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14th January 2022

Dear Dr Keir

Firstly let me take this opportunity to wish you, Dr. Keir, as Chairperson and the other members of the panel, every success in your Review of Education in Northern Ireland. Like your own review, The Coleman Report (Equality of Educational Opportunity 1966) was a monumental undertaking. James Coleman wanted to understand outcomes. How well were pupils learning? What might influence a child's capacity to learn? Was it teachers, peers, families? This mammoth piece of research involved 600,000 students, 60,000 teachers, 4,000 Public schools and a 737 page report. George F. Will writing in the Washington Post on the 50th Anniversary of the report 'The report was so 'seismic ' Daniel Patrick Moynihan's word – that Lyndon B. Johnson's administration released it on fourth of July weekend 1966, hoping it would not be noticed . But the Coleman Report did disturb various dogmatic slumbers and vested interests and 50 years on, it is as pertinent to today's political debates

about class and social mobility' (George F. Will – Washington Post July 6th, 2016).

Coleman found that the most important predictor of academic achievement is the socio – economic status of a child's family, and the second most important predictor is the socio – economic status of the classmates in her school. In other words being born poor imposes a disadvantage; but attending a school with large numbers of low income classmates presents a second independent challenge.

We have a failed education system where 30% of adults lack basic qualifications. The educationalist, Sir Robert Salisbury, in an address to the Policy Forum for Northern Ireland reported that no schools in England had such poor achievement as the lowest achieving schools in Northern Ireland. Economist, Professor John Fitzgerald , Trinity College Dublin warned that the North's economy needs a devolved government to tackle 'the worst educational system of any region in the UK' which he estimates would take up to thirty years to fix.

We have the most socially segregated system of education in Western Europe. The OECD's 2012 bench mark placed us at 34th out of 34 developed countries on that measure. The high levels of social segregation in our schools is facilitated by a transfer test which acts as a filter for social selection, more advantaged children go on to the grammar sector and poor children usually go on to the Secondary sector. This has led to high concentrations of poverty in too many of our secondary schools and it is these high concentrations of poverty that are causing a huge tail end of underachievement in our education system. High poverty schools consistently fail to provide students an equal opportunity for an adequate education. All students perform substantially worse in high poverty schools.

Parent Power, the Sunday Times School Guide 2022 identifies the highest achieving schools throughout the UK ranked on their examination results 2017 – 2019. The top ten schools in Northern Ireland are all grammar schools whose average free school meals figure is 7%. To put this figure in context, the overall percentage of children entitled to free school meals in Northern Ireland is 28.4%. Free school meals in Secondary schools here average 37.1% and almost a quarter of our secondary schools have over 50% of their pupils on the free school meals register. As the OECD have pointed out selecting pupils on the basis of academic achievement tends to create great social differences between schools. It also increases the link between socio economic status and performance - it tends to accelerate the progress of those who have already gained the best start in life from their parents. Our elitist education system favours the haves over the have nots and the process of social segregation facilitated by the Transfer Test has accelerated

since the Education Act of 1947. Fifty years ago grammar schools took roughly 20% of eleven year olds, now they take 45% and as the statistics indicate the vast majority of these children come from middle class backgrounds. So now we have more and more high poverty schools here with all the problems that come with high concentrations of poverty.

High poverty schools can be good schools but it's difficult. In 2000, the Heritage Foundation published a report entitled 'No Excuses', to show that high poverty schools could work well. The author proudly declared that he had found not one or two high poverty, high performing schools, but 21, high poverty, high performing schools. Unfortunately these 21 schools were dwarfed by the 7,000 high poverty schools identified by the US Department of Education as low performing.

Empirical evidence suggests that leaving the division of students into different types of school until they are a little older means students' scores at age 15 are more likely to reflect their potential and effort, and less likely to reflect the size of their parents pay cheques (Hanushek E, Woessmann L. Does educational tracking affect performance and inequality differences in evidence across countries . Economic Journal 2006). We know that the best education systems in the world are non-selective and those which have shown recent improvement, including Germany and Poland, are currently moving away from selective education. As Sir Michael Wilshaw, the retired head of Ofsted, said in an interview in *The Observer* in 2016: "Which great education system has selection at 11? I don't know any."

The ideology of ability is particularly powerful in UK educational policy and practice . There is a widespread belief both within and outside the education profession that individuals have 'fixed' ability with a strong genetic component (Sukhandan & Lee , 1998) . According to this belief ability can be measured accurately and is a significant determining factor in educational achievement. This focus on ability is in marked contrast to many of the countries that out-perform the UK in International comparative studies of educational performance (Stigler & Hiebert 1999). In the Pacific Rim, for example, a much greater emphasis is placed on the notion of effort (Askew et al 2010) whilst Finland emphasises equity throughout their education system (Pehkonen, Ahtee & Laronen 2007). Research by Professor Jeremy Hodgen (University of Nottingham) 'Setting, Streaming and Mixed Ability Teaching' concluded by saying: ' To sum up, although the current political consensus is in favour of more setting and ability grouping in schools in order to raise standards of educational achievement, there is little research evidence to support this view. In fact the evidence strongly suggests that grouping by ability is unlikely to raise attainment overall. Setting and streaming create and exaggerate differences in attainment between pupils. Small academic benefits for high achievers are achieved at the expense of serious disadvantage for low attainers. There is conclusive evidence that setting and streaming create and perpetuate social inequalities among students.'

Three seminal studies in the 1960's and 1970's provide support for this view. Hargreaves (1967), Lacey (1970) and Ball (1981) all found that placing students in high and low streams created a polarisation of pupils into pro and anti – school factions.

Academics at Durham University using Government data on more than 549,203 pupils in England in 2015, looking at information on their attainment, school and background concluded that the apparent GCSE success of grammar schools is down to pupils coming from more advantaged backgrounds and having higher academic achievement at the age of 11. Professor Stephen Gorard, of Durham University's School of Education , said, 'The progress made by grammar school students is the same as progress made by equivalent children who do not go to grammar school. Dividing children into the most able and the rest from an early age does not appear to lead to better results for either group. This means that the kind of social segregation experienced by children in selective areas in England and the damage to social cohesion that ensues, is for no clear gain.'

Since 2010 I have been involved in correspondence with Richard Kahlenberg a Senior Fellow at the Century Foundation and author of numerous books and articles on socio- economic integration including ' All together now – Creating middle- class schools through public choice'. In 1999 when he gave a talk on socio – economic integration in American schools he was asked by Washington Post reporter David Broder where socio- economic integration policies were being pursued. At that time he could only point to La Crosse, a district with fewer than 8,000 students. Today, however, 91 school districts and Charter schools use socio – economic integration policies to enrol over 4 million students. Roughly 8% of all Public school students currently attend school districts or Charter schools that use socio- economic status as a factor in student assignment. These school districts and Charter Networks are located in 32 different states.

Here are some of the factors driving the socio- economic integration movement.

1. High poverty schools consistently fail to provide students with an equal opportunity for an adequate education. Research suggests that while it is possible to make schools with high concentrations of poverty work – these schools are an exception rather than the rule. A study by Tulane University Professor Douglas Harris found that middle- class schools are 22 times more likely to be consistently high performing as high poverty schools.
2. All students perform substantially worse in high- poverty schools. On the 2011 National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP) given to fourth graders in Maths , low income students attending more affluent schools scored substantially higher (244) than low income students attending high

– poverty schools (223) . This 20 point difference is roughly the equivalent of two years learning. Moreover, low income students given a chance to attend more affluent schools performed more than half a year better, on average, than middle – income students who attended high poverty schools.

3. Data from 2006 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) for 15 year olds in Science showed ‘a clear advantage in attending a school whose students are on average , from a more advantaged socio- economic background’. The report continued , ‘ Regardless of their own socio – economic background students attending schools in which the average socio- economic background is high tend to perform better than when they are enrolled in a school with a below average socio – economic intake’ (PISA 2006: Science Competencies for Tomorrow’s World Vol 1)

4. In 2010 , analysing from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) researchers concluded that the academic success of countries like Finland and Canada appear to be related in part to their greater degree of socio- economic integration. Finland – often held up as a remarkable education success story – had the lowest degree of socio – economic segregation of the 57 countries participating in PISA.

5. In 2005 Professor Russell Rumberger and his colleague Gregory J. Palardy of the University of California, examining a large data set, found that a school’s socio- economic status had as much impact on the achievement growth of high school students in Maths, Science, Reading and History as a student’s individual economic status. (R.W. Rumberger & G.J. Palardy ‘Does Segregation still Matter ?’)

6. A 2010 review of 59 rigorous studies on the relationship between a school’s SES and outcomes in Maths found ‘ consistent and unambiguous evidence’ that higher school poverty concentrations are linked with less learning for students , ‘irrespective of their age, race or family SES’. (Roslyn Arlin Michelson & Martha Bottia, ‘ Integrated Education and Mathematics Outcomes’)

The most rigorous research suggests that socio- economic integration is a far more powerful educational intervention than compensatory education in high poverty schools . Some of the strongest evidence to date comparing compensatory spending and integration was published in 2010 by Heather Schwart of the Rand Corporation. In a carefully controlled study examining students and families who were randomly assigned to public housing units in Montgomery County, Maryland outside Washington D.C. , Schwartz found very large positive effects as a result of living in lower poverty neighbourhoods and attending lower poverty Elementary schools. The research took advantage of a rare opportunity to compare two educational approaches. On the one hand , the Montgomery County school district had invested substantial extra resources (\$ 2,000 per pupil) in its lowest income schools (dubbed ‘ Red Zone’) to employ a number of innovative educational approaches, all day Kindergarten, reduced class sizes, investment in teacher development . On the other hand, the County also had a long standing inclusionary housing policy that allows low income students to live in middle and upper middle class communities and attend fairly affluent schools (dubbed the ‘Green Zone’). Thus, Montgomery County offers an interesting experiment: Do low income students perform better in higher poverty schools that receive greater resources, or in more affluent schools with fewer resources? Which matters more for low income students : extended learning times, smaller class size, and intensive teacher development programmes – all made available in Montgomery County’s higher – poverty schools - or the types of advantages usually associated with schools in which the majority of students come from affluent families, such as positive peer role models, active parental communities, and strong teachers?

The results were unmistakable: low income students attending low poverty Elementary schools significantly out – performed low income Elementary students who attended higher poverty schools with state of the art educational interventions. By the end of Elementary school, students living in public housing who attended the lowest poverty schools cut their initial sizeable Maths achievement gap with non- poor students in the district by half. For reading, the gap was cut by one- third . What is particularly remarkable about the comparative success of students in Public Housing attending Montgomery County’s more affluent schools is that they weren’t besting students stuck in terrible schools but rather students in schools that saw improvements. Indeed, the school system’s intervention in its less affluent Red Zone schools helped decrease the County wide achievement gap in third grade reading from 35 per centage points to 19 points for African Americans and from 43 percentage points to 17 points for Hispanic children. One interesting question raised by the study is to what extent students benefited from living in more advantaged neighbourhoods , compared with attending more advantaged schools. It finds

roughly two – thirds of the benefit comes from the school and one third from the neighbourhood.

Extensive research clearly indicates that high levels of social integration in our schools creates a win – win situation. Not only will it benefit disadvantaged students but it will also benefit the high fliers and more advantaged. Learning in socially mixed classrooms, where students from different backgrounds communicate their different experiences and perspectives encourages students to think in more complex ways (Verends & Penaloz). In addition, middle class students benefit in integrated environments by learning to work with others, unlike themselves – a 21st Century skill highly valued by employers.

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