

Segregation of schools – the impact on young people and their families and communities

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Key Points

School segregation takes a number of forms, with divisions generally on the basis of social class, ethnicity or faith. Far too many schools are exclusively the preserve of one such community. Little is being done to consider the impacts of divided education, let alone address the problem, despite clear evidence that it is increasing.

It is not being tackled partly because it is in the 'too difficult' box, it may be seen as interfering with personal choice and freedom, but it mostly reflects the lack of will and imagination to work towards a shared society.

The choices people make are generally no more than a reflection of the institutional barriers and virtually every 'choice' is limited or constrained by historical arrangements and expectations but also by relatively recent policy changes. They now need to be urgently re-considered to enable all children to learn and understand about 'others', become more at ease with the complexities of diverse and open societies and to promote socially mobility.

What is the Problem?

Schools are divided in a number of ways. Some schools still select on the basis of ability, others decide by location or expressed preferences for subjects.

By far the most systematic inhibitor of free choice is that of faith – and as the vast majority of faith schools are supported by the state, government must accept responsibility for this restriction.

According to the OECD¹ the UK is one of the few countries that selects on the basis of religious preferences.

According to the DCSF² there are around 23,000 schools in England in the state sector, these include a large number of faith schools:

Church of England 4,500

¹ Musset, P. (2012) SCHOOL CHOICE AND EQUITY: CURRENT POLICIES IN OECD COUNTRIES AND A LITERATURE REVIEW Directorate for Education Working Paper N°66 OECD (2012)

² (DCSF 2008), *The Composition of Schools in England*. Statistical Bulletin (DCSF June 2008)

Roman Catholic 1750
Methodist 30
Other Christian 50
Jewish 30
Muslim, Sikh, other 20

Of the 7.5 million young people attending maintained schools in England, 23% (1.7 million) are educated in faith-based institutions.

Free choice can therefore be very severely constrained dependent on the local character of schools and particularly their religious affiliation. People of no faith are effectively excluded from up to one-quarter of schools, and may only be able to apply to faith schools if the schools in question are less popular and do not have sufficient applicants from their faith community. At a local level the choice may be almost non-existent if local schools happen to be faith based.

Religious identities often overlap with ethnic identities and faith schools effectively exclude some of the minority communities and can also contribute directly to ethnic segregation. Ethnic segregation is already an issue within our school system and has been directly linked to social unrest and poor community cohesion. Deborah Wilson and Simon Burgess, who have carried out a comprehensive quantitative research into educational ethnic segregation in England comment:

*Our main findings are that levels of ethnic segregation in England's schools are high. There is, however, a significant degree of variation both across LEAs and across ethnic groups: segregation is higher for pupils of Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin than for pupils with black Caribbean or African heritage . . . we identify areas of particularly high segregation, especially for pupils of Asian origin. These areas coincide almost exactly with the locations of urban unrest in the summer of 2001.*³

Herman Ouseley⁴ pointed to a 'virtual apartheid' between schools in his review of race relations in Bradford, arguing that it led to polarisation, failure to prepare students for life in multi-ethnic society, and racial tensions within and beyond schools.

School segregation is not confined to the North of England and has been developing for some time. Oonagh King MP, revealed her sense of 'shock' at finding segregated schools in her London constituency:

I have mentioned before in Parliament my shock at visiting two schools next door to each other soon after I was elected in 1997. They shared a playground with a fence down the middle. On one side of the fence there were white children playing with a smattering of Afro-Caribbeans and on the other there were brown, Muslim and Bangladeshi children. Perhaps it is because my father was brought up in the segregated south that I was horrified by that; I could not believe it. We read about such things, but when we see them in Britain, we must think that something is

³ Burgess, S and D Wilson (2004) *Ethnic Segregation in England's Schools*, p.25. CASE Paper 79. London: LSE

⁴ Bradford Race Review (2000) 'Community Pride Not Prejudice'. Bradford: Bradford Vision

seriously wrong.⁵

Research continues to demonstrate how existing levels of ethnic segregation between schools continue to be exacerbated by selection on the basis of faith⁶.

As early as 2001, Barry Sheerman, Chair of the Commons Select Committee on Education, voiced his reservations about the extension of the number of faith schools, commenting:

I think very few people in the government have looked carefully at the implications of a society ten to twenty years down the line where there is a clear divide between the religions and schooling. We've only got to look at the painful, recent example of Northern Ireland within the Christian community to see what problems that produces.⁷

In the wake of the terrorist bombings of 11th September 2001, another member of the select committee, Tony Wright, claimed: 'Before September 11, it looked like a bad idea, it now looks like a mad idea'.⁸ The debate was revisited in 2005 when David Bell, the Chief Inspector of Schools commented:

I worry that many young people are being educated in faith-based schools with little appreciation of their wider responsibilities and obligations to British society.⁹

His words were reported in the media the next day with headlines such as 'Islamic schools are threat to national identity, says Ofsted' (Telegraph), 'Muslim schools fail to teach tolerance, Ofsted chief says' (The Independent), 'Schools chief warns on Muslim threat' (Daily Express), '“Threat” of faith schools' (The Sun) and 'Rise of race-hate schools' (The Star). Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, was reported as backing David Bell's comments.¹⁰

The problem of mono-cultural schools is often seen as an inner city phenomenon, but this is far from the case and the white mono-cultural schools in suburban and rural areas are more difficult problems, simply because of the lack of a multicultural population in those areas. A substantial number of white children are therefore growing up in a multicultural country without any direct experience of other cultures. Attitudes are often formed at an early age and even where FE and HE offer a mixed intake in later teens, cross-cultural social patterns can then be hard to develop.

⁵ Quoted in Cattle 2008 *Community Cohesion and New Framework for Race and Diversity*. Palgrave Macmillan

⁶ Osler, A. (2007) *Faith Schools and Community Cohesion: Observations on Community Consultations*. Runnymede Trust Interim Report. London: The Runnymede Trust.

⁷ 'Call for minority quotas in schools', Tuesday, 11 December 2001 [www.news.bbc.co.uk]

⁸ 'British debate deepens on faith-based schools', 12 February 2002, International Herald Tribune

⁹ Archival records of the Hansard Society, London

¹⁰ 'Criticism of Islamic schools backed', 19 January 2005, The Guardian

Gallagher (2004) has also pointed out the mere fact of separation sent implicit messages to young people that they were different and that these differences were important.¹¹

If schools are divided so too is the wider community

Eleven years ago I coined the phrase 'parallel lives' to describe the complete segregation of communities¹². They did not live in the same area, go to school together, work in the same places or occupations, or share social and cultural activities. As a result they lived in fear of each other, had no real knowledge or respect of others and could easily be pushed into conflict by extremists.

They had no opportunity to challenge stereotypes, confound myths and to see the human face of the 'other'.

There were no shared spaces and no reason to venture out of their comfort zones. They lived in self-confirming worlds, reinforcing prejudices and stereotypes

Schools are one of the few safe places, to meet others and to learn about different people and share experiences. Segregated schools mean that many young people never experience difference and emerge into a multicultural world with little or no cultural navigation skills. They are not equipped for the modern world.

But if schools are divided so too are parental networks, with little or no opportunities to break down barriers between communities by meeting at the school gate, sharing facilities at the school and through cross-cultural friendships for childrens parties, school sports and extra curricula activities.

A divided school invariably means a divided community.

And the situation appears to be getting worse

- The national study of school segregation (Burgess, Johnston et al, referred to earlier) found this to be the case – and that schools were more divided than the neighbourhoods around them
- All iCoCo local studies of PLASC data found more school segregation in local areas
- The growth of more faith schools, free schools and academies means more partial admission policies
- A further tightening of exclusive admissions policies by existing faith schools in some areas

¹¹ Gallagher, T. (2004) 'Intercultural Education in a Divided School System ' in *Interculturalism: Exploring Critical Issues*. Eds. Powell, D. and Sze F. (Oxford: The Inter-Disciplinary Press)

¹² Cattle, T. (2001) *Community Cohesion: A Report of the independent Review Team* (London: Home Office).

- The recent Census data reveals more neighbourhood segregation and schools, particularly at the primary level, are heavily influenced by this.
- For faith schools a growing number of applications are emerging from minority and less established faiths. The Muslim community in particular has a large number of independent schools which could attempt to gain state support. Evangelical Christian communities are beginning to wake up to the possibilities – an application has recently been made for one such school in Oxford and no doubt many more will follow. This can only mean an increasing balkanization of our schooling system.

The prospect of ever more divided schools based upon faith and ethnicity in particular is of great concern, especially at a time of rising xenophobia and Far Right activity which undermines unity and creates tensions in already divided communities.

Faith schools are also part of a system which props up faith leaders and gives them a level of undeserved credence and power. The rigidity and conceptions of 'identity purity' are often tacitly and explicitly supported in relation to the UK's faith based school system and has attracted particular criticism. Kymlicka¹³ suggests that:

the proliferation of separate religious schools is regrettable, particularly when they will be controlled by conservative religious leaders who preach that their group is the chosen people, that people outside the church are evil and damned, that inter-marriage is a sin, etc. These schools may in fact generate precisely the sort of fear of 'otherness' that our conceptions of intercultural citizenship were intended to overcome.

It is ironic that David Cameron has condemned 'state multiculturalism'¹⁴ but has failed to recognise that the most pervasive and obvious example of state support for separation and divided communities is in respect of faith schools.

What has been done?

The last government was not especially active in this area and also tended to support the status quo. However a number of measures were introduced which did at least help to mitigate the worst effects, if not solve the problem.

Initiatives taken to promote community cohesion included:

- School twinning

¹³ Kymlicka, W., (2003) 'Multicultural States and Intercultural Citizens' in *Theory and Research in Education* 2003 1: 147 Published by Sage Publications

¹⁴ Cameron D, (2011) Speech to the Munich Conference, 5th February 2011.

- Encouraging school sharing and more inclusive admissions; Joint teaching, sports and other programmes
- The 'duty to promote community cohesion' for all state maintained schools was introduced and enthusiastically adopted by many schools
- Arts, drama and other intercultural projects in and around schools – eg community history projects

School twinning has since been downgraded and, more worryingly, the duty to promote community cohesion has been removed from the OFSTED inspection regime. This is a very retrograde step and effectively tells schools that this is no longer important. This is despite the fact that the previous DCSF Guidance¹⁵ clearly stated:

all children and young people can benefit from meaningful interaction, schools will need to consider how to give their pupils the opportunity to mix with and learn with, from and about those from different backgrounds

Policy and practice on admissions has also apparently gone into reverse and the local authority role has been all but removed. This compares with the previous approach which did at least encourage Admissions Forums to consider cohesion and requested Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to relate school-building programmes to wider objectives and by requiring faith schools to consider more inclusive intakes and admit children from other faiths and of no faith¹⁶.

These were engineered to cope with the deficiencies in the school environment and did not tackle the root cause – segregation. Only one LA has merged two schools (an all-White and all-Asian school), a bold but hopeful move which others need to emulate, but have been given little encouragement to do so.

It also has to be said that the attitude of the teaching unions and educationalists have been slow to demand change. The educational community in Britain has, though, a relatively good record in relation to inclusion generally. They have been particularly active in breaking down segregated education on the grounds of disability and learning difficulty and recognize in this respect that:

segregated education is a major cause of society's widespread prejudice ... desegregating special education is therefore a crucial first step in helping to change discriminatory attitudes.¹⁷

However, they have been slow to recognise the continuing and, in some cases, worsening, nature of segregation along faith and ethnic lines in British schools and to apply the same principles. This is despite an apparent growing disquiet in the profession about the selection of staff based upon religious affiliation rather than ability – further reinforcing the

¹⁵ Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007) *Guidance on the Duty to Promote Community Cohesion* (London: DCSF)

¹⁶ Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (2004) *Government Response to the ODPM Select Committee Report on Social Cohesion*, Cm 6284 (London: The Stationery Office Ltd).

¹⁷ Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education, 2004

separation of school communities and of teaching.

Employers seem to have a better understanding of the evident need to provide younger people with the skills to compete in an ever more competitive employment and business market:

What global companies look for are people who we think can take a global perspective. Students are well placed to do this if they have taken opportunities to widen their cultural perspective. The people that succeed can work in multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural and multi-locational teams. If students have demonstrated they can work with other cultures and teams, that's a big plus for us as we need students to be intellectually curious and culturally agile if they are going to work in a global context.

(Sonja Stockton, Director, Talent, PricewaterhouseCoopers. Source: British Council and Think Global 2010)

Indeed, opinion polls of business leaders suggest that they are more likely to recognise the growing need in this respect and believe that governments have been too slow to respond and have failed to prepare young people in the UK for our globalised world. Three-quarters of board and director level executives and CEOs think that young people 'are in danger of being left behind by emerging countries unless they learn to think more globally' and a similar proportion are 'worried that many young people's horizons are not broad enough to operate in a globalised and multicultural economy'. Further, they believe that the UK will be 'left behind by fast growing emerging countries such as China, India and Brazil unless young people learn to think more globally' (British Council and Think Global 2010). Employability skills are vital in business success and as the economy becomes ever more globalised, global employability skills will be one of the crucial determinants of business success and economic growth.

Both the past and previous governments have responded to globalisation through the national curriculum with the reinforcement of citizenship, Britishness and national pride, including the re-telling of the 'national story', school students need to come to terms with the intercultural world which they are about to enter. Employers in particular perhaps need to demand more action and restate the need for more intercultural education and skills.

What Can be Done?

We know that changing the composition of schools will change the outlook of pupils:

'Research into the effects of integrated education clearly indicates a positive impact of outgroup contact and integrated education particularly on outgroup attitudes and also on attitudes to forgiveness and reconciliation'.¹⁸

¹⁸ McGlynn, C., Niens, U., Cairns, E., and Hewstone M. (2004) Moving Out Of Conflict: The contribution of integrated schools in Northern Ireland to identity, attitudes, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Miles Hewstone has been a major force in development of 'contact theory' and the practice of inter-group contact in the promotion of inter-group harmony and like other social psychologists, he is developing new approaches and with clear and positive results:

The causal sequence traditionally implied in most contact research is that lack of or biased knowledge about the outgroup (i.e., stereotypes) promotes prejudice..... Intergroup contact cannot, however, be considered only in terms of its cognitive processes; a deeper understanding requires recognition of the role of affective processes.... and shows that affect plays an equally important role in changing intergroup judgements. We aimto point out the existence of a growing body of evidence about intergroup contact that is compatible with a new process of prejudice reduction, a process that we call 'affect generalization'¹⁹.

We also know that children who grow up in a diverse environment are less likely to be prejudiced and to take diversity for granted – for example in parts of London where diversity is the norm and over 50 languages in one school is not uncommon. Younger people in these environments tend to take diversity for granted and have less prejudiced and stereotypical views about 'others'.

It is not easy, however, to break down the mono-cultural nature of schools, nor even to reverse the evident trend towards them. But the process must be commenced, and some success has been achieved by gradualist approaches by re-defining catchment areas or changing admissions criteria. This has worked particularly well for popular schools. Other schools have managed to change the way in which they are perceived by different communities and, perhaps by outreach work, have convinced under-represented communities that the school 'is for them' – in other words, it is capable of responding sensitively to a broader range of diverse needs. In all cases, coercive policies like the bussing of children will be counter-productive, we need to work with communities and take them on the journey

For faith schools however, conversion to multi-faith institutions, of opening up schools to children of no faith can immediately secure a mixed environment and dramatically begin to undo much of the segregation children currently experience.

The *Think Global* (2011) organisation, which is supported by 230 groups, mainly NGOs and educational bodies suggest:

We live in an interdependent and globalised world. Collectively we face a range of challenges – inequality and poverty; climate change; racial and religious intolerance. And the future poses new issues that we cannot yet predict.

¹⁹ Hewstone, M, Paolini, S. Cairns, E., Voci, A. Harwood, J. (2006a) Intergroup Contact and the Promotion of Intergroup Harmony, in Brown R. J. and Capozza, D. (eds) *Social Identities: Motivational, Emotional, Cultural Influences* (Hove, England: Psychology Press)

We will meet these challenges through the power and creativity of an engaged public which is open to learning new ways of thinking and responding to a changing world. Change will not come about solely through the efforts of a government or non-governmental organisations. Catalysing this citizen movement requires us to learn about the global challenges we face, our interdependence and our power to effect change.

(Development Education Association, 2010)

The UK Government is apparently out of step with this and with more general public opinion. Polls suggest that as many as 86% of the public believe that young people should learn about global issues in schools according to research conducted by Ipsos MORI. (Think Global, 2011²⁰) In fact, the public has generally been supportive of intercultural learning programmes, which to date have often been small scale and under-funded and time limited, usually implemented only in response to some form of tension or conflict.

We need to see the curriculum change put into reverse – by all means teach our history, the national story and pride in Britain, but we desperately need a broad based intercultural education to equip today's children with the skills they will need to work in a globalized and competitive world. Furthermore, we need to ensure that the teaching of our history does not reinforce a 'them and us' culture, something that Cannadine²¹ believes is an endemic part of our present approach.

Most of all we need a vision of a shared society – this is not just about schools – and we need to ditch the multicultural language which locked us into de facto segregated and separate environments and create an intercultural world (Further explored in Cante, 2012: *Interculturalism: the New Era of Cohesion and Diversity*)

Globalisation and super diversity represents a real challenge to the way that populations now relate to each other and that will continue to change as the composition and movement of people continues to evolve. The development of another layer of identity – in the form of a cosmopolitan, or global citizenship conception – must now be gradually added to the already growing complexity of personal identity if further tensions and conflicts are to be minimised. Nations need to begin to invest in the development of cultural navigation skills to enable citizens to acquire the ability to explore other identities and build the ability to understand and embrace other cultures. A common identity does not mean giving up the distinct faith, ethnic or other identities, it means having more than one identity, being part of a shared society.

The London Olympics gave us a brief vision of an intercultural world, we need to build upon it and sustain it

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²⁰ Think Global (2011) <http://www.think-global.org.uk/page.asp?p=3865>

²¹ Cannadine, D. (2013) *The Undivided Past: History Beyond Our Differences*. Allen Lane

