

Selection and social mobility

A submission to the Social Mobility Commission

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Policy makers seem not to recognize that selection at 11 affects a significant proportion of children in England. Far too little attention has been paid to the effect of this on children.

Selection divides families and children from their friends. When selection is part of the education system many more pupils are affected than just those who pass the test, as far more are rejected. Inevitably these children will label themselves failures when only half way through their education. This is bound to affect the likelihood of children considering themselves to be equally valued members of society.

In 2005 there were 154070 places in grammar schools out of 3312160 total secondary places. Assuming 3 children rejected for each selective place this means about 14% of children demotivated by rejection in England (PQ 21 July 2005). This does not take into account children sitting entry tests for partially selective schools. Parliamentary answers indicate that data on the number of children sitting entry tests is not collected. Anecdotal evidence indicates that many children sit tests, often for several schools. Selecting 10% of places on aptitude may seem minimal, but far more than 10% will be rejected.

A report by Professor John Coldron (2008) for the DCSF looked at all admission arrangements. Coldron found that 43 local authorities in England (out of 150) have secondary schools which select by attainment as measured in a test. Coldron says that although the problem of social mobility will not be solved by changes to admission arrangements they would make a contribution. Our contention is that ending selection would make a significant contribution.

A move to more socially mixed intakes into schools is one of the areas suggested for policy development in the IPPR background paper for the Commission. This cannot be achieved unless selection by schools is ended. Where schools select social segregation increases. Schools will always have different pupil populations, if only because of residential geography, but selection exaggerates these differences and makes it hard for some schools to flourish. Changes in admissions to encourage a more balanced intake in all schools would help to level up standards across the board.

Selective schools are not escape routes from poverty. Compared to their local communities they take far fewer children eligible for free school meals. A comparison of the social segregation in England's secondary schools with other OECD countries by the Statistical Sciences Research Institute in Southampton showed that England is middle ranking in terms of social segregation (Jenkins et al 2006). High ranking countries such as Austria, Holland, Germany and Hungary have selective school systems. Countries such as the Nordic countries and Scotland have less

segregation than England and the researchers conclude this is because of their non-selective school systems.

Work by Allen and Vignoles (2006) from LSE found an association between local authorities with higher proportions of pupils in schools that controlled their own admissions or have explicit selection by ability and the level of FSM segregation.

In June 2007 The Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported on factors leading to low achievement. The researchers concluded that admissions are one factor influencing the outcome for disadvantaged pupils. The report said - *Anything that gives schools greater opportunities to select their pupils works to the detriment of the disadvantaged; the current ways in which school places are allocated is part of the process by which the disadvantaged end up in disproportionately worse-performing schools.*

Selective schools also take differentially from ethnic minorities. A report from Slough local authority to the Commons Education and Skills committee (2004) is an illustration of this. In 1999 17% of white children in Slough transferred to grammar schools, 1% of Pakistani pupils and 29% of Indian pupils.

Work by West and Hind (2006) looking at the composition of students from different ethnic groups in London grammar schools found a statistically significant differences between grammars and local 'comprehensives' in their ethnic composition. There was a lower proportion of Black students and a higher proportion of Indian and Chinese/other Asian students in grammar schools.

The significance of segregation in terms of differing social intakes between schools and their outcomes for pupils is highlighted in the reports of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). This large-scale study of the knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds was conducted in 2000 and again in 2003, on the latter occasion involving 41 countries. On each occasion it was shown that countries with more divided school systems perform distinctly less well, in terms both of overall standards and the spread of attainment, than those which are based on a more integrated and comprehensive approach. For example, the report said "*In countries with a larger number of distinct programme types, socio-economic background tends to have a significantly larger impact on student performance such that equity is much harder to realise*" and "*The analyses reveal that countries with greater socio-economic inclusion tend to have higher overall performance*" In other words integration, equity and excellence tend to go together.

This finding was repeated in the PISA study carried out in 2006 (OECD 2007). which said –

A clear cut finding from PISA is that early differentiation of students by school is associated with wider than average socio-economic disparities and not with better results overall.

Some claim that grammar schools were a route for social mobility. A paper by the London School of Economics by Blanden and others (2005) is often quoted in support but this paper did not attribute the slow down to ending selective education The LSE paper showed that the most socially mobile countries are the comprehensive Scandinavian countries.

A pamphlet from the Centre for Policy Studies (2006) claimed that those going from the bottom 25% to the top 50% has fallen from 40% to 37% at a time coinciding with the move from grammars to comprehensives. But for this argument to stand up, the majority of those 40% would have to have gone to grammar schools. In 1962 only 20% of children went to grammar schools so it is highly unlikely that any more than 10% of the bottom quartile, if that, would have gone to grammars. It is unlikely therefore that rammar schools account for the 40% mobility.

Researchers looking at social mobility in Scotland found that the expansion of professional jobs and the contraction of manual jobs, together with educational expansion and comprehensive reforms have enabled a large number of working class children to enter professional and

managerial occupations. Education has facilitated upward mobility. However education had not increased social fluidity. That is, it has not reduced the gap between social classes in the chances of entering top level occupations because there is still a strong effect on parental class on their children's achieved class which is not mediated by education. (Iannelli and Paterson. 2005).

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