



House of Commons
Education Committee

Evidence check: Grammar schools

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to the report*

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The Education Committee

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1 Introduction

Background

1. Selective schools admit some or all of their pupils based upon certain selection criteria. Grammar schools are an example of selective secondary education in England, where entry is dependent upon measured academic attainment in examinations at age 11 years (the 11-plus). In contrast, non-selective schools accept pupils regardless of their attainment (although they may use admissions criteria when oversubscribed). Non-selective schools may stream, track, or band pupils by ability or aptitude, but this generally takes place within a school rather than across different schools.

2. English grammar schools have existed in some form since before the 17th Century,¹ but the modern grammar school concept dates back to the Education Act 1944.² This provided for free secondary education after the age of 14, and split schools into three principal types: grammar schools, which focused on academic studies; secondary modern schools, which were intended to prepare children for trades; and secondary technical schools. Very few technical schools were established, undermining the structure and leaving—in effect—a two-tier system.

3. The number of state grammar schools peaked at almost 1,300 in the mid-1960s when around one-quarter of all pupils in state secondary schools attended grammar schools. While in Opposition, the Labour Party rejected the principle of academic selection, instead adopting a policy of ‘comprehensivisation’.³ The then Education Secretary Anthony Crosland requested plans from local authorities to convert all secondary schools into comprehensives,⁴ leading to a decline in the number of grammar schools, which continued through subsequent governments, with the fastest period of decline in the 1970s. The proportion of pupils in grammars fell to below 20% early that decade, below 10% by 1976, and has been 5% or less from the late 1970s onwards.

4. Grammar schools select almost all of their pupils based on examination of their academic ability, usually at age 11.⁵ Section 104 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 provided for the designation of maintained schools as grammar schools where the Secretary of State was satisfied that a school had selective admission arrangements at the beginning of the 1997–98 school year, the upshot of which being a ban on new grammars. There are currently 163 grammar schools in England with a total of 167,000 pupils.⁶

The Government’s proposals for selective education

5. On 12 September 2016 the Government launched a consultation entitled Schools that Work for Everyone, which sought “views on proposals to create more good school

1 [‘Private Education from the Sixteenth Century: Developments from the 16th to the early 19th Century’](#), in JS Cockburn, HPF King and KGT McDonnell, eds, *A History of the County of Middlesex* (London, 1969), pp 241–255

2 [Education Act 1944](#)

3 *Grammar Schools and Selection*, Lords Library Note [LLN 2016/0049](#), House of Lords Library, October 2016

4 Comprehensive schools were implemented more widely in Scotland than in England, Wales or Northern Ireland.

5 *Grammar School Statistics*, Standard Note [SN01398](#), House of Commons Library, November 2016

6 *Ibid*

places”.⁷ The Green Paper comprises four sections, including proposals relating to allowing selective schools to expand, or new ones to open, while making sure they support non-selective schools. This report focuses on those proposals, which attracted a great deal of public interest, and were a significant departure from the education policy of the past two decades.

Box 1: The Green Paper

The Government intends to apply conditions on new and expanded selective schools, and has proposed the following menu of options:

- “Take a proportion of pupils from lower income households;
- Establish a new non-selective secondary school;
- Establish a primary feeder in an area with higher density of lower income households to widen access;
- Partner with an existing non-selective school within a multi-academy trust or sponsor a currently underperforming and non-selective academy; and
- Ensure that there are opportunities to join the selective school at different ages.”

Source: Department for Education, *Schools that work for everyone* (12 September 2016)

Our evidence check

6. On 8 November 2016 we held an oral evidence session in order to examine the evidence surrounding academically selective schools, or grammar schools. Evidence checks are a form of select committee inquiry previously used by the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee and the Education Committee, and have been used to take a closer look at the evidence base for a high-profile policy. The November session gave us an opportunity to hear cases for and against grammar schools, and their effects on academic attainment, social mobility, and the education system as a whole.

7. We heard from Dr Rebecca Allen, Reader in Education, University College London and Director of Education Datalab; Professor David Jesson, Professor of Economics, University of York; Mr Luke Sibieta, Programme Director, Institute for Fiscal Studies; Professor Anna Vignoles, Professor of Education, University of Cambridge; Nick Gibb MP, Minister for School Standards, Department for Education; Dr Tim Leunig, Chief Scientific Adviser and Chief Analyst, Department for Education; and Donna Ward, Chief Analyst, Department for Education. This report summarises the evidence we heard in one oral evidence session in relation to the Government’s proposals. It does not offer a comprehensive analysis of all the issues, which are well documented elsewhere.

8. We are very grateful to all of our witnesses; our standing specialist adviser on education, Professor Jo-Anne Baird, Director of the Department for Education at the University of Oxford; and the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, which was a great aid to our work.⁸

Aims of the policy

9. The aims of the policy set out by the Government fell broadly into three categories: to increase parental choice;⁹ to create more good schools;¹⁰ and to decrease the attainment gap between children from high and low socio-economic groups.¹¹ This is expected to be achieved by repealing Section 104 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

Parental choice

10. Parental choice was a recurring theme throughout the evidence check. We asked the Government how many new grammar schools might emerge from this policy by the anticipated end of the present Parliament in 2020. The Minister told us that growth was not pre-determined and “will be driven by demand from local communities”¹² and that new school creation “will ultimately be driven by local demand and what parents want.”¹³ Donna Ward told us that the Government would consult with local communities before the expansion of existing grammar schools or the creation of new grammar schools was permitted.¹⁴

11. We asked the Minister what would happen if a local community did not make such a request.¹⁵ There is still a degree of ambiguity around the response to such a potential situation—the Government did not explain whether an external figure (or body) would decide on behalf of communities if the expansion was deemed to be in their best interest. The Minister did tell us that the aim was to create schools that have:

the ability to provide a very rigorous academic education for high-ability pupils [and that] they can then provide the support and knowhow to the other schools in the area about how to raise academic standards for their most able pupils.¹⁶

Creation of more good schools

12. The second reason given by the Minister for the introduction of the policy was that “grammar schools are good schools”.¹⁷ He noted that 99% of them are rated at least “good” by Ofsted and 82% are “outstanding”, while only 20% of non-selective schools are rated “outstanding”¹⁸ under the same measure. The Minister told us that:

8 *Academic Evidence on Selective Secondary Education*, [POSTbrief 22](#), Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, December 2016

9 Qq 57, 59, 72, 75

10 Qq 11, 20, 44, 46

11 Qq 2–3, 15–16, 37

12 Q57

13 Q59

14 Q75

15 Q72

16 *Ibid*

17 Q44

18 *Ibid*

one of the conditions for [grammar school] expansion [...] would be that you have to work with local neighbouring schools, either to establish an honest, non-selective school or to work with an underperforming selective school.¹⁹

He told us that the Government intends to:

bring the DNA of a grammar school, how they educate the most able pupils, to take that expertise about the curriculum, and about teaching methods, to those other schools to ensure that they are delivering similarly high-quality education.²⁰

13. Professor Vignoles told us that she was struck in the green paper by the statistic that 99% of grammar schools were rated “outstanding” or “good”: “That is a very high proportion. We think that that is down to the students who attend those schools or the teachers who teach in them or a combination of both.”²¹ She noted that it was “debatable” that “grammar schools know better how to educate [...] pupils, and therefore, could they be the ones to provide the assistance to the non-selective schools, as it appears to be proposed”.²²

14. Professor Vignoles also emphasised that “there is an assumption in the Green Paper [that] the grammar school is a superior quality school and that they are doing things that provide those children with a better education.”²³ We understand that—indeed, in many cases—current grammar schools do provide an excellent quality of education for the children who attend them. That said there is a “big assumption”,²⁴ in Professor Vignoles’s words, that the same model of schooling in these good and outstanding grammar schools would be as effective when applied to a school with a more varied intake. This is an area for which the existing evidence is inconclusive. Luke Sibieta told us that “grammar schools do not necessarily need to be part of the equation. It is offering high-quality academic education and high expectations [that matters].”²⁵

Narrowing the attainment gap

15. The pupil premium is additional funding made available by the Government for publicly-funded schools in England, with a view to raising the “attainment of disadvantaged pupils of all abilities and to close the gaps between them and their peers”.²⁶ closing the attainment gap. In oral evidence, the Minister cited a recent report into schools in Knowsley—an area that has historically low levels of educational achievement—which concluded that grammar schools “had the potential to transform education in the area.”²⁷ In 2016–2017 financial year, schools receive £1,320 per registered pupil in reception to year 6, and £935 per pupil in year 7 to year 11, where those pupils were eligible for free school meals at any point in the previous six years.²⁸

19 Q46

20 Ibid

21 Q11

22 Ibid

23 Q20

24 Ibid

25 Q16

26 Department for Education, ‘[Pupil premium: funding and accountability for schools](#)’, accessed 9 February 2017

27 Q72

28 Department for Education, ‘[Pupil premium: funding and accountability for schools](#)’, accessed 9 February 2017

16. We asked the witnesses whether, assuming the same prior attainment, pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds achieve better in grammar schools than they would do in non-selective schools. Professor Jesson explained that—from the current evidence base—“we find very little difference between the performance of those children with that measure.”²⁹ Dr Allen highlighted the uncertainty that exists in this area, noting that the data is imperfect:

We are grouping this huge group of children who are eligible for the pupil premium together [...] Yet, when we look at the data, we can see that those who are eligible for the pupil premium in grammar schools are less disadvantaged. They have spent less time on free school meals.³⁰

17. Professor Vignoles concluded that she did not think one could “sensibly argue that grammar schools are a force for social mobility.”³¹ Professor Jesson went on to say that:

the increase in difference in outcomes between the advantaged or the ordinary child, and the children who are disadvantaged—with free school meals—has been fairly stable over the last few years [and] I believe there is a disadvantage about the selective system, notably because of its very poor record at recruiting youngsters from disadvantaged backgrounds.³²

This is a point that the Government has indicated it wishes to tackle in the development of this policy.³³

18. Members of the first panel were in broad agreement that the evidence that pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds did better in grammar school was weak. They told us that historical and current evidence did not indicate that grammar schools had narrowed the attainment gap.

19. The policy aims set out by the Government—especially with respect to closing the attainment gap—differ significantly from the characteristics of grammar schools of the past and present.

Historical and international context

20. The Minister emphasised the importance of the Government’s proposed reforms not being a return to the 1950s and 1960s ‘binary model’, “where the alternative to a grammar school was a very weak secondary modern”.³⁴ Instead, the Government proposes that the alternative to going to a new grammar school would be for a child to attend “a very good comprehensive school”,³⁵ which would be effective at preparing them for modern life. The Minister reassured us that “we are taking seriously the improvement in skills so that the individual can fulfil their potential, but also for the needs of our economy.”³⁶ He noted that our economy is short of engineers, mathematicians, and physicists, and that this was part of the drive for the Government’s proposed education reforms.

29 Q37

30 Ibid

31 Q2

32 Q3

33 Department for Education, [Schools that Work for Everyone](#), September 2016

34 Q65

35 Ibid

36 Q76

21. The first panel of witnesses discussed the current labour market,³⁷ noting its demands for different skills than those that were required in the past. The witnesses told us that—when children are tracked by ability—the quality of the provision for children who do not pass the 11-plus can ameliorate the disadvantage for this group. Dr Allen drew attention to examples from abroad, noting that the economic gains of academic subject-specialisation can have significant effects on a country’s output.³⁸ We were told that, internationally, the move towards delayed tracking of students—delaying academic selection—is consistent with the changes that have taken place in the UK economy.³⁹ However, in some countries with high-performing education systems, tracking has proven beneficial. Dr Allen told us that in Germany, Hungary, and Austria, for example, tracking is used extensively. Luke Sibieta noted that the benefits of selection are most noticeable after 18, “because we think there are large gains from specialisation at [that] age”.⁴⁰

22. However, wide-scale selection in the 1950s and 1960s was predicated largely on the expected benefits of early specialisation. Since then, the UK economy has modernised and having a substantial supply of individuals able to fill unskilled jobs no longer matches economic demand. As Mr Sibieta noted, “we are moving to a society where we have a need for a more general level of skills, which suggests that selection at age 11 is less productive.”⁴¹ Professor Vignoles agreed: “we have moved to a labour market that requires a broader range of general skills [which] pushes you towards a more general education for longer”.⁴²

23. OECD analysis reviewed for us by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology found that, in highly differentiated systems, the impact of a student’s socio-economic status on their educational outcome was stronger than in less differentiated systems. This is perhaps due to disadvantaged students tending to be grouped into less academically-focused tracks. The Minister agreed that the UK economy requires a higher standard of education across the board than in the past, but made clear the Government’s determination that the current proposals would not replicate the then weak alternative provision of the past. Tim Leunig, the Department’s Chief Scientific Adviser, offered an example from abroad which suggested that early academic selection and overall educational performance were not necessarily mutually exclusive:

I think the most interesting country is the Netherlands. It is a much more similar country to ours [...] They select at the age of 12 [...] It is a tripartite of academic, semi-academic and technical. They are then stratified within each stream and in total they have nine different strata, so it is a very selective system. They do better than us on PISA, so clearly selection is compatible with doing well.⁴³

24. ***The Government’s proposals must take account of the needs of the economy for a broadly skilled workforce, recognising that generally technical specialisation occurs later in a student’s education, and take into account the UK’s competitiveness in a***

37 Qq 5, 10

38 Q5

39 Ibid

40 Q33

41 Ibid

42 Q10

43 Q84. The Programme for International Student Assessment (“PISA”) is a triennial international survey designed to evaluate education systems worldwide. In 2015, half a million pupils from 72 countries took the internationally agreed two-hour PISA test, results and rankings from which were published in December 2016. See OECD, ‘[What is PISA?](#)’, accessed 9 February 2017

globalised economy. This will involve having regard to international trends and the performance of other countries' education systems, which do not always point towards earlier specialisation within school systems, and attention should be paid to the Dutch model, which is overall a successful system and one that includes selection. If England is to take this course, it would be important for the Government to demonstrate clearly how this policy will meet the requirements of the Industrial Strategy.

2 Measures of success

Defining success

25. In our evidence check session, four broad potential measures of success were cited by the Minister:

- (1) The English Baccalaureate (“EBacc”) (GCSE grade C or above in English, Maths, History or Geography, the Sciences and a language);
- (2) Five A*-C GCSEs (including English and Maths);
- (3) Progress 8 (an assessment of pupil progress during secondary school, across eight subjects); and
- (4) Successful entry to university.

26. The Minister’s evidence indicated that measures (1) and (4) were preferred by the Government.⁴⁴ The first panel told us that the most commonly used reference in the academic literature is category (2), due to its deep-rooted historical legacy.

The EBacc

27. In explaining the specific research which has been reviewed by the Department for Education, the Minister referred to statistics relating to the EBacc. He stated that, of the children who leave primary school having achieved level 5 in the Key Stage 2 SATS, 78% of grammar school children will go on to achieve the EBacc at age 16. This can be compared with the lower (52%) proportion of similarly high-ability children who leave non-selective schools.⁴⁵ It is worth noting that the EBacc includes a core language, which is not compulsory on the national curriculum and at many non-selective schools. The Minister told us that the Government’s EBacc policy would be expanded so that “more young people [take] that combination of GCSEs.”⁴⁶ He noted that the subjects in this cluster are regarded as “facilitating subjects”⁴⁷ by the Russell Group of universities, and that too few schools enter pupils for these subjects. The Minister told us that the Government believes that, by increasing the supply of selective schools in such areas, school standards will be driven up across the board.⁴⁸ Responses to the Government’s consultation will clarify this issue further.

Five A*-C GCSEs

28. Professor Jesson told us that there was a lack of evidence regarding the enhancement in the outcomes for young people who attend grammar schools, when assessed by five A*-C GCSE grades, including English and Maths. He noted that, while taking account of the attainment with which these pupils enter secondary education, the eventual statistics

44 Qq 44, 96

45 Q44. The Minister stated 55% in his oral evidence, but 52% in a backbench debate on the same day. HC Deb, 8 November 2016, [col 1422](#)

46 Q96

47 Ibid

48 Ibid

do not prove causality.⁴⁹ The Minister told us that “the Education Policy Institute reported that those children going to grammar achieve one third of a grade in each subject higher than similar pupils in non-selective schools.”⁵⁰ However, Professor Jesson stated that:

Because a grammar school gets 100% of its children getting five A*-C and the secondary school down the road gets 70% does not tell you that the grammar school is better. It simply tells you that most of the youngsters that go to the grammar school are at the higher end of the attainment profile and those in the other school are not.⁵¹

29. This is an important claim by Professor Jesson: if public money is to be invested in expansion of selective education, the benefits must be made clearer.

Progress 8

30. The Minister cited Progress 8 figures to support the notion that, when children from poorer backgrounds go to grammar schools, they do well academically: “In fact, they do better in grammar schools than the children at those grammar schools who are not from a disadvantaged background.”⁵² This, he stated, is why the Progress 8 figures (calculated from progress during secondary school across eight subjects) were so good in grammar schools: “0.33 compared to the national average of zero and for non-selective schools -0.03”.⁵³

31. Dr Allen has written extensively on Progress 8, and offered a possible explanation for the reported success:

there are many children who are in grammar schools who have quite modest Key Stage 2 scores but they clearly passed the 11-plus, so we suspect they are much more able than their Key Stage 2 scores suggest. Then we observe these children with low [scores] making enormous progress in the grammar schools. It is most likely [that] the grammar schools are being wrongly rewarded for the progress that they made before they reached the age of 11.⁵⁴

Dr Allen concluded that, in her view, there is a risk that the influence of grammar schools in improving attainment is overstated by saying the Progress 8 figure is a third of a grade’s improvement.

32. Professors Jesson and Vignoles agreed with the scepticism regarding the quality of these results, noting that it was a new measure and still surrounded by some uncertainty.⁵⁵ They told us that the measure should be assessed in a year’s time, when consequences of Progress 8 could be assessed with more clarity: “As with any measure that you are using for accountability, you need to keep on top of the way that schools respond to it.”⁵⁶

49 Q35
 50 Q64
 51 Q35
 52 Q93
 53 Q44
 54 Q36
 55 Q37
 56 Q39 [Professor Vignoles]

University entry

33. The final success criterion cited in the evidence check was entry to university. The Minister told us that one in five of the state school students that started degree courses at Oxford University between 2012 and 2014 came from a grammar school.⁵⁷ This is a striking statistic, given that there are only 163 grammar schools, in comparison with thousands of non-selective state schools.⁵⁸ He also told us that a grammar school pupil from a disadvantaged background is twice as likely “to go to a Russell Group university than a child who goes to a non-selective school”.⁵⁹ However, citing admissions to a particular university or group of universities does not address the issue of improving outcomes for all children, or even academically gifted children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

34. *The Government must demonstrate how the creation of new grammar schools will help close the attainment gap within the wider school system, not just for individual pupils.*

35. *We urge caution when making comparisons between high- and mixed-ability pupils at selective and non-selective schools. It is important that, where comparisons are made, wider socio-economic issues are taken into account.*

57 Q55

58 5.2% of maintained secondary school pupils are taught in grammar schools. *Grammar School Statistics*, Standard Note [SN01398](#), House of Commons Library, November 2016

59 Q69

3 Admissions and testing

Self-selecting intake

36. We were told by the witnesses that children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to attend academically selective schools. Grammar schools have typically selected an ‘advantaged’ intake, and children from lower socio-economic families are less likely to pass the 11-plus for a variety of reasons. The Minister told us that this, which we might refer to as ‘the socio-economic entry gap’, could be because less well-off pupils are less likely to apply due to a lack of primary school support and/or encouragement to do so; or having parents who would prefer their children did not attend a selective school: “They may think it would be socially difficult for those children”,⁶⁰ the Minister told us. He emphasised the importance of new or expanded grammar schools working with non-selective primary schools to remedy this problem. Engagement with outreach programmes could “dispel these myths and encourag[e] the parents to apply for [grammar school] places.”⁶¹

37. Mr Sibieta said that, in terms of the social mix and socio-economic mix, the evidence was clear: “only 3% of children who attend grammar schools are eligible for free school meals, which compares with about 17% of children in the area as a whole”.⁶² He described some reasons for this discrepancy. First, less well-off children demonstrate lower levels of academic achievement by age 11—even by age 3 and age 5—than their selectively-schooled counterparts. This attainment gap widens throughout childhood. Professor Vignoles added that historic evidence shows a large degree of misclassification: children demonstrating “levels of achievement that you would expect to find in grammar schools [...] were not in grammar schools”.⁶³ This, Professor Vignoles told us, was due to self-selection.

Age of selection

38. Professor Jesson pointed out that the Green Paper suggests there is nothing set in stone about selection at only age 11,⁶⁴ and the Government has indicated that testing at different ages is part of their policy-scoping. The Minister agreed that 11 “may be too young for some children”,⁶⁵ which was why the Government is seeking “flexibility in the age of entry into a selective school”,⁶⁶ at age 14 or 16 for example. Professor Jesson regarded this as “a crucially important element”,⁶⁷ namely that selection at different ages could help to ensure the envisaged expansion is comprehensive and inclusive.

39. Professor Jesson told us that in Leicestershire the system was designed so that it was open for everyone. In that county children “transferred into a high school at the age of nine. They stayed there until 14. If they wanted to go to a grammar school, they transferred”.⁶⁸

60 Q86
 61 Ibid
 62 Q13
 63 Q12
 64 Q31
 65 Q96
 66 Ibid
 67 Q31
 68 Q26

We asked about existing research into the impact on children of their moving schools mid-studies. Dr Allen spoke about the impact of delaying entry to 14. She said that “we will not see more free school meal children passing a 14-plus than an 11-plus. We will probably see fewer”.⁶⁹ Dr Allen went on to tell us that the evidence from Cranbrook—a grammar school in Kent—previously selected at 13, but changed to 11 because later selection had led to difficulties with recruitment.⁷⁰ She emphasised that, at present, 2% per year join the current grammar school sector between the ages of 13 and 14, and much higher in some grammar schools.⁷¹ Dr Allen reiterated her overriding concern that “ad hoc entry points [mean that] some families are more motivated than others to enter”.⁷²

Tutor-proof tests

40. The existence of self-selection has led to the desire to reform admissions and the need to develop entrance tests that are ‘tutor-proof’—so that ability to pay for additional, private assistance is not a significant influencer on a child’s ability to pass an exam. Professor Jesson told us that the evidence for the old-style 11-plus tests was “pretty poor”.⁷³ We asked the academic experts about the prospects of a better test being created in the future. Dr Allen urged caution regarding the design of ‘smarter’ tests, noting that it was important to consider what indeed was being measured: future attainment, or current achievement.⁷⁴ Dr Allen went on to cite examples of recent research that challenges the notion that ‘ability’ is fixed: “everything we are starting to learn about the brain [...] suggests that is not right.”⁷⁵ In particular:

research came out from the University College London Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience. They said that older teenagers and young adults were actually fantastically good at being trained to improve their fundamental maths skills and their reasoning abilities. They were better at improving than younger children, which provides evidence that the brain is malleable.⁷⁶

41. In light of this evidence, and none provided to convince us to the contrary (that ability is fixed at 11), the notion that we can measure likely future academic achievement must be addressed by the Government. Account must be taken of evolutive ability. It also raises the prospect of students changing schools mid-way through their schooling, giving rise to potential disruption or at least instability during the formative years of a child’s development.⁷⁷

42. Mr Sibieta identified a further issue with testing, namely that tests which are used for setting are capable of being remedied at a later date. If for example a child underperforms on test-day, they can be re-assessed relatively easily, and moved between sets.⁷⁸ The same reassurance cannot be found in the school entrance context: mistakes could mean a child being placed in a school which is unsuitable for them. It is therefore at least more costly

69 Q32

70 Ibid

71 Ibid

72 Ibid

73 Q26

74 Ibid

75 Ibid

76 Ibid

77 This was a point raised during Q32 [Professor Jesson]

78 Q29

to correct mistakes or one-day underperformances. It is also noteworthy that movement seems to have been considered in a unidirectional manner—where children are moved to grammar schools, not removed from them. This might have implications for the capacity of these new grammar schools.

43. We asked the Government about its intended reforms to the testing process, namely how it could be ensured that advantage does not skew ability to pass in an unfair direction. Dr Leunig told us that “it is possible to level the playing field.”⁷⁹ For example, the same principle as that which is applied when allowing children born in August a lower pass-mark. In theory, the same could be applied in the context of socio-economic background. “Even without a perfect, tutor-proof test, which [...] does not exist”,⁸⁰ Dr Leunig told us that such adjustments were viable. Dr Leunig made a final important point on this topic, noting that empirical testing of this entrance system should be trialled: “try it and see whether it works better or worse than the predecessor. If it works better you build on it. If it works less well, you withdraw it”⁸¹

44. If, as the Minister suggested, a tutor-proof test is a ‘holy grail’, selection tests should not be the only basis on which admissions to grammar schools are based. The Government has yet to demonstrate how an admissions system could be designed in a manner which would be immune to gaming, or being reduced to the ability to pay.

79 Q91

80 Ibid

81 Q97

4 Resource sorting

Unintended consequences

45. There was broad consensus from the academic panel that—on balance—in areas with selective systems, children who do not pass the 11 plus do slightly worse when compared with comprehensive systems. Again, it is important to emphasise that the only evidence available is with regard to the historic system. That said, there is no widespread, representative, national evidence to the contrary. Dr Allen did note in evidence that “admittedly, the size of the damage to their GCSE outcomes is small”.⁸² The principal reasons for this discrepancy, we were told, relate to ‘resource sorting’, with grammar schools ‘creaming off’ teachers, pupils, and resources from local non-selective schools. Dr Allen explained:

The current selective systems in England [...] areas such as Kent or Lincolnshire or Buckinghamshire—have far more pronounced inequalities and access to suitably qualified teachers than do comprehensive or non-selective systems [...] Grammar schools are more likely to have fewer unqualified teachers, far more experienced teachers than in secondary moderns, more teachers with an academic degree in the subject that they are teaching, and less churn of teachers. This provides one piece of evidence as to why secondary moderns find it so difficult to function within a selective system.⁸³

46. Professor Vignoles cautioned using historical evidence to inform a new policy, which “might look quite different [to] the grammar system of old.”⁸⁴ She told us that every school might have an incentive to try to admit students by ability (under the new system), “in order to improve their intake and compete with their neighbouring schools”.⁸⁵ Professor Vignoles warned that, where children are ranked by ability in a widespread way, where some schools have the most able and some the very least able pupils, “the consequences for the schools at the bottom of that system [...] would be dire.”⁸⁶ She noted that a by-product of this system could very well be that many teachers would be less willing to teach in these bottom-rung schools, compounding the issues highlighted by Dr Allen with regard to ‘creaming off’ the best resources.

47. Additionally, the loss of positive peer-effects could take hold—situations where children struggling academically are ordinarily boosted by the presence of higher achieving members of their cohort, something which Professor Vignoles identified.⁸⁷ We heard that these concerns could snowball further, with low-achieving students seeing their support reducing and their class-sizes growing; therefore guaranteeing the quality of their education falls.⁸⁸ The Minister told us that, “in terms of what happens to the other

82 Q3
 83 Ibid
 84 Q7
 85 Ibid
 86 Ibid
 87 Q40
 88 Q7

schools in grammar school areas, the evidence is mixed”,⁸⁹ but that a Sutton Trust report from 2008 indicated there was “no adverse effect on the non-grammar schools in [the studied] areas”.⁹⁰

Resource implications

48. We asked the panel about the possibility of ameliorating such impacts of this system. We were told that this depends on whether these resources were perceived as finite, and what accountability structures were in place in regard to accountability. Professor Jesson emphasised the importance of interaction within local communities, a point with which the Minister agreed.⁹¹ Dr Allen said she would mandate every grammar school to:

take into a multi-academy trust three or so [non-selective schools], the correct number to be representative of the population. The advantage of that is they will have to bear the consequences of any of the negative impacts of resource sorting around finance and around teachers. Then we set up an accountability system that punishes them for standards in those [non-selective schools].⁹²

49. The Minister was clear that, under the Government’s proposals, “it absolutely will be a condition of approval that they [grammar schools] have to demonstrate how they are going to help other schools in the area”.⁹³ Moreover, these new or expanded schools would be required to collaborate with feeder schools in less affluent areas, in order “to ensure that all the children in that area have proper access to that grammar school, which of course does not happen in many areas at the moment”.⁹⁴ We agree that this is a very sensible element of the policy which must be made part of any new scheme.

50. *The creation of new grammar schools would have effects throughout the education system; whilst the Green Paper considers the system as a whole, the Government must look carefully at the consequences for school funding, the supply of teachers, and the overall health of schools in England. Specifically, alongside its response to the consultation process the Government must publish a thorough assessment of the impact of introducing greater selection on the wider school system, outlining all of the options considered.*

89 Q64
 90 Q44
 91 Qq 20, 83
 92 Q23
 93 Q83
 94 Ibid

Conclusions and recommendations

1. The policy aims set out by the Government—especially with respect to closing the attainment gap—differ significantly from the characteristics of grammar schools of the past and present. (Paragraph 19)
2. *The Government's proposals must take account of the needs of the economy for a broadly skilled workforce, recognising that generally technical specialisation occurs later in a student's education, and take into account the UK's competitiveness in a globalised economy. This will involve having regard to international trends and the performance of other countries' education systems, which do not always point towards earlier specialisation within school systems, and attention should be paid to the Dutch model, which is overall a successful system and one that includes selection. If England is to take this course, it would be important for the Government to demonstrate clearly how this policy will meet the requirements of the Industrial Strategy.* (Paragraph 24)
3. *The Government must demonstrate how the creation of new grammar schools will help close the attainment gap within the wider school system, not just for individual pupils.* (Paragraph 34)
4. *We urge caution when making comparisons between high- and mixed-ability pupils at selective and non-selective schools. It is important that, where comparisons are made, wider socio-economic issues are taken into account.* (Paragraph 35)
5. *If, as the Minister suggested, a tutor-proof test is a 'holy grail', selection tests should not be the only basis on which admissions to grammar schools are based. The Government has yet to demonstrate how an admissions system could be designed in a manner which would be immune to gaming, or being reduced to the ability to pay.* (Paragraph 44)
6. *The creation of new grammar schools would have effects throughout the education system; whilst the Green Paper considers the system as a whole, the Government must look carefully at the consequences for school funding, the supply of teachers, and the overall health of schools in England. Specifically, alongside its response to the consultation process the Government must publish a thorough assessment of the impact of introducing greater selection on the wider school system, outlining all of the options considered.* (Paragraph 50)

Annex: Birmingham

King Edward VI Foundation

1) The King Edward VI Foundation schools in Birmingham emerged as a case study during our session. The schools were noted as an example where an attempt had been made to address the low numbers of free school meal pupils in grammar schools. The Minister noted that this system has “different criteria for children from more disadvantaged backgrounds” and that it had been successful in increasing the proportion of children from those backgrounds attending those selective schools.⁹⁵ Moreover, Dr Leunig highlighted the King Edward VI Foundation as an example of an “experiment”⁹⁶ where its admissions testing was able to be tailored more closely according to background—a form of affirmative action, through which tutoring and affluence effects could be mitigated.⁹⁷

2) Professor Jesson highlighted the significance of this example, noting that the Foundation had “so enhanced its rapport and its engagement with its local schools”⁹⁸ that around one-third of the 120 pupils that go to this independent school are in fact from non-selective state primary schools.⁹⁹ This experiment, Professor Jesson told us, has given local children and their families the taste for—and inclination to—taking part in an elite system.

3) Dr Allen spoke at length about the Birmingham experiment, explaining that one of the King Edward VI Foundation schools had a target of 25% of its intake would be pupil premium children: a criterion that was met within two years.¹⁰⁰ Because the Foundation does not have control over the entire system in that city, Dr Allen warned, “there was quite a large displacement of pupil premium children from some of the other grammar schools, and one in particular, into the King Edward VI grammar school”.¹⁰¹ While not inherently a negative outcome as mobility is on its face being improved, it is of course important to reflect on the consequences for those children. Children in receipt of free school meals might be tracked into sets which would ultimately comprise only pupil premium children: a system of being separate but equal—where tokenism remains a risk, and the obvious benefits of mixing could be missed. Dr Allen concluded with a warning:

If we look at the Birmingham experience and say, ‘We could do that across the country. We could have dedicated places for free school meal children,’ some areas would find them very difficult to fill [...] they would have to dip so far down the ability distribution that they would be admitting pupil premium children who did not look much like the other children in the grammar school as a consequence.¹⁰²

95 Q86
 96 Q91
 97 Ibid
 98 Q14
 99 Ibid
 100 Q19
 101 Ibid
 102 Ibid

Specific effects in certain areas

4) The Minister cited a Sutton Trust report from 2008 regularly throughout the evidence session. He told us that it “says that there is no adverse effect on the non-grammar schools in those [studied] areas, although I admit that the evidence is mixed.”¹⁰³ While it is true that this particular report found no negative effect on other schools in the surrounding area, witnesses pointed out that the authors also note that there were few gains observed when controlling for achievement in primary school. This indicates that there were few advantages or disadvantages to a selective system. If the Government is determined to act, it should do so on the basis of stronger evidence than is currently available.

5) Mr Sibieta added that in Aberdeen in the 1950s and 1960s, boys who were not able to attend grammar schools did not experience significant disadvantage “because there was a high-quality level of vocational training and fairly clear occupational routes”.¹⁰⁴ He told us that “a similar thing happened in Northern Ireland”.¹⁰⁵ In response to this evidence, an official at the Department of Education in Northern Ireland told us that the figures are as follows: “84% of grammar pupils achieved 1 A-level; 41% of non-grammar pupils achieved 1 A-level; and 59% of pupils NI overall achieved 1 A-level”.¹⁰⁶

103 Q44

104 Q6

105 *Ibid*

106 *Ibid*

Formal Minutes

Wednesday 8 February 2017

Members present:

Neil Carmichael, in the Chair

Ian Austin	Lucy Frazer
Michelle Donelan	Lilian Greenwood
Marion Fellows	Catherine McKinnell
Suella Fernandes	William Wragg

Draft Report (*Evidence check: Grammar schools*) proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered that the draft report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 50 agreed to.

Annex agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fourth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

[Adjourned till Tuesday 21 February at 9.15am

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 8 November 2016

Question number

Dr Rebecca Allen, Director, Education Datalab, **Professor David Jesson**, Professor of Economics and Education, University of York, **Luke Sibieta**, Programme Director, Institute for Fiscal Studies, and **Professor Anna Vignoles**, Professor of Education, University of Cambridge

[Q1–40](#)

Mr Nick Gibb MP, Minister for School Standards, **Dr Tim Leunig**, Chief Scientific Adviser and Chief Analyst and **Donna Ward**, Chief Analyst, Department for Education

[Q41–106](#)

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2015–16

First Report	The role of Regional Schools Commissioners	HC 401 (HC 975)
Second Report	Holocaust Education	HC 480 (HC 974)
Third Report	Appointment of the Chief Regulator of Ofqual	HC 822
Fourth Report	Mental health and well-being of looked-after children	HC 481
First Joint Special Report	Education, skills and productivity: commissioned research	HC 565
First Special Report	Apprenticeships and traineeships for 16 to 19 year olds: Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2014–15	HC 317
Second Special Report	Extremism in schools: the Trojan Horse affair: Ofsted Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2014–15	HC 324
Fourth Special Report	Holocaust Education: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2015–16	HC 974
Fifth Special Report	The role of Regional Schools Commissioners: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2015–16	HC 975

Session 2016–17

First Report	Careers education, information, advice and guidance	HC 205
Second Report	Appointment of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills	HC 170 (HC 674)
Third Report	Social work reform	HC 201 (HC 733)

First Special Report	Appointment of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2016–17	HC 674
Second Special Report	Social work reform: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2016–17	HC 733