

EXTRACT FROM DAVID DAVIS' SPEECH ON GRAMMAR SCHOOLS

“I want to create an Opportunity Society. To make that a reality we need people who start near the bottom of the pile to be able to make it to the top. Good schools are absolutely crucial in that process. In particular, poor children need to be able to receive the best academic education—the sort that better off parents have the power to demand for their children.

One of the main reasons why social mobility is declining under this Government is the disappearance of grammar schools from most parts of the country. The areas where this creates the worst social barriers are our big cities. In many of these you find a concentration of social deprivation which gives teachers an almost impossible challenge. The schools themselves need to be able to focus better, and part of this focus should be the ability to offer academic excellence.

So as Prime Minister I would extend the range of choice available to parents and children in our big cities, I would, as an initial step, create 20 new grammar schools in the big cities of England, so that children from all backgrounds can benefit from the best academic education. This will revolutionise education in our inner cities. Instead of rigging university admission systems, or bussing children around cities, we will create equality of opportunity through the simple step of giving poor children the same choice that well-off children have always had. We will designate the schools to play this pioneering role, from those within the current City Academy programme.

This goes further than the Conservative policy at the last election, which allowed schools to set their own admissions policy. Some grammar schools may have been created through this regime, but it is extremely unlikely that any would have appeared in the more deprived areas of our cities. It will take a conscious act by Government to achieve this. I want to see these 20 added to the existing 164 grammar schools in our first term, acting as a beacon of excellence, and creating more choice for parents. I hope other schools would follow, and we would obviously keep the position under constant review.

The Government's position on this is ludicrous. Just read the Prime Minister's foreword to the Education White Paper. He says, “Many other countries have successful experience with school choice. There is increasing international

evidence that school choice systems can maintain high levels of equity and improve standards. Swedish parents can choose an alternative school to their local one, including a diverse range of state-funded independent schools.”

I agree with all of that. The difference is that I will make that choice a reality. This Government allows schools to specialise in musical excellence, or sporting excellence, or scientific excellence. But, for reasons of old-fashioned class warfare, it denies them the chance to specialise in academic excellence. Let’s sweep away this outdated prejudice.

Of course we need to do much more to improve our education system. In particular we need to concentrate efforts on technical and vocational education, where we have failed to keep up with other countries. This is another form of specialisation which will enhance the choice I want to offer every family.”