

Comprehensive schools do not reduce social mobility

March 4 2011



Student in laboratory on the Sutton Trust summer school at Oxford 2009. Credit: OU

Children are no worse off in socio-economic terms if they go to a comprehensive rather than to schools in the selective system, according to new research. The study found that when the total cohort of children was taken into account those who went to comprehensive schools were not disadvantaged in terms of social mobility compared to those who attended grammar schools and secondary moderns.

The research, published in the *British Journal of Sociology*, was carried out by Dr. Adam Swift, from the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford, and Dr. Vikki Boliver, from the Department of Social Sciences at Bath Spa University.

The researchers analysed data from the National [Child Development Survey](#), which tracks all [children](#) born in Britain in a particular week in 1958. Some of these children were among the first comprehensive school pupils, during the transition away from a selective system.

Unlike previous researchers Drs Swift and Boliver not only compared the social mobility of children who attended comprehensives with those from grammar schools, but also included secondary modern schools in their analysis. They looked at children from all social backgrounds, rather than just those from working- class or low-income families, and they compared children of similar measured ability at age 11.

The study measured children's subsequent progress in terms of income and class and found that overall the selective schools gave no advantage in social mobility. Going to a grammar school rather than a comprehensive did not make children from poorer backgrounds more likely to be upwardly mobile. Moreover, any mobility advantage provided by grammar schools was cancelled out by the disadvantage suffered by those who attended secondary moderns. Looking at the total cohort of children, the findings suggest that comprehensive schools were as good for social mobility as the selective schools they replaced.

Dr. Adam Swift said: "We must compare school systems, not merely individual types of school within them. Looking at the full picture rather than grammar schools alone, we find little to support the idea that comprehensive schools had a negative effect on their pupils' mobility chances."

Dr. Vikki Boliver added: "Whereas much media discussion focuses exclusively on grammar school pupils, with many bemoaning the introduction of the comprehensive school as depriving academically able children of a crucial ladder of opportunity, our analysis provides a more rounded approach."

The sample size for the analysis of class mobility was 4,728. The sample size for the analysis of income mobility was 3,335.

Provided by Oxford University

Citation: Comprehensive schools do not reduce social mobility (2011, March 4) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-03-comprehensive-schools-social-mobility.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.