4.8 The Comprehensive System and Its Aims: 30-minute Pack

AQA 8192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. For questions worth 3 marks or more write full sentences. Use sociological terms where relevant.

1 State one criticism from a Marxist perspective about the comprehensive system's effect on social class inequality.

(Total for Question 1 is 3 marks)

2 Explain two reasons why some sociologists conclude that comprehensivisation only partially achieved equality of opportunity, giving one concrete example for each reason.

(Total for Question 2 is 6 marks)

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3 Discuss how far the move to comprehensive schooling after 1965 achieved equality of opportunity in education, taking both supporting and critical sociological perspectives into account. Refer to policy aims and evidence where possible.

(Total for Question 3 is 8 marks)

4 Define what sociologists mean by 'comprehensive schooling' in the context of the 1965 policy change in England and Wales.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

5 Identify and explain two ways critics argue comprehensives may have maintained social selection internally, after the 1965 reforms.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

6 Describe one administrative measure local authorities used when converting schools to the comprehensive system after 1965, for example reorganising catchment areas or closing duplicate schools.

(Total for Question 6 is 3 marks)

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Mark scheme · 4.8 The Comprehensive System and Its Aims: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

identifies a Marxist criticism, e.g. comprehensives reproduce capitalist relations by teaching different social classes different skills and legitimising inequality	**B1**
development, e.g. schools sort pupils into roles useful for the economy while appearing fair	**B1**
brief further development, e.g. selection may be hidden in internal organisation, preserving class power	**B1**

Answer: A Marxist criticism is that comprehensives reproduce capitalist relations by sorting pupils into different roles and skills useful for the economy while appearing meritocratic; internal organisation hides selection and helps preserve class power.

Question 2

identifies first reason, e.g. internal selection like setting reproduces inequality	**B1**
provides an example and development, e.g. example: a working-class pupil put in lower sets misses A level preparation and so cannot progress	**B1**
identifies second reason, e.g. middle-class strategies such as house purchase and parental advocacy maintain advantage	**B1**
provides an example and development, e.g. example: parents move into a catchment for a high-performing comprehensive so their child gains better teachers and resources	**B1**
further development linking both reasons to partial achievement, e.g. these factors limit how far non-selection alone can make education fully meritocratic	**B1**
accurate use of sociological terms such as internal selection, social mobility, or cultural capital where appropriate	**B1**

Answer: Reasons include internal selection like setting that places some working-class pupils in lower bands so they miss A level preparation, and middle-class strategies such as buying into a catchment that secures better teachers and resources; these examples show why ending the 11-plus alone could only partially achieve equality of opportunity.

Question 3

Level 1 Basic points about comprehensives with limited development. May describe the policy aim or offer a single weak reason for or against the claim, with little evidence or sociological reference.	**1-3**
Level 2 Clear discussion that balances supporting and critical points. Uses some sociological ideas such as meritocracy, internal selection, or parental choice and gives brief evidence or examples. Lacks depth in evaluation or a clear overall judgement.	**4-6**
Level 3 Thorough discussion that evaluates competing perspectives. Refers to policy aims, provides evidence and examples, and explains mechanisms such as setting, parental strategies or widening access. Reaches a supported conclusion about how far comprehensives achieved equality of opportunity.	**7-8**

Indicative content:

- Supporting points: comprehensives ended formal 11-plus selection, widened access to academic courses, and in some areas increased working-class uptake of qualifications, which supports greater equality of opportunity.
- Critical points: internal selection via streaming and setting, middle-class strategies like moving into catchments or using influence, and differences in school resources meant selection could be relocated rather than ended.
- Sociological perspectives: functionalists might emphasise meritocratic aims and increased unity, Marxists argue class reproduction continues through hidden selection and role allocation, and feminists might note gender effects in subject choice and access.
- Evidence and examples: regional statistics showing rising O level/A level entries in some comprehensive areas, case studies of streaming outcomes, examples of parental house moves or appeals for banding, and methodological cautions about measuring opportunity using exam pass rates.
- Conclusion: a balanced judgement recognising that comprehensives made important moves towards reducing formal selection and widening access, but that equality of opportunity was limited by internal school practices and wider social inequalities, so the achievement was partial rather than complete.

Question 4

identifies comprehensive schooling as non-selective secondary schooling that educates all children together regardless of 11-plus results or class	**B1**
development, e.g. schools organised to teach pupils of all abilities in the same institution rather than separating them into grammar and secondary modern schools	**B1**

Answer: Comprehensive schooling is non-selective secondary education where children of all abilities are educated together in the same school rather than being separated by 11-plus selection into grammar and secondary modern schools.

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Question 5

identifies internal selection method, e.g. streaming or setting by ability within the school	**B1**
explains how streaming can reproduce class inequality, for example middle-class pupils more likely placed in top sets and access to better teaching	**B1**
identifies another internal mechanism, e.g. banding for entry to particular courses or sets for key subjects	**B1**
explains how banding can limit working-class pupils' curriculum choices and future qualifications, reproducing selection	**B1**

Answer: Critics point to internal selection such as streaming or setting, where middle-class pupils are more likely to be placed in top groups with better teaching, and banding for access to certain courses, which can limit working-class pupils' curriculum choices and future qualifications.

Question 6

identifies an administrative measure, e.g. redrawing catchment areas, merging grammar and secondary modern schools, or closing some small schools	**B1**
develops with a brief effect, e.g. redrawing catchment areas changed which pupils attended which schools and could alter the social mix	**B1**
additional development, e.g. merging schools removed the formal two-tier school structures in a local area	**B1**

Answer: Local authorities reorganised catchment areas and sometimes merged or closed schools, for example combining a grammar and secondary modern into one comprehensive, which changed which pupils attended which school and altered the local social mix.

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