**Research Record sheet**

**Source 1**

**Title**

 ‘Working-class children get less of everything in education - including respect.’

**URL**

https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/nov/21/english-class-system-shaped-in-schools#:~:text=Schools,%27Working%2Dclass%20children%20get%20less%20of,everything%20in%20education%20%2D%20including%20respect%27&text=When%20Diane%20Reay%2C%20Cambridge%20University,uncover%20in%20state%20schools%20today.

**What is it?**

An interview of Diane Reay written by Donna Ferguson

**Who produced it?**

The Guardian

**When was it produced?**

  November 2017

**What is the source telling you?**

The eduction system is unfairly biased towards the success of children in middle/upper class families. The academy and free school movement in 2010-11 created more ‘segregation and polarisation’ for working-class children as they receive more funding per pupil than in state comprehensives. Reay also found that free schools and academies typically educate fewer children that receive free school meals which therefore means that they have a more advantaged intake of students. Research suggests that the class and inclination of a child’s parents have a huge affect on how successful they are because of ‘extra resources and activities’. Less affluent children also tend to have a less broad education as they generally go to schools that aren’t doing so well in the league tables which makes maths and English a key focus. This often leaves no time for creative activities such as dance or drama and parents cannot afford for them to pursue them outside of school. Some ‘super-strict schools’ operate on the principle that children from working-class backgrounds are less disciplined and therefore don’t receive the respect for them and their families that they deserve. Research also shows that putting children of mixed abilities in a group, creates greater overall progress.

**What is its purpose?**

Its purpose is to expose the difference in quality of education of different classes.

**Is it reliable?**

It may be slightly biased as it is based on personal experience and opinions but contains many facts. The Guardian is a respectable newspaper with views from the centre-left of the political spectrum.

**How is it useful to answering the question?**

It is very useful as it has many facts that show that the type of school a student attends affects their education experience. It is also written by someone that saw the class gap first hand and who works in the faculty of eduction at Cambridge.

**What are the source’s limitations?**

Only presents one side of the arguement.

**Useful quotes:**

‘£12,000 a year is the average spending on a privately educated primary pupil, compared with £4,800 on a state pupil. For secondary it’s £15,000 compared with £6,200.’

‘Free schools receive 60% more funding per pupil than local authority primaries and secondaries.’

**Source 2**

**Title**

British education: still selecting and rejecting in order to read an elite.

**URL**

https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/british-education-still-selecting-and-rejecting-in-order-to-rear-an-elite/

**What is it?**

An article by Diane Reay

**Who produced it?**

London School of Economics

**When was it produced?**

August 2020

**What is the source telling you?**

The article discusses the failing of the government to handle the GCSE and A-level results during COVID as they underestimated the grades of working-class students which will affect them for the rest of their lives. The divide between rich and poor in education despite COVID because of the Conservative government’s new funding plans to, in essence, ‘increase the money given to affluent schools at the expense of those in disadvantaged areas’. Parents of the working-class students are more likely to have low qualifications and a low-status job, or none at all, which creates a loop meaning that social and economic mobility up the class system is unlikely.

**What is its purpose?**

Its purpose is to present an opinion and show how the GCSE and A-Level results during COVID-19 were just the tip of the iceberg of the huge underlying inequality in the British education system.

**Is it reliable?**

It is quite reliable as the journalist experienced the discrimination for being from a working-class family first hand.

**How is it useful to answering the question?**

It is very useful as it shows that the inequality that was ingrained into our education system still exists and due to COVID-19 has become very apparent.

**Useful quotes:**

‘The A-levels fiasco is yet one more confirmation that the education system remains elitist at its core’

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**Source 3**

**Title**

Hard evidence: do grammar schools boost social mobility?

**URL**

https://theconversation.com/hard-evidence-do-grammar-schools-boost-social-mobility-28121

**What is it?**

It is an article

**Who produced it?**

The conversation

**When was it produced?**

June 2014

**What is the source telling you?**

The average earnings in selective and non-selective areas are about the same but the earning inequality was far greater in selective areas. Top earners in selective areas earned roughly £24,000 more than those who live in the same area but attended a comprehensive school. This may be because taking the brightest pupils out of a class has negative affects on those that are left because children learn from each other. In addition, children that are more engaged often have more involved parents who may help them with their homework or comment to the school about improvements that could be made for example. The article also criticises the arguments made suggesting that grammar schools help social mobility by saying that grammar schools only have a positive impact on the brightest few from poorer backgrounds and ignores the children on the other end of the spectrum who also live in selective areas but don’t attend grammar schools.

**What is its purpose?**

To present both sides of the argument about the benefits that grammar schools have on social mobility but finds many flaws in the arguments that say that grammar schools aid social mobility.

**Is it reliable?**

Found through UCL so a reliable source.

**How is it useful to answering the question?**

It is very useful as it directly answers one of my sub-section questions about grammar schools.

**What are the source’s limitations?**

They only collected a few types of data so they may not have been able to get a full view of grammar schools’ affect on students. They also used a source from 2009 which may be slightly outdated. In addition, the group they focussed on where people born between 1961 and 1983 so some aspects may have changed but we have no way of knowing.

**Useful quotes:**

‘Grammar systems increase inequality, lowering earnings at the bottom as well as raising them at the top.’

‘Grammar schools focus exclusively on the impact that have on the top of the earnings distribution for the 25-30% of children who make it to one.’

‘The argument then runs that grammar schools promote social mobility by enabling bright kids from poorer backgrounds to access these schools and go on to achieve high earnings and status.’

**Source 4**

**Title**

If Boris Johnson really wants to ‘level up’ Britain, his reshuffled cabinet must be more diverse

**URL**

https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/boris-johnson-really-wants-level-up-britain-his-cabinet-greening

**What is it?**

A report by Rt Hon. Justine Greening (chairman of the social mobility pledge)

**Who produced it?**

LinkedIn

**When was it produced?**

Feb 2020

**What is the source telling you?**

The only way that Boris Johnson can really start to ‘level up’ the country is to reflect the diversity of society in the government. According to the Sutton Trust, Boris Johnson’s first cabinet was two-thirds privately educated whereas only 7% of the population are privately educated. To achieve a more equal society, it is very important to have a people with a wide range of experiences at the top, so decisions made made for the many and not for the few. The only investments that they are making is into infrastructure when they really need to be spending that money on improving healthcare, education, and jobs as well as removing any barriers to accessing them. Much of success in the UK is down to connections not ability which causes lots of unearned privileges and an absence of equality of opportunity.

**What is its purpose?**

To present an opinion.

**Is it reliable?**

Justine Greening is the founder of the Social Mobility Pledge and the Former Secretary of State for Education so she has a specialist insight into the topic.

**How is it useful to answering the question?**

It is useful as government makes policies about social mobility and at the moment, they don’t have the adequate diversity to do so in a way that benefits the greatest number of people.

**What are the source’s limitations?**

Although there are facts taken from reliable sources, it is mostly opinion based.

**Useful quotes:**

‘Mr Johnston’s government should be reflective of modern Britain … because diversity makes for better decision making.’

‘This isn’t about quotas - it’s about having people at the top table who have shared the lived experiences of a wide range of people around our country and can bring that insight to decision-making.’

‘Britain still runs on connections, not competence. There is too much unearned privilege.’

**Source 5**

**Title**

Grammar schools: what are they and why are they controversial?

**URL**

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-34538222

**What is it?**

It is an article

**Who produced it?**

BBC news

**When was it produced?**

September 2016

**What is the source telling you?**

Grammar schools are state schools that require pupils to pass an 11+ exam. This divides children at the age of 11 into those who got into grammar school and those who will go to a local secondary modern/comprehensive school. The grammar schools that we would recognise today dates back to the education act 1944. The system was changed by labour politicians as the selection reinforced the class divide as better-off children generally went to the grammar schools and working-class children generally went to the secondary moderns. In 1960, there were around 1300 grammar schools but in 1980 there were fewer than 200. The entry exams include English, maths and verbal and non-verbal reasoning. These tests have been widely criticised as children who have had extensive tutoring almost certainly do better.

**What is its purpose?**

To inform people

**How is it useful to answering the question?**

It is useful as it gives background information to the nature of grammar schools.

**What are the source’s limitations?**

Very few as the BBC have to be impartial so no opinions are expressed

**Useful quotes**

‘They have traditionally used questions based on verbal reasoning and non-verbal reasoning, and it is argued that those who have been intensively tutored tend to do much better in these tests.’

**Source 6**

**Title**

Free school meals: the lifelong impact of childhood food poverty

**URL**

https://theconversation.com/free-school-meals-the-lifelong-impact-of-childhood-food-poverty-148660

**What is it?**

An article discussing the effects that a lack of food can have on children’s education and their health

**Who produced it?**

The conversation

**When was it produced?**

October 2020

**What is the source telling you?**

Food security in the UK has decreased significantly because of the coronavirus pandemic. This causes ‘holiday hunger’ which is when families can’t afford the food that they would normally get for free from their schools during the term. Children who have food insecurities have a much greater loss of education during the holidays than those with food security. This means that they can’t achieve their full potential in school which has a knock on effect to their lives. They are also more likely to suffer from stress and anxiety and is linked with chronic illnesses such as asthma. Certain foods provided key nutrients such as zinc, iodine and iron which helps brain growth and development. Nutrient deficiency has an impact across generations. Mothers who were undernourished as children are more likely to have low birth weight. There is a strong correlation between underweight birth and heart disease in adults. Achieving a balanced diet is also a challenge for many families: a quarter of secondary school children in the UK eat less that one portion of fruit or veg a day. However, for a family with earnings less than £15,860, they would have to spend 42% of their income offer housing on food to meet the Eatwell guidelines.

**What is its purpose?**

To present an opinion against the government’s decision to not continue free school meals into school holidays.

**Is it reliable?**

It is reliable as it is written by a senior lecturer in food, nutrition and public health.

**How is it useful to answering the question?**

It is very useful as it shows how much free school meals help families with food insecurity. It also shows that disadvantages that children from poorer families automatically have on their education as they can’t afford the same nutritional food as children in food secure families.

**Useful quotes**

‘Five million families have encountered food insecurity, and 200,000 children are missing meals every day.’

‘In 2018, the Food Foundation charity published a report showing that following the Eatwell guide was likely to be unaffordable for families living on a low income. The report calculated that families earning less than £15,860 would need to spend 42% of their income (after housing) on food to meet the Eatwell guidelines.’

**Source 7**

**Title**

Five years of university admissions statistics reveals the disadvantages faced my state-educated students

**URL**

https://www.varsity.co.uk/news/19783

**What is it?**

It is an article

**Who produced it?**

Varsity, Cambridge

**When was it produced?**

September 2020

**What is the source telling you?**

The acceptance and application rates for universities are much lower for students without grammar or private school education. Only 48% of applications are from people who have never attended a private or grammar school at either L2 level (up to GCSE) or L3 (A-levels or equivalent). Given that 7% of children attend private schools and 5% of state education children attend grammar schools, the applications don’t reflect the population. The acceptances are also disproportionate to applications. The proportion of acceptances increases for those who attended private schools at L3 from 29% in admissions to 35% in acceptances. In 2020, Cambridge announced that its intake had a record number of state school students (70% risen from 68.7% the year before). However, this number includes those who move from private L2 to state L3. Colleges do record student’s L2 education, but they don’t categorise them by it. Applications from this group have a success rate of 33.9% compared to the average of 26.4% while those who have attended neither a private school or grammar school at L2 or L3 is only 20.9%. The categorisation of students’ previous education only sorts them into either private or state but doesn’t distinguish within those groups.

**What is its purpose?**

To show facts

**Is it reliable?**

It is a centre-left student paper. However, it is independent and not connected to any student union so is less likely to be affected by biases.

**How is it useful to answering the question?**

Very useful as it shows that state school students are extremely disadvantaged when applying for universities which would affect their future jobs and lifestyle.

**Useful quotes**

‘The biggest increase in acceptances versus admissions occurred for students who had attended a private school at L3; these students comprised 35% of acceptances but only 29% of applications.’

‘This data indicates that more students from private and grammar school backgrounds apply to Cambridge than are represented in the general population as only around 6.5% of school children in the UK attend private schools while only 5% of state-educated pupils in England attend grammar schools.’

‘However, currently University admissions categorise applicants according to L3 education type, meaning if someone takes A Level or equivalent qualifications at a state school, they are recorded as a state applicant and admission.’

‘Students who attended a private school for L2 but are recorded by the University as a state-school applicant because of their L3 education are the most successful category of applicants. Examining acceptances as a percentage of applications, students in this category have a success rate of 33.9% across all colleges, compared to an average success rate of 26.4% for all applicants.’

‘Among no colleges do pupils, with no private or grammar school education, have the highest acceptance rate when broken down according to educational institutions attended by offer-holders.’

Figure 1: All Cambridge applicants over the 2014 to 2019 period by L2 to L3 school type



Figure 2: All Cambridge acceptances over the 2014 to 2019 period by L2 to L3 school type



Figure 3: Acceptances recorded as state according to L2 school type



Figure 6: Percentage of successful applications across colleges for students without any private schooling (red) vs. with private schooling (purple)

**Source 8**

**Title**

Finland’s social climbers: How they’re fighting social inequality with education, and winning

**URL**

https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/how-finland-is-fighting-inequality-with-education-andwinning/article29716845/

**What is it?**

An article

**Who produced it?**

The Globe and Mail (Canada)

**When was it produced?**

April 2016

**What is the source telling you?**

The education system in Finland was originally implemented to close the gap between the urban and rural populations. However, nowadays it also helps immigrants and asylum seekers. Poorer children in Finland have a much better chance of becoming middle- or upper-class adults than in any other country in the world. This is because only Finland has changed its entire education system to improve social mobility. They have a high number of teachers meaning that there can be extra one-on-one sessions to help students with their specific needs. However, they still attend all the same classes as everyone else. There is no standardised testing or dividing in terms of ability until the age of 16. They strive to give every student the best possible ‘school experience’ to keep as many children as possible in education past the age of 16. They do this by not having a main focus on core subjects such as maths and science and spending more time on arts and languages. Teachers are required to be highly trained (have a master’s degree) in not only their own subject, but in education as well. It is a highly sought-after degree as promises a lifetime of job security. The system also had an unintentional side effect: giving Finland one of the highest scores on the PISA exams (an international ranking of student success). However, the system has come under criticism. Nowadays, as it mainly focusses on helping immigrant children, rural areas say that they are suffering from a lack of resources.

**What is its purpose?**

To show that there are much higher levels of social mobility in Finland, mainly because of their education system

**Is it reliable?**

the arguments made are backed up by data and the newspaper is at the centre of the political spectrum.

**How is it useful to answering the question?**

It is very useful as it shows that the type of education system a country has, has a great impact on its levels of social mobility.

**What are the source’s limitations?**

Some of the information and research may be outdated.

**Useful quotes**

‘The odds of someone born below the poverty line, becoming a middle-class adult are better in Finland that in almost any other country.’

‘Finnish officials estimate that, over a lifetime, each child who doesn’t complete high school costs the state $1.8 million in social expenditure and lost taxation’

‘Other countries have made education changes, but only Finland has altered its entire system to improve the odds of poor kids entering the middle class.’

**Source 9**

**Title**

Britain’s private school problem: it’s time to talk

**URL**

https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/jan/13/public-schools-david-kynaston-francis-green-engines-of-privilege

**What is it?**

It is an article by Francis Green and David Kynaston (who also wrote the book ‘Engines of Privilege’).

**Who produced it?**

The Guardian

**When was it produced?**

January 2019

**What is the source telling you?**

Private education in Britain damages the life chances of those educated in the state system. The inherent privilege that comes with attending a private school is effectively reserved for those at the 95th and above percentiles of the income ladder. Many of the most prestigious jobs are dominated by private school educated people (74% of judges and 32% of MPs). This means that private schools have people to vouch for them in parliament, the legal system and in the Church of England. One of the reasons for private school students’ success is their ability to prepare students for public exams. In 2018, the proportion of students achieving A\*s and As at A-levels was 48% compared with a national average of 26% meaning that they are more likely to go to university and earn more in their future employment.

**What is its purpose?**

To present the arguments against private education.

**Is it reliable?**

The article is published in a well-respected newspaper and contains lots of facts.

**How useful is it to answering the question?**

It is very useful as it presents the overall effect that private school have on society as a whole.

**What are the source’s limitations?**

It doesn’t offer a balanced opinion with points of view from both sides of the argument.

**Useful quotes**

‘“Britain has the lowest social mobility in the developed world,” laments David Cameron in 2015. “Here, the salary you earn is more linked to what your father got paid than in any other major country. We cannot accept that.”’

‘They have ready access to prominent public voices speaking on their behalf, especially in the House of Lords; they enjoy the passive support of the Church of England, which is distinctly reluctant to draw attention to the moral gulf between the aims of ancient founders and the socioeconomic realities of the present.’

‘Overwhelmingly, pupils at private schools are rubbing shoulders with those from similarly well-off backgrounds.’



**How Does the Education System in the UK Affect Social Mobility?**

I have chosen to write my Extended Project on the effect of the education system on social mobility. Social mobility is defined as ‘the movement of individuals, families, households, or other categories of people within or between [social strata](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_stratification) in a society’[[1]](#footnote-2) and a child’s standard of education heavily influences their economic and social status later in life. The education system in the UK often favours upper class children; private schools and extra parental support are just some of the reasons why this is happening. However, schemes such as the Pupil Premium have been put in place to try and close this gap between rich and poor in the quality of education. I think that it is very important in any society that everyone gets an equal opportunity in life so that they are rewarded by talent rather than background.

I decided to write my EPQ on this topic as I am studying History and Geography for GCSE’s and plan to continue with one of them for A-levels and maybe university. I have a general interest in Politics, Economics and currents affairs and believe that education is the main way to make our society more equal. Having gone to a state primary school in an affluent area I realised, through watching the news and documentaries, that it was hugely different to most state schools across the country. As I attend a London private school, I know that I don’t have much personal experience but during my research I have become much more aware of the significant problems that I have been fortunate enough never to confront. While personal decisions, based on financial circumstances, are important, I believe that it is also the government’s job to invest in the state school sector so that there would no longer be a need for private education.

In this essay, I will cover the private school problem and how much of a difference that makes to university enrolment and jobs. I will debate the significance of grammar schools and if they really do help children from different classes the same amount in terms of their admissions process. Over the past couple of years, the faults in our education system have been accentuated because of COVID-19. It has had a profound impact on all children’s educations but has particularly affected the poor who may not have the adequate resources to fully engage in their learning from home. Finally, I will evaluate a few different methods that have been employed to increase social mobility and I will compare the UK’s and Finland’s education system.

**Grammar schools**

Grammar schools are a type of state secondary school that selects its pupils by an exam called the 11+ consisting of English, Maths, verbal, and non-verbal reasoning tests. In England, there are 163 grammar schools out of over 3000 state secondary schools[[2]](#footnote-3). Throughout the 1950s and 60s, the two main types of education were grammar schools and state comprehensives. Students who passed the 11+ exams would go to a grammar school and students who did not went to a comprehensive school. At this time, there was a high number of grammar schools, but this decreased as the system was being criticised by especially Labour politicians who said that it reinforced class divisions. In 2016, the conservative government led by Theresa May said that they intended to remove the ban on the creation of new grammar schools with a purpose of making ‘this country a true meritocracy’[[3]](#footnote-4).

Grammar schools are often seen as the solution to low social mobility as they offer a high quality, free education to all. However, the children who have received extensive tutoring almost always do better on the entrance exams. Given that it is only children from upper and middle-class families receiving tutoring, they have a clear advantage when taking the test. This leads to an intake that doesn’t represent society as only 2.6% of grammar school students receive free school meals compared with 15% nationally[[4]](#footnote-5). In areas with highly achieving schools, estate agents can drive up house prices. This means that only families who can afford the housing, can send their children to a grammar school. In Kent, the most selective half of grammar schools are in the west of the county which has a lower average score in the IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation) 2019 than the east. Given that grammar schools are meant to be a key driver of social mobility the number of poorer children attending them is disproportionately low. This might be due to their start in life. According to a BBC documentary, by the time they start school, children who grew up in poverty are a year behind their wealthier counterparts[[5]](#footnote-6). This specifically affects children from Black and ethnic minorities as 45% of them live in poverty compared with 25% of white children5. While the majority of grammar schools were phased out in the 1960s and 70s, the ones that were kept tended to be in more affluent areas meaning that their intake would automatically be from more affluent families. Many families in these areas send their children to prep schools in order to get into the grammar schools.

Grammar schools also affect negatively affect the children who don’t pass the 11+. In an area with a selective system (not including private schools), the range of earnings between people at the 90th percentile and at the 10th percentile is £24,000 compared with £20,000 in areas with a comprehensive system. While people in the 90th percentile earn £1.31 more per hour in the selective area, those who didn’t do so well, at the 10th percentile, earn 90p per hour less than their equivalent in a comprehensive area[[6]](#footnote-7). This shows that while grammar schools do boost earnings for the top percentiles, they also lower them for the bottom meaning that someone who doesn’t make it to a grammar school does worse than they would have done if they had if they lived in a comprehensive area. Firstly, taking the brightest few children out of a class reduces the drive for success for the ones left so their academic results generally suffer. Secondly, many people argue that 11 is far to young to be dividing children up and sending them down what may be very different paths. This division essentially tells the ones who don’t succeed in the system that they’re not good enough, creating two very separate groups early on in children’s lives, and widening the class divide. Lastly, there is a greater inequality in the accessibility of qualified teachers in selective areas. Grammar schools have more qualified and experienced teachers, and lower teacher turnover. Not only does this make the quality of education higher, but it also gives students role models too look up to and may encourage them to pursue further education.

**Private schools**

Private schools may be one of the most controversial topics as it is a main part of our education system in the UK that consistently priorities the privileged. This limits the opportunities of state school pupils to achieve their full potential in life. Private schools have existed for centuries but only admitting those of nobility and high social status. The Public Schools Act in 1868 changed this making it so anyone who could afford it, could attend. Nowadays, about 6-7% of the UK’s school population attend a private school7. In other countries, there are still private schools, but they receive a lot of state funding meaning that they are less exclusive (Germany) or are centred around religion, also with low fees (France).

In 2018, the average cost of a preparatory school was £13,026[[7]](#footnote-8) – about half of the income of a family on the middle rung of the income ladder (in 2020, the median household disposable income was £30,800[[8]](#footnote-9)). The cost of private secondary education is much higher than this. In both cases it is clear that without financial support, private education will only ever be available to the wealthiest households. Due to these high fees, private schools can afford to pay their teachers higher wages. As a result, they attract more highly trained teachers often with degrees in their subjects. These people have done extensive research into their subjects so can make lessons engaging, leading to students learning more. This is also helped by smaller class sizes with secondary state schools having an average of 22 students per class compared with 15 in secondary private schools[[9]](#footnote-10). More affluent children also have more opportunities to do extra-curricular activities. Given that schools that working-class children predominantly attend aren’t doing so well in the league tables, a lot of pressure is put on teachers to improve results. This means that they have to focus on English and maths meaning that there often isn’t time for creative subjects such as art and drama. In an interview with Diane Reay, a Cambridge University professor of education who came from a working-class background, she said that ‘these children come from families where their parents can’t afford to pay for them to do those activities out of school… It feels very unfair’[[10]](#footnote-11)

Although one argument for private schools is that families who send their children to private schools still pay tax that goes towards the state sector, taking richer and generally more involved parents out of the system is detrimental. This is because as their child is no longer in the system, they will no longer take as much interest in improving it. Generally, parents who are more affluent are more involved. Parents who have benefitted from the education system encourage their children to work hard in order to do that same. Less affluent parents have often had a negative experience of the education system. This starts from an early age; children who have been brought up in a wealthy household generally have higher literacy skills than a child in a poorer household. Much like the divide between grammar schools and comprehensives, the brightest students leaving, negatively affects the rest of the class.

The privilege that private schools bring, gets passed through generations. People who have attended a private school are more likely to send their own children to a private school. This is because they generally do better in public exams. In 2018, 48% of private school students achieved A\*s and As at A-levels compared with a national average of 26% [[11]](#footnote-12). This means a higher percentage attend university and consequently get better paid jobs. The connections that come with these highly paid jobs are also crucial. People who are successful tend to work with or be friends with other people who are also successful so they would have more opportunities as they have more connections that might help them find internships or jobs. These connections also reinforce the class divide through marriage. People in highly paid jobs are more likely to meet and marry another person in the same situation and if they were to have children, then they would have a great advantage in getting a good education and job - as said by Justine Greening: ‘Britain still runs on connections, not competence. There is too much unearned privilege[[12]](#footnote-13)’. This causes extremely low levels social mobility as it is very hard for someone not born into money to achieve it in their later life.

Statistics from 2012 show that Oxbridge was disproportionately selecting students from three top private schools (Eton, Westminster, and St. Pauls) and two sixth form colleges (Peter Symonds College and Hills Road Sixth Form College). In fact, they selected roughly the same number of students from these 5 schools as from 1800 state schools across the country[[13]](#footnote-14). The top three private schools are some of the most expensive in the country with Eton costing £40,668 in 2018-19 which obviously excludes anyone coming from a working-class background. Research done by Varsity (a Cambridge University newspaper) shows that state school admissions are misrepresented in data. Between 2014 and 2019, 48% of the students applying to Cambridge University had no private of grammar school background but only 40% of acceptances were from this category[[14]](#footnote-15). This means that students with a private or grammar school background have been overrepresented in acceptances compared to admissions. It is clear that the university system is upholding a cycle of privilege that allows wealthier children to get better paid and more prestigious jobs. Professions with the highest percentage of people who have been privately educated are judges, barristers, and military generals with 2-stars and above with over 70% being privately educated[[15]](#footnote-16).

The British education system of private schools is unlike any other country which may be due to how it has affected politics. Since 1945, 50% of the UK’s Prime Ministers attended a private school with a further 29% attending grammar schools. In addition, 32% of MPs and half of the cabinet in 2019 attended private schools15. This means that they will never propose drastic legislation that would harm a system that they have benefited so much from. Boris Johnson’s recent ‘levelling up’ strategy has come under attack as his cabinet has very little diversity. In a LinkedIn post in 2020 after the reshuffling of the cabinet, Justine Greening (former Secretary of State for Education and Chairman of the Social Mobility Pledge) said that ‘Mr Johnson’s government should be reflective of modern Britain[[16]](#footnote-17)’. This is because more diversity brings more insights into different people’s lives and therefore lead to decisions that benefit the greatest number of people.

**The Effect of COVID-19**

The lockdowns that caused schools to close had a very different effect on children in various positions. From online lessons to GCSE and A- level grade predictions, children living in poverty were disadvantaged at every step. Working from home may not have been a possibility for many parents which would have been a challenge particularly for primary aged pupils. This has led to the gap that already existed before the global pandemic to greatly widen. In addition, the current cost of living crisis and rising gas prices will strain these families’ resources further. The challenges that young people, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, have faced will influence their future employment and life.

Online lessons were especially a challenge for those without access to the crucial resources needed such as laptops or iPads. In the UK, 11% of homes did not have access to the internet in March 2020[[17]](#footnote-18). Consequently, these children wouldn’t have been able to participate in many, if not all, of their lessons, losing countless months of learning throughout the two lockdowns when schools were closed. 34% of teachers working in schools with the highest number of children on free school meals said that they could broadcast a live lesson that their students could access compared with 47% on average, and 53% said that they could receive work sent to them by their students (73% average)[[18]](#footnote-19). In order to have made the educational experience better for the students, teachers especially in school in deprived areas needed extra training and support. Students also needed a suitable place to study. This would have been very difficult for poorer children living in cramped conditions to find. Working in a small, noisy space makes online lessons much harder, and once again, giving wealthier children a clear advantage. Because of the loss of many months of education, parents who could afford it were more likely to pay for their child to be tutored privately. This would widen the attainment gap even further as these resources are very limited for students from poorer backgrounds.

Keeping physically and mentally healthy during the lockdowns was a challenge particularly for students from working class background. For many children, the free school meals they receive are the most nutritious meal they have each day. Because of COVID-19, five million families suffered with food insecurity and 200,000 children missed meals every day[[19]](#footnote-20) which can have long-term effects on children's health. Children who do not get enough essential nutrients (such as vitamin D, zinc, and iron) are more susceptible to chronic illnesses such as asthma and their bodies can't properly develop and grow. Anxiety and stress are more common among people who suffered from food insecurity during childhood which can lead to depression. As a result, these children don't do as well in school as they are less able to concentrate and achieve their goals. While the government advises that children need to eat a balanced diet; this isn't always possible. If a low-income family followed the Eatwell guidelines, they would have to spend 42% of their income after housing on food19. The problems that were already facing low-income families before the pandemic became even more critical.

The algorithm used to predict A-level results was perhaps one of the government's greatest failings during the pandemic. The system undeniably discriminated against working-class children as results were based on mainly schools' previous results. For example, if a 2019 A-level student achieved a D, then a student from the 2020 class would also have to have that same score. This led to many, very bright and hardworking students who didn't go to the most highly academically achieving schools to have their grades go down which potentially might have cost them a place at university. As Diane Reay said in an article for the LSE, The A-Levels fiasco is yet one more confirmation that the educational system remains elitist at its core'[[20]](#footnote-21).

**Potential solutions to low levels of social mobility**

While the social strata of the British education system may appear unbreakable, many schemes have been put in place by to try to increase levels of social mobility such as the pupil premium, bursaries, and outreach projects from private schools. This section will evaluate these schemes as well as discussing if the Finnish education system, one of the most equal in the world, could be implemented in the UK.

Bursaries are the clearest way to widen access into private and higher education. They are means tested and is assessed by household income. This means that a child from a poorer family still has the opportunity to go to a private school and get a potentially better education than they would, otherwise. St Paul’s School in South-West London have about 15% of their pupils on bursaries[[21]](#footnote-22) ranging from 5% to 100%[[22]](#footnote-23). However, in order to get a bursary, the student must pass the entrance exams which, as previously discussed, would be a challenge as poorer children are disadvantaged educationally from birth. There are also very few bursaries compared to the number of students who would greatly benefit from receiving one.

 Universities often have quotas about the percentage of students they must admit from state schools. This is to make sure that the privilege that private education brings, is not the only factor that effects acceptance into higher education. However, these quotas don’t represent the proportion of children attending state schools compared with private schools. For example, 70% of Cambridge’s intake in 2020 attended a state school compared with 93% of the general population[[23]](#footnote-24). Contextual offers are another way that universities try to encourage students from all social classes to apply for higher education. This is when a university will look at the average grades of the school that a student is at and adjusts the grades they need to get at A-level to be accepted. It is very effective as students who are from more affluent families and have had more opportunities, have to get higher grades than those from poorer families. Nevertheless, some people say that assistance has to come in earlier education as people lose ambition and the divide between wealthier and poorer children just gets greater as they get older.

As private schools are classed as charities, they are required to help the community which they often do in the form of outreach projects to local state schools. During lockdown, students from St Paul’s would tutor boys from the Fulham Boys School in Maths. This helped both sides as, not only could the boys from Fulham be taught Maths, but the students from St Paul’s School could also consolidate their knowledge by teaching it to someone else. They also provided outreach to local primary schools through the ‘Primary Professors’ scheme in which pupils from local primary schools attended lessons in Maths and Science taught by teachers at St Paul’s who are specialised in their subjects. This meant that they got to make use of the resources St Paul’s has such as science laboratories which wouldn’t be available at their schools.

The pupil premium is a grant given by the government to schools to help the most disadvantaged students. The pupil premium is allocated to pupils who are eligible for FSM or have been in the last 6 years and children who have been adopted or are in care. For those who receive or have received FSM, the grant is £1385 per pupil per year for primary education and £985 for secondary education[[24]](#footnote-25). The pupil premium is paid to schools and is not a personal fund for those children receiving it as the school can decide where they want to spend it. In very economically divided areas, the children who need that extra support may not get it as the money may be spent on wider improvements rather than supporting their specific needs. In addition, schools can spend the funds to help pupils who aren’t eligible forthe pupil premium who have other needs, for example: have or have had a social worker, or act as a carer. While this money is benefitting students, it may not serve its original purpose and help increase social mobility. Schools must prove that they are spending the pupil premium beneficially with a yearly report, open for anyone to see, where they outline how they have spent the money and how it helps disadvantaged pupils. This is also constantly monitored by Ofsted inspections.

**Why the Finnish education system may be the solution?**

Finland has one of the best education systems in the world that offers equal opportunities for all to achieve highly in life. The change from a traditional system was made in the 1970s because of a growing divide between the affluent urban population and the poorer rural population. Rather than spending money to try and level out society, they invested it in a completely new system that is centred around creating equality. Now because of the drastic change ‘the odds of someone born below the poverty line, becoming a middle-class adult are better in Finland that in almost any other country’[[25]](#footnote-26).

Firstly, they have a larger number of teachers for example in a primary school in a poor area in Helsinki (Meri-Rastila Primary school) they have one teacher or teaching assistant for every 6.3 children26. Teachers are required to have a master’s degree in education with half of it dedicated to their specific subject. A teacher qualified in education can engage their students better as they are specialists in not only their subject but ‘how to teach’ as well. Although the job doesn’t pay any more than it does in other countries, it is extremely popular and selective as it offers a promise of lifetime job security.

Everyone gets taught the same curriculum in the same class and differences are handled by individual attention, not separation which is possible as there are so many teachers. By not separating and grouping students by ability until the age of 16, they are all treated the same rather than divided into the ones who will pursue further education and the ones that won’t. This is beneficial mentally as none of the students lose their ambition to succeed by being graded and not believing that they are good enough. There is also a lesser focus on core academic subjects such as Finnish, Maths and Sciences which take up only a third of the day. The other two thirds are used for sport, art, music, and foreign languages. This helps to reduce stress and consequently keeps a greater number of children in school past 16. According to Finnish officials, ‘over a lifetime, each child who doesn’t complete high school costs the state $1.8 million in social expenditure and lost taxation’[[26]](#footnote-27). This means that having a well-educated population not only benefits the individuals, but it also benefits the government financially. This would give a government an incentive to change to this system. Because state education is so good, private schools are irrelevant meaning that there isn’t a divide between those who are able to afford private education and those who aren’t. Finland’s schemes to increase social mobility also significantly increased their results, consistently having the West’s highest scores in the PISA exams (international ranking of student success). This shows that an equal system is also a productive system.

However, now the scheme mostly focuses on immigrants, or children of immigrants rather than the rural population whose education was meant to get better because of the change. They say that they are suffering because of a comparative lack of resources. The percentage of students dropping out of school at 16 has remained at 6% (but is low compared with 12% in Canada and 21% in America[[27]](#footnote-28)). Parents are starting to send their children to schools in other areas allowing them to attend schools in more middle-class neighbourhoods leaving children in poorer districts behind. This doesn’t happen to the huge degree that it does in Western Europe and the US but may affect the equality of the system. In addition, the system is based around making improvements for the many rather than for individuals. While the average results are greater, highly achieving pupils may not do as well as they could if classes weren’t made up of pupils of all abilities.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the education system in the UK consistently yet unintentionally discriminates against those born into lower and working-class families. From grammar and private schools to the effects of COVID-19, under-privileged children are destined to not achieve as good A-level results and not get as highly skilled or highly paid jobs as wealthier children. It is only the most determined, diligent, and dedicated who can overcome the system and get the same amount of value out of their education as upper-class children do. The idea of grammar schools was always to allow a better education to naturally talented children from all classes. However, because of private tutoring, the system has benefitted the wealthy and exacerbated the problem that it was trying to solve. Although grammar schools do give opportunities to outstanding students from poorer backgrounds, cases like this are very much the exception, not the rule. By having even more selective schools, despite being government funded, levels of social mobility are only going to remain constant or decrease. The same can be said for private schools but to a greater extent. From better trained teachers and smaller class sizes to more activities, private school children have a great advantage in attaining a better education. The fact that only the wealthiest households can afford to access the highest standard of education results in the perpetuation of class divides in society.

The lockdowns caused by COVID-19 worsened all the problems that already existed for poorer children. Not having a suitable place to do schoolwork or not getting sufficiently nutritious meals affected their education irreparably. The algorithm used to predict grades put under-privileged at a disadvantage because of the way that it was established, looking at 2019 grades. Bursaries and contextual offers to universities only helps a few very bright students from poorer backgrounds as the divide between upper- and lower-class children starts before they start school at the age of 4 or 5. The majority will not benefit from these schemes meaning that social mobility isn’t really affected.

The Finnish and the UK education systems have similar aims as they both revolve around making sure that children from all classes get a high-quality education, but they have had vastly different levels of success. So, would it be possible to implement it in the UK? Firstly, it would take a few decades for there to be changes in the levels of social mobility as the first changes in Finland were made in the 1970s and continued until the 2000s. Parents of highly achieving children wouldn’t support the change as it means that their children probably wouldn’t attain such high results because the classes aren’t divided into ability until the age of 16 and there aren’t any educationally selective schools. While they may support the fact that it benefits most students, the majority would always prioritise their own child’s education over that of the many. Finally, because of the academic results and financial benefits that the system brings from keeping children in school, the government has an incentive to make the change. However, the government would have to make a large initial investment into the system taking money from other sectors and wouldn’t see a return on their investment for decades. Overall, it would be possible to apply the system in the UK but until it brought returns, it would never be that popular especially among the upper classes.

**Project Evaluation**

In completing this project, I have found out the effect that the education system has had on social mobility in the UK by researching various different components of it such as grammar schools. When I conducted my research, I found that there are mainly negative views towards the education system so included a section on some solutions to the problems caused by it to create balance. For this I used mainly fact-based sources and thought about how great an impact the strategies had on the social mobility in the system as a whole. The project objectives that I set myself at the beginning of the project were: finding out if the system was bias towards the successes of upper-class children and to improve my source analysis and time management skills for longer projects.

Throughout the project, I found that I often felt rushed to keep up with my plan especially while doing the research. I constantly found myself too busy during term time so had to catch up during the holidays. I also found that there were few teachers who were able to talk knowledgeably about my topic as it is very specific, and no one had done any research into it. The subject of bursaries is very personal and private meaning there wasn’t much specific data available, and I didn’t feel it was appropriate to do a survey on it. Therefore, I didn’t have as much primary data as I would have liked to have. However, I found many, very useful articles, and papers which I quoted and took data from. I assessed their credibility by researching the publication and found that publications from the left of the political spectrum were the most critical. If I were to do this task again, I would have put aside more time for research and had a greater focus on talking to more people from diverse backgrounds who may perceive the education system in a different way.

Researching this topic has given me an insight into a system, that I am a part of, which I didn’t have before and allowed me to view it from a different perspective. I realised the huge challenges faced by students from different classes to continue to further education and I was surprised by how early the disparity starts. I believe that it is a very important topic as it greatly influences everyone’s lives and is a key factor determining the society that we live in.

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