



GSOC.ED9 Marketisation, Parentocracy and School Choice

AQA 8192 · Calculators not allowed · about 60 minutes

Total Marks

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Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. For questions worth 3 marks or more write in full sentences. Spend about 60 minutes on this paper.

- 1** Which of the following was a marketisation policy introduced or enabled in the period after the 1988 Education Reform Act?

- ☐ A) Ofsted inspections of schools
- ☐ B) Abolition of all school examinations
- ☐ C) Universal free university places
- ☐ D) Removing parental involvement in admissions

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

- 2** Define the term 'parentocracy' as used in sociology of education, referring to Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz's use of the term.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

- 3** Identify one feature of 'open enrolment' policy in the context of marketisation and school choice.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

- 4** Explain two ways league tables are intended to influence schools under marketisation policies for education since 1988.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

- 5** Explain the role of Ofsted inspections in the marketisation of schools since the 1988 reforms.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

- 6** Identify one stated aim of marketisation policies in education introduced from the late 1980s onwards.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

- 7** Item A: In 2025 a local authority published simplified data for six secondary schools. School X: 78% GCSE pass rate, oversubscribed; School Y: 52% pass rate, many vacancies; School Z: 80% pass rate, selective admissions; School W: 49% pass rate, high free school meal intake; School V: 75% pass rate, invests in tuition for borderline pupils; School U: 50% pass rate, recent poor Ofsted report. Using Item A and your own knowledge, explain two reasons why parents with more economic and cultural capital might prefer School X or Z.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

- 8** Describe two ways schools might respond to market pressures created by choice and league tables.

(Total for Question 8 is 4 marks)

9 Explain one criticism that suggests marketisation increases class inequality in education.

(Total for Question 9 is 4 marks)

10 Identify one example of a marketisation-related school type or status that became more common after the 1988 reforms and later policies.

(Total for Question 10 is 2 marks)

11 Define the term 'cream skimming' in relation to school choice and marketisation.

(Total for Question 11 is 2 marks)

12 Define the term 'silt-shift' as used by critics of marketisation in education.

(Total for Question 12 is 2 marks)

13 Give one strength of the argument that marketisation and parental choice can improve standards in schools.

(Total for Question 13 is 2 marks)

14 Explain two reasons why some parents may be unable to take full advantage of school choice.

(Total for Question 14 is 4 marks)

15 Compare how the New Right perspective and a Marxist perspective would view marketisation and school choice.

(Total for Question 15 is 4 marks)

16 Discuss how far sociologists would agree that marketisation of education has increased equality of opportunity, focusing on market mechanisms such as choice, league tables and inspections. Discuss how far sociologists would agree that marketisation of education has increased equality of opportunity.

(Total for Question 16 is 12 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.ED9 Marketisation, Parentocracy and School Choice

Question 1

- **B1** A (Ofsted inspections of schools)
- **Answer: A**

Question 2

- **B1** identifies parentocracy as a system where parents are given power to choose schools, with choice supposedly driving school improvement (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. credits Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz in noting this idea can mask inequalities between parents in the ability to choose
- **Answer: Parentocracy describes a system where parents are given power to choose schools, with the idea that parental choice drives school improvement; Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz note it can mask unequal ability among parents to exercise choice.**

Question 3

- **B1** identifies a correct feature, e.g. pupils can apply to schools outside their local catchment area
- **B1** brief development, e.g. this increases competition between schools for pupil places
- **Answer: Open enrolment allows pupils to apply to schools outside their local catchment area, increasing competition between schools for pupil places.**

Question 4

- **B1** identifies one way, e.g. to provide parents with information to compare school performance
- **B1** development of first way, e.g. so parents can choose higher performing schools, creating demand incentives
- **B1** identifies second way, e.g. to pressure schools to raise standards to improve their published position
- **B1** development of second way, e.g. lower-ranked schools may change practices or recruit differently to improve results
- **Answer: League tables are meant to give parents information to compare school performance so they can choose higher performing schools, creating demand incentives; they also pressure schools to raise standards to improve their published position, leading some schools to change practices or recruitment.**

Question 5

- **B1** identifies that Ofsted inspects and reports on school quality and standards
- **B1** development, e.g. inspection reports are public, informing parents and influencing school reputation
- **B1** identifies that poor Ofsted ratings can lead to interventions or loss of autonomy for a school
- **B1** development, e.g. this creates accountability and encourages schools to compete to avoid negative consequences
- **Answer: Ofsted inspects and reports on school quality and standards; its public reports inform parents and influence school reputation, and poor ratings can lead to interventions or loss of autonomy, creating accountability and encouraging schools to compete.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies an aim, e.g. to raise educational standards through competition
- **B1** brief development, e.g. by giving parents choice and by using performance information to reward successful schools
- **Answer: An aim was to raise educational standards through competition, by giving parents choice and using performance information to reward successful schools.**

Question 7

- **B1** identifies one reason, e.g. higher pass rates and oversubscription suggest better results and reputation
- **B1** develops that reason, e.g. parents with resources seek schools with strong exam records as this helps future opportunities
- **B1** identifies second reason, e.g. selective admissions or investment in tuition indicate selective or resource-rich environments
- **B1** develops second reason, e.g. parents with cultural and economic capital can meet admissions criteria or support extra tuition, so they can access or benefit from such schools
- **Answer: Parents with more economic and cultural capital may prefer School X or Z because higher pass rates and oversubscription indicate better results and reputation, which they value for future opportunities; selective admissions or investment in tuition show these schools are resource-rich or selective, and wealthier, culturally knowledgeable parents are better able to meet admissions criteria and support extra tuition.**

Question 8

- **B1** identifies one response, e.g. focusing resources on subjects that improve league table measures
- **B1** development of first response, e.g. setting more exam-focused teaching or revision classes
- **B1** identifies second response, e.g. selective admissions practices or marketing to attract desirable pupils
- **B1** development of second response, e.g. highlighting successes in publicity to boost reputation and applications
- **Answer: Schools may focus resources on subjects that improve league table measures, for example using exam-focused teaching and revision classes; they may also adopt selective admissions practices or market themselves to attract desirable pupils, highlighting successes to boost reputation and applications.**

Question 9

- **B1** identifies a criticism, e.g. choice benefits more advantaged parents who have information, money and social networks
- **B1** development, e.g. these parents can move, use private transport, pay for tutoring or navigate admissions to secure places
- **B1** links criticism to consequence, e.g. less advantaged families remain in lower performing schools, widening attainment gaps
- **B1** further development, e.g. marketisation can lead to cream skinning by successful schools, increasing segregation by class
- **Answer: Critics argue marketisation benefits more advantaged parents who have the information, money and networks to choose schools; they can move house, pay for tutoring or navigate admissions, while less advantaged families remain in lower performing schools, widening attainment gaps. Successful schools may cream skim, increasing class segregation.**

Question 10

- **B1** identifies a correct example, e.g. grant-maintained schools or academy status as types linked to marketisation
- **B1** brief development, e.g. such statuses gave schools greater autonomy and increased competition
- **Answer: An example is grant-maintained schools, and later academy status, which gave schools greater autonomy and increased competition.**

Question 11

- **B1** identifies cream skinning as selecting high-achieving or advantaged pupils to improve a school's results and reputation
- **B1** development, e.g. it leaves other schools with a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils
- **Answer: Cream skinning is when schools select high-achieving or advantaged pupils to improve results and reputation, leaving other schools with a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils.**

Question 12

- **B1** identifies silt-shift as the process where disadvantaged or lower-achieving pupils are concentrated in certain schools
- **B1** development, e.g. this happens when selective schools take the most advantaged pupils, leaving others 'silted' with harder-to-teach intakes
- **Answer: Silt-shift is the process where disadvantaged or lower-achieving pupils become concentrated in certain schools because selective or successful schools take the most advantaged pupils, leaving others with more challenging intakes.**

Question 13

- **B1** identifies a strength, e.g. competition can incentivise schools to improve teaching and outcomes

Question 14

- **B1** identifies one reason, e.g. lack of economic resources such as money for transport or to move house
- **B1** development of first reason, e.g. this limits the practical ability to access popular schools outside the local area
- **B1** identifies second reason, e.g. lack of cultural or informational capital to interpret league tables, fill forms or use social networks
- **B1** development of second reason, e.g. parents with less education may not know which questions to ask or how to navigate admissions procedures
- **Answer: Some parents cannot take full advantage of choice because they lack economic resources, like money for transport or to move house, limiting access to popular schools; they may also lack cultural or informational capital to interpret league tables, fill forms or use networks, making admissions harder to navigate.**

Question 15

- **B1** identifies New Right view, e.g. supports marketisation as increasing efficiency and standards through competition
- **B1** identifies Marxist view, e.g. sees marketisation as reproducing class inequalities and benefiting ruling-class interests
- **B1** explains New Right rationale, e.g. parents acting as consumers force schools to improve
- **B1** explains Marxist rationale, e.g. choice advantages privileged families and helps legitimize unequal outcomes as 'fair' market results
- **Answer: The New Right supports marketisation, arguing competition and parental choice increase efficiency and standards as parents act like consumers; Marxists argue marketisation reproduces class inequalities, advantaging privileged families and legitimising unequal outcomes as if they result from fair market processes.**

Question 16

- **Level 1** (1-3): Simple statements about marketisation with little or no sociological explanation, or an unbalanced description of one side only.
- **Level 2** (4-6): Clear explanation of one or two relevant sociological arguments about marketisation and equality of opportunity, with some use of evidence or examples, limited evaluation.
- **Level 3** (7-9): Developed analysis using competing sociological perspectives and examples, showing awareness of how market mechanisms have both positive and negative effects on equality of opportunity.
- **Level 4** (10-12): Thorough, balanced discussion drawing on several sociological perspectives and specific evidence, with a supported judgement on the extent to which marketisation has increased equality of opportunity.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Arguments that marketisation increases equality: New Right claim that parental choice and competition drive up standards, giving parents power to choose better schools and rewarding effective schools; league tables and Ofsted provide transparent performance data so parents can make informed choices; some disadvantaged pupils may gain from improved schools and targeted interventions in competition-driven contexts.
 - Arguments that marketisation reduces equality: Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz and other critics argue parentocracy privileges middle-class parents who have economic and cultural capital to choose, leading to cream skimming and silt-shift; league tables can stigmatise struggling schools and concentrate disadvantaged pupils; selective admissions, marketing and resource differences increase segregation by class and reduce genuine equality of opportunity.
 - Empirical and practical considerations: evidence that oversubscribed schools are dominated by pupils from advantaged backgrounds, that academy or autonomous status can lead to variable outcomes, and that Ofsted pressure can lead to short-term improvements but also to teaching to the test and exclusion of challenging pupils.
 - Perspectives to use: New Right supportive view, Marxist and critical sociologists highlighting reproduction of class inequality, Ball et al. on parentocracy, and feminist or interactionist comments on how choice affects different social groups in varied ways.
 - Possible judgement: balanced conclusion that marketisation has produced some improvements in choice and accountability but overall has tended to increase inequalities because advantaged families benefit most; extent of agreement depends on which sociological perspective is used and on how equality of opportunity is defined.