

## Briefing Paper: Parents

Writing in the late 1950s, Jean Floud observed that ‘there has undoubtedly been a post-war revolution in parents’ attitudes towards their children’s education, especially at the bottom of the social scale’.<sup>1</sup> This observation, marginalized by policy makers and schools at the time and underplayed in the secondary literature since, is crucial to understanding the shape and pace of educational reform after 1945. Across all social classes parents expressed rising expectations for their children’s educational prospects, often pushing hard against the limitations imposed by the structures of the tripartite and comprehensive systems. While the 1944 Act reiterated LEAs’ responsibility to organize and manage schools and made clear parents’ duty to ensure their child completed the now mandatory course of secondary education, it also stated their right to have their child ‘educated in accordance with their wishes’.<sup>2</sup> Over the following decades the gap between parental rights and responsibilities became a mounting source of tension; parents’ efforts to secure access to their preferred secondary school or play a more active role in shaping their children’s education often ran-up against schools and LEAs’ prevailing assumption that parental authority should be surrendered at the school gate.<sup>3</sup>

David Bridges has outlined how since the 1960s politicians, commentators, and academics have depicted parents in a variety of guises when trying to define their relationship to the institutions of state education at both a local and national level. Although warning against an overly teleological narrative hinging on a Thatcherite neo-liberal revolution, Bridges identifies distinct phases in which parents filled different possible roles: parents as puzzled bystanders (c. 1950-65), parents as supporters (c. 1965-77), to parents as partners (c. 1977-80), and after 1980 as governors, co-educators, and ultimately consumers.<sup>4</sup> While ‘parent power’ has frequently been associated with the marketization of the education system since the 1980s, framing this solely as a product or invention of Thatcherite policy alone belies the longer, complicated history of parents’ efforts to secure more direction over the course of their children’s education.<sup>5</sup> One of the key questions the project should seek to address is how parents came to exercise greater influence over their children’s education: how did this function at a local and national level; in what ways did parents make their wishes and expectations known, both individually and as a group; how did collective action and individual priorities connect; and how can we expose the fractures that ran across this group and which are so often obscured in broad reference to ‘parental interest’?

In moving beyond the language used by policy makers when talking about parents as an abstract, and largely passive, group to be deployed in support of a variety of ideological agendas, Peter Mandler has recaptured the democratic discourse that sat at the heart of postwar education. His stress on parents and pupils’ rising educational expectations, and increasing assertiveness in making claims upon the state, reveals how the impulse for reform frequently emanated from below rather than in the corridors of Whitehall.<sup>6</sup> Inevitably, parents’ demands were circumscribed by the dynamics of individual

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Floud, A. H. Halsey, & F. M. Martin, *Social class and educational opportunity* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., London), p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> *Education Act 1944*, II:36-39 & IV:76: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/7-8/31/contents/enacted>

<sup>3</sup> David Bridges, ‘Government’s construction of the relation between parents and schools in the upbringing of children in England: 1963-2009’, *Educational Theory*, 60:3 (2010), 299-324, p. 301. Bridges observes that at least one primary school took this literally by placing a line and notice at the gate that read ‘No parents beyond this point’.

<sup>4</sup> David Bridges, ‘Parents: customers or partners?’, in David Bridges & Terence H. McLaughlin (eds.), *Education and the market place* (London: Falmer Press, 1994), 65-79, pp. 65-76.

<sup>5</sup> For this framing see for example, Stephen Ball, *The education debate*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Bristol: Policy Press, 2008), pp.101-10; CCCS, *Unpopular education: schooling and social democracy in England since 1944* (London: Hutchinson, 1981); cf. Richard Aldrich, Dennis Dean, & Peter Gordon, *Education and Policy in England in the Twentieth Century* (London: Woburn Press, 1991), pp. 97-98.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Mandler, ‘Educating the Nation I: schools’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 24 (2014), 5 - 28.

circumstance, social class, gender, age, ethnicity, and locale. This makes it, rightly, difficult to generalize about parental opinion (although rarely sufficient to inhibit policy makers and commentators). Yet, as Matthew Hilton has shown for consumerism more broadly, understanding how contradictory and competing individualist and social democratic traditions could at the same time inform divergent conceptions of modern citizenship reveals a more fretful intellectual and cultural atmosphere than found in accounts built upon an assumption of postwar consensus.<sup>7</sup> In this light, understanding better how parents operated simultaneously as individuals guarding the interests of their children but also came to understand themselves as part of wider constituencies with the capacity to initiate (or inhibit) change through collective action offers important new insight into the intersecting currents of individualism and collectivism after 1945.<sup>8</sup> From at least the 1960s onwards, parents across the educational and political spectrum exhibited attitudes and behaviours suggestive of forms of ‘popular individualism’ that were temporally and spatially distinct from Thatcherism but which constituted one essential force in the breakdown of the postwar settlement.<sup>9</sup> Moving forward our project has the potential to show, in ways not yet satisfactorily accounted for in the wider literature, the ways in which ‘parents’ acted as crucial agents in the democratization of education in Britain, made integral contributions to structuring popular ideas of citizenship, but also provided impetus for more ‘neo-liberal’ impulses to take root.

Somewhat surprisingly the relationship between parent and school has not formed a central component in either the flourishing field of the history of the family in modern Britain or within the History of Education more broadly. Important exceptions do buck this trend. Amongst the former, Angela Davis and Laura King both offer revealing insights into the gendered dynamics of decision making around children’s education in their respective wider studies of motherhood and fatherhood.<sup>10</sup> Education forms a central element in Richard Hall’s doctoral research which promises rich new insights into the intergenerational emotional relationships between father and sons.<sup>11</sup> And, although her focus falls predominantly on primary rather than secondary education, Laura Tisdall’s examination of the influence of child development theories on progressive education offers a valuable new appraisal of parents’ reflexive relationship to changing classroom practice.<sup>12</sup> Of late, historians of education have tended to concentrate more on illuminating the inner workings of the classroom ‘black box’ as opposed to relationships between school and home. Even so, works by Brian Simon, David Bridges, and, more recently, Selina Todd provide important historical assessments of parents’ influence over educational reform and experience.

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain: the search for a historical movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 268.

<sup>8</sup> Although schools don’t feature in his monograph, Chris Moores’ recent work on civil liberties offers an interesting point of comparison for the types of behaviour and attitudes shown by parents during this period, Chris Moores, *Civil Liberties and Human Rights in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); cf. Geoff Whitty, ‘School autonomy and parental choice: consumer rights versus citizen rights in education policy in education policy in Britain’, in David Bridges (ed.), *Education, autonomy and democratic citizenship: philosophy in a changing world* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002) 87-97.

<sup>9</sup> Emily Robinson, Camilla Schofield, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, & Natalie Thomlinson, ‘Telling Stories about Post-war Britain: Popular Individualism and the “Crisis” of the 1970s’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 28:2 (2017), 268–304; See also, Chris Moores, ‘Thatcher’s troops? Neighbourhood Watch schemes and the search for “ordinary” Thatcherism in 1980s Britain’, *Contemporary British History*, 31:2 (2017), 230-55, p. 233.

<sup>10</sup> Angela Davis, *Modern motherhood: women and family in England, 1945–2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp. 56-84 & 159-64; Laura King, *Family men: fatherhood and masculinity in Britain, 1914-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 60-64.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Hall, “‘Education, education, education’: Experiences of Fathers and Sons in Britain, 1945-1974’, paper given to the Modern Cultural History Seminar, University of Cambridge, February 2018. We are grateful to Richard for sharing an unpublished version of this paper with us.

<sup>12</sup> Laura Tisdall, ‘Education, parenting and concepts of childhood in England, c. 1945 to c. 1979’, *Contemporary British History*, 31:1 (2017), 24-46.

Largely, however, this area has remained the preserve of sociologists and educationists, whose work often lacks a developed historical perspective or else deploys quantitative approaches that can conflate correlation for causation.<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that this material, particularly that produced across the mid-twentieth century, isn't of immense value. The research carried out by quantitative and qualitative sociologists from the 1950s onwards forms the basis of much of what follows and is discussed below. This paper opens with a chronological survey of how parents appeared in, and contributed to, debates around educational reform in the post-war period, before moving onto to examine in more detail what parents wanted expanded secondary education to offer their children and, finally, the ways in which they sought to realise these ambitions.

### Parents and the politics of Educational Reform

A majority of parents across all classes enthusiastically supported the expansion of secondary education. Working class parents appeared especially eager to take advantage of the expanded career opportunities mass secondary education seemed to promise.<sup>14</sup> Even so, openings for parents to become actively involved in school life were limited in the immediate aftermath of the war. Perhaps because of the constraints of their own education or through an instinctive deference to school authority and expertise, parents found it hard to challenge schools' decisions regarding their children's progress.<sup>15</sup> Where acknowledgement of parents' rights did occur, it tended to be in relation to private schools. In a foretaste of future priorities for all, a parental right to choice was stressed: a parent's right to choose to educate their child outside of the state system, their right to deploy their wealth to purchase educational opportunity, or to choose boarding or single sex schools.<sup>16</sup> The Fleming Report praised the parent-teacher relations that existed in private schools and the mutually beneficial role these played 'so that the school can be said to educate the parents, the home can equally be said to help the masters and mistresses to understand their pupil's individual problems'.<sup>17</sup> Beyond this narrow elite, however, schools and commentators assumed that parents' primary role was to support the school in imposing discipline and respect for its institutional values. If the link between school and home was to be strengthened in the age of mass secondary education, so the dominant message went, it would be to better educate ill-prepared parents in their responsibilities to the school, not the other way around.<sup>18</sup> For, as the Underwood Report on 'Maladjusted Children' made clear: '[T]he maladjusted child of yesterday can be the maladjusted parent of today, and his offspring the maladjusted children of tomorrow.'<sup>19</sup>

Nonetheless, by the mid-1950s it was becoming clear that many parents were increasingly dissatisfied with such a passive role. Tensions could flare around who should decide whether a child sat the 11-plus, with parents showing themselves unwilling to be dictated to by schools. As shall be discussed below, most parents aspired to a grammar school education for their children and when schools attempted to limit access to the 11-plus parents were quick to resist. For example, in 1954, in

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Gorard, Beng Huat See & Peter Davies, *The impact of attitudes and aspirations on educational attainment and participation*, review for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2012):

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/education-young-people-parents-full.pdf>  
<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/education/projects/causality-appendices.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Brian Simon, *Education and the social order 1940-1990*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1999), p. 102.

<sup>15</sup> This point was speculated on in many of the major studies and surveys that appeared across the period and which are cited below.

<sup>16</sup> Nicholas Hillman 'Public schools and the Fleming report of 1944: shunting the first-class carriage on to an immense siding?', *History of Education*, 41:2 (2012), 235-255.

<sup>17</sup> Board of Education, *The public schools and the general educational system* [Fleming Report] (London: H.M.S.O., 1944), p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> See for instance, Cicely M. Craven & Holroyd F. Chambers, 'Parents and The State: postwar increase in juvenile crime', *Times*, 7 December 1948, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Report of the Committee on Maladjusted Children* [Underwood Report] (London: H.M.S.O., 1955), p. 4.

Nottingham, where the 11-plus was not compulsory, 4,400 primary pupils might compete for 447 grammar places. Subsequently, headteachers reserved the right to decide who sat the exam, entering only the 1,321 they judged competitive. Parents of excluded children responded by demanding their legal right to a trial exam to establish whether their child was up to standard. This backlash forced headteachers to enter a further 1,395 pupils for the 11-plus, meaning that ultimately 2,716 pupils competed for under 500 places. Brian Simon sensitively observes ‘What this meant in terms of human frustration to both parents and children is easy to imagine, less easy to express’;<sup>20</sup> but it is also worth emphasizing *what* parents’ refusal to let headteachers make unilateral decisions about their children’s education reveals about the value attached to secondary education and their preparedness, even at this early stage, to challenge school authority on key issues.

Opportunity for interaction between home and school also expanded in less confrontational ways during this decade. Parent-Teacher Associations and Parent Associations grew rapidly in number after 1945 (although it was not until the 1970s that a majority of schools had one).<sup>21</sup> They signalled to a rising appetite for parental involvement in school life and desire for better channels of communication between school and home.<sup>22</sup> By the mid-1950s there were several hundred associations operating across the country, often joining together in local networks to distribute newsletters and coordinate local initiatives.<sup>23</sup> In 1956, 300 representatives from the local branches formed The National Federation of Parent Teacher Associations, which began operations the following year.<sup>24</sup> More radical voices saw potential in PTAs to provide a genuine forum through which parents could demand greater accountability from schools to remedy everyday frustrations of school life, such as the high cost of uniform, and also lobby government for smaller class sizes, better buildings, and improved facilities.<sup>25</sup>

Despite initial worries in the Ministry of Education that PTAs might compromise the authority of the school this rarely came to pass before the 1970s and the relationship between the NFPTA and government never justified David Eccles’ grumble that ‘it should have been stamped at birth’.<sup>26</sup> While the NFPTA provided a collective voice for PTAs, producing a twice-yearly bulletin and developing links to government, it is unlikely that it represented the full spectrum of parental opinion. Membership tended to be dominated by middle class parents who were broadly sympathetic and supportive of their school’s institutional ethos and outlook.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, one of the founding objectives of NFPTA was to provide a link between school and home that could educate parents in their duties and responsibilities to schools. Its newsletters incorporated articles written by teachers, union members, and parents explaining, amongst other things, the importance of discipline in school, disseminating theories of child development and the role of the parent in supporting this, and the best way to organize fundraising or social activities. Admittance was denied to any Parent Association that did not have the support of the school’s headmaster and an endorsement of the school’s authority in the classroom was explicitly stated. Parents from marginalized communities could find this conformity unappealing and unhelpful.

<sup>20</sup> Simon, *Education and the social order*, pp. 150-51.

<sup>21</sup> John Bynner, *Parents’ attitudes to education* (London: H.M.S.O., 1972), p. 25.

<sup>22</sup> Mary Morris, *Voluntary Work in the Welfare State* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), pp. 97-99

<sup>23</sup> Nottinghamshire’s Federation of Parent-Teacher Associations was the first to produce a newsletter, entitled *Parents’ Bulletin*. This provided the template for the national version.

<sup>24</sup> National Parent Teacher Association minutes of the inaugural meeting: Objects, and Constitution of the National Federation of Parent Teacher Associations, 9 June 1956. The National Archives [TNA] ED 147/652.

<sup>25</sup> *Report of the Thirty-Seventh National Conference of Labour Women* (London: The Labour Party, 1960), p. 47; ‘Talk of the Town’, *Worthing Herald*, 9 March 1956, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Department of Education memo, 28 December 1956, TNA/ED 147/652.

<sup>27</sup> Caroline Benn & Brian Simon, *Halfway there: report on the British comprehensive school reform*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp. 380-82; This point holds true throughout the late twentieth century and its implications for a sense of collective, community identity are explored in Gaynor Bagnall, Brian Longhurst and Mike Savage, ‘Children, belonging and social capital: The PTA and middle class narratives of social involvement in the North-West of England’, *Sociological Research Online*, 8:4 (2003):

<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/8/4/bagnall.html>

Reporting in the early 1980s, the Rampton Report recorded Caribbean parents' reluctance to become involved with PTAs because of a concentration on fundraising over more substantive educational matters.<sup>28</sup> NCDS' school age sweeps found that only around 17% of primary schools had PTAs in the mid-1960s and that this varied significantly across the country. In the north of England only 12% of participants were at schools with a PTA, compared to 30% in southern England, and that this tended to correlate with class background.<sup>29</sup> Growing demand for greater parental involvement during this decade and an increasingly supportive stance from government and schools meant numbers quickly swelled. In 1967 NFPTA counted over 74,000 families amongst its membership and by NCDS' Age-16 sweep (1974), 63% of secondary schools had a PTA.<sup>30</sup> Moving forward it would be worth the project focussing on the changing role and outlook of PTAs as they receive very limited coverage in the existing literature.

If PTAs offered most parents only limited opportunity for largely passive involvement in school life, how else did they seek to participate in more active ways? Before the mid-1960s parental influence remained largely excluded from the management, organization, and running of schools. Few LEAs supported the creation of boards of governors for individual schools, preferring instead to centralise control. Where these did exist, parents were seldomly included. Many schools still actively discouraged parents from involving themselves in the inner workings of the classroom (although there were signs that some were revising this attitude).<sup>31</sup> School feedback to NCDS showed that few offered opportunities for contact beyond an annual parents evening, speech or sports day to involve parents, with some headteachers responding with consternation to the question: does the school made provision for parents to observe lessons? Responses to the Plowden survey and its 1968 follow-up suggested that while most parents were broadly satisfied (or at least not disappointed) by their children's schooling, amongst those whose children attended secondary moderns and comprehensives there was a strong desire for greater parental involvement and better communication from the school.<sup>32</sup> Limited exchange between school and home often affected working class students most damagingly. Jackson and Marsden found working class grammar pupils (and particularly girls) were less likely to be kept informed regarding scholarship opportunities or on the university application process, which left several very able students unable to proceed onto higher education.<sup>33</sup> Non-white parents, similarly, often felt the worst effects of poor communication. Before the 1980s, schools offered them little opportunity to challenge decisions to place their children in the lowest streams, left them unaware as how to navigate the examinations process, and failed to provide sufficient support to help families adapting to new cultural expectations.<sup>34</sup> Rising expectations were clearly charted by opinion polls taken during the late-1950s and 60s. These showed a steady rise in support for PTAs and preparedness to assert a parent's right to joint responsibility with the school for their children's education. A 1959 Gallup Poll, for example, showed that 65% of respondents supported the work of PTAs, while in a similar poll taken nearly a decade later, support for PTAs had risen to 72%. In a follow-up question 65% of respondents stated that parents had as much concern as teachers for their children's education (compared to 12% who said education should be left entirely to teachers, 16% mainly to teachers, and 7% who didn't know).<sup>35</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Education, *West Indian children in our schools* [Rampton Report] (London: H.M.S.O., 1981), p. 42: <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/rampton/rampton1981.html>

<sup>29</sup> Ronald Davie, Neville Butler & Harvey Goldstein, *From birth to seven: the second report of the National Child Development Study* (London: Longman, 1972), pp. 134-35.

<sup>30</sup> 'Plowden boost for PTAs', *Times*, 14 August 1967, p. 9; Ken Fogelman (ed.), *Britain's 16 year olds* (Coventry: Northbourne Press Group, 1976), p. 42.

<sup>31</sup> David Bridges, 'Government's construction of the relation between parents and schools', p. 301.

<sup>32</sup> Bynner, *Parental attitudes*, pp. 27-28; *Taylor Report*, p. 9

<sup>33</sup> Brian Jackson & Dennis Marsden, *Education and the working class* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), pp. 158-62.

<sup>34</sup> Ministry of Education, *Education for all* [Swann Report] (London: H.M.S.O., 1985), p. 343.

<sup>35</sup> 'Gallup Poll: Education, February 1968', George H. Gallup, *The Gallup International public opinion polls: Great Britain 1937-1975*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Random House, 1976), p. 970.

All three of the high-profile government committees on state education that sat during this decade endorsed parents' rising expectations of schools but at the same time sought to contain their capacity to initiate change within strictly delineated bounds. Crowther (1959), Newsom (1963), and Plowden (1967) all stressed the need for government, LEAs, and schools to be more attentive to parental opinion.<sup>36</sup> Although Crowther and Plowden both commissioned extensive surveys of parental attitudes, all three relied heavily on testimonies from headteachers and LEAs to gauge relations between home and school. This meant that while parents garnered attention, the schools remained the interlocutor through which parental interests were interpreted, most often at an aggregate level ('middle class parents', 'working class parents', or just 'parents'). Published in 1959, the Crowther Report observed the 'strength of pressures, coming from pupils and parents themselves' for expanded access to public examinations and post-15 education. Contrary to those who blamed working class intransigence for early leaving rates amongst secondary modern pupils, the report's survey data made clear that lack of opportunity not demand had most effect in this regard.<sup>37</sup> As opportunities to work towards formal leaving qualifications expanded amongst Secondary Moderns, so parents of all classes became more invested in the education process; parents now requested higher levels of homework to push their children forward and rates of staying on increased as they realised the long term advantages Sixth Form could bring.<sup>38</sup> Crowther did not concern itself, however, with how parents and schools interacted on a day-to-day level and it was assumed that expanded provision would be sufficient to address parents' frustrations.

Building on Crowther's demand that more be done to understand and cater to parents' ambitions, the Newsom Report took this reasoning further by connecting parental dissatisfaction and early leaving with wider economic malaise.<sup>39</sup> Better communication was required between schools and parents, the report stressed, as well as efforts to support socially disadvantaged parents to help their children through school. Even so, the tenor of the criticisms reflected the heavy reliance on headteachers' testimonies and tended to absolve the schools of any blame.<sup>40</sup> Recommendations were largely conditioned by the assumption that parents should not challenge the school's day-to-day authority and that cooperation functioned best when it allowed the school to mitigate the negative effects of deprived home lives. Three years later, the Plowden Committee developed further this line of reasoning. Although stressing far more the mantra of 'partnership between parents and schools' in the primary system, it stopped short of recommending changes that would enable parents to have an active role in shaping school life. Once again, focus fell on the need for schools to correct the worst effects of home and where possible educate failing parents, but without giving voice to parents' criticisms on how schools could also change. Following the tone of contemporary sociological analysis (see below), headteachers again explained educational failure as a result of cultural deprivation. Parents were called upon to help uphold school codes of discipline by maintaining high standards of behaviour, conduct, and uniform; show support for academic, social, and fundraising initiatives by attending school events or participating in PTAs; or to counter criticism in the press. It was less clear what schools could do for parents.<sup>41</sup> Despite the language of partnership, the relationship envisaged by Newsom and Plowden limited parents to ancillary roles. While they could justifiably expect more information from schools on how to manage adolescents, they were not empowered to exercise a reciprocal influence on institutional ethos.<sup>42</sup> On

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<sup>36</sup> Ministry of Education, *15 to 18* [Crowther Report] (London: H.M.S.O., 1959); Ministry of Education, *Half our Future* [Newsom Report] (London: H.M.S.O., 1963); Ministry of Education, *Children and their Primary Schools* [Plowden Report] (London: H.M.S.O., 1967).

<sup>37</sup> *Crowther*, p. 85.

<sup>38</sup> *Crowther*, p. 91 & 202.

<sup>39</sup> *Newsom*, p. 3

<sup>40</sup> See for examples headteachers' comments in *Newsom*, p. 62

<sup>41</sup> *Newsom*, pp. 32-49.

<sup>42</sup> Bridges, *Government's construction of the relation between parents and schools*, p. 302.

these terms, disparity of parental choice and involvement remained stark between the state and private sector.<sup>43</sup>

This formulation began to shift within the increasingly antagonistic atmosphere surrounding education from the late-1960s onwards. Bridges observes that parents responded suspiciously to changes made to the primary and new comprehensive curriculum, often felt to reflect the impulses of an increasingly professionalized, remote and intransigent teaching body at the expense of parents' wishes. Drawing upon 'an esoteric and specialized language' from the social sciences and committed to progressive methods, teachers showed little enthusiasm for the type of partnership parents seemed to want.<sup>44</sup> As a result, many parents were left feeling alienated and uncertain in their dealings with schools, which, as discussed below, could have detrimental effects on educational outcomes.<sup>45</sup> In a precursor to the dominant message of the 1980s – although not necessarily its wellspring – parents' more assertive demands for greater control and participation quickly became central in wider debates. The rise of 'parent power' has typically been attributed to the reaction against the William Tyndale affair in 1976, which in turn galvanized support for a Thatcherite promise of greater parental choice; however, the roots of this demand are to be found well before the late 1970s.<sup>46</sup> Of course, politicians and commentators were predictably prone to invoking 'parents' in support of a range of diverging agendas. Contributors to the Black Papers consistently decried parents' loss of control following comprehensivization and alienation through progressive teaching methods. No less stridently, campaigners for comprehensivization pitted the image of the self-interested and reactionary middle class grammar school parent against the wishes of the majority, who favoured comprehensive education for all.<sup>47</sup> Politicians from both parties started to talk more about the wishes of parents. Norman St John Stevas, Thatcher's replacement as Conservative Education spokesman, relentlessly criticised Labour's apparent assault on parental choice (and, in hyperbolic tones, democracy) by closing grammar schools and promised a Parents' Charter under a Conservative government. Then, in 1976, James Callaghan made Labour's claim to win parents' support by emphasizing their interests as one of his priorities in calling for a new great debate.<sup>48</sup>

Nonetheless, such rhetorical abstractions should not blind us to the increasingly assertive ways in which different types of parent across the country sought to play a more active role in their children's education. It is equally important not to dismiss out-of-hand those instances in which parents and teachers collaborated to achieve shared goals, be they structural or more day-to-day. Comprehensivization galvanized parental interest and encouraged some on both sides of the debate to organize in pursuit of their educational objectives. Unlike PTAs, the parent activist groups that emerged in the 1960s and 70s were explicitly political in ambition and more confrontational in approach. Groups such as the Comprehensive Schools Committee and Confederation (later Campaign) for the Advancement of State Education, were formed to further the cause of comprehensivization. CASE first emerged as a series of locally organized committees, which joined in 1962 under a unifying central organization that could coordinate lobbying efforts and distribute a quarterly newsletter, entitled 'Parents and Schools'. High profile supporters, including Michael Young, Joan Sallis, Caroline Benn

<sup>43</sup> Department for Education and Science, *The Public Schools Commission: Second Report* [Donnison Report] (London: H.M.S.O., 1970).

<sup>44</sup> Bridges, *Parents: customers or partners?*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>45</sup> See for example Jackson & Marsden, *Education and the working class*, pp. 225-30; Paul Willis, *Learning to labour: how working class kids get working class jobs* (Farnborough: Saxon House, 1977); Stephen Ball, *Beachside Comprehensive: a case study of secondary schooling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 157.

<sup>46</sup> Dominic Sandbrook, *Seasons in the sun: the battle for Britain, 1974-79* (London: Penguin, 2012), pp. 205-16.

<sup>47</sup> See for example, Benn & Simon, *Halfway there*, pp. 75-77.

<sup>48</sup> James Callaghan, 'A rational debate based on the facts', Ruskin College, 18 October 1976: <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/speeches/1976ruskin.html>; Shirley Williams, *Climbing the bookshelves* (London: Virago, 2009), pp. 288-90.

and Brian Simon, directed efforts and helped ensure wide media coverage and political influence; Young sat on the Plowden Committee as a representative of CASE and Sallis on the Taylor Committee in the 1970s.<sup>49</sup>

On the other side of the comprehensive/selection divide, parents who supported grammar schools were no less active. Numerous ‘Save our School’ committees and grammar school action groups, organized by parents and teachers, appeared across the country in the early 1970s and were loosely knitted together under National Education Association. Comprehensive campaigners complained about the media’s overly sympathetic depiction of this ‘preservationist movement’ as embattled citizens defending their democratic rights against an overbearing state. This, they felt, gave a misleading impression of what was essentially a compliant group of privileged parents co-opted by the schools to do their dirty work.<sup>50</sup> Beyond political antagonisms, however, this does a disservice to the strength of feeling that energized parents to resist reform and defend what they believed to be their children’s educational interest through group action.<sup>51</sup> Confrontations frequently flared around local referenda over the future structure of secondary education, which tended to reveal strong support for comprehensivization.<sup>52</sup> Extensive coverage in local media amplified wider frustrations felt by parents at the structures of local education but also misleadingly suggested that these bifurcated neatly along the selective v non-selective binary.

Criticisms that all these groups were dominated by a minority of politicized middle class parents is probably fair but it is worth stressing the range of less high profile parent and community groups active at this time.<sup>53</sup> For example, efforts by the North London West Indian Association and another local Black Women’s group to challenge institutional discrimination in Haringey frequently focussed on conditions in schools, with members positioning themselves as both campaigners for race relations and parents’ rights. In Leeds, the Parents Action Group / United Caribbean Association criticised the hostile power nexus of police and school used to surveil young black men.<sup>54</sup> The rise of Student Action Committees, supported by the NUS, also drew left wing attention to racial inequalities in education and made possible new forms of cross-community solidarity.<sup>55</sup> Nonetheless, parents of colour were more likely to seek redress for discrimination experienced in the education system through the Race Relations Board than LEAs or PTAs, which were felt to be part of the problem.<sup>56</sup> Protests amongst South Asian and Caribbean parents against the assimilationist policies of the 1960s made this system increasingly unworkable at a local level and led to calls for greater government action to ensure ‘meritocratic achievement for all’.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, these community groups looked to compensate for the failure of state education to meet their needs by establishing supplementary Saturday schools, run and funded by local communities.<sup>58</sup> Criticisms of the racial discrimination endured in the state sector and obstacles faced by students of colour were central to forcing government action in setting up the Rampton (later

<sup>49</sup> Papers of CASE, MRC University of Warwick: <http://mrc-catalogue.warwick.ac.uk/records/CST>

<sup>50</sup> Benn & Simon, *Halfway there*, p. 76.

<sup>51</sup> John Bastiani, *Parents and teachers: perspectives on home-school relations* (London: NFER-Nelson, 1987), p. 56.

<sup>52</sup> Caroline Benn, ‘Referenda – do they help or hinder decision-making?’, *Education*, 21 April 1972, pp. 374–5; Caroline Benn, ‘Polling the People’, *Where: The Education Magazine for Parents*, November 1975, pp. 304–5.

<sup>53</sup> Sally Tomlinson, *Race and education: policy and politics in Britain* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 2008), pp. 65–67.

<sup>54</sup> Jessica Gerrard, *Radical childhoods: schooling and the struggle for social change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 157–58.

<sup>55</sup> Jodi Burkett, *Constructing post-imperial Britain: Britishness, ‘Race’ and the Radical Left in the 1960s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 122–23.

<sup>56</sup> Sally Tomlinson, ‘Educational Achievement and Ethnicity’, S. Modgil and G. K. Verma (eds.), *Multicultural Education – the Interminable Debate* (London: Falmer Press, 1986), 181–94.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Race, *Multiculturalism and education* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 18; Chris Searle, *An exclusive education: race, class and exclusion in British schools* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2001), p. 44.

<sup>58</sup> David Gilbourn, *Racism and education: coincidence or conspiracy?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p. 42.



Swann) Committee in 1979 and then maintaining pressure on schools, LEAs, and Thatcher's governments to take seriously the requirements of minority pupils.<sup>59</sup>

Although policy makers failed to show much interest in the demands of minority communities before the late-1970s, Conservative MPs were quickest to exploit the issue of parental frustration in an effort to stem the closure of grammar schools but, in forming the Taylor Committee in 1975, Wilson's Labour government showed itself similarly sympathetic to parents' calls for more influence in their children's education.<sup>60</sup> Appointed by Secretary of State, Reg Prentice, and chaired by Tom Taylor, the Labour leader of Blackburn Council, the Taylor Committee was charged with reviewing 'the management and government of primary and secondary schools...and their relationships with LEAs, with head teachers and staffs of schools, with parents of pupils and with the local community at large'.<sup>61</sup> It sat concurrently to the unfolding William Tyndale affair and in the final report made reference to the growing sense of urgency this engendered amongst parents. Unlike previous committees, Taylor included several members appointed specifically as 'parents' and went further than ever before in its recommendations for how parents could be more meaningfully incorporated into the running of schools. Although praising the progress made since the 1960s (by 1975 70 out of 82 LEAs made at least some provision for parents to sit on governing boards), the final report suggested parental representation be made mandatory and that members should be elected by their fellow parents. Schools were encouraged to support parent teacher organizations and where possible provide facilities for them to operate. Observing with appreciation the recent growth in popularity of PTAs, the report nonetheless advised schools to be more attuned to the requirements of all parents and not just 'the more articulate and committed proponents of parental participation'.<sup>62</sup> This should be achieved by automatically extending PTA membership to all parents and providing more informal opportunities for parents to discuss concerns with teachers, the Head, and other parents at least once a term. In addition, the report stated, it should be made easier for individual parents to meet with teachers and that the governors should explain to each parent the relationship between parent and school in a contractual letter sent at the time of acceptance of a place (a possible template was included). David Bridges characterizes the suggestions made in the Taylor Report as a genuine effort to develop a meaningful partnership between schools and parents, which acknowledged parents' right to be informed and involved, whilst eschewing the language of customer and provider.<sup>63</sup> While parents' right to information about school organization, curriculum, and a child's progress was endorsed, the report stressed that this should not come at the expense of LEA control of schools or be disruptive to the functioning of local education structures: 'We wish to produce a structure within which every parent will have a role in supporting the school and increasing its effectiveness'.<sup>64</sup> The following year, Joan Sallis, a member of the committee and President of CASE, published a book outlining the changes she wanted to see come from Taylor. In this, she stressed the committee's guiding principle had been to find a way to establish mutual consent, understanding, and shared responsibility between home and school.<sup>65</sup>

Shirley Williams incorporated most of Taylor's recommendations into Labour's abortive 1979 Education Bill, believing that they would strengthen relations not only between school and parent, but also act as an integral fibre of civic society running between school and the local community.<sup>66</sup> In 1977 the DfE issued Circular 15/77 instructing schools to provide parents with better levels of information.

<sup>59</sup> Gerrard, *Radical childhoods*, p. 158.

<sup>60</sup> Mark Peel, *Shirley Williams: the biography* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2013), pp. 229-54; Ian Abbott, Michael Rathbone, & Phillip Whitehead, *Education policy* (London: Sage, 2013), pp. 74-75.

<sup>61</sup> Department of Education and Science, *A new partnership for our schools* [Taylor Report] (London: H.M.S.O., 1977), p. 1.

<sup>62</sup> *Taylor*, p. 42.

<sup>63</sup> Bridges, *Parents: customers or partners?*, p. 70.

<sup>64</sup> *Taylor*, p. 43.

<sup>65</sup> Joan Sallis, *School managers and governors: Taylor and after* (London: Ward Lock, 1977)

<sup>66</sup> Shirley Williams, *Climbing the bookshelves* (London: Virago Press, 2009), pp. 172-73.

Many of the points made appear now utterly mundane – information on uniform, contact details, name of the senior staff etc. – but in laying out specific requirements the Circular highlights that this was not usual practice. It also stressed the need for schools to provide appropriate support for parents newly arrived in Britain, who might lack the necessary knowledge and literacy skills to understand school circulars.<sup>67</sup> Brian Simon offered a damning appraisal of Labour’s embrace of the principle of parental choice, dismissing it as ‘a belated but characteristic attempt to steal the Conservatives’ clothes’; however, this misses that many of these points represented a direct response to demands from parents across the social and educational spectrum.<sup>68</sup> Ultimately, the bill never reached the House of Commons following internal opposition from Tony Benn, purportedly egged on by his wife fearful of its effect on the comprehensive movement, and Labour’s election defeat soon after.<sup>69</sup>

Thatcher’s victory in 1979 has often been pinpointed as the moment when parent power became inserted at the heart of education policy and power shifted from producer to consumer.<sup>70</sup> Successive Conservative and New Labour governments looked to weaken the control of LEAs and drive up standards by empowering parents through the introduction of greater choice, accountability, and competition into the system. Several of the components of the 1980 Education Act drew inspiration from the Taylor Report, albeit with a marked change of inflection from the original intention. Dubbed the Parents’ Charter, this included the mandatory inclusion of elected of parents on governing boards, expanded stipulations for the level of information on curriculum and governance that schools provided to parents, introduced Assisted Places, and expanded parents’ ability to choose which secondary school. Between 1986 and 1992, 75,000 parent-governors were elected; however, this often failed to achieve the results hoped for in the mid-1970s as many new governors struggled to master the intricacies of the role and were often marginalized by teachers, LEA officials, and more assertive managers. As a result, they were given little opportunity to make meaningful contributions to the running of their schools.<sup>71</sup> For non-white communities, inclusion in their children’s schooling remained fraught with tension. While the Rampton and Swann reports made explicit that parents of colour would no longer tolerate the continuation of the status-quo and demanded improvement in what parents and pupils of colour should expect from schools, they reiterated an entrenched discourse of problem homes failing to give schools necessary support in discipline with a highly racialized inflection.<sup>72</sup> In consequence, little was achieved to incorporate parents of colour in a meaningful way despite suggestions for better communication and inclusion on boards of governors.<sup>73</sup> The Swann Report took the effects of systemic, institutional racism on both pupils and parents more seriously; however, the Thatcher government’s appetite to make meaningful concessions to communities of colour beyond advocating parental empowerment more broadly was limited and meant that racial hostility from white parents remained prevalent.<sup>74</sup>

Even as the so-called ‘age of parentocracy’ gathered pace through the introduction of grant maintained schools, and later league tables, Ball observes that successive governments found it easier to proclaim choice than to ‘operationalise’ it.<sup>75</sup> Efforts to reclassify parents as citizen consumers and prioritization

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<sup>67</sup> DES Circular 15/77 (1977): <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/des/circular15-77.html>

<sup>68</sup> Simon, *Education and the social order*, p. 460.

<sup>69</sup> Peel, *Shirley Williams*, p. 242.

<sup>70</sup> Ball, *The education debate*, p. 141.

<sup>71</sup> Michael Golby, ‘Parents as school governors’, in Pamela Munn (ed.), *Parents and Schools: customers, managers or partners?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993), 65-87.

<sup>72</sup> *Rampton*, p. 44-46.

<sup>73</sup> Sally Tomlinson, *Ethnic minorities in British schools* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983) p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> Tomlinson, *Race and education*, p. 90.

<sup>75</sup> Phillip Brown, ‘The “Third Wave”: education and the ideology of parentocracy’, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 11:1 (1990), 65-86; Ball, *The education debate*, p. 141.

of parent empowerment as a core element in the push for standards and accountability, did little to mitigate the social and economic limitations on ‘choice’ faced by many communities.<sup>76</sup>

### Parental aspiration

Contrary to the claims of some doubters that the expansion of secondary education was ‘an expensive luxury forced on a reluctant people’, social surveys conducted from the 1950s to the 1970s consistently showed high levels of parental aspiration for educational opportunities and outcomes across all social classes.<sup>77</sup> Neither the tripartite nor comprehensive system ever came close to achieving equality of output; however, when explaining the gap in achievement between working and middle class pupils there has been a tendency to stress class influences above all else. Middle class parents’ strong preference for selective schools, later leaving, and entry to professional careers is contrasted against opposing trends amongst the working class. Early explanations assumed this to be proof of the triumph of middle class values in the pursuit of educational success, whereas, from the late-1960s onwards, sociologists have stressed the structural inequalities that privilege this minority at the expense of working class pupils.<sup>78</sup> Nonetheless, by focussing so much on differences of social class both accounts can underestimate important qualifying factors; as Audrey Lambart observed of postwar sociology ‘Social class was central, with allowance for geographical diversity and historical change. Boys featured prominently. So did statistics.’<sup>79</sup> More needs to be done, firstly, to understand whether the strength of enthusiasm amongst working class parents for similar outcomes necessarily depended upon an accepted sacrifice of sense of class identity; and secondly, to expose alternative fracture points such as gender and ethnicity, which influenced parental expectation.<sup>80</sup>

Class, undoubtedly, provides an illuminating lens through which to interpret differing educational priorities. Under the tripartite system early parental ambition was most frequently directed towards success at the 11-plus and once in secondary school on a child’s age of leaving. Middle class parents (classified according to occupation) overwhelmingly favoured grammar school for their children and were more prepared to withdraw from the state system and pay for private school if their child failed the 11-plus. Where access to technical education was available, working class parents rated this highly but were also the most likely to endorse secondary moderns (or at least not dismiss them out-of-hand).<sup>81</sup> In a representative survey of parental attitudes towards education undertaken in the late-1950s, Mark Abrams identified three discernible categories of outlook amongst working class parents. Firstly, the majority who, regardless of school type, expected their child to leave at the earliest point and enter the work force (c. 60%). When pushed on the value of education they focussed on the need for schools to equip children with a trade. Secondly, those who saw education as the crucial ladder towards better careers and opportunities (c. 20%). They supported separation at 11 and wanted greater access to expanded grants and scholarships to ease access to university. Thirdly, those who saw merit in the tripartite system but felt it needed to be reformed in order to support late developers or those for whom

<sup>76</sup> Sally Tomlinson, *Education in a post welfare society* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 2005), pp. 54-55.

<sup>77</sup> Crowther, p. 65.

<sup>78</sup> For an example of the former approach see J. W. B. Douglas, *The home and the school: a study of ability and attainment in the primary school* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1964), and for the latter A. H. Halsey, A. F. Heath, & J. M. Ridge, *Origins and destinations: family, class, and education in modern Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980)

<sup>79</sup> Audrey Lambart, ‘Mereside: a grammar school for girls in the 1960s’, *Gender and Education*, 9:4 (1997), 441-56, p. 442.

<sup>80</sup> Stephanie Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 171; Elaine Bauer, ‘Racialized citizenship, respectability and mothering among Caribbean mothers in Britain’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41:1 (2018), 151-69.

<sup>81</sup> Douglas, 119-22; F. M. Martin, ‘An enquiry into parents’ preferences in secondary education’, in D. V. Glass (ed.), *Social mobility in Britain* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), 160-74, pp. 163-66; Michael Carter

the exam did not deliver the hoped-for outcomes (c. 20%).<sup>82</sup> Educational expectations often reflected parents' own experience of school and work. Both the cohort data and smaller surveys showed that parents from any class who had remained in school beyond minimum age or had ascended to positions of managerial responsibility in their work were likely to rate educational importance more highly.

Amongst parents who left school before 1939, this tended to map onto to class identity more broadly. For example, Abrams found that parents who had been to grammar school or university themselves (found almost entirely amongst the ABs) were far less willing to allow their children choice in deciding their educational path.<sup>83</sup> Reinforcing this view, the Crowther Report recorded parents' general reluctance to allow their children to leave education any earlier than they had.<sup>84</sup> In a survey of nearly 1,500 parents in South Hertfordshire undertaken in the early 1950s, F. M. Martin's research highlighted important gender differences on this point, showing that a mother's preference for grammar school depended more on her experience of the job market before marriage than her own schooling, with most women in the sample not having continued past 14.<sup>85</sup> In contrast, amongst those classified as skilled and unskilled workers (DE), there appeared a greater willingness to prefer an earlier leaving age to facilitate entry into the labour market or, even if the parents hoped their child would stay-on, to allow the child to make the decision for themselves. Class and neighbourhood influences could exercise a strong influence in this respect.<sup>86</sup> Michael Carter found parents in 'working class districts' in Sheffield to be less convinced of the benefits bestowed by a grammar school and more likely to encourage early leaving than those (of all classes) living in more mixed or affluent neighbourhoods. Before the 1970s, such attitudes frequently reflected local labour market conditions. In areas where an established staple industry seemingly offered stable job opportunities to school leavers, parents were more likely to prefer entry into the workplace at the earliest point.<sup>87</sup> It is tempting to see this framed by a north/south, industrial/service-economy divide; however, fear that expanded educational opportunity could threaten established patterns and rhythms of life and thus needed to be guarded against was not constrained by geography. Elizabeth Bott reported working class parental attitudes in London that were limited in ambition and unpersuaded by the advantages offered through secondary education: 'Mrs Newbolt had a vague dream that the youngest might go to a nice school, but Mr Newbolt was not keen on educational advancement. They both wanted the children to live the same sort of life as themselves.'<sup>88</sup> Even amongst some working class parents whose children made it to grammar school the experience could be alienating and disruptive in ways that made them question any overall benefit.<sup>89</sup>

Yet it is misleading to reduce parental ambition to a tale of class determinism. Across all social classes, and amongst mothers and fathers, a majority of parents expressed a preference for a grammar school place and a desire that their child depart school with formal qualifications even if that meant staying beyond the minimum leaving age.<sup>90</sup> Martin found that a majority in all occupational groups (professional, clerical, supervisory, skilled, and unskilled) reported that they 'had thought a lot about their child's secondary education' and expressed a preference for grammar school. Even amongst unskilled workers (total 309), of whom only 35.3% had thought a lot about secondary education (compared to 30% a little, and 33.9% not at all), 8% more favoured a grammar school (43%). Although

<sup>82</sup> Research Services Ltd., *Survey of educational attitudes*, J.912 (1957), Churchill Archives, ABMS 3/64, p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> Mark Abrams, *Educational aspiration* (1960/61), Churchill Archives, ABMS 2/4/6

<sup>84</sup> Crowther, p. 10.

<sup>85</sup> Martin, *Parents' preferences for secondary school*, 168-69.

<sup>86</sup> Michael Carter, *Home, school, and work: a study of the education and employment of young people in Britain* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1962), pp. 30-67.

<sup>87</sup> Carter, *Home, school, and work*, pp. 78-80; Floud et al, *Social class & opportunity*, pp. 115-17.

<sup>88</sup> Elizabeth Bott, *Family and social network: roles, norms and external relationships in ordinary urban families* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1957), p. 72.

<sup>89</sup> Selina Todd, *The people: the rise and fall of the working class*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: John Murray, 2015), pp. 229-31; Marsden & Jackson, *Education and the working class, passim*; Lacey, *Hightown Grammar*, 125-52

<sup>90</sup> Douglas, *The home and school*, p. 17 & 142; Plowden, Vol. 2, pp. 109-11.

the results showed predictably wide variation between occupational groups in terms of the importance attached to the long-term significance of secondary school (70% professional compared to 40% unskilled), greater nuance appears within these categories. For instance, white collar and manual fathers who expressed a preference for grammar school, reported similarly strong feelings about the long term importance of education.<sup>91</sup> In an expanded 1957 study Floud, Halsey, and Martin found 56% of 1412 parents in 'affluent' South West Hertfordshire and 54% (of 1011) in more industrial Middlesbrough favoured grammar schools. Willmott and Young reported similar sentiment in Bethnal Green, in the same year. Both studies suggested that this preference was not dependent on parents' educational background. Grammar schools were frequently viewed as the necessary route to better paid white-collar careers but, just as significantly for many working class parents, the means to avoid the physical toll and insecurity of work that had characterized their working lives.<sup>92</sup> Thus although more middle class parents expected their children to enter professional careers and working class parents manual careers, this obscures the high hopes of many working class parents that education might make a different trajectory possible.<sup>93</sup> Cohort data revealed a similar correlation between attitudes towards the importance of education, preference for a grammar school place, and career aspiration. Again, while appearing in greatest concentration amongst middle class participants, this relationship was present across the whole sample.<sup>94</sup> It is also clear that as more individuals who had experienced secondary education themselves became parents, so expectations increased.<sup>95</sup>

Popular understandings of the key levers of social mobility in the postwar meritocratic moment centred upon education and training. In another 1950 study, Martin found that all social groups below professionals ranked this as the most important factor in achieving social mobility. Amongst professionals, hard work and character came top, and placed second amongst all other groups.<sup>96</sup> Abrams' two representative surveys identified a similar preoccupation. Parents across all classes favoured grammar schools for the specialist education provided and as a ladder for social mobility. Where differences in attitude towards education did appear, they were as likely to be explained through divergent political loyalties as class background.<sup>97</sup> While white collar career ambitions certainly featured prominently for parents, this did not have to be premised upon an unqualified preference for middle over working class lives for their children. As participants in the Affluent Worker study showed in the early 1960s when exhibiting similar priorities, it was possible to articulate a confident working class identity alongside a desire for your children to attend a grammar or even public school en route to obtaining a white collar job.<sup>98</sup>

From the 1960s onwards, sociologists started to explain the gap between parental ambitions and outcomes as a consequence of a process of structural alienation from a system that seemed ill-equipped and unprepared to support their children's progress.<sup>99</sup> Even after comprehensivization these class inequalities continued to cause tension.<sup>100</sup> For those on the other side of the comp/selection divide, the

<sup>91</sup> F. M. Martin, *Parents' preferences in secondary education*, pp. 160-67.

<sup>92</sup> Michael Young & Peter Willmott, *Family and kinship in East London* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), pp. 29-30.

<sup>93</sup> Ferdynand Zweig, *The worker in an affluent society; family life and industry* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), p. 22.

<sup>94</sup> J. W. B. Douglas, J. M. Ross & H. R. Simpson, *All our future: a longitudinal study of secondary education* (London: Peter Davies, 1968), pp. 86-89.

<sup>95</sup> Taylor, p. 183.

<sup>96</sup> F. M. Martin, 'Some subjective aspects of social stratification', in Glass, *Social mobility*, 51-75, p. 74.

<sup>97</sup> Abrams, *Educational aspiration (1960/61)*, Churchill Archives

<sup>98</sup> John Goldthorpe, David Lockwood, Frank Bechhofer & Jennifer Platt, *The affluent work in the class structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 134-37.

<sup>99</sup> David Hargreaves, *Social relations in a secondary school* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967); Colin Lacey, *Hightown Grammar: the school as a social system* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971)

<sup>100</sup> John Bynner, 'Parents' attitudes to education and their consequences for working-class children', in James Rushton & John Derfel Turner (eds.), *Education and deprivation* (Manchester: MUP, 1975), 7-22; Stephen Ball,

end of the tripartite system became characterized as an assault on parental choice and the burning of the ladder that had allowed clever working class children to achieve upward mobility. Yet, as Mandler has recently shown, such explanations often mistook shifting priorities for deeper alienation. The popularity of Labour's call for 'grammar schools for all' in the late 1950s rested on a promise of universal excellence in secondary education intended to satisfy both constituencies. Abrams' concurrent market research amongst parents showed ongoing support for grammar schools as the pathway to academic success, and indeed a broader endorsement across all social groups for independent schools, but also that parents felt evermore frustrated by the unfairness of grammar school access under the 11-plus.<sup>101</sup> At this point, he failed to identify a particularly 'egalitarian' attitude, with most preferring reform within the system to structural overhaul.<sup>102</sup> Many separated dislike for the 11-plus from a wider condemnation of the tripartite system; while a sizeable majority were in favour of abolishing access through examination, support for a reformed grammar system remained across all social classes. A Gallup Poll taken in May 1959 reported similar findings, with 59% satisfied with the level attention the current government was giving to education and 71% who felt that children today were getting a better education than the previous generation. But while 55% wanted the 11-plus ended (compared to 27% kept and 18% who didn't know), 43% of respondents said they wanted to retain grammars compared to 36% in favour of comprehensives (and 21% dk).<sup>103</sup>

Growing concerns over 'the Bulge's' [baby boomers] impending impact on admissions amidst the state's failure to expand grammar school provision, meant parents became increasingly attracted by alternative options: as they began to find out more about comprehensivization, so parental opinion became more enthusiastic.<sup>104</sup> Abrams' 1957 survey showed more working class than middle class parents in favour of comprehensives (57% to 40%), more women than men (57% to 46%), and more Labour than Conservative voters (60% to 43%). Amongst those who approved of comprehensivization the principal reason of support focussed on removing the sense of inferiority from children who did not attend grammar schools (28%), with a smaller proportion articulating approval for increased social mixing (15%), better provision for late-developers (15%), and for the elimination of class distinction (10%). Amongst those who disapproved, most explained their choice through a fear that bright children would be handicapped.<sup>105</sup> Following the publication of the Plowden Report in 1967, Gallup showed that 91% of respondents had heard of comprehensives and 51% thought they were a good idea (22% against, 18% dk).<sup>106</sup> In his 1968 follow-up to the Plowden survey, Bynner found a rise from 10% to 21% of parents who expressed an explicit preference for a comprehensive school, a figure that reflected the proportion of children in comprehensives at this point (it should be remembered that provision remained uneven across the country and the survey didn't analyse the data based on region). He also found 'a slight preference for mixed over single sex schools, but a substantial proportion of parents had no feeling on this subject'.<sup>107</sup>

While high parental ambition cut across social class and locality, it did not remain constant throughout a child's education; as children and parents moved through the educational system, so expectations fluctuated.<sup>108</sup> Social background exerted a heavy influence in this respect. While a majority of parents

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Beachside Comprehensive: A Case-Study of Secondary Schooling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>101</sup> Research Services Ltd., *Survey of educational attitudes*, p. 5; see also Adrian Wooldridge, *Measuring the mind: education and psychology in England c. 1860-c.1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 259.

<sup>102</sup> Research Services Ltd., *Survey of educational attitudes*, p. 6 & 10-11

<sup>103</sup> George H. Gallup, *The Gallup International public opinion polls: Great Britain 1937-1975*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Random House, 1976), p. 510.

<sup>104</sup> *Crowther*, p. 5.

<sup>105</sup> Research Services Ltd., *Survey of educational attitudes*, p. 13.

<sup>106</sup> Plowden Report; February 1967, *Gallup international public opinion polls*, vol. 2, p. 912.

<sup>107</sup> Bynner, *Parental attitudes*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>108</sup> Bynner, *Parents' attitudes to education and their consequences for working-class children*

from all social classes supported the raising of the leaving age, a sizeable minority of working class parents questioned why this was necessary, particularly for children already at senior school. Abrams reported that working class parents in the late 1950s were highly sceptical over the need to raise the leaving age and more likely to express reluctance because of the extra expense of supporting a child at school for another year. Mothers showed significantly less support for staying-on than fathers, particularly within working class households; however, this also depended on age, with younger parents very much more in favour of ROSLA and staying-on. It was this latter group that tended to suffer most from alienation; as working class pupils and parents of both sexes, in all school types, moved through the system they were more likely to become disillusioned. This had the effect of undermining early enthusiasm to remain at school as long as possible, so that by the final year many parents were prepared to allow their child to leave if they wished and in some instances stress that it was time to enter the labour market and start earning a wage.<sup>109</sup> At the start of secondary school almost half of unskilled parents hoped their children would stay past minimum age (48%) and over half of semi-skilled (54%), and an even higher proportion wanted their children to leave with qualifications; however, while professional expectations remained very high (93%), manual parents' expectations, and especially those whose children were at Secondary Moderns, dropped consistently over the course of secondary school [see Figure 1].<sup>110</sup> As discussed below, this was not necessarily a reflection of parental antipathy towards

education but rather emerged from a sense that irrespective of their hopes school couldn't offer their children what they hoped for.

**TABLE 8**  
Parental aspirations related to social class of family

Parental aspirations	Social class (1964)					
	Un-skilled %	Semi-skilled %	Skilled manual %	Skilled non-manual %	Man-gerial %	Prof-essional %
1 Strength of educational aspirations for child while at primary school (+) (19), 1964	46	59	66	77	79	88
2 Hoped child would go to grammar school (26), 1968	32	42	47	61	65	74
3 Parent would like child to stay on past minimum leaving age (40), 1968	48	54	64	81	82	93
4 No wish for child to leave before 18/ wanted child to stay as long as possible (40), 1968	23	32	39	62	65	83
5 Educational aspirations for child while at secondary school (+) (6), 1968	32	36	49	72	72	89
6 Parent is in full agreement with raising of school-leaving age to 16 (Question 33) 1968	38	45	48	55	53	65
Base (100%)	111	278	884	200	248	66

*Note.* Numbers in brackets locate the scales in Appendix 3, with the exception of Question 33 which is located in Appendix 4.

Fig. 1: 'Parental aspirations related to social class', in John Bynner, *Parents' attitudes to education* (London: H.M.S.O., 1972), p. 16

Grammar and independent school parents were more likely to hold hopes for their child to go to university, while Secondary Modern pupils showed a preference for a post-15 switch to a Technical College, although this was more likely to be caveated 'depending on results'. These ambitions were

<sup>109</sup> Carter, *Home, school, and work*, p. 79. Douglas et al., p. 87.

<sup>110</sup> Bynner, *Parental attitudes*, pp. 16-17

reflected in the type of careers coveted by parents for their children, with independent school parents more likely to want professional careers than those from any other school; however, only 22% of Secondary Modern parents expressed a preference that their children would enter unskilled jobs, with a majority hoping for something better remunerated.

But what of factors beyond class and school type in shaping parents' attitudes to education? Frustratingly, many of the surveys did not differentiate based on gender or ethnicity; however, the cohort data gives a clearer sense of differing expectations for sons and daughters. Although girls achieved more grammar school places than boys, parents placed less importance on scholastic success or the need to stay on beyond minimum age. Unsurprisingly, the intersection of gender and class was important in this respect. Even amongst grammar school parents, whose overall expectations Bynner found to be so high, working class girls were more likely to face pressure from home to leave early to help with domestic duties or because it was felt girls should enter the labour force as early as possible.<sup>111</sup> The Crowther Report observed that expectations for girls were lower than boys, a point supported by Stephanie Spencer's research into girls' careers in the 1950s, which found that many parents assumed success at school would make little difference to girls' future prospects and were reluctant to invest in expensive post-school training.<sup>112</sup> Greater success in examinations and wider access to university started to change this in the 1970s but for the early period parents showed greater ambition for their sons. Similarly, the limited evidence available on parents of colour suggest that the sense of alienation from the system frequently conditioned attitudes to staying on.<sup>113</sup> Demographic trends meant that pupils of colour only started to make the transition to secondary school in large numbers from the late 1960s onwards. Undertaken at the start of this period, David Beetham's 1967 survey of 'immigrant school leavers' in Birmingham found that their parents (most often working in manual occupations) were more likely to have higher educational aspirations than white counterparts and more prepared to support their children financially after the minimum leaving age.<sup>114</sup> Successive government reports reiterated the high expectation amongst immigrant families but also, as the 1981 Rampton Report acknowledged, the 'loss of trust and a wide gulf in understanding between too many West Indian parents and schools'. It was hoped that by strengthening relations between home and school 'by explaining the factors influencing the attitudes of parents and teachers, and their aspirations and concerns, we can go some way towards bringing them closer together'.<sup>115</sup>

Pupils and parents faced sustained hostility and often overt racism from schools and teachers. Rampton heard repeated complaints that schools sought to stifle ambition and progress amongst pupils of colour through discriminatory streaming procedures and by refusing them access to O-level examinations. Like for their white working class counterparts, parental ambition was undercut through a lack of cultural capital required to influence school procedure. This meant that parents of colour were extremely likely to become alienated from the system as a whole.<sup>116</sup> Educational ambition was driven by the hope that immigrants' children could aim for better paid and more stable jobs than those open to their parents. Beetham found career expectations to be significantly higher amongst immigrant families than white counterparts.<sup>117</sup> Children at school in the late-1960s echoed this optimism, sensing that the only obstacle to achieving these goals lay in examination failure rather than discrimination. Beetham described these as unrealistic ambitions due the problems posed by integration but it was perhaps the constant thwarting of high expectations throughout the 1970s, as more children of immigrants proceeded through

<sup>111</sup> Jackson & Marsden, *Education and the working class*, p. 159; Lambart, 'Mereside: a grammar school for girls in the 1960s', p. 445.

<sup>112</sup> Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education*, p. 58

<sup>113</sup> Swann Report, *passim*.

<sup>114</sup> David Beetham, *Immigrant school leavers and youth employment service in Birmingham* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 1967), p. 15.

<sup>115</sup> Rampton, p. 4

<sup>116</sup> Rampton, p. 41

<sup>117</sup> Beetham, *Immigrant school leavers*, pp. 21-22.



secondary school, that explains the pervasive feelings of alienation and anger reported by Rampton and Swann in the 1980s. Pupils and parents repeatedly complained ‘that careers officers arbitrarily restrict the range of opportunities presented to their children’ because of ‘discriminatory views of young West Indians which lead them to channel them into certain occupations’.<sup>118</sup> In this sense, the failure of the system to meet parental ambition exposed the fundamental inequalities apart from class that remained present long after comprehensivization.

### Parents and children’s schooling

If most parents held high hopes for their children at school, how did they go about trying to realise these? Since the 1920s sociologists and educationists have stressed the fundamental importance of the relationship between home and school to educational outcomes.<sup>119</sup> Environmental factors have consistently been found to favour middle class children in terms of educational progress. In general, they were and remain more likely to come from smaller families, live in less overcrowded houses, be given greater quiet and privacy in which to complete homework, and have wider access to books and other resources. While Abrams’ research showed that parents from all classes valued education highly and expressed themselves willing to make financial sacrifices for their children’s schooling, this was inevitably easier for middle class households.<sup>120</sup> When investigating ‘managerial families’ in the 1960s, the Pahl’s found middle class parents placing high importance on their children’s education when making career decisions. It was already the case that these parents were prepared to move into the catchment areas of good schools, with changes in job or house moves often hinging on access to a certain school, interestingly sometimes new comprehensives that promised escape from the pressure of the 11-plus.<sup>121</sup> Discussions of the relationship between parental aspiration, scholastic outcomes, and career trajectories during the 1950s and 60s repeatedly stressed a causal link between social class and academic success.<sup>122</sup>

Nonetheless, material privilege alone could not explain school performance. Parental attitude and involvement were also identified as key.<sup>123</sup> In this reading too, middle class parents were praised for valuing education more highly and transmitting these values to their children as they supported them through school and into successful careers. Successive surveys showed middle class parents were more likely to read to their children, buy them books, and take to them museums and libraries. They were also prone to endorse the values of school and help enforce discipline and standards of uniform.<sup>124</sup> The publication of Douglas’ highly influential study based on the NSHD school age data in 1964, showed at a national level that educational outcomes were better amongst those whose parents invested time and energy in supporting their child’s progress (a finding reinforced by NCDS and BCS). Although Douglas found that the preparedness or capability of parents to engage actively with their child’s schooling differed according to social class, educational background, and type of school, he was clear that parental involvement of any kind had a beneficial effect on outcomes.<sup>125</sup> Amongst working class

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<sup>118</sup> Rampton, pp. 56-57.

<sup>119</sup> K. Lindsay, *Educational progress and social waste* (London: Routledge, 1926); E. D. Fraser, *Home environment and the school* (London: University of London Press, 1959); Charles Desforges & Alberto Abouchaar, ‘The impact of parental involvement, parental support, and family education on pupil achievements and adjustment: a literature review’, *Department of Education and Skills Research Report*, No. 433 (2003); S. Wilder, ‘Effects of parental involvement on academic achievement: a meta-synthesis’, *Educational Review*, 66:3 (2014), 377-97.

<sup>120</sup> Abrams, *Educational aspiration*; see also Jackson and Marsden, *Education and the working class*

<sup>121</sup> Ray and Jan Pahl, *Managers and their wives: a study of career and family relationships in the middle class* (London: Allen Lane, 1971), pp. 63-65, 76.

<sup>122</sup> See for example the Crowther, Newsom, and Plowden Reports.

<sup>123</sup> Floud et al, *Social class and educational opportunity*, pp. 87-95.

<sup>124</sup> Lacey, *Hightown Grammar*, p. 152.

<sup>125</sup> Douglas, *The home and the school*, pp. 54-59.

households, in particular, the data indicated that this engagement could deliver significant benefits in terms of passing the 11+ or staying beyond minimum leaving age. These findings became central to the development of cultural deprivation theory that pointed to failings in the home as the key inhibiting factor in children's educational development and which, as seen above, held heavy sway over the recommendations of successive reports on different aspects of education. By the late-1960s, this line of reasoning exerted an especially powerful influence in the Wilson government, which sought to mitigate potentially negative influence of home on equality of opportunity through the creation of Educational Priority Areas.<sup>126</sup>

Contemporary characterizations of parental attitudes were underpinned by strongly classed and gendered assumptions. NSHD and NCDS measured parental involvement and interest based upon level of contact with the school over the preceding year. This included visits to the school, contact with teachers (initiated by either parents or the school), and (controversially) a teacher assessment of parental engagement. For the 1946 cohort, Douglas was unequivocal in his judgement at Age-11: 'Middle class parents take more interest in their children's progress at school than the manual working class parents do, and they become relatively more interested as their children grow older' (a point reiterated in his analysis of the Age-16 sweep).<sup>127</sup> The data from both studies suggested that, throughout a child's school career, middle class parents visited the school more frequently and were more likely to ask to see the Headteacher, whereas when manual working class parents visited they were 'usually content to see the class teacher only'.<sup>128</sup> Douglas observed gendered differences in these interactions at both primary and secondary age; 32% of middle class fathers visited their children's schools compared to 12% of working class fathers during primary school, with this gap increasing throughout secondary school.<sup>129</sup> Amongst both groups, however, mothers remained most likely to have contact with the school and take responsibility for educational matters.<sup>130</sup> A generation later these patterns were picked up again in the NCDS Age-7 and Age-16 sweeps, as well as in the Plowden survey and follow-up.<sup>131</sup> Revealingly, the latter two surveys adopted a more detailed approach to assessing parental engagement, additionally enquiring into the information sought before the child moved to secondary school, parental assistance with and interest in child's school work, and interaction with the child over schoolwork. While the parents of children at grammar, independent, or technical schools in general scored more highly across most criteria, the variation between them and parents of children at secondary modern and comprehensives was not overwhelming. And on the criteria of parental encouragement and discussion about work there was almost no difference.<sup>132</sup>

The cohort studies and Plowden survey data indicated a correlation between those parents who took a high level of interest in their child's progress and those with high educational aspirations. This appeared to have a positive influence on a child's performance in the cohort intelligence test scores, especially amongst working class children and contributed to an accelerating advantage during primary school over those who lacked parental involvement. In the NSHD Age 11 sweep, parental involvement was judged to be more influential than three other key variables (family size, standard of home, and record of school) in determining test performance.<sup>133</sup> This effect was particularly pronounced amongst girls;

<sup>126</sup> Denis Lawton, *Education and Labour Party Ideologies, 1900-2001 and Beyond* (Abingdon: Oxford, 2005), pp. 73-74.

<sup>127</sup> Douglas, *The home and the school*, p. 52; Douglas et al, *All our future*, p. 84.

<sup>128</sup> Douglas, *The home and the school*, pp. 52-53; Pringle, *11,000 seven year olds* (London: Longmans, 1966), pp. 150-51.

<sup>129</sup> Douglas, *Home and school*, pp. 54-55; Douglas et al, *All our future*, pp. 83-85.

<sup>130</sup> Hall, *Education, education, education*, p. 9; King, *Family men*, p. 61.

<sup>131</sup> Ronald Davie, Neville Butler & Harvey Goldstein, *From birth to seven: the second report of the National Child Development Study* (London: Longman, 1972), pp. 39-40; Ken Fogelman (ed.), *Britain's 16 year olds* (Coventry: Northbourne Press Group, 1976), pp. 47-48.

<sup>132</sup> John Bynner, *Parents attitudes to education* (London: H.M.S.O., 1972), p. 14, & pp. 22-28.

<sup>133</sup> Douglas, pp. 57-59; Davie et al, *From birth to seven*, p. 25

however, as the Crowther Report recorded parents tended to place less emphasis on girls' secondary level outcomes and employers less importance on academic qualifications.<sup>134</sup> Bynner found that while fathers of grammar school boys were prone to become more involved during their sons secondary education, this was not the case for girls. Marsden and Jackson identified similar gendered variation in the attitudes of grammar school parents in the early 1960s, a point also emphasised more recently by Selina Todd in her survey of working class girls' experience of grammar school education.<sup>135</sup>

Although Douglas lamented the ongoing leakage of talent lost through failure at 11-plus and early leaving, both largely to the detriment of working class pupils, he offered little explanation beyond parents' limited horizons as to why working class parents seemingly appeared less invested in their children's education. Despite framing this as a staunch critique of the very limited levels of social mobility before 1939 and the often-deterministic effect of a curtailed secondary education, Douglas, like many others writing at this time, associated scholastic success and entry into professional careers with the acculturation of middle class values. From the late-1960s, cultural deprivation theory came under increasing attack, however.<sup>136</sup> Writing in the early 1970s, A. H. Halsey explicitly demanded that rather than forcing working class parents to adapt to a system designed to satisfy middle class values, the system itself had to change to orient itself around working class aspirations.<sup>137</sup>

School ethnographies from the 1960s and 70s treated the school as a social system engineered to work against those who refused or were unable to conform to its institutional identity. Teacher assessment of pupils' potential to pass the 11-plus or take public exams frequently rose depending upon parental involvement, which usually meant an entrenched bias towards middle class children. This had implications as much for parents as it did for pupils. Often forced to pick between their child and the school over questions of discipline, working class parents faced a dilemma of either having to enforce unfamiliar values or being labelled 'problem parents'. As Colin Lacey described, where they attempted to intervene on their child's behalf, they were often shown to be powerless to influence the school's decision and thus felt increasingly alienated from the school community more broadly.<sup>138</sup> Social class played a central role in shaping these interactions through the levels of cultural capital parents could bring to bear when attempting to gain concessions or support from schools. Middle class parents often found themselves in a strong position, in this respect. Christine Heward's investigation into the ways in which public school parents, often stationed across the world, were able to direct their sons' education, leverage support from the school, and find career openings, stands in contrast to Jackson and Marsden, and Lacey's description of working class parents' struggles to achieve similar objectives at local grammar schools.<sup>139</sup> These parents would, of course, also draw on their own social and cultural resources to support their children and facilitate access to the labour market; however, these inevitably tended to be narrower in horizon.<sup>140</sup> Parents of colour were even more disadvantaged in this regard. Interactions with the school were fraught with mutual misunderstanding but also premised on schools' assumption that they knew better than parents and could easily dismiss complaints or 'inflated ambitions'.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Crowther, p. 253

<sup>135</sup> Todd, *The people*, p. 220.

<sup>136</sup> Douglas S. Finlayson, 'Parental aspirations and the educational achievement of children', *Educational Research*, 14:1 (1971), 61-64.

<sup>137</sup> A. H. Halsey (ed.), *Educational priority* (London: H.M.S.O., 1972).

<sup>138</sup> Lacey, *Hightown grammar*, pp. 148-52.

<sup>139</sup> Christine Heward, *Making a Man of Him: Parents and Their Sons' Education at an English Public School 1929-50* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>140</sup> Colin G. Pooley, "'My father found it for me": changing experiences of entering the workforce in twentieth-century urban Britain', *Urban History*, 42:2 (2015), 290-308; Margaret Grieco, *Keeping it in the Family: Social Networks and Employment Chance* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1987).

<sup>141</sup> Swann, *passim*.

Using data from the Plowden survey and follow-up, John Bynner drew on the theories of alienation and polarisation put forward by the Manchester School to place Douglas' assumptions under greater scrutiny, asking what exactly it is about the working class home 'that sets a child off so early in life to a less exalted school career than he deserves?' Building on the observations of David Hargreaves and Paul Willis, he stressed that to understand fully the causes of alienation from the system required acknowledging that class identities are not static and parents' priorities change over the educational life course. One of the great problems of the system lay in its inability to allow parents and pupils to realise the high ambitions they had been encouraged to hold. Thus, even though many working class or (although not the focus of Bynner's analysis) minority families entered secondary school hoping to remain beyond minimum age, acquire formal qualifications, continue onto further education, and find a non-manual job, the years between 11 and 15 saw them become increasingly disillusioned at the prospect of successfully realising these ambitions and, subsequently, more likely to withdraw from the system. In consequence, working class children were left with few options but to enter unskilled work. Unlike Douglas and Abrams, Bynner did not put this down to an increasingly realistic assessment of likely outcomes but the product of mounting disillusion with, and alienation from, the education system.

Working class parents and pupils faced an ongoing process of selection and differentiation based upon teachers' subjective sorting of pupils based on perception as much as ability, with 'middle class values' often serving as a key sorting mechanism. This was a process also observed by Douglas et al in the cohort data, as middle class children consistently gained higher teacher ratings than working class counterparts often because of cleanliness, manners, and speech. Subsequently, when primary schools streamed and sorted children deemed likely to succeed at the 11-plus they tended to favour those from middle class homes. This class-based sorting continued at senior school level; working class pupils frequently found themselves in the lower sets at grammar schools, while access to exam courses at Secondary Moderns frequently favoured children from more middle class backgrounds. The effect of this sorting was to undermine further working class expectations, just as it boosted those amongst middle class parents. This ongoing shift in attitude helps explain the changing level of contact parents had with the school as their children progressed. Middle class interaction increased as children moved through secondary school, whereas working class involvement fell. Fewer visits to the school were made and parents had less contact with teachers. By the final mandatory year at secondary modern schools only 1/3 of parents attended their child's careers meeting in comparison to over 70% at grammar school. Amongst children at grammar schools, fathers tended to become more involved, but this was not the case for those at secondary moderns.

Like middle class counterparts, Bynner found that working class parents were generally supportive of the school's role in engaging in moral and personal, as well as academic, development; however, they were less persuaded by the associated markers of conformity and investment that schools demanded. Only 25% of unskilled parents supported school uniform and 23% encouraged their children to participate in sports or school clubs (compared to over 50% of middle class parents). This reflected mounting frustration with, and alienation from, school ethos and meant that parents became less likely (or able) to support their children's academic development in other ways. Less emphasis was placed on homework and reading as a leisure activity in working class homes, and children tended to watch more television and were more likely to have part time jobs. Rather than attribute this to low educational aspirations, Bynner stressed the lack of harmony between parents and school and the conclusion that 'it is difficult to escape the conclusion that middle class parents seem to be gaining *more* from the educational system as their children proceed through it. In contrast, working-class children seem to *lose out* in it.'

Bynner failed to explore the process of alienation amongst non-white parents; however, the investigations of the Rampton and Swann reports reported this to be incredibly high. Non-white parents consistently felt that schools were failing to do enough for their children. In response, schools frequently laid the blame back at parents' feet, arguing that immigrant parents tended to work longer, anti-social

hours and did not understand the basic expectation that they should work in partnership with schools to enforce discipline and standards (even if schools made little effort to cultivate such partnerships).<sup>142</sup> Amongst those pupils who gave evidence to the Swann Committee and had succeeded at school, the positive benefits of parental support was consistently mentioned. Yet success often depended upon parents having sufficient cultural capital to navigate the system, with high expectations alone rarely enough to overcome systemic discrimination.<sup>143</sup> Swann reported that South Asian parents tended to place even higher expectations on their sons, but fewer opportunities were open to daughters before the late 1970s. Concerns over coeducation and uniform were prominent amongst Muslim communities and in turn could affect relations with the school and wider attitudes towards girls' career choices; however, rising concerns over youth unemployment from the mid-1970s onwards saw a shift in attitude and greater willingness to allow daughters to remain in school after minimum leaving age.<sup>144</sup> In West Indian families mothers tended to be more engaged than fathers, with the Swann Committee observing that this had a 'dynamic' effect for girls.<sup>145</sup> By 1978/79 girls from minority backgrounds were more likely than boys of all ethnicities to remain at school beyond sixteen. A growing number of Caribbean boys also stayed after 16 but were more likely to leave after the lower sixth, with Asian pupils of both sexes the most likely to complete sixth form. Like in the white school population, this partly reflected parents' educational backgrounds, with higher rates of South Asian fathers holding advanced qualifications.<sup>146</sup> Progress was made more difficult by the prejudice faced from white parents, who consistently expressed dissatisfaction and sometimes outright hostility to the presence of pupils of colour in their child's school.<sup>147</sup>

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For parents from all backgrounds the challenge of realising educational aspiration for their children was a fraught and contingent process. Those with the greatest cultural and economic resources were most likely to find success in this regard. The system appeared designed to meet their needs, while their attitudes appeared most in line with school ethos and thus made collaboration between school and home easier to achieve. Nonetheless, ongoing inequality of outcome should not blind us to the multifaceted ways in which parents sought to influence their children's education across this period. As the project moves forward, we need to understand better the strategies pursued to further individual ambition but how these frequently depended upon parents' capacity to come together in collective action. While these alliances were always cleaved along lines of class, gender, ethnicity, and locality, they served to fashion parents into a key group in the formation of modern, democratic citizenship in postwar Britain.

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<sup>142</sup> Swann, p. 78

<sup>143</sup> Swann, p. 102.

<sup>144</sup> Swann, p. 108, 341.

<sup>145</sup> Swann, p. 169

<sup>146</sup> Swann, p. 169.

<sup>147</sup> Swann, p. 266; Tomlinson, *Race & education*, p. 90.