

Educational social policy: part 2

The next piece of educational policy that had major social significance was **Butler's 1944 Education Act** which re-organised secondary education, that is, education for those aged 11 years and above. The 1944 Act

- **Made secondary education free** – previously those grammar schools that provided it were fee-paying grammar schools
- Organised secondary education into a **TRIPARTITE** system, that is, **three different types of secondary school**. This occurred because educational thinking at the time believed that there were **three different types of intelligence and therefore children**; (1) **academic children** who would be catered for by **grammar schools offering higher forms of knowledge and qualifications such as A-levels, and therefore access to higher educational establishments such as universities and teacher training colleges**; (2) **creative and technically/scientifically inclined children** would be educated in **technical schools** that would offer them the opportunity to develop their artistic and scientific/engineering potential; and (3) **children who were neither academically nor artistically/scientifically inclined** would be educated in **basic skills** in secondary modern schools which they would leave at the age of 15 years. There would be no route from this type of school into higher education. It was assumed that children in these types of school would go straight into work.

In order to work out which children had which type of intelligence, an intelligence test or exam was devised called the **'Eleven Plus'**. This test embodied the idea of **'equality of opportunity'** – all children, regardless of social class, gender or ethnicity, at the age of 11 years would get the chance to prove themselves. The test was therefore supposed to sift, sort and allocate children to a school that could make the best of their potential ability. This was deemed an extremely **MERITOCRATIC** system because it judged all children in accordance with an **'objective'** test.

HOWEVER by the end of the 1950s, it was evident that the tripartite system was **failing** to achieve its objectives. There were 5 reasons for this;

- (1) Very few technical schools were actually built. In many areas, the system was bi-partite rather than tri-partite. The choice was either a grammar school or a secondary modern school.
- (2) **Social class divisions quickly emerged**. Grammar schools were dominated by pupils from middle-class backgrounds – only a minority of their pupils were from poorer working-class families. In secondary schools, the reverse

was true. These schools were almost entirely made up of children from working-class backgrounds because middle-class children who failed the 11+ were sent to fee-paying private schools by their parents.

- (3) The reason for these class divisions was probably the 11+ exam itself which was not as objective as hoped. This is because many of the questions it asked were knowledge-based. Accumulation of knowledge is culture-based to some extent. **IQ tests are not culture free or culture-fair. They benefit children who have access to economic or cultural forms of capital (middle-class children) and they penalise those are less likely to have access to these advantages (working-class children).**
- (4) **The 11+ was widely viewed by employers, parents, children and teachers as reflecting success or failure.** Children who passed it were seen as 'successful' and consequently probably experienced a positive sense of status whilst children who were allocated to secondary moderns were widely viewed as 'failures' and probably felt 'inferior' compared with their grammar school peers. Think too how the concept of a '**self-fulfilling prophecy**' might come into play in these circumstances.
- (5) **The 1944 Act did not challenge the class divisions perpetrated by the continued existence of the public schools** which educated **the richest 7 per cent of the school population** and who continued to **enjoy disproportionate access to Oxbridge and other universities as well as the most well paid and privileged jobs.**