



State funded places in independent day schools before 1976

January 2012

Introduction

This short note summarises findings of research by the Sutton Trust into the extent of state funded places at independent secondary schools before 1976.

In contrast to the stark divide between independent schools and state schools that exists today, before 1976 the majority of leading independent day schools were principally state funded. This research documents for the first time the extent of the numbers of state funded places, using a number of official historical sources.

This research finds that over two thirds (130 out of 188, or 70%) of England's top independent day schools were principally state funded up to 1976.

This historical research remains highly relevant to the current debate over low levels of social mobility in the UK, particularly at the top end of society. A series of research reports by the Sutton Trust has documented how the upper echelons of our most prestigious professions are made up disproportionately of those who were educated at leading independent schools. The most influential and powerful positions in society remain largely, apart from a few notable exceptions, off limits to those from low and middle income backgrounds¹.

The uncomfortable truth is that for the vast majority of pupils unable to pay the fees at leading private schools, the chances of getting into the top universities and subsequently the leading professions are slim². This waste of talent is not only unfair but also economically damaging for the nation, at a time when other countries are raising their game in the global marketplace³.

¹ For a summary of the Trust's surveys, see: <http://www.suttontrust.com/research/educational-backgrounds-for-submission/> See also: <http://www.suttontrust.com/research/the-educational-backgrounds-of-mps/>

² See: <http://www.suttontrust.com/research/degree-of-success-university-chances-by-individual-school/>

³ See: <http://www.suttontrust.com/research/the-mobility-manifesto/>

What is so significant about the education system in the UK prior to 1976 is the widespread funding available for state school pupils to be taught at leading independent day schools, through the Direct Grant scheme⁴ and a number of local schemes.

While the Sutton Trust is dedicated to raising achievement across the state schools, it believes that there exists a successful model for opening up our leading independent day schools once again – which would improve social mobility at the top end in particular.

In conjunction with the Girls' Day School Trust, the Sutton Trust ran a successful pilot at the Belvedere independent girls' day school in Liverpool, where all students were admitted on merit alone rather than ability to pay fees⁵. Roughly one third of those admitted paid full fees, one third paid partial fees, and one third received free places. Under the scheme the school achieved its best ever GCSE results and 95% of pupils, many eligible for free school meals, went to university – the majority to research led universities.

The Trust has advocated the expansion of the open access scheme with state funding and the scheme has the backing of a number of today's independent day schools. They are willing to adopt Open Access with necessary safeguards over state funding and freedom to operate.

⁴ A direct grant grammar school was a selective secondary school in England and Wales between 1945 and 1976 funded partly by the state and partly through private fees.

⁵ See <http://www.suttontrust.com/reports/BelvedereEval.pdf>

Research findings

The research on state funded places in independent schools before 1976 comes from two main sources: the Second Report of the Public Schools Commission (published in 1970), and information gathered from Parliamentary questions.

Direct Grant and Other State-Funded Independent Secondary Schools

According to Volume II of the Second Report of the Public Schools Commission, there were 175 direct grant grammar schools in England in 1970. Over the whole system, 61% of pupils paid no fees, 11% paid part fees, and 28% paid full fees.

When the direct grant scheme ended in 1976, there were 174 direct grant schools. Of these, 51 (mainly religious schools) applied to join the state sector. Of the remaining 123, 4 closed and 119 became independent day schools⁶.

Former voluntary aided schools that became independent schools

In addition, there were 11 voluntary aided schools which went independent between 1975 and 1979. Before they went independent, 100% of the places at these schools had been free⁷.

The schools were: Hampton School, Reigate Grammar, Emanuel School, Royal Grammar School Guildford, Godolphin and Latymer School, Colfe's Grammar School, Batley Grammar School, Sir William Perkins's School, Wolverhampton Grammar School, Kirkham Grammar School Preston, King Edward VI Grammar School Southampton

⁶ Source: Parliamentary question: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1978/mar/22/direct-grant-schools

⁷ Source: Parliamentary question: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1980/nov/05/schools-status

According to Volume I of the Second Report of the Public Schools Commission, there were also (in 1970) 56 independent schools where more than 25% of places were LEA-funded, and 7 independent schools where more than 75% of places were Local Education Authority-funded.

Volume II of the Second Report of the Public Schools Commission lists only 58 public day secondary schools in England in 1970 (defined as schools with more than 25% boarders that were members of the Headmasters' Conference, Governing Bodies' Association, or Governing Bodies of Girls' Schools Association). The information from parliamentary questions above suggests that 130 previously direct grant or voluntary aided schools went independent in the 1970s.

This suggests that over two thirds (130 out of 188, or 70%) of England's top independent day schools were principally state funded up to 1976.