premium, but this would increase so that the level of funding for the most deprived pupils would match that in private schools.

***Over the months ahead, I look forward to working with all those who seek to raise standards and increase opportunities for EVERY child in Britain.***

## **The role of faith schools is questioned**

***Dr Mary Bousted, General Secretary, Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) and Alison Ryan, Policy Adviser ATL***

Members of ATL, the education union, have long been involved in a broad range of educational and equality issues, from curriculum to assessment, from the marketisation of schools to the increasing emphasis by government on faith schools. Concerns about balance in school provision and the expansion of the faith schools sector were raised by members at our annual conference in 2006. Following a vote against any further increase in the number of faith schools after 2020, members worked to develop ATL's policy on faith schools.

A perceived imbalance between the level of state funding and the freedoms granted by the state to faith schools, led members to examine those freedoms to see the effect they have on schools and their local communities. From research evidence and member experience, it was found that selective admissions procedures, such as those practised by many faith schools, led to higher segregation of pupils in affected local authorities. We firmly believe segregating children on religious grounds is divisive to communities.

Drawing all the member work and research together we produced an ATL policy document which concentrates on admissions, employment practice and the school curriculum, against a background of equality and community cohesion. Our policy proposes linking levels of autonomy granted to schools to evidence they are promoting social and community cohesion.

Schools, such as voluntary aided faith schools, which practise selective admissions procedures that favour one particular faith group will, under our proposals and indeed, under the new community cohesion duty, need to demonstrate through their curriculum, outreach and other activity, they promote community cohesion and their pupils will gain a strong understanding of the broader community. This proposal certainly fits within broader societal concerns and also within the Every Child Matters agenda.

ATL represents education staff across all sectors and not only believes every child matters, but also that every education professional matters. Our members are deeply concerned about equality of opportunity in employment in all schools. In Autumn 2006, we strongly expressed our objection to late amendments to the Education and Inspections Bill (now an Act), which extended the prescription of employment, by faith, to new categories of staff, such as support staff in voluntary aided schools.

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These amendments will not only limit employment opportunities for our members of other or non-faith backgrounds, but also have a limiting effect on schools. Evidence has shown many faith schools have difficulty in filling headship positions due to the curtailing effect of their employment practices on recruitment. While members fully accept that school staff should be required to support the ethos of the school in which they work, they strongly question the interpretation that suggests that all, or key staff, must necessarily be of the same religion as the school foundation. We believe the legislative right of faith schools to select candidates on the basis of their religion is discriminatory.

The issues in the faith schools debate not only centre around who they serve and who they employ, but also on the curriculum within these schools. Members are concerned about the right of faith schools to follow their own religious education curriculum, particularly at a time when the need for crossfaith understanding is so high. We feel this right is questionable since the major religious groups not only had significant input to the development of the National Framework for Religious Education (a voluntary national RE syllabus), but also have representation on the local Standing Advisory Committees for Religious Education (SACREs) who determine the content of the RE syllabus in local community schools. Particularly as the RE curriculum in faith schools is not subject to the same inspection arrangements as those for community non-faith schools.

We recognise that many faith schools teach a broad RE curriculum, some following the National Framework. However, we question the extent of the legislative 'freedom' granted to faith schools by the Government, particularly when set against the high level of government funding they receive (100% of running costs and 90% of capital costs).

There are many issues of equality within this debate which must include a strong understanding of community needs and of a broad concept of citizenship. We clearly recognise that many faith schools offer excellent teaching and service to the community. However, we believe the fragmentation of education opportunities for pupils is not a good starting point for a society now recognising the dangers of segregation, the importance of community cohesion and shared understanding and values. We need schools that embrace the diversity of individuals within our communities, not a diversity of institutions dividing pupils and staff on religious grounds.



## **Making the state sector the sector of choice**

***Chris Keates, General Secretary, NASUWT***

On many aspects of education policy the Labour Government's track record is to be applauded. By working in social partnership with NASUWT, other school workforce unions and national employers, the Government has delivered real improvements to teachers' and headteachers' pay and working conditions, whilst also continuing the drive to raise educational standards.

Record investment in education has also been central to making progress on the Government's commitment to tackling social and educational disadvantage and inequality. But, such investment must not come at any price; particularly in terms of its impact on the future of our public services.

The flagship academies programme has been established as part of the Government's attempt to modernise and improve public services. The programme is underpinned by a seemingly unquestionable belief that the delivery of a modern public education service depends on the contribution of the private sector, which is claimed to be more efficient, innovative and cost effective than the public sector, despite all the evidence to the contrary. However, the target to establish 400 academy schools has the potential to convey to the public at large that the state sector simply is not good enough.

The NASUWT has never opposed per se the involvement of the private sector in education. However, in recent years attempts to engage the private sector in state education has tilted the balance away from supporting public services for the wider public good in favour of private sector ownership and control of public assets and the mining of public services for private interest.

The Government's rationale for the academy programme was to target areas of disadvantage and inequality and to seek to ensure that all pupils, whatever their socio-economic background, had access to high quality education. The Government also maintained that academies would be targeted on areas where everything else had been tried and failed. Academy sponsors would bring innovation and fresh thinking.

The current evidence from a range of sources raises serious questions about whether the academy schools programme is necessary or particularly effective as a means of tackling economic disadvantage. Whilst there are some initial indications of rising standards in some of the academy schools, the evidence base to support claims that academies are the right solution to the problems they were intended to address is highly contestable. What does appear to be

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clear, though, is that the academy-effect is shaping local admissions arrangements. Where local community schools have been starved of support and subject to intense criticism, many parents are clamouring to get their children into the new academies.

In 2006, an independent research study undertaken by Catalyst/Public World (*Catalyst/Public World (2006) Academy Schools: Case Unproven*) for the NASUWT found that there was little to justify the huge government investment in academy schools as a basis for raising educational standards. Evidence from research commissioned by the TUC in 2007 (*TUC (2007) A New Direction: A review of the School Academies Programme*) also found little evidence of innovation as a basis for delivering better educational standards.

However, on admissions, the Audit Commission in their 2007 report (*Audit Commission 2007, The Academies Programme*) found that the admissions arrangements in academies are in line with the statutory Code of Practice on School Admissions. Some academies are already selecting up to 10% of their pupils on the basis of aptitude. Although there is as yet no definitive evidence about whether this has impacted positively or negatively on the social and educational diversity of the intake to academy schools, the potential for such selective practices to do so exists and is set to increase.

The way to improve educational outcomes for all young people, and the means to bridging the social class gap in education lies not in increasing opportunities for schools to select pupils (i.e. by increasing the number of academies), but by delivering a first rate education system at the heart of a well funded public service.

The evidence demonstrates that selection actually suppresses educational performance between schools, local authorities and nations. For example, the OECD PISA study based on international comparative evidence across more than 30 countries, has shown that high educational standards and educational equality are most under threat within those national education systems where selection in admissions exists. The potential for the state sector to deliver high standards for all young people, and to tackle the achievement gap is, therefore, being undermined by the 'depressing' effect of selective education arrangements in academies.

As successive governments have made clear, Britain needs to be able to compete on the global stage. Schools have a vital role to play in terms of the nation's economic future. The system of school organisation and admissions

needs to reflect the desire to provide equality of access to high quality learning opportunities for all children and young people.

The vision of a comprehensive schooling system represented an important attempt to bring an end to elitism and privilege by providing equality of opportunity for every young person. The ideals underpinning that vision must not be consigned to history.

Now is the time to render the state sector as the sector of choice for children, young people and families. Bringing academies back into the family of state schools will be an important and symbolic step in the right direction.

### **Good local schools for all**

***Steve Sinnott, General Secretary, National Union of Teachers***

PricewaterhouseCoopers' (PwC) latest academies' evaluation contains some fascinating data. Academies have the lowest percentage intake from the local postcode district of the five different types of schools listed (18%). Community and voluntary controlled schools have the highest percentage of intake from their local postcode districts (28% and 31% respectively).

Both community schools and controlled schools have the lowest number of postcode districts serving their schools (14% each). In contrast, academies and voluntary aided schools have the highest number of postcode districts (21% and 25% respectively). Looking further, the report says that many academies have, 'exercised their independence to achieve a more balanced intake of pupils by using . . . admissions processes such as fair banding'.

The evidence shows, therefore, that both community and voluntary controlled schools are far more likely to serve their local communities. In contrast, academies are likely to use 'fair banding' to cherry-pick their pupils from a much wider area. 'Fair banding' for individual schools which conflicts with neighbouring schools' admissions arrangements seems to be a contradiction in terms. Such a process seems also to conflict with the Government's declared aspiration for academies which is to support children from socially deprived areas.

It is obvious that PwC's attempt to link the classic features of school improvement with the introduction of academy status is a red herring. To adapt Bill Clinton's famous aphorism, 'It's admissions stupid!' On a wider perspective, school admissions are as equally chaotic despite the excellent School Admissions Code. Voluntary aided and foundation schools have their own admissions arrangements. Despite the fact that such school admission arrangements have to be compatible with, and should not undermine, coordinated admissions schemes in their areas, the data quoted earlier shows the impact of individual school admission arrangements on the wider community.

The Education and Inspections Act requires all maintained schools to promote community cohesion. The contrast between this new and welcome requirement and the fracturing state of schools admissions processes could not be more stark. The legislative encouragement to increase the number of schools with their own admissions arrangements is likely to encourage social segregation and hostility, rather than the desired aim of community cohesion.

Why is all this important to the National Union of Teachers? I know that the NUT's members are working in every single type of school. They are committed to making sure that the young people they teach achieve the very best for themselves. In addition, teaching a diverse range of youngsters from different backgrounds is also incredibly exciting. What teachers do not need are claims that because they teach in one type of school, they are likely to be less effective than if they were teaching in another type.

The NUT is convinced that a good local school for every child is what every parent wants, and, what's more, a good local school is vital for the health and regeneration of local communities. The increase in schools being able to establish their own school admissions procedures drives a coach and horses through the notion of a good local school for every community.

For me, community cohesion should be the overarching principle which should inform schools admissions. I agree with IPPR's report; *School Admissions: Fair Choice for Parents and Pupils* which proposes, unless the new Code 'dramatically reduces current levels of segregation', that local authorities should perform the role of allocating places. The NUT's proposals, are therefore:

- Every local authority should be required to promote community cohesion.
- All schools would be required to seek agreement on admissions arrangements for their areas. In relation to banding, agreement would need to relate to the community, not to the individual school.
- Once each School's Admissions Forum had done its best to reach agreement on all admissions arrangements, it would report to the local authority.
- The local authority would be required to have regard to the report. The local authority would be required to decide on any appeals by individual schools in the context of the School Admissions Forum's report.
- The local authority would then determine the admissions arrangements for each of the areas covered by the Schools Admissions Fora. Any separate schools admissions arrangements would be agreed with the local authority.

I have not addressed the issue of full and partial academic selection arrangements. The arguments for their retention are discredited educationally. It is the political arguments which rumble on. I have focused on the dissonance of school admissions arrangements. They need solving for the sake of all our communities.

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### **Notes**

#### ***Selection - where is it?***

Fifteen English local authorities (out of 150 i.e. 10%) have fully selective systems where places in selective schools are around 20% - Bexley, Bournemouth, Buckinghamshire, Kent, Kingston, Lincolnshire, Medway, Poole, Reading, Slough, Southend, Sutton, Torbay, Trafford and Wirral.

Another 21 have one or more selective schools - Barnet, Birmingham, Bromley, Calderdale, Cumbria, Devon, Enfield, Essex, Gloucestershire, Kirklees, Lancashire, Liverpool, North Yorkshire, Plymouth, Redbridge, Stoke on Trent, Walsall, Warwickshire, Wiltshire, Wolverhampton, The Wrekin.

The grammar school ballot regulations determine only ten local authorities to be fully selective and therefore to require area ballots, for example, Kent. The rest would require feeder school ballots, for example, Ripon.

There are also partially selective schools which were selecting on ability before 1997 and are allowed to continue. All schools with a specialism are allowed to select 10% on aptitude in performing arts, visual arts, sport or modern foreign languages. Government does not collect data on this so the number of schools now selecting on aptitude is unknown.

#### ***The law***

The School Admissions Code is published by the The Stationery Office. It came into force in 28 February 2007. It includes requirements which 'must' be followed and some which 'should' ([www.dcsf.gov.uk/sacode](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/sacode)). It describes the whole process of admissions including, for example, the roles of admission authorities, local authorities, governing bodies and admission forums. The legislation and guidance related to school admissions are in Sections 84-108 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, amended by the Education Act 2002 and the Education and Inspections Act 2006. Regulations (statutory instruments) arising from these regulations cover, for example, selection on aptitude and co-ordination of admissions. The Education (Grammar School Ballots) Regulations 1998 Statutory Instrument 2876 cover the current arrangements for ending selection.

### ***The Adjudicator***

Schools Adjudicators were appointed under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. They have several roles including deciding on objections to admission arrangements. Local authorities have a duty to ensure that admission arrangements are lawful and must object to the Adjudicator if they are made aware of any unfair admission arrangements in the area. Admission Forums must consider local admission arrangements and may object over any unfair practices. Parents and school governing bodies may also object. For further information go to [www.schoolsadjudicator.gov.uk](http://www.schoolsadjudicator.gov.uk).

### ***The Schools' Commissioner***

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 stated that Admission Forums have the power to produce an annual report if they wish on many aspects of local admission arrangements and if these are operating in the interests of local children and parents. These reports will form the basis of a two yearly report on fair access by the Schools Commissioner, who has several other duties related to encouraging schools to become trust schools, for example. His first report on fair access is due in January 2009.

### **Comprehensive Future and how to support us**

**Comprehensive Future** is the campaign for fair school admission policies in England. The campaign is non party political and open to all. Please join us.

By lobbying Government, providing evidence, informing the media and supporting local campaigns on admissions we aim to bring about a comprehensive secondary school system in England with fair admissions criteria to all publicly funded schools, guaranteeing an equal chance to all children and an end to selection by ability and aptitude. Our individual supporters include school staff and governors, parents, members of both Houses of Parliament, local councillors, academics and other public figures who share a commitment to equality of opportunity within our education system. We also have support from organisations such as union branches and local political parties.

For more information and to join, go to our website:

*[www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk](http://www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk)*

or send your details by email to : *[info@ comprehensive future.org.uk](mailto:info@comprehensivefuture.org.uk)*,

or by phone: 020 8947 5758

or by post to : Comprehensive Future PO Box 44327 London SW20 0WD

We rely on donations to carry on our campaign for fair admissions and an end to selection and do not have a membership fee. A membership fee involves a lot of administration for a voluntary organisation, sending out reminders etc. So we hope supporters will make donations. Please make cheques payable to **Comprehensive Future** and send to our address.



## Further reading

These publications include extensive references including the work of academic researchers on admissions. Some have a history of comprehensive education.

Benn, M. and Millar, F (2006) *A Comprehensive Future* Compass

Crook, D, Power, S and Whitty, G (1999) *The Grammar School Question* Institute of Education

Campaign for State Education *Comprehensive Success Story* Download from [www.campaignforstateeducation.org.uk](http://www.campaignforstateeducation.org.uk)

Education and Skills Committee (2004) *Secondary Education School Admissions* Fourth report session 2003-04 The Stationery Office.  
[www.parliament.uk/parliamentary\\_committees/education\\_and\\_skills\\_committee.cfm](http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/education_and_skills_committee.cfm)

Edwards, T and Tomlinson, S (2002) *Selection Isn't Working* Catalyst, Central Books

Hewlett, M, Pring, R and Tulloch, M, (ed) (2006) *Comprehensive Education: evolution, achievement and new directions* CSCS

Pring, R and Walford, G (1997) *Affirming the Comprehensive Ideal* Falmer Press

Tough, S and Brooks, R (2007) *School Admissions: fair choice for parents and pupils*, IPPR. Download from [www.ippr.org](http://www.ippr.org)

# The campaign for fair admissions

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