

Response of the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)

House of Commons Education and Skills Committee

Inquiry into Secondary Education: Pupil Achievement

1. NASUWT is pleased to be invited to contribute to the work of the Work and Pensions Select Committee. NASUWT represents the interests of over 211,000 teachers in schools and colleges throughout the United Kingdom.
2. NASUWT believes that the Inquiry raises a number of highly important issues relating to the needs of pupils and families from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In particular, the Inquiry has a number of wider implications in terms of tackling poverty and economic inequality; racism, discrimination and identity; the public sector expenditure strategy; the structure, organisation and management of the nation's education system; and the distribution of resources between schools.
3. The differences in pupil achievement need to be addressed as part of a national strategy for reducing inequality and raising standards of achievement amongst all young people. This will require a targeted approach which specifically identifies how the needs of particular pupil constituencies (e.g. minority ethnic groups, boys, disabled students) will be addressed and which examines the effectiveness of existing national education strategies and programmes. It requires that Government make available the resources necessary to assist the engagement of these groups of pupils.
4. Moreover, NASUWT asserts that a strategy to tackle low achievement amongst requires a commitment to ending the existing hierarchical arrangements between different categories of school and which is linked to differential funding arrangements between schools in the state sector. The funding gap between schools and LEAs must also be addressed.

Pupil Achievement: Structural/Organisational Implications

5. The Government has made clear the need for Britain to compete on the global stage. New and higher order knowledge and skills are needed within the workforce. Schools have a vital role to play in terms of the nation's economic future.
6. NASUWT asserts that systems of organisation must provide access to the highest quality learning opportunities for all young people. There should be no return to the days of the tripartite system that ensured a privileged education for the few whilst limiting opportunities for the many. This not only limited the life

chances of individuals, but for decades has hampered the nation's economic progress and global competitiveness.

7. It was in the 1960s that the then Labour Government recognised how selection in education, and the operation of the 11 plus system, was constraining the nation's development. It was a deeply damaging system which affected adversely the lives of many young people branded as "failures" from an early age.
8. The comprehensive model was an attempt to address the problems of inequality and elitism brought about by the previous arrangements. At that time, its supporters argued that a system of comprehensive education would serve to undermine privilege and inequality, and would provide better learning opportunities for all young people. Despite this progress towards comprehensivisation was delayed in many parts of the country, and comprehensive schools had to seek an uneasy co-existence with local grammar schools.
9. Successive Government have resisted any attempts to abandon selection and comprehensive schools have had to co-exist with grammar schools, as well as other forms of selective school provision ever since, including, latterly, grant maintained schools, City Technology Colleges and City Academies. The present Government has identified its aspiration to establish 1000 specialist schools by 2003, together with advanced specialist schools and around 400 beacon schools.
10. There are around 8.4 million pupils studying in 25,700 maintained and independent schools. 92 per cent of pupils are taught in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools, 7 per cent of pupils attended independent schools and 1 per cent went to maintained and non-maintained special schools and pupil referral units. There are variations within this. For example, whilst 5% or fewer young people in the North East, North West, Yorkshire and Humberside, East and West Midlands are taught in independent schools, the proportion of pupils in London and the South East who are taught in such schools is up to 3 times higher.
11. In 2001, 8.5% of all schools were independent or City Technology Colleges. However, the national picture masks significant variations between Government regions. For example, in the North East, only 3% of schools are independent or CTCs; whereas in London and the South East up to 19% of schools are independent or CTC status, able to "cream off" some or all of the most able young people in the area to form their annual intake. There are around 160 grammar schools in England with 108 of these located in just 15 out of 150 local education authorities.
12. The policy which underpins the drive for the expansion of specialist schools, reflects the problems which beset schools in London and the South East, and where there are major problems attached to recruiting and retaining teachers in many of these schools. Fewer parents are confident to have their children educated in maintained schools, leading to an expansion of alternative provisions for those who can afford to pay.

13. The available evidence demonstrates that, rather than helping to raise educational standards, the system of selection undermines the nation's educational performance which is so central to our economic performance.
14. The Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) provides a major comparative analysis of data on skills levels amongst young people at the end of their compulsory schooling. Based on an analysis of student achievement in 32 countries, the report identified a number of important issues which will be relevant to the work of the Committee.
15. The PISA analysis demonstrates that a key factor impacting on national educational standards overall relates to the attainment gap that exists between students. The most recent PISA report identified a relationship between socio-economic background and the skills of young people at age 15. However, what is more revealing is the study's conclusion that achievement differences can be moderated through effective Government intervention and by the way in which education systems are designed and organised.
16. A major conclusion of the OECD was that high educational achievement for all young people was undermined in those countries in which children of all social and economic backgrounds were not educated together. This raises important questions about the purpose, validity and consequences of selection in education systems, and raises further questions about the merits of parental choice and differential funding arrangements for specialist schools.
17. One of the arguments made in favour of the Government's plans to expand the number of specialist schools is that such schools would remain in the state sector. However, it should be borne in mind is that specialist schools receive premium funding levels per pupil when compared to their non-specialist counterparts and may not be bound by the same regulatory controls that apply to maintained schools, for example in relation to the admission and exclusion of pupils. Rather than promoting social inclusion and excellence for all, the specialist school development have exacerbated the problems of social segregation within our education system.
18. But the problems do not end there. It is also the case that the new breed of specialist schools are able to exercise the right to select up to 10% of their pupil intake on the basis of aptitude. 10% is a significant number in its own right and one which could be increased in the future. At the present time, research evidence has identified that the freedoms available to some schools has resulted in an amplified problem of covert selection and exclusion. In short, the creation of "sink schools" is likely under the current arrangements.
19. Access to educational opportunities is increasingly dependent upon the lottery of the postcode and the inequalities that exist within the housing market. Put simply, those who can afford to do so will buy eligibility into their preferred school. House prices attract a premium on the basis of proximity to the most desirable schools. Action is needed to address this. The expansion of a tier of specialist schools is not the answer, and it is also the case that action is needed to address the wider

problems of social inequality and poverty as a means to tackling apparent underachievement. Indeed, it would be a wholly misguided strategy that sought to address the problems of low pupil achievement exclusively at school level, and which did not connect these educational imperative to a wider public policy agenda for regeneration and wealth redistribution.

20. Successive Governments have failed continuously to take account of the effectiveness of comprehensive education as a model for raising standards. However, results of attainment at GCSE, A level and GNVQ as well as the findings from OFSTED inspection all point towards the success of the comprehensive system.
21. There is a considerable body of research evidence which has concluded that comprehensive systems deliver better results when factors such as prior attainment are taken into account. Moreover, the potential for comprehensive education to deliver high standards and to tackle the achievement gap between students is undermined by the 'depressing' effect of continued selective education arrangements. To be clear, research evidence demonstrates that pupils, educated in LEAs that have selective provisions, appear less proportionately in the two highest categories of GCSE performance whilst in greater proportions amongst those students in the average and below average achievement categories.
22. Selection, therefore, suppresses educational performance between schools, LEAs and between nation states. The Government's plans to increase the number of specialist schools is likely only to exacerbate the problems of selection and undermine the goal of creating the knowledge economy.
23. There is a need for a coherent programme of action to eradicate the inequalities between schools, by removing the two-tier funding structure, and by implementing the comprehensive education strategy laudably started by a Labour government some 40 years ago and which has been the bedrock of the nation's economic success in the last decades.

Pupil Achievement: Teaching and Learning Implications

24. OFSTED has previously identified that the absence of nationally comparative data that identifies patterns of attainment of children of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese Irish, Greek and Turkish origins (amongst other groups) places serious constraints on effectively targeting policy and practice developments at a national and local level. The absence of comprehensive, rigorous and systematic ethnic monitoring data has served as a major blockage to progressing racial equality in terms of pupil achievement. Moreover, there is a need for comprehensive and comparative ethnic monitoring data to be available which is linked to a thorough assessment of gender and social class differences between students.
25. The patterns of educational attainment by ethnic group are diverse and complex. Some ethnic minority groups perform better in some contexts than in others. In this overall context, generalised conclusions about educational attainment and

'race', which do not consider differences between ethnic minority groups, are unhelpful and misleading.

26. The establishment of the national strategies for literacy and numeracy in primary and secondary schools have coincided with increased levels of pupil achievement at each of the Key Stages. Indeed, evidence available from the Department for Education and Skills does confirm that achievement across all groups of pupils has improved. However, there remains a gap between the achievement levels attained by pupils, which is linked to socio-economic status and the entitlement to free school meals. At the same time, it is necessary to improve the quality of data available in relation to the backgrounds of pupils as a means of better contextualising the issue of pupil achievement. The use of the free school meals proxy is a generally inadequate measure.
27. Moreover, the Association is concerned that the data made available by the Government has tended not to address cross-cutting strands of ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status in an assessment of the pupil achievement gap. The production of statistical data on pupil performance which operates in a colour-blind way will continue to circumvent progress on racial equality.
28. It is also clear that where pupils from minority ethnic and white ethnic groups have not reached the expected levels of attainment by the end of Key Stage 2, their progress and achievement is seriously restricted when they attend secondary school. The evidence available confirms that pupils from some minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to be represented amongst those pupils who have failed to achieve level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2.
29. Schools can make a difference to levels of pupil progress and attainment. The culture and ethos of the school, the way in which it is led and managed, the extent to which staff are valued and motivated, and the extent to which racial equality and cultural diversity issues are at the centre of schools' practice are key issues in locating the potential impact schools may have on pupils' learning.
30. Moreover, where pupils do not feel that their backgrounds, cultures, needs and identities are recognised, this may serve to undermine efforts to raise their achievement. It is also the case that the peer group sub-cultures within schools may also impact positively or negatively on pupil performance. These subcultures may result in a range of anti-school attitudes and behaviours, leading to truancy (especially amongst white working class boys) or exclusion (especially amongst black working class boys). Research undertaken for NASUWT by Dr Tony Sewell (University of Leeds) has identified the impact of pupil attitudes and identities on motivation and achievement. This work confirms that the identification of effective intervention programmes can have an effect in transforming student motivation.
31. The Association also recognises that pupil achievement is affected by parental involvement and support for learning. Where parents are involved in supporting their children's education, there appears to be a direct correlation with positive pupil motivation and achievement. However, such parental support may not be

shared equally amongst parents from different socio-economic backgrounds, and may also reflect the former school experiences of parents themselves.

32. The disproportionately high rates of school exclusion of pupils from particular minority ethnic groups may also impact adversely on their progress and attainment.
33. This links to a general issue of increasing levels of pupil disaffection which has arisen as a result of a multiplicity of factors. In particular, the Association would draw attention to the impact of the overload nature of the National Curriculum and the lack of flexibility within that curriculum to meet the needs of particular groups of pupils. The Government's proposals in respect of affording greater flexibility at the end of Key Stage 3 could provide some solution to this problem; however, it is essential that curriculum flexibility does not result in a hierarchy of learning pathways for young people beyond age 14.
34. The demands of the examinations and testing system must also be addressed. It is evident to teachers in schools that the burdens on pupils can have a very demotivating effect. Many pupils are not subject to testing on an annual basis. These high stakes tests often reinforce artificial notions of ability amongst students and may serve to exacerbate the problems of failure.
35. The Association is also concerned that the economic circumstances within the homes of many students does contribute to limited opportunities to continue study outside of the school day, and may also lead many young people to secure part time employment.

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