



NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

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## THE IMPACT OF THE STRUCTURE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN SLOUGH

### Final Report

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1001. This report presents the findings from a research project carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) on behalf of Slough Borough Council (SBC). The aim was to examine the impact on performance of the structure of education in Slough. Since Slough – a unitary authority since 1998 – has a fully selective system of education, this meant exploring the impact of selection and comparing the performance of Slough students with those of students in comprehensive schools elsewhere.

1002. This chapter describes the background to the study, the evidence from previous research, the methods used and the structure of the report.

### **1.1 Background to the Selection Debate**

1003. In 1965, the then Department of Education and Science (DES) issued Circular 10/65, asking local education authorities (LEAs) to re-organise their secondary schools on comprehensive lines. Some LEAs had already made moves in that direction; as Benn and Simon (1970) observe, the effect of the circular was to *'accelerate rather than begin'* the process. A variety of secondary reorganisation plans were put forward and approved, including some which sought to soften selection, rather than remove it altogether.

1004. However, in 1970, following a change of government, Circular 10/70 effectively withdrew Circular 10/65. The move towards comprehensive education continued, but LEAs which preferred to retain their selective systems were allowed to do so. A survey conducted in 1975 indicated only 20 of the LEAs in England and Wales were fully comprehensive, and a quarter of the nation's children still sat an '11-plus' selection test (Simon, 1991). By then, there had been another change of government, and in 1976 a new Education Act required LEAs to produce plans for comprehensive reorganisation if they had not already done so. However, the Act proved difficult to enforce, and in 1979 it was repealed by the new Conservative government.

1005. The Conservative Party continued in power for 18 years. During that period, some LEAs implemented schemes for comprehensive reorganisation, but those which chose to remain selective were under no obligation to change.

Hence, when the Labour Party won the 1997 general election, it inherited an education system which in England (unlike Scotland) was varied. While most LEAs are totally comprehensive, some are basically comprehensive but include one or two grammar schools serving part of their communities, and some retain a fully selective system.

1006. There are now 164 grammar schools, unevenly distributed through the country. Although committed in principle to comprehensive education, the Labour Party recognised the popularity of the remaining grammar schools, and the prime minister promised that *'as long as the parents want them, they will stay'* (speech at the Barber Institute, University of Birmingham, 14 April 1997). Legislation was therefore introduced to allow for the possibility of parental ballots concerning the future of local grammar schools.
1007. The regulations allow for 'area ballots' (of all resident parents of schoolchildren) in selective areas, and 'feeder school ballots' relating to 'stand-alone' grammar schools. However, ballots can only take place in response to a petition submitted by 20 per cent of the eligible parents. Thus, LEAs which might wish to change their selective system no longer have the power to do so. Comprehensive education can be introduced only if enough parents request a ballot and vote for change; the LEA itself cannot decide to ballot, and if parents petition for one, the LEA has to remain neutral throughout the process.

## **1.2 The Local Context**

1008. Slough is one of ten LEAs subject to a possible area ballot because at least 20 per cent of their secondary students are in grammar schools (see Jesson, 1999). Slough is a small LEA, responsible for fewer than 50 schools in total, including nursery and special as well as primary and secondary schools. It has only 11 secondary schools (not including an all-age special school) but four of these are grammar schools. Until 1996, Slough had a middle school system, and all Year 7 children took a '12 plus' test (provided by Berkshire LEA) in their middle (or 'combined' first and middle) schools. If successful, they transferred to grammar school at the age of 12; if not, they transferred to one of the non-selective secondary schools.
1009. In 1996, two important changes took place. First, school reorganisation meant that the age of transfer to secondary school changed from 12 to 11; in

September 1996, two cohorts of children made the transfer simultaneously. Second, the grammar schools (three of which had become grant-maintained) decided to set their own admission tests. The 11-plus test is 'opt in' rather than 'opt out'; it is taken by candidates for admission at the grammar school of their choice, not by all (or almost all) children in their primary classrooms.

1010. Because SBC covers a small geographical area, a high proportion of its population lives close to its borders; this means that it is relatively easy for Slough children to attend schools outside the borough, and for non-Slough children to attend SBC schools. It is therefore relevant to consider the education systems of neighbouring authorities, in particular Buckinghamshire and Windsor and Maidenhead. Bucks also has a selective system, and one of its grammar schools (Burnham) is only just outside the Slough border; in fact for pupils in some Slough primary schools, it is the nearest grammar school. This means that some Slough children take the Bucks selection test either instead of, or as well as, the Slough test.
1011. Windsor and Maidenhead, like Slough, is a new LEA, a unitary authority created by the abolition of Berkshire County Council. Although, like Slough, it covers a small geographical area, it includes different systems of education. Both towns are comprehensive, but in Maidenhead the age of transfer to secondary education is 11, while in Windsor there are middle schools catering for pupils aged 9-13. There is also, however, one secondary school (Churchmead, at Datchet) which under Berkshire was the designated non-selective school for some Slough pupils; it is now part of Windsor and Maidenhead, but although closer to Windsor than Maidenhead, it takes pupils at age 11, including large numbers from Slough.
1012. The result is that, in theory at least, Slough parents can choose from a range of types of schooling. They can enter their children for the Slough and/or the Bucks 11-plus test, in the hope of securing a grammar school place; if they are opposed to selection (or if their child fails the test), they can apply for admission to a comprehensive school in Windsor or Maidenhead. In practice, however, the choice for the majority of parents is likely to be limited. Their child may not succeed in gaining admission to a grammar school, and they may not have the resources to pay for travel to a school outside the borough.

1013. The other side of the equation is that the Slough grammar schools attract applications from a large number of families who live outside the borough. Hence, in 1998, 40 per cent of the Year 7 pupils in Slough grammar schools came from outside Slough. It is perhaps not surprising that this fact is resented by local people who feel that grammar school places which would otherwise have been available for Slough children are being given to outsiders instead.
1014. There are also differences in admission to grammar school in terms of the ethnicity and socio-economic status of the families represented. According to SBC records, in 1999 17 per cent of the white children in Slough maintained primary schools transferred to grammar school; the percentage of Pakistani pupils was lower (13 per cent) and that of Indian pupils much higher (29 per cent). More than a quarter (26 per cent) of pupils in non-selective schools were eligible for free school meals (FSM), compared with only eight per cent of those in grammar schools.
1015. In this difficult situation, SBC wishes to provide the fairest and most effective system of education for pupils from all ethnic communities in the town. As explained in Section 1.1, it does not have the power to abolish selection, even if this were considered desirable. However, Slough has a responsibility to provide clear unbiased evidence about the impact of selection on the borough's children and schools. Moreover, an understanding of the impact of selection should help Slough to operate effectively within the present system.

### **1.3 Research Evidence**

1016. Prior to the move towards comprehensive schooling, the Crowther Report (Ministry of Education, 1959) noted that, since

*The proportion of grammar school places to the total population varies so greatly from one part of England to another ... There is a considerable intermediate group of boys and girls whose abilities would in one place give them a grammar school education and in another a modern school one.*



1017. Furthermore, according to the report:

*Much careful research work has shown pretty clearly that a fresh classification after four years, i.e. about the age of 15, would have redistributed between selective and non-selective schools about 14 per cent of the pupils.*

1018. The Newsome Report (DES, 1963) similarly noted the overlap in abilities between pupils in grammar schools and those in secondary modern schools. Comments such as these highlight the fact that there is inevitably a degree of arbitrariness in the allocation of places in a selective system. The latter is often described in terms of providing the most appropriate education for different types of children, the academically able and the more practically orientated. But children do not fall neatly into one or the other category; on the contrary, they represent a whole continuum of ability, and selective systems have to decide where to draw the dividing line.

1019. It is not simply that, as Crowther noted, the proportion of available grammar school places may vary. There is also the fact that the best and fairest test which could be devised has a measure of unreliability, as Yates and Pidgeon noted back in 1957. This means in effect that children who achieve scores close to the borderline could obtain a different result (in terms of success or failure) even if tested again the following week. The impact of selection on these 'borderline children', and their subsequent progress in different types of secondary school, was therefore a key issue for the NFER research.

### **1.3.1 Comparing different systems**

1020. Because the change to comprehensive education was gradual – and has never been completed – researchers have been able to compare the effects of comprehensive and selective systems. In terms of performance, two key questions are:

- ♦ does comprehensive or selective education produce the best overall results?
- ♦ what kind of secondary school is best for different groups of children?

1021. A number of research projects examined these questions during the 1980s and early 1990s, although they were often criticised for being politically biased and/or methodologically flawed.<sup>1</sup>
1022. For example, Steedman (1980) used data from a longitudinal study (the National Child Development Study) in order to '*evaluate aspects of educational progress in selective and non-selective secondary schools*' in England. Her main conclusion was that the progress in reading and mathematics made by the most able children in comprehensive schools matched that of their counterparts in grammar schools.
1023. In an extension of the study (1983) she compared examination results in three types of school, and found (not surprisingly) that grammar schools did best, then comprehensive schools, then secondary moderns. However, after making allowance for prior attainment, social class and parental interest, the differences were greatly reduced, although the ranking stayed the same. In a different analysis, she compared the combined results for grammar and secondary modern schools with those for comprehensive schools. Before controlling for relevant factors, grammar and secondary modern schools outperformed comprehensives, but when allowance was made for prior attainment and family background, there were no statistically significant differences in the results.
1024. Steedman's work was criticised on the grounds that her sample was too small; she was also accused of being biased in favour of comprehensive schools. She was herself cautious in interpreting her findings, noting that they were '*observations of how pupils were faring in schools which were not true comprehensives but which coexisted with selective schools*'. This comment highlights another difficulty for researchers seeking to compare the impact of selective and comprehensive education: how does one define a comprehensive school (or LEA)? It is still the case in some areas that individual grammar schools exist alongside comprehensive schools: are the latter truly comprehensive if the most able students in the area attend the grammar school? For this reason, in comparing the performance of Slough students with those in comprehensive LEAs, we have restricted the latter group to those LEAs which do not have any grammar schools at all.

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<sup>1</sup> As the research project did not have scope for an independent literature review, this section is based on the work of Crook *et al.* (1999).

1025. Research undertaken by Marks *et al.* (1983) indicated that selective education produced better overall results, although their methodology has been widely criticised. Marks *et al.* used published 1981 examination results, and sought to control for a range of variables (including social class and LEA expenditure) by using multiple regression analyses. On two different measures (the number of O level / CSE grade 1 passes per pupil and the average number of examination points per pupil) the performance of comprehensive school pupils was below the national average; indeed, it was reported that the number of exam passes per pupil in selective education was 30-40 per cent higher than that achieved by pupils in fully comprehensive systems. However, the study was criticised particularly for its method of controlling for social class, and other researchers reached substantially different conclusions by re-analysing the same data: Gray *et al.* (1984) used different statistical controls and concluded that there was no evidence to suggest that selective systems would produce better results.
1026. In a follow-up study, Marks and Pomian-Szrednicki (1985) again found that pupils in LEAs with a relatively high proportion of grammar school places obtained '*more and better passes*' than those in comprehensives, although on their second criterion (points per pupil) there was no significant difference between selective and comprehensive systems. A third study (Marks *et al.* 1986) focused on London; it concluded that pupils attending ILEA comprehensive schools were performing less well than their counterparts elsewhere in comprehensive and secondary modern schools. The authors themselves acknowledged some limitations relating to this research, and their classification of all ILEA schools as comprehensive was challenged on the grounds that the strong independent school sector in London caters for a significant proportion of the more able pupils.
1027. Research undertaken by Gray *et al.* (1983) was confined to Scotland, but their conclusions are worth noting: they found that '*comprehensive education had a levelling effect on attainment, raising fewer pupils to the highest levels of attainment, but helping more of them progress beyond the minimum*'. Overall, they found that comprehensive education '*appears to have raised average attainment*' (although there was again controversy about their definition of comprehensive schools). However, their comments about its 'levelling effect' are interesting; the clear implication is that high-ability children would

perform better in a grammar school, while other children would perform better in a comprehensive.

1028. More recently, Kerckhoff *et al.* (1996) reached precisely that conclusion. Like Steedman, they used data from the National Child Development Study. After controlling for social background and prior attainment, they found no significant differences in the average achievements of students in comprehensive and selective systems. However, they found clear evidence of difference in the achievements of students of different ability: high-ability students performed at higher levels in selective systems, and low-ability students performed better in comprehensive schools. This finding seems plausible, in line with what (from a common sense point of view) might be expected; a number of comments made in interviews for the NFER project reflected a similar perspective.
1029. The foregoing summary of research studies is based on the review by Crook *et al.* (1999). In conclusion, they note that '*a succession of research studies over a period of more than 30 years has failed to produce a consensus*' as to whether selective or comprehensive education is the more effective. They note the methodological difficulties we have discussed above, such as defining a comprehensive school, and the fact that some studies appear to be partisan as well as methodologically flawed. However, they suggest that some tentative conclusions can be drawn from the findings of the more robust research studies. These are in line with the points made in the previous paragraph with reference to Kerckhoff *et al.* When relevant background variables are effectively controlled, it appears that there is little if any difference in the overall results achieved by different (i.e. selective or comprehensive) systems of education. It appears to be the case that more able children do better in grammar schools and less able children in comprehensive schools, but, as Crook *et al.* note, '*even in these cases the differences are very small*'.

### **1.3.2 Recent research**

1030. Two very recent developments in research on the selection issue must be briefly summarised. First, David Jesson has carried out extensive 'value-added' analyses of GCSE results for pupils, schools and LEAs in selective and comprehensive contexts. In a 1999 paper, he first placed pupils in five ability groups according to their prior attainment at key stage 3; comparing the mean total GCSE point score for each group, he found that '*pupils generally "did*

*better” in Comprehensive as opposed to Selective LEAs once account had been taken of their prior attainments’.* Jesson went on to do a multilevel regression analysis for individual pupils, and concluded that the type of system was significant; students’ estimated total point score would be reduced by 1.1 points if they were in a selective system of education. By then evaluating the performance of different types of school, he concluded that comprehensive schools (and ‘isolated’ grammar schools) were the most likely to achieve better than expected results, while secondary modern schools were by far the most likely to achieve worse than expected results.

1031. It needs to be said that the difference in total point score identified by Jesson is relatively small; further, his paper was criticised, particularly for focusing on GCSE outcomes and thus ignoring pupil achievements in schools of different types during key stage 3. Jesson himself noted that pupils in selective LEAs had generally higher average prior attainments (i.e. key stage 3 results) than in the country as a whole. One possible explanation is that selective systems are most effective during the first three years of secondary education. The difficulty is that key stage 2 tests were not implemented nationally until 1995, and the first cohort of pupils did not take GCSEs until 2000; data to facilitate value-added analyses from key stage 2 to GCSE is not yet available.
1032. In a later paper, Jesson (2000) used an Ofsted framework to classify schools according to whether their outcomes were significantly above, below or at the expected level. Multilevel modelling was used to regress total GCSE/GNVQ points per pupil (school average) against average key stage 3 level, and standardised residuals derived for schools and for LEAs. The results showed that, within the 15 selective LEAs, 16 per cent of schools had results above, and 44 per cent of schools below expectations (compared with 26 per cent and 23 per cent respectively in non-selective LEAs). It might be assumed that this is because grammar school performance is above average, and that of secondary modern schools (which outnumber them) is below, but Jesson’s further analysis disproved that theory. By distinguishing grammar and secondary modern schools within LEAs, he found that only 13 per cent of grammar schools (compared with 17 per cent of secondary modern schools) exceeded expectations; 51 per cent of grammar schools, and 41 per cent of secondary modern schools, fell short. Jesson further ranked LEAs in terms of value-added performance, and found that the top ten did not include any selective LEAs, while the bottom ten included five.

1033. More recently, Jesson (2001) divided pupils into three ability groups, based on the Autumn Package classification, and compared the performance of those with ‘average’ prior attainment in selective and comprehensive LEAs. He found that average pupils in comprehensive LEAs performed better at GCSE level, obtaining a mean GCSE point score of 37.0 compared to 35.9 for those in fully selective LEAs. Similarly, the percentage of average pupils obtaining five or more A\*-C grades was 45.3 in comprehensive LEAs, against 43.1 in fully selective LEAs.
1034. The statistical analyses undertaken as part of the Slough project (see Section 1.4.3 below) used similar methods to those employed by Jesson, but with a range of different outcomes. Because of the specific requirements of this project, we have compared Slough with fully comprehensive LEAs, i.e. those with no grammar schools at all. We acknowledge the importance of looking at the whole of secondary schooling, but as it is still not possible to track a single cohort from key stage 2 to GCSE, we have explored key stage 2-3 progress on a different dataset.
1035. Another key piece of recent research related to Northern Ireland, where selection at the age of 11 is still the norm (Gallagher and Smith, 2000). The research was wide-ranging, aiming to explore the impact of selection on pupils, teachers, schools and on the wider community. For our purposes, the most relevant finding was the existence of a highly significant ‘grammar school effect’: a multilevel analysis suggested that, after allowing for prior attainment and other background factors, being in a grammar school added almost 16 points to pupils’ total GCSE score. It should be noted, however, that intake grades were used as the measure of prior attainment, and each will cover a range of ability; it is likely that those achieving the best results within a grade would be in grammar schools. This may perhaps contribute to the detected difference between grammar school and secondary school performance, but it certainly cannot explain it all, since grammar students with transfer grades B and C obtained better results than secondary students with transfer grade A. In their discussion of the grammar school effect, Shuttleworth and Daly (2000) note that *‘a “critical mass” of pupils with desirable characteristics can assist school performance’*.
1036. The researchers also reported the view of teachers *‘that many of the pupils arriving in secondary [i.e. non-selective] schools do so with a sense of failure*

*and a key priority for the schools is seek to re-establish a sense of self-worth'. Concern was also expressed about the 'intense pressure felt by primary schools to gear Year 6 and the first term of Year 7 towards the Transfer Tests'; it was noted that many parents pay for out-of-school coaching, and that 'the reputation of primary schools is often largely based on a school's Transfer Test performance, or at least the local perception of a school's performance'. These issues were also raised during the interviews conducted with Slough headteachers (see Section 1.4.1 below).*

## **1.4 Methodology**

1037. The research project undertaken for SBC by NFER had a mixed qualitative and quantitative methodology; it comprised three separate though interrelated strands.

### **1.4.1 Interviews with headteachers**

1038. We wished to obtain the views of primary headteachers about the impact of selection, and specifically the 11-plus test, on their pupils. We also wished to explore the perspective of secondary headteachers – those in grammar schools and those in non-selective schools – on issues related to selection. In order to give every headteacher an opportunity to express his or her thoughts, we sought to interview the headteachers of all primary and secondary schools. However, where separate infant and junior schools exist, we sought to interview only the headteacher of the latter, since the former would have no direct experience of the selective system.

1039. In total, therefore, 33 headteachers (11 secondary and 22 primary) were approached. All but one readily agreed to participate in the research, so 32 face-to-face interviews took place between November 2000 and January 2001. In just a few cases, where the headteacher was not available (e.g. because of illness) the interviewee was a deputy headteacher or other senior teacher nominated by the headteacher as a substitute.

1040. Primary headteachers were asked questions about:

- ◆ advice to parents about entering/not entering children for the test
- ◆ the impact of the selection process on their curriculum
- ◆ the impact of the selection process on pupils and their families

- ♦ the extent of private coaching
- ♦ their views on the reliability of the 11-plus scores
- ♦ the perceived suitability of different types of secondary schools for individual pupils.

1041. Some of these questions (e.g. the impact of selection on pupils, the reliability of 11-plus scores) were also asked of secondary headteachers. In addition, they were asked:

- ♦ whether they felt that any groups of children would perform better or worse under a comprehensive system
- ♦ whether they felt that young people's achievements and career aspirations were influenced by the type of school attended
- ♦ what changes they believed would result if their school became comprehensive.

#### **1.4.2 Year 11 questionnaire**

1042. NFER was required to consider the impact of selection on the expectations and aspirations as well as the achievements of young people in Slough. It was decided to focus on the current Year 11 cohort, for two reasons. First, by Year 11, students should have some idea of the GCSE grades they are likely to obtain, and of their plans for the future (how long they will continue in full-time education, and what they will do afterwards). Second, the present Year 11 are the first group of students to take the Slough 11-plus test, following the change in the age of transfer (see Section 1.2). It was hoped to obtain their 11-plus scores, in order to compare the expectations and aspirations of those whose performance in the test was similar, but who had moved on to different types of school.

1043. The questions designed for this project therefore included:

- ♦ questions asking directly for students' views of the 11-plus, e.g. 'Did you think it was a fair test?'
- ♦ questions asking about their expectation in terms of GCSE results and leaving full-time education
- ♦ a set of questions designed to assess students' self-confidence and self-esteem.

1044. As part of a separate project, NFER was commissioned to undertake a standard attitude survey of all Year 11 students in the borough. Rather than



asking schools to administer two separate questionnaires, it was decided to combine the two sets of questions; this would have the additional benefit of providing more data which could be compared, showing whether attitudes of grammar school students were significantly different from their peers in non-selective schools.

1045. Questionnaires were pre-labelled with the names of Year 11 students (in order to link responses with attainment data) and sent to the appropriate secondary schools. All non-selective schools, a special school and one grammar school participated in the survey (a second grammar school allowed students to complete the pupil attitude questionnaire anonymously). This meant that the questions designed specifically for this project were answered by students from only one grammar school, which limited the effectiveness of comparisons between students at the two types of school.
1046. A further difficulty was experienced in obtaining background information on the students' attainment. As noted above, it was hoped to obtain their 11-plus scores, but this proved impossible. Key stage 2 results were the chosen alternative, but they were available for only some of the students concerned. We therefore used the scores for cognitive ability tests (CATs) which were taken in Year 9. CAT scores were available for most, but not all, of the students who completed the questionnaire. We would have preferred to use a measure of attainment taken prior to, or immediately following, transfer to secondary school, but – in the absence of such data – CAT scores were considered acceptable, as the tests measure ability rather than attainment, and it is therefore possible to identify a group roughly equivalent to those who would have been borderline at the time of the 11-plus test.

### **1.4.3 Statistical analyses of performance data**

1047. A range of statistical analyses was undertaken, using national value-added datasets as well as data provided by SBC. As explained in Section 1.3.2, it is important to consider the impact of different systems on the whole of secondary education. As key stage 2 data for 1995 was not available, and young people in later cohorts have not yet taken GCSEs, analyses focused on **either** key stage 2-3, or key stage 3-GCSE. Outcome measures for key stage 3 were the levels obtained in each of the three core subjects, and the average level; outcome measures used at GCSE were total point score, average point score, points for English and points for mathematics. Statistical techniques

used included multiple regression, logistic regression and multilevel modelling.<sup>2</sup>

1048. The analyses aimed to compare the performance and progress of
- ♦ pupils in grammar schools with pupils in non-selective schools
  - ♦ all pupils in Slough with pupils in fully comprehensive LEAs (those without any grammar schools at all).
1049. Some of the analyses focused particularly on students whose ability (usually defined in terms of CAT scores) placed them close to the borderline for success/failure in the 11-plus test. By doing this, it is possible, and illuminating, to compare the performance of students of similar ability in different types of school.

## **1.5 Structure of the Report**

1050. The next three chapters outline the findings of the three strands of research described above: Chapter 2 reports and analyses the views of headteachers, Chapter 3 summarises the responses of Year 11 students to the questionnaire survey, and Chapter 4 discusses the results of the statistical analyses. Chapter 5 summarises the key findings from the research as a whole, and offers some suggestions for SBC's consideration.
1051. Appendix I provides definitions of the statistical terms used, and Appendix II describes the process and outcomes of the multilevel modelling.

### **A note on terms used in this report**

1052. In a selective system of education, schools catering for students who did not pass the selection test are traditionally described as secondary modern, and have been so described in the summaries of research in Section 1.3. However, Slough secondary modern schools have been officially re-designated as 'all-ability schools', although their intake is clearly very different from that of 'true' comprehensive schools (i.e. those in areas where no grammar schools exist). Hence in this report the term 'non-selective school' is used for secondary schools in Slough which are not grammar schools.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix I for a description of these techniques.

1053. As noted in Section 1.4.1, a large majority of interviewees were headteachers, but in just a few cases we interviewed an acting headteacher, a deputy headteacher or another senior teacher. Such distinctions are not made in the report, as they might facilitate identification of the interviewee concerned. Further, given the small numbers involved, we have adopted the convention of using 'he' for all secondary headteachers, and 'she' for all primary headteachers, in order to preserve confidentiality.

## 2. VIEWS OF HEADTEACHERS

2001. The project sought to ascertain the views of Slough headteachers about the impact of the selective system on their schools, their pupils and the pupils' families. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at 32 schools – all but one of those with pupils in Year 6 or Year 7, on either side of the primary-secondary divide. In most schools, the headteacher was interviewed; in just six cases, the interviewee was a deputy or acting headteacher.

2002. Interviews were conducted with headteachers (or their representatives) in

- ◆ 22 primary or junior schools
- ◆ 3 grammar schools
- ◆ 7 non-selective secondary schools.

2003. Some of the questions asked were specific to primary or secondary headteachers, but generally the interviews sought to gain different perspectives on key issues relating to the 11-plus test and the selective system as a whole.

2004. The Slough selective system clearly affects **children** and their **parents** as well as the **schools** which those children attend. Although there is of course a large degree of overlap, we attempt below to distinguish the impact of the selection on schools, parents and pupils.

### 2.1 Impact on Primary Schools

2005. Unlike the earlier 12 plus test set by Berkshire, the Slough 11-plus is 'opt in': parents can choose whether or not to enter their children for the test. Primary headteachers were asked:

*In a typical year, what proportion of your pupils take the 11-plus test?  
How many pass the test?*

2006. One headteacher, who was strongly opposed to the selective system, said that she could not answer, since: '*I don't take an interest in the 11-plus*'. Several others noted that the numbers could vary considerably – there was no such thing as '*a typical year*'. However, most gave approximate figures, and it was interesting to note the wide variation between schools in this respect. The proportion of Year 6 pupils **taking** the test ranged from about a third to nearly

all; the proportion typically **passing** ranged from ten per cent in one school to about 70 per cent in another.

### 2.1.1 Advice to parents

2007. Headteachers were asked whether they provided advice or guidance to parents about entering their children for the 11-plus. Most said that they organised a meeting for parents, in order to explain the procedures and give relevant facts and figures. Some headteachers, particularly those in schools close to the border, felt it necessary to explain the Bucks system, as well as the Slough system (see further Section 2.5.3).
2008. These meetings typically took place towards the end of Year 5 or (more commonly) at the beginning of Year 6. Reported attendance varied widely: two headteachers said that the 11-plus meetings were the best attended of all meetings for parents, but two other headteachers said that the majority of parents did not attend.
2009. A number of headteachers said that, in the context of the parents' meeting, they provided an indication of the level of ability needed to pass, and related this to standard tests which the children had already taken, so that parents would be able to estimate the chances of success. Several interviewees said that they provided opportunities for parents to seek advice on an individual basis, by talking to class teachers or to the headteacher herself. Some positively encouraged parents to do so, while others provided advice only if specifically approached.

### 2.1.2 Preparation for the test

2010. Primary headteachers were asked how much school time, if any, was devoted to preparing children for the 11-plus. A few were adamant that they would not give any curriculum time to the test: *'I would not give it house room in the curriculum'*. One observed that *'the deputy CEO said that we should not use school time to coach; we don't, but we know it goes on elsewhere'*.
2011. One headteacher pointed to a difficulty with the 11-plus mathematics paper: *'It covers all of key stage 2, but the children have not had Year 6 when they take the test'*. This concern was reflected in the responses of three headteachers who said that they would compare test papers and schemes of

work, aiming to ensure that their pupils would have covered everything they needed to know before the date of the test.

2012. A few headteachers, including some strongly opposed to ‘coaching’ (*‘no time for coaching in something we don’t believe in’*) nevertheless provided some ‘familiarisation’ with question types and test procedures. Some schools hosted the Bucks test (see Section 2.5.3) and as part of that procedure, gave the children three familiarisation tests, which could also serve as preparation for the Slough test – indeed, one headteacher reported that the majority of her pupils registered for the Bucks test, specifically in order to practise for Slough.
2013. Some headteachers reported that they provided help with reluctance, because they felt under pressure to do so. One said that it seemed right *‘to work with the community’* because of the importance attached to the test by parents. Another observed: *‘This year, we did a bit of coaching [for the first time] because the governing body insisted’*.
2014. Only two interviewees reported allocating a significant amount of school time to preparation for the test. One clearly felt that it was her duty to do so; she argued that the parents of her pupils were not well-educated themselves, and not in a position to help their children, who would thus be disadvantaged if the school did not provide alternative support.
2015. Whether or not they devoted curriculum time to preparation for the 11-plus, a large majority of interviewees reported that they offered some form of coaching or assistance out of school hours (usually after school, but in a few cases at lunchtime). At one school, ‘clubs’ had been introduced in response to demands from parents; at another, the clubs were actually run by parents and governors. In some cases, the purpose of the sessions was explicit: there were references to ‘11-plus clubs’, ‘weekly coaching’ and ‘practice tests’. Other schools were rather coy; they used names such as ‘Thinking Skills Club’, and insisted that they were open to all.

### **2.1.3 After the test**

2016. Headteachers were asked what, in their view, was the impact of the selection process on pupils and their families. Responses are reported in full in Section 2.3 below, but a few key points will be briefly mentioned here because of their impact on the pupils’ schools.

2017. With very few exceptions, headteachers reported that children were deeply affected by the test results, and consequently primary school staff had to devote considerable time to *'picking up the pieces'*, providing counselling and support for children who perceived themselves as failures. As one headteacher put it, *'staff have to work overtime to build up the children's self-esteem'*.
2018. Another problem, discussed by three headteachers, was that the 11-plus could have a negative impact on the key stage 2 SATs, which are taken several months after the 11-plus. As one headteacher observed: *'There is a crescendo building up to November, then we have to manage the deflation and bring them back up for SATs'*. If, as another headteacher put it, the children *'hit the SATs with low self-esteem'*, they are perhaps less likely to perform well. *'If they fail the exam, there is quite a turn-off'*. But children who have failed the 11-plus test may not be the only ones to think *'Why bother?'*, as children who have already gained a grammar school place may see the SATs as an anti-climax: *'They work fever pitch and then the effort drops'*. Indeed, a number of headteachers made the point that – for Slough parents as well as children – the focus of Year 6 is the 11-plus test; the SATs are perceived as relatively unimportant.

#### **2.1.4 Appeals**

2019. Parents whose children have not been awarded grammar school places have the right of appeal to the school concerned. The interview schedule designed for primary headteachers did not include a question about appeals, but the subject was raised by almost every interviewee. It was clear that headteachers felt very strongly about this issue, so the topic was added to the schedule in order to ensure that all had an opportunity to express their views.
2020. The majority of headteachers said that they would support an appeal if they felt it appropriate, i.e. if they felt that the child concerned had the potential to benefit from a grammar school education. Their perception of the appeals system varied. Some were confident that their views counted, and a few expressed the opinion that the system was *'getting better now'* or *'fairer than it used to be'*. One felt however that *'the rules of the game seem to change year on year'* and that *'children can lose out because the rules are not understood'*.

2021. Other headteachers were very critical of the appeals system. One described it as *'a farce'*; she complained that *'they disregard what headteachers say'*, and gave examples of very able children *'all Level 5s'*, who had perhaps been nervous on the day of the test, and had failed the appeal despite being *'wholly supported'* by the school. Another headteacher reported a similar experience, and complained that *'It's all closed shop'*. Evidently headteachers felt frustrated if they could not understand the reason why appeals were or were not successful. One had written similar reports for two children who had obtained identical marks in the test, and yet one appeal had been successful and the other had not.
2022. Two major concerns were frequently voiced during interviews. One was the amount of time that primary schools had to spend in dealing with appeals: talking it over with parents, advising them whether to appeal, writing reports and (in some cases) attending the panel. One headteacher commented that dealing with appeals took *'an inordinate amount of time'*. Another described what was involved: *'You have to help the parents through the next stage – letters, thought processes, actions. You help them to say what they want to say, [even though] you may not support it.'* She added that, although she often tried to dissuade parents from appealing, she sometimes had to deal with ten cases (for Slough or Bucks) in a single year.
2023. The other major problem was that the appeals system *'does not help home-school relations'*. One headteacher reported that parents generally took his advice about whether to appeal, but several reported problems in that respect:
- When the letters arrive, the parents come in to talk about appeals ... there is animosity if you don't support them.*
- It does not help the child to be dishonest. But parents get a copy of the headteacher's report – if I say a child is not suitable for grammar school, the parents will get upset, think we are against them ... We've had some pretty unpleasant times.*
2024. A few headteachers reported pressure from parents – and even hints of attempted bribery – to persuade them to support an appeal.
2025. One final point made with reference to the appeals is that they delay the process of obtaining a firm place in secondary school. Some children may not know until the summer which secondary school they will attend, and



inevitably feel unsettled and worried as a result. This problem is not, of course, confined to areas which have selection.

## **2.2 Parents**

2026. Parents were not approached directly for the research project, but headteachers gave a very clear picture of their views and their response to the selective system in Slough. Reports varied somewhat from school to school, reflecting the area where the school was situated and the nature of its intake (in terms of ethnicity and socio-economic status) but overall, they were remarkably consistent.
2027. It was evident that a large majority of Slough parents are desperately keen to obtain grammar school places for their children. They will therefore enter them for the test, and probably arrange coaching for them; if the children nevertheless fail, they may go through the appeals procedure (see above).

### **2.2.1 Entry for the test**

2028. As noted in Section 2.1, the proportion of Year 6 children entered for the 11-plus varied widely from school to school. In most schools, however, the proportion of children taking the test was reported to be much higher than the proportion passing the test. The most extreme example of this was a school where an estimated 80-90 per cent of the children took the 11-plus, but only seven per cent of the children (ten per cent of those taking the test) passed.
2029. As several headteachers noted – and these figures clearly confirm – some of the children who are entered for the test have very little hope of passing. We noted in Section 2.1.1 that most schools give parents advice – or provide opportunities for them to seek advice – about whether their children should take the test. Interviewees were asked whether parents were willing to accept such advice; the general response was that some were, but many were not. Headteachers said that many parents insisted that their children should be entered, even when the school had made it clear that the children had no realistic hope of success. Several quoted examples to illustrate their point:

*Six statemented children took the test.*

*Some children who find it distressing and humiliating still do it.*

*Some enter inappropriately – the grammar schools are seen as pinnacles to be achieved, so they want to try. They feel that if they don't, the child may come back and say 'You didn't bother'.*

*I've never managed to persuade parents not to take it – they say 'She might do it on the day'. Some parents won't even put a secondary [non-selective] school [on the transfer form].*

2030. Headteachers were asked whether any identifiable groups of parents were particularly keen to enter their children for the test. Two interviewees mentioned middle class parents, but more than half of the headteachers interviewed made specific reference to Asian families as being particularly keen.

*Asian parents very much value the test – they make more noise about it.*

*Most Asian children are entered irrespective of academic ability.*

2031. One headteacher said that '*ethnic minority boys always take it*', and that Asian families were less worried about girls, but other headteachers agreed that Asian parents wanted to enter their daughters as well as their sons for the test.

2032. Groups mentioned as being less likely to enter their children for the test were poor white or African-Caribbean families, and travellers (most of whom do not go on to secondary school). According to one headteacher, this was partly because '*poor white parents are becoming more realistic – they accept that their children might not have the ability [to pass the test]*', but also because '*white parents don't value education as much as ethnic minority parents*'. However, a headteacher in a different part of the town reported difficulties with some parents from a low socio-economic background who saw grammar school as a '*way out*' for their children, and sometimes entered them for the 11-plus without informing the school: '*They don't want to know anything about preparation ...we could save some sadness ... a lot of the kids don't want to do it*'.

2033. Headteachers were asked whether they ever had very able children who were **not** entered for the test. Evidently, this situation was far less common than the reverse (children of very low ability being entered) but some headteachers were able to provide examples. Three categories were mentioned:

- ♦ parents who were opposed to the selective system on principle might choose to avoid the test and send their children to comprehensive schools in Windsor or Maidenhead
- ♦ parents who for practical reasons made a non-selective school their first choice – perhaps because travel to a grammar school was difficult, or because older brothers and sisters were already at the school
- ♦ parents who were not sufficiently interested to get up on Saturday morning and take their children to a grammar school for the test.

2034. It should be noted that according to headteachers' reports, the number of parents in these categories was relatively small. One headteacher reported that numbers were growing, due to increased confidence in the local non-selective school, but that was an exception to the general picture. It was clear that a large majority of parents are very keen to get their children into grammar school, and will fight very hard to do so.

### 2.2.2 Coaching

2035. Interviewees were asked:

*To what extent do you think that children are coached for the test by their parents and/or private tutors?*

2036. Headteachers would not necessarily know whether individual children were coached, so were expected to give impressions only, but most had information which enabled them to estimate with confidence the extent of coaching that went on. They agreed that private tuition was '*rife*', '*a whole cottage industry*' or '*big business*' which was '*subsidised by Slough Borough Council*' (the latter comment was made with reference to Saturday schools for Asian children).

2037. Estimates of the proportion of children coached varied, as would be expected, from school to school. The headteacher of a school in a predominantly poor white area reported that only a '*small handful*' of her pupils received some coaching, usually from their mothers. Other responses ranged from 40 per cent to 80-90 per cent, from '*at least half*' to '*a large majority*'. It was said that some children were coached '*to a terrific extent*' or '*from an early age*'; one interviewee knew of '*a mum who was buying practice papers for a child aged seven or eight*'.

2038. Some children are coached by their parents; one headteacher observed that *'ninety per cent of parents will have gone to Smiths and bought booklets'*. Another mentioned parents who had given their child a test every Saturday morning. As one interviewee commented:

*Some parents know the system, will do intensive coaching, the kids get very tired, they are doing it every night. Some are more sensible, they just do a bit. Those entering for the sake of it would not know how to do it.*

2039. Parents who are very keen for their children to pass, but do not feel able to provide coaching themselves, may turn to private tutors, assuming that they have the money to do so. Hence the observation, made by several headteachers, that Asian children are particularly likely to experience this kind of coaching:

*We suggest that they get a book from Smiths, do one or two [practice questions] a night. Asian parents don't feel they can do that ... nearly all Asian children are coached.*

2040. If intensive coaching is successful, it can distort the results of the selection test (see further Section 2.4.1). However, for some children coaching is clearly inappropriate, and parents could waste a great deal of money: there are *'a lot of kids who don't have a hope, but their parents spend lots of money on tutoring'*. When such children inevitably fail, *'the tutor blames the school, and the parents believe them'*.

2041. Other headteachers expressed similar views. They reported being asked to recommend tutors, and blamed if children who had been coached nevertheless failed the test. A few also noted that children sometimes missed school, because they were kept at home to practise for the test. Two headteachers mentioned individual children who had been kept at home (in one case, for a week, and in the other case, for a fortnight) immediately before the 11-plus test, in order to practise.

### **2.2.3 Enthusiasm for grammar schools**

2042. The responses of headteachers, summarised in this section, illustrate the fact that many parents – though not all – are desperate to secure a grammar school place for their children. Why do they see it as so important?

2043. Some of the reasons have already been touched on in the foregoing discussion. Asian parents in particular were reported to value education highly, and to see it very much from a traditional perspective. Grammar schools are seen as having status, kudos or ‘cachet’, to quote words used by three different headteachers. Parents believe that a grammar school education is more likely to lead to a career in the professions. Primary teachers may try to explain that all children – in grammar or non-selective schools – follow the same National Curriculum, but parents still see the grammar schools as superior. The fact that they have sixth forms confirms this understanding.
2044. There is also a question, as noted above, of ‘keeping up with the Joneses’. Since grammar schools are seen within the community as the goal to aim for, families may feel inferior if their children fail to obtain a place. (It may be seen as yet more of a disgrace if the children do not even take the test.) Parents may therefore enter children even if they have no realistic chance of success; they feel there is nothing to lose, and there is always the possibility that the child ‘*might do it on the day*’. The pressure experienced by children in that position will be discussed in the following section. However, it should not be assumed that they are all unwilling to take the test, and forced to do so by their parents. Two headteachers (both from schools where a high proportion of children take the test) noted that some children want to take it because their friends are doing so: ‘*A lot of kids don’t want to be different, they live in hope even if there’s not much chance of getting through*’.
2045. It must be noted that some parents have negative as well as positive reasons for wanting grammar school places. The positive side is that they value the grammar schools highly; the negative side is that they wish to avoid the non-selective schools, some of which have a particularly poor reputation. One headteacher believed that parents were ‘*not desperate for grammar schools, but desperate to avoid poor secondary moderns*’.
2046. Some parents may choose to send their children out of the borough, but for many that would not be an option. (It was noted, in any case, that the closure of the Princess Margaret Royal Free School may result in fewer Windsor places available for Slough children.) The grammar schools are considered by many (we should stress again, not all) to be the only good schools in town, and therefore parents are desperate for their child to obtain a place. As one headteacher remarked, the situation would not change until there was a

*'quality alternative'* in Slough – a non-selective school which was good, and (equally important) perceived to be good.

## 2.3 Children

2047. Headteachers were asked:

*What impact, if any, do you think the selection process has on (a) individual pupils, and (b) their families?*

2048. The same question was asked of primary and secondary headteachers, although it is primary schools where the immediate impact is felt. Responses can be grouped in two categories, dealing with children's reaction to the **test itself**, and to the **results of the test**, i.e. their selection for a particular type of school.

### 2.3.1 Reaction to the test

2049. Children take the 11-plus test in the grammar school of their choice, on a Saturday morning in November. Grammar school headteachers who see the children on the day commented that *'a large number are very well prepared ... many go through without problems'*. However, one acknowledged that the test had *'little effect on some, but a very negative effect on others'*. This view was endorsed by the headteacher of a non-selective school who had been present at the 11-plus test in one of the grammar schools and had observed *'children sobbing on the day of the test, because they feel they have let their parents down'*.

2050. Some primary school staff also go to grammar schools on the day of the test, so that *'the children can see a familiar face'*. One headteacher felt that children who received sufficient preparation *'do not find it so stressful ... they quite enjoy taking [the test]'*. She added that she felt it important for children to visit the grammar school before the test, so they would know where they would be on the day. Another primary headteacher noted that individual children responded differently to the test: *'Some children can deal with the pressure, others find it difficult'*.

2051. Other primary headteachers talked about the pressure experienced by children, not just on the day of the 11-plus, but in the weeks leading up to the test. One described Year 6 as *'a year of intense pressure on parent and child'*; others

commented '*in the autumn term, the pressure is palpable*' ... '*The first half of the autumn term is quite stressful for the children ... they get quite uptight the week before [the test]*'.

2052. A lot of the pressure was attributed to parents<sup>3</sup>:

*The parents are so anxious ... it comes out on the children themselves.*

*Some children are put under a lot of parental pressure.*

*Parents put a lot of pressure on kids to 'pass the test'.*

2053. Examples were quoted of children being offered generous presents as a reward for 'passing', and feeling that they had let their parents down if they failed to do so. One headteacher noted the '*more subtle pressure*' on a child whose older brothers or sisters had been selected for grammar school. In certain cases, younger children can be at a disadvantage, even if their older siblings had not been successful: one headteacher told of a child whose level of attainment meant that there could be no realistic expectation of a grammar school place, but the parents insisted on entering her for the test because she was their '*last hope*'. The problem is also acute for twins who may not perform identically (see further below).

2054. Inevitably, comparison was made between the current method of test administration, and the old (Berkshire) system, under which all children took the 12 plus test (on three different days) in their primary schools. The majority of primary headteachers felt that this system (still used for the Bucks test) was much kinder to their pupils than taking all of the tests in one morning in the unfamiliar surroundings of a grammar school, in the company of many strange (and probably nervous) children. Two of the grammar school headteachers pointed out that they went to great lengths to minimise the stress and help the children to relax. Primary headteachers did not deny this; on the contrary, one noted that '*some Slough grammar schools do a wonderful job in making the children welcome*'. Nevertheless, there was a common (though not universal) view that the old system was better:

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<sup>3</sup> Some researchers believe that the origins of 'test anxiety' lie in parental expectation (see McDonald, 2001).

*The way the test is set up now, it's more difficult for the children. They go to a strange school, with strange teachers, and take three tests in one morning. That's the worst part ... The old system was much easier.*

2055. This quotation illustrates the two main aspects of the present system which headteachers objected to. First, taking three tests in one day. Under the Berkshire system, the tests were taken on different days, and the lowest score was disregarded. So if a child was feeling upset, unwell or particularly nervous on one occasion, they could obtain a low score without hindering their chances. Under the new system, if children underperform on the day of the tests – for whatever reason – their only hope will be an appeal. The headteacher quoted above went on to point out that

*Girls of that age could have periods ... they could get a doctor's note, but Asian families would not do that.*

2056. Second, primary headteachers disliked the fact that the test was taken in the grammar schools:

*Moving them out of a secure environment does not help.*

*Our children react badly to unfamiliar surroundings.  
It was much better in primary schools – we could set aside the time, build it in, do it with familiar people in familiar surroundings.*

2057. So, would primary headteachers wish to go back to administering the tests? Some certainly would, even if they were personally opposed to selection: *'I'd be in favour of changing back, for the children's sake'*. Others however made it clear that they would *'hate to have it back in school'*; it had been *'a drain on school time'*, and *'we don't want to be involved'*.

### **2.3.2 Reaction to the results**

2058. Primary school headteachers were almost, but not quite, unanimous in reporting that the 11-plus results had a very negative impact on their pupils. One interviewee who said that the results did not have much impact was the headteacher of a school where relatively few children took the test, and success was the exception rather than the rule. Another felt that, by the time the results were published, children had begun to visit other schools, and the tension was not as great as it had been at the time of the test.



2059. The majority of headteachers, however, felt very strongly about the impact which the 11-plus results had on their pupils. The headteacher of a school in a poor part of Slough said that the impact was

*... devastating – absolutely devastating. Our children are typified by poor self-esteem. They are told that they have not passed, and they are told by how much they have not passed ... We tell them they can still do well, but they say ‘No, I’ve failed’. It’s labelling kids when they are already down.*

2060. The loss of self-esteem was mentioned by several other headteachers. One said:

*It has an impact on the children’s self-esteem, it’s a major hurdle to get over ... We see children crumble when the results come out. They see themselves as failures, whatever we say. We do a lot of work on self-esteem, leading up to the 11-plus, and after ... Talking them through the disappointment takes a huge amount of time.*

2061. Other words used to describe the selective system included ‘damaging’, ‘demoralising’ and ‘barbaric’. It was also regarded as ‘deeply divisive’, not just because children will be separated from their friends (in terms of future schooling), but also because there is a sharp and immediate divide between those who are rejoicing in their success and those who are bitterly disappointed. One headteacher said that she felt it necessary to warn the former group to consider the feelings of the latter.

2062. It was evident that school staff took care to avoid the terms ‘pass’ and ‘fail’, but it was equally obvious – and not surprising – that children see the outcomes of the test in precisely those terms. ‘Those who do not pass the test feel failures’, even if they had no realistic hope of success. Because their parents have such high hopes, the children themselves may feel optimistic about their chances, and therefore very disappointed when they get the results. They may also feel that they have let their parents down. It could be argued that, in such cases, the parents are to blame for entering the children and thereby engendering false hopes. However, one headteacher commented:

*The children feel total failures – it’s very difficult counselling them. Even those who don’t enter ... sometimes the sense of failure is reinforced because they are not entered.*

2063. Some headteachers felt very angry about the impact of the selection process on their pupils. The headteacher just quoted went on to say:

*It's rubbish to say that children are failures at 10 or 11 – so many succeed later, and they carry the stigma, it's wrong ... Having seen the traumas that our children go through, I would come down on the side of a good comprehensive.*

2064. Another headteacher commented:

*They say 'I've failed' – it's deplorable ... Other children say 'I've passed' – elitism there straightaway. A dreadful system.*

2065. The views of non-selective secondary school headteachers were similar to those expressed by their primary colleagues. The need for re-building self-esteem continues after children arrive in their schools in September: *'we have to start by building up self-worth' ... 'we try to repair the damage done by the process'*.

2066. Like teachers in Northern Ireland (see Section 1.3.2), Slough headteachers agreed that children *'arrive in non-selective schools feeling second-rate'*. One commented:

*Many students have a built-in sense of failure – it's part of our job to raise aspirations ... We try to tell them they can succeed, make them ambitious.*

2067. Another headteacher observed:

*In the first half-term, pupils continually refer to friends at grammar school, and siblings at grammar school ... They always say 'They passed – we failed'.*

2068. Similarly, it was noted that *'kids feel those who go to grammar school are different from them, will do better than them'*.

2069. While one headteacher felt that, in some cases, pupils *'may have failed because of their parents' lack of ambition'*, some interviewees reiterated the opinion expressed by primary headteachers that *'Asian parents, especially, put such a huge weighting on it'*. Children may therefore feel that they have let their parents down. One headteacher reported that:

*The brightest boy in one year group regularly underachieved and caused trouble. He'd been here for two years before we found out that his parents had not spoken to him since he failed the test. He was the first in his family to do so.*

2070. 'Split' families – with children in both types of school – may experience particular problems. An extreme case is that of twins; one headteacher told of twin girls who had narrowly failed, their parents had appealed on behalf of both of them, but only one appeal had been successful. Staff at the non-selective school attended by the other twin reported '*traumatic experiences*', although in the end she had obtained more GCSE A\*-C grades than her sister.
2071. The two cases cited above represent extreme examples of the negative impact which the selection process can have on Slough pupils. It should not, of course, be inferred that all pupils will experience such difficulties. Indeed, it was suggested by one headteacher that 11-plus 'failure' may have little or no immediate impact on those who know they will not get in to grammar school: '*They may perceive themselves as inferior, but they have no high expectations, so they are not damaged by the process*'. He felt that '*In the short term, those who just fail are most damaged – it takes a long time to build up their self-esteem, make them feel they are just as important as someone at grammar school*'.

## **2.4 Secondary School and Beyond**

2072. In this section, we summarise the views of headteachers about the impact of selection on pupils' progress in secondary school and in their future careers.

### **2.4.1 Accuracy of selection**

2073. Interviewees were asked how reliable they felt the 11-plus test was, and whether, in the context of the present system, they felt that children moved on to the kind of secondary school which was right for them.
2074. Primary school headteachers agreed that the test was reliable in most cases. Indeed, nearly half of the primary interviewees expressed the view that the results were '*quite accurate*', and almost always in accordance with their expectations, based on their knowledge of individual children and their achievements in other standardised tests. Others were less positive. One said that he found the test only 60-75 per cent reliable, and another suggested it

was *'increasingly unreliable'*. Several headteachers reported the occasional surprise, and a few said this happened regularly: *'Virtually every year there's one child we're totally flabbergasted about'*.

2075. Interviewees suggested a number of reasons why some children should succeed – or fail – against all expectations. Unexpected success was most frequently attributed to the impact of coaching: *'Every year, there is at least one child whose private tuition seems to elevate them to unexpected levels'*. Several headteachers agreed that coaching could distort the results, and concern was expressed that children whose parents could not afford private tuition were disadvantaged. One headteacher said that some borderline children would undoubtedly pass if they were coached.
2076. Reasons given to explain poor performance in the test by able children were more varied:
- ♦ children may be nervous and *'go to pieces'* on the day of the test; this depends partly on the individual child's personality, but parental pressure can aggravate nervousness<sup>4</sup>
  - ♦ children, particularly those from deprived backgrounds, may have acute family problems which can affect performance
  - ♦ children for whom English is an additional language (EAL) may be handicapped.
2077. While great efforts are made to simplify the language used in the tests (and instructions for the non-verbal reasoning test are read out to the children), it is clearly impossible to design a test which could allow for the first two factors above. Children who were thought to have failed for these reasons would need to go through the appeals process discussed in Section 2.1.4 above. This could give certain children a second chance, and children who had underachieved in the test might nevertheless be able to gain a grammar school place. However, headteachers did not all have confidence in the appeals system; some felt that parents unfamiliar with the system or lacking a good command of English would have difficulty in putting their case. As a result, there would still be a few children who merited grammar school places but did

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<sup>4</sup> McDonald (2001) summarises evidence of a negative correlation between test anxiety and test performance. Certain groups of children (those with high ability, low socio-economic background, and English as an additional language) are particularly likely to be affected. Test anxiety is linked with parental expectation, and is likely to be experienced most strongly in relation to a 'high stakes' test such as the 11-plus.

not achieve them, as well as some of rather lower ability who owed their place to intensive coaching.

2078. Primary headteachers were asked their opinion of the 11-plus test (in terms of reliability) in comparison with the national key stage 2 tests (commonly known as SATs) which the children take later in Year 6. These are of course a totally different type of test: *'The SATs are looking for content, the 11-plus for innate ability'*. Several headteachers said that they preferred the key stage 2 tests for precisely that reason:

*The key stage 2 tests are best. Verbal reasoning tests can measure clear thinking and problem solving, but they don't measure aptitude and application ... The key stage 2 tests are rooted in what children are doing.*

2079. The headteacher quoted was not alone in feeling that, to benefit from a grammar school education, innate ability was not enough – a positive attitude to learning and a willingness to work were also needed. (*'Some years, children who are incredibly bright but lazy get through, but do not hack it.'*) The SATs were therefore regarded by a number of headteachers as a better indicator of grammar school suitability, which therefore should be given more credence – at present, they are relevant only as evidence in appeal cases which continue after the results are available.

2080. Secondary headteachers were also asked for their opinion of the reliability of the 11-plus scores as indicators of pupils' ability. Non-selective schools are not given 11-plus scores, and so headteachers could not comment on individual cases. They did however make the general point that some pupils in non-selective schools (who have failed the 11-plus test) attain greater success at GCSE level than some pupils in grammar schools (who have passed the test). Like the primary headteachers, they felt that *'testing is an imprecise science'* and that *'all sorts of things can make children underperform'*.

2081. The three grammar school headteachers who were interviewed agreed that they made little use of the test results after entry. They preferred to use key stage 2 tests or CATs, and only one of the three had looked at correlations between the 11-plus scores and later attainment. He noted a general link between 11-plus success and Level 5 at key stage 2: grammar school entrants might not have Level 5s in all three subjects, *'but it would be rare for someone*

*to come in with three Level 4s*'. He did not feel that there was much correlation between 11-plus scores and GCSE grades, (*'someone with [an 11-plus score of] 115 may do as well as someone with 125 or 130'*) and preferred to use CATs for that purpose.

#### **2.4.2 Progress in secondary school**

2082. Primary headteachers were asked to what extent they felt pupils' future progress was determined by the type of school they attended. Some widely divergent views were expressed. One headteacher said that:

*Ninety per cent of the future of the child depends on the secondary school. Schools make or break – the child has no chance ... The avenues open to children who go to [grammar school] are much greater.*

2083. Another headteacher noted that the non-selective schools simply could not offer the same academic opportunities as the grammar schools (for example, they could not teach the same range of languages). It was pointed out that the grammar schools have better staffing: the non-selective schools *'have problems attracting staff'* because *'the difficulties and challenges faced [there] are much higher'*. This means that the quality of teaching and learning will be lower.
2084. There is also the question of atmosphere and environment. At grammar school, pupils have been *'selected to achieve'*. Teacher expectations will be higher, and pupils will be *'among other high achievers'* so there will be *'a knock-on effect from their friends'*. This is particularly important for children whose home background does not promote high educational aspirations. One headteacher said that, if children had *'strong home support of the right type'*, they would probably do well in any school, but *'those from a more dysfunctional family, who do not understand the rigours of higher education, may be less likely to go on [to HE] if not in a grammar school'*.
2085. Some headteachers felt that, future progress would be influenced by the *'psychological effect'* of going to a particular type of school – confidence or sense of failure which came as a result of passing or failing the 11-plus test. It *'encourages one group to excel, but for most of the children, it's damaging'*. They *'don't understand why they haven't passed, feel a failure ... it can affect*

*their future learning*'. On the other hand, children who have managed to get into grammar school '*may think that's it and slide back*'.

2086. Other interviewees insisted that children were not affected by the type of secondary school they attended: '*an able child will do well anywhere*'. They felt that it depended much more on the individual school: there were '*good schools and poor schools*' in both categories.
2087. There was considerable discussion, in this context, of 'borderline children' – those who passed or failed the 11-plus test by a very narrow margin. One headteacher observed that '*there are inevitably some mismatches ... If the passmark is 114, can you really say that all borderline children are appropriately divided out?*' She is of course correct; the most accurate test which could possibly be devised has a measure of uncertainty around the mark given (see Section 1.3). There will always be a significant number of children whose ability level is borderline, and who could equally well be allocated to a grammar school or a non-selective school, depending on the exact mark they manage to achieve in relation to others taking the test.
2088. Several primary headteachers believed that these borderline children would be better off in non-selective schools rather than grammar schools. Concern was expressed that they might struggle to keep up in grammar schools; one headteacher said that they '*often dropped out*', while another said '*Those who go to [non-selective] schools seem to do better, I don't know why*'. A third headteacher felt quite strongly:

*Children who are above average really shine in secondary modern schools – they become prefects, get five A-Cs. They have high pass rates given their entry level. Because the schools are small, they are known, and they have not got brighter kids to take their glory.*

2089. Other headteachers were less sure about this. One noted that because the borderline children are '*top dogs*', they '*have to be pressed to ensure they succeed*'. Similarly, another headteacher observed that '*borderline kids need role models*', and small non-selective schools, without sixth forms, would find it difficult to provide them.
2090. Secondary headteachers were asked similar questions and provided a similar range of responses. A grammar school headteacher argued that pupils'

progress ‘*depends on the quality of work each school does in fulfilling their potential*’, but all three agreed that environment could be influential: ‘*Many here improve by contact with high-achieving hardworking pupils*’. Headteachers of non-selective schools also felt that environment was important, although it was sometimes difficult to distinguish its impact from that of other factors:

*[Our pupils] come from disadvantaged backgrounds, their parents are unemployed, they have very low personal aspirations – but is this the school, the area or both?*

2091. Another headteacher commented that ethnicity also played a part, and that class and ethnicity needed to be examined together: ‘*An Asian pupil (especially a Sikh) would not lower their ambitions [if they failed to obtain a grammar school place], but a white working-class lad probably would*’.
2092. Two grammar school headteachers noted that borderline children might struggle in their schools, and might possibly be better off in non-selective schools. A non-selective school headteacher also felt that it was ‘*better to be top of the heap [in a non-selective school] than bottom in a grammar school*’. However, two headteachers noted ways in which such children are disadvantaged. Because non-selective schools have relatively few pupils of high academic ability, it may be difficult for the schools to cater for them adequately, and there is a danger that they may ‘*switch off*’. To illustrate the problem, he explained that his school was running an after-hours class for students taking higher-tier mathematics at GCSE, because there were not enough young people in this category to form a separate class or set. Students with the necessary ability but not the enthusiasm to undertake extra lessons would miss out.
2093. Another headteacher highlighted a problem facing schools without a ‘critical mass’ of academically able young people:

*In a proper comprehensive, there will be conversations about sixth form and university, and others will be drawn in. The group here is so small, it’s difficult to draw others in, and keep expectations high.*

2094. This is particularly unfortunate for young people who do not have the kind of home background which would foster aspirations of higher education.



## 2.5 Related Issues

2095. Before going on to summarise the views of headteachers on the selective system in Slough, we shall look briefly at some related issues which were discussed in interviews, and about which some headteachers felt quite strongly.

### 2.5.1 Moving into Slough

2096. A number of primary school headteachers commented on the large number of pupils from outside the borough who enter Slough grammar schools. One headteacher described selection as '*the one disuniting force in Slough*' and observed that over 50 per cent of grammar school pupils come from outside the borough. (This is more or less correct: in 1999 52 per cent of grammar school entrants came from schools other than Slough maintained primary schools, and although some of these would be from Slough independent schools, the majority would be from outside the borough.)

2097. Another headteacher, observing that '*the grammar schools are accessed by a wider region*', believed that '*the impact on Slough children is damaging*'. A third headteacher was concerned that the increased numbers coming from outside the borough meant that there were fewer grammar school places for Slough children.

2098. Secondary headteachers tended to take a very different view of the situation. Two of the three grammar school headteachers interviewed acknowledged that they took approximately half of their pupils from outside the borough; they believed that families chose the schools because of their good reputation and the quality of education on offer. Additionally, one school is denominational, and the other is situated near the borough boundary, and so could be the nearest school for some pupils living outside Slough.

2099. As some primary headteachers saw it, the influx of 'outsiders' meant that there were not enough grammar school places for Slough children.<sup>5</sup> However, the headteachers of the non-selective schools tended to make the opposite complaint, i.e. that there were too many grammar school places. They

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<sup>5</sup> Some headteachers apparently failed to notice the inconsistency between this argument and the view expressed in the previous section, that borderline children would struggle in a grammar school.

expressed the view that the Slough grammar schools were not ‘true’ grammar schools, because they took such a large percentage of children. Some, although opposed to the present system, felt that a ‘true’ grammar school, which catered exclusively for the top five or maybe ten per cent of the population, would be acceptable. The thinking was that, if only a few high-ability pupils were specially chosen, the rest would not feel particularly left out; it would therefore contrast favourably with the present practice of dividing each cohort into two groups and labelling the larger group as failures. This was seen as having a negative impact on the non-selective schools (as well as on their pupils) because their intake was effectively restricted to the lower ability range, where behavioural as well as educational difficulties would be concentrated. As one headteacher put it:

*Taking 30 per cent of the top ability [into grammar schools] is fundamentally wrong-headed. It prevents schools such as [] escaping from the label of a sink school. It’s a self-perpetuating system. They have low-ability pupils, teachers who fail to challenge, and standards of behaviour are poor ... With the stimulus of a full ability-range, a lot of this would not happen.*

2100. It should be noted that this view was shared by some primary headteachers:

*The Slough system is not strictly a grammar school system, because they take 30 per cent, not ten per cent.*

*The grammar schools take too many children. Creaming off one third of the population means that the other schools struggle.*

2101. However, such statements reflect some misconceptions which need to be clarified. First, it is true that the proportion of secondary school pupils in grammar schools is particularly high in Slough: in January 2000, it was 45 per cent, the highest in the country.<sup>6</sup> But there is no justification for saying that ‘true’ grammar schools would only cater for the top ten per cent, since 14 of the LEAs where selection is still practised have over 20 per cent of secondary pupils in grammar schools.

2102. Second, the fact that 45 per cent of Slough secondary school pupils are in grammar schools needs to be understood in relation to the other important fact

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<sup>6</sup> Bucks was the second highest, with 44 per cent (see further Section 2.5.3). It should be noted that these figures include sixth form students, most if not all of whom would be in grammar schools. In Years 7-11, the proportion of students in Slough grammar schools would be closer to 37 per cent.

discussed in this section, i.e. that about half of the grammar school pupils come from outside the borough. It therefore does not follow that non-selective schools are deprived of the top third of the ability range, as several interviewees seemed to think. On the contrary, SBC statistics indicate that in 1999 only 17 per cent of Year 6 children in Slough primary schools moved on to Slough grammar schools. It is true that 24 per cent went to schools outside Slough; these included two per cent going to Burnham Grammar School, and may also have included a large proportion of borderline children (see Section 2.5.2 below). Nevertheless, 29 per cent of children in the top third of the ability range (based on key stage 2 data) moved on to non-selective schools in Slough. So although the selective system does undoubtedly have a negative impact on those schools (by significantly restricting the ability range of their intake) it is perhaps not quite so great as some interviewees claimed.

### **2.5.2 Moving out of Slough**

2103. The number of pupils transferring out of the borough at age 11 is even greater than the number moving in (in 1999 the figures were 390 and 350 respectively). Almost a quarter (24 per cent) of the children in Slough primary schools moved on to schools outside the borough. Individual primary school headteachers were asked which schools their pupils moved on to, and why.
2104. Both the proportions and the reasons varied considerably from school to school. The first and most obvious point to note is that, for some Slough families, schools in Windsor or Bucks may be as near or even nearer than Slough schools. It is therefore not surprising that primary schools in Langley/Colnbrook or Cippenham/Burnham tend to send a large number of children to secondary schools outside the borough. These schools may be selective (e.g. Burnham Grammar) or non-selective. The most frequently mentioned school in the latter category was Churchmead at Datchet; although now part of the borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, it remains the designated secondary school for some pupils living in Slough.
2105. Headteachers reported, however, that a number of families chose out-of-borough schools in order to avoid sending their children to Slough non-selective schools.

*Many do not choose local secondary modern schools. They try for Windsor and Maidenhead, ... Hillingdon, Churchmead, because of [their] poor perception of local schools.*

2106. If the local secondary school had a particularly bad reputation, parents might try for a place in another Slough school, but headteachers reported a feeling among parents that Slough (non-selective) schools in general were *'not up to it'*. According to headteachers, parents tended not to have confidence in the schools, and despite the change of name, they did not regard them as true 'all-ability' schools. One headteacher said that some parents:

*... see all secondary schools in Slough as sink schools. They say 'I don't want my children to mix with those troublemakers'. It's a very middle-class attitude.*

2107. Another primary headteacher reported that *'better calibre'* parents preferred Burnham schools to Slough, to the extent that securing a place at Burnham Upper School was regarded as 'passing' the 11-plus.

2108. There was general agreement that parents who make a positive choice to send their children (perhaps some distance) to an out-of-borough school tended to be *'thinking parents'*, interested and supportive, with higher aspirations and a greater understanding of the system. According to headteachers' reports, they included a small number who objected on principle to selection, and therefore sent their children to comprehensive schools in Windsor or Maidenhead rather than entering them for the test (see Section 2.2.1 above). However, it seems that the majority in this category were 'borderline' children who had taken the test and narrowly failed: in their parents' view, a comprehensive school in Windsor or Maidenhead would be *'the next best thing'* to a grammar school.

2109. One headteacher summed up the situation reflected in many reports by saying that *'those who go to Churchmead are a cross-section'* (in terms of ability), while *'those who go to Windsor are the more able, who object to the test or narrowly fail'*. Another headteacher commented:

*In some cases, [parents] want a school with a sixth form – they are keen for their children to stay on. Those [whose children] have just failed want them to be with children who are better than them, so there is still a challenge ... It is the borderline children who go.*

2110. SBC statistics would appear to confirm this hypothesis. Borderline children are likely to achieve Level 4s (but not consistent Level 5s) in the key stage 2 SATs. And the proportion of children achieving Level 4 (in all subjects) is much higher among those leaving the borough than among those staying –

indeed, the proportion of ‘leavers’ achieving Level 4 is considerably higher than the national average.

2111. Windsor itself, unlike Maidenhead, operates a middle school system, and therefore children who transfer to Windsor at age 11 would have to attend a middle school for two years before moving on (assuming it was possible to obtain a place) to Windsor Boys’ or Windsor Girls’. If parents decide in advance that they wish their children to take this route, there could be advantages in making the transfer at an earlier age. One Slough primary school reported losing a number of pupils every year at the end of Year 4. The number varied, but in one recent year no fewer than 12 girls transferred; all would have been regarded as borderline in terms of 11-plus chances.
2112. Travelling to schools outside Slough can be problematic in terms of transport and can also be expensive – another reason why it is more likely to be middle-class, relatively affluent parents who choose those schools for their children. Two headteachers said that they felt that more parents would send their children out of borough if transport were easily available. However, several headteachers felt that in practice the number of children going to Windsor and Maidenhead schools would decline rather than increase, since the closure of the Princess Margaret Royal Free School would reduce the total number of secondary school places in the borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, and make it harder for outsiders (in this case, Slough families) to get in. Another headteacher felt that Burnham Upper had ‘*closed ranks*’ so it may be that there will be fewer opportunities in future for pupils to move out of Slough.

### **2.5.3 The Buckinghamshire system**

2113. Slough shares a border with Buckinghamshire, which also operates a selective system. Many Slough children take the Bucks test instead of, or as well as, the Slough 11-plus; for some Slough families, Burnham Grammar may be the nearest school, and others may wish to ‘play safe’ by entering their children for both tests. Primary headteachers thus become involved in explaining the Bucks system to parents (see Section 2.1.1) and perhaps running the Bucks 11-plus test in their schools (see Section 2.1.2). Inevitably, therefore, comparison between the two systems was often made by interviewees.
2114. The Bucks test itself is taken as the Slough (Berkshire) test used to be – in primary schools, on three separate occasions. Although primary headteachers

were asked specifically about the Slough 11-plus, about half volunteered the information that they arranged for pupils to take the Bucks exam in their schools.

2115. Some did so rather reluctantly, because it *'takes time'* and is *'a nuisance'*, especially when there are absentees who have to take the test on another day. Accordingly, one headteacher said that *'till this year, we've done the Bucks 11-plus, but we won't any more'*. However, despite the practical problems of arranging the tests, a number of headteachers said that they felt the Bucks procedure was much better and fairer than the present Slough system, since tests were spaced out over three different days, and children took them in familiar surroundings.
2116. It was noted that some parents found it difficult to understand that some schools, though close to their home and to their children's primary school, were nevertheless in a different borough with a different selection system. Primary headteachers had the difficult task of explaining how two different admissions systems worked. They also reported problems in explaining why scores in the two tests could be markedly different, although comments revealed that headteachers' own understanding of the issue was sometimes flawed.
2117. One primary headteacher said that her children had no chance of passing the Bucks test, because the passmark was too high. Another primary headteacher, arguing that Slough grammar schools were not true grammar schools (see Section 2.5.1) pointed to the lower Slough passmark as evidence that they were *'just filling the [Slough grammar] schools up'* with children who would not qualify for a place elsewhere.
2118. Such comments reflect a failure to understand two key facts about 11-plus scores. First, they are age standardised within the population of children taking the test, i.e. an individual child's score will be determined with reference to the performance of the other children taking the test. Since the population of children taking the Bucks test will not be identical to the population of children taking the Slough test, a child who performed the same in the two tests would not necessarily obtain the same score. (For the same reason, 11-plus scores are not directly comparable with scores obtained in nationally standardised tests such as CATs.)

2119. Second, while the Slough scores are standardised to 104.6 (i.e. a child whose performance in the test was average would be given a score of 104.6), current practice in Bucks is to standardise the scores to 108. Hence a child performing the same in both tests would obtain a higher score in Bucks; and so the fact that Bucks has a higher passmark does not necessarily mean that it is more difficult to pass the test.

2120. Interviews revealed that some secondary headteachers shared similar misunderstandings about the Bucks system. One said:

*Slough has more grammar school places than anywhere I know ... In Bucks, the [non-selective] secondary schools are better, because the grammar schools take a smaller percentage.*

2121. This belief is also erroneous, as Slough and Bucks have approximately the same proportion of students in grammar schools. In 1999, Slough with 44 per cent was second highest to Bucks, with 47 per cent. In 2000, Slough with 45 per cent was marginally ahead of Bucks with 44 per cent (Ofsted, 2000).

#### **2.5.4 The age of transfer**

2122. The selection test administered by Berkshire in Slough was until 1996 taken at the age of 12 rather than 11. At that time, Slough had a middle school system, although the middle schools catered for children of 8-12, rather than 9-13 as in Windsor. When the age of transfer was changed to 11 – in line with most of the country, and with the key stages of the National Curriculum – middle or ‘combined’ schools lost their Year 7 pupils, and some were not happy about this. In the context of these interviews, some primary headteachers made it clear that they still regarded the change as a mistake.

2123. The main reason given was that children were considered too young to take the test in Year 6, when (since the test is taken in November) most would be only ten. Several headteachers argued that many children develop later, and are therefore disadvantaged by taking the test at such an early age.

*Children are almost on the threshold – you begin to see their ability, but it's not quite there, they develop later.*

2124. Another headteacher asked rhetorically ‘*If you looked at it later, would you divide the children the same way?*’ The implied answer was ‘definitely not’.<sup>7</sup> Two headteachers felt that they could see significant changes in children during the course of Year 6, and that some who were not able to pass the test in November were performing much better by the end of the year. One, arguing that ‘*More credence should be given to SATs*’, maintained that ‘*Children can put on a lot in Year 6 – you can turn them round in the six-month gap [between the 11-plus test and the SATs]*’. Another headteacher felt that EAL children, in particular, suffered as a result of taking the test a year earlier, since ‘*Year 7 gave them a chance to catch up*’.
2125. Some believed that transfer at 12 was preferable for educational reasons. One claimed that the ‘*slump at the beginning of key stage 3*’ does not happen in Windsor, and that ‘*The middle schools in Slough had a huge advantage*’. However, a headteacher from a school in a deprived area thought that the change was ‘*in curriculum terms, probably right*’ but ‘*in pastoral terms, disastrous*’. She argued that primary teachers know individual children well, and can therefore provide the kind of support which is particularly needed by children lacking an appropriate parent figure.
2126. Only one primary headteacher put the opposite view (secondary headteachers did not raise the subject). She felt that ‘*11-year-olds now have the maturity of 12-year-olds*’, due at least in part to the earlier transfer. Children now are ‘*more grown up – they leave nervous, but come back [on visits to their primary school] as students*’.

### **2.5.5 Sixth forms and staffing**

2127. Sixth forms and staffing are issues not directly linked with selection at age 11, and so questions about them were not asked during interviews. However, a number of headteachers pointed out the impact of the selective system in these areas.
2128. Sixth forms are popular with parents, as a primary headteacher noted. A secondary headteacher said that one of the two questions most frequently asked at open evenings was ‘*Are you likely to have a sixth form in the future?*’.

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<sup>7</sup> In this the headteacher was no doubt correct; as noted in Section 1.3, the Crowther Report of 1959 cited evidence to that effect.



Sixth formers add ‘*vitality, maturity and strength of character*’ to a school, as well as providing role models for the younger students.

2129. In the context of comprehensive education, it is recognised that schools need to be large in order to produce an economically viable sixth form which can offer a wide range of options.<sup>8</sup> It would be difficult for the Slough non-selective schools (relatively small yet catering for a wide ability range) to operate sixth forms, even if they were given permission to do so. As interviewees saw, enabling individual schools to have sixth forms would mean not only going comprehensive, but reducing the number of schools in Slough (see Section 2.6.2).
2130. At present, students in non-selective schools who reach the age of 16 have up to three options if they wish to continue in full-time education:
- ◆ a few non-selective schools provide informal opportunities for students to take a limited range of post-16 courses, such as GNVQ Intermediate
  - ◆ students can transfer to one of the grammar schools, providing they have the GCSE grades required for the courses on offer (mainly A-levels)
  - ◆ students can take a wide range of post-16 courses at the local further education (FE) college.
2131. Some secondary headteachers reported examples of students moving on to grammar schools at the age of 16, and achieving success in subsequent examinations. One noted however that ‘*some students find it difficult to transfer to grammar school – they lack the self-confidence*’ as a result of being classified a ‘failure’ five years earlier. Another headteacher felt that ‘*the move [from non-selective school to FE college] depresses grades*’. She felt it would be better if ‘*everyone started afresh*’. Proposals for a new sixth form centre at Wexham School may help to meet this need.
2132. One point – made by interviewees and generally acknowledged – is that schools without sixth forms have more difficulty in attracting high-quality teaching staff. Teacher recruitment is a serious problem at present, and some interviewees expressed the view that it was exacerbated by the selective system in Slough. The non-selective schools lack sixth forms, they have fewer high-ability pupils than a comprehensive, and a greater number of pupils with

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<sup>8</sup> This is not necessarily the case for grammar schools, since the large majority of their students would be expected to enter the sixth form and follow traditional A-level courses.

learning or behavioural difficulties; they may therefore experience severe problems in recruiting teachers. By contrast, the grammar schools may find it relatively easy to attract staff, but one interviewee pointed out that grammar school teachers lack the opportunity to gain a broad experience:

*The selective system disadvantages you for the future, whichever side you are on. It would be difficult for a secondary modern teacher going for a head of department job, and for a grammar school teacher going for a job in a comprehensive.*

2133. He concluded, *'If I was a teacher, I would not want Slough'*.

## 2.6 Views of the Slough System

2134. It will be evident from the above that a large majority of interviewees were opposed to the current system of selection in Slough. The exceptions were the grammar school headteachers (not surprisingly) and a few primary headteachers who thought that the system was basically acceptable, though aspects of it could be improved. One primary headteacher believed that there was *'a big advantage to working-class bright children in grammar schools ... some from poor homes have gone on to higher education, they might not have done so via comprehensive schools'*. However, positive comments such as this were rare, and many interviewees focused on the disadvantages of selection. Most of these have already been discussed at some length elsewhere in this chapter, and so this section will summarise briefly the main points.

### 2.6.1 For and against selection

2135. Arguments in favour of or (more commonly) opposed to selection could be classified in four broad categories: **moral**, **social**, **educational** and **practical**.

#### **Moral considerations**

2136. The **moral** argument centred on the fundamental issue of dividing children into successes and failures at an early age. As already reported, the majority of primary headteachers were deeply concerned about the impact on children of what they described as *'barbaric'*, *'demoralising'*, *'a dreadful system'* which resulted in the loss of self-esteem for many children (see Section 2.3.2). One secondary headteacher observed:

*Socially, selection is untenable. You are not segregated at work – it's an unnatural process, morally indefensible.*

2137. A comprehensive system, with ‘*automatic transfer, and no stigma*’ was therefore seen as preferable by the majority of interviewees. One primary headteacher observed:

*Until I came here, I had not got a view [on selection]. But now I've seen it [the impact of the present system on the children] I think comprehensive education is much better.*

### **Social considerations**

2138. Some headteachers expressed the view that there are social advantages in a comprehensive education. A primary headteacher said:

*You cannot beat a really good comprehensive. Children should be able to learn and mix with a whole range of people – they learn to become tolerant, recognise strengths and weaknesses.*

2139. The corresponding disadvantage of selection was described by a secondary headteacher:

*Pupils in grammar schools suffer socially – they develop a superior view of life. If they go on to university, they do not have the background for a job in society.*

### **Educational considerations**

2140. A number of educational considerations have been mentioned, and will be briefly recapped here.

2141. First, it could be argued that children's education may suffer even while they are in primary school as a result of the selection system. While few headteachers reported devoting a significant amount of curriculum time to preparation (and most were opposed to doing so) there were several references to children being taken out of school for private preparation, or being encouraged to do practice test papers rather than homework: ‘*Some children especially in Year 5 put 11-plus homework from tutors before school homework*’. Several headteachers felt that, because the 11-plus is regarded as more important, children may not perform so well in the key stage 2 SATs (see Section 2.1.3).

2142. In terms of secondary education, the main perceived disadvantage was the hard-and-fast division into two educational ‘camps’ at the age of 11: ‘*A few questions can determine their future*’. Comprehensive education was preferred because it is more flexible – children may be placed in streams or sets, but there is scope for movement:

*I’m quite happy with ability bands, but you can move between them. [A child] may be excellent in one subject, and need support in another.*

2143. Another headteacher made the point that ‘*you can look at kids succeeding ... if you are in Set C, you realise you can move up*’. This links with the view that sixth formers and/or higher-ability children can provide examples of excellence or ‘role models’, helping to stimulate the other children to higher achievements and aspirations. As one headteacher said, ‘*Articulate and clever people can have a good influence on others*’.

2144. There was greater debate in response to a question to secondary headteachers about the impact of comprehensive education on particular groups of children. A number of interviewees thought that the top children (in terms of academic ability) would fare better in a grammar school. One non-selective headteacher thought that there might be educational (but not social) reasons to support grammar school education for a small number of very gifted children. Another headteacher, strongly opposed to selection, said that there was perhaps

*... a very small percentage at the top of the grammar schools who might perform slightly less well in comprehensives. But the losses would be more than compensated for by the greater achievement in the rest of the population.*

2145. A grammar school headteacher thought that higher-ability pupils might do better in grammar schools, and lower-ability in comprehensives, but ‘*the middle band of children will get on anywhere*’. However, there was considerable discussion about the best place for borderline (above average, but not high-flier) children. The majority view was that such children were better at the top of a non-selective school than struggling to keep up in a grammar school, although there was a counter-argument that such children needed the challenge and encouragement which would result from mixing with high-ability students (see Section 2.4.2).

2146. The arguments quoted above relate to the best type of school for borderline children within a selective system; our main concern here is how they would fare within comprehensive education. One interviewee argued that children who were at the top of a non-selective school would be ‘overshadowed’ in the middle of a comprehensive. However, another headteacher felt that ‘*those who just fail* [under the present system] *would particularly benefit*’ from being in a comprehensive school. A third headteacher agreed that such young people would

*... gain by being in a more challenging environment – it’s too easy here to be top of the class ... Borderline kids lose out because the weight of the school is below them, the pull up is not there. They may not achieve their potential.*

2147. Statistical evidence for the impact of different types of schooling on different ability groups will be discussed in Chapter 4.

### **Practical considerations**

2148. Under this heading we discuss the problems affecting schools as a result of selection, while recognising that these in turn have an obvious impact on young people’s education.

2149. Many of these problems have been mentioned elsewhere in the present chapter. In primary schools, a lot of time would be spent on matters related to the 11-plus – even if the headteacher was opposed to the selective system and tried to have as little to do with it as possible. Time could be spent on any or all of the following:

- ◆ explaining the Slough 11-plus procedure (and possibly the Bucks system as well) to parents
- ◆ advising individual parents on whether to enter their children for the test
- ◆ helping to prepare children for the test
- ◆ running the Bucks tests in school
- ◆ counselling children, and trying to rebuild their self-esteem after the results became available
- ◆ advising parents about the prospects for appealing, writing reports and helping parents to negotiate the procedures.

2150. For details, see Section 2.1 and Section 2.3.2. As noted in Section 2.1.4, appeals are not only time-consuming, but can have a damaging effect on home-school relations.
2151. Some primary headteachers also observed that their schools were effectively judged by parents in terms of their perceived success in sending children to grammar school.<sup>9</sup> One headteacher remarked that ‘*a lot of parents ask about pass rates*’ when they first visit the school. Another headteacher likewise noted that parents used the 11-plus test results as a measure of the school’s performance. The previous Year 6 had been a particularly able group, so the pass rate had been high, and parents concluded that the school had improved. The current Year 6 was much weaker, the headteacher anticipated that only one or two would go to grammar school, and was wondering how parents would react.
2152. In (non-selective) secondary schools, selection can cause different but equally significant problems. Because they have relatively few high-ability pupils, they are unable to support sixth forms and may have difficulty in forming sets to work towards the higher tiers of GCSE (see Sections 2.5.5 and 2.4.2). The converse is that non-selective schools are likely to have an above-average number of young people with learning or behavioural difficulties, which can make teaching a challenge. This in turn can cause problems in teacher recruitment, and staffing shortages can mean that the quality of teaching and learning suffers: hence there is a danger that non-selective schools can become trapped in a downward spiral from which it is difficult to escape.

### **2.6.2 Impact of a change to comprehensive education**

2153. Secondary school headteachers were asked: ‘*If your school became comprehensive, what changes do you think would result?*’
2154. Some interviewees argued that there would be no dramatic change. A grammar school headteacher said ‘*We’d still be equally good. We would not change our support systems or pastoral care*’. Similarly, the headteacher of a non-selective school commented ‘*It would not change the values and principles on which the school is based, nor its aims and objectives, nor its*

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<sup>9</sup> A similar concern was expressed in Northern Ireland primary schools (see Section 1.3).

*priorities. The change would not shift attention to the academically able – there are no rejects in this school’.*

2155. Schools recognised, of course, that they would have to cater for a wider ability range. Some saw great advantages in this:

*The presence of more able kids would have a ripple effect – it would raise the performance of the others.*

*If we went comprehensive, we’d get more staff. Commitment, motivation, behaviour would all improve. If we had higher-ability students here, they’d say ‘Shut up, we want to get on with our work’. It does not happen here [with the current intake].*

2156. However, headteachers recognised that a switch to comprehensive education would not immediately solve all problems. A grammar school headteacher wondered how happy his staff would be about the change, and how well they would cope. Another grammar school headteacher observed:

*It would be difficult for a time, because we’d be trying to operate two different types of school. Teachers have different skills – mine could not handle the lower-ability children, and those at [] might not cope with the academic high fliers.*

2157. Interviewees also recognised that major structural change would be necessary, or at least desirable. One headteacher envisaged that the grammar schools would become 11-18 comprehensives, and the non-selective schools 11-16 comprehensives. Certainly Slough could not support 11 comprehensive schools with sixth forms, so most interviewees acknowledged that some of the existing secondary schools would have to close: *‘There are too many schools – you need fewer, larger schools, with better facilities’.*

2158. As one headteacher put it, *‘Simply getting rid of selection would not necessarily even up the playing field’.* Headteachers were aware that *‘parents would prefer ex-grammar schools’*; *‘The old grammar schools would be valued most’.* One headteacher thought that *‘In the short term, it would be devastating’.* However, the longer-term prospects were considered more promising:

*We’d get kids more likely to conform and study, it would tip the climate. The [present] climate is always challenging because there are*

*few supportive parents – in a comprehensive school, there would be a better balance.*

2159. Most non-selective school headteachers agreed that, although going comprehensive would not solve all their problems, certainly not in the short term, it would be ‘*a move in the right direction*’; it would ‘*at least affirm the principle of equity*’.



### 3. THE YEAR 11 QUESTIONNAIRE

3001. A set of questions was designed to collect the views of all Year 11 students in Slough on the 11-plus test and the selective system in general. These questions were combined with a standard NFER pupil attitude questionnaire which is administered annually to Year 11 students in Slough. An additional question, designed to assess self-confidence and self-esteem, was included.
3002. Names of the current Year 11 cohort were obtained from SBC, and questionnaires were labelled before being despatched to schools. In addition to obtaining views on selection, we wished to compare the attitudes and self-esteem of pupils of similar ability in different types of school. It was therefore necessary to match responses to data about individual pupils' levels of attainment.

#### 3.1 Views of Selection

3003. All Slough schools with secondary age pupils were sent questionnaires for their Year 11 students, but three grammar schools refused to take part in the survey (although one allowed students to complete the pupil attitude questionnaire anonymously). As a result, questions relating to selection were answered by a total of 753 students, representing seven non-selective schools, one grammar school and one special school (11 students only). Opportunities for comparing the responses of students from different types of school were therefore limited.
3004. Students were first asked whether they had taken the 11-plus test at one of the four Slough grammar schools. Almost two thirds (64 per cent) said yes, and almost one third (31 per cent) said no (the remaining students said 'Can't remember', or failed to answer the question). The most common reasons given by the 230 students who did **not** take the test were:
- ◆ I did not want to take the test (58 students)
  - ◆ I was living somewhere else when I was 11 (54 students)
  - ◆ It was not needed for the school I wanted to go to (42 students)
  - ◆ I knew I would fail so there was no point (36 students)
  - ◆ My parents did not want me to take the test (30 students).

3005. Students who **had** taken the test were asked: ‘Do you think that the Slough 11-plus test was a fair test?’. Responses were neatly divided: almost exactly one half said yes, one quarter said no, and the other quarter could not remember. Those who thought that the test was **not** fair were asked to explain why they thought that. It should be noted that this question was completely open-ended; no suggestions were provided, so the students responded in their own words. In summary, the reasons most frequently given were:

- ◆ children are too young when they take the test – some develop later (23 students)

*I feel it is unfair to judge a pupils intelligence at age 11, how can you base the rest of someones life on a test they took at age 11?*

- ◆ the two-tier system is fundamentally wrong (18 students)

*Because everyone took the same test, and if you're not that clever, you get classed as a failure.*

*It puts people down, and makes them think they are not clever, because they did not get into grammar school.*

- ◆ the questions were of an unfamiliar type (15 students)

*Because I didn't fully understand what I had to tick. So I wasted most of the time.*

- ◆ it was not a good test of knowledge (14 students)

*It is multiple choice and doesn't bring out the true qualities in the pupil. You can get them right by luck! The SATs are much better!*

- ◆ it puts pressure on children / children are nervous (14 students)

*Because you may be really bright and deserve to go to a grammar school, but the nerves get too much for you.*

*You go to another school where you have never been and this makes you more nervous, so you'll find it hard to concentrate.*

3006. There are interesting similarities between these views and the views of headteachers discussed in Chapter 2. Several headteachers also argued that children develop later, and are therefore disadvantaged by taking the test at such an early age (Section 2.5.4); many felt strongly that the two-tier system is fundamentally wrong (Section 2.6.1); they talked at length about the pressure children were under (Section 2.3.1).

3007. It might be expected that grammar school students – who by definition had passed the 11-plus test – would be less likely to consider it unfair. In fact, 18 per cent of grammar school respondents took that view, compared with 26 per cent from non-selective schools: a lower proportion, but the difference was not

statistically significant. There was however a different emphasis in the reasons given by grammar school students. Not one of the 22 students in this category thought that the two-tier system was fundamentally wrong; instead, they focused on the random nature of the test: six said that it was not a good test of knowledge, and four that it was wrong to be judged on your performance on a single day.

*I don't think that it tested you on the things you need for life. People who had done well in their last school failed because the test didn't test them on things they had learnt.*

*Candidates are too young and get too stressed over it. Children should not be put under so much pressure at so young an age, it depends how you feel on the day of the test also, getting in should depend on your work throughout your primary school life.*

3008. This suggests that some children, who were generally confident in their own ability, nevertheless worried that their performance on the day might not do them justice. Again, this reflects the concerns voiced by primary headteachers about the possibility of children – for whatever reason – performing badly on the day when the tests are held (see Section 2.3.1).

### 3.2 Choice of Secondary School

3009. Students were asked which secondary school they most wanted to go to (at the age of 11). Sixty per cent responded 'The one I am at now'; 24 per cent wrote in the name of a different school; 16 per cent said 'Can't remember' or left the question blank. The responses of students who named a different school are summarised in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1 Students who wanted to go to a different secondary school**

Type of school	No.	%
A Slough grammar school	71	43
A Slough non-selective school	38	23
A grammar school not in Slough	15	9
Another school not in Slough	41	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>100</b>

3010. As Table 3.1 shows, students who were disappointed in their choice of secondary school were by no means all children who wanted, but failed to

achieve, places in Slough grammar schools. On the contrary, a third of the children apparently wanted to leave the borough, but found themselves in Slough schools instead. There were also a substantial number of children who wanted to go to a Slough non-selective school, other than the one in which they eventually found themselves.

3011. Students who said they wanted to go to a different school were asked to give their reasons, and these are consistent with the analysis outlined in the previous paragraph. The most common reasons were:

- ◆ the school provided a good standard of education (52 students)
- ◆ the school had a good reputation (46 students)
- ◆ friends were going to / already at the school named (42 students)
- ◆ the school was close to home (19 students).

3012. Reasons given by students specifying a Slough grammar school were compared with those of students naming a non-selective school in Slough. Not surprisingly, the first two reasons given above were by far the most important to the would-be grammar school students:

*Because it's a grammar school. You get to do more work and courseworks that help you. Good discipline and responsibilities.*

*I would like to go to – Grammar School because you find there clever people and that will ever push you to work very hard like them.*

3013. Those who wanted to go to a different non-selective school were more likely to say that they wanted to be with their friends or close to home, although the reputation of the school was also a key issue.

3014. These responses suggest that only some disappointments – perhaps a minority – were due to the 11-plus. To explore this further, the analysis was repeated for students in non-selective schools only (i.e. students from the participating grammar school were excluded). More than half (57 per cent) of those who said they took the test (and must therefore have failed) said that they had wanted to go to the school that they were attending; only 18 per cent said that they wanted a place in a Slough grammar school. So why did they take the 11-plus test? It may be that some parents insisted on their children taking the test, while the children themselves actually wanted to go to a non-selective

school. However, we should note that the students were responding with hindsight, describing the way they had felt some five years earlier, and their memories may have been coloured by their experiences in the intervening years.

3015. Certainly, some post-hoc rationalisation is suggested by the responses to a further question: ‘Do you now feel that your secondary school is the right school for you?’ More than three quarters (77 per cent) answered in the affirmative, despite the fact that only 60 per cent said they had wanted to go to that school. However, almost one in five (19 per cent; four per cent did not reply) maintained, towards the end of their secondary education, that their school was **not** right for them. They were asked to say why they thought another school would have been better. Most students responded by identifying the shortcomings (as they saw it) of their present school; the most common were:

- ◆ staff shortages (26 students)
- ◆ other problems with teachers (23 students)
- ◆ poor standards of education (19 students)
- ◆ not enough rules / motivation (13 students)
- ◆ curriculum constraints (nine students)
- ◆ poor classroom management (seven students).

3016. Teacher shortage is currently a serious problem in Slough, particularly in some of the non-selective schools; it is interesting that the students themselves identified this as a major source of dissatisfaction:

*Because I am not receiving the right amount and standard of education I should be. I am being predicted low grades and I know I could do better if we have more qualified full-time teachers.*

*Because the terrible way they’ve handled the teacher shortage has left me and my education behind.*

3017. Other problems relating to teachers included allegations that they lacked skills in teaching, classroom management and dealing with bullying; however, many comments were more personal (students claiming that teachers had treated them unfairly) and should probably be disregarded. Finally, a number of

pupils believed that the standard of education and/or behaviour in their school was poor, and therefore felt that they would have been better off elsewhere.

### 3.3 Self-confidence and Self-esteem

3018. Students were given a series of ten statements, and asked to indicate which were true for them. Responses are summarised in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2 Student self-confidence and self-esteem**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>True %</b>	<b>Not true %</b>	<b>Not sure %</b>
I often have good ideas	75	5	20
I find it difficult to make decisions	27	53	21
I enjoy meeting new people	87	5	9
I feel confident about the future	52	20	28
Whenever I try to do something, it goes wrong	14	65	22
I am good at organising my work	53	24	24
I find it easy to set targets for myself	46	31	23
I can cope with unexpected things	57	16	27
I often feel that I am not very clever	40	40	20
I am good at solving problems	54	16	30
<b>Total number of students = 740</b>			

3019. The responses of grammar school students were compared with those from non-selective schools. (It is important to remember, however, that only one grammar school was involved, so differences may be due to the individual school rather than school type.) Only two items were significantly different: grammar school students were more confident about coping with unexpected things (72 per cent, against 54 per cent of non-selective students) while non-selective students were more likely to say that they were good at organising their work (54 per cent, compared with 46 per cent of grammar school students).

3020. Factor analysis suggested two distinct themes: organisation (Items 6 and 7) and general self-image (all other items except Item 3, which did not relate closely to either factor). In terms of organisation, non-selective school students gave the more positive response, but the difference was not significant. In terms of general self-image, the grammar school students'

responses were significantly more positive than others; however, when the responses of individual schools were compared, the grammar school scored highest, but was not significantly higher than some of the non-selective schools. The range of scores suggests that the differences are due more to variation between individual schools than to school type.

### **3.4 Attitudes to School**

3021. The questionnaire included a standard set of NFER questions designed to measure student attitudes to school. This part of the questionnaire was completed by Year 11 students at a second grammar school, so the scope for comparison was better, though still limited.

3022. Students were first asked to agree or disagree with a series of questions relating to their school. On most of the statements, the difference between grammar school and non-selective school responses was highly significant. Grammar school students were more likely to say that:

- ◆ people think this is a good school
- ◆ the school is a clean and attractive place to be
- ◆ if a younger person asked me, I would recommend him/her to come to this school.

3023. Non-selective school students were more likely to agree that:

- ◆ on the whole, I like being at school
- ◆ on the whole, school work is worth doing
- ◆ the school has sensible rules
- ◆ homework is important in helping me to do well at school.

3024. It seems that grammar school students recognised and shared the high opinion in which their schools were held, while students at non-selective schools seemed to enjoy school more and accept the value of school work and school rules.

3025. Students were next asked to rate their actual lessons, by saying whether certain statements were true in all/most/some/hardly any/no lessons. Surprisingly, perhaps, grammar school students felt more often that they were bored in lessons, their work was a waste of time, and they often counted the minutes

until a lesson ended. It was more often true for non-selective students that their work was interesting, and they worked as hard as they could. A possible explanation is that grammar school students find their lessons insufficiently challenging (and therefore boring), while non-selective students find them more difficult (but therefore more interesting).

3026. A series of questions about teachers also yielded very clear distinctions between responses from different types of school. Grammar school students were more likely to say that most or all of their teachers:

- ◆ make sure we do any homework that is set
- ◆ make it clear how we should behave in school
- ◆ take action when they see someone breaking the school rules
- ◆ can keep order in class
- ◆ try to get me to work as well as I am able
- ◆ always mark my work.

3027. Clearly, grammar school teachers are perceived as being more strict and in control than teachers in non-selective schools. In accordance with this, grammar school students were much more likely to say that the discipline in their school was too strict (37 per cent, compared with 12 per cent in non-selective schools) and that the school had too many rules (55 per cent compared with 30 per cent). Conversely, 21 per cent of non-selective students (but only five per cent in grammar schools) thought that discipline was ‘not strict enough’, and 11 per cent (compared with one per cent) that the school had ‘not enough rules’.

3028. Students were also asked to ‘describe the behaviour of your close friends and yourself in class and around school last year and this year’. Overall, two thirds said that they were usually or always well-behaved in Year 10, and a much larger majority (85 per cent) gave that response with reference to Year 11. However, students in non-selective schools gave a more positive assessment of their behaviour than those in grammar schools.

3029. Asked to rate the preparation they had received for the future, grammar school students were more likely to agree that their Year 11 education had:

- ◆ covered a wide range of subjects



- ◆ provided a good balance of general and specialised subjects
- ◆ equipped me with the right skills and knowledge

while non-selective school students felt more strongly that Year 11 had:

- ◆ prepared me for adult and working life
- ◆ been suitable for my individual needs.

3030. Non-selective school students were also much more positive about the helpfulness of the career guidance they had received, although it should be noted that 13 per cent of the grammar school students (and six per cent of those in non-selective schools) ticked 'not sure'. A number of students actually wrote on the form that they had not yet received any guidance; one or two made specific reference to careers interviews, and it may be that students saw careers guidance exclusively in those terms. In sum, grammar schools were seen to provide the best general education, while non-selective schools were better at preparing students for working life (probably seen as less important in grammar schools, where students would be expected to continue in full-time education for several years).

3031. A factor analysis of the responses reported above was undertaken, and four factors were identified, which can be broadly described as follows:

- ◆ good school – generally positive view of school, lessons, teachers
- ◆ liking school – finds lessons interesting, enjoys school in general
- ◆ good behaviour – works hard and usually well behaved
- ◆ strictness – firm discipline and rules, linked with good reputation.

3032. Grammar schools score significantly higher than non-selective schools on the 'good school' and 'strictness' factors; non-selective schools scored higher for 'good behaviour' and 'liking school', although in the latter case the difference was not statistically significant. However, a comparison of the factor scores obtained by individual schools was revealing.

3033. In terms of the 'good school' factor, the two grammar schools scored highly (and hence their average score was higher than the average for non-selective schools) but the highest score of all was obtained by a non-selective school, with two other non-selective schools obtaining scores approximately equal to

those obtained by the grammar schools. In terms of ‘liking school’, five schools (including one grammar school) had positive mean scores, and five schools (including the other grammar school) had negative mean scores. In terms of good behaviour, one grammar school had the lowest score, while the other was in the middle of the range. Only in terms of strictness did the two grammar schools clearly have the highest scores. This confirms the conclusion reached in the previous section, that the difference between individual schools is greater than the difference between school types.

### 3.5 Future Expectations

3034. Students who completed the full questionnaire were asked to say what qualifications they expected to get at the end of Year 11, in terms of GCSE A\*-C grades, GCSE D-G grades, and GNVQ Part 1 (Intermediate or Foundation). More than a third of the students (36 per cent) indicated that they were ‘not sure’. Only a small number of students (all from non-selective schools) expected to get a GNVQ Part 1, and there appeared to be a degree of confusion, as some of them apparently expected to get as many as eight or nine.
3035. In order to facilitate comparison, an expected total point score was calculated for each student who answered the question about GCSEs. The number of expected D-G grades was multiplied by 2.5, representing the midpoint score in that range (between an E and an F). The number of A\*-C grades was multiplied by six; since A\*s are relatively rare, it was decided to take a B as the midpoint of that range. Adding the two figures yielded an expected total point score. The overall mean score was 36.14, but there was a big difference between grammar school students (mean 57.56) and non-selective school students (mean 30.05).
3036. GCSE results (actual and predicted) obviously depend on students’ ability, and since grammar schools have the more able students, it is to be expected that grammar school students will anticipate higher point scores. We wished to know whether there was a difference between types of school, *over and above the difference due to varying levels of ability*. We were able to match the student questionnaire responses with CAT scores for individual pupils obtained when they were in Year 9. We then undertook a multiple regression analysis, using predicted GCSE score as the outcome.

3037. The analysis confirmed the strong correlation between ability and predicted GCSE score. However, it revealed that, even after allowing for CAT score, there was a significant difference in the predictions of grammar school students and those in non-selective schools. The ‘grammar school factor’ accounted for 11.14 GCSE points; in other words, being in a grammar school added on average 11 points to the predicted total GCSE scores, even after allowing for ability.
3038. It must be remembered that we are talking about GCSE scores predicted by the students themselves, and of course their predictions may not be accurate. But either way, the finding in the previous paragraph is significant. If the students’ predictions are accurate, then being in a grammar school significantly enhances their achievement at GCSE level. If the difference is not as great as predicted, it shows that the grammar school pupils have a great deal more confidence and higher expectations (relative to their ability) than those in non-selective schools.
3039. Evidence will be presented in Chapter 4 to support the former view, i.e. that grammar school students do perform significantly better than students of the same ability in non-selective schools. However, the two options are not mutually exclusive; there may also be truth in the hypothesis that being in a grammar school increases confidence and raises expectations.
3040. Students were asked when they thought they would leave full-time education. Responses of grammar school students and those in non-selective schools are compared in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3 Age at which students expect to leave full-time education**

	<b>Grammar %</b>	<b>Non-selective %</b>
At the end of Year 11 (at age 16)	2	19
At age 17 (one year after taking GCSEs)	1	6
At age 18 (two years after taking GCSEs)	10	19
In my early 20s, after a university or other course in higher education	74	37
I am not sure yet	14	19
<b>Number of students responding</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>592</b>

3041. There are obvious differences between students at schools of different types, although the non-selective students appear to be optimistic about their prospects of undertaking a higher education (HE) course, since the number of students obtaining five or more GCSE A\*-C grades (the basic qualification for advanced post-16 courses to prepare them for university entrance) is lower than 37 per cent in all of the non-selective schools in Slough. Evidently some low-ability students have unrealistic expectations.
3042. Using Year 9 CAT scores again, a logistic regression analysis was undertaken, with expectation of HE as the outcome. The results showed that, after allowing for ability, the probability of a grammar school student wishing to go on to HE was 1.85 times as high as for a student in a non-selective school.
3043. As noted above, type of school has a major impact on expected GCSE results, as well as on plans for HE. Obviously the two outcomes are related, so a further analysis was undertaken which showed that expected GCSE point score was sufficient to explain students' HE intentions: the 'grammar school factor' did not appear to have a further influence at this point.

### **3.6 Borderline Students**

3044. Headteachers' comments, summarised in Chapter 2, reflected a particular concern with borderline students, i.e. those whose level of ability means that they could be allocated to a grammar school or a non-selective school, depending on the exact mark they manage to achieve in relation to others taking the test. We were particularly interested in that group of young people, since (within what might be called the borderline zone) it is possible to compare the performance of students of the same ability level in different types of school. Their achievements will be examined in Chapter 4; we also wished to examine their views, as reflected in the Year 11 questionnaire, to see if type of school appeared to influence them in any way.
3045. We defined the borderline zone in terms of CAT scores 100-110: young people who are above average in terms of ability, but not academic high fliers. Some students with CAT scores in that range will be in grammar schools, others in non-selective schools. Of the students who completed the Year 11 questionnaire, 131 had CAT scores in the relevant range: 46 were in a grammar school and 85 in non-selective schools.

3046. The analysis described in earlier sections of this chapter was repeated for this group alone. On most issues the views of the group were representative of the whole cohort, and differences between grammar school students and those in non-selective schools were similar to those already noted. However, given that the analysis was confined to a relatively homogeneous group (in terms of ability) it is striking that there was still a very significant difference in terms of future expectations.
3047. In terms of GCSE success, grammar school students in the borderline zone expected an average total point score of 56.43, against 38.81 for students in non-selective schools. As would be expected, borderline students in non-selective schools expected better results than the average for their schools. Borderline grammar school students were close to the average for their school, but it must be remembered that the way in which expected scores were derived would tend to ‘flatten’ the results, i.e. a borderline student who expected ten grade Cs would obtain the same score as a high flier who hoped for ten As or A\*s.
3048. Nevertheless, there is a big difference between expected total point scores of 38.81 and 56.43. It is right to note that even our restricted borderline zone covers a range (albeit a limited range) of ability; it is true that most students with a CAT score of 108-110 will be in grammar schools, while most of those with 100-102 will not. Clearly this will have an impact on expectations, but is it enough to explain such a gap?
3049. In order to find out, we repeated the multiple regression analysis described in the previous section, and found once again that the ‘grammar school factor’ was highly significant. In this case, after taking account of ability in terms of exact CAT score, the grammar school students expected 13.89 additional points at GCSE. The impact of a grammar school place was even greater for borderline students than for the cohort as a whole.
3050. Nearly three quarters (72 per cent) of the borderline grammar school students expected to go to university – almost as high a percentage as in the whole sample of grammar school students. Within non-selective schools, 45 per cent expected to do so. Again, allowance needs to be made for varying levels of ability within the borderline zone, so the logistic regression analysis was repeated for this group of students only. The results demonstrated that, within

the borderline zone and after allowing for ability, grammar school students are **three times** as likely to have plans for higher education than students in non-selective schools.

3051. In Section 2.4.2, we discussed the different views of headteachers relating to borderline pupils. Some were convinced that such young people would be more successful in non-selective schools, where they would *really shine*, rather than grammar schools where they might struggle. However, others pointed out the disadvantages for them in non-selective schools, mainly because those schools lack a 'critical mass' of able students with high expectations. Our analysis suggests that those concerns were fully justified.

#### 4. STATISTICAL ANALYSES OF PERFORMANCE DATA

4001. A range of statistical analyses was undertaken, using national value-added datasets as well as those provided by SBC. The overall aim was to compare the progress and performance of

- ♦ pupils in grammar schools with pupils in non-selective schools
- ♦ all pupils in Slough with pupils in fully comprehensive LEAs.

4002. For some of the analyses, we focused particularly on students in the borderline zone, i.e. those with CAT scores of 100-110 (see Section 3.6).

##### 4.1 Different Types of School

4003. The key stage 3 results of young people who took the tests in 1999 were compared with their CAT scores from the same year. CAT scores were available for two grammar schools and six of the seven non-selective schools. Not surprisingly, average CAT scores were higher in the grammar schools (112-114) than in the non-selective schools (87-95). However, there was an overlap between the range of CAT scores represented in different types of school: there were students with scores as low as 97 in grammar schools, and as high as 119 in non-selective schools.

4004. As would be expected, there were positive correlations between CAT scores and key stage 3 results. However, in most schools there were some pupils whose key stage 3 results were well below expectations based on their CAT scores; in some of the non-selective schools, there were substantial numbers in this category.

4005. Key stage 2 results for 1997 were compared with key stage 3 results for 2000. (Data was available for students in three grammar schools and five non-selective schools, although in some cases it did not represent the whole cohort. For one non-selective school, there was data for only one student, so this was ignored.) Overall correlations were highest for mathematics (0.8222) and lowest for English (0.6645). The increase in mean levels attained was greater in grammar schools than in non-selective schools; this is not surprising, but the difference was considerable.

4006. In order to explore this issue further, progress (in terms of increase in level between key stage 2 and key stage 3) was calculated for each individual student, and the mean individual increase calculated for each school. (This procedure takes account of the fact that there will be changes in a school's population between Year 7 and Year 9, and so provides a truer indication of progress.)

- ◆ For mathematics, each of the three grammar schools had a mean increase of at least two levels; the highest increase in a non-selective school was 1.33.
- ◆ For science, grammar schools had a mean increase of at least 1.5 levels; the highest increase in a non-selective school was 0.6.
- ◆ For English, the difference between school types was not so stark, although grammar schools still reflected a greater increase: they were in the range 1.31 – 2.00, while most non-selective schools were between 1.13 and 1.22 (although one had an increase of only 0.07).
- ◆ The increase in average level obtained varied from 1.65 to 1.93 for grammar schools, and 0.48 to 1.01 for non-selective schools.

4007. Although, as the above figures demonstrate, there was variation between individual schools, it is very clear that young people in grammar schools are making much more progress than their peers in the non-selective schools of Slough. There are a number of possible explanations, which are not mutually exclusive. Social factors may also have an impact, and the proportion of pupils in Slough grammar schools who qualify for FSM is well below the borough average. A multiple regression analysis was therefore carried out, with key stage 3 results as the outcome measures. Variables included were average key stage 2 level, key stage 2 level for the relevant subject, sex of pupil, school percentage FSM and school type (grammar or non-selective). The results showed that, after allowing for all other factors, school type was highly significant in all four outcomes. More specifically, regardless of prior attainment, being in a grammar school added:

- ◆ 0.58 to level attained in key stage 3 mathematics
- ◆ 1.18 to level attained in key stage 3 English
- ◆ 1.13 to level attained for key stage 3 science
- ◆ 0.88 to average key stage 3 level.

4008. A similar multiple regression analysis of Slough GCSE 2000 results showed that, after allowing for key stage 3 performance and sex, type of school was



again a highly significant factor. Being in a grammar school added an extra 6.2 points (equivalent to an extra B grade) to a student's total score.<sup>10</sup> With reference to Section 3.5, this shows that the grammar school factor influences actual as well as expected results, though not to such a high degree.

4009. It is no doubt true that academically able young people learn faster and therefore make more progress than others, but it is also likely that students (irrespective of their own ability) make more progress in a climate of high achievement and expectations. The latter hypothesis accords with the findings of Shuttleworth and Daly (2000), noted in Section 1.3. With reference to Slough, it will be explored by focusing again on the 'borderline' students in Section 4.3 below.

## 4.2 Slough and Comprehensive LEAs

4010. The main purpose of this research is not to see how performance in grammar schools compares with performance in non-selective schools – grammar schools students would of course be expected to outperform other students, although the research has demonstrated the extent to which type of school influences results, even when prior attainment is taken into account. The main objective is to assess whether Slough students would perform better or worse under a comprehensive system. To do this, we need to compare the achievements of all Slough students (in both types of school) with those of students in LEAs which have a fully comprehensive system, taking account of differences in ability and contextual factors such as the number of students eligible for free school meals.

4011. GCSE results in 2000 showed that Slough was slightly above the national average on a number of indicators. The percentage of students gaining five or more A\*-C grades was 51.4 per cent (49.2 nationally); the average total point score was 39.6 for Slough, 38.9 for England. However, these figures do not take into account any background or contextual data. A value-added analysis was therefore undertaken, using 1998 key stage 3 results as a baseline. The

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<sup>10</sup> The impact of the grammar school factor appears to be not as strong as that reported in Northern Ireland, where it added 16 points to a student's total GCSE score (see Section 1.3). However, Shuttleworth and Daly's analysis spanned the whole of secondary education, while our measure of prior attainment was the key stage 3 tests taken in Year 9. The analysis described above confirms that the grammar school factor has a strong additional impact during the early years of secondary school.

national value-added dataset was used in order to compare the performance of Slough students with those in comprehensive LEAs.

4012. The results showed that, after allowing for prior attainment (mean level at key stage 3), sex and FSM, Slough students performed better than those in comprehensive schools in terms of total GCSE point score and average score. The differences were not great (1.27 and 0.07 respectively) but they were statistically significant.

### **Individual subjects**

4013. Slough students also achieved significantly above average results in a range of subjects: mathematics, food technology, resistant materials, business studies, information technology and Spanish – the latter two were particularly good. However, results were significantly below average in English, history and double science.

4014. In order to explore these findings further, we looked at the take-up of subjects in Slough compared with the national picture. This yielded some interesting results. Take-up in Slough was low for:

- ◆ double science (67 per cent compared with 84 per cent nationally)
- ◆ German (11 per cent compared with 24 per cent)
- ◆ Spanish (three per cent compared with seven per cent).

4015. Take-up in Slough was high for:

- ◆ French (73 per cent compared with 58 per cent)
- ◆ religious studies (24 per cent compared with 17 per cent)
- ◆ resistant materials (33 per cent compared with 22 per cent)
- ◆ business studies (30 per cent compared with 16 per cent)
- ◆ single science (22 per cent compared with nine per cent).

4016. The high take-up of religious studies is probably due to the fact that Slough has two Roman Catholic secondary schools where the subject is compulsory. The reason for other differences is not entirely clear, but some hypotheses can be suggested. If the non-selective schools in Slough are unable to offer a second modern foreign language, this could account for the low take-up of German and Spanish and also the high take-up of French at GCSE (since a

large number of students would have no choice about which language to take). The high take-up of single science, and correspondingly low take-up of double science, could be due to some non-selective schools either lacking the facilities needed to run the double award course for the majority of students, or believing that substantial numbers of their students would not have the ability to benefit from it.

4017. The latter hypothesis would be in accordance with the fact that attainment was low for the Slough students who did take double science (see above). The high attainment in Spanish is related to the low take-up, in that the only Slough school offering Spanish is one of the grammar schools.

### **Students of varying ability**

4018. The analysis described above shows that Slough students (as a whole) are performing well (compared with the national average) in terms of GCSE scores. In order to explore this further, and identify the impact of the Slough system on students of varying ability, a multilevel analysis was carried out (see Appendix II) with four different outcome variables: GCSE total point score, average point score, mathematics score and English score. Once again, sex, average key stage 3 level and percentage of FSM pupils were used as background variables. The graphs produced illustrate the link between key stage 3 level and each GCSE outcome for Slough grammar school students, Slough non-selective school students and students at comprehensive schools in other LEAs.
4019. At the bottom end of the ability range, students in Slough non-selective schools perform slightly better than those in comprehensive schools in terms of total GCSE point score, and to a lesser extent in terms of average point score and mathematics score. At the top end, Slough grammar school students appear to perform slightly less well in English and mathematics than those in comprehensive schools; for total and average point score, the difference is hardly noticeable.
4020. The main difference, however, occurs towards the middle of the ability range (key stage 3 level 5-6) – the only place where there are students in all three types of school. The precise results vary with the outcome, but in general the grammar school students perform better than those in comprehensive schools, and the students in Slough non-selective schools do not perform as well.

Table 4.1 shows the expected GCSE outcomes for a borderline student with an average key stage 3 level of 5.5.

**Table 4.1 Expected GCSE outcomes for borderline pupils (key stage 3 average = 5.5)**

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Comprehensive LEAs</b>	<b>Slough Grammar Schools</b>	<b>Slough Non-Selective</b>
Total score	47.1	47.9	45.7
Average score	4.9	5.2	4.8
Maths	4.8	5.6	4.8
English	5.1	5.5	5.0

4021. On all four outcomes, Slough grammar schools students are ahead of students in comprehensive schools. Those in Slough non-selective schools are equal to comprehensive schools in mathematics, and only 0.1 point below in terms of English and average point score, though in terms of total point score they are further from the comprehensive school 'norm' than the grammar schools (1.4 below, compared with 0.8 above).

### **Key stage 2-3**

4022. It must be remembered that this analysis takes account of the value added in only the last two years of compulsory education. The impact of different types of secondary schooling is perhaps more likely to be felt during key stage 3, so a comparable value-added analysis was carried out for key stage 2-3, using 1997 key stage 2 results as a baseline. The national value-added dataset was again used in order to compare the performance of Slough students with those in comprehensive LEAs. The results showed that, after allowing for prior attainment (mean level at key stage 3), sex and percentage of students qualifying for free school meals, Slough students performed significantly better than those in comprehensive schools in terms of mathematics (0.14 levels above), English (0.15) and average level (0.09); there was no significant difference for science.

4023. A multilevel analysis of key stage 2-3 data was also undertaken (see Appendix II). The results were similar to those relating to GCSE score, but even more striking. Students at the bottom of the ability range performed well in Slough non-selective schools compared with comprehensives (except in science, where there was no distinguishable difference). Students at the top end

performed less well in grammar schools than in comprehensives. In the middle (overlapping) ability range, there were marked contrasts between the three types of school; Slough grammar school students performed much better than comprehensive schools students, and students in Slough non-selective schools performed considerably worse.

4024. These results are illustrated in Table 4.2, which shows the expected key stage 3 outcomes for a borderline pupil with an average key stage 2 level of 4.5.

**Table 4.2 Expected key stage 3 outcomes for borderline pupils (key stage 2 average = 4.5)**

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Comprehensive LEAs</b>	<b>Slough Grammar Schools</b>	<b>Slough Non-Selective</b>
Average level	5.8	6.3	5.6
Maths	6.2	6.7	5.9
English	5.6	6.1	5.5
Science	5.7	6.0	5.3

4025. On all four outcome measures, grammar school students are at least 0.3 levels (usually 0.5) above comprehensive pupils. Those in Slough non-selective schools are consistently below, the difference ranging from 0.1 (English) to 0.4 (science). It is not possible to carry out a single value-added analysis for the whole of secondary education, since the required data is not available for a single cohort. However, it can be inferred from Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 that the GCSE achievements of students with the same level of attainment at key stage 2 would be greatly influenced by the type of secondary school they attended.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Since National Curriculum levels are notoriously wide (each covering approximately two years' work) it could be argued that students entering grammar school with Level 4 (for example) may be further ahead than those entering non-selective schools on the same level; this could account at least in part for the difference in later achievement. However, it is important to note that our calculations are based on **average** key stage 2 levels, so the difference between categories (e.g. average level 4 and average level 4.33) is reduced to a third of a level. Moreover, analysis of the Slough 1997 key stage 2 results indicates a considerable overlap in the average levels of pupils going to grammar and non-selective schools. For example, 38 per cent of those with average level 4 went to grammar school, and it might seem reasonable to assume that they were the top 38 per cent; however, this is not necessarily the case, since 31 per cent of those with the level above (4.33) were in non-selective schools. We conclude therefore that differences of this kind would be insufficient to explain the effects described above.

### **A note on ethnicity**

4026. We have seen that, at both key stage 3 and GCSE, the performance of Slough students (grammar and non-selective schools together) was higher than that of students in comprehensive LEAs. Is this due to the selective system in Slough? Possibly, but the evidence is insufficient to make such an assumption. For although we were able to control for prior attainment, sex and percentage FSM, there are other factors which could also influence the outcome.
4027. One possible factor is ethnicity. We were specifically asked to explore the impact of selective education on identified groups of students, including those from different ethnic communities. However, the national value-added datasets do not include information about ethnicity, so we could explore only the data provided by SBC. For both key stage 2-3 and key stage 3-GCSE, residuals<sup>12</sup> for individual pupils were derived from the multilevel modelling described above. Mean residuals for different ethnic groups were then compared, within (a) the whole Slough sample, (b) Slough grammar schools and (c) Slough non-selective schools.
4028. The analysis did not produce any clear evidence that the selective system as such was having a differential impact on students of ethnic minority origin. However, it was interesting to note that, while Indian pupils in both types of school performed significantly better on all four GCSE outcomes than their white peers, this was true of Pakistani students in non-selective schools but not those in grammar schools.
4029. What the analysis did demonstrate very clearly was that the progress made by Asian students, particularly those of Indian origin, was generally well above average; since Slough has a high Asian population, this could be one reason for its overall good results.

### **4.3 Borderline Students**

4030. The evidence from the multilevel modelling contradicts the often expressed view that students of high academic ability benefit most from a grammar school education (see Sections 1.3.1 and 2.6.1). On the contrary, it suggests that the selective system advantages particularly the borderline students who

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<sup>12</sup> Residuals measure how far the performance of each pupil is above or below expectations based on their prior attainment and other known background variables.

just manage to obtain a place in grammar school, and correspondingly disadvantages the borderline students who narrowly fail the 11-plus test. It strongly contradicts the view that borderline children fare better as the top group in a non-selective school, rather than ‘struggling’ in a grammar school.

4031. In order to explore this topic further, borderline students were identified within the cohort which took key stage 3 tests in 1999. These are the current Year 11, for whom CAT scores were supplied by SBC. We could therefore isolate students with a borderline score of 100-110 (see Section 3.6). No such measure of underlying ability was available for young people in fully comprehensive LEAs, so we selected those with an average key stage 2 level of 4.0, which yielded a roughly equivalent group.

4032. We identified 181 borderline students in Slough, from two grammar schools and six non-selective schools.<sup>13</sup> (Most students with the highest CAT scores within the 100-110 range were in grammar schools, and most of those with the lowest scores were in non-selective schools, but there was considerable overlap throughout the range.) For these students, the difference in attainment at key stage 3 was heavily influenced by the type of school they attended. Table 4.3 shows the percentage of borderline students obtaining Level 6 or above in the core subjects, and as an average score.

**Table 4.3 Borderline students obtaining Level 6 or above at key stage 3**

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Slough Grammar Schools</b>	<b>Slough Non-Selective</b>	<b>Comprehensive LEAs</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Maths	93	45	57
English	93	45	35
Science	55	6	28
Average	65	10	19
<b>Number of students</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>64,637</b>

4033. Given that the students concerned are within the same ability band, the differences between the grammar school and non-selective school results are very striking. In science, only six per cent of the borderline students in non-selective schools managed to reach Level 6, while more than half of those in grammar schools did so. (This may help to explain why Slough GCSE science

<sup>13</sup> Data for other schools was not available, so the total number of borderline students in Slough would be considerably higher than 181.

results are below the national average – see Section 4.2.) For mathematics and English, the non-selective schools results are much better; in each case, 45 per cent of the borderline students gained Level 6 or above, but in grammar schools nearly all of the borderline students did so.

4034. The comparison with the national figures for comprehensive schools is only approximate, since, as noted above, a different criterion had to be used for identifying borderline students. This may help to explain why the English results appear to be better for non-selective students in Slough than for the national group; this is somewhat puzzling as it contradicts the findings of the multilevel modelling (see Section 4.2), although it should be noted that the latter involved a different cohort (those who took key stage 3 tests in 2000 rather than 1999).
4035. For mathematics and science, the figures in the table are in accordance with the findings of the multilevel modelling, i.e. that the attainment of borderline students in non-selective schools is well below that of students of similar ability in comprehensive schools, while that of grammar school students is far above. This analysis therefore confirms that the impact of the selective system in Slough is felt most keenly by the students in this ability band – to the great advantage of some, and the detriment of others.



## 5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5001. In this chapter we summarise the findings from all three strands of the project, and offer some suggestions for possible action based on the research.

### 5.1 Summary of Findings

5002. The main purpose of the project was to assess the impact **on performance** of the structure of education in Slough, i.e. the present selective system. We did this by examining the progress (in value-added terms) made by pupils between key stage 2 and key stage 3, and also between key stage 3 and GCSE.

#### GCSE

5003. The statistical analyses described in Section 4.2 show that, in value-added terms, after taking into account prior attainment (key stage 3 results) and other background variables, Slough GCSE results are better than those attained in comprehensive LEAs. Slough students obtain higher total point scores and average point scores; the differences are not great, but they are statistically significant.

5004. We should be wary, however, of assuming that this positive outcome is the direct result of selection, especially as the results differ from those obtained by Jesson, and by NFER in a similar analysis based on data from all selective LEAs (Schagen and Schagen, 2001). The Slough outcome may be influenced by other possibly significant factors which were not included in our models. For example, Slough has a high proportion of students from ethnic minority (particularly Asian) backgrounds, and an analysis of Slough data showed that they tend to perform better than white students. It is at least possible, therefore, that their presence may explain, or help to explain, why Slough's overall GCSE results are so good; unfortunately, we did not have the national data needed to carry out an analysis designed to test this hypothesis.

#### Key stage 3

5005. In the value-added key stage 2-3 analysis, the difference between Slough pupils and those in comprehensive LEAs was more marked. Moreover, NFER's analysis of national data confirms that selective LEAs have an overall advantage at this stage.

5006. The research project aimed to find evidence of the impact of selection on the performance of students of different levels of ability. It is worth considering also the impact which selection may have in other areas not directly related to performance.

### **5.1.1 Students of varying ability**

5007. The statistical analyses undertaken enabled us to compare the performance of Slough students with those in comprehensive schools elsewhere in the country; within the overlapping ability band, we were also able to directly compare the performance of Slough students in grammar and non-selective schools.

5008. The results showed that, contrary to some previous research and to opinions expressed by several interviewees, high-ability students in Slough grammar schools performed no better than students in comprehensive schools nationally. At the other end of the ability range, students in Slough non-selective schools appeared to perform slightly better than students in comprehensive schools.

5009. The impact of the selective system was felt most keenly, however, in what we have termed the 'borderline zone', i.e. the ability range in which there is an overlap between grammar schools and non-selective schools. In the borderline zone, students in Slough non-selective schools perform significantly worse than those in comprehensive schools, while those in Slough grammar schools perform very much better.

5010. The research thus completely contradicts the view expressed by some headteachers that young people in the borderline zone are more successful in non-selective schools (where they would be the top pupils) than in grammar schools, where they might struggle to compete with their more able peers. It accords rather with the alternative view that such young people need the challenge and encouragement which would result from mixing with high-ability students. There may also be practical problems, in that non-selective schools may not have enough high-ability students to be able to run courses leading to higher-tier GCSE papers, and this may prevent borderline students from achieving the highest grades.

### 5.1.2 The wider impact of selection

5011. The clear view of a majority of Slough headteachers is that the selective system in Slough – and specifically the selection process focusing on the 11-plus test – has an overwhelmingly negative impact on schools, families and in particular the children involved. The responses of Year 11 students to the questionnaire survey provided confirmatory evidence of some of these points.
5012. Headteachers felt that the 11-plus test had a negative impact on **primary schools** since:
- ♦ they were often under pressure to help prepare children for the test
  - ♦ children sometimes missed school in order to spend time with private tutors practising for the test
  - ♦ after the test results were published, teachers had to devote considerable time to counselling and supporting children who perceived themselves as failures
  - ♦ key stage 2 SATs were seen as relatively unimportant, and it could be hard to persuade the children to work for them
  - ♦ dealing with appeals took up a tremendous amount of time, and could pose a threat to home-school relations.
5013. Headteachers felt that **non-selective secondary schools** were also handicapped by the selective system because they had a disproportionate number of lower-ability children with special educational needs and/or behaviour problems; as a result, they often found it difficult to attract enough high-calibre teachers. Interestingly, Year 11 students also identified staff shortages as the biggest problem in their present schools.
5014. Primary headteachers reported that many **parents**, particularly Asian parents, were desperately keen to obtain grammar school places for their children. They therefore tended to enter them for the 11-plus test (even if the child concerned had no realistic expectation of passing), and in many cases paid large sums of money for private tutoring. Such attitudes naturally tended to put pressure on the children.
5015. Primary headteachers reported that many **pupils** felt nervous on the day of the test, as well as under a great deal of pressure. The unfamiliar surroundings, and the fact that the tests were taken on a single day, made matters worse. The impact of the test results on children who do not pass was described as

damaging, devastating and demoralising; children regarded themselves as failures, and their self-esteem suffered accordingly.

5016. Headteachers of non-selective secondary schools endorsed this view; they said that children arrived in their schools feeling second-rate, and the need for rebuilding self-esteem continued. Responses from Year 11 students who considered the 11-plus test unfair (about a quarter of those who had taken the test) reflected similar thinking: they referred to being nervous or under pressure, and did not think it was right that their future should depend on how they performed on just one day.
5017. Another key area for exploration was whether selection influenced the expectations and aspirations of young people. Analysis of responses to the Year 11 questionnaire showed that, even when ability and other factors were taken into account:
- ◆ grammar school students expected to obtain GCSE scores 11 points higher than their counterparts in non-selective schools
  - ◆ grammar school students were nearly twice as likely to plan to take a higher education course.
5018. Once again, it appeared that those most affected by selection were the borderline students. It was suggested, and seems reasonable to assume, that they would feel most keenly the disappointment of failing to secure a grammar school place, since (unlike lower-ability children who might be aware of their own limitations) they would have had high hopes of success. In terms of expectations, our analysis showed that, after allowing for ability within the borderline range, grammar school students in this group expected GCSE results almost 14 points higher than their non-selective school peers. They were also three times as likely to have plans for higher education. The findings suggest that action needs to be taken to help reduce these stark differentials.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

5019. Is there a case for changing the selective system in Slough? To crystallise yet further the findings from this research, we suggest that there are three key points to be considered:

- ♦ Slough's overall performance in value-added terms is above the national average. It cannot be assumed that this is due entirely to selection, since other factors (which we could not account for) may be involved; however, we have found no evidence to suggest that the performance results of Slough as a whole would improve under a comprehensive system.
- ♦ The research evidence does demonstrate clearly that some Slough children fare significantly better (in terms of achievements and aspirations) than they would do in comprehensive schools, while other children fare significantly worse. The divergence is particularly acute in the borderline zone, where pupils of similar abilities have very different outcomes, depending on the type of school attended.
- ♦ Almost all of the headteachers interviewed were very concerned about the pressure on children to succeed in the 11-plus test, and the devastating impact on their self-esteem if they failed.

5020. Whether a change to the present system is considered desirable will depend on the relative importance accorded to each of these three factors. But whatever view is taken, the fact remains that Slough does not have the power to abolish selection unless parents petition for a ballot and vote for change. Further, as we have noted in the report, a change to comprehensive education would not solve all of the problems discussed, certainly not in the short term.

5021. It seems therefore that it is important to consider what could be done, within the present system, to mitigate the most serious negative effects of selection, which (according to the research) are the low performance of borderline children in non-selective schools, and the poor self-esteem of those who fail the test.

### **5.2.1 Borderline children in non-selective schools**

5022. As we have seen, borderline children (those with CAT scores 100-110) may be allocated to grammar or non-selective schools. Within this group, there is a random element in the results, as the overlapping CAT scores confirm. Borderline children achieve highly (relative to national norms) if they manage to secure grammar school places. Those who fail to do so have to cope with tremendous disappointment and loss of self-esteem. Some may leave Slough and go to comprehensive schools in Windsor or Maidenhead; the borough thus loses a number of able young people with supportive parents. Other borderline children, who enter Slough non-selective schools, tend to have poor GCSE results (relative to their ability) and are much less likely to go on to higher education. What can be done to help these children?

5023. One obvious suggestion is that, since they would perform much better in grammar schools, they should be given places there. This could be achieved by increasing the number of grammar school admissions (or by reducing the number of children from outside Slough who are given places). However, with further thought it becomes obvious that this would not solve the problem – there would still be borderline children, wherever the borderline is located.
5024. A radical change which might help to some extent would be to reduce the number of non-selective schools in Slough. At present, these schools are relatively small. If two were combined (for example), the number of borderline children per school would increase. The proportion, of course, would stay the same, but the increase in absolute numbers might make it more feasible to run courses aimed at higher-ability students, and to create a ‘critical mass’ of students looking towards university.
5025. The alternative to this rather drastic option is to provide a special programme for the ‘gifted and talented’ pupils in non-selective schools. We recognise and share concerns about singling out certain pupils for special treatment, but in this particular case it seems that the children concerned deserve some compensatory intervention to ensure that they reach the level which they would be expected to achieve in a different kind of school. Identifying them as a particular group might also help to rebuild their self-esteem. Further, membership of the group could be fluid, rather than fixed ‘once and for all’ like allocation to a particular school.
5026. Opportunities provided for these young people could include special lessons in school time and activities after school or in the holidays. It seems right that at least some should take place in school time, to ensure that all the relevant children are able to participate.
5027. If advanced lessons were to be provided, it might be necessary either to do so for small groups (perhaps smaller than would usually be considered viable) or to run sessions jointly with another school. Both options would have funding implications. Joint sessions would require moving children between schools, which can be complex as well as costly; however, they would have the advantage of enabling students to meet other equally able young people, in a context of mutual challenge and encouragement.

5028. If the practical difficulties could be overcome, it might also be worth considering the possibility of small groups of students from non-selective schools visiting grammar schools for specific lessons or other activities. This would probably not be desirable in the early secondary years, since such visits might serve to reinforce the students' sense of frustration at not having obtained a place in the grammar school concerned. However, it could be useful at a later stage, since familiarity with the school and some of its pupils might encourage the students to consider transfer to the sixth form and then to university.

### **5.2.2 The impact of the test**

5029. Although the majority of headteachers were opposed to the principle of selection, they were particularly critical of the 11-plus test. They felt that current arrangements for the test put children under additional pressure; they were also concerned that the test measured only ability, not learning skills or application. Year 11 students made similar points. Further, headteachers noted that some parents spent large sums of money on private tutoring, which could have a negative impact on school attendance and tests, and might in a few cases distort the results of the 11-plus.

5030. In view of this, it is perhaps worth considering whether the 11-plus test is actually necessary. When asked whether 11-plus results matched their expectations, several primary headteachers remarked that they could, and did, predict accurately which children would pass. Could they not simply do so? Such a proposal would no doubt raise objections from both sectors. Primary headteachers might not want the responsibility (in the light of their comments, they would no doubt be under pressure from parents, and unpopular with those whose children were not recommended for grammar school entrance). Grammar school headteachers might feel that primary headteachers' judgements would be too subjective, and biased towards their own pupils.

5031. There are however arguments which make this suggestion worthy of serious consideration. To begin with, children are now routinely tested more than ever before. There are national tests, which all children take in Year 6; there are also nationally standardised tests which many primary schools use to monitor pupils' progress throughout the school. Primary headteachers can predict children's success or failure with some degree of confidence, because they have good, reliable evidence on which to base their judgements. They

could provide such evidence to support their recommendations; indeed, the grammar school headteachers could specify what kind of evidence they would take into account.

5032. It is true that the SAT results come very late in the school year, but teachers' predictions of levels could be used, subject if necessary to confirmation when the results became available. It was recently planned to trial such a scheme, offering places at one of the grammar schools to pupils from a feeder primary school who achieved at least two Level 5s and one Level 4 in the key stage 2 tests. We understand that the governors of the grammar school concerned withdrew from the scheme because they did not wish to be seen as giving preferential treatment to the children concerned, who therefore had to take the 11-plus test at a late date; but more passed under the 11-plus than would have been admitted under the pilot rules, so abolishing the test would not necessarily be an easy option.
5033. If grammar school entrance was based on a range of tests and/or reports, rather than three tests administered on a single day, children might be less nervous and less likely to consider the test unfair. If the tests used were part of the primary school curriculum, all children would be prepared for them in lesson time, and there should be fewer cases of children attaining grammar school places because of intensive coaching. The perceived need for private tutoring might be reduced, but even if it continued, the coaching would help pupils with their schoolwork instead of distracting them from it.
5034. If abolishing the 11-plus test is regarded as too radical for Slough, changes in the method of test administration might be considered. A majority of headteachers felt that the old system of taking the 11-plus (in primary schools on three separate occasions) was preferable, although a few were very reluctant to return to this system. Another possibility, which would help some children at least, would be to use the same test as Bucks, but to standardise the Slough sample separately.
5035. A final point to note is that, according to some primary headteachers, some parents are making a positive decision not to enter their children for the 11-plus test. The numbers in this category are small, and most of the parents concerned choose comprehensive schools in Windsor or Maidenhead as an alternative. However, one primary headteacher reported that a few of his



high-ability pupils were being sent to the local non-selective school, without taking the 11-plus test, because parents were beginning to appreciate the school's excellent qualities. This recalls comments from other primary headteachers, to the effect that parents are desperate to secure grammar school places for their children because the perception of local non-selective schools is very poor. Parents need to see the non-selective schools as a 'quality alternative' to grammar school provision; this will take time, but perhaps in some cases it is beginning to happen.



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## APPENDIX I: GLOSSARY OF STATISTICAL TERMS

- Factor analysis** Factor analysis is a technique which is widely used in dealing with large numbers of measurements made on different individuals or objects, when many of the measurements may be strongly correlated with each other. In factor analysis we attempt to define a smaller set of underlying factors which are related to the variables measured, and which explain or represent most of the correlation structure of the data. The set of factors we define in this way is not unique, and the final set used can be chosen according to a number of criteria. The process of finding the ‘best’ or simplest factor solution is known as factor rotation.
- Logistic regression** A form of *regression* in which the outcome of interest is binary, i.e. just takes two values – for example: passing an exam or not; going into further education or not; achieving five or more A\*-C grades at GCSE or not. A set of background variables can be used to predict the probabilities of the binary outcome, as in conventional regression analysis, but the interpretation of the coefficients is less straightforward.
- Mean** The conventional way of calculating the ‘average’ of a set of data values, by adding them up and dividing by the number of data values. Can be seriously affected by a few extreme data values (see *median*).
- Median** The central value in a set of data, such that half the cases lie below and half above that value. It is less affected by extreme values than the *mean* as a measure of the ‘average’ of a dataset.
- Multilevel modelling** Multilevel modelling is a recent development of linear *regression* which takes account of data which is grouped into similar clusters at different levels. For example, individual pupils are grouped into year groups or cohorts, and those cohorts are grouped within schools. There may be more in common between pupils within the same cohort than with other cohorts, and there may be elements of similarity between different cohorts in the same school. Multilevel modelling allows us to take account of this hierarchical structure of the data and produce more accurate predictions, as well as estimates of the differences between pupils, between cohorts, and between schools. (Multilevel modelling is also known as hierarchical linear modelling.)
- Regression analysis (linear)** This is a technique for finding a straight-line relationship which allows us to predict the values of some measure of interest (‘dependent variable’) given the values of one or more related measures. For example, we may wish to predict schools’ GCSE performance given some background factors, such as free school meals and school size (these are sometimes called ‘independent

variables'). When there are several background factors used, the technique is called multiple linear regression. If just a single background factor is used to predict, we have simple linear regression, and the results may be plotted as a straight line on a graph.

- Standard deviation** Standard deviation is a measure of the spread of some quantity within a group of individuals. If the quantity is distributed approximately normally, we would expect about 95 per cent of the individuals to be within two standard deviations either side of the mean value.
- Standard error** A measure of the uncertainty in the estimation of a statistical parameter. It is expressed as the *standard deviation* of the errors in the estimate, so that there is roughly a 95 per cent chance that the 'true' value lies within two standard errors either side of the estimate.
- Statistical significance** We say that there is a statistically significant difference between two groups in some quantity if the probability of that difference arising by chance is less than a preset value (in this report, taken as five per cent). Similarly, we say that there is a significant relationship between two variables if the observed results have a low probability of arising by chance, that is by random fluctuations when the two variables are really unrelated.

## **APPENDIX II: Multilevel Modelling**

### **Multilevel analysis of progress from key stage 2 to key stage 3, and key stage 3 to GCSE, for pupils in Slough schools, compared with those in comprehensive LEAs**

AII.10 Two national value-added datasets were used in this analysis: one of key stage 3 results in 2000 linked to key stage 2 performance in 1997; and the other of key stage 3 results in 1998 linked to GCSE performance in 2000. From these datasets, pupils were included in the analysis if they were either in Slough schools or in LEAs which included no selective schools (i.e. ‘comprehensive LEAs’). For the pupils in Slough, a distinction was made between those in grammar schools and non-selective schools.

#### **Key stage 3 models fitted and background variables**

AII.11 The key stage 3 outcomes investigated were:

- ◆ Average key stage 3 level achieved;
- ◆ Mathematics level achieved;
- ◆ English level achieved;
- ◆ Science level achieved.

AII.12 The pupil and school background variables used in the model to predict each of these key stage 3 outcomes were:

- ◆ Sex of pupil (girl v. boy);
- ◆ Age of pupil;
- ◆ Average level achieved at key stage 2 in maths, English and science;
- ◆ School percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals.

AII.13 In addition, pupils in Slough schools were allocated extra indicators which allowed the relationship between key stage 2 average level and key stage 3 outcome to vary from that fitted to the non-selective LEAs. This was done separately for grammar and non-selective school pupils.

AII.14 The multilevel model was fitted at three levels: LEA, school and pupil.

#### **Key stage 3 summary of results**

AII.15 For all four key stage 3 outcomes, the variance at each level was greatly reduced by fitting the background variables, by between 70% to 90% for LEAs and schools, and 46% to 65% for pupils. In other words, differences between LEAs, schools and pupils could be substantially explained by the above background factors.

AII.16 The girl/boy difference was significant for all outcomes, with boys outperforming girls in mathematics and science, and girls doing better than boys in English and average level, when other background variables were taken into account (including key stage 2 average level).

AII.17 All four outcomes were very strongly related to key stage 2 levels, and negatively to percentage eligible for free school meals (i.e. key stage 3 performance relative to key stage 2 tends to be reduced in schools with higher percentages eligible for free school meals).

AII.18 Of most interest to this research is the way in which the relationship between key stage 3 and key stage 2 for Slough schools differed from that in non-selective LEAs. This is illustrated in the four attached figures (Figures A2.1 to A2.4), one for each of the four outcomes.

AII.19 In general, pupils in Slough schools tend to have ‘flatter’ lines, with less differentiation between the extremes of the ability range. However, the lines for the two different school types tend to have the greatest separation for pupils around the range of key stage 2 values from level 4 to level 5. This is illustrated in Table A2.1 below, which gives expected key stage 3 outcomes for ‘average’ pupils with a nominal key stage 2 level of 4.5 in the three different systems.

**Table A2.1. Expected key stage 3 outcomes for pupils with key stage 2 average level = 4.5**

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Comprehensive LEAs</b>	<b>Slough Grammar Schools</b>	<b>Slough Non-Selective Schools</b>
Average level	5.8	6.3	5.6
Maths	6.2	6.7	5.9
English	5.6	6.1	5.5
Science	5.7	6.0	5.3



Figure A2.1: Average KS3 Level v. KS2: Slough Schools and Comprehensive LEAs

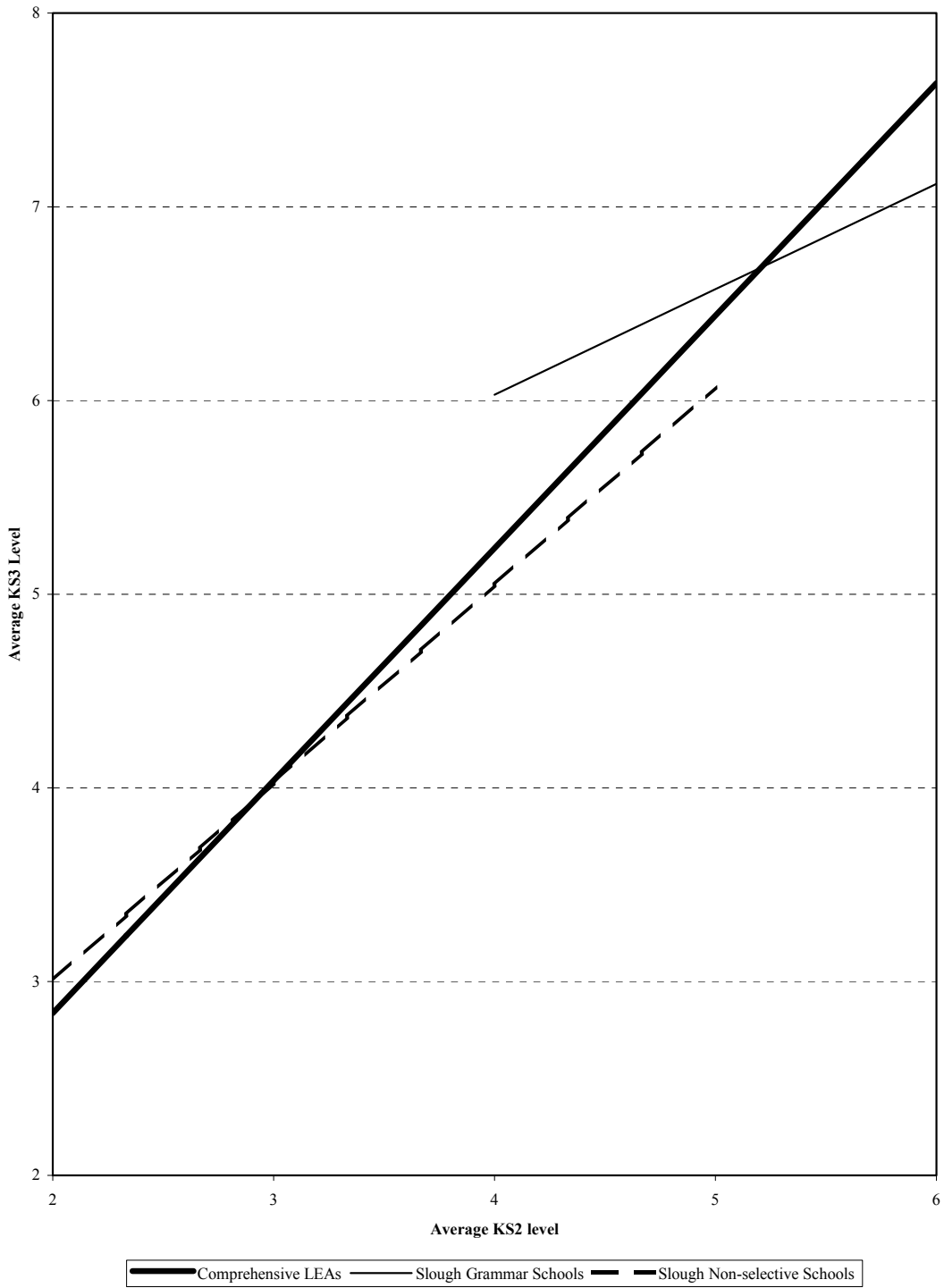


Figure A2.2: KS3 Maths Level v. KS2: Slough Schools and Comprehensive LEAs

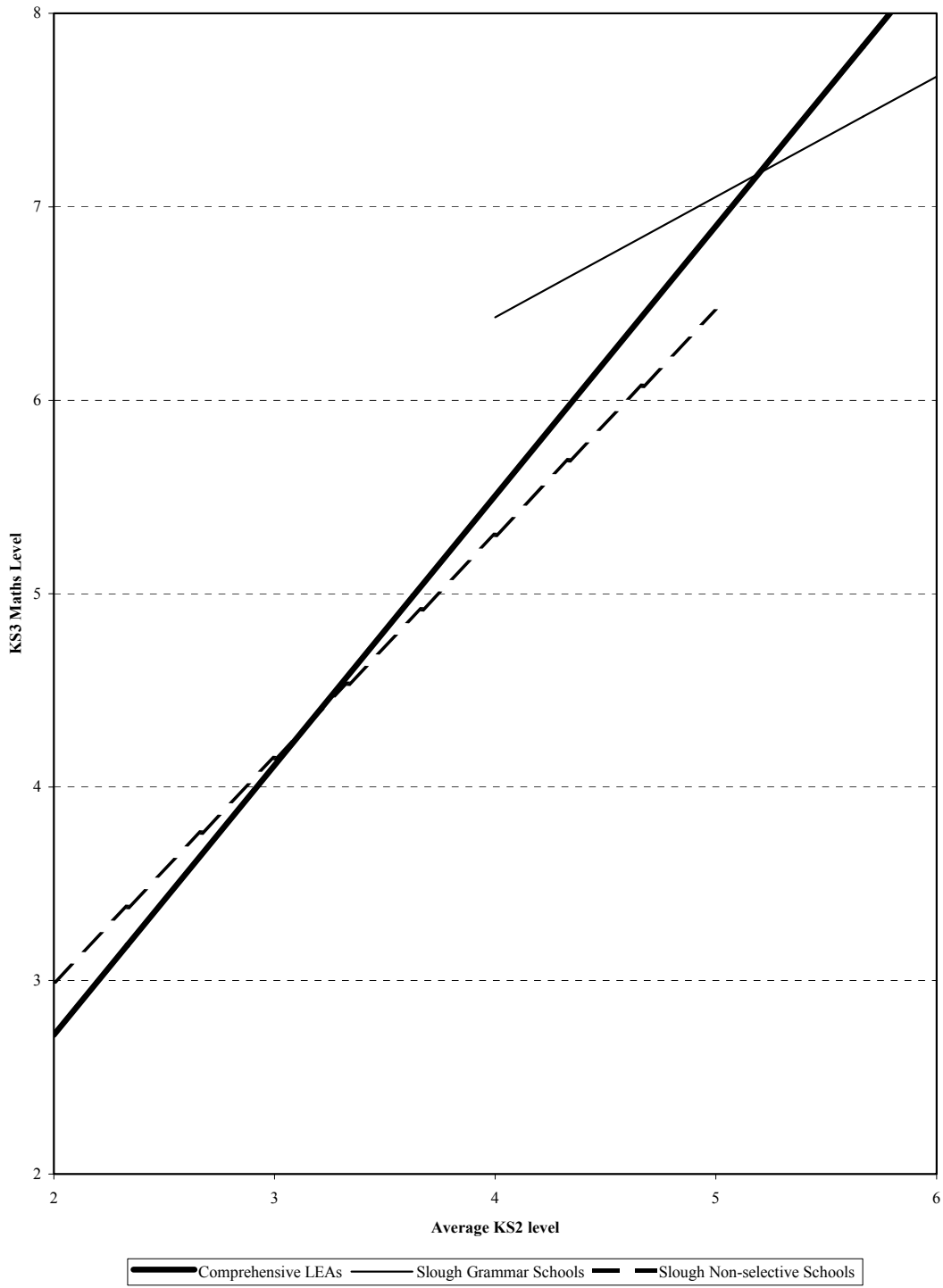


Figure A2.3: KS3 English Level v. KS2: Slough Schools and Comprehensive LEAs

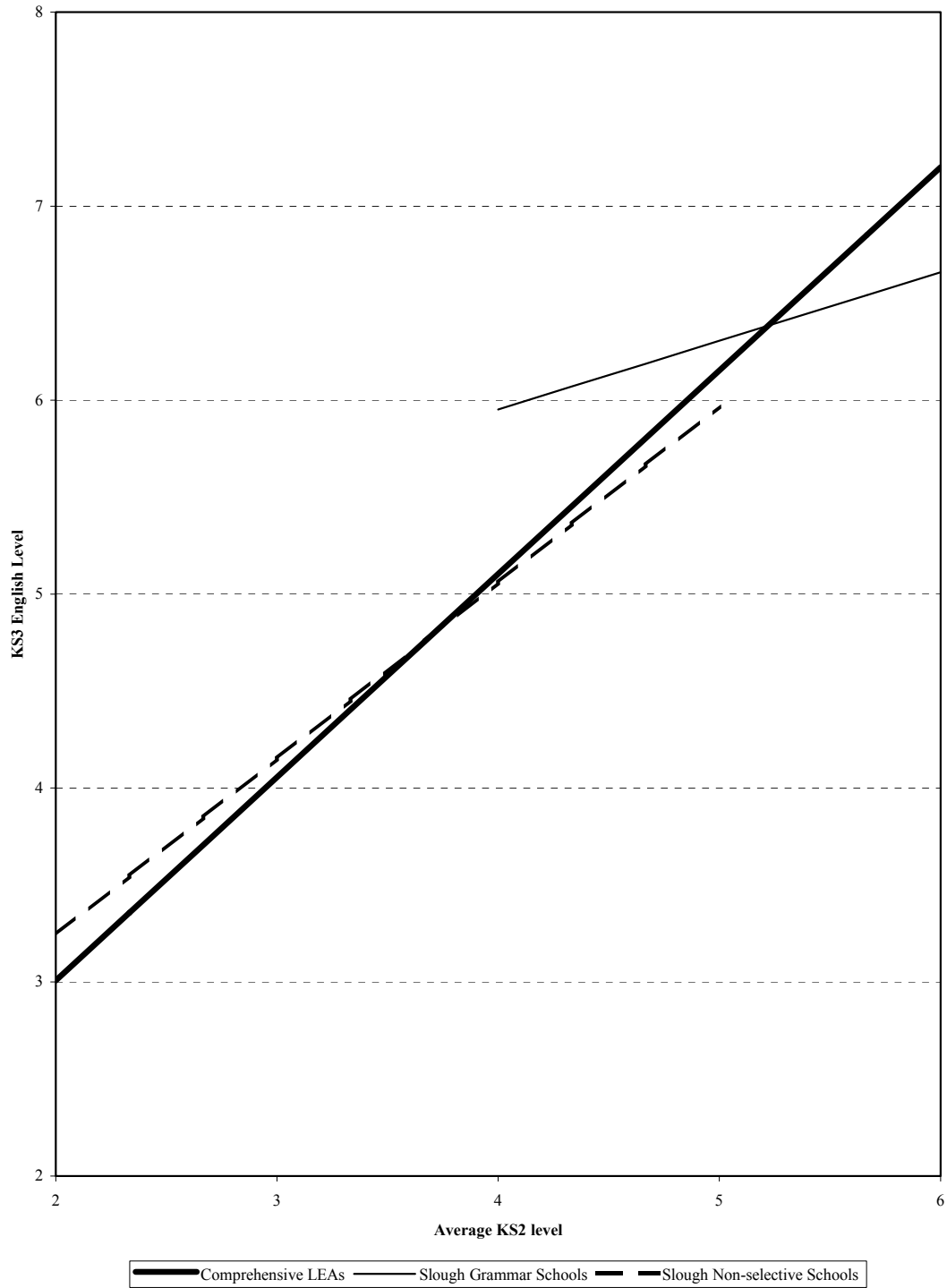
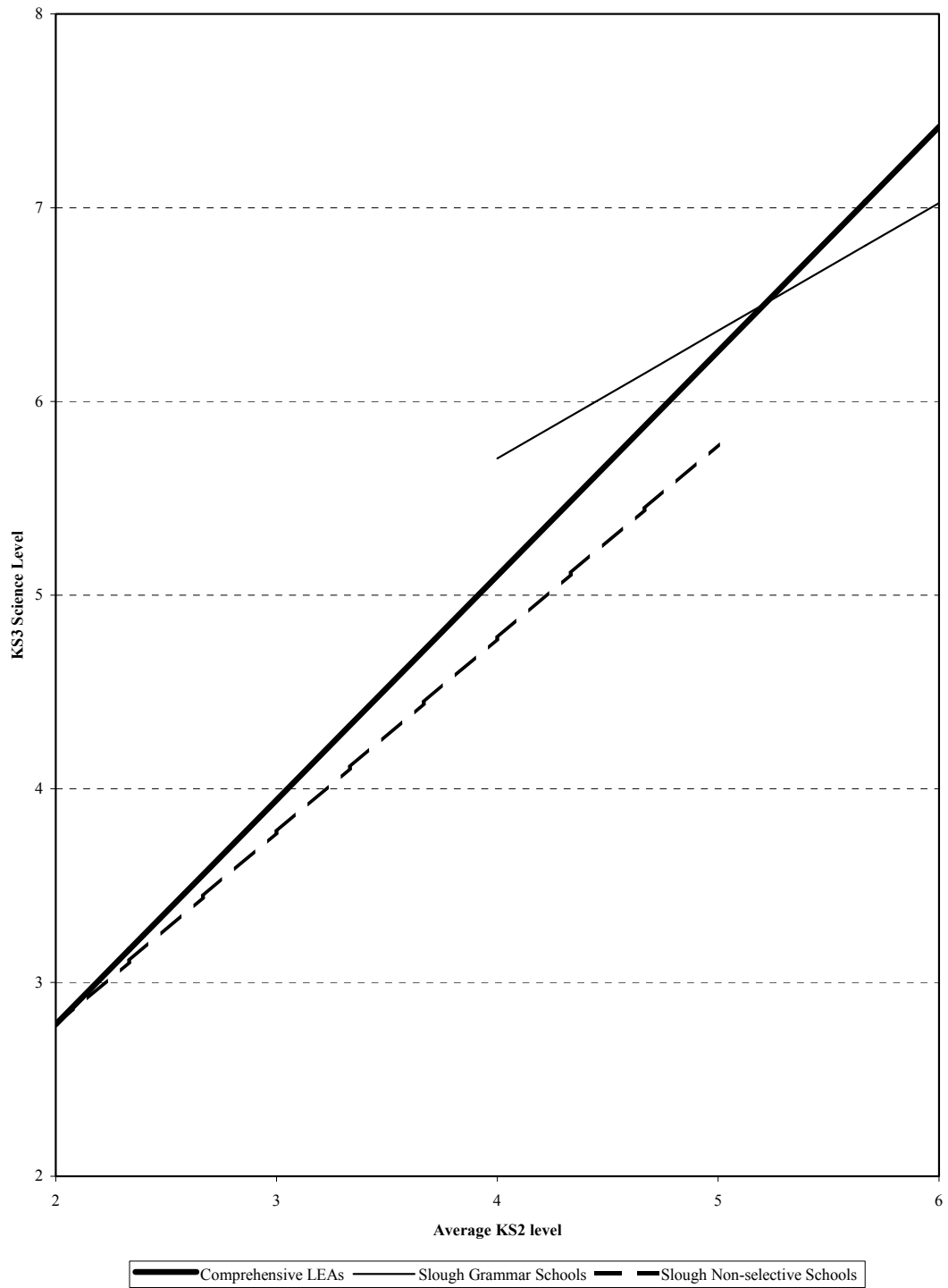


Figure A2.4: KS3 Science Level v. KS2: Slough Schools and Comprehensive LEAs



## GCSE models fitted and background variables

AII.20 The GCSE outcomes investigated were (based on a grades to point score conversion of A\* = 8, A = 7, down to G = 1):

- ◆ Total GCSE point score achieved;
- ◆ Average GCSE point score achieved;
- ◆ Mathematics point score achieved (0 if not taken);
- ◆ English point score achieved (0 if not taken).

AII.21 The pupil and school background variables used in the model to predict each of these GCSE outcomes were:

- ◆ Sex of pupil (girl v. boy);
- ◆ Average level achieved at key stage 3 in maths, English and science;
- ◆ School percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals.

AII.22 In addition, pupils in Slough schools were allocated extra indicators which allowed the relationship between key stage 3 average level and GCSE outcome to vary from that fitted to the non-selective LEAs. This was done separately for grammar and non-selective school pupils.

AII.23 The multilevel model was fitted at three levels: LEA, school and pupil.

## Summary of results

AII.24 For all four GCSE outcomes, the variance at each level was greatly reduced by fitting the background variables, by about 70% or 80%. In other words, differences between LEAs, schools and pupils could be substantially explained by these three background factors.

AII.25 The girl/boy difference was significant for all outcomes, with boys outperforming girls in mathematics and girls doing better than boys in the other three outcomes, when other background variables were taken into account (key stage 3 level and free school meals).

AII.26 All four outcomes were very strongly related to key stage 3 levels, and negatively to percentage eligible for free school meals (i.e. GCSE performance relative to key stage 3 tends to be reduced in schools with higher percentages eligible for free school meals).

AII.27 Of most interest to this research is the way in which the relationship between GCSE and key stage 3 for Slough schools differed from that in comprehensive LEAs. This is illustrated in the four attached figures (Figures A2.5 to A2.8), one for each of the four outcomes.

AII.28 In general, pupils in Slough schools tend to have ‘flatter’ lines, with less differentiation between the extremes of the ability range. However, the lines for the two different school types tend to have the greatest separation for

pupils around the range of key stage 3 values from level 5 to level 6. This is illustrated in Table A2.2 below, which gives expected GCSE outcomes for ‘average’ pupils with a nominal key stage 3 level of 5.5 in the three different systems.

**Table A2.2. Expected GCSE outcomes for pupils with key stage 3 average level = 5.5**

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Comprehensive LEAs</b>	<b>Slough Grammar Schools</b>	<b>Slough Non-Selective Schools</b>
Total score	47.1	47.9	45.7
Average score	4.9	5.2	4.8
Maths	4.8	5.6	4.8
English	5.1	5.5	5.0

Figure A2.5: Total GCSE Score v. KS3: Slough Schools and Comprehensive LEAs

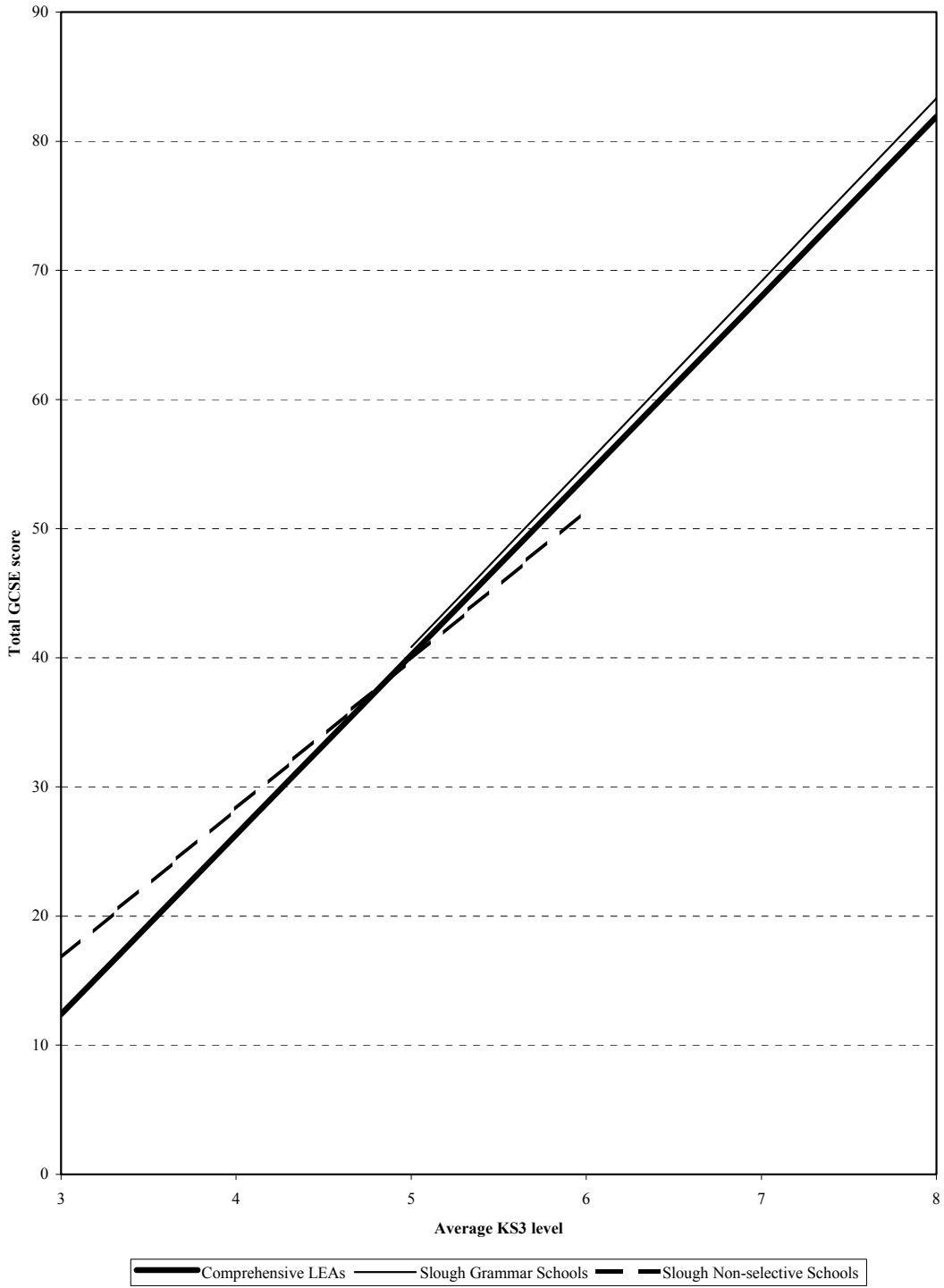


Figure A2.6: Average GCSE Score v. KS3: Slough Schools and Comprehensive LEAs

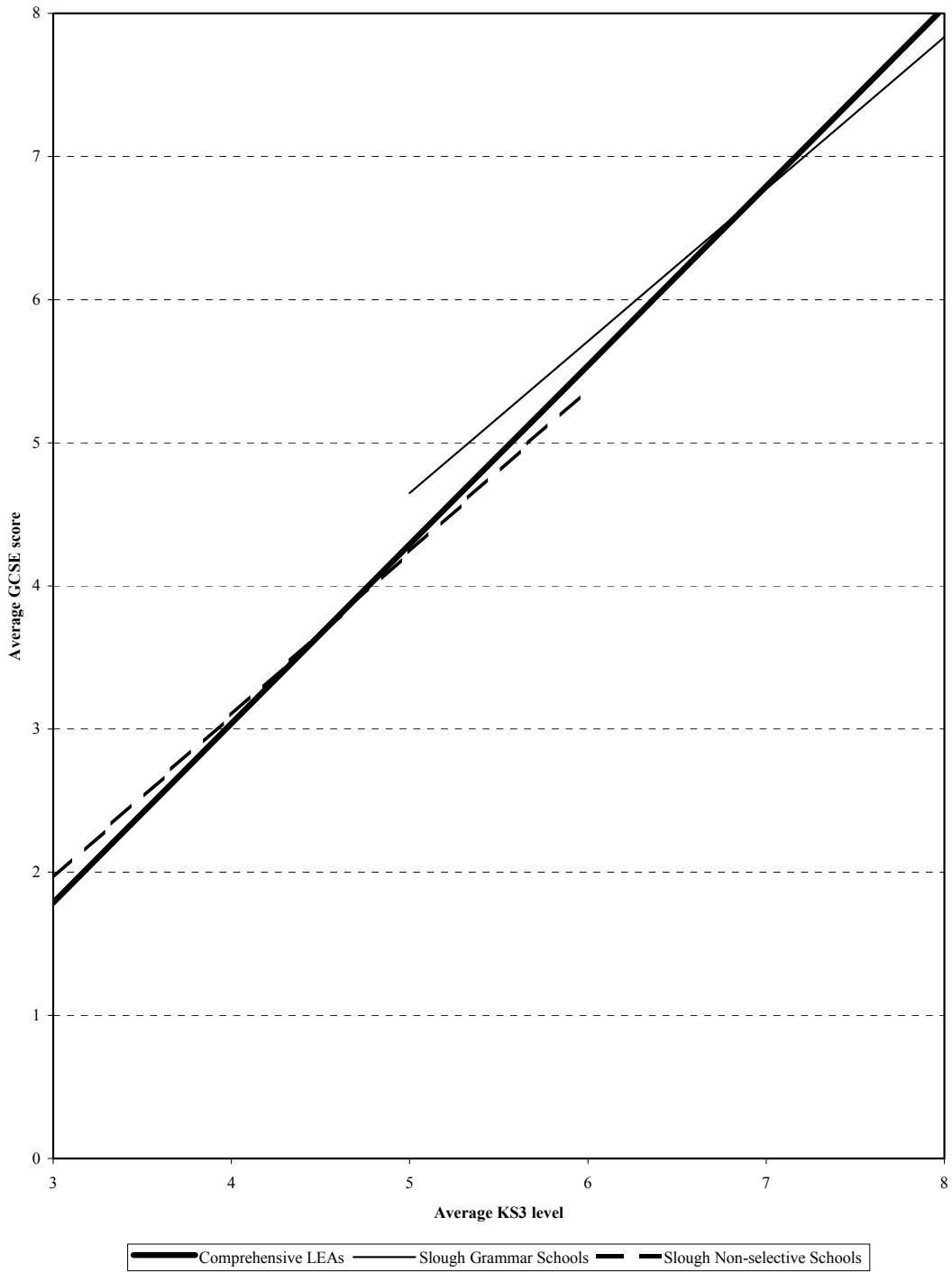




Figure A2.7: Mathematics GCSE Score v. KS3: Slough Schools and Comprehensive LEAs

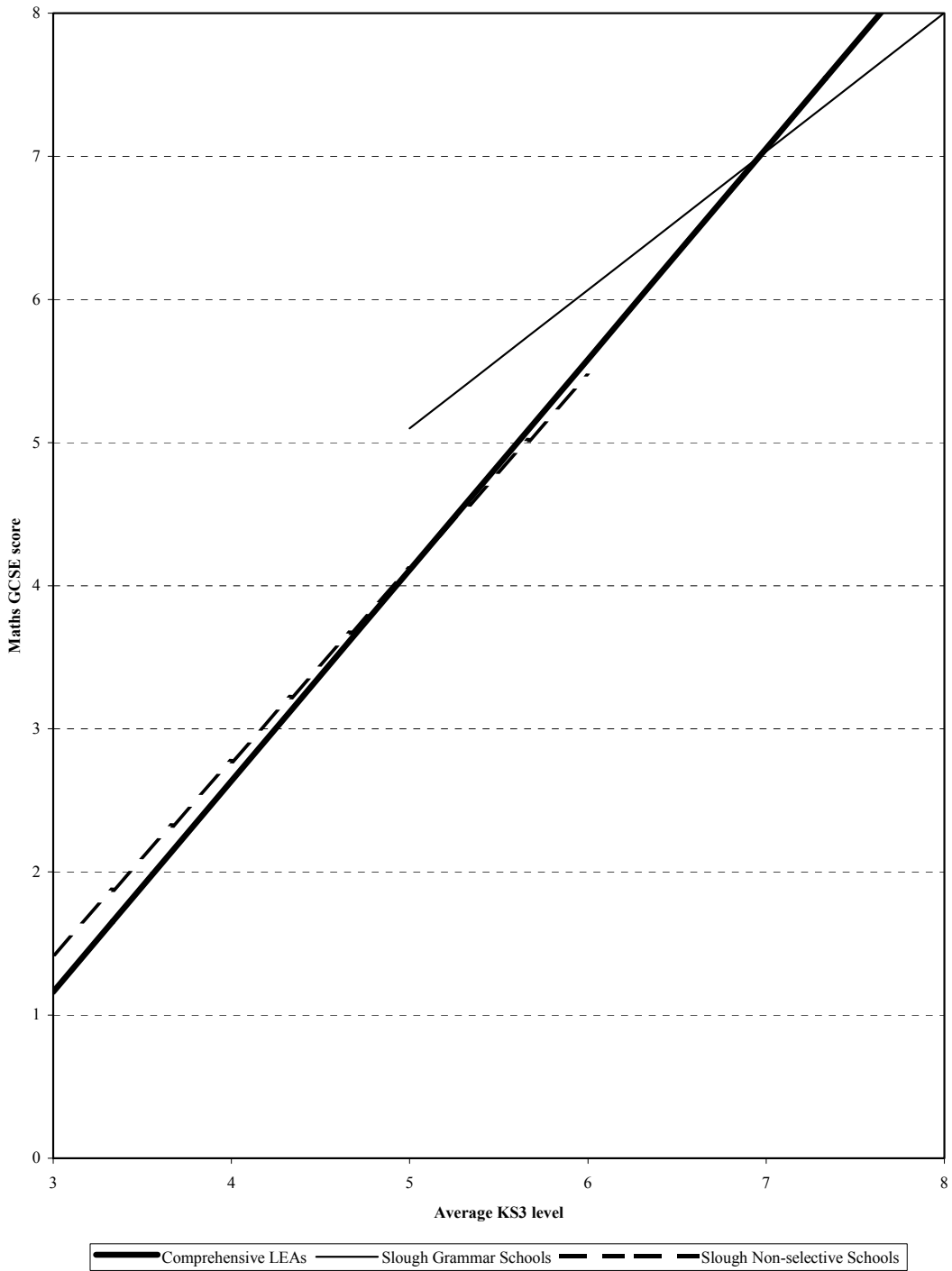


Figure A2.8: English GCSE Score v. KS3: Slough Schools and Comprehensive LEAs

