

# Are independent schools really in decline?

## The facts suggest otherwise

Lord Lucas, Old Etonian and one of the hereditary peers elected to remain in the House of Lords after the passing of the House of Lords Act 1999, has been widely quoted as saying independent schools are 'in decline.'



Chris King, Chairman of HMC and Headmaster of Leicester Grammar School said: "It is surprising to read Lord Lucas's views given numbers of pupils are at record levels in independent schools."



Barnaby Lenon, chairman of the Independent Schools Council, ISC, said data does not support Lord Lucas's opinion. "Numbers grew last year; of course things are tough for many schools but we are successful because we work hard, employ good staff and do the right things. We also have advantages in terms of per pupil spending and freedoms from government."

Parents may be concerned about some of the recent coverage which may have included misleading or misinformed opinion. The following aide memoire - compiled by the ISC - will prove useful to heads and others who prefer to base their responses on facts..

### Exam results

At A level in 2015 49% of subjects taken at independent schools were graded A\*/A compared to 26% nationally. Research published by Cambridge Assessment in December 2015 found independent sector pupils were up to four times more likely to achieve at least one top grade than pupils from a state school (nearly all of which have academically selective sixth forms). In 2015 nearly a third of pupils taking the IB Diploma obtained 40 points or more. The average was 36 points, equivalent to 4.5 A grades at A level.

In 2015 a third of ISC GCSE entries were awarded an A\* compared to 7% nationally.

This would be less impressive if fee-charging schools were very selective academically - but most are not. There are few well-known schools that are very over-subscribed, very selective and who achieve outstanding results, but equally impressive are the great majority which barely select at all but where most pupils achieve very good grades.

Since 2003, the state sector has recruited approximately 6,000 secondary teachers with Oxbridge degrees, increasing its proportion of Oxbridge educated teachers from 3% to 5%. During the same period, the proportion of

independent secondary teachers with Oxbridge degrees has remained stable at about 17% (Sutton Trust, 2015).

### Value added

The DfE performance tables measure progress (value added) from Key Stage 4 to Key Stage 5 and show that of schools where the A level value added was significant in 2014, 37% of state schools added value, while 94% of ISC schools did. The average value for independent schools was 0.16. The average for state schools was -0.09 (ISC research, 2015).

The Durham University CEM 2016 study found that differences existed between the academic achievements of independent and state schools from as early as the age of four years. Differences in the PIPS scores in reading and mathematics were found in favour of independent schools at ages 4, 8, 10 and at age 16 (GCSEs). At GCSE, independent schools had higher average scores than state schools in all the subjects included in the study and in the average of best 8 GCSEs. The difference between independent and state schools in the average of best 8 GCSEs was just under 2 GCSE grades based on the mean of three cohorts.

However, when the prior academic ability, deprivation,

student's gender, single sex and compositional variable were taken into account, the difference between the two sectors was 0.64 GCSE grades. The difference of 0.64 GCSE grades translates to an average difference of 0.41 standard deviation units between the GCSE performances of independent and state schools. This difference equates to a gain of about two years' normal progress and suggests that attending an independent school is associated with the equivalent of two additional years of schooling by the age of 16. Interpreting the difference on the scale of international PISA outcomes equates it to raising the UK's latest PISA results to be above the highest European performers, such as Finland, Switzerland and the Netherlands, and on a par with countries such as Japan and Korea.

### University entry

In 2014 researchers at the Institute of Education (IOE) and the University of Manchester analysed the education histories of more than 7,700 people in England and Wales whose lives are being followed by the 1970 British Cohort Study. They found that those who attended private secondary schools in the 1980s were about two and a half times more likely to gain a degree from a highly selective Russell Group

university than comprehensive or grammar school pupils with the same A-level results. They were also almost one and a half times more likely to graduate from a mainstream university than their state school peers.

Our own research shows that 2015 was the best-ever year for university entry for ISC schools. The ISC Census showed that over 92% of pupils went on to university. The offer rate (% of all applications receiving an offer, remembering that most pupils apply for five universities) for HMC and GSA schools rose to 80.6%, 78% for Russell Group universities.

Since 2011 the gap between ISC schools and other schools has increased on these measures. We may have only 6.5% of the school population but those pupils go on to make up 40% of the Oxbridge entry.

There are several reasons for this. Most important is the excellent A level grades of our students. Despite everything we might read, the top universities take the students with the best grades. For maths and science, independent schools make up less than a fifth of all A level entries but we achieve nearly one third of all A\*s.

Second, our students are much more likely to study the A-level subjects that the best universities want.

And thirdly, we give excellent university application advice.

### University degree results

HEFCE research in 2015 found that of independent school pupils 82% got 1sts and 2:1s, compared to 73% for state school students.

On all key measures (achieving a degree; achieving a 1st or 2:1 degree; continuing to employment or further study; achieving 'graduate-level' employment) independent school pupils at university outperform state school pupils.

### Support for hard subjects

In order to get into the best universities it helps if you have studied the subjects that those universities want. Independent schools in the UK teach these subjects especially well. Subjects like music, Latin and Greek are not offered to A level in many state schools.

Subjects like modern languages, maths, chemistry and physics have a bigger take-up in fee-paying schools than in the state sector. In 2015 independent school pupils made up 24% of entries for modern languages and gained 42% of the A\*s. ISC pupils are five times more likely to apply to university for MFL than were all applicants using UCAS in 2015. Our schools remain central to the survival of MFL courses at university.

### Support for alternative qualifications

A high proportion of the entries for the International Baccalaureate, the Pre-U and IGCSEs are from independent schools. They have sustained these qualifications in the UK. Schools which have chosen these alternative qualifications did so because they were more demanding than GCSEs and A levels.

### Support for the nation's sport

Sport, music and drama tend to be stronger at independent schools than in state schools. This is especially true of boarding schools

but is true of all independent schools. In most state schools, a small PE department has to manage most of the sport. In most independent schools many teachers are required to help with sport, so greatly increasing the number of teams that compete in any week.

As Sir Michael Wilshaw commented recently: 'Overall, independent schools are producing far more elite athletes across a range of sports than we would expect given the proportion of the population in England that they actually educate. This indicates that these schools are more effective at recognising, supporting and nurturing sporting talent than maintained schools and academies.'

At the 2012 Olympic Games 41 per cent of UK medallists were educated in the private sector. Of the England cricket team Stuart Broad was educated at Oakham, Joe Root at Worksop, Jonny Bairstow at St Peter's York, James Taylor at Shrewsbury, Alastair Cook at Bedford, Nick Compton at Harrow.....as Michael Henderson said in the Spectator in January about victories in South Africa - it was 'a wonderful tribute to the public schools which sharpened the skills of the star players.'

According to Ofsted, 61 per cent of the English players plying their trade in the Rugby Premiership went to independent schools. Twenty of the members of the 2015 Rugby World Cup squad were educated privately.

During the Conservative governments of 1979 to 1997, more than 10,000 school playing fields across Britain were sold off. A further 200 were sold off under Labour between 1997 and 2010.

### Soft skills

Sutton Trust research into former Assisted Places holders who were at independent schools in the period 1980-1997, published in October 2013, showed that these pupils had done much better than their peers of similar ability in state schools. The reason, the report states, is

that the independent schools taught self-discipline, self-reliance, ambition, curiosity, communication skills, cultural sophistication and self-confidence.

### Salaries

A 2015 report from the Sutton Trust and upReach charities found that six-months after finishing university, private school graduates in high-status jobs are earning £670 per year more than those from the state sector in the same high-status positions, even after taking into account any differences in age, gender, university attended and degree obtained.

Three years later, this gap has grown such that a private school graduate is on average earning £2,198 per year more than the comparable state school graduate. Half of this difference can be explained by factors such as prior academic attainment and the type of university attended, but the remaining half cannot - and is likely to be down to non-academic factors such as articulacy, assertiveness and other important soft skills.

### Careers

Alan Milburn's 2012 report into the professions showed 43% of barristers, 54% of chief executives, 51% of top medics and 54% of leading journalists attended independent schools. Nationally, only 6.5% of children attend private schools.

2013 research from the UCL Institute of Education and the University of Cambridge found that in a raw comparison, graduates who had attended private schools were 32% more likely to gain a "high-status" job - defined as the "higher managerial, administrative or professional" occupations - than state-school graduates from similar family types.

Even when accounting for other factors that could be driving this difference - such as a person's grades in school, the university they attended, the course and qualification they got, or their age

and gender - people who went to private school were still more likely to access a high-status job after leaving university.

In 2016, Debrett's 500 list of the most influential people revealed that more than 40% went to fee-paying schools.

The twenty-first century will be dominated by the growing importance of digital technology - a technology developed by pupils from British independent schools. The computer was invented by Alan Turing who went to Sherborne, the worldwide web was invented by Tim Berners-Lee who went to Emanuel, and Wolfram Alpha, one of the world's most important search engines, was developed by the Etonian Stephen Wolfram. A high proportion of those engaged in tech start-ups and software development in the UK went to our schools.

Four in ten of the UK's leading scientists went to independent schools - that is, 42% of the Fellows of the Royal Society and British Academy. John Gurdon won a Nobel Prize for his work on stem cells. Peter Higgs won the Nobel Prize for his work on sub-atomic particles. Our mathematicians include Tim Gowers, winner of the Fields Medal, and Andrew Wiles who proved Fermat's Last Theorem.

### Specialist schools for parents with particular requirements not met in the state sector

There are quite a number of schools of this type. For very clever children there are a number of highly academic, selective schools. For musical children there are schools which specialise in music or have outstanding music departments. The cathedral schools offer pupils the incredible experience of singing in a cathedral choir. For children who are good at sport, it is easy to find an independent school which will guarantee them good coaching, a full fixture list and the opportunity to play alongside other children of *(continued overleaf...)*

## in decline? part 2

### More about exam results...

Chris King, Chair of HMC and Headmaster of Leicester Grammar said:

“The current assertions that state schools have higher exam results than independent schools are based on a confused picture and do not compare like with like.

The best state schools are getting better but these are a relatively small number of predominantly grammar and free schools. When we look at the overall picture it tells us something very different, with hundreds of failing schools and areas of the UK where it is difficult to find a good school to send your child.

Parents and pupils deserve consistency and leading independent schools produce reliably outstanding results on a far bigger scale than the relatively small number of free schools.

This, alongside a holistic education, is why pupil numbers are at a record level and HMC schools are thriving.

Specifically, the New Schools Network findings rely on just 877 A-level candidates in free schools, compared to the

52,000 in independent schools who, across the board, achieve outstanding university entrance results each year. [52,000 is the upper sixth ISC population – i.e. includes c.2,000–3,000 who instead do IB or Pre-U]

More than half of all HMC sixth formers achieve straight As and A\*s in their exams each year and this is what parents are looking for, alongside brilliant co-curricular and pastoral care.

Also, HMC schools deserve credit for helping achieve the great free school results. A third of all free school A-level candidates come from two schools, the London Academy of Excellence and the Westminster Harris Sixth Form. Both were founded by schools in HMC.

The 280 or so A-level candidates at these two free-schools have achieved superb results and their success reflects a significant contribution by the HMC community to raising aspiration and achievement in these new state schools.

HMC heads are always delighted to see standards in state school rising; this is not the Football League and everyone can win”.

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high athletic ability. For those with special needs such as dyslexia or autism there are many outstanding independent schools that offer the best provision in the country for such children.

Another important specialism is boarding. There are some very good state boarding schools, but they are few in number. Parents choose independent boarding schools because they offer a secure environment where pupils receive excellent care, outstanding teaching and unparalleled access to extra-curricular activities.

### Social mobility

A third of pupils at ISC schools are on a reduced fee. Several schools have spent the last ten years building up bursary funds.

For example, Manchester Grammar School now has 220 bursary holders and the AVERAGE bursary there is 93% of the fee.

And as 40% of UK independent school pupils have parents who did not themselves go to an independent school this is not about the perpetuation of a small elite. These schools are a path to social mobility.

29% of pupils at independent schools are from a minority ethnic background – more than in the state sector. In many independent schools in London and Birmingham the majority of pupils are now non-white – and their schools are providing them with the ladder to prosperity their parents or grandparents envisaged and hoped for when they came to this country.

# Innovative plans to inspire & equip next generation of engineers

Enjoying high-profile backing for the concept from Professor Dame Ann Dowling (President of the Royal Academy of Engineering) and the James Dyson Foundation, St Faith's school has developed a robust engineering curriculum in consultation with Cambridge University's Department of Engineering, with additional input from international engineering companies based in Cambridge, and in accordance with the Royal Academy of Engineering guidelines. Pupils aged between 7 and 13 now benefit from weekly lessons, delivered by a specialist teacher as part of the core timetable.

The curriculum has been designed to incorporate aspects from across the various engineering disciplines including: civil; electronic; mechanical; aeronautical; sustainability and chemical.

Mrs Margaret White, Director of Studies, at St Faith's explained, “Engineering will support our goal of developing good habits of learning, and will be taught in such a way as to foster the essential attributes of curiosity, creativity, initiative, and rigour. Pupils will be expected to apply their scientific, mathematical, computing, and design skills to solve a variety of problems.



Margaret White, Director of Studies

They will be encouraged to find and develop their own areas of strength while working in collaborative teams, tackling projects from the problem and design stage through modelling and modification to implementation and evaluation, applying knowledge, understanding and skills gained in other subject areas. This will be a new way of working, which strongly combines the intellectual, creative, practical and social elements of learning. As such we are confident that Engineering is an excellent addition to our curriculum, and to our pupils' academic development.

“We understand that engaging pupils in real life scenarios is inspiring and that engineering, to be appealing, should have a practical context. Our Year 6 pupils are being challenged to consider how they can make a difference by designing

