

Schools 'selecting by back door'

State schools that control their own admissions are covertly selecting pupils by ability, a think tank claims.

The IPPR study claims such schools are significantly less likely to reflect the social make-up of their locality.

The report says that admissions for all schools, including the government's academies, should be decided independently through a local system.

Ministers said they had banned unfair admissions practices which penalised the poor and led to segregation.

City academies, some faith schools and foundation schools can administer admissions, within rules designed to stop the increase of selection by academic ability.

We should be concerned by the fact that Academies are their own admissions authority

Richard Brooks

But the report argued that there were too many loopholes with the new admissions code for it to be effective.

This was because where schools controlled their own admissions procedures there was no effective body to enforce it.

And that it was in the interest of a school to select more able pupils as it was likely to improve its results.

The IPPR study compared the progress of pupils in 3,000 secondary schools in England with the social make-up of their local area.

It found that faith schools were the least reflective of their local area.

They were nearly 10 times more likely to have a higher proportion of able pupils than their local area might suggest.

Academic selection

Meanwhile state foundation schools, many of which select a proportion of their pupils by ability and aptitude, were six times more likely to have a higher share of high-ability pupils than were in their local area.

Report author Richard Brooks said: "Both political parties now accept that academic selection is a bad thing. The argument now turns on covert selection.

School admissions

LAs manage the admissions of community, voluntary-aided and some church schools

Foundation, trust, voluntary-controlled schools (mainly church

schools) and academies control their own admissions

Some of these select a proportion of pupils by aptitude - i.e. a talent for a particular subject

All schools have to give priority to 'hard to place' pupils such as those in local authority care

After that they will allocate places to pupils' siblings and by proximity to school

New rules such as banning interviews with parents aim to prevent schools selecting by social class or ability

"Where does it happen? Where schools are controlling their own admissions.

"How do we stop this happening? By taking control of admission away from them."

Although the research does not focus on academies - which are privately run but publicly funded schools - Mr Brooks sounds the alarm about how he believes they are likely to operate.

"We should be concerned by the fact that academies are their own admissions authority and the fact that we are going to see a lot more of them."

He added that unless the rules were changed so that admissions were decided independently, Academies were likely to take more than their fair share of bright pupils.

He urged government not to set up any more without changing the way admissions are controlled.

But schools minister Jim Knight said: "Academies do not increase social segregation - quite the reverse.

It's irrelevant whether a school operates its own admission criteria or not

Jim Knight

Schools minister

"Academies are transforming the lives of disadvantaged children in our cities by admitting higher proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals, special educational needs and lower-performing young people than the proportions living in their local areas.

"It's irrelevant whether a school operates its own admission criteria or not.

"We have brought in a new, tough, mandatory School Admissions Code to outlaw unfair admissions practices which lead to social segregation and penalise children from low-income backgrounds.

"As the IPPR report itself acknowledges, every admissions authority now has to comply with this by law."

Tony Blair has said that one day every state school is likely to be a trust school or an Academy.

Story from BBC NEWS:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk_news/education/6709381.stm

Published: 2007/05/31 22:20:51 GMT

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