

Grammar schools helped to create a more unequal society, research suggests

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The English grammar school system has widened the gap between rich and poor, according to a new study published today.

Researchers have reached this conclusion after analysing the pay of more than 2,500 people born between 1961 and 1983. They found a much bigger gap between the wages of the highest and lowest paid individuals born in areas with a selective education system than they did in similar local authorities that had introduced comprehensive schools.

The average hourly wage difference between the top 10 per cent and

bottom 10 per cent of earners born in selective schooling areas was £16.41 between 2009 and 2012.

In otherwise similar areas that had gone comprehensive, the equivalent earnings gap was £12.33, says the research team from the University of Bristol, the University of Bath and the Institute of Education, University of London.

The researchers analysed information gathered by Understanding Society, a study that is following the lives of people in 40,000 UK households. This enabled them to take into consideration a wide range of factors that can affect individuals' earnings. These include gender, ethnicity, parents' education level and occupational class, and labour market conditions.

Even after allowing for such factors, they still found that 18 per cent of the income gap between the highest and lowest earners could be explained by the school system.

The researchers also point out that the highest earners from grammar school areas are significantly better off (£1.31 per hour, on average) than top earners born in similar comprehensive authorities. High-earning men appear to gain most from selective school systems.

At the other end of the scale, the lowest earners from areas with selective schools receive significantly less than their non-selective counterparts. The gap at the bottom of the income scale is most evident among women. The lowest-paid women from selective areas earn £0.87 less per hour than women from non-selective authorities. This may be because a disproportionate number of girls were assigned to secondary modern schools in the past, the researchers say.

Average earnings in both types of area considered are almost identical

(£8.59 in selective areas and £8.61 in non-selective).

Professor Simon Burgess, Director of the Centre for Market and Public Organisation (CMPO) at the University of Bristol, who led the research, suggests that the inequality caused by selective schooling systems could be explained by the calibre of their teaching force.

"Selective schooling systems sort pupils based on their ability and schools with high ability pupils are more likely to attract and retain high quality teaching staff," he says. "This puts pupils who miss out on a grammar school place at an immediate disadvantage. In addition they will be part of lower ability peer groups, which also affects their chances of succeeding at school."

'Selective schooling systems increase inequality', by Simon Burgess, Matt Dickson and Lindsey Macmillan, is published today [May 29] as part of the IOE Department for Quantitative Social Science's working paper series.

England still has 164 grammar schools. Fourteen [local authorities](#) currently operate selective education systems.

The researchers defined a local education authority as selective if more than 20 per cent of its children were assigned their school place by selection. Non-selective LEAs were those where less than five per cent of 13-year olds were assigned by selection.

More information: The study, "Selective schooling systems increase inequality," is available online:

repec.ioe.ac.uk/REPEc/pdf/qsswp1409.pdf

Provided by University of Bristol

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