



Working-class pupils, Walsgrove Colliery School, Coventry, 1952

GETTING STARTED

The following points highlight some key phases of education policy in the UK. In pairs, discuss these and make notes on whether you think each one would have a positive or negative effect on the education of pupils. Would the effect be the same for all pupils regardless of social class, gender or ethnicity? Give reasons for your answers.

- 1 Having to pass an exam at age 11 to get into a particular secondary school.
- 2 All students in one area having to go to the same local school.
- 3 Schools competing to attract the best students.
- 4 Parents being able to choose which school their child attends.

Feed back your responses to the rest of the class. Does everyone agree?

Learning objectives

After studying this Topic, you should:

- Know the main features of important educational policies, including the tripartite system, comprehensivisation, marketisation, privatisation and globalisation, and policies relating to gender and ethnicity.
- Be able to apply sociological perspectives to educational policies.
- Be able to evaluate the impact of educational policies on inequality of achievement.

'Educational policy' refers to the plans and strategies for education introduced by government, for example through Acts of Parliament, together with instructions and recommendations to schools and local authorities. Examples of educational policy include the 2010 Academies Act, which made it possible for all state schools to become academies.

Most educational policy is a response to the following issues:

Equal opportunities How far do government policies help to achieve equal opportunities for all pupils? How far do they actually make the inequalities greater?

Selection and choice What types of school should we have? Should schools be able to select their pupils? Should parents be able to choose which school their children attend?

Control of education Who should control schools and what they teach? How much influence should central government, local councils, schools themselves, businesses, teachers, parents and pupils have?

Marketisation and privatisation Should state schools operate like businesses within an 'education market'? Should they be given to private companies to run?

Many educational policies have contributed to maintaining and justifying inequality between classes, genders and ethnic groups. However, certain policies have had some success in reducing inequality. This Topic examines the relationship between inequality and educational policy.

Educational policy in Britain before 1988

Before the industrial revolution in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, there were no state schools. Education was available only to a minority of the population. It was provided by fee-paying schools for the well off, or by the churches and charities for a few of the poor. Before 1833, the state spent no public money on education.

Industrialisation increased the need for an educated workforce, and from the late 19th century the state began to become more involved in education. Reflecting the growing importance of education, the state made schooling compulsory from the ages of 5 to 13 in 1880.

In this period, the type of education children received depended on their class background. Schooling did little to change pupils' ascribed status (the position they were born into). Middle-class pupils were given an academic curriculum to prepare them for careers in the professions or office work.

By contrast, working-class pupils were given a schooling to equip them with the basic numeracy and literacy skills needed for routine factory work and to instil in them an obedient attitude to their superiors.

Selection: the tripartite system

From 1944, education began to be influenced by the idea of meritocracy – that individuals should achieve their status in life through their own efforts and abilities, rather than it being ascribed at birth by their class background.

The 1944 Education Act brought in the tripartite system, so called because children were to be selected and allocated to one of three different types of secondary school, supposedly according to their aptitudes and abilities. These were to be identified by the eleven plus (11+) exam.

- **Grammar schools** offered an academic curriculum and access to non-manual jobs and higher education. They were for pupils with academic ability who passed the 11+. These pupils were mainly middle-class.
- **Secondary modern schools** offered a non-academic, 'practical' curriculum and access to manual work for pupils who failed the 11+. These pupils were mainly working-class.

(The third type, technical schools, existed in a few areas only, so in practice it was more a bipartite than a tripartite system.)

Thus, rather than promoting meritocracy, the tripartite system and 11+ reproduced class inequality by channelling the two social classes into two different types of school that offered unequal opportunities. The system also reproduced gender inequality by requiring girls to gain higher marks than boys in the 11+ to obtain a grammar school place.

The tripartite system also legitimated (justified) inequality through the ideology that ability is inborn. It was thus argued that ability could be measured early on in life, through the 11+. However, in reality children's environment greatly affects their chances of success.

The comprehensive school system

The comprehensive system was introduced in many areas from 1965 onwards. It aimed to overcome the class divide of the tripartite system and make education more meritocratic. The 11+ was to be abolished along with grammars and secondary moderns, to be replaced by comprehensive schools that all pupils within the area would attend.

However, it was left to the local education authority to decide whether to 'go comprehensive' and not all did so. As a result, the grammar-secondary modern divide still exists in many areas.

CHAPTER 2

Two theories of the role of comprehensives

As **Topic 5** showed, Marxists and functionalists see the role of education very differently. Functionalists see it as fulfilling essential functions such as social integration and meritocratic selection for future work roles. By contrast, Marxists see education as serving the interests of capitalism by reproducing and legitimating class inequality. We can apply these theories to the role of comprehensive schooling.

Functionalists argue that comprehensives promote social integration by bringing children of different social classes together in one school. However, an early study by Julienne Ford (1969) found little social mixing between working-class and middle-class pupils, largely because of streaming.

Functionalists also see the comprehensive system as more meritocratic because it gives pupils a longer period in which to develop and show their abilities, unlike the tripartite system, which sought to select the most able pupils at the age of eleven.

However, Marxists argue that comprehensives are not meritocratic. Rather, they reproduce class inequality from one generation to the next through the continuation of the practice of streaming and labelling. These continue to deny working-class children equal opportunity.

Yet by not selecting children at eleven, comprehensives may appear to offer equal chances to all. This 'myth of meritocracy' legitimates (justifies) class inequality by making unequal achievement seem fair and just, because failure looks like it is the fault of the individual rather than the system.

Marketisation

Marketisation refers to the process of introducing market forces of consumer choice and competition between suppliers into areas run by the state, such as education. Marketisation has created an 'education market' by

- reducing direct state control over education
- increasing both competition between schools and parental choice of school.

Marketisation has become a central theme of government education policy since the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA), introduced by the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher.

From 1997, the New Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown followed similar policies, emphasising standards, diversity and choice. From 2010, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government took marketisation even further, for example by creating academies and free schools.

As we saw in **Topic 5**, neoliberals and the New Right favour marketisation. They argue that marketisation means that schools have to attract customers (parents) by competing with each other in the market. Schools that provide customers with what they want – such as success in exams – will thrive, and those that don't will 'go out of business'.

parentocracy

Policies to promote marketisation include:

- Publication of league tables and Ofsted inspection reports that rank each school according to its exam performance and give parents the information they need to choose the right school.

- Business sponsorship of schools.
- Open enrolment, allowing successful schools to recruit more pupils.
- Specialist schools, specialising in IT, languages etc, to widen parental choice.
- Formula funding, where schools receive the same amount of funding for each pupil.
- Schools being allowed to opt out of local authority control, e.g. to become academies.
- Schools having to compete to attract pupils.
- Introduction of tuition fees for higher education.
- Allowing parents and others to set up free schools.

Miriam David (1993) describes marketised education as a 'parentocracy' (literally, 'rule by parents'). Supporters of marketisation argue that in an education market, power shifts away from the producers (teachers and schools) to the consumers (parents). They claim that this encourages diversity among schools, gives parents more choice and raises standards.

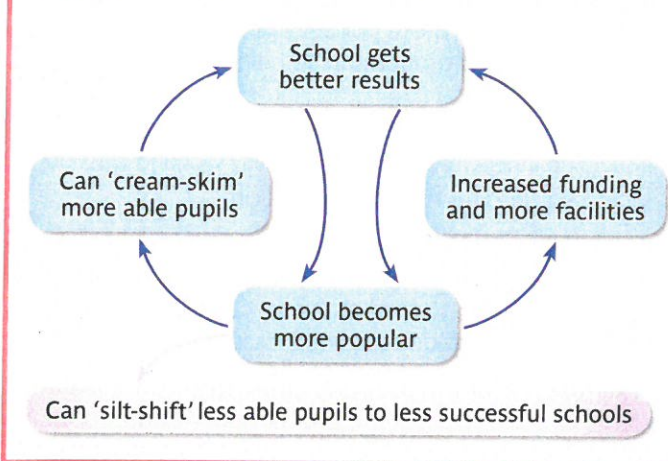
The reproduction of inequality

However, despite the claimed benefits of marketisation, its critics argue that it has increased inequalities. For example, Stephen Ball (1994) and Geoff Whitty (1998) note how marketisation policies such as exam league tables and the funding formula reproduce class inequalities by creating inequalities between schools.

league tables and cream-skimming

The policy of publishing each school's exam results in a league table ensures that schools that achieve good results

Figure 2.7: Marketisation – how success breeds success



are more in demand, because parents are attracted to those with good league table rankings. As Will Bartlett (1993) notes, this encourages:

- **cream-skimming** 'Good' schools can be more selective, choose their own customers and recruit high achieving, mainly middle-class pupils. As a result, these pupils gain an advantage. (See **Figure 2.7**.)
- **silt-shifting** 'Good' schools can avoid taking less able pupils who are likely to get poor results and damage the school's league table position.

For schools with poor league table positions, the opposite applies: they cannot afford to be selective and have to take less able, mainly working-class pupils, so their results are poorer and they remain unattractive to middle-class parents. The overall effect of league tables is thus to produce unequal schools that reproduce social class inequalities.

Activity Webquest

Marketisation and selection

...go to www.sociology.uk.net

the funding formula

Schools are allocated funds by a formula based on how many pupils they attract. As a result, popular schools get more funds and so can afford better-qualified teachers and better facilities. Again, their popularity allows them to be more selective and attracts more able or ambitious, generally middle-class applicants.

On the other hand, unpopular schools lose income and find it difficult to match the teacher skills and facilities of their more successful rivals. Thus, popular schools with good results and middle-class pupils thrive; unpopular schools fail to attract pupils and their funding is further reduced.

A study of international patterns of educational inequality by the Institute for Public Policy Research (2012) found that competition-oriented education systems such as Britain's produce more segregation between children of different social backgrounds.

Gewirtz: parental choice

Not only do marketisation policies benefit the middle class by creating inequalities between schools. By increasing parental choice, marketisation also advantages middle-class parents, whose economic and cultural capital (see page 23) puts them in a better position to choose 'good' schools for their children.

This is shown in Sharon Gewirtz's (1995) study of 14 London secondary schools. Gewirtz found that differences in parents' economic and cultural capital lead to class differences in how far they can exercise choice of secondary school. She identifies three main types of parents, whom she calls privileged-skilled choosers, disconnected-local choosers and semi-skilled choosers.

Privileged-skilled choosers These were mainly professional middle-class parents who used their economic and cultural capital to gain educational capital for their children. Being prosperous, confident and well educated, they were able to take full advantage of the choices open to them.

These parents possessed cultural capital. They knew how school admissions systems work, for example the importance of putting a particular school as first choice. They had the time to visit schools and the skills to research the options available.

Their economic capital also meant they could afford to move their children around the education system to get the best deal out of it, for example by paying extra travel costs so that their children could attend 'better' schools out of their area.

Disconnected-local choosers These were working-class parents whose choices were restricted by their lack of economic and cultural capital.

They found it difficult to understand school admissions procedures. They were less confident in their dealings with schools, less aware of the choices open to them, and less able to manipulate the system to their own advantage. Many of them attached more importance to safety and the quality of school facilities than to league tables or long-term ambitions.

Distance and cost of travel were major restrictions on their choice of school. Their funds were limited and a place at the nearest school was often their only realistic option for their children.

Analysis and Evaluation

Suggest reasons why working-class parents might be less able to manipulate the education system to their advantage.

CHAPTER 2

Semi-skilled choosers These parents were also mainly working-class, but unlike the disconnected-local choosers, they were ambitious for their children. However, they too lacked cultural capital and found it difficult to make sense of the education market, often having to rely on other people's opinions about schools. They were often frustrated at their inability to get their children into the schools they wanted.

Thus, although in theory the education market gives everyone greater choice, Gewirtz concludes that in practice middle-class parents possess cultural and economic capital and have more choice than working-class parents.

The myth of parentocracy

Not only does marketisation reproduce inequality; it also *legitimises* it by concealing its true causes and by justifying its existence.

Ball believes that marketisation gives the appearance of a 'parentocracy'. That is, the education system seems as if it is based on parents having a free choice of school. However, Ball argues that parentocracy is a myth, not a reality. It makes it appear that all parents have the same freedom to choose which school to send their children to.

In reality, however, as Gewirtz shows, middle-class parents are better able to take advantage of the choices available. For example, as Leech and Campos show in **Topic 1**, they can afford to move into the catchment areas of more desirable schools.

By disguising the fact that schooling continues to reproduce class inequality in this way, the myth of parentocracy makes inequality in education appear fair and inevitable.

Application

- 1 Explain the difference between the 'myth of parentocracy' and Bowles and Gintis' 'myth of meritocracy'.
- 2 What similarity is there between these two 'myths'?

New Labour and inequality

While marketisation policies have tended to increase inequality, the New Labour governments of 1997 to 2010 also introduced a number of policies aimed at reducing it. These included:

- Designating some deprived areas as Education Action Zones and providing them with additional resources.
- The Aim Higher programme to raise the aspirations of groups who are under-represented in higher education.
- Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs): payments to students from low-income backgrounds to encourage them to stay on after 16 to gain better qualifications.

- Introduction of the National Literacy Strategy, literacy and numeracy hours, and reducing primary school class sizes. It is claimed these policies are of greater benefit to disadvantaged groups and so help to reduce inequality.
- City academies were created to give a fresh start to struggling inner-city schools with mainly working-class pupils.
- Increased funding for state education.

However, critics such as Melissa Benn (2012) see a contradiction between Labour's policies to tackle inequality and its commitment to marketisation – something she calls the 'New Labour paradox'.

For example, despite introducing EMAs to encourage poorer students to stay in education, Labour also introduced tuition fees for higher education that may deter them from going to university.

Investigating how middle-class parents 'play the system'

The issue of how middle-class parents 'play the system' has certain important **research characteristics** – particular features that may make it easy or difficult to investigate. For example:

- Some of the ways in which middle-class parents 'play the system' verge on illegality – for example giving a false address so as to be in the preferred school's catchment area. Parents are unlikely to trust a researcher sufficiently to disclose such wrongdoing.
- Pupils may have little awareness of how their parents succeeded or failed in getting them into a particular school, so there may be little point in asking them.
- Some of the ways in which middle-class parents 'play the system' may be hidden from public view, for example having friends in the teaching profession who can give them advice on admissions. It may be difficult for researchers to uncover these hidden processes.
- This is an ill-defined idea – for example, is middle-class parents buying a house near a 'good' school 'playing the system' or simply a sensible family decision?
- Most schools wish to represent themselves as having fair admissions policies and as welcoming all applicants, so they may not welcome research that suggests otherwise.

- 1 What other research characteristics of how middle-class parents 'play the system' can you think of? You could consider issues of cultural capital, confidentiality etc particular to investigating this topic.
- 2 Using the research characteristics listed above and any others you can think of, identify two strengths and two limitations of using **unstructured interviews** to investigate how middle-class parents 'play the system'. You can read more about unstructured interviews on pages 127–34.

Furthermore, New Labour governments neither abolished fee-paying private schools nor removed their charitable status (estimated to be worth over £165 million per year).

Activity Webquest

New Labour and educational inequality

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Coalition government policies from 2010

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government elected in 2010 accelerated the move away from an education system based largely on comprehensive schools run by local authorities. Its policies have been strongly influenced by neoliberal and New Right ideas about reducing the role of the state in the provision of education through marketisation and privatisation. (See **Box 10**.)

Prime Minister David Cameron stated that the aim of the Coalition's education policy was to encourage 'excellence, competition and innovation', by freeing schools from the 'dead hand of the state', through policies such as academies and free schools. Furthermore, cuts were made to the education budget, as part of the government's general policy of reducing state spending.

Academies

From 2010, all schools were encouraged to leave local authority control and become academies. Funding was taken from local authority budgets and given directly to academies by central government, and academies were given control over their curriculum.

By 2012, over half of all secondary schools had converted to academy status. Some academies are run by private educational businesses and funded directly by the state.

However, whereas Labour's original city academies targeted disadvantaged schools and areas, the Coalition government, by allowing any school to become an academy, removed the focus on reducing inequality.

Free schools

Although funded directly by the state, free schools are set up and run by parents, teachers, faith organisations or businesses rather than the local authority.

Supporters of free schools claim that they improve educational standards by taking control away from the state and giving power to parents. Free schools, it is claimed, give parents and teachers the opportunity to create a new school if they are unhappy with the state schools in their local area.

However, Rebecca Allen (2010) argues that research from Sweden, where 20% of schools are free schools, shows that they only benefit children from highly educated families. Other critics claim that free schools are socially divisive and that they lower standards – Sweden's international educational ranking has fallen since their introduction. Charter schools in the USA (which are similar to free schools) have also been criticised for appearing to raise standards but only doing so by strict pupil selection and exclusion policies.

In England, evidence shows that free schools take fewer disadvantaged pupils than nearby schools. For example, in 2011 only 6.4% of pupils at Bristol Free School were eligible for free school meals, compared with 22.5% of pupils across the city as a whole (DoE 2012).

Analysis and Evaluation

Why might free schools be more likely to attract pupils from better-off backgrounds?



▲ Selection by mortgage? Not all parents can afford to move into the catchment area of a popular school.

CHAPTER 2

Fragmented centralisation

Ball (2011) argues that promoting academies and free schools has led to both increased fragmentation and increased centralisation of control over educational provision in England.

- **Fragmentation** The comprehensive system is being replaced by a patchwork of diverse provision, much of it involving private providers, that leads to greater inequality in opportunities.
- **Centralisation of control** Central government alone has the power to allow or require schools to become academies or allow free schools to be set up. These schools are funded directly by central government. Their rapid growth has greatly reduced the role of elected local authorities in education.

Coalition policies and inequality

While the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition's marketisation policies are said to have increased inequality, they also introduced policies aimed at reducing it. These included:

- **Free school meals** for all children in reception, year one and year two.
- **The Pupil Premium** – money that schools receive for each pupil from a disadvantaged background.

However, Ofsted (2012) found that in many cases the Pupil Premium is not spent on those it is supposed to help. Only one in ten head teachers said that it had significantly changed how they supported pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Furthermore, as part of the coalition government's 'austerity' programme, spending on many areas of education has been cut: spending on school buildings was cut by 60%, many Sure Start centres were closed, the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) was abolished and university tuition fees tripled to £9,000 a year.

Critics argue that cutting Sure Start and the EMA has reduced opportunities for working-class pupils. Similarly, increased university fees may discourage them from entering higher education (see **Topic 1**).

The privatisation of education

Privatisation involves the transfer of public assets such as schools to private companies. In recent years, there has been a trend towards the privatisation of important aspects of education, both in the UK and globally. In the process, education becomes a source of profit for capitalists in what Ball calls the 'education services industry' or ESI.

Private companies in the ESI are involved in an ever increasing range of activities in education, including building schools; providing supply teachers, work-based learning, careers advice and Ofsted inspection services; and even running entire local education authorities.

Large-scale school building projects often involve public-private partnerships (PPPs), in which private sector companies provide capital to design, build, finance and operate educational services. Typically, such contracts last for 25 years or more, during which time the local council pays a monthly lease and a management fee out of public funds.

Many of these activities are very profitable. According to Ball (2007), companies involved in such work expect to make up to ten times as much profit as they do on other contracts. However, local authorities are often obliged to enter into these agreements as the only way of building new schools because of a lack of funding by central government.

Activity Media

Sponsored academies — a public-private partnership

...go to www.sociology.uk.net



Blurring the public/private boundary

Many senior officials in the public sector, such as directors of local authorities and head teachers, now leave to set up or work for private sector education businesses. These companies then bid for contracts to provide services to schools and local authorities. For example, two companies set up in this way hold four of the five national contracts for school inspection services.

As Allyson Pollack (2004) notes, this flow of personnel allows companies to buy 'insider knowledge' to help win contracts, as well as side-stepping local authority democracy.

Privatisation and the globalisation of education policy

Many private companies in the education services industry are foreign-owned. The exam board Edexcel is owned by the US educational publishing and testing giant Pearson,

and according to Ball some Pearson GCSE exam answers are now marked in Sydney and Iowa.

Similarly, according to Buckingham and Scanlon (2005), the UK's four leading educational software companies are all owned by global multinationals (Disney, the US toy companies Mattel and Hambro, and French media corporation Vivendi). Many contracts for educational services in the UK are sold on by the original company to others such as banks and investment funds. In a globalised world, these are often bought by overseas companies.

Conversely, some UK edu-businesses work overseas. For example, Prospects has worked in China, Macedonia and Finland. Often, private companies are exporting UK education policy to other countries (for example, Ofsted-type inspections) and then providing the services to deliver the policies. As a result, nation-states are becoming less important in policymaking, which is shifting to a global level and which is also often privatised.

The cola-isation of schools

The private sector is also penetrating education indirectly, for example through vending machines on school premises and the development of brand loyalty through displays of logos and sponsorships. This process has been called the 'cola-isation' of schools.

According to Molnar (2005), schools are targeted by private companies because 'schools by their nature carry enormous goodwill and can thus confer legitimacy on anything associated with them'. In other words, they are a kind of product endorsement.

However, the benefits to schools and pupils of this private sector involvement are often very limited. For example, according to Ball, a Cadbury's sports equipment promotion was scrapped after it was revealed that pupils would have to eat 5,440 chocolate bars just to qualify for a set of volleyball posts. According to Sharon Beder (2009), UK families spent £110,000 in Tesco supermarkets in return for a single computer for schools.

Education as a commodity

Ball concludes that a fundamental change is taking place in which privatisation is becoming the key factor shaping educational policy. Policy is increasingly focused on moving educational services out of the public sector controlled by the nation-state, to be provided by private companies instead. In the process, education is being turned into a 'legitimate object of private profit-making', a commodity to be bought and sold in an education market.

As **Box 10** shows, privatisation means that the state is losing its role as the provider of educational services. For Ball, the overall effect is that:

'More and more areas of education are now subject to business practices and financial logics, and bought and sold as assets and made part of investment portfolios. The possibilities of privatisation continually expand, and the ratcheting up of policy over time opens up more education services for profit.'

Similarly, Marxists such as Stuart Hall (2011) see Coalition government policies as part of the 'long march of the neoliberal revolution'. Hall sees academies as an example of handing over public services to private capitalists, such as educational businesses. In the Marxist view, the neoliberal claim that privatisation and competition drive up standards is a myth used to legitimate the turning of education into a source of private profit.

Activity Webquest

Should education be privatised?

...go to www.sociology.uk.net



Box 10 Neoliberalism and privatisation

Neoliberal and New Right approaches largely share the functionalists' view that education must be meritocratic and must promote social integration. However, unlike functionalists, they are critical of the role of the state in performing these functions. They argue that the state's involvement leads to bureaucratic self-interest, the stifling of initiative and low standards. To overcome these problems, the education system must be marketised. In their view, competition will make schools more responsive and raise educational standards. We can identify two types of marketisation:

Type 1: an internal market within the state education system

This was established by the 1988 Education Reform Act, which directed state schools to act more like private businesses, e.g. competing for pupils. However, schooling was still largely delivered by the state, mainly through local authority schools.

Type 2: the privatisation of state education

In a privatised system, the state ceases to be the actual provider of educational services. Instead, private companies or voluntary organisations deliver education and the state is reduced to two roles:

- It commissions educational services, putting them up for contract and deciding which private bidder gets the contract.
- It acts as regulator, setting targets and monitoring performance to ensure that the private providers meet certain standards, e.g. through Ofsted inspections.

This form of marketisation began in the late 1980s in a fairly limited way but the trend has steadily accelerated as more areas of the education system have been opened up to private businesses.

Policies on gender and ethnicity

So far we have focused largely on policies affecting class differences in achievement. However, policies can also have an impact on other differences in achievement, such as gender and ethnicity.

Gender

In the 19th century, females were largely excluded from higher education. More recently, under the tripartite system, girls often had to achieve a higher mark than boys in the 11+ in order to obtain a grammar school place.

Since the 1970s, however, policies such as GIST have been introduced to try to reduce gender differences in subject choice. For more about policies on gender, see [Topic 4](#).

Ethnicity

Policies aimed at raising the achievements of children from minority ethnic backgrounds have gone through several phases:

Assimilation policies in the 1960s and 70s focused on the need for pupils from minority ethnic groups to assimilate into mainstream British culture as a way of raising their achievement, especially by helping those for whom English was not their first language. A related policy is that of compensatory education (see [Topic 3](#)).

However, critics argue that some minority groups who are at risk of underachieving, such as African Caribbean pupils, already speak English and that the real cause of their underachievement lies in poverty or racism.

Multicultural education (MCE) policies through the 1980s and into the 1990s aimed to promote the achievements of children from minority ethnic groups by valuing all cultures in the school curriculum, thereby raising minority pupils' self-esteem and achievements.

However, MCE has been criticised on several grounds:

- Maureen Stone (1981) argues that black pupils do not fail for lack of self-esteem, so MCE is misguided.
- Critical race theorists argue that MCE is mere tokenism. It picks out stereotypical features of minority cultures for inclusion in the curriculum, but fails to tackle institutional racism.
- The New Right criticise MCE for perpetuating cultural divisions. They take the view that education should promote a shared national culture and identity into which minorities should be assimilated.

Social inclusion of pupils from minority ethnic groups, and policies to raise their achievement, became the focus in the late 1990s. Policies include:

- Detailed monitoring of exam results by ethnicity.
- Amending the Race Relations Act to place a legal duty on schools to promote racial equality.
- Help for voluntary 'Saturday schools' in the black community.
- English as an Additional Language programmes.

However, Heidi Safia Mirza (2005) sees little genuine change in policy. She argues that, instead of tackling the structural causes of ethnic inequality such as poverty and racism, educational policy still takes a 'soft' approach that focuses on culture, behaviour and the home.

Similarly, Gillborn argues that institutionally racist policies in relation to the ethnocentric curriculum, assessment and streaming continue to disadvantage minority ethnic group pupils (see [Topic 3](#)).

Topic summary

Policies can have important effects on **inequalities** within the education system. Policy has gone through three main phases since 1944.

The first was the **tripartite system**, with selection at 11+ (based on the idea of innate ability) for either grammar or secondary modern school. **Comprehensivisation** from 1965 abolished the 11+; all children went to comprehensive schools, but **streaming** continued.

Marketisation from 1988 aimed to create an education market, with parental choice and competition between schools. More recently, there has been some **privatisation**.

Some sociologists see most policies as **reproducing and legitimating inequality**. Some policies have aimed to deal with **gender** and **ethnic** differences in achievement.

While marketisation has been the dominant policy since 1988, some **policies to reduce inequality** have also been introduced.

EXAMINING EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND INEQUALITY

QuickCheck Questions

Check your answers at www.sociology.uk.net

- 1 In what way did the tripartite system reproduce class inequality?
- 2 Identify two reasons why comprehensivisation did not end educational inequality.
- 3 Explain how the idea that there is a 'parentocracy' legitimates inequality.
- 4 Explain why an education market might raise educational standards.
- 5 Identify two policies that have helped to create an education market.
- 6 In what ways might the education system be a source of profits for private companies?
- 7 Explain what is meant by 'assimilation' policies in relation to ethnicity and education.
- 8 Suggest two criticisms of multicultural education policies.

Questions to try

Whether or not you are taking the AS exams during your A level course, trying the AS questions below is a very good way of testing your knowledge and understanding and practising your skills in preparation for your A level exams.

Item A Until the 1980s, most education was provided by elected local education authorities, directed and funded by central government. However, the 1988 Education Reform Act began the marketisation of education, aimed at raising standards by increasing parental choice and competition between schools. After 2010, there was a substantial move towards the privatisation of education through policies such as the growth of chains of academies run by private businesses.

Some sociologists claim that the main impact of marketisation and privatisation policies has not been to raise standards, but to increase educational inequality.

AS level questions

- 1 Define the term 'reproduction of social inequality'. (2 marks)
- 2 Using one example, briefly explain how 'multicultural education' may reduce ethnic differences in achievement. (2 marks)
- 3 Outline and explain the effects of two marketisation policies. (10 marks)

A level questions

- 4 Outline two criticisms of the comprehensive school system. (4 marks)
- 5 Applying material from Item A and your knowledge, evaluate the claim that marketisation and privatisation policies have increased educational inequality. (30 marks)

The Examiner's Advice

Q3 Spend about 15 minutes on this question. Divide your time fairly equally between each policy. You don't need a separate introduction; just start on your first policy. Possible policies include exam league tables, parental choice, specialist schools, free schools, Ofsted inspections, the funding formula, open enrolment, academies, the National Curriculum. Describe in some detail each policy. Explain the effect of each of the two policies. Do this by creating a chain of reasoning (see page 248). For example, exam league tables give parents the information to identify and choose the best schools, as in a market. This means that the middle class, who possess more cultural and economic capital with which to make choices, gain advantage. Use concepts such as parentocracy, myth of parentocracy, fragmented centralisation, reproduction and legitimation of inequality, competition, selection by mortgage, economic and cultural capital, and studies such as David, Ball, Whitty and Gewirtz.

Q5 Spend about 45 minutes on this question. First explain what marketisation and privatisation mean, and how they differ; e.g. privatisation goes beyond marketisation by taking state-funded education out of state control and placing it in private hands. Identify and explain policies firstly that create an education market, and secondly policies that move control of education away from the state. Do this by creating a chain of reasoning. For example, formula funding means schools get funds based on how many pupils they attract. This puts pressure on schools to improve results so as to gain more funding by attracting more pupils. These well-resourced, popular schools can then select successful middle-class pupils. Meanwhile, working-class pupils are more likely to end up in schools with more limited funding and underachieve. Use evidence from studies such as Ball, Whitty, David, Gewirtz, Allen, Pollack, Molnar, Beder and Hall, and develop the points noted in Item A. Evaluate the impact of individual policies as you go along, as well as the claim as a whole in your conclusion.