

Private schools and inequality

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ABSTRACT

Among the significant inequalities within Britain's school system, the greatest lies in the resources gap and the social segmentation between fee-paying and state schools. Published estimated average effects of attending private schools in Britain on academic performance are modest, but nevertheless significant at each stage of education. Cumulatively, by the end of a school career the private school pupil has gained notably higher qualifications compared with a state school pupil with an observably similar background—enough to ensure a distinct advantage in access to a high-status university, a good job and high pay. These gains add to the educational advantages of growing up with an affluent family background. An unusually high proportion of private school alumni occupy highly influential positions in business, in the judicial system, in the press and in politics. A further financial advantage from private school stems from an increased probability of partnering with a richer spouse. The hallmark of a good school policy for reducing inequality would be one that opens up access to private schools, so that participation is no longer constrained as much by financial background, and diminishes substantially the inequalities between schools' resources. Feasible reforms are of two kinds: those that would lower parental demand for private schooling, inducing enlargement of the state sector, and those that would directly integrate pupils from the state sector into currently private schools. Currently, bursaries are far too small to make a substantial difference.

Key words: private schools; education; inequality

Introduction

Education achievement is one of the key foundations for the inequalities in the UK. A good part of the inequality in people's educational achievements stems from their socio-economic background. There remains, however, very significant inequality in the institutions of education, and in particular within the school system. I take this to be the substantive issue for schools policy, when addressing the UK's economic and social inequality. The overriding question is: to what extent do schools provide children with equal opportunities to flourish and thrive? The subsidiary question is: does the schooling system afford potential mitigating measures that compensate for the educational inequalities arising from social background or, conversely, does it reinforce the advantages of growing up in a wealthy family?

The greatest schooling inequality by a very long distance lies in the resources gap between the private (fee-paying) and state sectors. With access limited by ability to pay, there exists a stark socio-economic demarcation of pupils between the sectors, yielding in effect a two-tier, segmented system. How does this fact colour the answers we should give to these questions?

In this commentary I expand upon the evidence described in Farquharson et al. (2024). The private schools in total are quite small, if measured by the proportion of the pupil population (6.4% in England in 2021, some 4% in Scotland, 2% in Wales and less than 1% in Northern Ireland).¹ Yet they deploy some

¹ See the Fact Finder tool on private education on the Private Education Policy Forum (PEPF), <https://www.pepf.co.uk/fact-finder/facts-and-figures/>. About 5% of England's private school pupils are foreign nationals with parents living abroad.

15% of the resources devoted to schools. As many as 18% of England's school pupils aged 16–19 are in the private sector, and the privately educated have a disproportionate presence at Cambridge, Oxford and other high-status universities. This formidable presence is magnified still further by the extensive reach of private school alumni in public life. These factors suggest that the UK's private schools are no minor issue for the understanding of inequality and potential remedies. I set out the evidence that the UK's private schooling makes a difference to educational, economic and social outcomes. I argue—on the basis of both common sense and substantive evidence from recent literature on educational production functions—that the prime factor behind their effects on educational performance is likely to be the huge resource gap between the sectors, though the effect of the segmentation of pupils' peer groups is surely important too. Evidence also shows that access to the private school system remains highly concentrated among affluent families, and that the bursary grants made available for low-income households by the schools themselves are too small to make a notable difference.

A reform of private education should be seen as a complement to good policies for state education, rather than as an alternative policy competing for attention. Farquharson et al. have set out some guiding principles for general improvement in educational outcomes across all stages. I focus here on the inequality effects of the private–state divide in education, and in the final section I set out alternative approaches for policy reform in this area. I argue that some reform of the private school system will be necessary for achieving a substantial reduction in inequality.

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Table 1: The educational premium, conditional on socio-economic background and prior attainment, for private schooling is modest but occurs at every stage, and cumulates through the school career.

School stage	Example study	Key finding
Primary	Pupils born in 2000 (Parsons et al. 2017)	Private school pupils' reading scores raised by 5 percentile ranking points more than state school pupils
Lower secondary	Pupils born around 1990 (Malacova 2007)	Higher progress achieved from Key Stage 3 to GCSEs by private school pupils compared with state grammar schools
Upper secondary (sixth form)	Pupils born around 1990 (Henderson et al. 2020)	11 percentage points rise up the A-level rankings for subjects favoured by universities; 10 percentage points increase in probability of gaining a place at an elite university

Evidence on the private–state school gap in educational and socio-economic outcomes

I begin by highlighting the considerable evidence that the private–state divide in the school system does matter: it makes a difference, both to pupils' educational attainments and to their subsequent fortunes in the labour market and in society.

Private schooling and educational performance

When estimating the effects of private schooling it is important to control for pupils' socio-economic background and prior attainments, not least because their pupil composition is highly concentrated according to family income and wealth (see Fig. 4 and related text). When these differences are accounted for, the major gaps in academic outcomes between private and state school pupils are lower than the raw gaps. Nevertheless, with rich data on these control factors, many studies now confirm that Britain's private schools affect educational performance, as measured by exam or test scores (see Table 1). None of these studies uses quasi-experimental methods, given the absence of randomized private school lotteries in the UK or of other suitable instruments for proving causal effects in this way; nevertheless, the observational data cover all variables typically found to affect educational performance.

The estimated average effects on academic performance are modest but significant at each stage of education. Cumulatively, by the end of a school career the private school pupil has gained notably higher qualifications compared with a state school pupil with an observably similar background—enough to ensure a distinct advantage in access to university and to good jobs.

When added to the educational advantages of growing up with an affluent family background, the private school education premium helps to explain the huge successes in accessing high-status universities and jobs, as documented by Farquharson et al.

Studies of non-academic outcomes—which might be anticipated from the aspirational peers, the broad curriculum and the extra-curricular activities in affluent private schools—are scarce. Despite efforts to improve welfare services for children in the most affluent schools, evidence so far suggests that private schooling is neither especially beneficial, nor harmful, for pupils' subjective well-being (von Stumm and Plomin 2021). Green et al. (2018a) show that the schools do, however, inculcate a greater 'locus of control' (a sense of being in control of one's life). The effect of differential school types is an area for ongoing investigation as the mental health of school students comes into the spotlight with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Private schooling, occupational attainment, influence and earnings

The educational gain from private schooling delivers the greater part of the advantages for private school alumni in their subsequent lives. Consider first, the occupation that people work in. A private education is likely to result in higher-status occupational attainment. To take one example study, private schooling in England at age 13 is found to be associated with a 12 percentage point greater probability of attaining work in a professional or managerial occupation by age 25, compared with someone from a similar social background who attended a state school (Green et al. 2020). Nevertheless, the effects of private education go beyond the occupation alone. The same study found that, even after controlling for the educational level that pupils eventually reach, the private school alumni remained more likely (by about 5 percentage points) to be in a high-status occupation. Similarly, Crawford et al. (2016) found that, three and a half years after graduation, privately educated degree-holders were 2.5 percentage points more likely to be in a high-status occupation even after controlling for their personal and family characteristics, and for all their educational achievements including the university attended.

Perhaps the most striking indication that the UK's private schooling makes a difference—and not just to the occupations of former pupils—is the dominance of private school alumni in high-level positions within occupations central to our public life. Figure 1 highlights some of the recent evidence, from 2019: some 39% of the cabinet, 34% of the chairs of companies listed in the FTSE index and 44% of media columnists are privately educated. The enduring prominence of the privately educated among the UK's elites is also formally documented in another source: some 43% of those born during the 1960s who later in life join the elites listed in *Who's Who*, are privately educated (Reeves et al. 2017). Even more acutely, some 19% of the 1960s-born elites were educated in just nine super-elite schools, making the alumni of these schools 67 times more likely than an ordinary person to gain entry to *Who's Who*.²

These influential, high-level attainments of private alumni can no doubt partially be attributable to their hard work and their personal talents, as well as their affluent upbringing. No estimates are available that control for such factors. Nevertheless, among pupils aged 16–19—a crude comparison population of those who might be expected, in an equal opportunity society, to have a chance of rising to the top of an influential profession—only 18%

² These super-elite schools are the 'Clarendon Nine' (Charterhouse, Eton, Harrow, Merchant Taylors', Rugby, Shrewsbury, St Paul's, Westminster and Winchester), whose preferential treatment by the state through exclusion from regulation (despite retaining their charitable status) dates from 1864 (Lowe 2021, p.70).

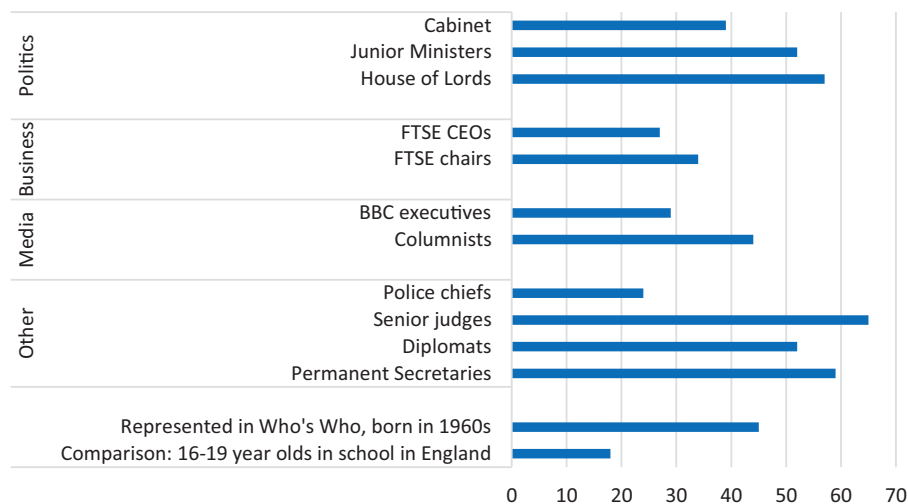


Figure 1: Percentage of privately educated among the UK's influential people. Source: Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission (2019); Reeves et al. (2017); DfE School Pupils and their Characteristics January 2019.

in England are at a private school; and in the other UK nations the figure is lower. It is hard not to conclude that the successful privately educated alumni were helped along their way by their schooling, ahead of some others who were equally hard working and talented, but educated in a state comprehensive school.

Where more research is needed concerns the question of whether and how private school alumni, once entered into an occupation, progress faster than similar state-educated peers. Social networks and possession of the appropriate cultural capital are among the likely hypotheses offered for this progression. There is circumstantial evidence that an important part may be played by two institutions servicing social networks—private members clubs (ibid) and the masonic lodges that are attached to most of the major private secondary boys' schools (Lowe 2021); but there is no formal evidence.

The occupational status advantage of private school pupils is reflected in a premium to their pay. Figure 2 shows the findings of recent studies, concerning adults this century at different ages. At age 25, the premium was 17% in 2015, and not notably different between women and men (Green et al. 2020). At age 42, the premium for the 1970 cohort was 21% for women and 35% for men (Green et al. 2017)—a striking return on their parents' investment. These studies control for a rich array of social background indicators and pre-private-school cognitive skills.

As with the attainment of high-status occupations, the pay premium is largely attributable to the educational advantage achieved through private schooling. Indeed, in the case of women there is no significant residual impact on pay, once the educational outcomes are accounted for in detail; for men, however, there is an additional premium of around 10% at age 42 (Green et al. 2017). This extra advantage could be attributed to the social and cultural capital accrued at private school, but while these have been studied in qualitative research (Ashley et al. 2015), quantitative studies have been inconclusive. A possible explanation for the gender difference would be that social networks are the mechanism, and masonic lodges are important for fostering these. The additional premium for men might also be attributable to private school pupils having a greater familiarity with, or affinity for, working in high-paying industries such as finance and business services. Green et al. (2017) find evidence that the selection of privately educated men into certain industries accounts for some of the additional premium. These estimates apply to

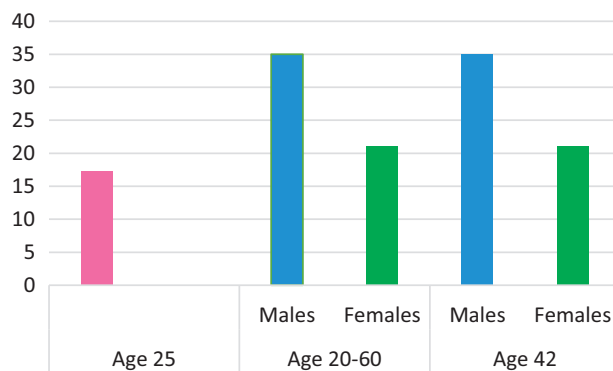


Figure 2: Private school pay premium (%). Note: Pay premium for private school attendance, after controlling for rich array of social background characteristics and early cognitive skills. Source: Green et al. (2018a, 2020).

the early part of this century—for data collected in various years ranging from 2006 to 2015. Other studies show that this premium is not just a recent phenomenon. The generation born in the late 1950s also benefited through attending private school, though not by as much as those educated in the late 1970s and 1980s (Green et al. 2011; Sullivan et al. 2020).

Non-wage and social outcomes

In recognition of the broader educational aims of many private schools, and the generous resources that enable wide curricular and extra-curricular choices, a growing range of studies have recently studied the impact of private schooling on other life outcomes relevant to the consideration of inequality in UK society. Private school alumni are likely to be in jobs where, on the positive side, they can participate more in their work organization but, on the negative side, must agree to higher levels of work intensity (Green et al. 2017). For women who later marry, those with a private schooling marry a husband earning on average 15% or 20% more (depending on which of two data sets are used) than the husbands of state-educated women (Green et al. 2018b), after controlling for social background and childhood skills indicators.

Private schooling and external benefits or harms

In addition to the private benefits of private schooling, are there also significant external effects—for example, benefits for others? With positive benefits accruing to those not educated in private schools, the inequality implications so far discussed could be mitigated. External harms, however, could have the opposite effect. I consider four possibilities that are sometimes raised.

First, following the 2006 Charity Act, and a subsequent court ruling in 2011, private schools that are registered as charities (56% of all private schools) must provide a ‘public benefit’ at a self-determined minimal level. The public benefits typically claimed are threefold: means-tested bursaries, ‘partnerships’ with local state schools, and encouraging children to carry out charitable works (Wilde et al. 2016). In practice, the law appears not to be a major constraint on their activities, in that some ‘public benefit’ activities take place because they are deemed by schools to be in their own interest. There is, however, evidence that there is no substantive positive or negative impact from private schooling on conventional indicators of external benefit—such as civic activity, volunteering and charitable giving (Green et al. 2020). While many schools make some facilities available and occasionally share cultural activities, notwithstanding frequently cited exceptions there is no evidence of a substantive widespread transfer of resources through partnerships, sufficient to make a sizeable dent in the resource gap between private and state sectors. Better data and transparency on such resource transfers, sector-wide, would enable a more definitive assessment.

A second possibility is that, because private schooling raises educational outcomes, the incremental outcomes could provide a small external benefit for the rest of the population. There is no valid estimate of the magnitude of any such effect; and it could be hard to find evidence of a net external benefit from the concentration of influence among the alumni of the most elite and expensive private schools. Some private schools specialize in children with special needs, providing a clear public good; though often these are partly state funded.

A final possibility, commonly advanced in political sociology (Swift 2003), is the opposite of the second. What may sometimes be important for subsequent success may in part be, not so much the sum total of the skills acquired through education, as where a person stands in the educational achievement ranks. With private schooling sorting access to scarce university places and to scarce entry-level vacancies in jobs with good career prospects, the advantages from a private schooling are disadvantages for those with state schooling. To the extent that this is true, private schooling has a private benefit but no social benefit, and underpins a sub-optimal allocation of talent to jobs in society.

Evidence on private–state differences in educational inputs

If the private–state segmentation of the school system matters significantly for inequality in educational and subsequent outcomes, what do the private schools do differently from state schools?

I begin by documenting and highlighting what might be obvious to anyone closely acquainted with the UK school system: that its private schools have at their disposal hugely more resources than state schools. This private–state gap is of a quite different order of magnitude to any differences found within the state sector. In addition to incomes, the buildings and land assets of private schools far exceed those of state schools.

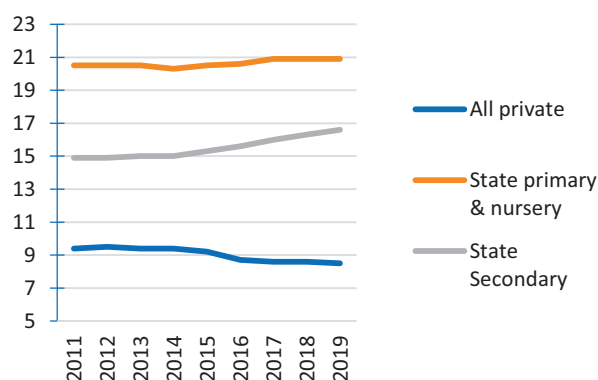


Figure 3: Pupil–teacher ratio in private and state schools since 2011. Source: ISC Annual Censuses and Department for Education’s ‘School workforce in England’ reports for various years.

Table 2 shows the average fees in 2020 for different types of private school, excluding the often costly extras. The fee was approximately £15 800 in day schools, and £35 300 in boarding schools. Alongside, the table shows average spending of £6125 on pupils in English state schools, most of which is through the schools themselves, but with some services being provided by local authorities (e.g. transport).³ The figures would be added to by some capital spending on the state school side, while on the private school side resources are enhanced by the returns from their wealth holdings and charitable donations, but lessened by the disbursement to parents of scholarships and bursaries. The wealth holdings can be gauged approximately from published accounts of individual schools (Green and Kynaston 2019, pp. 104–5); yet no aggregate data across the sector exist. Taking the broad picture, the resource ratio between the two sectors is approaching the order of three to one, but no precise comparison can be made.

This resource supremacy of private schools is manifested in multiple ways, including much smaller class sizes. The pupil–teacher ratio in private schools affiliated to the ISC has been falling since the 1980s. In the latest decade, the ratio continued its decline, and by 2019 it had fallen to 8.5 (Fig. 3). By contrast, the ratio increased in England’s state schools through the decade, particularly in the secondary sector. Private schools’ extra resources also enable the deployment of teachers with subject specialisms more closely matching pupils’ needs, enable higher spending on ancillary staff, buildings and general equipment, and support a much greater range of activities. For the prolonged periods of school closures during the pandemic lockdowns, private schools’ resources, allied with their parents’ home facilities, were deployed to deliver a much less compromised educational service, than that experienced by the majority of state school children (Elliot Major et al. 2020; Green 2020).

How much of a difference do these resource advantages make? Estimates from educational production functions across the world are mixed, and many examine much smaller resource gaps than are present here. Nevertheless, as indicated by Farquharson et al. (2024), there are now high-quality studies that show substantive long-term educational effects arising from resource differences, including the effects of much smaller class sizes (e.g. Fredriksson et al. 2013; Jackson et al. 2016). What can be deduced with some certainty from such studies—if not also from common sense—is that the large resource gap is a major factor

³ Boarding in state schools is scarce. The average fee in 2019 was £12 000, with the state funding the education costs.

Table 2: Resources for state school pupils and private school fees in 2020.

State school spending per pupil in England (£ per annum)		Private school fees (UK) (£ per annum)			
			Boarding	Day fee 1	Day fee 2
All	6135	Overall	35 289	19 908	14 940
composed of: Schools	5355	Sixth form	37 017	21 993	16 263
Local authorities	540	Senior (below sixth form)	34 827	20 695	15 744
Sixth forms	239	Junior	25 863	16 326	13 812

Note: Day fee 1 is for boarding school; day fee 2 is for day school.

Source: Fig. 23 from ISC Annual Census 2020 and Annual Report (<https://www.isc.co.uk/research/annual-census/isc-annual-census-2020/>); Table 3.1 and Fig. 3.3 from Britton et al. (2020).

behind the UK’s private schools’ educational advantage.⁴ Yet no studies exist, which quantify the exact contribution of the superior resources. One difficulty in attempting to make such an estimate is that private schools’ resources are devoted not just to academic outcomes but also to broader educational outcomes and to supporting pupils’ lifestyles—luxuries in the sense that the income elasticity for the consumption of lavish facilities is high.⁵

Another significant factor affecting educational performance, however, may be peer effects, the strength and direction of which are likely to differ between the sectors as well as between schools. About half of private schools are academically selective; there are, therefore, far more academically selective private schools than state grammar schools. The evidence (well discussed by Farquharson et al.) on the implications of tracking and streaming for inequality within and between sectors is not decisive. There are also major sectoral differences in the social and economic background of the pupils. While social background peer effects on academic outcomes are themselves very limited, some of the most robust evidence surrounding peer effects concerns the detrimental effects of exposure to disruptive peers—both in schools and in neighbourhoods. Private schools are able to exclude or expel troublesome pupils from the sector altogether.

One input factor that is unlikely to be important in explaining the different outcomes of private and state schools is any hypothesized differences between the two sectors in the use of efficient management strategies. While the private–state gap in governance autonomy has decreased with the expansion of academies in the state sector, the private schools are only weakly regulated and there remains the key difference that private schools can choose their fee levels and hence their budget bottom lines, subject only to market constraints. Yet, formal studies of managerial performance across UK schools show either a broad equivalence in the use of efficient management methods, or else a small advantage in some areas for state school leaders (Bloom et al. 2015; Bryson and Green 2018).⁶

⁴ There is, moreover, substantive variation within the private sector, and some evidence that these resource variations affect academic outcomes (Graddy and Stevens 2005).

⁵ One journalist with a sense of humour described some of London’s private schools as ‘country clubs with quite a nice school attached’ (Ben Chu, *Independent*, 11 May 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/private-schools-catering-to-the-global-elite-are-spending-lavishly-because-of-their-huge-uk-tax-breaks-it-has-to-stop-a7022246.html>).

⁶ This discussion has emphasized the evidence surrounding the UK’s private schools. While the scattered evidence for private schools in other countries is instructive in itself, elsewhere the notion of ‘private’ typically entails having autonomous governance, rather than being mainly fee-paying; and even in cases where fees are paid, these are rarely as high as in the UK—hence the resource gap when compared with the state sector is typically small and occasionally negative.

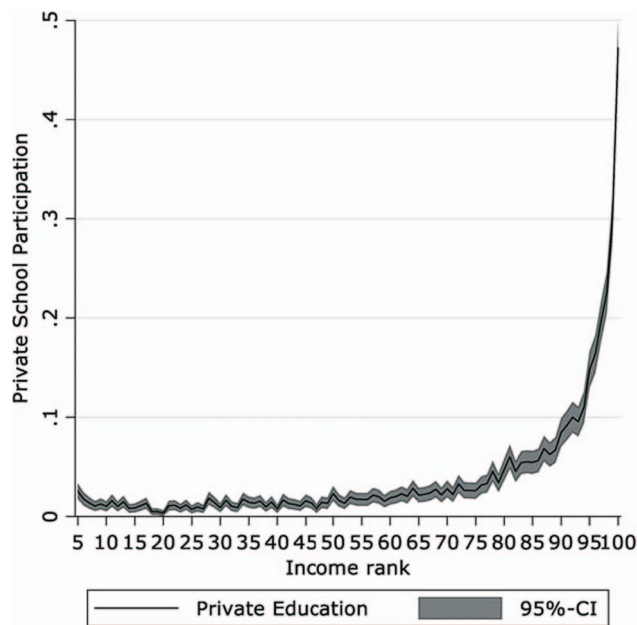


Figure 4: Income concentration of private school participation, 1997–2017.

Source: Henseke et al. (2021).

Evidence on economic and social exclusivity

If the private–state divide in the school system matters, then how access to private schools is distributed becomes crucial for understanding the contribution of the school system to educational and economic inequality.

Figure 4 shows the extent of the concentration of private school participation among families with the highest incomes. In this figure, families are ranked by their equivalized net family income. Three-quarters of the children at private school are drawn from families in the top three income deciles, and most of these from the richest decile. This concentration is unsurprising given the high level of fees, which have risen more than threefold in real terms since the 1980s. Moreover, there is evidence that the socioeconomic composition of the pupils has not changed significantly since at least the start of this century.

Despite the overall economically exclusive pupil population, a small minority of families with modest or low incomes still access private education. How is this possible? About one in six pupils are in receipt of a bursary or scholarship grant (Fig. 5).⁷ The allocation and the value of such grants have become more

⁷ This does not include fee discounts, for example, for siblings.

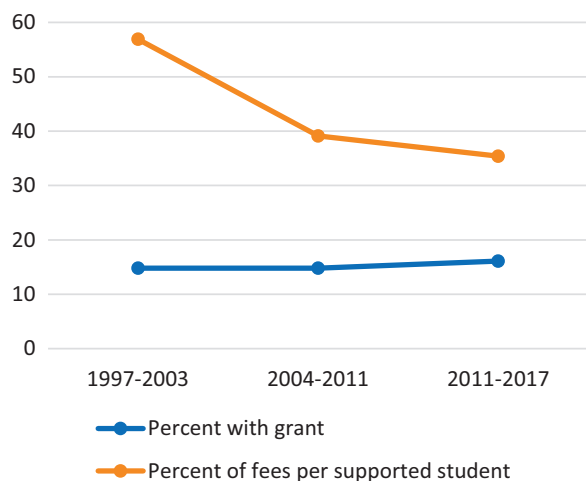


Figure 5: Bursary and scholarship grants to assist access.
Source: Henseke et al. (2021, Table 4).

progressive since the end of the 1990s; by 2011–17, the average grant value for those below the 60th income decile was £6300, while the grants for top decile pupils averaged only £3000. However, in proportion to rising fees, the grants have been declining, and only about 4% of turnover has been devoted to bursaries, while just 1% of private school pupils have been educated for free. Bursaries, therefore, are too small to account for much of the participation by low- and middle-income families, or to be reducing substantially the concentration of access in high-income households. Rather, the participation of households below the top income deciles is enabled through their family wealth, typically including grandparent contributions. Henseke et al. (2021) show the importance, in particular, of rising home values in supporting private school demand among all income groups.

The relationship with accumulated family wealth implies that the private–state divide reduces intergenerational mobility. It also suggests that the future of many private schools would be challenged in the event of declining wealth inequality. Participation in private schooling is not, however, just about affordability—as Fig. 4 shows, by no means all those who could afford it choose to pay. Some parents' choice of private or state schooling is affected by where they live, their values or the particular needs of their children, factors that would endure through any economic crisis (Anders et al. 2020).

Policy lessons and recommendations

In this final section I outline and comment on potential changes to the private–state divide that could diminish the way that the current school system contributes to the UK's economic and social inequality.

The arguments for the need for private school reform to lower educational inequality

The studies reviewed so far imply that the private–state divide in the UK's school system really does make a difference. To summarize the evidence, there is an extreme gap—around three to one—between the two sectors in the average resources devoted per pupil to schooling. Together with possible peer effects (including the ease of exclusion of disruptive pupils), the resources enable private schools to perform well in bringing forth good academic outcomes for their pupils, while also—though this is not formally

evidenced—engendering non-academic outcomes in the cultural and sporting spheres. The academic outcomes (including access to high-status universities), supplemented by hard-to-measure social and cultural capital, then generate substantive inequalities in society. Overall, private school alumni start off with the advantages of their wealthy background; their schooling premium adds to those advantages in generating superior educational outcomes. These educational outcomes, supplemented (among men) by direct effects of private schooling on their social and/or cultural capital, yield higher pay through their careers and a greater likelihood of reaching positions of public prominence and influence in UK society.

This individual-level evidence may not fully capture the macro-social effects of the private–state divide on schooling inequality. Through external effects (noted above) and through feedback loops between the education and political systems, the overall impact of the private–state divide could be greater or smaller than the sum of the individual parts. For example, it has been argued that top-level political support for state education is lessened because so many leaders and influencers have been privately educated. However, it could be argued that pressures for inequality and segmentation in state schooling are reduced when there is the option of private schooling. With current data, such arguments cannot be evaluated by formal evidence, or through simple international comparisons. Theoretical models of the political economy of education spending do not help, either, because their findings are sensitive to assumptions about voting, consumer preferences, and the parameters of the educational production function (Glomm et al. 2011).

Routes to school reform for less inequality

Perhaps even more than other zones of education policy, any proposed changes for private schooling polarizes opinions. The right to a fair opportunity through school can find itself in conflict with rights to the liberty to freely spend one's wealth on whatever one chooses—though such rights are neither absolute nor unconstrained. Weighing these rights is beyond the scope of this commentary, but it remains very important that options are reviewed rationally. Assuming that there is a desire to reduce inequality and that a fair opportunity through schooling is an accepted objective, analysis needs to be evidence-based and policies must be evaluated dispassionately. What, then, are the possible remedies?

The hallmark of a good school policy for reducing inequality would be one which, deploying robust evidence:

- (i) opens up access to the currently private schools, so that participation is no longer constrained as much, if at all, by social class, family wealth or income;
- (ii) diminishes substantially the inequalities between schools' resources.

A reform that achieved both these would unequivocally lead to greater educational equality. Feasible reforms are of two kinds: those that would lower parental demand for private schooling, inducing enlargement of the state sector, and those that would directly integrate pupils from the state sector into currently private schools.⁸ Under the first of these, government could:

⁸ The reforms can be framed as resource-neutral. A successful reform would entail a levelling up for all state school pupils, while private school pupils would experience a levelling down—not to the current level of state school spending but to the raised level for state schools. Luxury spending by the wealthy would have to be confined to their non-school lives.)

• raise income by eliminating entitlement to local business tax reductions⁹ or—more substantively—by raising value added tax on school fees. The resulting increase in fees would induce some parents to choose state education. One estimate puts the price elasticity of demand at -0.26 (Blundell et al. 2010), which means that (for example) a 20% fee increase would lower demand for private schooling by around 30 000 pupils. This switch would take place gradually, as few children switch schools within an education level. While this reform would go a little way towards achieving hallmark (ii) by diminishing the private sector, hallmark (i) would be compromised because the remaining private schools would be even more income-exclusive. The policy would leave the segmented and unequal private school–state school system fundamentally unchanged, except that the private sector would be slightly smaller.

- remove the privileges of charitable status. This would also increase the tax burden of schools, with similar effects.
- require universities (through funding leverage) to offer more strongly weighted preferential access to children from disadvantaged, and specifically non-private-school pupils—an intensification and targeting of current university access policies. The effect that such a policy would have on parental demand is hard to predict in advance. The non-academic benefits of private schooling would remain, and the private school premium might not be affected.

Under the second kind of reform, policies can originate from within or outside the private school sector, as follows.

- From within the sector, there could be a game-changing expansion of means-tested bursaries that are not linked to academic selection. Ultimately, this would depend on the fund-raising efforts and abilities of schools. The trend of the last 20 years, noted above, is not encouraging, and there are substantial constraints on private schools, especially those that operate only at the primary level. Nevertheless, a step-change in fund-raising is not inconceivable (Claughton 2020).
- Alternatively, private schools could collaborate with government to offer a proportion of places for state school pupils. Funding can be provided by government. In the best collaborative programmes, many places in currently private schools would become, in effect, part of the state school system, offering further choice and diversity for state school pupils, shunning the constraints of selection through parental wealth or academic tests. In this author's judgement, this policy is the one most likely to bring about real change, so that after five or more years of operation the system would look distinctly different.

The effectiveness of such a reform would depend on the disposition of control over student admissions. Those who participated in the Assisted Places scheme, in operation from 1983 until it was abolished in 1997, succeeded better with their education and subsequent careers than similar counterparts at state schools (Power et al. 2006). But schools could control their own admissions and choose whether to participate, with the consequence that the scheme ended up with a predominantly middle-class take-up; it was perceived as a subsidy to the private sector and never gained widespread acceptance.

A re-purposed integration scheme would need to vary differently in these respects. It would also benefit from being managed and

administered locally, enabling integration schemes to be sensitive to the diversity of each area's schools map.¹⁰

Given the social segmentation of the current system, some form of change to the current private–state balance in the nation's schooling is arguably a necessary (though not sufficient) condition if there is to be a significant reduction in inequality. Without any alteration, the far better resources of the private schools will continue to enable an already-wealthy minority to qualify well for high-ranking universities, and for the best and most influential jobs in a society that strongly rewards educational achievement. Choosing a route to reform of the private–state divide should therefore be a priority for schools policy. Something, more than a token, needs to be done.

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⁹ This policy was recently enacted by the Scottish government; due to take effect from September 2020, it was postponed by a year following the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the finances of independent schools.

¹⁰ For a fuller evaluation and costing of a range of reform proposals, see the report by the Private Education Policy Forum, 'Reform Options for Britain's Private Schools', <https://www.pepf.co.uk/publications/publications-reform-report/>. See also Green and Kynaston (2019, Chapter 8).

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