



GSOC.ED8 The Comprehensive System and Its Aims

AQA 8192 · Calculators not allowed · about 75 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

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

- 1** Which of the following was a central policy aim of the 1965 move to comprehensive schooling in England and Wales?

- ☐ A) To expand selection by ability at eleven
- ☐ B) To end the 11-plus selection system and widen access
- ☐ C) To introduce tuition fees for state schools
- ☐ D) To replace local education authorities with academies

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

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

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

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- 3** Identify and explain two aims of the 1965 comprehensive schooling policy in reducing class-based inequality in education.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

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

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

- 5** 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 5 is 3 marks)

- 6** State one way the ending of the 11-plus exam was intended to affect social mobility in England and Wales after 1965.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

- 7** Identify one piece of evidence sociologists use to argue that comprehensives produced real meritocracy rather than merely relocating selection.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

- 8** Explain one reason why streaming within comprehensive schools can disadvantage working-class pupils.

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

- 9** Which administrative policy was often used to try to prevent obvious social segregation when forming comprehensive schools from previously separate grammar and secondary modern schools?

- ☐ A) Selective catchment exclusion
- ☐ B) A selective 11-plus retest
- ☐ C) Creating balanced intake through paired school catchments
- ☐ D) Introducing school fees to limit intake

(Total for Question 9 is 1 mark)

- 10** Using an example, explain one way parental choice or middle-class strategies could continue to affect equality of opportunity after comprehensivisation.

(Total for Question 10 is 4 marks)

- 11** Define the term 'meritocracy' as used in debates about comprehensive schools and equality of opportunity.

(Total for Question 11 is 2 marks)

- 12** Identify and explain one methodological difficulty when using exam pass rates to judge whether comprehensives improved equality of opportunity.

(Total for Question 12 is 4 marks)

- 13** Explain two practical measures a comprehensive school might use to reduce the visible effects of prior attainment differences between pupils on entry.

(Total for Question 13 is 6 marks)

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

(Total for Question 14 is 3 marks)

- 15** 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 15 is 6 marks)

16 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.

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 16 is 8 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.ED8 The Comprehensive System and Its Aims

Question 1

- **B1** B (to end the 11-plus selection system and widen access)
- **Answer: B**

Question 2

- **B1** 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
- **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.**

Question 3

- **B1** identifies an aim, e.g. to remove early selection at age eleven that favoured middle-class pupils
- **B1** explains how removing selection could reduce class-based inequality by giving all pupils access to the same curriculum and resources
- **B1** identifies a second aim, e.g. to widen access to academic courses for working-class pupils
- **B1** explains how wider access could reduce inequality by increasing opportunities for social mobility through qualifications
- **Answer: Aims included removing early selection at eleven to prevent middle-class advantage, so all pupils had access to the same curriculum and resources; and widening access to academic courses so working-class pupils had more opportunity to gain qualifications and move up socially.**

Question 4

- **B1** 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
- **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 5

- **B1** 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
- **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.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies a way, e.g. it was intended to increase opportunities for working-class pupils to access academic education
- **B1** brief development, e.g. by reducing an early gate that often diverted children into non-academic routes
- **Answer: The ending of the 11-plus was intended to increase opportunities for working-class pupils to access academic education by reducing an early gate that diverted many into non-academic routes.**

Question 7

- **B1** identifies an evidence type, e.g. studies showing increased numbers of working-class pupils taking O levels or gaining qualifications in areas with comprehensives
- **B1** explains how this supports meritocracy, e.g. more qualifications suggest wider access to academic routes
- **B1** identifies supporting data, e.g. regional statistics of rising working-class progression to further education in comprehensive areas
- **B1** development, e.g. such trends are taken as evidence tests of improved equality of opportunity
- **Answer: Sociologists point to studies and regional statistics showing increased numbers of working-class pupils taking O levels or progressing to further education in areas that moved to comprehensives; rising qualification rates are used to argue comprehensives widened access and supported meritocratic outcomes.**

Question 8

- **B1** identifies the reason, e.g. top sets often get more experienced teachers and a faster-paced, exam-focused curriculum
- **B1** development, e.g. if working-class pupils are disproportionately placed in lower sets they miss out on higher quality teaching and qualifications
- **Answer: Top sets often receive more experienced teachers and a faster-paced curriculum, so if working-class pupils are disproportionately placed in lower sets they miss out on higher quality teaching and chances to gain top qualifications.**

Question 9

- **B1** C (creating balanced intake through paired school catchments)
- **Answer: C**

Question 10

- **B1** identifies a parental or middle-class strategy, e.g. moving house to a desirable catchment area, or applying for entry to a particular comprehensive
- **B1** explains how this affects access, e.g. securing a place in a higher-performing comprehensive or a school with more top sets
- **B1** applies an example, e.g. a family buying a house near a well-regarded comprehensive to increase their child's chances
- **B1** development, e.g. this replicates class advantage by using economic resources to secure better school opportunities
- **Answer: Middle-class parents can move house into a desirable catchment or use applications to get into a higher-performing comprehensive, for example buying a home near a school with strong exam results; this secures better school places and top-set access for their children, reproducing class advantage despite non-selection by exam.**

Question 11

- **B1** identifies meritocracy as a system where people gain education and social positions on the basis of ability and effort rather than birth or class
- **B1** development, e.g. in education this means exams and qualifications should reflect individual merit
- **Answer: Meritocracy is a system where people gain education and social positions on the basis of ability and effort rather than on birth or class; in education, qualifications should reflect individual merit.**

Question 12

- **B1** identifies a difficulty, e.g. changes in exam systems, grade inflation or rising national standards over time
- **B1** explains how this complicates comparisons, e.g. later increases in passes may reflect broader standards or more exams rather than local school effects
- **B1** identifies another aspect, e.g. differences in pupil intake or social composition over time
- **B1** explains how intake differences confound causal claims, e.g. a school showing rising passes may have a more middle-class intake rather than have become more meritocratic
- **Answer: Methodological difficulties include changes in exam systems or standards and differences in pupil intake: grade rises over time may reflect national changes or inflation rather than local school effects, and higher passes can be due to a more middle-class intake rather than improved equality of opportunity.**

Question 13

- **B1** identifies a first practical measure, e.g. mixed-ability teaching in key subjects
- **B1** explains how mixed-ability teaching could reduce visible effects, e.g. by allowing lower-attaining pupils access to higher-level material and teacher expectations
- **B1** identifies a second practical measure, e.g. setting extra support such as catch-up classes or small group tuition
- **B1** explains how targeted support helps, e.g. by raising attainment and enabling pupils to compete for examination routes
- **B1** identifies a further measure, e.g. use of a broad curriculum including vocational as well as academic pathways
- **B1** explains how a broad curriculum reduces barriers, e.g. it provides multiple routes to qualifications so pupils of different backgrounds can succeed
- **Answer: Measures include mixed-ability teaching which gives lower-attaining pupils access to higher-level material and better expectations; targeted support like catch-up classes or small group tuition that raise attainment; and offering a broad curriculum including vocational routes so pupils have multiple routes to qualifications and success.**

Question 14

- **B1** 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
- **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 15

- **B1** 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
- **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 16

- **Level 1** (1-3): 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.
- **Level 2** (4-6): 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.
- **Level 3** (7-8): 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.
- **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.