



CENTRE FOR POLICY STUDIES

Briefing Note:

GRAMMAR SCHOOLS

Grammar schools achieve higher standards – for all:

- Of course, because grammar schools select the brightest children, they achieve better results. But a 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:

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

- Northern Ireland is a case in point. There, where the 11+ has been retained, 10 per cent more pupils achieve five A*-C grades at GCSE than in England. And at 'A' level, 30 per cent of entrants achieve an A grade, compared to 22 per cent in England.
- Research by Prof. Jesson of York University followed a cross-section of the most able pupils (those who achieved the top 5 per cent 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 A*s or As at GCSE for this group in selective schools was significantly higher than the average for those who had gone on to comprehensives.¹

Grammar schools help the poor:

- As David Willetts acknowledges, 'For those children from modest backgrounds who do get to grammar schools the benefits are enormous'.²
 - Once again, Northern Ireland illustrates this: 42 per cent of university entrants there come from less privileged backgrounds – compared to only 28 per cent in England.³
- **But Mr. Willetts is wrong to suggest that grammar schools entrench social immobility.** If the existing grammar schools do so, it is because there are *too few* of them at present:
 - The remaining 162 grammar schools are predominantly in leafy, affluent areas – there are 45, for instance, in Kent alone.
 - 76 per cent of LEAs have no grammar schools at all.
 - We welcome Mr. Willetts's commitment to drive up educational standards in our inner cities. We believe that an excellent way of doing this would be to increase access to good, selective schools in these areas.

¹ See *The Sunday Times*, 5 February 2006

² David Willetts MP, speech to CBI Conference on Public Service Reform, 16 May 2007

³ *The Sunday Telegraph*, 15 January 2006

The real inequality now is that middle-class parents can – and do – work around the system:

- Mr. Willetts cites a Sutton Trust study showing 2 per cent of pupils at grammar schools receiving free school meals compared to an average for the local area of 12 per cent.
 - But the same problem affects comprehensives. The Sutton Trust has also shown that only 5.6 per cent of pupils at the country's top 200 comprehensives qualify for free meals, compared to a national average of over 14 per cent.
- Mr. Willetts cites the research of Burgess and Briggs, which had found that poor children are half as likely to go to good academic schools as other children.
- This is because more affluent parents are prepared – and financially able – to buy their children a way in to the best state schools by moving house.
- As Mr. Willetts acknowledges in his speech, 'middle-class parents invest far more effort in raising their kids than they did a generation ago':
 - A recent survey by the ING Direct bank found that 39 per cent of parents with children under 15 would consider moving house to ensure their child got into a good school – and that 12 per cent had already done so.⁴
 - Being in a catchment area for a popular school can add a huge premium to house prices. For instance, houses within the catchment area of the girls' school in Watford, which is ranked 45th among comprehensives in this year's *Sunday Times* survey, are on average 10% higher than those outside according to local estate agents Watford Estates.
- As the schools minister himself, Lord Adonis, has noted: '**Comprehensive schools have largely replaced selection by ability with selection by class and house price**'.⁵

The public supports selection:

- The CPS commissioned a poll from ICM which showed that the majority of the public now favour some form of selection.⁶
- 76% believe that *more academic* children can maximise their potential at secondary school through streaming or by attending selective schools:
 - 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.
- 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 Reported in *The Guardian*, 12 September 2006

⁵ Andrew Adonis & Stephen Pollard, *A Class Act: the Myth of Britain's Classless Society* (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 54-5

⁶ ICM interviewed 1,006 respondents in an omnibus survey on 21 and 22 June 2006.