



# Three Cheers for Selection

*How grammar schools help the poor*

LORD BLACKWELL

WITH A FOREWORD BY SIR ERIC ANDERSON

*“Comprehensive schools have largely replaced selection by ability with selection by class and house price... Far from bringing the classes together, England’s schools – private and state – are now a force for rigorous segregation” – Andrew Adonis, 1998*

CENTRE FOR POLICY STUDIES  
57 Tufton Street, London SW1P 3QL  
2006

## THE AUTHOR

NORMAN BLACKWELL was head of the Prime Minister's Policy Unit at 10 Downing Street from 1995 to 1997, and has been a Life Peer since 1997. His publications include *Towards Smaller Government: the second wave of the revolution* (Centre for Policy Studies, 2001), *Better Healthcare for All* (with Daniel Kruger) (CPS, 2002), *A Defining Moment? A review of the issues and options for Britain arising from the Convention on the Future of Europe* (CPS, 2003), *Freedom and Responsibility: a manifesto for a smaller state, a bolder nation* (CPS, 2003), *What if we say no to the EU Constitution?* (CPS, 2004) and *From Principle to Policy: what an alternative manifesto should say* (CPS, 2006). He holds a doctorate in Finance and Economics and an MBA from the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, where he was a Thouron Scholar. He was a partner at McKinsey & Company until 1995, and currently has a range of business interests.

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ISBN No. 1 905389 41 8

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Printed by 4 Print, 138 Molesey Avenue, Surrey

# CONTENTS

Foreword by Sir Eric Anderson

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Selective schools achieve higher standards	5
3.	Helping children from poorer backgrounds	9
4.	The public supports selection	15
5.	The way ahead	18



## FOREWORD

IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, Britain cannot afford to educate its people less well than the best in other countries. We have to educate everyone well, and our most able brains superbly well, if we are to compete globally with educated people from the rest of the developed world and perhaps particularly from the emerging new economies in the east.

Our present education system is simply not good enough to do that. There are some very good individual schools, including some good comprehensives, but the system as a whole does not achieve enough. International results put Britain so far down the league tables that it must be time to look at another way of doing things. The experience of those English counties which retained a selective system, and in particular of Northern Ireland, suggests the way forward. Their results show that selection works better both for the very able and for the student body as a whole.

It is not a case of reverting to the 11-plus, nor of creating a few good schools for the academically able and forgetting about the rest. The selective system proposed here would set schools free to choose their students from those who applied; would offer ladders of opportunity to clever boys and girls from deprived areas; and would create a national network of specialist academic schools.

The 40 year experiment with comprehensive schools has fallen far short of its aims. It was meant to provide, in Harold Wilson's words, "grammar schools for all" and it was meant to lead to increased social mobility. It has done neither. It has not raised the

## THREE CHEERS FOR SELECTION

standards of all and, as recent studies show, we now have a less mobile society than we had in the 1950s and 1960s.

In effect, selection by ability has been replaced by selection by neighbourhood. That is not sensible, nor is it even egalitarian. This publication suggests that we rid ourselves of an outworn dogma, and follow a practical way to make our schools as good as we can make them.

### **Eric Anderson**

*Sir Eric Anderson was headmaster of Abingdon (at that time a direct-grant school), Shrewsbury and Eton; Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford; and a governor of several independent schools and one excellent comprehensive school.*

## CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

FOR OVER THREE DECADES, selection and selective schools in the UK have been under attack. Many old grammar schools, with proud traditions of academic excellence, have disappeared in the process. Today, only 36 out of 150 LEAs in England still retain any selective state schools. Many comprehensive schools over this period also rejected any selection or ‘streaming by ability’ within their class structures.

While some comprehensives deliver excellent results, the wholesale shift towards non-selective schooling has not delivered the improvements in education standards or social equality that it was suggested would result. It is now time to re-examine the accepted wisdom on selection and to consider the need for a change in direction. For our children deserve a school system which once again recognises the value and opportunities that selective education can bring.

As a starting point, it is worth looking back at the rationale that led to the current approach. The original arguments for the destruction of grammar schools, while stated in terms of ‘raising educational standards’, were based more on the ideology of social equality. Anthony Crosland and others on the left saw grammar schools as class institutions which, because they delivered high standards, perpetuated advantages for the middle classes.

They argued that it was children from more affluent homes who tended to do better in the 11-plus examinations and who thereby gained places at grammar schools. It was therefore the

### THREE CHEERS FOR SELECTION

children of the affluent, it was said, who benefited from the better job prospects that a grammar school education provided. For example, Crosland, when Secretary of State for Education in 1965, told the North of England Educational Conference:

*The central and irresistible argument against the 11-plus lies in the denial of social justice and equal opportunity that it implies...[because] the 11-plus reflects not only IQ but also environmental factors, especially home and neighbourhood and parental aspirations.*

This same thinking led the OECD in 1970 formally to announce a shift in its education policy from ‘equality of opportunity’ to ‘equality of results’, an approach that was endorsed by the then Labour Education Minister, Edward Short. As one of the main proponents of comprehensive education, Professor Brian Smith, observed in 1975, the principles underlying comprehensive education were intended to be egalitarian whereas selective systems were meritocratic.

The flaw in Crosland’s arguments, however, was in not recognising that the advantages that come from a ‘middle-class’ background could not simply be negated by abolishing grammar schools. In reality, the loss of selective state schools has accentuated social divisions as wealthier parents have driven up property prices in the catchment areas of high-performing, middle-class comprehensives – or opted out into private education – while able children from poorer families have been stranded in local schools with low aspirations and low achievements. This is particularly damaging as it is the latter group which recent research has shown can gain most value from a selective system. The research concludes:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See A Atkinson, P Gregg and B McConnell, *The result of 11+ Selection: An Investigation into Opportunities and Outcomes for Pupils in Selective LEAs*, Centre for Market and Public Organisation, University of Bristol, 2006.



## INTRODUCTION

*The minority of able poor children who do attend grammar schools do exceptionally well.*

Unfortunately, the vast majority of bright children from poor families in the 76% of LEAs without grammar schools have little chance of going to either a grammar school or an independent school.

Nor has comprehensive education succeeded in driving up overall standards. While official statistics record ever-higher GCSE pass rates in both selective and non-selective schools, the experience of employers is of falling literacy and numeracy in school leavers; and the evidence from international comparisons is that the UK continues to slip further down the league tables in science and maths.<sup>2</sup>

Belatedly, the Government is starting to acknowledge the benefits of streaming by ability within mixed-ability schools. However this is only part of the answer – and does not provide the solution to the postcode disadvantages of able but poor children whose local comprehensives often fail to provide the standards or peer group ethos to encourage their development. As Lord Adonis, now Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the DfES, recognised in a book he co-authored in 1998:<sup>3</sup>

*Grammar Schools, formally opened to all who were bright enough by Butler's Act, enabled a proportion of working class children to mix with their similarly able middle-class peers... The challenge for the next generation was to widen access to grammar schools... The comprehensive revolution, tragically, destroyed much of the excellent without improving the rest. Comprehensive schools have largely replaced selection by ability with selection by class and house price...*

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<sup>2</sup> Between 2000 and 2003 the OECD's PISA survey showed the UK slipping from 4th to 11th in Science and 8th to 18th in Maths.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Adonis and Stephen Pollard, *A Class Act: the Myth of Britain's Classless Society*, Penguin, 1998.

### THREE CHEERS FOR SELECTION

*Far from bringing the classes together, England's schools – private and state – are now a force for rigorous segregation.*

It is now time for politicians of all parties to reconsider the bias against selection that has dominated education thinking since Crosland. We owe it to our children to create a new generation of selective, academic state-funded schools and to open up access to all parts of the community, where necessary by providing free transport to those children who need it.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SELECTIVE SCHOOLS ACHIEVE HIGHER STANDARDS

WHILE THE ADVOCATES OF MIXED-ABILITY TEACHING have argued that comprehensive schools can raise standards, the evidence points clearly to the fact that selective education performs better in terms of the overall standards achieved.

Since grammar schools select the more able children from their communities, it is not surprising that they perform better than comprehensives or secondary modern schools. Thus, for example, the percentage of 15-year-old pupils in the maintained sector achieving five or more high grades at GCSE in 1999/2000 was:

#### **Proportion of children gaining five or more high grades at GCSE (1999/2000)**

	<b>A*-A</b>	<b>A*-B</b>
Grammar Schools	47.9%	82.6%
Comprehensives	8.3%	22.7%
Secondary Modern	2.8%	10.6%

Source: Parliamentary answer to Graham Brady MP, 16 October 2001.

However, the out-performance of grammar schools is more than would be expected from their intake alone. Comparison of the results for those LEAs which have retained selective schools with those that have a completely comprehensive education system shows that the *overall* GCSE performance of the selective system is substantially better.

### THREE CHEERS FOR SELECTION

#### Proportion of children gaining good grades at GCSE, by type of LEA (2002)

	A*-A	A*-B
LEAs deemed wholly selective	15.1%	32.1%
LEAs deemed wholly comprehensive	8.6%	23.1%

Source: Parliamentary answer to Graham Brady MP, 20 May 2003.

Of course it can be argued that some or all these differences reflect higher levels of affluence in the LEAs which have remained selective. Available research accounting for these differences is scant. However, the Government's own preferred value-added measures provides strong evidence that the superior performance of selective systems is real.

In 2005, published league tables showed that grammar schools accounted for 86 out of the top 100 schools for improving performance between the ages of 11 and 14. Based on an expected 'value added' score of 100, the average score in comprehensives was 99.51 whereas for grammar schools it was 101.97 – the equivalent of almost two extra terms' learning. Equally remarkably, the average value added for secondary modern schools was 99.55 – slightly above the average for comprehensives, and disproving arguments that selective systems let down the less able.

An official study that attempted to account for all possible background factors was published by the Department of Education and Science in 1984.<sup>4</sup> This also confirmed that, for three out of five categories of examination attainments at 16+, results were significantly higher after allowance for background factors in LEAs which had retained selection – and that the level of superiority was directly proportional to the degree of selectivity operating. Based on these results, it was estimated that an LEA

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<sup>4</sup> DES Statistical Bulletin 13/84.

## SELECTIVE SCHOOLS: HIGHER STANDARDS

with 15% of its pupils in grammar schools would have 2% more of its pupils attaining five or more higher grade O-level results.

Further powerful support for the impact of selection comes from research by Professor Jesson of York University – himself a long-time advocate of comprehensives – presented to a schools conference in Birmingham in November 2005. Professor Jesson followed a cross-section of the most able pupils – those who achieved the top 5% of grades in tests at 11+ in 1999 – to see how their subsequent performance was affected by their secondary schooling. He found that the average number of GCSE A\*/A passes for this group in selective schools was significantly higher than the average for those who had gone on to comprehensives.<sup>5</sup> This mirrors the findings of other recent research which also showed that the results of children at grammar schools were substantially better (around 4 grade points) than children of comparable ability in non-selective areas.<sup>6</sup>

Professor Jesson's work also provides evidence for why selection is beneficial for high ability children. His analysis showed a strong linkage between the number of very able (top 5%) children in a school, and the average achievement of those schools. The small number of children in comprehensive schools with 20 or more very able children in the same year performed as well as their peers at grammar schools – achieving six to seven A/A\* passes; but those in the majority of comprehensives with ten or fewer able pupils did considerably worse, with those pupils on their own achieving only half the pass rate of those in schools with more than 20 able pupils.

These findings should not be surprising. Common sense and observation would suggest that most children have higher aspirations and are prepared to work harder when they are surrounded by other children with similar motivation and ability. By contrast, able children who are isolated in a peer group which

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<sup>5</sup> See *The Sunday Times*, 'Cromwell was right', 5 February 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Atkinson, Gregg and McConnell, *op cit*.

### THREE CHEERS FOR SELECTION

has low aspirations and which may pick on or bully hard workers, are less likely to work to their potential – particularly if the school as a whole has poor discipline and low standards.

Selective classes or streaming in comprehensives can work if the school has enough bright children, but grammar schools can provide the advantage of both ensuring a critical mass of able children in each year group and by bringing children into an established school ethos that values academic achievement and encourages high aspirations.

Northern Ireland provides a case model of the standards the education system in England might have achieved.<sup>7</sup> Having retained selection at 11+ in Northern Ireland, their system achieves 10% more pupils achieving five A\*-C grades at GCSE than in England, with 30% of A level exams achieving an A grade compared to 22% in England. Yet, the Government has passed legislation this year intended to abolish selection in Northern Ireland.

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<sup>7</sup> See *The Times*, 'Grammar Lessons', 26 July 2006.

## CHAPTER THREE

### HELPING CHILDREN FROM POORER BACKGROUNDS

IT COULD BE ARGUED that the price of some fall in standards was worth paying if non-selective education led to a society with greater equality of opportunity. However the evidence suggests that the non-selective structure is restricting opportunity.

Historically, grammar schools provided an opportunity for able children from poor backgrounds to get onto the same educational track as those from more privileged families – with a high proportion going on to Oxbridge and other top universities where they could compete on level terms with students from private schools. The products of this grammar school system have been able to take their place in the current generation of business and professional leaders – for example some 26% of current FTSE 100 chairmen and CEOs are beneficiaries of a grammar school education alongside 39% from independent schools.<sup>8</sup>

The removal of this route to equality has coincided with a significant decline in social mobility in the UK. A recent study by the LSE looked at the income progression of a cohort of people born in 1958 compared to a group born in 1970.<sup>9</sup> The results showed that the proportion of sons from families in the bottom income quartile who had progressed into the top half of incomes by their early 30s dropped from 40% to 37%; and the proportion

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<sup>8</sup> CPS research, September 2006. A further 6% came from Comprehensive and Technical Schools, with the remainder educated abroad.

<sup>9</sup> J Blanden, P Gregg and S Machin, *Intergenerational Mobility in Europe and North America*, Centre for Economic Performance, LSE, April 2005.

### THREE CHEERS FOR SELECTION

who stayed in the bottom quartile rose from 31% to 38%. By contrast, the proportion of sons from top quartile families who remained in the top quartile of incomes rose from 35% to 42%. The study concluded:

*Intergenerational mobility fell markedly over time in Britain, with there being less mobility for a cohort of people born in 1970 compared to a cohort born in 1958. No similar change is observed in the US.*

It explained that:

*Part of the reason for the decline in mobility has been the increasing relationship between family income and educational attainment.*

And it noted that it is children from poorer backgrounds who have suffered disproportionately:

*The expansion of higher education since the late 1980s has so far disproportionately benefited those from more affluent families.*

This is reinforced by research from the Sutton Trust.<sup>10</sup> This has shown that the partners of ‘Magic Circle’ law firms are largely drawn from fee-paying schools. In 2004, 55% of partners had attended fee-paying schools, compared to 34% from selective state schools, and 11% from comprehensives. More worryingly, the number of younger partners (defined as those under the age of 40) drawn from fee-paying schools has *increased* over the last 15 years – from 59% in 1988 to 71% in 2004.

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<sup>10</sup> Sutton Trust, *The Educational Background of the UK's Top Solicitors, Barristers and Judges*, June 2005, Appendix 2.



## HELPING CHILDREN FROM POORER BACKGROUNDS

### Selection by postcode

As selective schools have been replaced with comprehensives, the affluence of the catchment area rather than ability has become a primary determinant of the quality of schooling. Good schools and high house prices have reinforced each other, with children from poorer families being excluded from good comprehensives. As a result, just 3% of pupils in the best state schools were entitled to free school meals, compared to a national average of 17%, leading the LSE researchers to conclude that ‘academic selection had been replaced by social selection’.<sup>11</sup>

A recent survey by ING Direct bank found that 39% of parents with children under 15 would consider moving house to ensure their child got into a good school – and that 12% had already done so.<sup>12</sup> But this is simply not an option for many parents, as the benefit of being in a catchment area for a popular school can add a premium of tens of thousands of pounds to house prices. A good example is Watford Grammar School for Girls, which, while partially selective, takes a majority of its pupils from a postcode-defined catchment area irrespective of ability. Thanks to the school’s success in the exam league tables (it is ranked 45th among comprehensives in this year’s *Sunday Times* survey), houses within its catchment area are on average 10% higher than those outside according to local estate agents Watford Estates. They say that it adds an extra £20,000 to £25,000 to the price of a three-bedroom terraced house.<sup>13</sup>

The concentration of the remaining grammar schools in a small number of mostly higher income areas means that many able children from poor families miss out on the opportunities selective education can provide. Yet it is the poor who benefit most from access to grammar schools. Recent research compared

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<sup>11</sup> As reported in *The Guardian*, 25 April 2005.

<sup>12</sup> *The Guardian*, 12 September 2006.

<sup>13</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 19 November 2006.

### THREE CHEERS FOR SELECTION

the results of selective LEAs with a group of non-selective LEAs with similar characteristics. While this study suggested that the average level of attainment is not significantly higher in selective LEAs, the research found that the minority of children from poor families who make it to grammar schools do ‘exceptionally well’, bumping up their average GCSE scores seven or eight points – equivalent to converting their grades from Bs to As. This compares to an average uplift of four points for all grammar schools pupils.<sup>14</sup>

The return to social selection in the current state system has been further reinforced by the ability of those with higher incomes to opt out of comprehensives by choosing private education – an option not available to the poor (particularly since the abolition of the Assisted Places Scheme). The average cost of sending a child to private school has increased by 42% to nearly £10,000 per year over the past five years, whilst average earnings have only increased by 24%. Each child sent to a private school charging average fees would now account for only 7% of the annual salary of a senior director or chief executive. But an engineer on average earnings would have to part with 28% of his income to cover the fees for a private prep or secondary school, and school fees would eat up nearly 40% of a nurse’s annual pay, according to a study by Halifax.<sup>15</sup> As Martin Ellis, the bank’s chief economist, says:<sup>16</sup>

*The average worker in a number of occupations, including pharmacists, engineers and journalists, can no longer afford private education for their offspring.*

Of course, selective state-funded education cannot redress all the social factors. Parental interest, peer group encouragement and neighbourhood still play their part. The research referred to

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<sup>14</sup> See Atkinson, Gregg and McConnell, op cit.

<sup>15</sup> *The Times*, 9 October 2006.

<sup>16</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 19 November 2006.

## HELPING CHILDREN FROM POORER BACKGROUNDS

above shows that where grammar schools exist,<sup>17</sup> more still needs to be done to enable able children from disadvantaged backgrounds to apply for and take up places. Even in selective LEAs, the proportion of able children attending grammar schools from families eligible for free school meals is still only half that of able children from better off families.

Nevertheless, entry to a selective school still provides the best opportunity for many able children from poor families to achieve their potential, including access to higher education. The better academic results of grammar and independent schools mean that the distribution of pupils with three A grade passes at A level is now heavily skewed towards these schools, together with a small proportion of the top comprehensives. As seen below, grammar and independent schools account for 54% of all students achieving three A grade A level passes, while accounting for only 20% of A level candidates. One in five grammar school candidates achieve three or more As compared to one in 20 candidates at comprehensives.

### A level results for 16-18 year olds, 2001-02

	Distribution of A level candidates	Distribution of candidates gaining 3 or more As at A Level	Proportion of students gaining 3 or more As
Grammar	7%	17%	19%
Independent	13%	37%	23%
Comprehensive & 2 <sup>nd</sup> ary Moderns	43%	29%	5%
6th Form colleges	17%	13%	6%
FE and Other	20%	4%	2%
	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	

Source: Parliamentary answer to Lord Quirk, 8 September 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Atkinson, Gregg and McConnell, op cit.

### THREE CHEERS FOR SELECTION

It is not surprising, therefore, that – as grammar schools have disappeared – the proportion of state educated children at Oxford has fallen from 60% some 40 years ago to around half today<sup>18</sup> (many of whom come from the remaining grammar schools); or that wealthier children with access to better schools have taken a disproportionate number of places in all universities. According to the LSE report, the proportion of children from the poorest fifth of families obtaining a degree has increased from 6% to 9% between the 1958 and 1970 birth groups; but for the richest fifth of families, it has risen from 20% to 47% over the same period.

The *Sunday Times* ranking of the best 500 schools in the UK (based on GCSE and A level scores) in 2006 showed the continuing dominance of fee-paying schools. Of the top 500, only 151 were non-fee-paying schools – of which 127 were selective and only 24 comprehensives. The survey also revealed that more than half of the state school entrants to Oxford and Cambridge in 2005 came from just 150 schools, a number largely weighted towards the grammar schools. As the former Chief Inspector of Schools, Chris Woodhead, remarked:<sup>19</sup>

*If the 164 grammar schools were to go then virtually no children from state schools would secure a place at Oxford and Cambridge.*

Once again, Northern Ireland provides the model for what a selective system can achieve for social mobility as well as standards: 42% of university entrants from Northern Ireland come from less privileged backgrounds compared to only 28% from England.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 'The grammar lesson', 25 April 2005.

<sup>19</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 19 November 2006.

<sup>20</sup> *Sunday Telegraph*, 15 January 2006.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE PUBLIC SUPPORTS SELECTION

REMOVING SELECTION is clearly bad for both standards and social mobility. So it is remarkable that the political parties have been so slow to break ranks with the current educational hostility to grammar schools. One reason may be that they believe that the weight of public opinion is not yet ready for such a move.

New polling undertaken for the Centre for Policy Studies by ICM shows that this concern is mistaken.<sup>21</sup> Despite the years of public argument against selection, the majority of the public now favour some form of selection, and a significant group would favour fully selective schools – both for their own children and to help the disadvantaged. While the public may not back a return to an old style compulsory 11+, these results should encourage politicians to create a system that offers a choice.

*1. Almost three quarters of the public believe some form of selection in secondary schooling can help both academic and less academic children achieve their potential, with those in favour split between streaming in mixed-ability schools and fully selective schools.*

- 76% believe that *more academic* children can maximise their potential at secondary school through streaming or by attending selective schools:

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<sup>21</sup> 1006 respondents were interviewed in an omnibus survey by ICM. The fieldwork was conducted on 21 and 22 June 2006. Full results can be found at [www.cps.org.uk](http://www.cps.org.uk)

## THREE CHEERS FOR SELECTION

- 40% favour streamed by ability in mixed-ability schools.
  - 36% favour selective schools.
  - 20% favour mixed-ability classes.
  - 73% believe that less academic children can maximise their potential at secondary schools through streaming or by attending selective schools:
    - 42% favour streamed by ability in mixed-ability schools.
    - 31% favour selective schools.
    - 24% favour mixed-ability classes.
2. *If offered the choice a sizeable minority would choose a selective school for their own child, although the majority would opt for a mixed-ability school.*
- 39% would choose a selective school.
  - 58% would choose a mixed-ability school.
3. *The public is open-minded about whether selective or mixed-ability schools provide the best route for those from poorer sections of society to obtain better qualifications and jobs.*
- 51% believe schools which mix by ability provide the best opportunity, against 44% who believe schools which select by ability provide the best opportunity.
  - 54% dislike selective schools because those who do not get into the top schools are made to feel like failures, but 44% reject this argument.
4. *A small majority of the public are in favour of schools being free to set their own admissions policy, with the predominant view that selection where practised should be by a mix of exams, interviews and head-teacher recommendations.*
- 51% are in favour of allowing to set their own admissions policy.
  - 46% are not in favour of allowing schools to set their own policy.

## THE PUBLIC SUPPORTS SELECTION

- 48% are in favour of an admissions policy based on a mix of exam results, headteacher recommendations, and discussions with pupils and parents.
  - 17% are in favour of an admissions policy based on one-off examination that everyone takes.
  - 8% are in favour of an admissions policy based on school records.
5. *Support for selection is not confined to the affluent middle classes. The results on selection and selective schools are broadly consistent across all age groups and demographics, although older groups who experienced selective education tend to be most positive. For example, the proportion of people in different groups who think that selective schools provide the best opportunity for those from poorer sections of society are:*

<b>Age</b>		<b>Social Class</b>	
18-24:	41%	AB:	46%
25-34:	39%	C1:	43%
35-44:	44%	C2:	45%
45-54:	42%	DE:	43%
55-64:	48%		
65+:	50%		

Alongside these poll findings, perhaps the most tangible evidence of parental support for grammar schools comes from the real data on pupil numbers. Although no new grammar schools have been established for many years, since 1995 the number of pupils at the existing grammar schools has expanded by 35%.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *The Times*, 26 July 2005.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE WAY FORWARD

WHAT POLICIES should Britain adopt to regain the social and academic benefits of selection? The answer is to develop a new system of selective education that reflects the needs and realities of the twenty-first century based on the following policies:

1. *Ensure that state schools are free to adopt best practice in streaming – by subject or by class – together with a flexible age structure that allows children to jump ahead or stay back a year in order to match them with other children of similar standard.*

Streaming within comprehensives can help. However the evidence suggests that it is not enough on its own to overcome the disadvantages for pupils of schools in deprived areas – where there may be a relatively small peer group of children who are both academically able and motivated. These children need the option of a selective school which puts them in a new peer group and new ethos.

2. *Enable state schools to be fully selective, without any LEA block, aiming for a network of selective schools offering universal coverage across the country. Those that achieved high enough standards would be awarded ‘academic school’ status (‘new grammar schools’).*

The current specialist and city academy schools do not meet this requirement because of the limitations they have on selection by ability. While private sector sponsorship brings some benefits – and many of these are excellent schools - in



## THE WAY FORWARD

practice they have to continue operating as slightly better-funded comprehensives rather than specialist academic schools.

To extend choice, other specialist schools can and should operate alongside academic schools and comprehensives, including the modern equivalent of the old technical schools which can provide a practical skills base for those who choose it.

- 3. Maintain parental choice over whether or not to apply for selective schools or remaining comprehensive. There is no need to return to a mandatory 11+ exam.*

Where excellent comprehensive schools exist, some parents may make a positive choice to stay with a high quality local school. However, existing barriers that inhibit parents applying for selective schools should be removed, in particular the requirement in some local authorities to apply before the results of the 11+ are known (with the risk that other good non-selective schools are filled with first choice applicants by the time the result is known).

The system should also allow flexibility for children to apply and move at different ages – for example 13+ and Sixth Form – thereby recognising that different children develop at different speeds.

- 4. Offer free transport to children from low income families at selective academic schools, including school buses where required, in order to ensure no child is prevented from attending because of the difficulties and cost of travel.*

The cost of this policy is estimated at no more than £20 million to £30 million a year. It would make a major contribution to social mobility.

### THREE CHEERS FOR SELECTION

5. *Ensure information on opportunities at selective schools is sent to all parents of children at primary schools, with a helpline for guidance on applications.*

The aim should be to remove barriers and encourage applications from the widest social and geographic mix.

6. *Adopt wider reforms of the educational structure to encourage free development and competition within the state and independent sectors.*

The current legislation for foundation schools should be extended to transform all state schools into independent schools, directly funded by government grants on the basis of pupil enrolment, and operated by voluntary, charity or private sector organisations. Governors would have much greater freedom to set the size, ethos and admissions policy of the school without interference.

Existing independent schools should also be allowed to compete freely with the former state schools, accepting the government enrolment grant as full or part payment. The distinction between 'state' and 'independent' schools would no longer act as one of the major sources of social division.

All politicians recognise education is important. Yet for too long they have tolerated a system which is both academically sub-optimal and socially divisive. The refocusing of education around selection and streaming is long overdue. It cannot afford to be delayed any longer.

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*Tom Burkard*

West Dunbartonshire is one of the most deprived regions in Scotland. Yet it is set to become the first local authority in the English-speaking world to eliminate reading failure. Reading failure has already fallen to 6% (compared to 21% in England).

It has achieved this for two reasons: first it has used the synthetic phonics method of teaching reading; and second it has adopted a “bottom-up” approach (in stark contrast to the “top-down” approach advocated by the DfES in England). West Dunbartonshire shows that more central control is not the solution to the country’s educational problems. Indeed, it is the problem. The power of a successful example – such as West Dunbartonshire – can do more than yet more well-intentioned but inevitably doomed top-down government edicts.

*“West Dunbartonshire’s success in virtually eliminating illiteracy proves beyond doubt that synthetic phonics is the most effective method of teaching children to read” – Nick Gibb MP, Shadow Schools Minister*

### **AFTER THE LITERACY HOUR: may the best plan win! (£5.00)**

*Tom Burkard*

The Literacy Hour was launched in 1998. Since then, 1,200,000 children have left primary school with poor literacy skills. This rate of failure is, shows Tom Burkard, completely unnecessary. Synthetic phonics can reduce the rate of reading failure to near zero – even with disadvantaged pupils. Indeed, the advantage enjoyed by pupils of the synthetic phonics over pupils taught by other methods has increased to 3½ years in reading, and almost two years in spelling. Since publication of this pamphlet, the Rose Review of Best Practice in the Teaching of Early Reading has confirmed that synthetic phonics should play the dominant role in teaching children to read.

*“Congratulations to the Centre for Policy Studies and the education campaigners Martin Turner and Tom Burkard!... the next phase of the National Literacy Strategy will focus on synthetic phonics” – leading article in *The Daily Telegraph**

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*Lord Blackwell*

Attempts to improve education and healthcare through more funding and 'better management' of the current structures have failed. It is time for a double reform of both schools and hospitals: first, parents and patients must be given the freedom to choose their school and hospital, and for money to follow the pupil and patient. Second, schools and hospitals must be given far greater freedom to respond to local demand with good schools and hospitals allowed to expand, and new entrants allowed to set up wherever they see an unfulfilled demand. It is this combination of independent suppliers together with personal choice and money following the pupil or patient will improve standards.

*"The Centre for Policy Studies estimates that the average cost of a [private] day school now is only £6,150, so with many state schools there not would be much topping up involved, a tenner a week or thereabouts" –*

Ferdinand Mount in *The Sunday Times*



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The Secretary

Centre for Policy Studies

57 Tufton Street, London SW1P 3QL

Tel: 020 7222 4488

Fax: 020 7222 4388

e-mail: [mail@cps.org.uk](mailto:mail@cps.org.uk)

Website: [www.cps.org.uk](http://www.cps.org.uk)