

# ROBERT CASSEN



## Can Education Overcome Social Disadvantage?



THE  
ECONOMIST'S  
SOCIETY



22th OCT  
18:00 - 19:30  
Medical  
Sciences  
AV Hill LT

# Can Education Overcome Social Disadvantage?

Robert Cassen, Emeritus Professor  
Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, LSE



The London School of Economics  
& Political Science

# We aren't doing very well

- Large tail of inadequately educated pupils generally. In 2012, 36% of pupils couldn't manage an A\*-C grade in English GCSE; 42% couldn't manage it in Maths.
- Free School Meal (FSM) pupils half as likely to get 5 A\*-Cs as non-FSM: the 'social gap'. Little improvement in 5 years to 2012.
- Begins before school: cognitive gaps between disadvantaged and better-off children as early as age 3, and gaps in vocabulary at age 5. Famous study (Leon Feinstein) showed that bright children from disadvantaged backgrounds fared worse at primary age than less bright children from better-off homes.
- The social gap widens by age 11, and further by age 16
- Internationally we have a stronger relationship between social origin and educational outcome than many comparable countries – though we have done a little better in this OECD league table in recent years.
- LSE Growth Commission has called it 'a waste of human resources on a grand scale'.

## Some more background

- Variety of learning difficulties known as Special Educational Needs (SEN), not being met very successfully. But SEN are more common among the disadvantaged. Also there is an acute problem with children in care: the lowest educational outcomes of any defined group.
- Particular groups: **Boys** outnumber girls as low achievers by 3:2. (Same families, mostly same schools, but boys doing worse.) And among the disadvantaged, **White British** and **Afro-Caribbean** children do particularly badly. White British are over 70% of the school population.

# What could we do better?

Some key areas: -

- Teach them to read
- Reduce selection in schools
- Improve teaching
- Improve practical education
- Do more for SEN pupils
- Assist parenting more
- Do better in early years

# Reading:

## % getting Level 4 or above at Key Stage 2

<u>Year</u>	<u>Boys</u>	<u>Girls</u>	<u>All</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Boys</u>	<u>Girls</u>	<u>All</u>
1997	63	79	67	2007	81	87	84
1998	64	82	71	2008	83	90	87
1999	75	86	78	2009	82	89	86
2000	80	85	83	2010	80	87	83
2001	78	83	82	2011	80	87	84
2002	77	84	80	2012	84	90	87
2003	78	87	81	2013	83	88	86
2004	79	87	83				
2005	82	87	84				
2006	79	87	83				

# Improving Reading

- Research shows with best teaching, and individual support where needed, poor readers can be brought down to around 1.5%, not 14% as now.
- Individual support: Reading Recovery works (but Coalition Government has reduced its ring-fenced funding). Expensive but worth it. High cost of not learning to read.
- Some helpful ICT: 'Assistive technologies'; Accelerated Reader, Lexia Reading ...
- Cope better with dyslexia. Or 'dyslexia'.
- Phonics – ok but need 'phonics plus'. Programmes like Power of Reading, and Building Communities of Readers help teachers know what books pupils will like and encourage reading of books (not least for boys).
- 'Get London Reading' seems to be successful. But why was it left to the *Evening Standard*?

# Schools (1)

## Selection

- The disadvantaged have lower chances of getting into better schools. The UK has in fact among the highest degrees in the developed world of school segregation by disadvantage.
- Segregation occurs because schools which can control their intakes often select pupils more likely to do well. (League tables!) But also better-off families can afford, and do choose, housing where state schools are better, so they get into the catchment area. (Research shows big premium for this housing. (Steve Gibbons, Quantitative Geography, LSE.)) There is covert as well as overt selection.
- Some faith schools can control intakes, and take less than the average share (17%) of FSM pupils. Currently about 1/5 of pupils are in faith schools which control admissions (many more in schools whose admissions are controlled by LAs).
- Solutions: (a) get schools which can control intakes to be fairer. Lot of calls for faith schools to give fairer access. (b) Lotteries? (Did not work very well in Brighton, but could work better: need to band schools.)

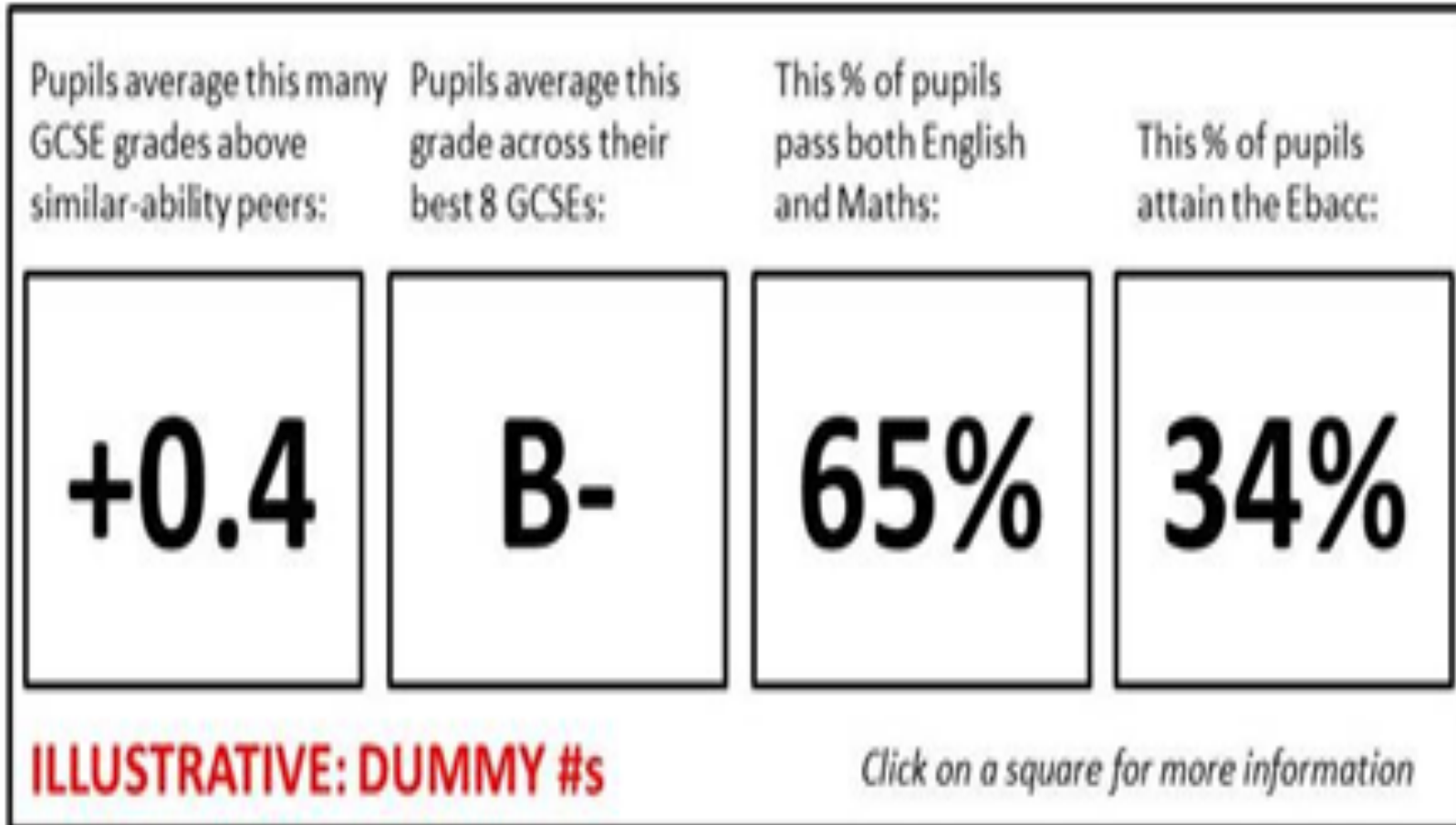


# Schools (2)

## Teaching

- Even if all secondary schools were 'outstanding', and the disadvantaged made the same improved progress they already do in 'good' schools, a substantial gap would still remain. Secondary schools can't close the whole gap they inherit from primary schools.
- Key thing besides selection is to improve teaching. Not bad at present: Ofsted found 59% of teachers 'outstanding' or 'good' in 2010. But obviously can do better. Research says improving teaching is best way to improve outcomes, yet so much concentration on school reform ...
- Should look at (a) Initial Teacher Training: Too much based on school experience, give more weight to incorporating research findings in training? No clear evidence of the effectiveness of different routes into teaching. Perhaps make it easier to enter teacher training, but harder to qualify, with longer probationary periods. But **only 35,000+ new teachers per year, and whole teaching force is 400,000+**. So
- (b) Continuing Professional Development: Fairly good research. Key seems to be to transmit skills within schools to teachers who need improvement, with outside help when necessary, or with the collaboration of partnerships. Actual practice in pursuing CPD is highly variable.
- Expand Teach First: seems to be doing well, enhancing attractiveness of teaching profession and some evidence that Teach First teachers raise outcomes. But quite small, only 1000, present plan to expand to 2,000 a year by 2015.
- League tables! Research shows bad for disadvantaged, as teachers may concentrate on D's they can turn into C's, not make equal efforts for all; or pupils for whom schools have lower expectations get worse teachers. NB Just announced: change to League tables for 2016 - will look at progress in 8 GCSEs.

# New League Table system for 2016



# Practical education

- Lot of concentration today on making curriculum and GCSEs 'tougher', English Bacc etc. Not likely to be helpful to those already struggling.
- Range of vocational options in schools huge, confusing and unhelpful. Several qualifications have no value in labour market (Wolf Report).
- Coalition Government has expanded apprenticeships (good) but removed Educational Maintenance Allowance (not so good: research showed the EMA had positive effects, keeping students in college courses etc). Also not many apprenticeships for young people: new Sutton Trust report.
- Still need clear (and switchable) path into vocational, practical courses. Some practical education good for everyone; some students may be less academically inclined and really need it.
- Instead we have endless churning of policy without much useful outcome. Exceptions? University Technical Colleges for 14-18 year olds (now 17 of them)? ...?

# Special Educational Needs

- Currently about 1/5 of pupils are classified as having SEN. But not clear that this is helpful. Schools differ in how they identify.
- Little robust evidence that large expenditures on SEN pupils are having much effect on their outcomes. Much expenditure is on teaching assistants (there are some 400,000 of them) whose effectiveness is uncertain. Though they may be raising achievement of non-SEN pupils, by giving teachers more time, reducing disruption etc (not much research).
- Pupil premium may help but too early to say.
- For those interested, the Lamb Report, *Special Children* (2009) has latest, sensible sounding, set of recommendations.

# Early years and Parenting

## Early years

- Evidence (especially from USA, but also UK) suggests that high quality early years interventions can help considerably in overcoming disadvantage. Economists should be aware of the 'Heckman curve': the earlier you intervene, the higher the return. NB High quality essential, as UK research shows.
- Key policy of late has been Sure Start. Coalition Government has reduced Local Authority funding, which has led to closure of some Sure Start centres – though many were not reaching the most disadvantaged.
- Visit National Evaluation of Sure Start, <http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/>

## Parenting

- Considerable evidence of effectiveness. Very large number of interventions, for health, home learning environment etc.
- Research gives key importance to school-parent links for educational outcomes
- Essential reference: Desforges, C., and Abouchar, A. (2003) *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: a literature review*, Research Report RR433. DfES

# Conclusions

- There is a considerable amount to be done to overcome disadvantage in education. An educational system which set out to be more effective for those who have a poor start in life would look considerably different from what we have at present.
- Better reading, less selection, better teaching, no league tables (well maybe value-added tables, but not 5 A\*-C), better performance with SEN, better early years and parenting.
- But education alone will always leave some behind. Fundamental inequality needs to be addressed. Studying our educational system just shows us how unequal we are as a society.

Forthcoming book:

*Making a Difference:  
What works in education and what doesn't*

Prof.s Robert Cassen, Sandra McNally, and  
Anna Vignoles

To be published by Routledge in Spring  
2014

While you are waiting:

Peter Mortimore, *Education Under Siege*

Policy Press 2013