



National Grammar Schools' Association

**“Grammar Schools
in the
Twenty-first Century”**

Autumn 2001

National Grammar Schools' Association

- Founded in the 1970s the NGSA is a non-political organization
- It is made up of Parents, Governors, Heads and educationalists concerned to promote the interests of Grammar Schools and public awareness of their role
- It seeks, through factual information and reasoned argument, to contribute to the national and local debate on the future of our schools.

GRAMMAR SCHOOLS IN THE 21st CENTURY

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For up-to-the-minute responses, consult the NGSA Web-Site

www.ngsa.org.uk

Introduction

In summer 2000, in reply to a written Parliamentary Question, Baroness Blackstone, then a Minister at the Department of Education and Employment, stated that 13% of the A and B grades at A Level were gained by pupils from the surviving Grammar Schools and 25% by the Independent Schools. This means that about 40% of the top grades at A level were gained by children of around 10% of the school population.

All the Grammar Schools, and some of the Independent Schools, are specialist schools catering for pupils with specific academic abilities.

This specialization is obviously successful and it is good to see the Government recognizing its value in the recent White Paper.

In Europe, the value of Specialist Schools has long been recognised. In Germany, pupils divide at thirteen into academic schools (Gymnasium) and vocational schools. The same system operates in Holland while in many other countries the division occurs at sixteen. This specialisation is obviously valued in that, when the East German State collapsed, the Comprehensive system was largely abandoned and the West German model of specialised schools adopted. Specialization is valued because it is not only successful for academic pupils but benefits those with other gifts, across a wide range of aptitudes, particularly in the vocational field.

The White Paper goes some way to recognizing this but is too timid because of ancient ideological battles.

The papers in this Pamphlet show the advantages of specialization in the academic areas and support its extension to pupils with other equally valuable gifts.

Statistics and foreign experience suggest that thought should be given to providing more specialist Grammar Schools and prestigious, specialist vocational schools.

Peter Pilkington

Grammar Schools and the White Paper

The Government White Paper September 2001 confirms that National Education Policy increasingly recognizes the importance of diverse and specialist provision for the wide range of aptitude of pupils at the Secondary level.

The 164 Grammar Schools are proud of the high and improving standard of performance of their pupils both in developing their academic aptitude and in the broad education that all good schools offer in developing the whole person.

Grammar Schools are equally conscious of the complementary nature of their working alongside schools that offer provision for pupils of different aptitudes.

Currently, following specialization under the changes of the past two decades, different patterns of local diversity include:

Grammar Schools which develop pupils with academic aptitude to GCSE, AS and A Level, some including GNVQ Courses.

City Technology Colleges ("CTC"s) which may select according to their own criteria, (some selecting wholly on tests), which develop aptitudes and all of which offer specialisation in a range of qualifications.

Specialist Technology Schools, some selecting totally on test, which develop aptitude and all of which offer specialization to a range of qualifications

Other Specialist Schools which may select on aptitude in *arts, sport, languages*.

The White Paper envisages extension of specialization to *engineering, enterprise, science, mathematics and computing*.

City Academies and *Faith Schools* are proposed to extend the City College and Denominational principle.

The NGSA

- a) **Supports this development in view of the body of evidence demonstrating that standards reached by pupils in Grammar Schools and in other schools taken together in a diverse Selective system are superior to those in a fully Comprehensive system;**
- b) **Deplores the fact that the Grammar Schools alone are discriminated against by current legislation on parental ballots;**
- c) **Urges that consideration be given to increasing the number of Grammar Schools in areas where there is a parental demand.**

John Harris

A Rebuttal of Attempts to Undermine Selective Schools

Educationists who oppose allowing young people the opportunity of a grammar school education regularly produce 'evidence' and 'research' purporting to indicate that academic standards are higher in a comprehensive system than in a selective system. Recent examples include:

1. A parliamentary answer prepared by Department for Education statisticians for Baroness Blackstone and Lord Bach, later used by Lord Hattersley in an article in *The Guardian* (22 May 2000).
2. *Evaluating Performance at GCSE in LEAs and Schools of Differing Types* by Professor David Jesson (2000). Also *The Comparative Evaluation of GCSE Value-Added Performance by Type of School and LEA* by Professor David Jesson (undated).
3. *Comprehensive Secondary Education: Building on Success* by Professor Clyde Chitty, Professor Tony Edwards, Professor Ron Glatter, Professor Margaret Maden, Professor Richard Pring, Professor Sally Tomlinson, Dr Anne West and Professor Geoff Whitty (2001).
4. 'The high price communities pay for their grammars' by Professor David Jesson, Parliamentary Brief (August 2001).

Below is a summary of some of the fundamental flaws in the 'evidence' put forward by the above.

- 1) On 6 April 2000, education ministers produced figures in the House of Lords in support of an earlier claim by Baroness Blackstone that the brightest pupils do better at comprehensive schools than at grammar schools.
 - **But the DfEE's Analytical Services had made basic errors, which any bright 16-year-old would have spotted.**
 - **The Department's statisticians compared results achieved by only the top 25 per cent of comprehensive pupils with the results of ALL grammar school pupils. Because 5 or more grade A*-C GCSEs were taken as the benchmark and 45 per cent of comprehensive pupils reach this level, any calculation based on any proportion of their top pupils which was under 45 per cent was bound to show 100 per cent success. (Using the same 'logic', because the top 33 per cent of secondary modern pupils achieve 5 or more grade A*-Cs, if ONLY the top 25 per cent of their pupils are considered, they too will show 100 per cent success.) And because most schools of whatever type have some pupils who, for a variety of reasons, fail to get a higher grade, by including all the grammar school pupils and comparing them with only the highest achievers (i.e. the top percentage) in other types of school, civil servants ensured that the grammar schools were placed at a further disadvantage in their calculations.**
- 2) In November 1999, Professor David Jesson claimed that 'very able pupils in comprehensive schools do as well as their counterparts in grammar schools' and that there was 'no advantage for these pupils in attending a grammar as opposed to a comprehensive school'. When he made these claims, Professor Jesson had not published the data on which his claims were based, thus making it impossible to verify or contradict them. Since then, his work has been published.
 - **But it was strongly criticised by Dr John Marks, who has been researching and publishing statistical information on standards since 1981. As Dr Marks points out (*Examination Results: The Truth* (www.ngsa.org.uk)) Professor Jesson fails to quote real, unadjusted results alongside his adjusted data. He fails to consider progress made during the full period of secondary education from the age of 11 to 16 (or, indeed, in primary schools). Instead, he concentrates only on the 'value added' between 14 and 16 years of age. Naturally, pupils who make good progress up to 14 are unlikely to make**

the same rapid progress from 14 to 16 as pupils who made slower progress earlier. Again, the grammar schools are placed at a disadvantage.

Professor Jesson's claims were also examined by renowned researcher and statistician, Professor S.J. Prais, whose analysis, 'Grammar Schools' Achievements and the DfEE's Measures of Value-added: an attempt at clarification' was published in the Oxford Review of Education, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2001.

Professor Jesson had claimed he could find 'no evidence for the superiority of either grammar schools nor selective systems of educational provision; indeed any advantages appear to lie with those schools and systems organised on non-selective lines.'

- By contrast and after examining the same DfEE data, Professor Prais concludes that, "as measuring rods" the DfEE data was "hardly adequate, but insofar as they are used for these purposes, the results indicate precisely the opposite: namely the greater average progress (greater 'value-added') for grammar schools, and for high-attaining pupils in grammar schools."
 - It should be stressed that Professor Jesson was supplied with a pre-publication copy of Professor Prais's paper and he agreed with its conclusions. On 21 May 2001, it was reported in The Daily Telegraph that the 'Anti-grammar school data was wrong' and that Professor Jesson had 'retracted his findings'.
- 3) In July 2001, a paper by Professor Clyde Chitty and 7 other high-ranking academics was published by the Campaign for State Education on its website. This claimed that 'Selective systems do not raise standards overall' and that 'Standards have risen, not fallen, since comprehensive education was introduced'.
- But these 8 academics dismiss the findings in Dr John Marks's *The Betrayed Generations* (CPS, 2000) as "'what if' estimates which are untestable". Yet in his study covering standards and exam results over the last fifty years, Dr Marks found that: 'These results indicate that selection is better for all pupils and not just those selected to attend grammar schools. The average advantage is about 25 per cent for GCSE and more for basic subjects like English and Mathematics, and about 20 per cent or 18 months of progress at the age of 14. The good overall performance of a selective system is, in part, due to the widely under-rated secondary modern schools.' He also found that 'The [5 A*-C grade GCSE] figures for Northern Ireland (which has retained its selective schools) are about 10 per cent absolutely and 40 per cent relatively above those for England.'
 - More seriously, the claim by Professor Chitty et al that 'standards have risen, not fallen, since comprehensive education was introduced' is misleading without any consideration of the standards and marking/ grading of the examinations. As Fred Naylor shows in *The Comparison of Standards between the Comprehensive and Selective Systems*, today's secondary modern schools have nearly twice the success rate in 16-plus examinations as did the WHOLE of the maintained sector in 1967. Higher grade 16-plus examination passes in secondary modern schools have risen 16-fold between 1967 and the present day - from 2.1 per cent to 32.8 per cent. So does this mean standards have risen phenomenally, not just in comprehensive schools but also in the much maligned secondary modern schools? Or does it mean that exam standards are lower than they were?
- 4) In his article in Parliamentary Brief, Professor Jesson disgracefully asks 'where's the evidence?' that selective schools offer the 'best education', implying that no statistics or conclusions other than his own and his ideological allies' have ever been published. Whilst getting the number of grammar schools wrong, he also claims that 'selective education depresses the performance of

whole communities' by suggesting that youngsters who fail to win places in grammar schools, where they exist, do not do as well as they should.

Furthermore, he makes the obviously false claim that supporters of grammar schools have ignored the results from secondary modern schools.

- By simply asking 'where's the evidence?', Professor Jesson pretends to his readers that the wealth of evidence published by others does not exist. His further claim that supporters of grammar schools do not consider results from secondary modern schools alongside those of grammar schools is simply untrue, as the words of Dr John Marks and Fred Naylor, above, show.

It should also be noted that claims that standards have risen simply because exam results have improved were again brought into question in August 2001, when Jeffrey Robinson, a recently retired chief examiner, exposed how GCSE grade marks have been systematically reduced year after year to produce more high-grade passes.

Thus people on both sides of the debate are confused and deceived. But clearly, any observer in possession of the full facts will see that pupil performance will be raised by further extension of specialist schools which, most importantly, must include maintaining and increasing the availability of grammar and other selective schools.

Nick Seaton

It's All About Diversity and Choice

At the beginning of the 21st century, only the most diehard of ideologues would deny that competition raises standards. And it goes without saying that competition between goods and services can only take place where there is choice.

Consider, for example, the computer industry which was in its infancy a mere 20 years ago. Fierce competition and choice, coupled with some elements of standardisation, have resulted in unimaginable gains for producers and consumers, plus a steady reduction in prices.

The contrasting performance of state monopolies could not be more striking. In particular, the English, Scottish and Welsh state education systems have all gone into marked decline over the last two or three decades.¹ In the meantime, costs have inexorably risen. The only country in the UK where educational standards are not at the same low ebb is Northern Ireland. Is it just coincidence that Northern Ireland is the only country in Britain to have retained diversity, choice, and many selective schools?

Indeed most people regard it as common sense that because everyone is not the same, there should be different types of school to cater for different aptitudes and abilities. Surely, we should be grateful that some of us are academic, some are practical, and most of us are probably a mixture of the two? In order to flourish, any successful society needs different kinds of people. And yes, there are many excellent comprehensive schools providing an excellent education for their pupils. But why the overwhelming need for uniformity?

The answer lies in a mixture of ideology, philosophy and politics. (If the argument were to be conducted purely on educational grounds, selective education would win hands down.) The sad fact is that there are two opposing philosophies of education battling it out for supremacy, not just in the British education system, but in all the major democracies. Generally, they are recognised as 'traditional' and 'progressive', though there are minor variations.

At its simplest, the traditional philosophy (supported by most parents and employers) suggests that the purpose of education is to transfer a body of knowledge from one generation to the next in order for the recipient to reach his or her full potential and gain worthwhile qualifications. Key tenets of the traditional philosophy include acceptance of hierarchies, respect for authority, knowledge of subject-centred content, accuracy, factual evidence and recognition of right and wrong. Also, there should be a product, but above all competition and choice to maximise individual strengths.

By contrast, the progressive philosophy holds that the primary purpose of education is to change the attitudes and values of society. Here, the emphasis is on egalitarianism, child-centredness, skills, relevance and self-discovery. Feelings are more important than facts and right and wrong are relative – they depend on one's point of view. The process matters more than the product and co-operation more than competition. Entitlement for all displaces choice.

Despite the progressive pretence that the product is unimportant, it seems clear that these two different types of education are likely to produce very different outcomes. Parents and employers know this, as do most teachers though few dare admit it publicly.

But massive problems arise – and not just in the selective versus comprehensive schools debate – because our state education system as a whole is increasingly committed to the progressive philosophy. Within the system, and especially in teacher training institutions, it is well understood that any opposition to progressivism is not conducive to a successful career. Meanwhile, state education generally is falling into disrepute. Morale in the teaching profession is at an all-time low.

The current crisis was more or less foreseen 25 years ago. In a seminal book, *Comprehensive Values*, P.E. Daunt explained the developing conflict between the values imposed in the world of state education, which he supported, and those of the wider world outside: 'What the comprehensive teacher learns is that his task is radically different from that of the grammar or independent school

¹ See, for example, *The Betrayed Generations* by John Marks, Centre for Policy Studies, 2000.

teacher, who is still the established model of respected and proved success in his profession. This creates for him a crisis of esteem, including self-esteem . . . yet he feels that he is in the right. From this it follows that the crisis of esteem must be a conflict of values. He must strive to identify those values, and then to induce the world around him to embrace them too.’²

Note ‘he *feels* that he is in the right’ and Daunt’s recognition of the ‘conflict of values’. It is not necessary to have a degree in psychology to understand that striving to ‘feel’ or believe something which is contradicted by evidence (and common sense) is bound to create stress and mental conflict!

Yet there is a simple way to reconcile these deep philosophical differences. That is to be honest about them and follow the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which allows parents the ‘prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.’ The European Convention on Human Rights is even more explicit, in that it gives parents the right to have their children educated ‘in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions.’

But here again, problems arise because progressive ideology is totalitarian by nature. (Traditionalists, it seems, can live with progressives, but there is no reciprocal tolerance.)

If political requirements are set aside and the government means what it says about diversity, there is no reason why existing – and new – grammar schools should not thrive in peace with their own particular ethos and with entrance dependent on passing a voluntary exam. Those families who, for philosophical or other reasons, prefer their child to avoid the 11-plus or prefer a comprehensive education should be free to choose. But so, too, should those with a more traditional view or different aspirations.

Unfortunately, because they fear competition, progressives cannot allow choice. So long as schools with more traditional learning styles exist, there is always a danger of invidious comparisons. Indeed, at the heart of the matter is egalitarianism – not liberal democratic equality of opportunity, but sinister, Marxian equality of result.

P.E. Daunt is quite frank: ‘The first point to emphasise is that the comprehensive principle has every intention of ousting from its position of eminence the principle of equality of opportunity.’ He also admits that ‘the comprehensive drive is not something isolated...but part of some wider movement...It is distinctly an underground movement.’

He is hostile to the choice of single-sex schools, church schools and, of course, selective schools. According to Daunt, public examinations at sixteen should be abolished and he looks forward to the ‘total elimination of the independent schools’.

Professor David Hargreaves who, in the year 2000 was appointed chief executive of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), is equally frank in his book, *The Challenge for the Comprehensive School*, which is frequently recommended on teacher-training courses: ‘A change of emphasis was essential from academic to social subjects, and from the learning of information to the acquisition of skills...We must refuse to confine education to the culture of individualism and design a secondary education with more social and political objectives.’³

In 1997, Professor Stephen Ball wrote that: ‘...Within the UK education system, there is now a struggle underway over values...On the one side are the values of comprehensivism...based upon communitarian principles...On the other side, the market...’⁴

More recently still, Professor Tim Brighouse, Birmingham’s chief education officer, perhaps showed why the progressive philosophy is not widely supported outside the closed world of state education.

² *Comprehensive Values* by P.E. Daunt, Heinemann Educational Books, 1975

³ *The Challenge for the Comprehensive School: Culture, Curriculum and Community*, RKP, 1982. Incidentally, Hargreaves also argued for ‘the abolition of all the sixteen-plus examinations’ so that the comprehensive school curriculum could be ‘reconstructed or revised.’ As head of the QCA, he is now working seriously towards that objective.

⁴ *Affirming the Comprehensive Ideal* edited by Richard Pring and Geoffrey Walford, Falmer Press, 1997.

According to an open letter written by Brighouse to a new education secretary, 'the curriculum needs tackling also. There is too much information at the expense of skills, attitudes and values.'⁵

Never mind that in the real world, the market has now triumphed almost universally over 'communitarian principles'. None of these leading educationists wants real diversity or choice. In their view, it is quite acceptable to sacrifice individual pupil achievement and parental aspirations for political ideology.

'Ah, yes', opponents of selective education would say, 'but they are right. What about the majority of young people who are unable to choose a grammar school, because they cannot pass their 11-plus? Parents and their children don't choose schools, schools choose pupils.'

Like all such arguments against choice, this is disingenuous. Because we cannot all afford (or may not want) a large or very luxurious car, does that mean all such cars should be banned and we should all drive Ford Fiestas? And if Fiestas were the only cars available, albeit in different colours, would that be choice or would it be an infringement of liberty?

In the real world it seems obvious that a minority of young people can benefit immensely from the very academic education provided in most grammar schools. As a society, we should not discriminate against this minority, nor deny these youngsters the opportunity to flourish. Similarly, there are young people who can benefit from (and are happier with) a less academic, more practical, type of education. These youngsters, too, should be encouraged to flourish in their own chosen fields. Nor should secondary modern schools be under funded. Their pupils are not failures: they are different. Because we don't all have the ability (or the wish or aptitude) to become a brain surgeon or a Queen's Counsel, does this mean, as opponents of selective schools suggest, that anyone who doesn't reach the top echelon in any chosen field is a failure? Of course not!

Other countries such as Germany and Switzerland, where educational standards are generally higher than here, manage selection without rancour. In those countries, the success of individual pupils matters more than political ideology and selection does not carry the same fears because pupils can move fairly freely between different types of school, if they will benefit. German teachers have recently voted by a considerable majority to retain their selective schools!

Progressivism should never be under-estimated. It has its proponents deep in the heart of government, along with access to taxpayers' money. For example, only a committed ideologue would fund and promote dubious research such as that produced by Professor David Jesson to manipulate exam results and mislead the public.

Nor should other signs of the progressive drive to egalitarianism and aversion to choice be ignored. This destructive ideology has massive effects on overall policies. Its adherents have already worked successfully to combine CSEs and O-levels into GCSEs in an attempt to cater for all abilities with a single exam. Under the guise of reforming the curriculum for 14 to 19 year-olds and introducing AS-levels, they are now causing chaos and dissatisfaction with the A-level system to justify its 'reform'. And, of course, the transformation of polytechnics and higher education colleges into universities in their own right was another major step towards egalitarianism.

Nevertheless, a wealth of evidence suggests that none of these 'reforms' has actually raised standards.⁶

If standards are to be improved nationally, surely it makes sense *not* to undermine successful schools, but to make changes only to those that are failing their pupils? Government ministers, from the prime minister down, keep promising that interference with the running of schools will be in inverse proportion to the school's success. But if that is so, and raising standards is truly the main objective, why are some of the best schools in the country (the grammar schools) under constant threat? As the

⁵ *Times Educational Supplement*, June 2001.

⁶ See, for example, 'Nonsense in any language' by an anonymous professor of French, *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 January 2001; 'What is university for now?' by Dr Frank Furedi, *The Sunday Times*, 20 May 2001 and 'Eviscerating Oxford' by Robert Stevens, *The Spectator*, 14 July 2001.

former chief inspector of schools, Chris Woodhead, has written: 'This is not a sensible way to proceed. A government which has recognised that it is good for schools to offer different specialisms should have the courage of its convictions and offer genuine selection. If the Government really wants to do something for bright inner-city children, it must have the courage to upset some of its own MPs and establish a few dozen inner-city grammar schools.'⁷

Why, if not for purely ideological reasons, was it necessary for the excellent Ripon Grammar School to spend money and valuable time over most of a 12-month period to protect itself from closure? And why, too, is Ripon's former secondary modern school now a successful technology school and applying for foundation status to escape as far as possible from the malign influence of its local education authority?

In truth, government policy on diversity and choice is incoherent and contradictory. Where it is understood by voters, it is deeply unpopular, as opinion polls regularly show. In practice, parents may be allowed some limited choice, but only between comprehensive schools with a slightly different ethos. Many would argue that this refusal to acknowledge fundamental philosophical differences is, in itself, totalitarian and deeply sinister.

Tony Blair is happy to identify himself as a progressive. The anti-grammar school lobby quotes him from 1996: 'The grammar school system was a response to the needs of a vanished society that required a small educated class and a large number of manual workers. It is no longer the appropriate model for a world where most jobs require educated men and women.'⁸

At the launch of his Green Paper on education in Spring 2001 (below), Tony Blair said: 'The fierce battle between supporters of a rigid form of selection at the age of 11 and those who believe in schools that were fully inclusive and gave equal opportunities to pupils regardless of ability is largely resolved *apart from some voices on the far right* (emphasis added).'⁹

Such gross dishonesty is unbelievable: Firstly, 'rigid' forms of selection are only required by *opponents* of selection so they can capitalise on them to produce dissatisfaction with the system – in fact the system could work better if it was more flexible as in Germany; and secondly, to classify supporters of selection as 'far right', as though it is they who have totalitarian instincts, is insulting in the extreme. But that, dear reader, is the nature of progressivism!

Nevertheless, just before the last election, Tony Blair's press secretary, Alistair Campbell, famously remarked that the days of the 'bog-standard' comprehensive school were over. To gain favourable media coverage and to show that New Labour was 'in touch with the people', he was acknowledging that the lack of competition and choice between different types of school was damaging – that his government's policies were (and are) incoherent and almost certainly unpopular.¹⁰

But having taken advantage of their privileged position to make excellent choices of school for their own children, the Blair family could not continue to deny that a particular ethos or philosophy can, and often does, provide something special in a school. That the Blair choices were for (excellent) comprehensive schools matters not one jot – the point is that they could make choices, as could many of their colleagues who have been able to choose grammar schools for their own children.

So whilst the government has recognised that diversity and choice matter to the voters, those who make policy are still prevented by their ideological baggage from allowing real diversity and genuine choice. Although the government's Green Paper¹¹ promises 'greater diversity of provision', it does not allow for new grammar schools, or even freedom from interference for those that remain. To keep the voters happy, almost any form of selection, real or imagined, is to be allowed except honest

⁷ Chris Woodhead, *The Daily Telegraph Education Guide*, Part 3, 2001.

⁸ *Comprehensive Secondary Education: Building on Success* by Professor Clive Chitty et al, Campaign for State Education, 2001.

⁹ Quoted by Dr John Marks in *Parliamentary Brief*, May 2001.

¹⁰ When York's grammar and secondary modern schools were under threat in the mid-1980s, an opinion poll of more than two thousand householders, including many living on council estates, showed that 84 per cent wished to keep the good schools and less than 12 per cent wanted them abolished.

¹¹ *Schools – Building on Success*, The Stationary Office, 2001.

selection on the grounds of proven academic ability.¹² Estate agents suggest that proximity to a good school may add £20,000 to the price of a house. That, apparently, is acceptable but yet again, outdated political ideology is poised to deny genuine diversity, choice and parental rights.

Of course, there are honest socialists such as the author, Iris Murdoch, who has written: 'Schools are like states, easier to destroy than to build.' On the consequences of the loss of selective schools, she advised: 'The children who will be lost forever are the poor clever children who are being denied the right to a strict academic education which can only be achieved on the basis of some sort of selection. Why should socialist policy of all things be so grossly unfair to the underprivileged clever child, avid to learn, able to learn in those precious years when strenuous learning is joy and when and when the whole intellectual and moral future of the human being is at stake?'¹³

Meanwhile, the politicians who set national policy and make our laws should be asked two fundamental questions:

When supporters of selection and the traditional philosophy are quite happy to co-exist with progressives and the choice of comprehensive schools, why are their totalitarian, anti-choice opponents allowed to deny diversity and choice to others?

And, when will those who govern us ensure that, as far as practically possible, all parents, regardless of their personal philosophy and their ability to pay, will be able to make similar choices for their children that Tony Blair has made for his?¹⁴

Though it is said that state education (along with the National Health Service) were high among the voters' priorities at the last election, it is also said that the winner of the 2001 general election was the 'I won't vote for any of you' party. With 41 per cent of the electorate not voting at all - as against only 25 per cent voting for New Labour, it seems obvious that no political party was offering what voters wanted. Perhaps politicians generally would have more support if they were to offer genuine diversity and choice? Pure spin and weasel words such as the dishonest use of 'diversity' have had their day.

Those who support the traditional philosophy of education are not against change or stuck in the past. They just believe that, before it is carried out, any change should be supported by objective evidence which *proves* it will bring genuine improvements. Feelings alone are not enough and, as Fred Naylor shows, those who seek to destroy or undermine good schools for ideological reasons are still a long way from proving anything.

Nick Seaton

¹² Even the left-leaning Independent newspaper, whose editorial staff are no friends of grammar schools, had the grace to admit in its leader: 'At least selection by academic ability had the potential to offer equal opportunities to equally able people, regardless of their ethnic, cultural or class origins and to do so in a relatively transparent way.' *The Independent*, 15 June 2001.

¹³ 'Socialism and Selection' in *The Black Papers* edited by Brian Cox and Dr Sir Rhodes Boyson, 1975.

¹⁴ These questions do not just apply to the grammar schools. Dr John Marks has found that, on average, all our remaining secondary modern schools produce better results than a third (about 700) of our comprehensive schools. So the propaganda put out by opponents of selection that secondary modern pupils are failures is also part of the big lie.

The Comparison of Standards Between the Comprehensive and Selective Systems

The first attempt to compare the performances of the two systems was commissioned by Anthony Crossland in 1965. It started off as a full-scale enquiry by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), but was abandoned and became a study limited to three reports. The final report, *A Critical Appraisal of Comprehensive Education*, appeared in 1972. One of its main findings was that only one of the 11 fully developed comprehensive schools examined came at or above the national average in respect of the proportion of pupils gaining certificates with two or more A-level passes. The comments of Guy Neave, a social scientist and comprehensive school supporter, are apposite. He wrote: [1]

"The advent of the comprehensive education system stands as one of the most significant developments in secondary education since 1902, that is, from the time when the State first supported secondary education. Yet this event has remained virtually unaccompanied by any sustained research of an empirical variety. To be sure, we have had £100,000 worth of bromide from the NFER. But that ceased in 1972, after the appearance of three reports remarkable only for the virtuosity with which they avoided the major issues.

" . . . without adequate up to date information we can only discuss the issue in terms of prejudice. Morally unjustifiable also because, without such enquiries and information, we are, in effect asking parents to endorse our convictions, beliefs and prejudices either for or against comprehensive education, without the opportunity of making their own judgement on the development of a national education system."

The Labour Government did not feel the need to justify the comprehensive system in terms of its academic achievements. Its main motives were ideological. As Prof. Brian Simon argued in 1975, selective and comprehensive schools are based respectively on meritocratic and egalitarian philosophies. "These two philosophies are, as it were, powered by opposite ideas as to the nature of the child, his learning and the good society -yet all existing concurrently." [2]. Five years earlier Simon had argued the need for comprehensives to stress GCE academic achievement during the transitional phase, "the more so in areas where the problem of 'selling' the comprehensive is most urgent." [3]. (p.66)

The same concern for overcoming public suspicion in respect of academic standards was shown by Prof. Robin Pedley, who in *The Comprehensive School*, 1963, produced 'evidence' which shocked the grammar school lobby and greatly helped to speed up comprehensivisation. It was later criticised for its biased sample, which Pedley had not acknowledged. For example, the 67 comprehensives in his survey included only one from the ILEA and GLC areas (containing 15% of the nation's secondary school children) and 24 from Wales (containing only 6% of the same population). 41 of his comprehensives were in country towns.

The fact that comprehensivists place ideology way ahead of academic achievement demands that any claims they make, based on the latter, be given special scrutiny. Biases are often unconscious in these circumstances.

Some fallacies in comparative exercises

1. The *a priori* fallacy

It is often argued on *a priori* grounds that because the selection process is inefficient some children who are allocated to secondary moderns should have gone to grammar schools (and vice versa) This results in an overall waste of talent, it is suggested.

The argument is of course full of fallacies. Yes, it is true that the 11+ is not 100% accurate. It is also true that the top pupils in secondary modern schools do better in public examinations than some in grammar schools. We know this only because the secondary moderns have run GCE, CSE and - later on - GCSE courses. Such overlap courses are of course essential if we wish to avoid deciding a child's future at 11. They are fundamental to the system. They provide opportunities for their pupils to proceed to A-level courses. There can be no way of deducing that they would have done better, or even as well, in a comprehensive school. The principle on which the selective system is based is flexibility with the possibility of lateral transfer across a differentiated or multi-line system - as practised with great success in the tripartite systems of Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

It is not difficult to find fault with the tripartite system. The fallacy in the argument we are examining, however, is the failure to recognise that the comprehensive system has its faults too. To use an analogy, a team which has reached the F.A. Cup Final may have several perceived weaknesses. Only a fool though would assess its chances of winning without examining the strengths and weaknesses of its opponent. The comprehensive system is not without its faults. Selection also occurs in the comprehensive, as its year 7 pupils pass through the system to emerge as year 11 pupils, or sixth-formers, with qualifications spread over a widening range. Additionally, the lack of competition in both the feeder primary and comprehensive might weaken the stimulus to succeed. The much larger size of the comprehensive might reduce its efficiency. Its more egalitarian ethos might adversely affect discipline. And so on.

There is simply no known way in a theoretical analysis of balancing the putative faults of the tripartite system against those of the comprehensive system. All *a priori* reasoning, including psychological theorising yields no more than what Neave alluded to as prejudiced convictions. It is futile in settling this issue. The only real way of adjudging the standards argument is by a contest based on empirical evidence.

Because of the presence of high achieving Modern pupils ** a straight comparison of the performances of Grammar school and Comprehensive school pupils will give an unfair advantage to the latter. Fair comparisons can only be made between the Comprehensives on the one hand and Grammars and Moderns on the other.

Note

The NFER *Achievement in Mathematics*, 1967, showed that for 15-year olds "it is approximately true that the top 15% of Modern pupils score higher . . . [in the maths tests set in year 5] . . . than the bottom 15% of Grammar pupils" (p.107). For O-level candidates, taking the same tests, it was said that "Surprisingly, however, Modern school pupils perform better than Comprehensive school pupils."(p.108).

2. The post hoc ergo propter hoc fallacy

It is often argued that because examination successes are now higher than they were before comprehensivisation took place this proves that comprehensivisation has raised standards. In point of fact the greatest rate of improvement in A-level achievement in maintained schools occurred when the tripartite system was predominant (the percentage of school leavers with 2 or more A-levels increased from 4.8 to 9.6 between 1962 and 1968). This notwithstanding, it is a fallacy to argue that because B followed A it was caused by A. This will be better understood when it is recognised that the improvement in grades referred to is a feature of grammar and secondary modern schools too. As previously shown, secondary modern schools have achieved an eighteenfold increase in the percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more higher grades in the 16+ examination since 1967. A proper comparison would be between the improvement in grades occurring in comprehensive schools and the improvement occurring in grammar and modern schools combined -over the same period.

This fallacious argument was the principal one employed by the joint authors of *Comprehensive Secondary Education: Building on Success* – a Briefing paper published on the CASE website, July 2001, by Prof. Clyde Chitty and seven others. It is no less fallacious from being employed jointly, by eight people who ought to know better. It is a vivid testimony to the poverty of their argument. They were desperately seeking to draw a veil over the Government's deep disillusionment with comprehensives.

Conclusion

The only valid comparisons are those between systems operating over the same period of time and in the same general cultural framework. Even here, comparisons will be misleading if due account is not taken of socio-economic and other background factors. Statistical devices, such as multiple regression analyses, are available to make such comparisons as fair as possible.

Note

****There is much evidence to show the success of the secondary modern schools.** NCES Research Report No.3, *Examination Performance of Secondary Schools in the Inner London Education Authority* by John Marks, Caroline Cox and Maciej Pomian-Szednicki, 1986, showed that the secondary modern schools of the nation achieved a higher rate of O-level and CSE Grade 1 passes per pupil than all the maintained schools in the Inner London Education Authority. Recent figures, issued by Baroness Blackstone on behalf of the Government on 11 May 2000, showed that no fewer than 32.8 % of all 15 year-old pupils in secondary modern schools achieved 5 or more higher grades at GCSE. This compares with the figure of 1.8 % in 1967. It also compares with a figure of nearly 18% for all maintained schools in 1967. It is a partial answer to the question to be posed, concerning the relative improvements made by the two systems over the last few decades. It also makes a nonsense of the argument employed in the CASE Briefing Paper that schools need a 'critical mass' of high ability pupils in order to succeed. By any standards the secondary moderns are doing extremely well indeed. It beggars belief, however, that today's secondary modern schools have nearly twice the success rate in the 16+ examination as the whole of the maintained sector in 1967. What equally beggars belief is the assumption on which it is based – viz that 5 higher grade GCSEs can be equated with 5 GCE O-level passes.

Comparisons with Scotland and Northern Ireland

Scotland, with a predominantly comprehensive system, and Northern Ireland, with a predominantly selective system, have been used respectively by proponents of comprehensive and selective schools to establish their case. Unfortunately the Scottish examination system is so unlike that of England that there is no equivalence between the grades awarded in each system, and no fair comparison can therefore be made. The system in N. Ireland has an examination system in which the grades are comparable with our own. Dr. John Marks has reported that the selective system of N. Ireland produces significantly better results than our own [4]. 52% of fifth formers scored five or more higher grades at GCSE, compared with 42% in England. Perhaps more importantly, examination standards have recently been rising more rapidly in N. Ireland than here. Both these findings are highly suggestive, but because full allowance for social and other background factors cannot be made they are not conclusive.

There is an interesting reference to the Scottish system in the Briefing Paper on the CASE web *site* mentioned above. There was wisely no attempt to compare the standards reached in Scotland with those of any other country. What impressed the authors was the fact that there was evidence that comprehensives "reduce the gaps in attainment between children of different abilities and between children from different social class backgrounds". Such an aim is purely egalitarian. Whether the reduction of gaps is brought about by a levelling-up or levelling-down was a matter of complete indifference to the authors, and no attempt was made ascertain which it was. It is in practice much easier to *level down* than to *level up*. Any efficient system of education or training, provided *it* is based on equality of opportunity, will inevitably widen differences the longer it operates. Think of a

national programme for developing top-flight athletes or tennis stars. Think also of the fact that the number of levels or grades used for the measurement of performance increases as the schooling process lengthens. The Labour Government in 1970 abandoned the policy of equal educational opportunities in favour of equal outputs at the same time that it was launching comprehensivisation and dispensing with the search for empirical evidence to show that it would maintain standards. This policy change signalled a prior commitment to equality, over and above standards.

The best evidence

The only study which has tried to take into account all possible background factors is the Department's own *School Standards and Spending: Statistical Analysis*, DES Statistical Bulletin 13/84. For the first time the degree of selectivity (i.e. the percentage of pupils in grammar schools at 12) was examined in relation to the performance of school leavers. For three out of the five categories of examination attainments at 16+ studied, results were significantly higher in those local education authorities that had retained a selective system of schooling (for the other two categories no differences were observed). Furthermore, the superiorities demonstrated were directly proportional to the degree of selectivity operating. And this was after due allowance had been made for possible background factors (26 in all).

The detailed results are to be found in Hansard 15 May 1987, Columns 465/466. They were: (i) An LEA with 15% of its pupils in grammar schools would have 2% more of its pupils attaining 5 or more higher grade O-level/CSE results than a fully comprehensive LEA, (ii) an LEA with 15% of its pupils in grammar schools would have 2.5 % more of its pupils attaining 1 or more higher grade O-level/CSE results, and (iii) an LEA with 15% of its pupils in grammar schools would have 1.2 % more of its pupils attaining 1 or more graded results at O-level/CSE.

The figure of 15% was chosen because it was near to the mode. Results for a fully selective authority would be expected to be much higher, but the estimate would be expected to have less precision. The superiorities of the selective authorities were evident for pupils right across the ability range.

Two studies which have been closely associated with the Department's 13/84 investigation are those made by Dr John Marks, Caroline Cox and Maciej Pomian-Szednicki of the National Council for Educational Standards (NCES). The first, *Standards in English Schools* (Report No.1) - by Marks, Cox and Maciej Pomian-Szednicki was published in 1983 and dealt with the examination results of secondary schools in England for 1981. The findings, based on a representative sample of 57 LEAs embracing more than 2,000 schools and 350,000 fifth-year pupils, led to the conclusion that pupils at secondary modern schools and grammar schools obtained more O-level passes (including CSE Grade 1) than comprehensives, both nationally and within the same social class group. The superiority of the selective system was 30-40 per cent nationally, and nearly 50% in areas for which the social class mix was near the national average. Multiple regression analyses had been used to allow for background factors such as each local authority's expenditure, pupil-teacher ratio and proportion of pupils of non-white origin or who were born abroad. Use was also made of the DES classification of Local Education Authorities (3 groups) based on the proportion of pupils from socio-economic groups 4 and 5.

Standards in English Schools Second Report - by Marks and Pomian-Szednicki - was published in 1985 and dealt with the examination results of secondary schools in England for 1982, and in comparison with 1981. With slight adjustments to the analytical techniques the findings showed a remarkable consistency with those of the previous year. At a meeting held on 13 January 1986, between representatives of the DES Statistical Branch and the authors of a Centre for Policy Studies publication on Statistical Bulletin 13/84, it was agreed that "Results obtained by the NCES using regression methods were similar [to those obtained in statistical Bulletin 13/84] notwithstanding their different data sources." Hansard, 12 May 1987, Question No.57

Statistical Bulletin 13/84 was the first, and last, time that the Department ever tried to estimate the influence of selective schools on examination results. The NCSA, in December 1999, officially indicated its wish to see the study updated. It had been assured by Civil Servants that it could be

done; the results would probably be the same; and it was not a political priority. The Department had agreed with the NGSA when we suggested that we should undertake the research. But when requests for data were made the Department refused access to the data. Baroness Blackstone suggested that we should employ the value-added approach instead.

Value-added comparisons

In recent years the concept of "value added" has found its way into the evaluation of school performance. If the performances of pupils entering a particular school are lower than those of pupils entering another school at the same stage, then it is argued that the school cannot be expected to get its pupils up to the standard of the other over the same period of time. It should therefore be judged not by its actual examination results, but by how it has performed in relation to schools with a similar intake to its own -by the 'value that it has added' during the educational process. The concept of value-added can be used to evaluate the progress of pupils made during any one of the four key stages.

The Department has been investigating the value added by each of the nation's schools during Key Stage 4. This is done by taking the individual scores of pupils in the KS3 tests (in 3 basic subjects) and comparing them with their combined GCSE point score two years later. The value each pupil has added (compared with the average added by all pupils with the same KS3 score) is calculated. The school's value-added score is then obtained by averaging the scores of all its individual pupils.

The results obtained by the DfEE in its Pilot scheme were subsequently used by commentators to suggest that grammar schools do not make as much progress between those ages [14 -16] as comprehensive schools; and that pupils who are high-attainers at age 14 do better in their subsequent two years if they attend a comprehensive school rather than a grammar school. These conclusions were examined by Prof. S. J. Prais, of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, who is well known for his international studies of educational performance. His paper was published in the Oxford Review of Education (Vol. 27, No.1, 2001) under the title *Grammar Schools' Achievements and the DfEE's Measures of Value-added: an attempt at clarification*. Examining the robustness of the measuring rods used, he concluded that "they are hardly adequate but, insofar as they are used for these purposes, the results indicate precisely the opposite, namely, greater average progress (greater 'value-added') for grammar schools, and for high-attaining pupils in grammar schools."

One of the commentators criticised by Prof. Prais was Prof. David Jesson, University of York, who had made claims for comprehensive schools at a CASE Conference in November 1999 -without giving any supporting evidence. Following Prof. Prais's criticism, David Jesson admitted that the Government statistics, on which he based his claim that able pupils in comprehensives do as well as those in grammar schools, were flawed. It is a pity that he did not publish his work before permitting false claims to be publicised. Unfortunately, he has since laid himself open to the same charge by announcing similar conclusions before publication of the work on which they are supposedly drawn -promised in *Parliamentary Brief* in the autumn of 2001.

Whilst the value-added approach is useful in giving comfort to those schools whose intakes are below average in ability, it has a number of inherent flaws when it is employed as a robust measure in comparing the performance of individual schools or school types (apart from the more specific weaknesses identified by Prof Prais). Firstly, the performance of pupils during any stage of their education cannot be cleanly separated from that during the previous stage. The four key stages can be likened to the four laps athletes run during a race. Those who are level on entering the final lap cannot be assumed to have an equal chance of winning. Some who have been pushed hard will find it difficult going. Others, who have paced themselves, will have greater potential than those alongside them when the bell rings and make greater progress over the last lap.

Exactly the same considerations apply in making academic progress. Those high ability pupils who have made little progress during the third key stage have a much greater potential for progress from 14 to 16 than lower ability pupils with the same scores, who have been progressing steadily throughout. It is now generally accepted that progress during key stage 3 is unexpectedly low for the majority of pupils. Before any conclusions can be drawn from value-added measurements from 14-16 it is therefore essential to study differential rates of progress during key stage 3. In particular, are grammar school pupils relatively immune from the slackening off which occurs on entering secondary education? If this is so, a comprehensive school pupil with an average level 6 at 14+ has a higher academic potential than a grammar school pupil with the same average level 6. If the comprehensive pupil achieves a greater 'value-added' score than the grammar school pupil this could be due to the relative failure of the comprehensive school in the previous key stage.

Secondly, the value-added comparisons ignore completely the background factors, which are so essential in any fair comparison. In theory they need not do so, but in practice it is found to be too difficult to incorporate socio-economic and other background factors into value-added comparisons.

The top 25 per cent or the top 50%?

It has been generally assumed that in a fully selective system 25% were catered for by the grammar schools. The precise figure varied from area to area and from time to time. The 1967 NFER mathematics study, previously referred to, made the assumption that the figure was 20% (p. 100). For the same year (1967) nearly 18% of leavers from maintained schools obtained 5 or more GCE ordinary level passes. The normal assumption that the O-level examination was by and large associated with the grammar school population is broadly confirmed by these figures.

The situation today has changed, especially in relation to examination performances. According to the latest published figures in 2000 nearly 50% of 15 year-olds in maintained schools achieved the official equivalent of 5 or more GCE ordinary level passes. Government targets have been, and presumably will be, continually raised. The old success criterion of 5 or more O-level passes (5 or more higher level grades at GCSE) has, for whatever reason, ceased to be a suitable measure of the standard expected of the top 25%. In its place we need to find a new criterion, viz. that standard which is realizable by only 25% of the fifth year cohort. This might be:

5 or more grades A *	realizable by a% of fifth-formers
5 or more grades A * or A	realisable by b% of fifth-formers
5 or more grades A *, A or B	realisable by c% of fifth-formers

Once we have established a measure that will be realizable by ca. 25% of fifth-formers then we can use this to compare the performances of the selective schools with those of the non-selective system. The results are awaited with interest.

Notes

1. *Sense and Sensitivity: The case of Comprehensive Education*, Quantitative Sociology Newsletter, No. 21, 1979.
2. *Comprehensive Education: Internal Structure and Organisation*, Prof B. Simon, 1975.
3. *Halfway There*, Caroline Benn & Brian Simon, McGraw 1970.
4. *The Betrayed Generations*, Dr John Marks, Centre for Policy Studies, 2001.

Fred Naylor

Parental Perspective

The vast majority of parents expect the time spent at school by their children to prepare them for future employment in whatever field they choose. In this respect they expect success.

Socio-economic change in the past decade has altered the perception of ordinary parents as regards both their own employment conditions and more importantly the employment potential of their children.

Most working class parents have become aware that the long-standing reliance on relatively well-paid unskilled and semi-skilled work opportunities in the manufacturing industries has virtually disappeared.

Parents across society have realised that in order to secure a job in either manufacturing or service industries, qualifications of some sort will be required and more and more parents are aspiring to send their offspring to university.

Revelations about educational standards arising from publication of League Tables came as a shock to many. Whilst various criteria relative to what the Tables show are argued by the educational establishment, their relative merits are not lost on parents who pragmatically are fully aware that on entering the job market, the vast majority of applicants start on the scratch line. They also know that getting to the scratch line requires educational success, the more particularly for people from lower social echelons. The League Tables present parents with an unambiguous yardstick when assessing the chances of their children leaving school with the appropriate yardstick to further advancement in life.

A simple comparison between the performance of pupils in Selective and those in Comprehensive areas leaves no doubt as to which is better. While there are some enclaves in relatively affluent areas where the difference in performance are not so marked, even in areas where Grammar Schools are thin on the ground performance is in a different league to that of the comprehensive provision.

The paucity of Grammar School provision in many areas brings both apprehension and frustration. Apprehension springs from scarcity of places raises the level of competition to frightening proportions for many. Indeed, a significant proportion of parents feel that unless their children show signs of genius, they will not stand a chance of entry and shy away from entering them for the entry procedures at age 11. Other sectors of society approach the circumstances differently and put their children forward on a "nothing ventured, nothing gained" basis. Thus many children are denied the opportunity of academic education for which they would be entirely suitable. Frustration arises from the realisation that the alternatives to Grammar School education are in some areas dire. They feel powerless in the face of LEA selection regimes that allocate places in schools in their area and they bemoan the absence of greater Grammar School provision.

Parents will see through the introduction of Government initiatives to convert schools to Schools of "Special interest" and providing means by which peripheral studies can boost League Table performance, if these measures do not meet parents' expectations of outcomes and examination success to progress satisfactorily to appropriate Higher Education.

Parents, even those without prior formal educational background, know only too well that tried and trusted methods such as those provided by Grammar Schools have a formula which consistently produces high levels of success.

It is that aspect more than anything that prompts parents in their approaches to the Association to seek more Grammar Schools, particularly as they enquire about schooling when they move to a different part of the country. They see these schools offering continued stability and a haven from the bewildering changes that have stalked both primary and secondary education, changes with which most parents are heartily disenchanted.

Stan Danks

