

## Selection and Education

On 12 September 2016, the Government published its education Green Paper, *Schools that work for everyone*. The Green Paper contains a number of proposals for creating new school places and improving existing schools, including:

- allowing independent schools to sponsor academies, to set up free schools, or to offer a proportion of places as fully funded bursaries to those who are insufficiently wealthy to pay fees;
- requiring universities, as a condition of charging higher fees, to establish new schools in the state system or to sponsor an academy;
- supporting the expansion of grammar schools, ensuring there are opportunities to join selective schools at different ages, such as 11, 14 and 16;
- replace the 50% cap on faith-based admissions for free schools with new requirements including twinning with other schools, sponsoring underperforming non-faith schools, or placing an independent member or director who is of a different faith on the governing body.

The Government's plans were not specifically detailed in the Conservative Party's 2015 General Election Manifesto. The Green Paper consultation runs for three months, closing on 12 December 2016.

The NASUWT will be responding in detail to each of the Government's proposals.

### School choice and diversity

The diversity of school provision – wherein children are divided according to religious affiliation and gender, as well as ability and aptitude – has been a feature of the school system for generations.

Nevertheless, **there is strong empirical evidence that demonstrates that those countries that operate selective systems of education, whether by design or by accident, perform less well overall** and are characterised by a wider achievement gap between pupils from rich and poor backgrounds.<sup>1</sup>

The NASUWT believes that if the diversity of educational provision is to continue, then there should be an expectation that a corollary requirement of institutional collaboration across all schools should also be non-negotiable, without qualification or restriction.

In addition, consideration must be given as to the limits of diversity of school provision.

For example, **it would be unacceptable for there to be a deliberate government policy of selection or segregation of pupils on the basis of ethnic background or parental income**. Yet, currently, it is the case that children's schooling is divided along these lines, albeit without the explicit imprimatur of government. Where school admissions operate on the basis of a child's postcode, pupils from low-income households will be unlikely to be admitted to schools in more affluent areas.

There is also clear evidence of some schools adopting covert practices deliberately to deter pupils from socio-economically deprived backgrounds from applying for admission. Such practices include imposing costly school-uniform requirements, using open evenings as a means of conducting tacit interviews and producing publicity materials that convey expectations to parents that they will be required to make substantial 'voluntary' financial contributions.

**There must be a role not only for central government but also for local government in planning, organising and overseeing school provision and admissions arrangements to ensure that social divisions and inequalities are not exacerbated over time**, and to ensure good social relations between

<sup>1</sup> Wilkinson, R. and Pickett, K. (2009) *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*. London: Allen Lane

different social groups. In particular, local government has an important role in bringing together the ‘family’ of local schools, enabling them to work together, and championing collaboration between different schools. Local and central government must also be proactive in prioritising efforts to tackle segregation in the arena of public education. This should not be left to chance.

The NASUWT endorses the view that securing equity in education systems requires measures which:

- limit early tracking and streaming and postpone academic selection;
- manage school choice so as to contain the risks to equity;
- provide alternative pathways for pupils with genuine parity of esteem;
- offer second chances to gain from education;
- provide effective and independent information, advice and guidance for pupils;
- ensure strong links between school and home to support all families;
- provide high-quality early years education; and
- target resources to students and regions with the greatest needs.<sup>2</sup>

Access to qualified and experienced teachers has a major impact on children’s educational outcomes. **If the Government is serious about securing social mobility and excellence for all children, then it must begin by ensuring that all pupils are taught by qualified and experienced teachers.** This means having appropriate levers in place to recruit and retain qualified teachers and to ensure the continuous development of teacher quality.

## Conclusion

The NASUWT is committed to creating the conditions in which all schools work together for the benefit of all children and young people, irrespective of sex, disability, race, colour, religion, wealth or family income.

However, wider social and economic divisions, coupled with the failure of the Government to regulate effectively, has led to children and young people being at the mercy of market forces, where educational opportunities are increasingly based upon parents’ ability to pay.

The NASUWT rejects any proposals which would risk an extension of privilege rather than tackle the problems of inequality and social exclusion which blight the lives of many children and young people.

In order to promote equality, inclusion and social mobility, the Government needs to ensure:

- sufficient numbers of high-quality and qualified teachers;
- sufficient numbers of school places for children; and
- real-terms investment in education.

In responding to the Government’s Green Paper proposals, the NASUWT is making the case for clear and determined action to establish conditions in which all children and young people – including children from low-income households – benefit from decent and secure housing provision, safety from discrimination and abuse, and access to a broad and balanced educational offer, including access to high-quality information, advice and guidance, knowledge, skills and training, and decent jobs and careers.

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<sup>2</sup> Field, S., Kuczera, M. and Pont, B. (2007) *No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education*. Paris: OECD Publishing



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