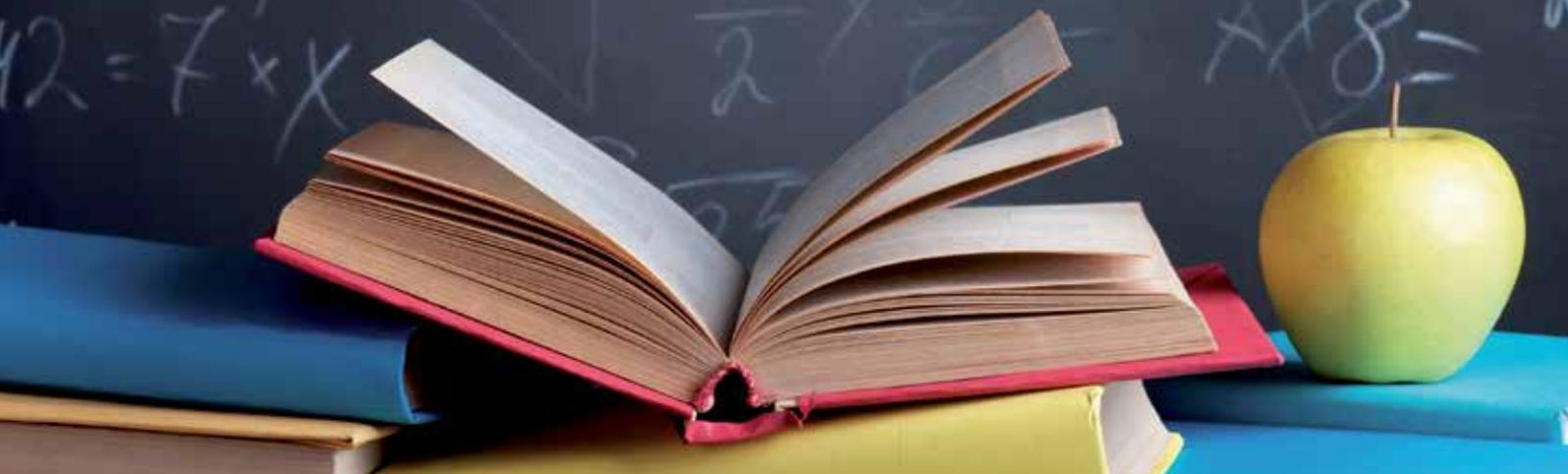


Grammar time?



Should the moratorium on new grammar schools be lifted? Two MPs debate the selective system



Ditch the rose-tinted glasses. In reality, most children were failed by the grammar system, says **Kevin Brennan**

A schools system based on selection at 11 is not the way to raise standards or promote social mobility. Instead we should focus relentlessly on supporting schools to raise standards for all, regardless of their backgrounds. The most effective way to do this is through great teaching and leadership.

Economic and social changes, including the creation of more white-collar jobs, better healthcare through the NHS, and more free

education increased social mobility in the postwar period, but there is no convincing evidence that this was driven by having a schools system dominated by secondary moderns with a selected minority attending grammar schools. In fact, as Andreas Schleicher – who oversees the OECD Pisa scores – has made clear, the international evidence shows that systems with selection for children at the tender age of 11 perform less well than non-selective school systems.

Far from promoting social mobility, selective systems entrench social division. The difference in domestic average wages between the top 10% and bottom 10% of earners is much wider in selective areas than in non-selective.

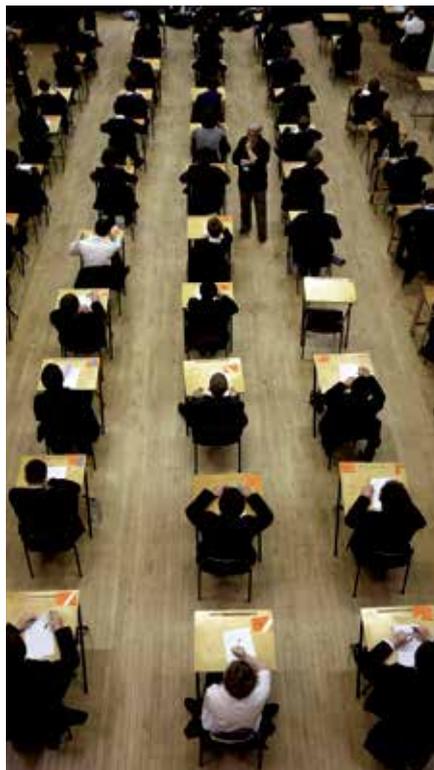
Furthermore, grammar schools are highly socially selective institutions overall. Of the 164 that remain, 161 have fewer than 10% of pupils eligible for free school meals. In 2010, 96,680 year 7 pupils received free school meals out of a total of 549,725. Of the 22,070 grammar school pupils, only 610 were receiving free school meals. It is undeniably the poorer children who are losing out, in part because in some areas almost everyone who passes the 11-plus has had private tuition.

Some people look back at the previous selective system through rose-tinted glasses. At its height at the beginning of the 1960s, more than a third of grammar school pupils got only three O-levels. Just 0.3% of grammar school pupils with two A-levels were working class. Less than 10% of the population went to university. Most pupils were failed by the 11-plus test and attended resource-starved secondary modern schools where they could not take O-levels, and where they were highly unlikely to have the opportunity to go on to a sixth form. In contrast, teenagers are now 50% more likely to go to university than they were just 15 years ago.

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David Cameron was right in 2007 when he said that those who wanted to expand the number of grammar schools were “splashing about in the shallow end of the educational debate”, and that his party was in danger of becoming a “rightwing debating society” rather than an aspiring party of Government.

Yet the current government led by him has pandered to those he said were “clinging on to outdated mantras that bear no relation to the reality of life”, by creating a loophole to allow the expansion



of selective provision by stealth to locations many miles from existing grammar schools.

A future Conservative government would be likely to further expand selection at 11 against all the evidence that selective systems do not work, and even though across the country parents overwhelmingly do not want a system where children are segregated at such a young age.

In government, Labour legislated to prevent the expansion of divisive selection at 11, and to allow local parental decisions to determine the future of the remaining grammars. That remains our policy.

In the next government we will focus on school improvement, ensuring all teachers are qualified and on achieving outstanding provision in all our schools for all young people. Our education policy will be designed for the many, not a socially selected few. 🏰

Kevin Brennan is Shadow Schools Minister and Labour MP for Cardiff West



We need to look again at grammar schools to level the playing field and spread opportunity, says **Graham Brady**

When Rab Butler legislated to open grammar schools to all regardless of the ability to pay fees, the Labour party welcomed it.

In January 1944, their spokesman John Parker said: “We are particularly pleased to see the Tories accepting progressive ideas and I welcome the fact that the two main parties are collaborating in trying to pass this bill as law. In all our big educational advances there has been a sharing of ideas.”

Then, the only objection of a Labour party truly in touch with working-class aspiration was that the 1944

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Act did nothing to open the public schools to the many and not the few.

Through the postwar decades, grammar schools powered a massive levelling of British society. Grammar-school girls and boys led an assault that opened up the professions, the media, the civil service and politics in a way that had never been seen before.

How depressing it has been to watch this process go into reverse over the last 30 years. An unholy alliance of deluded egalitarians on the left and the comfortable middle classes, who can afford to go private, has connived in the removal of opportunities from people of limited means.

Still, no one has really opened up access to the public schools, so we are left with a gross distortion. If you are



Altrincham Grammar School for Boys, in Graham Brady's Altrincham & Sale West constituency

well off, you are allowed to buy access to schools that specialise in catering for the more academically inclined: if not, you should know your place and do what the man in Whitehall tells you to do.

Those who campaigned against selection in the 1960s always said they objected to second-rate secondary modern schools, not to grammar schools, but their dubious achievement was to get rid of the bit of the system that worked – not the bit that failed. Authorities such as Trafford – which kept our grammar schools – top the league tables year after year, not just because of the outstanding grammar schools but because the high schools do such a great job too.

Now, where grammars remain, the proof of the pudding is found not just in the academic performance of selective and part-selective areas; it is in the support of the public, too. Opinion polls show three-

quarters of people wanting more grammar schools and the only local vote to decide the future of a grammar school since the introduction of the ballot system in 1998 showed similar support. As both serious parties approach the election struggling to gain support much above 30%, perhaps their determination to stop people having more of the schools they want is part of the reason?

As the 7% educated in independent schools rebuild their grip on the establishment, it is time we looked again at how we can level the playing field and spread opportunity more fairly. The last government and this one have both encouraged diversity. We have academies and University Technical Colleges; schools that specialise in everything from maths and computing to the performing arts. Parents can even open free schools when they are unhappy about state education where they

live, but still those who think Whitehall knows best insist on telling them what kind of schools they are allowed to have.

In 21st-century Britain it is unacceptable that people's choices are so severely constrained. It is a bizarre anachronism that in most of the country only people who can afford to pay are allowed access to academically selective schools. It is absurd that admission to the best state schools is routinely determined not by how well a child is suited to that school but by whether his parents can afford to buy a house in the catchment area.

Those of us who really want a fairer Britain should be prepared to trust the people. 🇬🇧

Graham Brady is Conservative MP for Altrincham and Sale West, Chair of the 1922 Committee and an Associate Editor of *The House*