

The recent controversy surrounding grammar schools has sparked my interest as of late, being a student in a comprehensive school with my sights set on university. It used to be that students were split: those who passed the 11-plus would be sent to grammar schools and eventually would go on to higher education and those who didn't would be sent to secondary school and go straight into trade jobs. However, during the 50's and 60's the two schooling systems were under immense scrutiny from politicians who claimed that these schools were creating a class divide in communities. After a government order in 1965, grammar schools were phased out and replaced with a mixed comprehensive schooling system.

Modern grammar schools still use the 11-plus system which has been criticized by many people recently because of the way it tests students. The questions are not often covered in standard primary school teaching which means that children whose parents can afford tutoring and extra education are more likely to pass the test leaving students in lower-income families behind. Comprehensive schools, on the other hand, accept students of all abilities and give them an equal chance to go on to higher education.

Recently, our PM Theresa May has said that she has plans to create a new generation of grammar schools following the ban that was placed on them nearly 20 years ago. This decision has been faced with a lot of debate due to what some believe to be the elitist nature of these schools. But May's decision to lift the ban was backed by her opinion that the ban on selective schools "has held bright poor children back". Originally her plan was to fund 70,000 lower-income students to go to these grammar schools but it has now come to light that the budget will allow only a meagre 13,000 students to attend these tax-funded schools. This comes across as a pitiful nod to the lower-class students across the country who even despite this funding would struggle to fit into such an elitist environment. Kids are cruel and snobbiness spans across all ages. Even with May's funding plan poorer students will struggle to gain the most from a grammar school experience if they are subjected to the torment many will instil upon them.

My question is: is it really necessary to fund Grammar schools when we could focus our efforts on raising the standard of education in non-selective comprehensive schools?

School funding is a national crisis and many secondary education institutions are struggling to provide students with everything that they need. Rather than improve funding for schools in need and raise the bar for schools across the country, our government has decided to spend our valuable tax money on expanding selective schools and shutting out less-able and less-fortunate students. One of the main arguments for the resurgence of grammar schools is that they provide a better quality of education for higher achieving students but it seems to me that we could easily achieve the same quality of schooling in comprehensive schools if we invested our money in school equipment and better pay and support for our admittedly undervalued teaching force.

Overall, I believe that we should not be reserving our best education systems for the elite and we should ensure that everybody has an equal chance at academic excellence and success in further education. To me, grammar schools are not the solution and in fact reinforce a class divide that we should be working to close.