

What evidence is there that the UK secondary education system is inadequately addressed to the needs of particular groups of children? Give illustrations of this.

Using the concepts introduced in your course also consider both:

1. What political channels exist for different groups of people to influence the provision of education and how effective are they?
2. Explain the economic principles behind the system of Local Management of Schools outlined in DES Circular 7/88 on the implementation of this aspect of the Education Reform Act 1988. What effect did these changes have on the quality of secondary education?

Inequality within the education system is a complex issue, complicated further by the lack of apposite data: even though data regarding pupils' attainment is collected today, there are still variations in the way in which ethnicity is recorded. From 1988 to 1997 the number of pupils of all ethnicities achieving grades A* - C in five or more GCSEs has risen. Figures 2 and 3 in *inequality* (Gillborn & Mirza, 2000 (Appendix A, page 13ff.)) illustrate the differences between the percentage of high passes within each ethnic group. It can be seen that the difference between white children and the lowest attaining group has widened from 13% to 16%. It should be noted that in 1991 the percentage of Indian children with high passes exceeded the percentage of white children. This may suggest either an element of positive discrimination, or reflect a difference in the attitudes of the children to schoolwork. However, the majority of other ethnic groups continue to perform less well in exams than their white counterparts.

While black pupils can be seen to have the lowest attainment level at GCSE, if their progress is considered from the start of their education, an interesting pattern can be discerned. Figure 5 (Appendix A, page 16) shows that in one LEA, black pupils' attainment was initially the highest of all ethnic groups, but by GCSE it had fallen to the lowest. This, and the fact that Pakistanis and Bangladeshis never reach the LEA average, could suggest that the curriculum throughout compulsory schooling is Anglocentric. Indeed Arnot (2000) suggests that "the Education Reform Act 1988 made only passing reference to the needs for schools to promote cultural diversity within existing programmes of study". Alongside attitudes to work, the greater level of attainment by Indians could also be attributed to the expectations and stereotyping by their teachers (Arnot, 2000) and their greater positive self-image than other ethnic groups.

Social class is another difficult category by which to compare children's attainment, however by grouping the occupations of their parents into manual, and non-manual *inequality* (Figure 6 (Appendix A, page 20)) shows fewer children from manual backgrounds within each ethnic group reaching the high grades attained by their non-manual parented counterparts. By comparing the results of all the ethnicities on the same chart, Gillborn and Mizra (2000) show that the achievements of 'middle class' black pupils are hardly better than those of 'working class' children from other ethnic groups.

Although Gillborn and Mizra (2000) illustrate the gender difference in attainment to be statistically the least significant, "it is no longer in question whether or not gender equality is a legitimate educational issue" (Burchell & Millman, 1989). In the 1980s centralised government made it possible for the differences to be studied, and changes were made in teacher training to try and help reduce the gender differences. Looking back, any initiatives seem to have made little difference, and the 2000 report shows the gender achievement gap widening through the 1990s.

Considering gender with ethnicity (*inequality* figure 8 Appendix A, page 23), the exam results retain their ethnic groupings, with girls achieving higher than boys from the same ethnic background. It is therefore Indian females who attain the highest results, and black males the lowest.

Overall the ethnic differences are still observed even when other sociological variances are examined. This indicates an education system that is not designed to support children of non-white backgrounds, or at least that the methods of assessment are biased towards white and Indian children. Researchers have also considered the higher rates of exclusion of non-white pupils as an important factor for under-attainment (Skellington and Morris, 1992), and the lack of non-white teachers in positions of educational authority.

With such apparent discrepancies arising within the education system, the need for change and adaptation is clear. While statistics are useful in helping bring about change, government also receives input from

parents, religious groups, professional educators, pressure groups, and employers. Indeed, the Church of England has recently been “challenged to press for the biggest expansion in Anglican education since the 19th century”, and “much of the money [...] can come from government sources” (Holness, 2001); this influence over the provision of education to promote Christian attitudes within this country is clear.

Teachers are able to offer their input through their union bodies, however there are several unions of which it is possible for teachers to be members. Whilst the choice is beneficial for the teachers, the NUT suggest the diversity “dissipated the potential for influence that the teachers collectively possessed” (Coates, 1972). The NUT is still the largest teachers’ union, however the existence of other groups serve to weaken the sway held by any union over policy changes.

To stand a reasonable chance of success, any pressure group attempting to influence provision, whether it is a single issue outsider group, or a large influential insider group, needs to have the financial resources to be able to observe the current situation, and present proposals to government staff. Moran (1983) suggests that the only way that groups have been able to influence policy making is “bureaucratically”. This suggests a rather bleak prospect for people outside parliament trying to have an effect on education provision. It should be mentioned that while some groups seek only to influence government, the Runnymede Trust (1998) also describes its role as to “draw attention to the likely impact on ethnic minorities of any existing or proposed legislation” thereby offering essential feedback to inform debate.

This can be compared to the results of petitioning by groups within government. In 1987, three groups concerned with education were formed in the Conservative Party, most importantly the Hillgate Group. It was this group that “urged introduction of a detailed national curriculum for all pupils” (Chitty, 1992). Although more work had to be done by the then Education Secretary, Kenneth Baker, to convince other neo-liberals to support the idea, the concept of a national curriculum was nevertheless introduced in the Education Reform Act 1988 illustrating the power that an insider group can have.

While influencing decisions on a national scale appears to be difficult, the 1988 ERA increased the power of the individual at a local level by changing the make up of schools' governing bodies. The changes included "increasing parental governor representation [...] decreasing LEA representation [...] and increasing co-opted membership" (Flude and Hammer, 1990). The purpose of the first two changes are immediately obvious, but the third was intended to increase community involvement, with an emphasis on "people representing the business community". This is an indication of the government bowing to a demand for greater vocational training, the first acknowledgement of which was seen in 1983 with the introduction of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) conceived by Young's Manpower Services Commission; which in itself is another example of a group consisting of politicians being in a position to influence government policy successfully.

The concept of Local Management of Schools introduced in the 1988 Act created a market led education system. A market is concerned with the most efficient allocation of resources, and education became no exception. Budgets to schools were no longer fixed, 75% of funding was determined by the number of pupils in the school. Therefore the larger the school, the greater funding it received which would in turn attract pupils from smaller, less well resourced schools. This spiral would inevitably lead to the schools either being closed down naturally, thereby absolving the government of the stigma of school closures, or they would become Grant Maintained whereby they would receive a fixed grant from the government.

As it put parents in a position to chose which school to use, there had to be some means by which to measure the output of the schools. To allow this to be done equitably the schools' curriculum was centralised and decreed by the government. Having a standard curriculum meant that that the output of the school could be measured using assessments throughout a student's compulsory schooling. The results of these assessments could be published in the form of league tables to give the consumer, or parent, greater information about the choice that they were making. The centralisation of the curriculum is in stark contrast to the budgetary decisions which, under the provision of funding by the Act, were to be done by each school individually.

The Act had the combined effect on schools of stimulating and simulating competition: it had created a quasi market where one previously had not existed. The management of the schools had to adopt to their new roles quickly to avoid failing and, due to the rapid reaction of a market economy, possibly closing. It was not only the role of management within schools that changed, the teachers had suddenly become more accountable, whether it is to the pupils, parents, employers, or government is beyond the scope of this essay, and their actions could have dramatic consequences for the school as a whole. While people generally do not like quasi markets, as they challenge existing thinking, are not clearly understandable, and can have unpredictable effects, they do appreciate being given more information, such as league tables, to facilitate the decision making.

Having created a market in which competition is rife can only, in the longer term, serve to improve the levels of teaching in the education system as all the protagonists are held accountable and high results are demanded. It is therefore concerning to see that while higher levels of attainment are being reached by pupils, there are still dramatic divisions between children of different ethnicities.

(1595 words)

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Appendix A