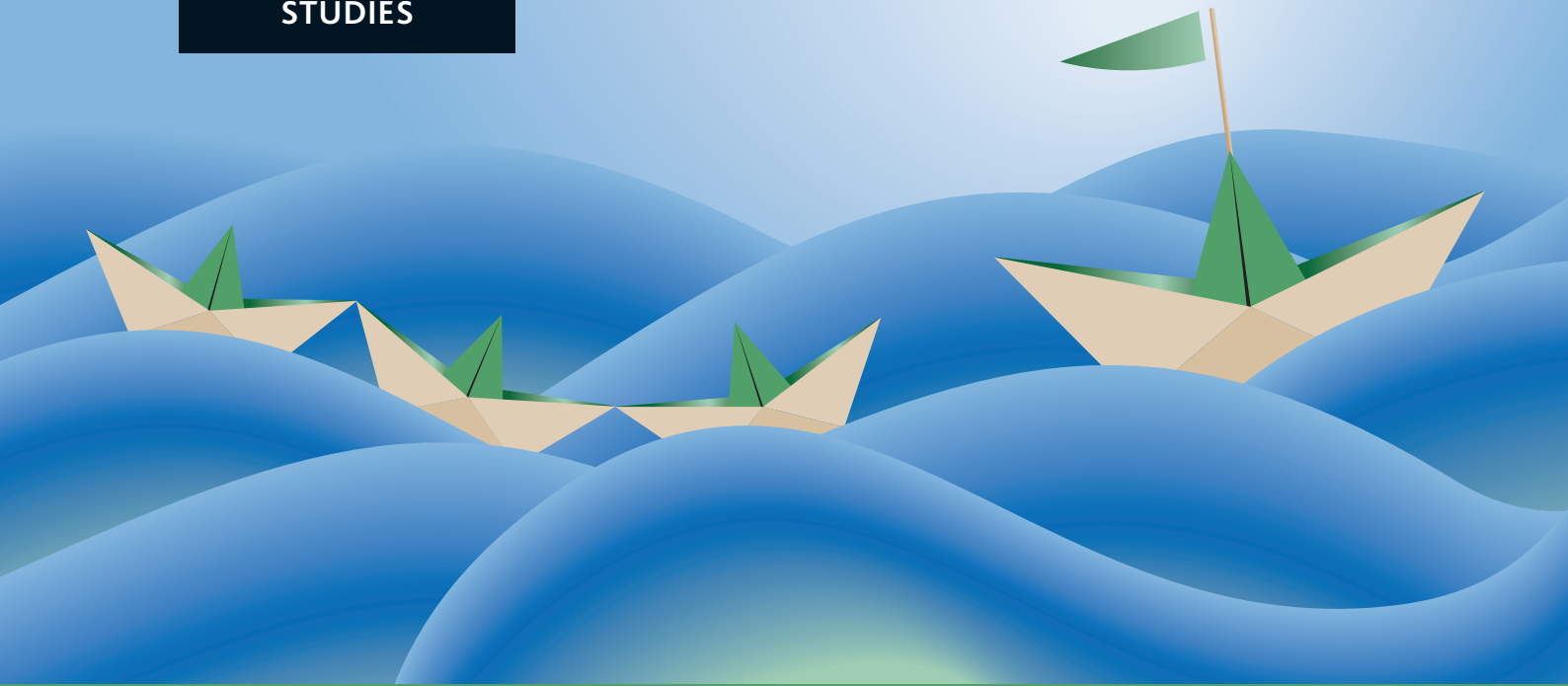


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A Tide that Lifts All Boats?

Response to the Schools Green Paper

by James O'Shaughnessy

PROMOTING POLICIES THAT LIFT PEOPLE FROM POVERTY TO PROSPERITY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the Brexit vote, there is an urgent need to heal the many divisions in British society. One of those divisions is the large gap between the educational outcomes of white working-class pupils and others. With ethnic minority children beginning to reach or even exceed national performance averages, the focus is shifting away from the big cities towards the towns, particularly the coastal towns of England. As the Legatum Institute's UK Prosperity Index shows, these less prosperous areas can lack the social capital and the critical mass of academic teachers and aspirational parents needed to break out of a culture of underperformance.

Successive governments have been alive to this problem and tried to intervene. City Technology Colleges, Education Action Zones, Teach First, City Academies, the National Teaching Service—all have all been tried, yet in many areas there seems to have been little improvement. This is the context for Prime Minister Theresa May's controversial proposals to introduce a new wave of grammar schools.

There are three main proposals for expanding selection in the Department for Education's Green Paper *Schools That Work for Everyone*: allowing existing grammar schools to expand, allowing new grammars to be set up, and allowing all schools the chance to select some or all of their pupils. The last of these proposals is the most radical idea in the Green Paper. The evidence from totally selective areas, such as Kent and Buckinghamshire, cannot be said to be supportive of a wholesale move to reintroduce selection. Wholly selective areas seem to do worse in terms of both social mobility and income inequality, although it is true that, for the small minority of less well-off children who gain access to such schools, they can have a transformative effect.

However, the idea of allowing a small injection of academic selection into low prosperity areas where performance is poor, local capacity is weak, and there is a need for an external stimulus, has more potential. Establishing a new grammar school (or perhaps converting an independent school) could act as a catalyst for change by raising aspiration, bringing in academic teachers, and then spreading quality throughout the local system. It is unlikely that such an initiative would have a significant negative impact in a community that experiences low standards.

However, just introducing a new grammar school would not be enough. The critical test is not that it raises standards for its own pupils, which it obviously must, but that it should be—in the phrase used by Professor Caroline Hoxby when talking about the potential benefits of school choice—a “tide that lifts all boats”. Certain conditions should apply to make sure that everyone benefits from the arrival of a new selective school. The most obvious are limits on pupil numbers, partnering with other schools, increasing the intake for less well-off families, and accountability for performance across the local network of schools.

For example, a new grammar school might be permitted if it provides no more than 5 percent of local secondary places, sponsors a local multi-academy trust that includes low-performing schools and feeder primaries, admits a high percentage of less well-off pupils, and becomes a teaching

school. This would ensure that one institution was held accountable for the education performance across the ability spectrum while also taking positive steps to increase local capacity.

The state school system has an obligation to make sure that all pupils, including the most able, receive an education that meets their needs. As Smithers and Robinson said in 2012, "Ensuring that the brightest pupils fulfil their potential goes straight to the heart of social mobility, of basic fairness and economic efficiency."¹ This places a premium, therefore, on designing a system which seeks to ameliorate the weaknesses of selective systems without sacrificing their strengths.

Any expansion of selection will need to be deliberately and explicitly different from those selective systems currently in place in England. The £200 million announced in the 2016 Autumn Statement for expansion of grammar schools should be focused on areas of low achievement, low capacity, and low prosperity. Spreading the benefits of an aspirational culture—using grammar schools if necessary—to those in greatest need is consistent with the view that a core purpose of education is to provide equality of opportunity, so that every child has the chance to become, in former Education Secretary Michael Gove's words, the author of their own life story.

1 TACKLING UNDERACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLAND'S SCHOOL SYSTEM

THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF SCHOOL REFORM

By and large, the story of state education over the last 20 years has been a positive one. Standards have risen, instances of acute failure have fallen, and Inner London—for so long the locus of some of the worst educational outcomes in the country—has been transformed.

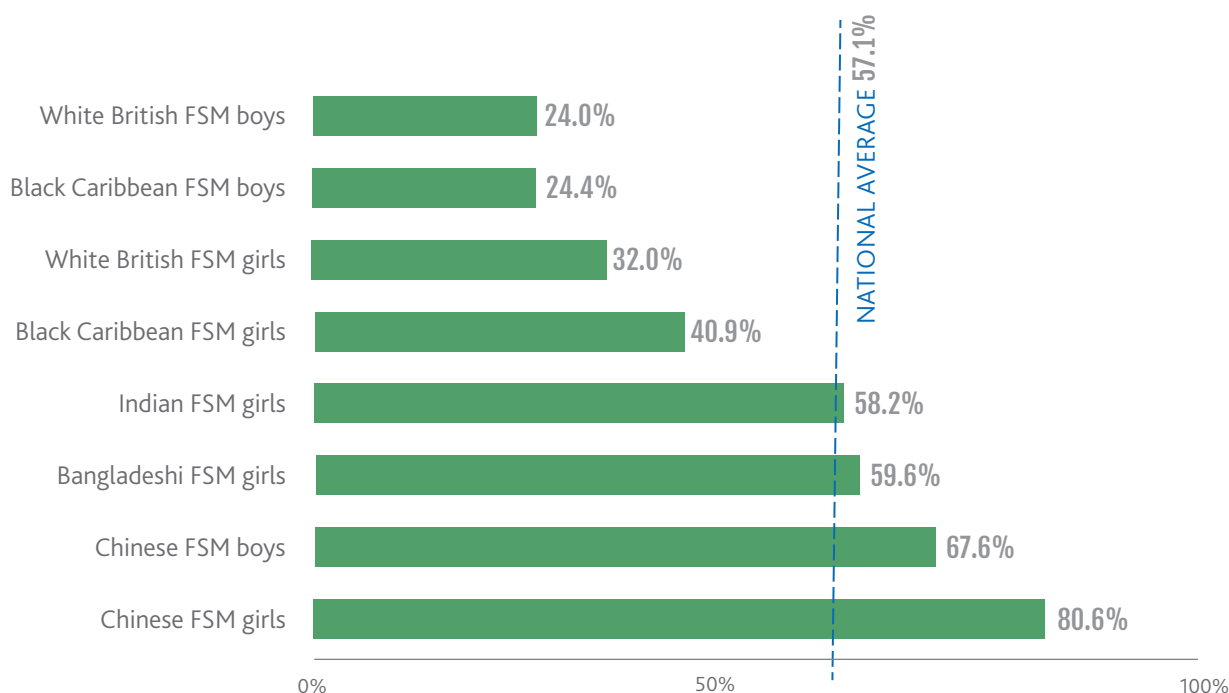
Nowhere has that success been more apparent than in the performance of minorities, where disparities in educational achievement across ethnic groups have significantly narrowed.² Ethnic minority pupils have faced the most significant challenges but, overall, have improved relative to the national average. For example, Bangladeshi, black African, and Chinese pupils eligible for Free School Meals ("FSM") have improved by more than 20 percent since 2006 on the benchmark five A*–C grades at GCSE (including English and maths), while the national average has improved by 13.5 percent.³

WHITE WORKING CLASS STILL LAGGING BEHIND

It is not a story of unalloyed success, however. The attainment of disadvantaged white British pupils has continued to lag behind. Of the main ethnic groups, white British FSM pupils have consistently achieved the lowest or second-lowest performance at GCSE for a decade.⁴ Just 28 percent of white British FSM pupils achieved the benchmark five A*–C grades at GCSE (including English and Maths)—32 percent of girls and only 24 percent of boys—compared to the national FSM average of 33 percent⁵ (see graph on p5).

Partly because of where white British working-class families are clustered, and partly because of local economic effects, further distinctions in educational outcomes are also recognisable at a regional level. At GCSE level, there is a clear North–South divide in attainment and progress. Reports by Ofsted (2015)⁶ and CentreForum (2016)⁷ found that the lowest-performing areas were predominantly in the North and Midlands, with 13 of the 16 weakest local authorities named by Ofsted falling in these regions.⁸ Provisional data released on "coasting" secondary schools emphasises the point: regionally, the highest proportion of coasting schools can be found in the Regional School Commissioner areas of Lancashire / West Yorkshire (16.8 percent of eligible schools), followed by East Midlands / the Humber (16.4 percent); this compares with 5 percent for East of England / North-East London and 6.9 percent for North-West London / South-Central England.⁹

A longitudinal study undertaken by the Social Market Foundation has found that these regional "postcode inequalities" are long-standing and, in some areas, have worsened over the past three decades.¹⁰ Government regions such as the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, the West Midlands, and the East Midlands have consistently underperformed while London's performance has surged. Examining trends in inequality across three generations of 11-year-old children (born in 1958, 1970, and 2000), the report highlights that the geographic area a child comes from has become a more powerful predictive factor for the most recent generation than for those born in 1970.



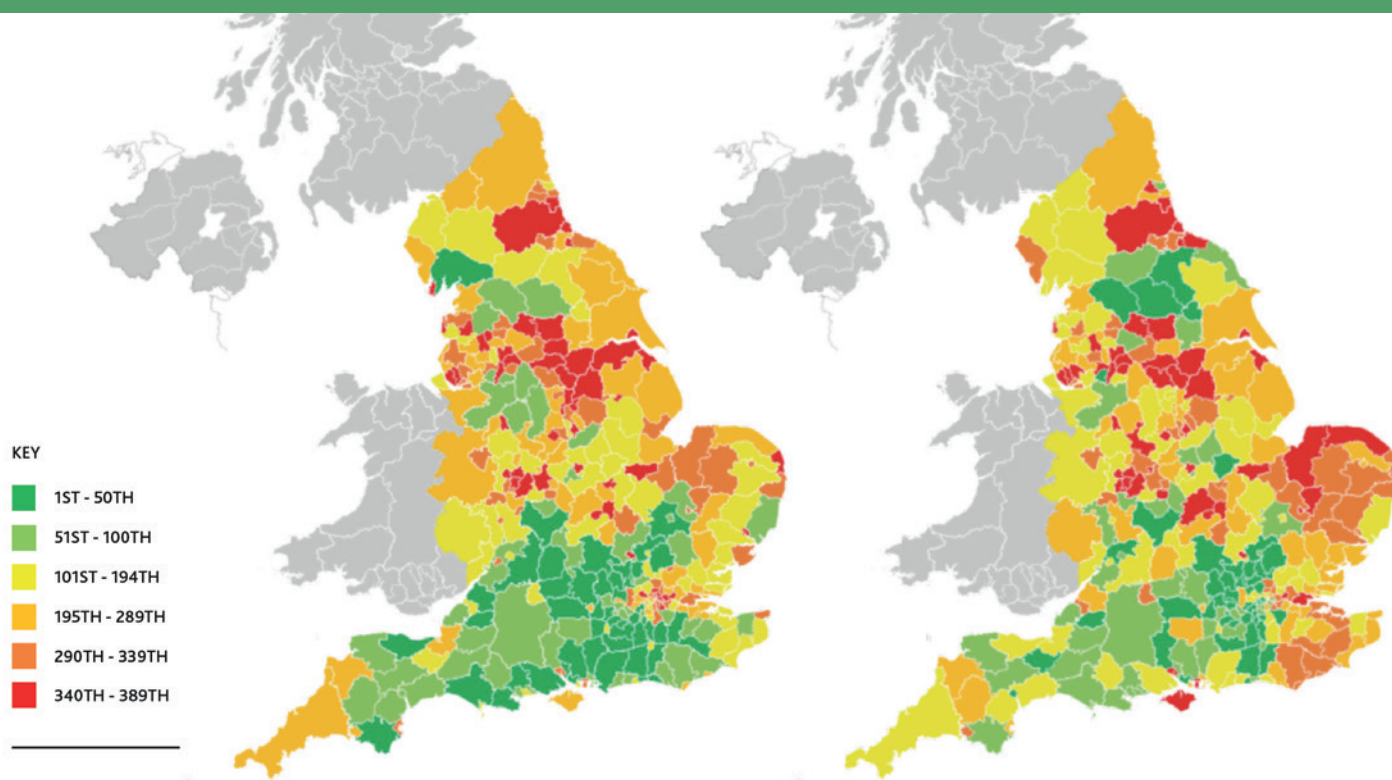
The Legatum Institute has another way of understanding the challenge, which is to look at areas of need through the prism of prosperity. Prosperity—broadly defined as a function of wealth and wellbeing—is a multi-dimensional measure of the determinants of a good life. The Legatum Institute’s UK Prosperity Index (UKPI) uses objective and subjective data to measure prosperity across seven sub-indices: Economic Quality, Business Environment, Education, Health, Safety & Security, Social Capital, and Natural Environment.¹¹ The UKPI measures the impact of education on prosperity by examining educational attainment (percentage gaining five GCSEs or equivalent at A*–C), human capital (percentage of population with no qualifications), and attendance (percentage of unauthorised absence in state secondary schools).

According to the most recent UKPI, across all of England’s local authority areas the lowest-ranking areas for overall prosperity are also those that rank among the lowest for education.¹² The Index reinforces the sense of a North–South divide, with local authorities in the North and Midlands comprising nine out of the top ten least prosperous areas in England.¹³ This regional trend is even stronger when we examine the education data subset alone, where 19 of the top 20 lowest-performing areas are located in England’s northern regions.

Above: Percentage of FSM eligible pupils achieving 5+ A*–C including English and maths for selected minor ethnic groups by gender

England, state-funded schools 2015

Source: Key State 4 attainment data



Above left: England
Overall Prosperity

Above right: England
Education Prosperity

Source: *The UK Prosperity
Index 2016*.
Legatum Institute Foundation

TACKLING UNDERACHIEVEMENT

Successive governments have introduced a range of policy interventions to raise attainment and aspiration, especially in areas of lowest performance. One strand of policy has been to reform the structure of individual schools, bringing in outside expertise, funding, and ambition to challenge a culture of mediocrity in some low-performing areas. Building on the creation of City Technology Colleges in the 1988 Great Education Reform Act, the New Labour government introduced City Academies in 2002. These independent state schools are funded directly by the government and sponsored by charities or philanthropists who are tasked with dramatically raising standards.

The system has evolved in the last 15 years and now includes the Free School programme, but academies can still largely be divided into two types: sponsored and converter. Sponsored academies are typically underperforming schools which are partnered with external organisations such as businesses, foundations, and high-performing schools. These schools currently educate 16 percent of England's state secondary pupils, and of the major school types (local authority schools, sponsored academies, converter academies, and free schools), they have the lowest proportion of students (44.7 percent in 2015) achieving the government benchmark GCSE measure.¹⁴

City Academies originally formed part of the London Challenge programme (2003–11) which used a variety of initiatives to raise the quality of school leadership, teaching, and learning in response to the widely documented poor performance of London's schools. Based on the success of London, the City Challenge programme targeted Manchester and Blackburn, but did not experienced the same level of success as the London initiative.¹⁵

Other place-based programmes included Education Action Zones (EAZs) and Excellence in Cities (EiCs), initiatives started in the early 2000s to tackle low achievement and social exclusion in disadvantaged areas. EAZs partnered co-located groups of schools with local businesses and were run by an "action forum", which was required to implement an action plan that would create new learning opportunities for teachers and pupils, raise standards, and serve the needs of the wider community. EiCs ran parallel to the EAZs and aimed to tackle underachievement through the introduction or expansion of Learning Support Units, Learning Mentors, City Learning Centres (providing ICT learning opportunities for a network of schools), and Beacon Schools (to disseminate good practice).

More recent interventions have focused on the delivery of education in the classroom and have aimed to improve teaching quality through the introduction of Teaching Schools, the expansion of the National Leaders in Education programme, and a regional expansion of Teach First. A new national network of Maths Hubs is being introduced to raise standards in maths education, and there were plans to introduce a National Teaching Service to bring high-quality teachers into areas of low performance, although these have now been abandoned.

ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE EVERYWHERE

While the impact of these multiple initiatives has largely been positive, some areas have stubbornly resisted improvement. These were the target of the March 2016 Schools White Paper *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, which presented the government's vision for "ensuring every child has an excellent education which allows them to achieve their full potential".¹⁶ A core part of the strategy it set out was a targeted approach to places that suffer from chronic underperformance and which lack the social capital required to drive improvement.

The White Paper proposed the introduction of "Achieving Excellence Areas" that would focus on improving access to good schools in areas where there are insufficient high-quality teachers, leaders, system leaders, and sponsors to enable the school-led system to deliver rapid and sustainable improvement.

Further developing these proposals, in October 2016 the new Secretary of State, Justine Greening, announced the first six "Social Mobility Opportunity Areas" across England (Blackpool, Derby, Norwich, Oldham, Scarborough, and West Somerset). These will receive £60 million funding with the aim of building "young people's knowledge and skills and provide them with the best advice and opportunities". The scheme will operate through local partnerships which will aim to build teaching and leadership capacity in schools, increase university access, strengthen technical pathways for young people, and work with employers to improve access to the right advice and experiences.¹⁷

2 THE GREEN PAPER

PROPOSALS ON SELECTION

Following the change of prime minister after the EU referendum result, the Green Paper *Schools That Work for Everyone*, published in September 2016, took up the challenge set out in the March 2016 White Paper. While it recognised the impressive increases in standards over the last six years, including 1.4 million more children attending good or outstanding schools, it did not shrink from the fact that there are still 1.25 million children attending schools that are inadequate or require improvement. The Green Paper also specifically identified a new group of young people whose families do not qualify for free school meals and are “just about managing”, but who in the government’s view should get more support through the school system.

The central idea within the Green Paper is that the system as a whole can be improved only when the best education providers are able to grow, to start new schools, and to sponsor underperforming ones. The Green Paper contains proposals that would encourage independent schools, faith schools, and universities to do more to improve state schooling, but the most controversial proposals revolve around the idea that grammar schools should be part of this process.

The Green Paper proposes four ways in which more selection could be introduced into the system:

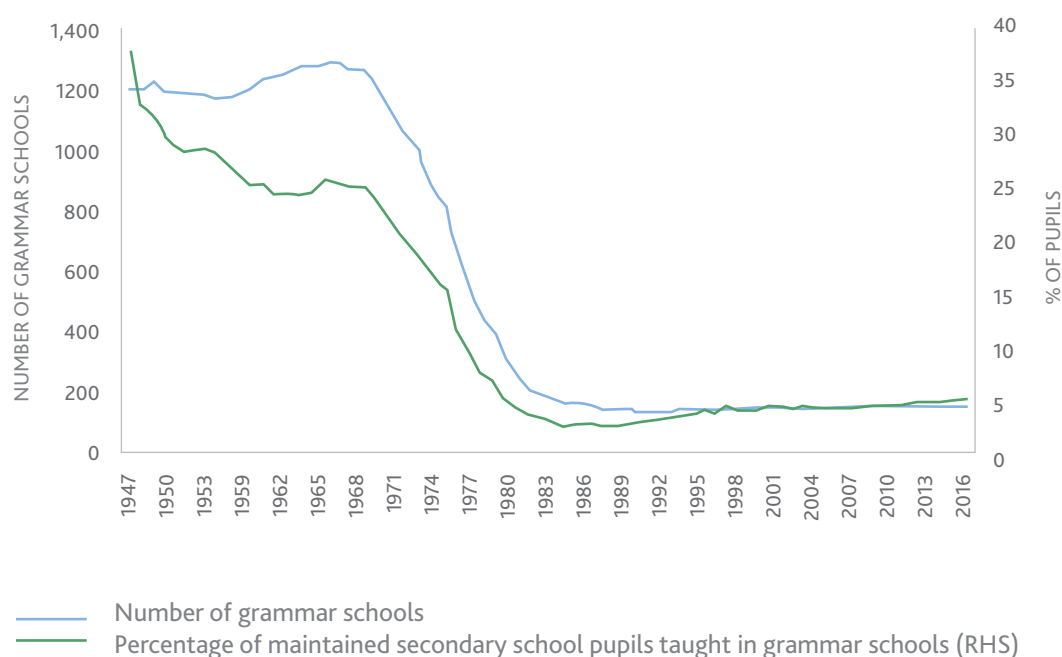
- » allowing existing grammar schools to expand;
- » allowing new selective schools to start up;
- » giving all schools the chance to select 100 percent of their pupils;
- » giving all schools the chance to select a lower proportion of their pupils.

In order to take advantage of these opportunities, the Green Paper explains that new selective schools would need to take on a number of additional responsibilities, such as diversifying their intakes, opening new non-selective schools, or sponsoring their feeder primaries or underperforming local schools.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SELECTION

The separation of children into different school types based on measures including age, academic ability, and faith has been a feature of England’s education system from the outset. Academically selective admission arrangements “make provision for all (or substantially all) of [a school’s] pupils to be selected by reference to general ability, with a view to admitting only pupils with high ability”.¹⁸

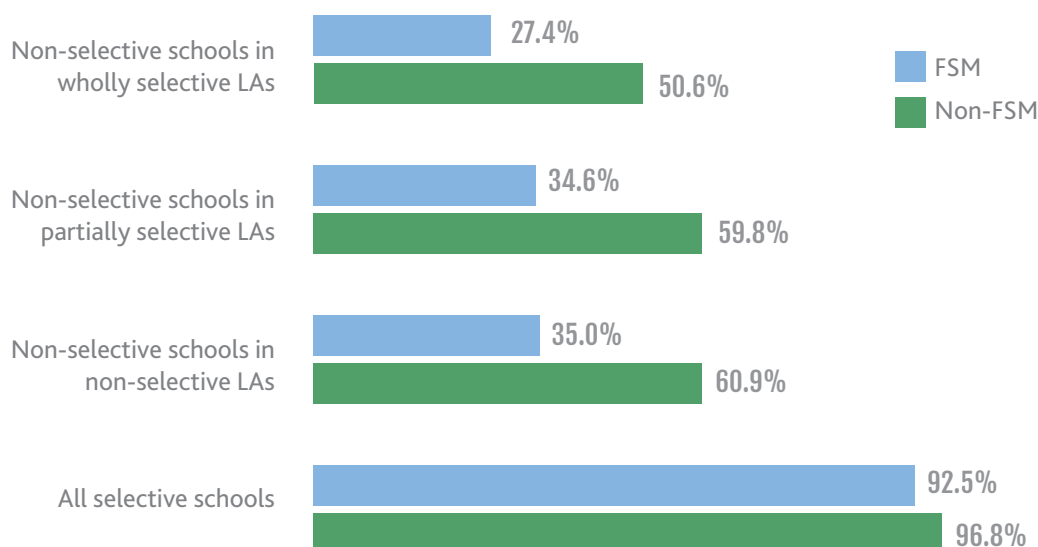
Grammar schools are state-funded schools which select pupils based on academic ability. Children are selected by some measure of general intelligence, testing for a perceived aptitude or ability.¹⁹ Typically, this selection process has been based on the results of the 11-plus test which examine aptitudes in English, maths, and verbal reasoning.



Grammar schools were formalised into the state education system through the 1944 Education Act, which adopted the recommendations of the 1938 Spens Report to introduce a streaming system based on selection.²⁰ The Act proposed the creation of a tripartite system of secondary moderns, grammar schools, and technical colleges, although technical colleges failed to develop as planned. The selective approach was largely maintained until the 1960s, when a policy of comprehensivisation was adopted. The number of grammar schools fell from a peak of 1,298 schools in 1964, educating around 25 percent of state secondary pupils, into a fast decline throughout the 1970s, reaching below 10 percent in the mid-1970s to 4–5 percent from the late 1970s onwards.²¹

There are currently 163 state-funded grammar schools in England educating 5.2 percent (166,517) of all secondary school pupils. Grammar schools are mostly concentrated in Kent, Buckinghamshire, and Lincolnshire, which operate wholly selective systems.²² As of 2015, grammar schools were more likely to hold academy status compared to non-selective secondary schools (86 percent vs 58 percent), to be single-sex (74 percent vs 11 percent), and to have a sixth form (100 percent vs 65 percent). They were less likely to be faith schools (12 percent vs 19 percent).²³

Above: Grammar school and pupil numbers since 1947



Above: Free School Meals (FSM) in selective and non-selective schools

Under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, no new grammar school has been permitted to open, but changes to the School Admissions Code in 2012 enabled all types of school to increase their Published Admission Number (PAN) without the need for consultation. In May 2014, 37 percent of grammars were full or above their stated capacity, compared to 15 percent of all state-funded secondary schools.²⁴

The expansion of existing grammar schools has to date been limited to increasing admissions rather than enlarging school premises. Physical expansion of existing schools is required to ensure that the changes form part of an existing school, and does not constitute a new school. Applications for satellite schools made in 2013 by two existing Kent grammar schools—Weald of Kent Grammar School and Invicta Grammar School—were rejected, in the former case, on the grounds that the school would move from single-sex to co-educational status, and in the latter case, because it would not serve the parents' existing community. However, the application from the Weald of Kent Grammar School was approved in 2015 on the basis of a revised co-education structure which better represented an expansion of the existing school. The approval was initially challenged by the lobby group Comprehensive Future, but their objection has since been dropped.

BENEFITS OF GRAMMAR SCHOOLS

Grammar schools were founded upon principles of meritocracy, offering a ladder of opportunity to children with a high academic ability to benefit from a stretching education that enables them to fulfil their potential. They also contribute to the creation of a diverse education system that is able to offer parents a choice.

Grammar schools have performed strongly on the benchmark GCSE measure, with 96.4 percent of all pupils achieving five A*–C grades (including English and maths), compared to the national average of 57.1 percent across all state-funded secondaries.²⁵ Research conducted by the Education Policy Institute found that grammar school pupils achieved, on average, one third of a GCSE grade higher compared with similar pupils in non-selective schools in comprehensive areas, and an average half a GCSE grade higher for FSM pupils.²⁶ Furthermore, grammar schools appear to be effective in closing the attainment gaps for disadvantaged pupils—with a small 4.3 percent performance gap between FSM and non-FSM children securing the five good GCSE benchmark, compared with a 25.5 percent gap in all non-selective schools.²⁷

Attending a grammar school has also been linked to a higher uptake of further education and increase in long-term earnings. The Economic and Social Research Council used a case study of “Aberdeen Children in the 1950s” to examine the long-run impacts of the grammar school system on borderline 11-plus passers. For girls, attending a grammar school led to an average of almost one whole additional year of full-time education, increasing their chances of getting A levels by almost 25 percent. It also led to a 20 percent increase in gross income and a 10 percent increase in wages. Grammar-educated boys were also more likely to gain A levels but otherwise saw no real advantage in wages by the age of 50.²⁸

COSTS OF SELECTION

The Green Paper explicitly notes that the evidence base for increasing selection is not overwhelming.²⁹ Both domestic³⁰ and international³¹ evidence suggests that selective systems:

- » can increase polarisation, i.e. those who get into grammar schools do better but those who do not do worse; and,
- » have no net benefit on average performance across the system, i.e. the gains are matched by the losses, primarily because there tend to be many fewer selective schools than non-selective ones.

Leading arguments against the grammar school model tend to centre on the effectiveness and impact of the selection process. Several pieces of research have shown that children from poorer backgrounds are more likely to be dropped by the selection process through “social selectivity”,³² with pupils eligible for FSM comprising 6.9 percent of those with high prior attainment living near selective schools but only 2.4 percent of attendees.³³ Instead, grammar schools are reported to take a relatively large proportion of their pupils (13–15 percent of enrolled pupils) from independent primary schools.³⁴

Selection at 11-plus may also arrive too late for disadvantaged pupils. Research by the Education Policy Institute found a ten-month gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers by the end of primary school, half of which was inherited from the early-years stage.³⁵ The existence of debilitating attainment gaps prior to 11-plus selection may lead to a reduced pool of disadvantaged candidates who are likely to pass the 11-plus and hence limit the impact of grammar schools on social mobility.³⁶

Linked to the weaknesses of the selection process is the failure of grammar schools to reflect broader national demographics. In comparison with other state secondary schools, selective schools have a significantly higher representation of Asian, Indian, Chinese, and mixed White pupils, but black Caribbean and white British pupils (65.9 percent selective vs 70.9 percent nationally) are under-represented.³⁷ This is also reflected in pupil characteristics, where selective schools have significantly fewer pupils eligible for FSM than the average across state-funded secondary schools (2.5 percent vs 13.2 percent—and 8.9 percent in wholly selective areas), are less likely to have pupils with special education needs (4.0 percent vs 12.7 percent), and are also slightly less likely to have pupils with English as a second language (13.1 percent vs 15.7 percent).³⁸

The costs of selection may also extend to the long-term earning potential of individuals. Simon Burgess, Professor of Economics at the University of Bristol, examined the systemic impact of selective systems compared to standard comprehensive systems by focusing on the spread of earnings.³⁹ The study found strong evidence that selective school systems increase earnings inequality, with inequality significantly higher among individuals in selective areas compared to those who grew up in comprehensive system areas. For example, individuals who grew up in a selective system area and became top earners achieved 9 percent (£1.31) an hour more than a similar individual from a comprehensive system area. In contrast, if an individual grew up in a selective system area and was earning in the bottom 10 percent, the earnings shortfall was significantly greater than a similar individual from a comprehensive area (earning 35 percent, or £0.90 an hour, less).

3 JUDGING WHETHER TO INTRODUCE MORE SELECTION

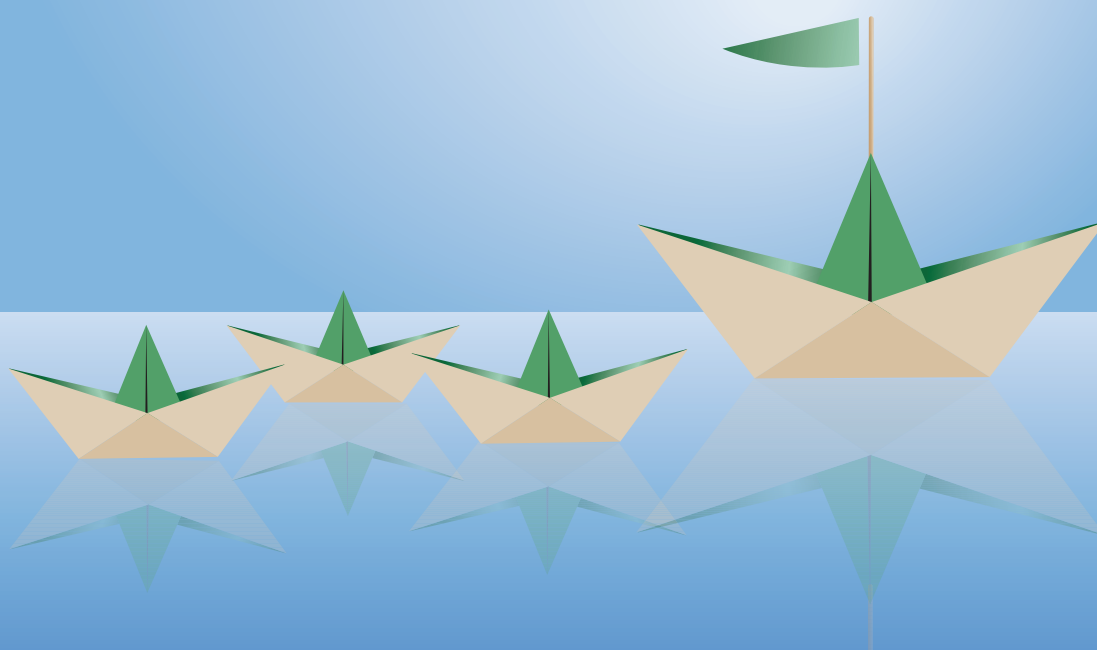
PARENTAL VIEWS

Based on data alone, the case for wholly selective school systems is not overwhelming, as the Green Paper itself admits,⁴⁰ but any attempt to reform schooling must also take account of the perspective of parents. What is it that they want for their children? There is a small amount of polling around the issue of grammar schools and selection. ComRes recently found that:

- » Half of British adults (51 percent) think grammar schools are good for social mobility, while around a quarter (27 percent) think they are bad in this respect, as they help those who are privileged already.
- » Just under half (47 percent) think that the government should allow new grammar schools that select pupils through the 11-plus. A quarter of adults (25 percent) think the ban on new grammars should be kept in place.⁴¹

YouGov carried out a similar poll and also discovered support for the creation of new grammars and a belief that they are good for social mobility, although at lower levels than the ComRes research (38 percent and 35 percent respectively).⁴² YouGov also found that people who had been to secondary moderns and comprehensives were much less enthusiastic about creating new grammar schools. Another poll, for the Huffington Post, uncovered other aspects of popular views about grammar schools, with Conservative voters much more in favour than Labour ones and older voters much more in favour than younger ones. Better-off parents were less likely than poorer ones to believe that failing to get into a grammar school would leave children feeling like failures.⁴³

It is difficult to tell from the headline polling whether parents are supportive of more selection *per se* or are, instead, expressing their desire for the kind of traditional academic education—involving tough discipline, academic rigour, and an aspirational ethos—that grammar schools are seen to deliver. There are also important regional dimensions we do not know: how do parents feel in wholly selective areas versus wholly non-selective ones; how do they feel in areas of low achievement versus areas of high achievement; and are there socioeconomic aspects to parental opinion? Nevertheless, through the Green Paper the government is clearly responding to the preferences of a reasonable proportion of parents for more grammar or grammar-style schools.



A TIDE THAT LIFTS ALL BOATS?

As well as responding to the desires of parents, any good education policy must take other considerations into account. We believe that there are three tests any policy should pass:

- » **Excellence** Does it increase the number of good school places in the system, extending access to a high-quality academic curriculum and ensuring that more pupils receive an education that challenges and stretches them, whatever their ability?
- » **Equity** Does it improve the chances of accessing a good school place for children who are not currently well served by the system?
- » **Choice** Does it increase parental choice by providing an increasingly diverse set of high-quality options that suit pupils of all abilities and aptitudes?

We sum up these tests by borrowing a phrase from Professor Caroline Hoxby's work on school choice: in what circumstances can more selection be a "tide that lifts all boats"?⁴⁴

4 HOW DOES THE GREEN PAPER MEASURE UP?

The standard against which the proposals in the Green Paper should be measured is, then, that any increase in selection should be a “tide that lifts all boats”. Can the benefits of selection be gained without the costs?

ALLOWING EXISTING GRAMMAR SCHOOLS TO EXPAND

It is hard to object to existing grammar schools expanding. The percentage of pupils educated in grammar schools has been rising slowly since the mid-1980s (from 3 percent in 1986 to 5.2 percent in 2016),⁴⁵ and—other things being equal—this proposal ought to be able to meet the three tests set out above. The case for expanding existing grammars will be even stronger if, as a condition of expansion, those schools are also obliged to sponsor local schools so that more children can benefit from the strengths of the grammar school.

The Green Paper does not distinguish between an existing grammar expanding its footprint, as some have already done in response to increasing local demand, with a satellite expansion of the type recently approved in Kent. We think the distinction held at present between these two expansions ought to hold in the future too. A genuine expansion of one school ought to be allowed with almost no restriction; an expansion which is in practice a new school ought to be considered as just that, and treated in whatever way the government decides to treat brand-new selective schools.

ALLOWING NEW SELECTIVE SCHOOLS TO START UP

In certain circumstances, creating new grammar schools could reasonably be expected to be a “tide that lifts all boats”. The two key criteria for such provision should be the location of a new school and the conditions attached to its expansion.

Location of a new school

If a new grammar (or perhaps an independent school undergoing conversion) were allowed in a low-performing area, we can envisage how it could act as a catalyst for change. It would do this by raising aspiration, bringing in academic teachers, and then spreading quality throughout the local system. It is also unlikely to drive significant negative performance in areas which have struggled for some time to deliver systematic improvement. This is the rationale behind the ResPublica proposals for a new grammar school in Knowsley (see Case Study).

One way to identify such areas would be the “social mobility opportunity areas” announced recently by the government. Another would be to focus on the least prosperous areas as identified by the UKPI, which in England would include Kingston upon Hull, Blackpool, Middlesbrough, Nottingham, and Sandwell. These are places where performance is poor, local capacity is weak, and an external stimulus is needed.

CASE STUDY: Knowsley

The ResPublica report *Achieving Excellence in Knowsley* was commissioned by Knowsley Council to review state education performance and to help identify tools for raising the attainment and aspirations of pupils.⁴⁶ The report found that Knowsley's secondary schools are failing to successfully improve, with the government's £157 million project in 2009 to replace Knowsley's failing secondaries with "Centres for Learning" (CfLs) having "inadvertently pushed struggling schools into sharper decline".⁴⁷

Knowsley is one of the six constituent local government districts of the Liverpool City Region. It is currently the second-most deprived authority in England, having suffered from general economic decline (driven by a fall in manufacturing) and a falling population (194,600 inhabitants in 1971 to 146,000 in 2011). Over 15 percent of the working population have no qualifications, compared with the national average of 8 percent, and 34 percent of all children in the borough live in income-deprived households. It is also one of the least culturally diverse authorities, with 95 percent of the population classified as white British.

According to the Legatum Institute's UKPI, Knowsley ranks at the bottom for education prosperity, performing very poorly across all measures of education performance. It also falls in the top 10 percent of authorities with the lowest economic prosperity (which accounts for factors including economic growth, unemployment, job satisfaction, and child poverty) and towards the bottom end of measures of social capital (measuring social network strength, social norms, community participation, and trust), reflecting a strong correlation between education performance and levels of social and economic deprivation.

Primary schools in Knowsley have generally been viewed as a success, with over 80 percent rated good or outstanding by Ofsted (2016). Attainment at KS2 is broadly in line with the national average, although relatively few pupils achieve high KS2 results. In 2015,

35 percent of Knowsley's pupils achieved a level 5+ for English compared to England's average of 43 percent. Those who do achieve highly fall into one of the highest local authority scores for "Missing Talent"—defined as pupils who score in the top 10 per cent nationally at age 11 but fail to achieve in the top 25 percent at GCSE.

Knowsley has experienced persistent underperformance in its state secondary schools over an extended period. They are the lowest-performing in the country for pupils achieving the government's benchmark of five A*–C grade GCSEs (including English and maths)—in 2015, just 37.4 percent of pupils in Knowsley's schools achieved the government GCSE benchmark, compared to 53.8 percent nationally. Pupils eligible for FSM performed even worse, with just 20 percent attaining the government benchmark compared with 33 percent nationally. Absenteeism has improved but continues to lag behind the national average, with total absence of 7.9 percent compared to 5.1 percent nationally.

The report makes several recommendations to break the cycle of underperformance. Among these proposals, the report suggests that the introduction of a grammar school in Knowsley could contribute to raising attainment and closing the performance gap of disadvantaged pupils:

Reintroducing grammar schools is potentially a transformative idea for working-class areas where there are little or no middle classes to game the admission system. We know that selection improves the performance of those white working-class children selected—the trouble is too few of them are. We recommend that new grammars in the first instance are exclusively focused on the needs of white working-class children.

Phillip Blond, Director of ResPublica

Conditions attached to expansion

There must be a significant element of central control attached to the creation of new selective schools. The most obvious conditions would appear to be limits on pupil numbers, partnering with other schools, increasing the intake from less well-off families, and accountability for performance across the local network of schools. For example, a new grammar school might be permitted if it provides no more than 5 percent of local secondary places, sponsors a local multi-academy trust that includes low-performing schools and feeder primaries, admits a high percentage of less well-off pupils, and becomes a teaching school. This would ensure that one institution was held accountable for the education performance across the ability spectrum while also taking positive steps to increase local capacity.

GIVING ALL SCHOOLS THE CHANCE TO SELECT THEIR PUPILS

The proposals for allowing all schools to select are more difficult. The Green Paper states a belief that, in practice, the supply of such schools could be limited. However, such a belief does not take full account of the dynamism in the system. When this is taken into account, a move to allow all schools to select is likely to lead to undesirable outcomes.

In reality, if one school were allowed to select, then this would rapidly cascade through the area and all local schools would attempt to become selective. There would be a huge benefit to being a first mover in the market (regardless of the quality of that school) because if a school did not try to select, then selection would be “done to it” by a rival school and it would not be able to provide a competitive response. As a result, all local schools would try to become selective, but in practice only some would be able to apply their academically selective criteria. The remainder, shorn of their higher-attaining pupils, would effectively become secondary moderns. This would inevitably lead to the re-creation of the binary system found in selective counties, which both the Green Paper and ministers have ruled out. This inevitable collapse into a totally selective system could be ameliorated by only allowing partial selection, but similar effects—and similar educational consequences—would ensue.

Such selection, when not targeted at areas which would benefit from it, risks severe negative consequences. To take a practical example: if a new grammar were allowed in South London, where chains like the Harris Federation and ARK Schools have been engaged in such transformative work through their comprehensive academies, this could seriously impair their successful work. Such high-performing academies make a significant impact on their more able pupils, and these organisations are highly responsive to the increased challenge from government to improve outcomes further. Removing their more able students would reduce their ability to pioneer the effective use of curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy to raise standards for all pupils, including the more able. It would not seem sensible to implement policies which harmed precisely those schools that act as exemplars for the system, especially where such schools are already achieving excellent outcomes for more able students.

Unlike the proposal of allowing new selective schools, the creation of which would be under tight central control, allowing all schools to select via a general policy change, for example to the School Admissions Code, would probably lead to the kind of negative outcomes the government wants to avoid.

5 OTHER WAYS TO EXPAND SELECTION

In addition, we believe there are two other options for increasing selection not mentioned in the Green Paper:

- » Increasing the amount of academic selection at age 16, a phase where it is already permitted.
- » Creating “super-selective” schools that cater for the top 1–2 percent of cognitively able pupils, who may not be well served by mainstream schools.

Increasing the number of highly selective post-16 schools seems unequivocally desirable, and King’s Maths College, Harris Westminster, and the London Academy of Excellence show the way. This is an area where the independent sector and universities have already been successfully working in partnership and could be induced to do much more. The challenge is to open more of these schools outside London. However, we should be aware of the funding challenges presented by the size of cohorts in these selective post-16 schools. If the government wishes them to endure and thrive while retaining their selective character, then their specific funding needs will have to be met.

In the same vein, creating highly selective secondary schools for the most cognitively able 1–2 percent of pupils would be a positive development. These children are often poorly served in the state system, even in grammar schools,⁴⁸ and their high IQs require a different kind of education. In addition, a long-running study of those defined as “precocious” in the US (defined as having an ability level ranging from the top 3 percent to the top 0.01 percent in quantitative or verbal reasoning) has shown consistently that such children are both identifiable on a reliable basis from around the age of 13 and that “their awards and creative accomplishments by age 38, in combination with specific details about their occupational responsibilities, illuminate the magnitude of their contribution and professional stature ... Their leadership positions in business, health care, law, the professoriate, and STEM suggest that many are outstanding creators of modern culture, constituting a precious human-capital resource.”⁴⁹

There may only be around 75,000 secondary school children who fall into this category, so a small network of super-selective schools around the country would transform the state education on offer to these extraordinarily talented young people. These could be new schools or independent schools converting to academy status. Such an approach would place England in line with other countries which have a dedicated resource for the very top of their ability spectrum, including the US, India, France, and Russia.

6 A WAY FORWARD

Because of the high risks of recreating a binary system, and because local circumstances are so important in determining whether increasing selection will be a “tide that lifts all boats”, we do not believe a simple, general rule change in the School Admissions Code to allow all schools to select is the right way forward. It is too blunt an instrument and would create an unavoidable race towards full selection, which would be undesirable educationally and politically.

Instead, we propose that the government do three things:

- » **First**, allow the two most straightforward proposals for more selection—allowing existing grammars to expand and creating more academically selective colleges at age 16—to proceed, subject to relatively minor conditions.
- » **Second**, pursuing the Free School route, create a dedicated programme that invites bids from providers outlining how they would use increased selection through the creation of new grammars to drive up standards in low-prosperity areas of England. This could also include the creation of super-selective schools for the top 1–2 percent of most cognitively able young people.
- » **Third**, commit to objective evaluation of each of the new selective projects against the criteria of excellence, equity, and choice (an approach taken by the previous Labour government to both academies and Sure Start). Such evaluations would allow the government to demonstrate that the selective projects are having the desired effects, and to amend or reverse them if they are not working.

While die-hard opponents of selection will not support this package, we believe that for areas with stubbornly low academic outcomes it is worthwhile piloting new selective schools. In the Autumn Statement the Chancellor announced £200 million to support the growth of grammar schools; we believe that this funding should be targeted at spreading high-quality education in areas of low prosperity and persistent low performance. By controlling the programme centrally, the DfE would ensure that all bids are assessed against the educational tests of excellence, equity, and choice—both before sign-off and once the schemes are up and running. And the DfE should be tough on instances of underperformance by newly selective schools, putting sunset clauses into funding agreements so that schools will lose their ability to select if they fail to play their role as the “tide that lifts all boats”.

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