



# Education Politics

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# Editorial

With the political situation nationally and globally becoming curioser and curioser, the government's education policy for England becomes ever more confusing. The Green Paper, now apparently demoted to a 'consultation paper', is a very strange set of proposals indeed. What's more, it sometimes seems as if the Secretary of State agrees with that assessment. In November, she admitted the department doesn't know which areas of education are best to invest in: 'A simple question that I always want to answer is if I had one more pound, where should it go? Right now I don't have a sufficiently broad evidence base to answer that question.' A comment which the National Audit Office found extremely interesting.

Maybe Justine Greening suspects what the rest of the education world knows. While a huge proportion of her civil servants' time is occupied in secret with converting, sponsoring, monitoring, rebrokering, fixing and fiddling academies and their chains, a rational education department would be ending this longstanding obsession with secondary school structures and seeking the restoration and development of SureStart and quality early years provision. It would be spending a lot of time on enhancing the recruitment, training and development of its workforce. It would be screwing sufficient funding from the Treasury to prevent shortages of school places. It would be creating a credible offer for young people post-16, rather than passing laws about the insolvency and closure of colleges. And most of all, it would be moving towards a curriculum and assessment system designed not for institutional accountability but to meet the needs of people and society.

As it is, Ms Greening and this journal must attend to the proposals for grammar schools, faith schools, and for the sponsorship of academies by a range of profoundly unsuitable organisations. We know she opposes early selection, and we may imagine she has little time for the rest. We also know that another Tory Prime Minister is putting Tory Party politics ahead of the national interest again, including sponsoring this kind of nonsense in an attempt to divert attention from her European policy dilemmas. Ms Greening's Right Honourable Friend Nick Gibb, whom allegedly she has put in a box, has been attempting in a number of Parliamentary settings to deny the overwhelming evidence against selection with ever more selective statistics which have attracted the condemnation of the UK Statistics Authority.

The SEA has always seen the ending of early selection as a no-brainer, but at the recent Reclaiming Education conference Prof Anne West described the historical caution within the Labour Party on the policy. It is true that Gaitskell, Wilson, Callaghan, Foot and Kinnock all presided over election manifestos which committed to it, but the two who presided over election wins did not pursue the policy (with vigour in one case, or at all in the other). Now Annual Conference has adopted unanimously a composite motion, substantially drafted by SEA, to end selection at 11+ everywhere in England and Angela Rayner repeats that position on p3.

The immediate tactic must be to bolster a broad front of opposition to the expansion of grammar schools, but we should not kid ourselves: those Tory MPs and their allies in the shires who will make it impossible for the government to implement May's madness will subsequently do nothing to get rid of the 163 which blot our landscape. Even the political intervention of the ostensibly neutral number crunchers in PISA, who have put the cap on the arguments over equity in education systems in their 2015 report, will not move those Tories from a support for local decision making on selection. Never mind that the Education Policy Institute has calculated that 46% of England's pupils live within reach of a grammar school, making selection far from the concern of a few.

In the longer term, however, Labour must honour the overwhelming support in the Party for the ending of all selection. The Shadow Secretary of State's commitment is very welcome, and surely all wings of the Party in Parliament can get behind her. After all, ending selection could be achieved simply and quickly by a Labour government through the mechanism of the school admissions code; a ban on the use of ability or aptitude as an admissions criterion would presumably do the job. It would also by-pass the misleading arguments about 'closing' grammar schools.

Recent research, however, is leading to the question of whether grammar schools are the only significant impetus for social segregation in our education system. The evidence on faith schools is by no means as clear cut as for grammars, and their role in their communities is much more varied, but they will surely come under the spotlight. And there is the vexed question of the relationship between ethnic segregation in schools and housing. We must maintain the pressure on selection by ability, but also think through these other pressures on social cohesion within our classrooms.

# Why Labour will lead the campaign against grammar schools

Angela Rayner

When this Conservative government made their first major domestic policy announcement a plan to lift the statutory ban on building new grammar schools, they showed just how far from the concerns of ordinary voters they have moved in the past few months.

From grammar schools, to lists of foreign workers, to a shambolic move towards a chaotic Brexit that will send Britain tumbling out of the Single Market and pose a threat to jobs, to growth, and to prosperity, this government have made their concerns clear.

Theresa May promised to govern for ordinary working class families, for those who are just about managing, but in reality the only people she is interested in are sitting on her backbenches.



There are very few issues that unite me, David Cameron, Tony Blair, Anthony Crosland, and Margaret Thatcher. But grammar schools is certainly one of them.

In fact, the opposition goes far beyond that. Every single Prime Minister and Education Secretary, including ten Conservatives, have been united in either reducing the number of grammar schools in England, or, at the very least, doing nothing to increase them. Until July, there was nobody - in politics or the wider world of education policy and practice - who thought that lifting the statutory ban on opening new grammar schools would be an option for any government.

After all, the consensus on this issue goes beyond Labour and Conservative politicians, and extends to every major figure and thinker in the world of education policy. The Institute for Fiscal Studies, the OECD, the

Sutton Trust, Policy Exchange, and every teaching union in the country are united against these proposals. That's because all have considered the evidence which already exists.

And the fact is that there is simply no evidence that grammar schools improve social mobility. Nor do they improve the life chances of disadvantaged young people. That's why the Labour Party has been leading the campaign against these proposals, which unite our party and which have rallied our entire membership against these divisive and ineffective proposals.

In the coming weeks and months, we will be campaigning even harder against these proposals. Despite the recent announcement that there would be no new schools legislation in this legislative session, it looks likely that there will be a new Bill that will include plans for new grammar schools in the next Queen's

The Labour Party, and all other interested parties, including activists, teachers, and others who oppose selection, must now consider how we take forward our opposition to new grammar schools. But in my view, opposition is not good enough. We must make it clear that we are not content with the status quo.

Speech. The Labour Party, and all other interested parties, including activists, teachers, and others who oppose selection, must now consider how we take forward our opposition to new grammar schools.

But in my view, opposition is not good enough. We must make it clear that we are not content with the status quo.

Our education system leaves too many of our young people without the schooling they deserve. We cannot be satisfied with the attainment gap between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and the rest, GCSE results which are taking their largest year on year drop since records began due to this government's chaotic management of our schools, nor the plummeting number of students from state schools going on to university. Nor can we tolerate classes which are too big for children to thrive, or the worrying shortages in teacher recruitment.

## Angela Rayner (cont)

Further, plans to expand academic selection are particularly ill thought through at a time when our country feels increasingly divided, with fractures emerging across our society. As Sir Michael Wilshaw said when presenting his final Ofsted annual report as HMCI, 'whatever cultural tensions exist outside school, race and religion are not barriers within them. Children in schools across the country are learning about modern British values and seeing them in practice.'

This is one of the most important, and too often overlooked, contributions that a comprehensive system makes to our society as a whole. In a way that no other system of education can, it brings together young people from a diverse range of backgrounds, and as they grow and learn together, they will better understand each other, and the unique social, cultural, and economic circumstances that have developed them.

Understanding those from different backgrounds and culture is essential to life in modern Britain, as our country becomes increasingly diverse. Our comprehensive schools offer one of our best hopes for ensuring that each generation to come is open-minded, tolerant, and understanding of others.

The great success of our comprehensives in bringing people together risks being undone by haphazard plans to expand academic selection. All of the evidence already tells us that the student bodies of selective schools are drawn from a far more narrow range of backgrounds than the students at comprehensive schools. Taking groups of pupils who are overwhelmingly from more affluent backgrounds, and removing them from the comprehensive system, will make it far more difficult for our schools to promote social cohesion.

The failings of the grammar school model will therefore be shown not just in attainment, but in the wider impact on our society. Not only will they mean that a much smaller number of pupils, almost exclusively those from more affluent backgrounds and more likely to have high academic attainment, will have academic success, at the expense of all the rest, but it will fragment our schools and divide our young people, making it more difficult for children to meet and understand those from different backgrounds to their own.

At a time when our country is more divided than at any time in recent history, the responsibility of our schools in bringing people together could not be clearer. Plans to expand selection, which is by its very nature socially divisive, simply cannot be justified. None of this is acceptable. Everyone who believes that every single child deserves the best start in life and the best education possible, must work tirelessly to address all these problems and more. I am on the case.



Labour believes in an excellent education for every child, and our plans for a National Education Service will be at the heart of delivering on this ideal. It is this plan, founded not in lowering standards, but in helping every child to do better and in fulfilling their potential, which must guide us.

We must continue to oppose plans to open new grammar schools because they will not help every child gain an excellent education. They will benefit only a tiny minority of young people, overwhelmingly those from the most affluent backgrounds, rather than those who need help the most.

An excellent education is the right of every child. That can only be delivered with a fully comprehensive system of education in our country. I hope to count on the support of MPs from all parties, from teachers, from experts, and from activists, to ensure that we do not try to address the challenges of the 21st century with the failed solutions of the 20th.

**Angela Rayner is the Shadow Secretary of State for Education**

# How Labour Conference voted unanimously for the end of secondary school selection

## Sarah Williams

I was very pleased to be elected as this year's Labour Party conference SEA delegate, although I realised I would have work to do when I received this email from SEA's General Secretary John Bolt a week before conference:

*"I'm very pleased to say that our resolution to the Labour Conference on grammar schools has been accepted by the Conference Arrangements Committee. That means that it goes forward to a ballot on Sunday at Conference to decide whether or not it will be debated."*



Our motion on grammar schools did in fact make it through the ballot and grammar schools were to be debated in the main conference hall. There were eight different grammar school motions which had to be reduced into one composite. Our motion was backed by Maidenhead, Bolton West, Wycombe, Holborn & St Pancras, Hackney North, Tower Hamlets, Witney and Holborn CLPs; the other seven motions were forwarded by individual organisations or CLPs and included subjects other than grammar schools.

Navigating the conference systems was rather difficult, as was finding the compositing meeting, but I eventually discovered the allotted room. I had been encouraged to try to move the composite, primarily because our motion had the backing of 4 CLPs, and also because the SEA is Labour's only education affiliate. A colleague gave me these words of wisdom: 'you'll need sharp elbows'. He wasn't wrong.

In the compositing meeting, there were thirteen representatives for the eight motions and a panel of four who would make the final decision. The panel consisted of two from the Conference Arrangements Committee plus Angela Rayner MP plus a member of her team.

The Chair distributed a composed motion and then asked if anyone had produced their own composite. But nobody had; I'm not even sure anyone knew that this could have been done. The proposed composite was then debated. Angela started by advising us that grammar schools are unpopular and that with the 'Education for Everyone' white paper, Justine Greening had provided an 'open goal', and although there were many issues in education which Angela and her team would like to address we would be foolish not to score easy points on the contentious issue of expanding grammar school provision.

The first draft composite contained much of our own resolution, with contributions from Harborough CLP and Putney CLP. After debating the contents of the composite, we were asked to vote on each sentence. During this process there were numerous contributions from the floor and the Chair seemed to get increasingly frustrated with each contribution. The final outcome was that the composite stood as proposed, but with the addition of 'in England' and 'as well as ensuring a greater voice for councillors, parents and professionals'. I tried to get the wording of our final sentence to be more precise, but unfortunately my changes were not met with agreement.

The composite ended:

"Conference therefore commits the Labour Party to opposing any expansion to selective education and also to the establishment in all areas of a genuinely comprehensive and inclusive secondary education system that provides for all children according to their needs as well as ensuring a greater voice for councilors, parents and professionals."

The sentence stating: "ending of educational selection in all state funded schools" had gone, but, "establishment in all areas of a genuinely comprehensive and inclusive secondary education system" remained.

The amended composite was agreed on a majority vote. The Chair then asked for a mover and a seconder for the composite. Almost everyone expressed a desire to move or second the composite and the Chair instructed us to form a group and decide

## Sarah Williams (cont)

amongst ourselves on a mover and seconder. This created quite a debate, although we did manage to agree on having gender balance, which worked in my favour, as men were being most vocal on who should move. As the discussion was getting lengthy the Chair said it would have to go to the vote. We started with nine vying to move, four men dropped out in favour of gender balance, it was then left to five of us to each give a speech, with a vote to decide. I am very pleased to say that, as SEA delegate, I got twelve of the possible thirteen votes and was therefore elected to move the composite.

The [composite](#) motion, which definitely included our desire for a genuinely comprehensive system - grammar schools cannot operate within a genuinely comprehensive system - would now be debated in the main conference hall.

Jeremy Corbyn has argued the need for a National Education Service; and an inclusive comprehensive system would form the back-bone of the NES. Labour

is currently working on its education policies; therefore it would be very odd for us to have a strong policy on one aspect of the education system. Additionally, the composite is in fact slightly stronger than our original resolution as it includes opposition to the removal of the cap on faith-based admissions. Faith schools are arguably more divisive than grammar schools; as Peter Mortimore says, faith schools are 'silos of segregation', and as [research](#) from the British Humanist Association demonstrates, faith schools often have an intake which is not representative of their local community. Surely, we must work equally toward the removal of all faith-based admissions as well as all exam-based admissions.

I am pleased to say that in the hall 'Composite Number 10 - Grammar Schools' passed unanimously and Labour launched its 'Education not Segregation' campaign, putting comprehensive education back at the heart of Labour thinking.

### Labour Party Conference 2016: Composite Ten

Conference abhors the Government proposal to encourage the creation of more Grammar Schools in England. Conference believes education is a collective good that benefits, not just individual pupils/students but society as a whole. Conference views the recent proposals set forth by Justine Greening MP for Putney to expand grammar schools and to remove the cap on faith-based admissions as divisive.

Conference believes that the best interests of all children, and the country, would be better served by providing adequate resources for all schools to match the highest achieving ones. Conference notes that grammar schools fail the poorest students "less than 3% of their students are eligible for free school meals (FSM), whereas the average proportion in selective areas is 18%" and that grammar schools encourage inequality. Since there is no evidence that grammar schools improve social mobility or educational outcomes conference condemns this proposal as a retrograde step.

Conference recognises that the purpose of education should be to provide all children, irrespective of background or specific needs, with the skills, knowledge enthusiasm an understanding necessary to lead a rewarding and fulfilling life. Conference therefore commits the Labour Party to opposing any expansion to selective education and also to the establishment in all areas of a genuinely comprehensive and inclusive secondary education system that provides for all children according to their needs as well as ensuring a greater voice for councillors, parents and professionals.

# Tutor-proof tests: the impossible quest

Rebecca Hickman

The government has been assailed on all fronts for their plans for more grammar schools, and one issue that fails to go away is whether or not it is possible to develop a fair and objective method for selecting children at the age of 10. It was in this context that education minister Nick Gibb recently described tutor-proof 11-plus tests as the “holy grail”. The experience of existing selective areas suggests that “wild goose chase” might be more apt.

The 11-plus tests currently relied on by grammar schools around the country have been shown to result in substantially worse outcomes for children from certain social and racial backgrounds. The government has tried to address this concern by proclaiming that new grammar schools will use new ‘smarter’ tests, which sounds good in principle. The problem is there is no evidence that such a test – which isolates ability from background – exists or is capable of being created. The government’s own confusion was laid bare in a single sentence in a recent speech by Theresa May: “While there is no such thing as a tutor-proof test, many selective schools are already employing much smarter tests that assess the true potential of every child.” If grammar schools are using tests that “assess the true potential of every child” then those tests must be tutor-proof. If they are not tutor-proof, then test results will be distorted to some degree by parents’ ability to afford and access tutoring – in other words, they will not be a true reflection of children’s academic potential. So the first and second part of the Prime Minister’s statement cannot both be true.

It is also wrong to claim that smarter tests are already in use. While selective areas such as Buckinghamshire and Kent have paraded the introduction of new 11-plus tests that are “more resistant to coaching”, the results have not lived up to the PR. Commenting on the Bucks test, the government’s Chief Scientific Adviser Dr Tim Leunig told the Education Select Committee, “I don’t want to cast any aspersions on their reasons for doing it or on the people who designed the test but it didn’t work.” That is a fairly damning judgment on an exercise that has cost Bucks’ state-funded grammar schools hundreds of thousands of pounds. It might make some politicians reflect carefully on whether or not to pour more public money down the same hole.

The Bucks experience is important for two reasons. Firstly, the introduction of the so-called “tutor proof” 11-plus test in this fully selective local authority in 2013, presented a unique opportunity to compare before and after data. The Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring at Durham University designed the test, claiming that it was more “resistant to tuition”

because the content was less predictable and practice papers would not be available. Their marketing brochure stated that “our assessments focus on evaluating the natural reasoning abilities of candidates” rather than acquired knowledge. Secondly, Bucks is the only selective area in the country where every state school child is automatically entered for the 11-plus. In other words, it provides an opportunity to examine exactly what happens when a typical cohort of children try to secure a grammar school place.

In 2014, just 10 FSM children in all of Bucks passed the 11-plus

Local campaign group Local Equal Excellent set about using freedom of information requests to collect data on how outcomes for Bucks children were changing under the new test. Because prep (private) schools in Bucks provide intensive 11-plus test preparation, and because paying for tutoring requires more disposable income, any test that is resistant to coaching should substantially reduce the advantage provided by higher income. There are therefore a number of indicators that enable this to be tracked: Pass rates for children at state and private schools; pass rates for children living in more and less affluent areas; pass rates for children eligible for free school meals (FSM); and pass rates for children from different ethnic backgrounds.

So in which direction have these indicators moved in the first three years of the new Bucks test? The pass rate for Bucks state school pupils decreased from 23% to 20% in the first year of the new 11-plus test. In each subsequent year, the gap between the pass rate for Bucks state school pupils and the overall pass rate has got bigger. The pass rate for private school children was 56% in 2012. In 2016, after three years of the new test, it had risen to 60%. This means that a child from a Bucks private school is now nearly three times more likely to pass the 11-plus test than a child from a Bucks state primary school. The significant difference in the pass rates for children from the most and least well-off areas of Bucks has been maintained. Bucks is divided into four districts. In all three years of the new test, a child living in Chiltern District was at least twice as likely to pass the exam than a child from the less well-off district of Aylesbury Vale.

## Rebecca Hickman (cont)

In the first two years of the new test, the proportion of children on FSM entering grammar schools fell. In 2014, just 10 FSM children in all of Bucks passed the 11-plus – a shockingly low pass rate of 4% compared to the overall average that year of 30%. Finally, the figures show that children from some ethnic backgrounds are suffering serious bias under the 11-plus test. Children of Pakistani heritage (Bucks' largest ethnic group by some margin) are half as likely to pass the exam than White British children. Average test scores are also substantially lower for children from Black Caribbean and Black African backgrounds. Crucially, new data obtained by Local Equal Excellent indicates that high ability children from poor backgrounds and some ethnic groups do disproportionately badly in the Bucks 11-plus test. These are precisely the children who proponents of selection claim the system helps.

The depressing conclusion from this data harvesting exercise has been that CEM's new 11-plus test has failed against all key measures of fairness. Far from being "tutor proof", it is faithfully reproducing all the social and educational inequalities that emerge in the first ten years of a child's life. If anything, the new test seems to be conferring even more of an advantage on children from certain backgrounds – which would suggest it is even more coachable than the previous test, or that more middle-class parents are investing in coaching than ever before. The vast tutoring industry in Bucks is booming and children from better-off homes are still coming out on top.

While it is generally accepted that exams like SATS and GSCEs are likely to reflect differences in learning contexts and opportunities for children from different backgrounds, the School Admissions Code requires that grammar school entrance exams do not test acquired knowledge but rather measure aptitude or ability. For any test that achieves this, we would expect to see a representative spread of results for children from different socio-economic backgrounds and ethnic groups, as tutoring and prior learning opportunities would make no difference. But this is the opposite of what the data shows. In fact, alarmingly, CEM's 11-plus test appears to be even more susceptible to background factors than Key Stage 2 SATS scores.

As a result of Local Equal Excellent's challenges to CEM, they have now withdrawn the online brochure in which they claimed that their 11-plus test assessed 'natural ability'. Perhaps more surprisingly they have even conceded that they never had any evidence that their test is in fact resistant to coaching. In a recent e-mail they stated, "Without extensive and expensive research, it is not possible to quantify the impact of coaching on the results from our tests."

In her recent evidence to the Education Select Committee, Dr Rebecca Allen suggested why this might be the case:

"If you have a very narrowly defined predictable test, the amount of money you need to invest in private tutoring is relatively limited. If somebody says to you, "You are going to be tested on something, something in the primary curriculum, but we are not going to tell you why or how," as a parent my response would be to put my child through tutoring for years to ensure that all bases are covered. This is the difficulty with the idea of designing a tutor-proof test."



For those who believe that children have a fixed quantum of 'ability' (a necessary, if anachronous, belief for the underlying logic of the 11-plus to hold together), the fairness of selective education stands or falls on whether or not an exam can accurately measure that ability at a fixed point in time. The effort to produce a test that was more resistant to coaching was perhaps worthwhile on its own terms. But it has failed, and this failure not only results in profound unfairness for thousands of Bucks children every year, but also means that the government is constructing a policy on an edifice of empty claims.

**Rebecca Hickman is a charity consultant and education campaigner**

# Schools that work for everyone - a comment

From its obviously jokey title to its last astonishing threat to take powers to intervene in faith schools on uniform, food policy, curriculum or to remove their faith school status, in 34 pages this document proposes to overturn some of the post-war foundations of education policy. And all in pursuit of one simple and misguided obsession: to find organisations prepared to sponsor academy schools. You may now respond, I thought this Green Paper was about grammar schools? Well, that is just a small part of it, and we'll come back to it later.

In its disregard for evidence, for logic, and indeed for political realities, this must be the worst yet in a growing series of low-quality policy papers from the DfE. The whole rationale for it, set out in the Introduction, is completely nonsensical. We need many more school places, nay *good* school places. Actually, as everyone knows, including DfE civil servants, a good school is created by the practice of its staff. But this paper claims that the answers are to expand the schools which are already good and 'to deliver a diverse school system'. So institutions which are 'not incentivised' to create new school places are to be strong-armed in unprecedented ways to do so. It seems irrelevant that the institutions of choice are variously not equipped and/or unwilling to take on this burden.

Of course, there are already institutions with legal duties to ensure the provision of sufficient school places in their areas, and to support schools to be good by improving their practice, but local authorities are not part of the plan. This is not surprising, but does amount to Tories retaining statutory duties on local authorities without providing the powers or resources. But no, it is the private schools, universities, grammar schools and faith schools who are to be in the front line.

So-called independent schools are described as having a 'privileged position' and are told they should use it more to benefit 'ordinary families, particularly those who are just about managing'.

So-called independent schools are described as having a 'privileged position' and are told they should use it more to benefit 'ordinary families, particularly those who are just about managing'. So far, so good.

But how? Either by sponsoring an academy or free school, or by offering a much higher proportion of free places – no matter that over the last century successive attempts at this have been a proven failure.

Independent schools which refuse to comply with the policy would suffer the removal of their charitable status.

Smaller private schools would have to provide teachers, directors of MATs, access to facilities, or sixth form scholarships. While examples of success in such practices are given, the more numerous examples of failure are not mentioned. Who can forget that great pedagogue Anthony Seldon losing it in assembly at 'his' Swindon comprehensive? And what if they don't or won't do it? Why, the government would legislate to remove their charitable status. No, really: a Conservative government proposes to remove charitable status from independent schools which will not bend to its will.

New faith schools which refuse to comply with the policy would suffer the removal of their faith status

As for universities, they would also have to sponsor an academy or free school. The government would issue new guidance to the Director of Fair Access with the effect that non-compliance will lead to a ban on increasing student fees. Cockeyed, of course, but the only available lever.

Existing faith schools have been spared the threat of the lash; there is no intention to change the admission rules for faith maintained schools and academies. Existing faith free schools would no longer be limited to admitting a maximum of 50% of their intake on the basis of faith. New faith schools, however, would have some stiff tests: to prove demand for places from parents of other faiths; to twin with other schools not of their faith; to sponsor mixed faith MATs; and to appoint a governor not of the faith. Non-compliance would lead to loss of faith school status.

We may suppose that the independent schools and university lobbying powers will be sufficient to see off these proposals. They were certainly quick off the

## Schools that work for everyone - a comment (cont)

blocks, with the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford being noticed pointing out that this is not their job. The abolition of the 50% rule would lead to the Catholic authorities sponsoring many new free schools. But for the left, a larger quandary appears. Could Labour ever propose removing charitable status from private schools, or suggest moving away from the 1944 settlement with the Churches? It is difficult to avoid the temptation to applaud this government for resolute action on the 'privileged position' of independent schools, while using it as cover for more decisive solutions when in power. And while a Labour government might not wish to pick a fight with the Churches, support for the principle of intervention now would provide cover for changes later, such as to the admissions code.

Could Labour ever propose removing charitable status from private schools, or suggest moving away from the 1944 settlement with the Churches? It is difficult to avoid the temptation to applaud this government for resolute action on the 'privileged position' of independent schools, while using it as cover for more decisive solutions when in power.

And then we had proposals on grammar schools, with the one to legislate for new schools abruptly withdrawn (for now, at least) by Justine Greening half way through the consultation. However, we are left with support for the expansion of existing grammars, including into 'satellites', and expectations that grammar schools will sponsor non-selective free schools, establish feeder primaries, form MATs with non-selective schools, allow entry at 11, 14 and 16, engage in outreach, and adopt fair access strategies.

Where these 'expectations' are not met, sanctions could include loss of funding and removal of the right to select. This sounds less like an expansion and more like an attack, not least in the repeated expectation that grammar schools will increase the proportion of FSM, or perhaps 'just managing' children, in their intakes. Nowhere does the Green Paper attempt to square the circle of this aspiration against the act of selection. The well-known headteacher (of both grammar and comp) and blogger, Tom Sherrington,

summed it up, 'The low level of students on FSM in selective schools isn't a conspiracy; it's hard-wired inevitability.'

Here we see at its clearest a battle between Downing Street and the Secretary of State. Theresa May's hard to understand commitment to grammars, and the completely cynical use of the term the 'just about managing', are reflected in the Green Paper and are set against Justine Greening's growing and novel reputation for an interest in the balance of evidence. In its unprecedented threats against various educational institutions we see also the degree of desperation within the DfE over the critical shortage of MAT sponsors. Its own evidence is that almost no MATs are effective. Existing MATs are prone to pick and choose what academies to take on. As real funding cuts bite,

In its unprecedented threats against various educational institutions we see also the degree of desperation within the DfE over the critical shortage of MAT sponsors.

managing schools becomes even less attractive. The government's insane ambition for an all academy system will be thwarted unless sponsors can be found; and these proposals would not produce anything like the numbers needed.

The evidence is growing that the Secretary of State is seriously unimpressed with these proposals. While her junior minister persists in banging the drum about the qualities of grammar schools, she remains silent. Indeed, civil servants have started denying that this document is a Green Paper, insisting that it is a 'consultation paper'. They clearly see a difference. Yet this was a consultation with questions designed to be impossible to answer without appearing to accept the basis policy direction.

Finally, whatever the outcome of the Green Paper, it has opened doors for Labour. Labour believes that private schools, selection, and potentially faith schools obstruct opportunities for all and wider social justice. Perhaps these proposals can give us heart to believe that a Labour government could act decisively in favour of social justice.

MJ

# Real statistics on England's schools

## A review of recent publications by the Education Policy Institute

Once upon a time there was an ineffectual think tank called CentreForum which reflected Orange Book liberalism. Indeed, its Chair was Paul Marshall, founder of a huge hedge fund and co-author, with David Laws, of that notorious neo-liberal tract, and in his spare time Chairman of Ark Schools. But in June 2016 CentreForum had a makeover. Laws replaced Marshall as Chair, its name was changed to the Education Policy Institute, and perhaps most importantly the highly capable Natalie Perera became Director. She was a long-time civil servant in the DfE and school funding expert, who also spent time in Nick Clegg's Deputy Prime Ministerial office. She has recruited a string of able and knowledgeable survivors from the DfE. And EPI appears to have launched an all out assault on current government schools policy. Here we review two recent reports as examples.

### Grammar schools

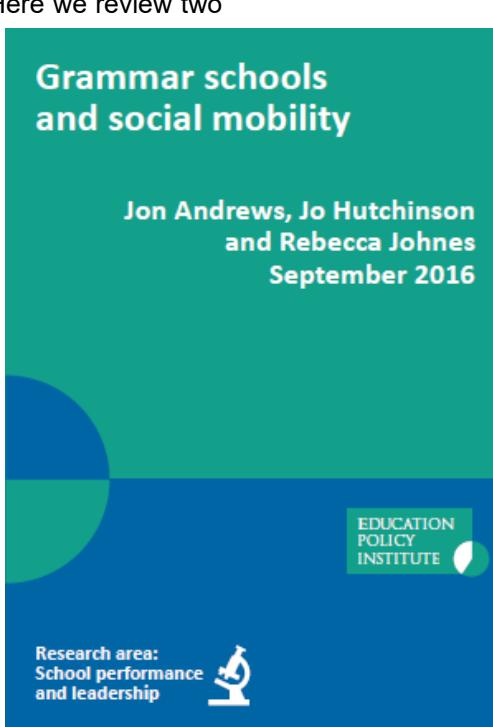
In September it published '*Grammar schools and social mobility*' by Jon Andrews, Jo Hutchinson and Rebecca Johnes. It summarises the international evidence from the OECD. PISA 2012 showed that academic selection in school systems is associated negatively with equity, and students in highly stratified systems tend to be less motivated than those in less stratified systems. School system performance overall is not better if it has a greater proportion of academically selective schools. And in systems with more academic selection, the impact of socio-economic status on student performance is greater.

Turning to England, the basis of the research model was to use the National Pupil Database to compare the characteristics and attainment of pupils in selective and non-selective schools. The evidence presented is almost all numerical – and there is plenty of it. This review cannot do justice to the sophistication and complexity of the analysis, particularly of the big question of the performance of pupils in selective and non-selective areas.

There are 10 fully and 26 partially selective local authorities in England. On average pupils travel about twice as far to attend selective compared with non-selective schools, and 46% of state secondary pupils live within reach of one or more grammar schools. 140 of the 163 grammar schools are academies, 111 of

them being in single academy trusts. More than two thirds of grammar schools are single sex.

The well-known facts about grammar school pupils are brought together, but the report suggests that these figures are to be expected, since there are few disadvantaged pupils at the top of the performance distribution at KS2, and relatively fewer who live in wholly selective areas. However, even when allowance is made for this, pupils eligible for free school meals make up 6.9% of the high-attaining group living near selective schools but only 2.4% of those that attend them, with the figures for Black Caribbean pupils being 1.3% and just 0.5%. These effects are also seen to some extent in high-performing comprehensive schools.



Part five of the report analyses in great detail GCSE results for 2014 and 2015, comparing grammar school pupils with a sample of pupils from comprehensive schools with matched social and attainment characteristics. The former achieve, on average, an estimated one third of a GCSE grade higher in each of eight GCSE subjects, but the higher the proportion of grammar school places in an area, the less the effect, and in areas with most grammar school places the difference was 0.1 of a grade. When compared with 'high-quality' comprehensive schools, there is no benefit of attending a grammar school for high-attaining pupils.

The report soberly concludes that at a national level, and adjusting for pupil characteristics, there appears to be no overall impact of selective

schooling either positive or negative and this suggests that additional grammar schools are not a good intervention for raising average standards across a schools system. There is evidence that other interventions may be more effective in achieving the aim to provide parents with more choice and access to good schools.

### Faith schools

Then, in early December, EPI published '*Pupil characteristics and attainment at faith schools*', by two of the same authors. The report sets out the features of faith schools, just over a third of primaries but under a fifth of secondaries, with large regional and even more local variations. Again, these schools are investigated

**Education Policy Institute: <http://epi.org.uk>**

**Grammar schools: <http://epi.org.uk/report/grammar-schools-social-mobility/>**

**Faith schools: <http://epi.org.uk/report/faith-schools-pupil-performance-social-selection/>**

by reference to the National Pupil Database. It discusses why pupils tend to travel further to faith schools than to others. Nationally, their pupils have fewer pupils eligible for FSM than non-faith schools, particularly in primaries, fewer with SEN, and in primaries but not secondaries fewer with EAL and fewer non-white British. In both phases they have higher prior attainment.

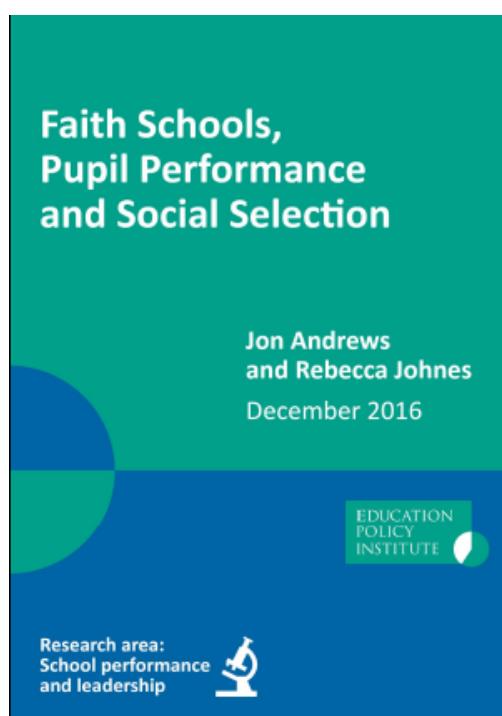
Again, the EPI also analyses local circumstances. 'Faith schools have, on average, fewer pupils that are eligible for free school meals than the areas in which they are situated,' with a tenth of the 637 secondaries as socially selective as grammar schools; although there are considerable variations, with another tenth having disproportionately more FSM pupils. There are complex analyses of the relationships between faith, urban/rural, and value added in both phases, with selection added to the secondary analysis. The report sets out the attainment of faith school pupils in two ways, as in the grammar school report. First, it describes the 'raw score' attainment of pupils at KS2 and KS4. Given their relatively advantaged intakes, on average, it is not surprising that in both phases faith schools score higher than other schools. 'Other faith schools' as a category, which consists of non-Christian faiths, score particularly highly.

Then a similar methodology to that used in the grammar school report is used to identify a sample of non-faith school pupils who have the same social characteristics as the faith school population. In this case the matching cannot be as precise as the NPD does not capture characteristics such as the attitudes of parents to religion and faith schools. The control sample scored the same attainment at KS2 as faith school pupils once controls for pupils' previous outcomes and characteristics were applied. At KS4, when the controls were applied, faith school pupils scored just over a seventh of a grade higher across eight GCSEs.

The report concludes by summarising the results reported above and the government's proposals for more faith schools. It restricts its comment to the following: *'...while encouraging more faith schools to open may help the government to meet its requirements to provide sufficient school places, the*

*proposed policy is unlikely to yield school places that are of a significantly higher quality than that offered by non-faith schools. Furthermore, given that faith schools on average admit fewer pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds than non-faith schools, there is a risk that these small gains would come at the price of increased social segregation.'*

What is the significance of these two studies? They are just a part of the output of the EPI which may be seen as a direct response to the green paper 'Schools that work for everyone'. They have the minimum of commentary and the maximum of statistical analysis relevant to the social reality under investigation. They are receiving a high degree of attention in policy circles, and arm the many opponents of government policy on all political sides.



#### **And more**

In December it also published a report entitled 'The 11-plus exam - how well does it test, and is it possible to make it tutor proof?' and a follow up report on grammar schools, looking at post-16 performance. With the DfE having been chastised twice by the UK Statistics Authority for its misleading statistics in statements about grammar schools, the EPI is staking a claim to be *the* statistical authority in the education debate.

It has also made important contributions to other debates recently. In November it published an analysis of Ofsted gradings of schools with two key findings. The first was that when the results of good and outstanding schools deteriorate, there is a significant

inconsistency with the resulting Ofsted judgement. The second, even more serious, was that schools with more disadvantaged pupils are less likely to be judged 'good' or 'outstanding', while schools with low disadvantage and high prior attainment are much more likely to be rated highly.

Also in November, it published a report by Alison Wolf on the lack of appropriate higher level technical education and the excessive provision of academic higher education. And in December EPI hosted the global launch of the PISA 2015 report. EPI has indeed come from nowhere to become perhaps the busiest education think tank. Labour must ensure it embeds its work in its evidence base for policymaking.

# The Promise of a Successful Future

## Kevin Smith

The editorial of the September issue of *Education Politics* set out a broad vision for socialist education, stating that “for socialists, education must...”

- recognise the essence of humanity, not its capitalist distortion
- develop the innate human capacities for doing and making, recognising that we are physical beings
- help develop the capacity to thrive in our increasingly complex worlds, from inter-personal skills through social and community studies to ethics
- release intrinsic capacity to express ourselves freely
- refer to past achievements and future directions
- overturn the hegemony of the ‘academic,’ now being touted as ‘powerful knowledge’ because it is owned by the powerful, requiring new thinking about the assessment of learning and selection by differential qualification.

Currently, teachers from over 65 “pioneer schools” across Wales, along with government officials, academics and consultants, are engaged in developing a new national curriculum. The curriculum, introduced by Professor Graham Donaldson and based on evidence from his year-long review of education in Wales, is a marked departure from the existing curriculum implemented in 1988.

For example, in *Successful Futures*, the report detailing evidence from Donaldson’s review and rationale for the new curriculum, the curriculum is organised into the following six areas of learning and experience:

- expressive arts
- health and wellbeing
- humanities
- languages, literacy and communication
- maths and numeracy
- science and technology.

Teaching and learning in these “areas of learning and experience” is guided by four curricular “purposes.” These include a number of criteria, but the main aims of each purpose are included below:

All our children and young people will be...

- ambitious, capable learners... who are ready to learn throughout their lives
- healthy, confident individuals... who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society
- enterprising, creative contributors who... are ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens who... are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world.

A thorough analysis of the Curriculum Wales is far beyond the scope of this brief article. However, I would like to address some key elements of the new curriculum and, given the criteria for a socialist education provided in September’s editorial, discuss how effective *Successful Futures* might be in establishing a socialist tradition of education in Wales.

### The Pros

*Successful Futures* utilises progressive language to communicate its aims. This language addresses the “humanity” of pupils in Wales, enlarging the discussion of their learning experiences to accommodate a more holistic interpretation of their educational goals and aims. This approach resists reducing pupils’ educational activities and academic achievement into solely potential, economic outcomes. The concepts organising the four purposes of the curriculum may assist in the decolonisation of schooling, allowing concerns for social, emotional, cultural and physical health to re-inhabit areas of children’s learning experiences left too-long deprived by an organisation of schooling dominated by discourses of capital and consumption.

The six areas of learning are intended to encourage pupils’ self-expression, improve social interaction, develop a variety of meaningful skills, and to possess a more sophisticated understanding of the social, cultural and political factors affecting their lives and community. In regard to referring to past achievements and future directions, *Successful Futures* provides pupils with a voice that informs the assessment and reporting of their academic achievement and, through emphasising broader forms of knowledge and the experiential aspect of learning, potentially lays the groundwork for overturning the hegemony of the “academic.” In short, the educational concepts organising the curriculum address a more encompassing, egalitarian and progressive education, and help to communicate a potential, more-socialistically aligned vision for schooling in Wales. However, irrespective of these strengths, there are areas of weakness that undermine this vision.

### The Cons

*Successful Futures* utilises progressive language to communicate its aims. Sounds familiar? Although the curriculum engages a progressive discourse of education, the message is abstract, lofty and difficult to engage. Strategies for implementation, managed through the “pioneer school” model, can potentially suffer from the lack of clear and concise language regarding how areas of learning are to be developed, delivered and assessed, or even how the purposes of

## Kevin Smith (cont)

the curriculum are intended to guide pedagogical practice. In 2010, Professor Donaldson led curricular transformation in Scotland with a remarkably similar approach. Six years on, reactions to this transformation are still mixed, with many of these concerns resulting from abstract goals and aims, and a lack of concrete, pragmatic approaches for implementation, delivery and assessment.

As noted above, in Scotland, many of the issues were attributed to an “implementation gap,” where teachers struggled to reconcile new curricular possibilities with the realities of the existing school structure. Wales faces similar problems. The development of the new curriculum is managed through the principle of subsidiarity, which maintains decisions should not be made at higher political levels than is necessary, and that centrally-organised authorities should support ancillary organisations in their decision-making processes. Therefore, teachers in “pioneer schools” work closely with stakeholders (including pupils) in setting the groundwork for the new curriculum. In many respects, this is a strength. However, it also reveals potential problems.

While experts in pedagogy and other aspects of the schooling experience, teachers’ ability to mediate curriculum reform on a national scale is limited. In short, their contributions can be circumscribed by discourses of “self-reliance” mandated by a neoliberal conceptualisation and implementation of subsidiarity. From a socialist (and admittedly sceptical) perspective, the deployment of subsidiarity can be perceived as a self-serving principle for government and not necessarily for the benefit of teachers and the communities they serve. For example, subsidiarity can be an economic benefit to Welsh government, reducing potential costs through exploiting an existent workforce under the guise of “democratic participation.” It can also help to achieve the instrumental and political goals of a “finished project” for a given official or administration. Finally, it can relieve the burden of responsibility and liability through displacing potential culpability on those most-actively engaged in curriculum development and furthest removed from the centre.

I’ve had the privilege of working with “pioneer school” teachers as they undertake this herculean task. The vast majority of them are dedicated to the process and crave a vibrant educational system for Wales. They are professionals who provide a crucial insight into schooling, and are a necessary force in the development of the new curriculum. Still, they are teachers undertaking curriculum reform in an educational system rocked by the tumult of excessive policy change. Many suffer from “policy fatigue,” and

seek to thrive in a profession that is, at times, managed through the educational equivalent of Orwellian newspeak. These factors (and more), can render educational discourse meaningless, and leave teachers to ultimately regard the promise of curricular transformation as circumspect. For many, the development of a new national curriculum will mark the end of a transformative educational project, but if the new curriculum is to be successfully implemented, it will need to be accompanied by a new era of continuing professional development and support for teachers in Wales.



Apart from the organisational challenges of curriculum reform, what I find most troubling is the way in which young people and pupils are constructed through the purposes of the curriculum. If you recall, the four purposes were prefaced by the phrase “All our children and young people will be....” Do you notice something strange about that phrase? The words “will be” place pupils’ possession of the features described in the purposes of the curriculum in the future, and only in the future.

At first glance, this doesn’t seem problematic, school is a process and hopefully, by the end, these purposes will be met. But what about *now*? In what way does the curriculum speak to the *current* abilities, circumstances, knowledge, skills and personalities of young people? The purposes of the curriculum ignore pupils’ ambition, capability, health, confidence, enterprise, creativity and ethics. Furthermore, each purposes is followed by phrases beginning with “are ready...,” which also ignores the immediate disposition of pupils. I’m convinced young people in Wales are already learning “throughout their lives.” I’m convinced in many ways they are leading “fulfilling lives,” and that they are already “valued members” of our society. I’m convinced they are “playing their part,” to their ability, “in life and

## Kevin Smith (cont)

work," and aren't they (or most at least) already citizens of Wales, or at least "of the world" (whatever that means)?

When schools fail to recognize and respond to the immediate realities of young people, their humanity remains unacknowledged, and schooling becomes a banal exercise of arrested development. Here, both young people and their teachers experience pedagogies robbed of authentic learning experiences. While some thrive in this system, many are relegated to a mindless march towards a meaningless qualification. In either case, the process of schooling existed more as a feature to maintain discourses of neoliberalism and capital than as a means through which we can become liberated from our ignorance.

In this situation, the outcomes of schooling are empty-signifiers, and the efficacy of learning loses its potency. The accrual of disassociated and irrelevant facts meant to pave the way to a sustainable, economic future remain unrealised and at-odds with the reality of the day-to-day lives of youth. Socially and culturally relevant concepts like citizenship, civic and social participation, autonomy, agency and rights, exist as "adult" commodities temporarily out of reach of young people.

### Conclusion

*Successful Futures* is a curriculum in conflict. On one hand, progressive language and egalitarian aims suggest the potential for a more socialistically-oriented system of education. On the other, discourses of deficiency render pupils as incomplete humans and reinforce a neoliberal rationale for modern schooling. Today, schools serve as crucibles through which young people are refined into "valued members of society," and discourses of capitalism, neoliberalism and the emerging "alt-right" fan the flames. In order to ameliorate these extreme conditions, communities must respond by transforming the abstract into the practical, and create strategies to implement effective, socialist discourse in the public sphere. Hopefully, through a coordinated and politically vibrant movement, the once abstract notions of the new curriculum will be made more concrete, and the once immutable discourses of neoliberalism and capitalism that currently dominate the ways in which we teach our children will fade.

**Dr Kevin Smith is a Research Associate at WISERD (Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods), Cardiff University**

## Updating SEA policy

### John Bolt, SEA Gen Sec

For some time the SEA has been discussing how to update its policy material. Now the Executive has decided to aim to produce a comprehensive manifesto. Given the lack of clarity in the policy making process of the party as a whole, it seemed that there is an opportunity now to make our voice heard.

We thought it could be published as a special edition of *Education Politics*. It would contain perhaps a number of themes. Each of these would start from an analysis of what is wrong from the perspective of students, parents and the wider community. This would be followed by a set of policy proposals designed to bring about improvement.

We have identified a number of possible themes:

1. providing enough good school places and providing fair access to them for all in ways that strengthen rather than weaken social cohesion
2. ensuring there are enough good teachers – covering recruitment, training, CPD and retention
3. improving the quality and availability of early years provision
4. reducing inequality in educational outcomes – or should this be a theme which runs through all the others rather than something on its own?
5. improving provision for those with special educational needs
6. a curriculum (5 to 14) which adequately prepares young people for their adult lives and an assessment regime which supports learning and does not dominate teaching
7. post-14 education and training which offers all students a full range of academic and vocational opportunities
8. ensuring that there is adequate funding fairly distributed, less waste and that resources are properly used for the benefit of young people
9. restoring opportunities for local communities to determine how their local school system is organised and who schools are run
10. a system of monitoring and supporting schools which is not punitive and genuinely promotes improvement.

**All members are invited to contribute to the discussions** including at the forthcoming all-member meetings (see p20). We shall also use Executive meetings and Annual Conference sessions to develop our ideas. We plan to publish the manifesto around the time of party conference at the end of September.

# The 2016 Caroline Benn Memorial Lecture

## Professor Danny Dorling

2016's Caroline Benn Memorial Lecturer in the House of Commons was Danny Dorling, the well-known and popular opponent of social inequality. He opened with a challenging suggestion: the 'converted', such as this audience and *Guardian* readers, have not yet got it right and need new ideas. A preview of the lecture had appeared in that newspaper the same morning. By the end of the lecture, the audience had received many more stimulations and provocations.

Professor Dorling read approvingly a quotation from the Compass report 'Big Education - Learning for the 21st century' published in March 2015. It described our education system as small, restrictive, lacking in ambition and imagination. Throughout the lecture, he described current features of the system which fitted that label, and suggested ways to move towards

education, describing his students at Oxford as exam-conditioned guinea pigs. They were horrified when he asked them to read books just because they were interesting and demanded to know whether they would feature in the exam. As he said, exam technique is not a useful skill in the adult world; we need people with confidence and imagination.

Dorling said that comprehensive schools had improved all our lives, and evidence does not exist that grammar schools do better. He argued that comprehensive education has improved massively since the 70s and it makes little sense to send your child to a private school, but people don't realise it. Only one third of pupils from elite private schools reach Oxbridge. The two thirds go to Russell Group universities where they are petrified of the society they



Melissa Benn, Danny Dorling and Angela Rayner are amused by an aside

something better. A key indicator of the poor outcomes was the performance of our 24 year olds in numeracy, literacy and problem solving. Dorling was referring to the OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), which tests the basic abilities of adults aged 16-65 in those areas. In the most recent tests England was one of very few countries whose young people achieved lower scores than the older generations. He also compared school performance unfavourably with that in what he consistently called mainland Europe.

Dorling repeatedly criticised the exam factory nature of our schools. He noted the limited pedagogy used in many schools, where all lessons are directed solely at the highest possible performance in the next external test. He made the link with current attitudes in higher

haven't been part of. We don't look enough at the top end of education; if we did, and saw what a mess it is, reform would happen more quickly. Current popular support for grammar schools, particularly amongst the grammar school educated, was related to a rejection of the 70s model of public services. This was a theme which re-appeared throughout the lecture.

As soon as league tables started to be published, parents moved their children between schools and moved house, with the resulting house price gulf and unfair admissions. Dorling also criticised the trustees of academies and asked 'Who chooses these people?' Another target was selection at 16+, when youngsters may be rejected by their own schools on the basis of GCSE results. This leaves young people with very little time to find alternative education. He

## Danny Dorling (cont)

might have added that the absence of significant advice and support beyond the school which has rejected them makes this decision doubly difficult.

Dorling pointed out that in 1958 Michael Young introduced the idea that by 2033 the country could be run on strictly meritocratic principles, and that Young was trying to portray this as a dystopian vision. But the reintroduction of grammar schools would complete the process early, by picking a few 'golden children' from the working class and dumbing down the rest. It has been a long time since this country has been becoming more equal; it is now more unequal than at any time since the early thirties, and more unequal than any other country in Europe.

Dorling summed up this wide ranging critique of current arrangements by saying that people want something better than we have got. They don't want an exam factory. They don't want underfunded schools, or schools filled with very young teachers because of the turnover, or schools that the middle class avoid.

Turning to how the left might respond to all this damage, Prof Dorling argued that in the past governments, including Labour governments, have tended to introduce change to public services only when forced. The move to comprehensive schools was forced on governments by pressure from groups of middle class parents. Their income was squeezed in the fifties and sixties and could no longer afford private education, and they were horrified at the risk that their children might go to a secondary modern school.

He introduced two themes. First, he complained that the left tend to look back to the period of the move to comprehensive schools and to campaign for a return to that period. But at that time the left was looking forward, suggesting something new, so secondly we should get back to proposing something new, not a return to the past.

Calling for aspiration, he said, 'Suppose we decided that no school should be a sink school'. A big ask indeed, although Prof Dorling did not discuss how such a goal might be achieved. 'Suppose we decided that we would no longer allow tens of thousands of our lower working class children being expelled from our schools every year,' obviously referring to both those officially excluded and those who might be called 'the disappeared' who vanish from the rolls of secondary schools as GCSE approaches. He pointed out that we need schools which recognise that children are individuals who develop in different ways and at different rates.

Prof Dorling then turned to the real pressure for change arising from what is becoming a sustained reduction in real terms funding for the schools sector, which is being exacerbated by the incredibly expensive academies programme. 'In our state schools, we spend very little per child now.' He introduced the ideas previewed in the *Guardian* as new left proposals for schools. The need for savings would force new forms of co-operation. He was not referring to the Co-op academy trust schools, as misinterpreted by the *Guardian*, but to a variety of resource sharing approaches. He first mentioned sharing expensive senior management teams and a single governing body, which should be drawn from staff, pupils, parents and others, and then suggested that staff could move between local schools to share their expertise, for example teachers of minority subjects. Indeed, this could extend to pupils moving between schools to benefit from quality resources such as laboratories and other specialised accommodation. This would embed co-operation. In such a co-operative comprehensive system, where pupils were taught by the co-operative and not the individual school, selection by house price would be prevented.

This may sound fanciful, Prof Dorling said, but progressive ideas must sound not achievable when first suggested. We should move towards such a system slowly and carefully, area by area. He does not believe the current system will be around in 30 years time because we shall run out of money. Turning to our private schools, he believed that 'most of them will be gone' because we shall not be able to afford them or see the use of them. Almost all private schools are charitable because the people who use them understand that if they were profit-making they would be much worse, and that would be the result if charitable status were abolished. Instead, a decline in the demand for fee-paying schools would be a measure of success for the reformed system. He ended by quoting Caroline Benn: 'a hangover fraction of selective schools for the rich is not necessarily alarming.'

All this left the audience with plenty to think about but with little time for questions. Some wondered aloud whether the reform proposals looked a lot like a multi-academy trust model, but the differences in terms of geography and governance were clear. As the meeting broke up, Angela Rayner, who had stayed for the whole lecture and took copious notes, lingered to answer questions from some attendees.

**Danny Dorling is the Halford Mackinder Professor of Geography at the University of Oxford**

# No return to selection

## The Reclaiming Education conference

Reclaiming Education, the alliance of campaigning groups of which SEA is a member, brought together a range of interests opposed to grammar schools at its conference in London on 12th November. The academic, the parent, the campaigners, the union leader – and the Conservative politician – presented a huge variety of reasons to celebrate the success of comprehensive schools and condemn the failure of selection.

Anne West, Professor of Education Policy at LSE, provided an invaluable historical background. The 1944 Education Act introduced universal secondary education but did not prescribe its form, and although the first comprehensive in the country, Walworth School, was established in 1946 the Attlee government was not interested. But by 1962 there were 152, and growing support in local government and amongst parents. When Michael Stewart became a short-lived Education Minister in 1964, he could propose full conversion to comprehensives and be opposed by just 20% of the population. Even then, Labour lacked the courage to act decisively and merely issued two circulars putting pressure on local government to reform their schools. With continued parental support, and even after the 1970 Tory government withdrew the circulars, reform took place almost everywhere.

But this was the high point. With the advent of a new kind of Tory administration in 1979, hope for political consensus on secondary selection disappeared. Instead, we saw the advent of new varieties of school and the growth of 'soft selection', leading towards the academy programme begun by Labour in 2000. Almost all grammar schools are now academies, and public opinion seems unclear on the idea of more. Finally, Prof West suggested that anecdotal evidence is that some schools would take up any new licence to convert to grammar.

Jo Bartley from the Kent Education Network described the realities of selection through accounts of its impacts on some real parents and children. Going through the 11+ test is a contest which causes immense stress to both. The rules are complicated and not always well understood. It is also difficult for teachers and schools. But the stress does not end there, because there are many stories of mental health issues in Kent grammar schools, particularly amongst girls. And those who fail suffer a loss of self-esteem. No wonder that 'If we look at poorer children who achieve Level 5 in Reading, Writing and Maths at Key Stage 2 just half take the test... If the government prioritises families from low income backgrounds, they still have to persuade them to choose grammar schools. But why would they want the stress of a school test? Why would they want to compete against tutored children? Why would they want a long journey to a grammar school instead of a walk to a local school with their friends?'

Ricky Thompson updated his article for Education Politics (No.127 March 2016 p15) on the Fair Admissions campaign, see <https://socedassoc.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/education-politics-march-2016.pdf>

Of the religious secondary schools surveyed, a random one in eight sample, all bar one broke the admissions code – a finding upheld for 98% of the schools by the Office of the Schools Adjudicator. Thompson has calculated that 'The combined impact on socio-economic segregation of religious selection at the primary and secondary phases is in fact twice that caused at grammar schools.' In following sessions of the conference, a number of speakers from the floor echoed the need to deal with faith schools as well as grammars.

# NO RETURN TO SELECTION

In 2016 we planned to celebrate fifty years of comprehensive schools beginning to replace the old selective system of grammar schools and secondary moderns under which children were declared failures at age 11.

Now this Conservative Government has announced increased selection in the form of:

- More new grammar schools
- Extensions to existing grammars
- Forcing Multi-Academy Trusts to create a new form of back-door selection through "Centres of Excellence".

We cannot let this go unopposed and have now retitled our 12th November conference (originally called "The Stalled Revolution") as "No Return to Selection".

A strong line-up of speakers will lead the discussion on what has been achieved - and what remains to be done to save and complete the comprehensive revolution.

Speakers will include:-

- Anne West, Director of Education Research at LSE
- Melissa Benn, journalist and author
- Roy Perry, Conservative Leader of Hampshire County Council
- Joanne Bartley, parent and Education campaigner in Kent
- Ricky Thompson of Fair Admissions Campaign

Online booking is available at [www.ticketsource.co.uk/date/287985](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/date/287985)  
Tickets cost £27.50 (£30 on the door)



We are grateful to the National Union of Teachers for allowing us to use Mander Hall.

Should the Green Paper proposals be enacted, the Catholic authorities would open 40 new secondary schools, and the CofE no fewer than 100. Yet the only countries in the world apart from UK to allow selection on religious grounds are Israel, Ireland and Estonia. The Catholic International Education Office itself states, 'The Catholic school is an inclusive school... It is open to all. In many European, American, Arab, African or Asian countries, Catholic school welcomes mainly, or even exclusively, Muslim pupils, Buddhists, animists, or pupils of other religions, even those without religion.'

## The Reclaiming Education conference (cont)

Roy Perry, the affable Tory Leader of Hampshire County Council, has previously appeared on left wing platforms to oppose any extension of grammar schools. He believes that decisions on their future should be taken locally but stated that the LGA Conservative Group was split on this policy. He would not confirm or deny a suggestion from the floor that 29 Tory MPs were refusing to support the Green Paper proposal, but agreed that backbenchers had forced the withdrawal of the forced academy proposals and suggested that since the grammar proposal had not been in the Conservative manifesto the government would be in difficulty if any Bill reached the House of Lords.

Roy described the success of Hampshire's 11-16 comprehensives and (selective) sixth form colleges. He also asserted that parents want a local democratically accountable person to turn to if things go wrong in their schools. Answering a question about winning public support for comprehensives, Roy referred to a presentation by Ipsos Mori which concluded that the public mood was a nostalgia for a better past.

The final speakers were seasoned campaigners against selection, Melissa Benn and Kevin Courtney. Melissa repeated Anne West's message that Labour has always been ambivalent about phasing out grammar schools and currently lacks political will. The evidence given to the Education Select Committee was clear, and the

government has lost the argument, but not the battle. Melissa also repeated the claim that we are in an era of nostalgia, with resentment of the excluded. Comprehensive Future is working on an alternative admissions policy as another way to address issues of selection.

Kevin opened by celebrating the decisions of NUT and ATL to form a new union; this was warmly welcomed by the audience. He pointed out that forms of selection and exclusion of pupils for league table reasons was already common, and argued that proposals to extend selection were the wrong priority when funding, staffing, and curriculum and assessment problems were piling up. Picking up the theme raised from the floor by SEA's Sheila Doré, he echoed Melissa's argument that schools cannot solve problems of poverty in our society. Kevin ended with the rousing recognition that current policies have failed and we need a system which offers quality and equality for all.

This was an informative and stimulating event, which deserved a larger audience than it attracted. It highlighted a key current question for the left: do we focus for now on exposing the nonsense of the government's proposals, or do we press Labour to adopt wholeheartedly its conference decision – comprehensives for all?

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## More on the history of the Labour Party's position on the 11+

At its Margate conference in 1953, the Party adopted a wide-ranging policy statement which included a commitment to end selection to secondary schools. The 1955 general election manifesto watered this down to a position of encouraging local education authorities to bring forward their own schemes. However, the 1959 manifesto was unambiguous, stating:

*'One of the greatest barriers to equality of opportunity in our schools is the segregation of our children into grammar and other types of school at the age of 11. This is why we shall get rid of the 11-plus examination.'*

This pledge was then repeated in different words in 1964, 1966, 1970, 1974 (twice), 1979, 1983, and 1992 (but strangely not in 1987).

During the sixties it was widely accepted that public opinion largely supported that position. As Prof West described, nevertheless the 1964 Labour government, which had a small majority, reverted to the 1955 position of encouraging local authorities to take the initiative. The 1966 government had other priorities, although a draft bill to implement the pledge was ready before England lost the World Cup and Labour lost the 1970 election.

The next time Labour came into power with a healthy majority was 1997. By then, the world had changed, variety and choice were the watchwords, and there was a political consensus not to rock the grammar school boat. Theresa May has rocked that boat. Can it now be overturned?

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## Forthcoming events

7th January Birmingham: SEA Executive and All members meetings

4th March, Manchester: SEA Executive and All members meetings

13th May, Cardiff: SEA Executive and All members meetings

24th June, London: SEA Annual Conference and AGM

See p15 for details of SEA's policy review. All member meetings take place on Saturday afternoons and details will be notified to members in advance. New attendees particularly welcome.

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**The articles reflect the views of their authors and not the SEA unless indicated otherwise.**

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