RESEARCH REPORT

Review of Education ▓BERA

Responding to research evidence in Parliament: A case study on selective education policy

Alan Bainbridge[1] ⬤ | **Tom Troppe**[1] | **Joanne Bartley**[2]

[1]Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education, Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury, UK

[2]Comprehensive Future, London, UK

Correspondence
Alan Bainbridge, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education, Canterbury Christ Church University, North Holmes Road, Canterbury, Kent CT1 1QU, UK.
Email: alan.bainbridge@canterbury.ac.uk

Abstract

This research focuses on how members of the UK Parliament engaged with evidence in relation to the policy decision leading to the Selective Schools Expansion Fund, a policy designed to enable the existing 163 English grammar schools to apply for additional funds to expand their intake. Although a small case study, the narrow focus provides a fertile setting for analysis of the relationship between research evidence, parliamentary debates and policy decisions. The article provides contextual background in relation to the dominant political parties' (Conservative and Labour) education policy manifesto statements and a discussion on the nature and understanding of evidence. Particular attention is given to how evidence can be used to support claims and the importance of justified warrants. Using NVivo software, we identified the thematic content of 11 parliamentary debates and analysed the findings using descriptive statistics, which we tested with a playful, carnivalesque extrapolation of the data. Argumentative

analysis shows that within the debates a number of rhetorical tools are used to avoid empirical evidence, including the deployment of a 'moral sidestep' which discourse analysis reveals in this case to be the repeated communication that grammar schools are 'good'. In this way, Ofsted ratings are conflated with moral goodness, leading to a disproportionate diversion of school funding in their favour. This case study exposes strengths and weaknesses of parliamentary debate, which might be relevant to educational researchers who focus on evidence-based policy and to the policy makers and other stakeholders who engage with the evidence such researchers offer.

K E Y W O R D S
education policy, evidence-based policy, policy making, representative democracy

Context and implications

Rationale for this study

In the context of calls for 'evidence-based practice', we sought to investigate why research evidence on selective education is repeatedly ignored.

Why do the new findings matter?

Our findings have implications for researchers who aim to improve education through providing evidence on which effective policies may be based, and for policymakers who encounter such research evidence.

Implications

Our findings also suggest broader implications for representative democracy and the efficacy of parliamentary debate. Within the immediate context of our research, these findings expose a moral positioning that persistently disrupts moves towards a more just comprehensive schooling system and the end of the eleven-plus exam. It also identifies and asks questions of the moral stance taken by policy makers, and how ignored evidence represents an ethical lapse that may negatively impact schools, teachers and student outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

This research focuses on a policy dilemma surrounding a particular type of secondary school selection within a specific temporal context that led to the Selective Schools Expansion

Fund (SSEF) (Department for Education [DfE], 2018), a policy designed to enable the existing 163 English grammar schools to apply for additional funds to expand their intake. This narrow focus provides a fertile setting for analysis of the relationship between empirical research evidence, parliamentary debates and policy decisions. In the process of such analysis, this research does not aim to offer new evidence or conclusions regarding the merits of secondary school selection. Rather, this single topic is the context within which we address the way the UK Parliament is observed to develop educational policy. Our approach was inspired by Stevens (2019), who observed politicians using moral concerns to avoid making evidence-based policy decisions and described this as a 'moral sidestep'. We wondered if similar avoidance was occurring in regard to the evidence being offered to politicians about grammar schools and selective education. Along the way, we began to question if the failure to effectively use evidence is a flaw in our representative democracy and its processes, with consideration to how this might impact educational researchers focused on evidence-based policy and the politicians who receive the evidence such researchers offer.

The enactment of the SSEF provides temporal and topical focus to explore the use of evidence in policy decision making. The expansion of grammar schools, which is the focus of the SSEF, and more explicitly the building of new grammar schools, is currently illegal (Education & Inspections Act, 2006), and additionally there is a paucity of empirical evidence for selective education providing better outcomes (see reviews in Danechi, 2020; Long et al., 2018; POST, 2016). The dubious legal nature of the SSEF would suggest that something was driving policy decision making and it did not seem to be evidence. The relevance of our focus can be further confirmed because, despite this transitory expansionist policy that in reality effected very few local authorities, the call to return to more widespread selective education is a continual campaign call from political parties mainly from the conservative right wing (e.g., Asthana & Elgot, 2016; Hitchens, 2021; Owen, 2021). Secondary school selection based on the exam known as the 11-plus persists as an issue inside and outside of Parliament, as can be seen in a parliamentary debate pack (Parliament. House of Commons, 2016) provided to MPs prior to a debate on grammar and faith schools. It listed 50 newspaper articles on grammar school and selection in the three months prior to the debate.

Within this context, we initially sought, as members of a group campaigning for comprehensive education, to investigate why the calls for more widespread secondary school selection persisted, particularly in relation to how and why the evidence on this topic is ignored when presented to local and national elected members. What has emerged, though, is an understanding of policy making that has implications beyond 163 schools and 50 newspaper articles. We suggest that our findings and the results of their analysis challenge our understanding of a representative democracy and exposes the strengths and weaknesses of parliamentary debate.

Our argument begins with a three-stage review of relevant literature. First, we examine the nature of evidence itself, taking into account the disparity between government and academic perspectives. Second, this is followed by a broad review of the research on how evidence is used in policy making. Third, we continue to explore the relationship between evidence and policy making by providing a brief summary of contemporary research on secondary school selection, followed by an examination of the dominant political parties' (Conservative and Labour) manifestos and how the education policy statements within them frame party perspectives on selective education. From this review of the literature, we then proceed to our methodology, where we describe how we selected and analysed data from parliamentary debates relevant to the time and topic of the enactment of the SSEF.

We interpret our findings using descriptive statistics, a playful, carnivalesque (Allen, 2000; Aydarova, 2020) extrapolation of this data, and finally an argumentative analysis (Stevens, 2019, citing Thompson, 1990) of the debates and the discourses which shape

their outcomes. We uniquely conclude that within this policy-making case study, we found not just the avoidance of evidence by moral sidestep, but the avoidance of evidence by a complex interplay of moral sidestep, dominant discourse and the moral code concealed within the Ofsted 'evidenced' measure of 'good'. Finally, we suggest that the use of moral sidesteps, and the associated coded discourse within parliamentary debates is unlikely to lead to evidence-based policy outcomes and raises questions about the efficacious functioning of a representative democracy.

LITERATURE, PART 1: THE NATURE OF EVIDENCE FROM GOVERNMENT AND ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVES

Government perspective on the nature of evidence

As the focus of this special issue is the use of evidence in policy and practice, we start this section highlighting the understanding of evidence as used by policy makers during the period of our research. In the Department for Education report 'Evidence-informed teaching: an evaluation of progress in England Research' (Coldwell et al., 2017), the government announces their aim to 'align policy changes with the best research evidence available' (p. 9).

They proceed to define evidence in the following terms:

> We use the term 'evidence' to mean seeking out and using: quantitative and qualitative research findings generated by external researchers; evidence reviews such as those produced by the Sutton Trust, EEF and John Hattie; external evaluations; and/or research produced by teachers/schools that is underpinned by rigorous and systematic enquiry. (p. 10)

It is noticeable (and will become important later in this paper) that neither Ofsted nor internal parliamentary reports are mentioned in this context. Equally, there is a shift away from the possibility of evidence being generated by those in practice, as suggested in the following passage.

> The ultimate test would be whether teachers could explain their choices and practice by referring to a robust evidence base and using logical argument and reasoning, rather than saying that they do it because Ofsted or the department has told them to. Within this, though, there must be appetite for innovation in order to further develop practice. Rather than this being unfettered development, innovation must be 'disciplined' in that it would build on existing knowledge of what works and why. (pp. 9–10)

Evidence is therefore clearly defined as being rigorous qualitative or quantitative enquiry and not emerging in an 'unfettered' manner within practice. This need to 'discipline' innovation within the confines of evidence related to 'what works and why' provides a clear signal that only certain types of evidence, even from certain organisations (Sutton Trust, EEF), or particular individuals (John Hattie) can be acceptable. This is a stance which, as we will explore just below, might not sit easily within the academic community due to its lack of acknowledgement that definitions of evidence can be and are contested.

Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education near the start of our research period, famously depicted his role as a battle with 'The Blob'—the educational research community, teaching union leaders and local authority officials who he argued favoured a more progressive and less traditional approach to schooling (Gove, 2013; Young, 2014). Although a politician might benefit from newsprint publicity and social media clicks by depicting a very broad

community in the education sector through the lens of a 1950s sci-fi film, this approach has defined an unhelpful binary positioning between what is regarded as progressive and traditional practice and equally what is acceptable evidence. Using this context as a point of departure, we shall explore the varied understandings of evidence from within the academic research community, while also highlighting the importance of legitimate or justified warrants (Gorard, 2002; Malone, & Hogan, 2020).

Educational research community perspective on the nature of evidence

The Michael Gove portrayal of the education academic research community as 'The Blob' and the accompanying attacks on what is perceived as progressive educational practices appear ironic in the context of the DfE's (2017) definition of evidence as 'quantitative and qualitative research findings generated by external researchers' (p. 10). What cannot be avoided, though, is that within the academic research community there is much discussion and division on the nature of the research process and its contribution to practice. The recent increase in the use of local, national and international league tables, often linked to conceptions of evidence-based practice, has begun to increasingly dominate the discourse. Associated with this has been attempts to identify 'what works' (Biesta, 2007, 2010). The discussion on what evidence is appropriate, and what may or may not work and why, as campaigners, is at the heart and soul of our academic inquiry.

A recent change of the *British Educational Research Journal* (*BERJ*) editorial board occasioned reflection on the impact of the evidence-based discourse favouring particular types of research, noting that:

> The nature and size of the part that educational research can play in the 'education debate' is a highly contested question across many quarters of society and academic endeavour. (Aldridge et al., 2018)

Whereas in a more recent *BERJ* editorial, Wainwright et al. (2020) make the case for educational research to be responsive to both the international and more intimate local level. We see our research in this context, working from a very localised case study that has potential application more widely in policy-to-practice decision making. Aldridge et al. (2018) make the case that although 'educational research remains contested' (p. 4), and therefore question what evidence is appropriate to inform policy decisions, it is important that these questions can be 'debated with sophistication' (p. 2). While we acknowledge that the *BERJ* editorial board do not represent the whole academic community, a broad tension exists between the certitude of the DfE, the narrow band of evidence they refer to, and the more sceptical positioning of the academic community.

The evidence-based policy-making debate between a 'what works' and a more sceptical 'purpose of education' approach has been well covered, but we offer a brief review here to provide context for our own research methodology. In a discussion on teacher education policy, Mayer (2021) questions what can be relied on as evidence in the complex non-linear process of learning and doing teaching, particularly while current policy appears to be in the grip of 'assumed linear connections driving regulation and accountability mechanisms and dictating what counts as evidence' (p. 132).

Calls to consider the complexity of education settings, and as such the type of evidence, are also echoed by Wrigley (2018) making the claim that due to the cultural status given to numbers, the 'evidence' in 'evidence-based practice' refers mainly to numerical or statistical data. Wrigley notes that the dominant milieu is driven largely by neo-liberal

principles of accountancy and audit and is particularly critical of two of the DfE's favoured sources of evidence—The Education Endowment Foundation's Teaching and Learning Toolkit (EEF, 2021), and John Hattie's (2009) *Visible Learning* project. The use of numbers is not rejected by Wrigley, in fact he supports their use in making very complex experiences understandable and therefore enabling effective interventions, the criticism focuses on:

> … an inflated and generalised role for statistical studies, a lack of awareness and self-awareness, and the omissions and linearities that arise in order to create an aura of science, order and regularity. (p. 374)

A position echoed by Aldridge et al. (2018) and Wainwright et al. (2020) who make calls for policy makers to consider a greater variety of evidence drawn from the diverse forms of research available to the academic research community.

We do not wish to create the simplistic impression that it is only policy makers who do not understand that evidence comes in many forms, let alone what evidence 'should' appropriately be used to inform policy. Gorard and Fitz (2006) note that even academics—often stuck with their own ideological preconceptions—struggle to identify 'good' research, and that this is not just an issue for those early in their career but also those who have a responsibility, through peer review, to ensure the publication of high-quality evidence of all types. Evidence obtained in this way would conform to the government's own definition (Coldwell et al., 2017) of suitable source evidence, for example, quantitative and qualitative research findings generated by external researchers.

Another noteworthy consideration identified by Gorard and Fitz was the unwillingness of researchers to be surprised, instead seeking to have already established views confirmed. Our own research survives or falls on our ability to consider and manage the influence of our campaigning stance, as well as holding on to the possibility of being surprised. This research would have little value if it simply confirmed that policy makers do not understand and avoid evidence of secondary school selection. What is important is that we explore *how* evidence is used in decision making.

Nature of warrants and evidential proof

The political emphasis on 'evidence-based' assumptions has dominated the educational research discourse for at least two decades since its emergence in medical practice (Guyatt et al., 1992). It leaves in its wake a confusion among many policy makers *and* academics what might constitute good, or appropriate evidence; what may or may not be reliable, replicable and ultimately generalisable. Not wishing to promote or denigrate any particular research approach or the evidence that emerges, we see value in all methods and their thoughtful application, and therefore wish to move the debate away from linear suggestions of proof and replicability, turning instead to consider the usefulness of the Dewey inspired 'justified warrant' (Malone & Hogan, 2020). There is not the space in this article to explore the epistemological dimensions or ontological derivations of Dewey's concept—this has admirably been done by Malone and Hogan—but what it offers is the possibility to view all types of research and their evidence as equally valid and worthy of consideration in policymaking decisions. This does not mean that 'anything goes', rather the opposite, that the academic community has a responsibility to ensure that assertions from research are held lightly to avoid misleading certainties.

Research guided by expectations of providing warranted assertions, as opposed to certainty, would be more provisional, open to criticism, while also being open to surprise and

unexpected nuance. Such a sceptical approach is also explored by Gorard (2002) who challenges the research community to provide persuasive links between the research carried out, findings and conclusions, including suggestions of real-world application. Gorard also suggests that much of the confusion about the nature of research evidence and its applicability is due to researchers making poor and unjustified warrants. That is, they make real world applications from their findings that over-emphasise or conflate potential conclusions. The advantage of considering the justified warrant is that it allows for the possibility that the academic or the politician might step out of their narrow research and partisan silos. The quality of research and evidence is therefore not linked so much to the 'how it was done' (although this is, of course, important), but to the logical progression from evidence to warranted assertions that make links to the real world alongside caveats that guide the reader preventing unrealistic claims.

In the next section we therefore seek to explore what warrants are used to justify the link between qualitative and quantitative research evidence, the conclusions drawn and how these may have been applied to practice—not just by the academic researcher but also the professional politician. The paper now moves to focus on a more general review of the literature, not always from the educational research community but does, in general, relate to how research evidence is used in policy-making decisions.

LITERATURE, PART 2: THE EVIDENCE—USE OF RESEARCH IN POLICY-MAKING DECISIONS

As would be expected there is already an extensive literature (for example, Cairney, 2016; Parkhurst, 2017) on 'evidence-based practice' and that various 'evidence-to-policy' models already exist. These models can be represented in three broad approaches, each describing increased situational complexity: the first would be a simple Linear Model, with a direct connection between evidence and policy; the second, the Multiple Streams Model, offers the possibility that policy decisions are influenced by the evidence, economic factors and public opinion; and finally, a Melee Model, where the fluid interaction between four types of evidence, scientific, political, economic and social, lead to policy decisions.

For us, the Melee Model most closely represents the context of educational research, and yet the complexity of the educational encounter may even make this model redundant. We imagine these four competing factors embedded with and influenced by the existing neo-liberal audit cultural discourse which has led to the call for 'evidence-based practice' (Ball, 2016). The previous section has already highlighted an unease within some of the academic educational research community of the attempt to reduce educational processes and practices to coherent linear relationships (Malone & Hogan, 2020; Mayer, 2021) and see any 'evidence' that emerges from these approaches as not valid. Dominant in this debate is educationalist Gert Biesta, who has confronted the 'what works' discourse with provocative articles on 'why what works, doesn't work' (Biesta, 2007, 2010).

Biesta provides three reasons why the very premise of 'evidence-based practice' is flawed; these are presented as deficits in knowledge, efficacy and application and have a synergy with those who assume that education is too complex for assumptions of a linear relationship between evidence, policy and then practice. Biesta argues for a knowledge deficit as the relationship between action and consequence can never be fully known, therefore evidence cannot be about certainty but possibilities, having some resonance with the application of justified warrants. The efficacy deficit draws on this position noting that if the relationship between action and consequence can only be in the realm of possibility, then research findings can only ever be tentative at best. Finally, the application deficit rejects simple linear notions

of evidence-to-policy-to-practice as this removes the complexity of education involving particular individuals, in particular circumstances at particular times (Bainbridge, 2019). Biesta's arguments are complex and at first seem unhelpful to the educational researcher (and by association policy maker); it is not that he rejects outright the idea that research can inform practice, more that the distinctiveness of the educational event requires a more nuanced approach than neo-liberal motivated linear cause and effect (Biesta, 2015).

Finding out 'what works' in education settings is not just a philosophical discussion but crucially one of fundamental importance to the democratic process, Biesta (2015) frames his discussion on the appropriateness of research methods in relation to the vital role education has in facilitating social justice. Gorard et al. (2017) also note that practitioners and policy makers should 'routinely use, or ought to use, evidence of many kinds to help decide on or to justify actions taken to improve the conduct of education' (p. 3). They also warn against the seduction of commercial or politically motivated kinds of evidence, that although often seen as helpful, and may even be to a limited extent, but that these are poorly understood and 'unwarranted'. There is therefore an ethical and democratic imperative (Alexander, 2017) for the appropriateness of the research method and the effectiveness of how evidence is translated into policy. This is what Sanderson (2003) had earlier referred to as the moral and factual decisions that can lead to practical and reasonable policy decisions.

Despite the UK government's call for education to be evidence-based, Pellegrini and Vivanet's (2021) review of European Commission documentation concluded that the impact of research on education policy continues to be limited. A number of authors argue that one suggestion for this impasse is largely due to institutional barriers that exist both within academia and government. For example, Ion and Lucu (2015) highlight the need to make research more visible and transferable; Newman et al. (2016) note how if it was made more clear that policy decisions should be based on both instrumental/technical and symbolic/valued assumptions, then the relationship between research and policy would be improved; and the Eurydice (2017) publication 'Support Mechanisms for Evidence-based Policy Making in Education' highlights the need for 'knowledge brokers' to facilitate the flow of information between academics and those developing policy. A second barrier frequently identified as hindering the use of research evidence in policy making is the quality of educational research. Slavin (2020) suggests that more careful research design would align educational research with impacts similar to those of agriculture and medicine. Additionally, there are numerous calls for research funding to be increased (Cooper et al., 2009; Gough et al., 2011; Ion & Lucu, 2015).

As has been shown, there are diverse views as to what 'good' research might be, specifically in the context of the complexity inherent in education processes and that wrong approaches to research, or unwarranted claims leading to inappropriate policy is likely to have serious social consequences. This section now moves to explore why research evidence may or may not be heeded and what the barriers might be.

The barrier between good research having a positive impact on policy and ultimately practice is not only a philosophical tussle between politicians and the disparate array of academic educational researchers but also the very different working conditions their professions require. Politicians typically will require simple solutions that can be clearly presented to the voting public and with equal haste wish to see some positive effects before the next round of voting, whereas the timeframe for academic researchers is more likely to be much slower (Gorard et al., 2020). Academic researchers are more likely to work to much more extended timeframes that require careful identification of the research context, development of a proposal, search for funding, and time to carry out and evaluate. This is without considering the nature of how to engage successfully with politicians (Alexander, 2017; Harford, 2020). One notable feature of recent times has been the rapid growth in commercial 'think-tanks' (although some are 'not-for-profit')—organisations that are often funded by

endowments or private donations (Weinberg, 2021). Their rise in popularity can be linked to the recent move towards 'evidence-based policy', as think-tanks can also be associated with neo-liberal principles. Harvey (2005) suggests that the dominant global cultural discourse of neo-liberalism positioned much of higher educational research, which is typically perceived as 'left leaning', as in conflict with government ideology. Think-tank research could therefore be quicker and more in line with previously held views. Finally, it is also worth noting that the fractured organisation of the academic community, including the competitive nature of grant application, and the presence of research excellence league tables, often does the community no favours, complicit in slowing down or preventing good research not only becoming policy but being shared with policy makers (Farley-Ripple et al., 2020).

It has been argued (Weinberg, 2021) that the influence of think-tanks and a dominant linear model of evidence-to-policy that decision making is more linked to conformity of previously held value assumptions than thoughtful analysis. Much of the research we present later will also confirm this assumption and. to an extent, this does not particularly surprise as values and ethical positioning will influence the way research is carried out, interpreted and accepted or rejected by policy makers. Decision is as much an ethical process as it is technical (Gorard et al., 2020). Van Leeuwen's (2007) work on 'legitimation' offers a helpful lens to explore how value assumptions lead to a discourse that may impact judgement. Evidence will be interpreted as legitimate and more likely accepted and acted on if it aligns with and is beneficial towards existing social values. Legitimation operates on four levels; the first is if the idea or action is linked to either past or current structures of authority or tradition; the second refers to alignment with moral values held by the organisation or group; next that there needs to be a relation to 'truth' or rational argument; finally, for the evidence to support existing narratives of reward.

We shall argue later in the discussion that legitimation and the Deweyian concept of justified warrants are supportive of each other and potentially provide insight into policy-making decisions. We suggest that evidence is more likely to be accepted if it is legitimated within the structures, process and moral assumptions held within the receiving group or organisation. Weinberg (2021) refers to certain static or resistant process factors as hegemonic structures that develop into 'corporate populism', largely influenced by the:

> … echo chamber of policy entrepreneurs who are influencing government policy in both tone and content, and undermining a logic of consultation with the core policy community (p. 582)

This observation is not dissimilar to Stevens' (2019) work on drug policy where substantial research evidence has been routinely rejected at the highest levels of government, and decision making can be described as a 'corporate agency' influenced by legitimated authority figures, rational positions and moral assumptions.

It is this synergy that leads towards a more detailed discussion of Stevens' moral sidestep. Stevens draws on Archer's (2000) definitions of corporate and primary agency, noting that the former emerges from socially advantaged groups, defined by normative values and structures that dominate the political and social landscape, whereas those with primary agency are usually groups with disparate and fragmented interests and values that exclude them from collective action. Our interest is mainly with those who represent the values espoused through and within corporate agentic structures, and to explore how this may influence policy decision making (although important but not a significant part of our research, the corollary infers that those with the status of a 'primary agent' will have little influence and their needs ignored and rejected).

The moral sidestep identified by Stevens noted how those who represented the dominant, powerful socially and politically advantaged groups made decisions that denied the full

humanity of others, in his case, drug users. The overall outcome is to protect established interests and power imbalances: those unable to articulate or inhabit the normative values of those who dominate are demonised for their inability and perceived to have no agency. It is of great interest to us to consider whether a similar dehumanization and stripping of agency might be occurring in the sidestep we have identified in this research with regard to policy making for selective education. In this case, the politically disadvantaged might be those children who do not pass an 11-plus examination. Equally, we might consider whether Archer's (2000) 'dehumanised' primary agents will be represented here by schools which do not receive the status of 'good' and so become the hidden 'bad' schools. Indeed, the evidence (Farquharson et al., 2021) suggests that this may be the case, as over the last 10 years the most deprived schools have had a funding drop of 14%, compared to 9% for the least deprived. Despite the importance of such considerations, they fall outside the purview of the present paper. Instead, we consciously limit our inquiry into the moral sidestep we observe here, with the expectation that it might provide insight into why research evidence that almost exclusively finds that secondary school selection has little or no significant academic advantage, should fail to dislodge this educational policy from its persistence as a mainstream policy-making objective.

Having explored multiple understandings on the nature of evidence and how this may or may not be used by politicians and academics, for context we shall now provide a brief summary of the contemporary evidence in relation to secondary school selection and how this same topic appears in political manifestos.

LITERATURE, PART 3: RESEARCH EVIDENCE AND POLITICAL MANIFESTOS REGARDING SELECTIVE EDUCATION

The tensions outlined above between political and academic perspectives on evidence are mirrored in the way that selective education is framed in research evidence and political manifestos. The aim of this paper is not to enter a debate about the efficacy of secondary school selection and the impact of segregating children into grammar and secondary modern schools. However, this context provides a suitably small case study within which to explore the complex phenomenon, outlined in the previous sections, of how politicians use empirical evidence when making policy decisions. It is appropriate to here mention not only how clear the existing evidence base already is, but also the authors' professional familiarity with and perspectives on the evidence due to political campaigns we have joined to question the efficacy and justice of selective education. This experience brings with it an awareness of the complexities of these issues and the varied evidence brought into argument on the topic. Therefore, we have set ourselves the aim in this research to focus on how evidence is used and not continue a discussion of conflicting sources and views of evidence. For context, then, this paper will provide a brief overview of current research evidence on the impact and effectiveness of selective education, in terms of academic achievement, social cohesion and individual well-being.

Despite our campaigning background, we recognise evidence for the potential benefits of selective secondary school selection, for example, slightly improved GCSE results for borderline 11-plus pass/fail pupils (Coe et al., 2008; Danechi, 2020; Lu, 2020a, 2020b; POST, 2016). It is worth noting that the report by Coe et al. (2008) was for the Sutton Trust—one of the DfE's 'approved' sources of evidence—who cast doubt on what has been termed the 'grammar school' effect. However, the evidence for either neutral or damaging outcomes represents the vast majority of the research literature (Buscha et al., 2021; Gorard & Siddiqui, 2018; Long et al., 2018). These include evidence that the academic segregation of

children: maintains existing inequalities, leading to schools that do not represent their local communities and have a negative impact on children's well-being (Phillippo, 2019); does not increase social mobility in either relative or absolute terms (Buscha et al., 2021); increases the attainment gaps between socio-economic groups for long-term disadvantaged children (Gorard et al., 2021); has little impact on academic attainment for most pupils (Lu, 2020a, 2020b); and that selective schools receive a disproportionately large income (Rowe & Perry, 2021). Thus, the conclusion to be inferred from research evidence is that academic selection has at best a null effect, although it is most likely negative and damaging, and cannot be supported by evidence-based policy. Indeed, parliamentary briefings and research summaries (Danechi, 2020; Long et al., 2018; POST, 2016) have consistently presented the empirical evidence to MPs showing that selective education has little, if any positive impact.

As this paper will ultimately expose, what is noticeable is the lack of engagement with such evidence in the development of the SSEF policy. Antecedent to that specific policy are the manifestos of the Conservative and Labour parties and their statements on selective education. While it would be inaccurate to suggest that all members of each of the two main political parties in England adhere to partisan views on selective education, the Conservative and Labour Party manifestos released during the period of our research offer insight into their views on secondary school organisation. If it can be assumed that manifesto writing—the setting out of policy intentions—has been based on discussions involving evidence, the manifesto commitments may then provide an initial indication on how evidence has been interpreted. We are aware, and not wishing to make a pun, that our evidence base for this assumption is weak insomuch that we can provide no causal link between evidence and policy beyond Nick Gibb the Conservative Party School Standards Minister's observance of E. D. Hirsch's claims of the benefit of a traditional knowledge-rich curriculum (Gibb, 2017). While not providing direct support for selective education and grammar schools, the link to traditional knowledge rich curriculum is often regarded as synonymous with grammar school education.

The Conservative Party manifesto, within its section on education titled 'The World's Great Meritocracy' (Conservative Party (Great Britain) and May, 2017), provides some indication of their stance on selective education plus some insight on how this may be more inspired by moral discourse than informed by evidence. In it, the Conservative Party promises to deliver:

> More *good school* places, ending the ban on selective schools and asking universities and independent schools to help run state schools. (p. 48, authors' emphasis)

And to succeed they must:

> … redouble our efforts to ensure that everyone, no matter who they are or where they are from, can have a world-class education. (p. 49)

They further propose to achieve '*more good school places'* by lifting:
… the ban on the establishment of selective schools, subject to conditions, such as allowing pupils to join at other ages as well as eleven. Contrary to what some people allege, official research shows that slightly more children from ordinary, working class families attend selective schools as a percentage of the school intake compared to nonselective schools. (p. 50)

In the argumentative analysis of parliamentary debate later in this article, we shall highlight how these ideas of 'meritocracy' and 'world-class' continue to influence policy making in the context of grammar schools. Additionally, even in the early stages of this article, seeking to explore how evidence is perceived and applied, it is apposite to highlight the dubious use of the phrase:

> … official research shows that slightly more children from ordinary, working class families attend selective schools as a percentage of the school intake compared to nonselective schools.

The assertion that slightly more '*ordinary and working-class families'* has been shown by research is one that has been widely contended by academics (Burgess et al., 2018), independent education policy researchers and analysts (Allen, 2017) and activists (Coombs, 2017). Each question the nature of the evidence used to support the government's claim, ranging from simply a lack of understanding of the evidence to suggestions that the statement is a deliberate deception. It is also noted that 'evidence' is referred to explicitly in the context of funding free school meals:

> We do not believe that giving school lunches to all children free of charge for the first three years of primary school—regardless of the income of their parents—is a sensible use of public money. There is now good evidence that school breakfasts are at least as effective in helping children to make progress in school. (p. 51)

The source of evidence is not offered but we do acknowledge that this would not be expected within a party manifesto.

Within the Labour Party manifesto, 'For the Many Not the Few' (Labour Party, 2017), the section on education—'Towards a National Education Service'—is equally vague in relation to sources of empirical evidence.

The manifesto notes that:

> When it [education] fails, it isn't just the individual that is held back, but all of us. When we invest in people to develop their skills and capabilities, we all benefit from a stronger economy and society. (p. 34)

This represents a politically predictable shift from the Conservative Party's focus on individual attainment to the Labour Party's concept of education as a greater societal advantage. There is a clear commitment to:

> not waste money on inefficient free schools and the Conservatives' grammar schools vanity project. Labour does not want a return to secondary moderns. (p. 37)

This suggests that there is some knowledge of the ineffectiveness of the selection process, and importantly that there is a requirement to engage with evidence when making policy claims. A more direct claim is made against evidence in context to early years provision:

> There is also extensive evidence that early years education has a major impact on child development, and that time in a formal education setting for young children can improve performance at GCSE and beyond. (p. 35)

Although the evidence is said to be 'extensive', no indication is provided but, as noted before, this would not be expected in a political manifesto.

Our assertion is that evidence-based policy makers should be cognisant of and use the evidence available to warrant their decisions. The paper now moves on to introduce our investigation of how evidence is encountered and used in Parliamentary debates and hence, policy-making decisions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Rationale

Our research on secondary school selection and the 11-plus has emerged from a confluence between the authors' campaigning background and a response to Stevens' (2019) research on drug policy describing how policy decisions are influenced more by moral sidesteps than research evidence. Our contention was that perhaps a similar, evasive, moral strategy has made the deployment of evidence ineffective in the debate around grammar schools and selective education.

We would argue that although this research only seems to address, perhaps, the idea of selection and 11-plus testing, what it addresses is the way the UK Parliament is observed, in this instance, to craft educational policy around this single topic, providing a suitably small case within which to begin to explore what might be a much larger phenomenon. Echoing as it does similar processes observed by Stevens, and so might begin to question if the failure to effectively use evidence is a flaw in our democracy and its processes. What a representative democracy might expect is some engagement with the evidence at hand, the findings that evidence presents and rationally warranted conclusions that the politicians codify into law and policy. This would show a demonstration that they have made use of the best evidence available and not just bluster and a clamour for populist votes. Equally, if evidence is to be rejected, then the valued assumptions directing this decision would be exposed.

Guided by Stevens' application of critical realism we also sought to identify what discourses may or may not be deployed when evidence is encountered and what the outcome might be. As campaigners and researchers, we asked ourselves: if Stevens identified moral claims and not evidential refutation as being the basis for policy decisions, then, we expected something similar would also be observed in education policy decision making. Our approach was initially, therefore, largely deductive, setting out as we did to explore the discourses implemented during parliamentary debates.

We developed our research approach with the aim to explore how evidence is encountered and used by education policy makers. Our approach will be presented in five sections that follow the sequence in which our research proceeded. The first section provides descriptive statistics on the themes we identified through using NVivo software to analyse the debates recorded in Hansard that subsequently exposed the dominance of a discourse of 'goodness' in relation to selective secondary schools. The second section uses direct quotations to provide a qualitative insight into how the discourse of 'goodness' is used anecdotally to legitimise policy decision based on secondary school selection. Next, we provide a playful carnivalesque (Aydarova, 2020) analysis that, although fanciful and encourages the researcher to be the 'joker', exposes the absurdity and indeed morally questionable nature of rejecting research evidence that has led to a dominant hegemonic discourse of 'goodness'. The fourth section returns to a more detailed qualitative analysis of how this dominant discourse of 'goodness' is used within a particular parliamentary debate. Finally, we provided a detailed argumentative analysis (Stevens, 2019 citing Thompson, 1990) used during this debate, which highlights encounters with research evidence and importantly shows how evidence on the impact of secondary school selection can be ignored, although evidence that selective education has little impact on social mobility is accepted.

Method 1: Descriptive statistics

Our primary data was the full text of debates in the Houses of Parliament as collected on the Hansard database. As the SSEF was announced in May 2018 with the first funds made

available in January 2019, we determined that a date range of 5 years (2015–2019; Appendix 8) was appropriate and examined every debate within this period which focused on grammar schools ($n = 11$). We further reviewed every mention of 'grammar' in parliamentary debate during this period ($n = 995$) to discover other instances of debate around grammar schools. Using NVivo software, we examined the content of the 11 parliamentary debates, identifying, separating and carrying out a thematic analysis of each of these debates. The 'They Work For You' (https://www.theyworkforyou.com/) search engine was used to identify extra debates to capture all mentions of grammar schools; these were analysed for responses to evidence and to identify potentially discursive associations between key terms. As a bicameral Parliament, this analysis included the House of Commons, the House of Lords and committee debates.

We analysed these themes with descriptive statistics without any attempt to establish causal or other relational links between, say, the number of thematic references and debate outcomes. Instead, we sought within the data some understanding of quantity and proportion. Our aim was to observe what themes receive emphasis simply by being spoken in debate, and then try to show how these quantities and proportions might provide a warranted justification for the qualitative interpretation of how evidence is used. We accept that such a technique is limited, of course, in what it might discover. Things not said cannot be counted; reading between the lines might be necessary and, yet, necessarily flawed. The interpretations provided are only 'possibilities' and offer an invitation to all concerned parties to explore possible other interpretations. The themes identified were narrowed to the 25 most frequently occurring in parliamentary debate around grammar schools and selection. They were also examined for frequency of use along party lines and additionally special attention was paid to the use of anecdotal evidence.

Findings 1: Descriptive statistics

The themes we identified are presented in relation to the House of Commons, the House of Lords, all parliamentary debates and finally a brief discussion of how the themes are represented with the two main political parties (Labour and Conservative). We do acknowledge the role and input of other parties in these debates (including Liberal Democrat, Scottish National and Green Parties) but the government and main opposition can be shown to control parliamentary debate. These contributions are not discounted but numerically offer little; also the argumentation section will later include robust contributions from a member of the Scottish National Party. What emerges very early on from the analysis of the descriptive statistics, is how entrenched and dominant the discourse of 'goodness' is alongside any mention of grammar schools. The top five themes to emerge for each are shown in Table 1 (full data can be seen in Appendix 1–4).

Unlike themes of 'selection', 'evidence', 'disadvantaged and social privilege' and themes linked to funding and social mobility, the clear linking of grammar schools with 'good schools' not only countered our expectations, but from a critical realist perspective, motivated us to explore in more nuanced detail what understandings of 'goodness' were being promoted and why. The disparity between the number of references in the Commons (117) compared to the Lords (47) provided a suggestion that the 'good school' discourse had political leanings, the House of Lords being a more, although not entirely, apolitical debating chamber. The identification of 'good schools' as a significant dominant theme in relation to grammar schools resulting from the use of NVivo in our analysis across both houses is one that could not have been predicted. The surprising magnitude of the 'goodness' discourse in relation to grammar schools will be explored in a carnivalesque playing with data later, exposing how many other types of 'good' school are not referred to in the same terms.

TABLE 1 Top five themes

Theme	Number of references
House of Commons	
Good schools	117
Evidence	103
Disadvantaged and social privilege[a]	91
Selection	85
Underfunded	71
House of Lords	
Selection	110
Evidence	57
Good schools	47
Anecdote	39
Social mobility	30
Parliament (House of Commons + House of Lords)	
Selection	195
Good schools	164
Evidence	160
Disadvantaged and social privilege	91
Underfunded	71

[a]The two terms 'disadvantaged' and 'social privilege', were retained as a single theme after being observed to arise in tandem in the debates, as though the two were inseparable.

Of the 164 references to 'good schools', 125 were linked to members of the Conservative Party compared to just 30 for the Labour Party. Other party-political disparities also emerged, including the mainly Conservative themes of 'social mobility', 'parental choice' and 'underfunded'. Labour Party majority themes included 'teaching', 'socially diverse' and 'early years'. It is not unreasonable to link these differences to traditional party positioning, particularly from the Conservative perspective, as this research was carried out in response to a Conservative government's SSEF that sought to provide extra funding for grammar schools under the auspices of enhancing social mobility.

At this stage of analysis, the descriptive statistics suggest the existence of a dominant conservative discourse that grammar schools are good schools and that if these were provided with the funds to expand, they would enhance social mobility. Such a position defies the empirical evidence presented in the literature review, and of course the evidence provided in the parliamentary debates. The next section therefore sought to identify the causal mechanism that leads to policy decisions rejecting, or avoiding, the overwhelming evidence that would mitigate against their intended actions. Our focus now orientates to anecdotes used in the debates, as empirical evidence does not support more widespread academic selection.

Method 2: Anecdote and the legitimisation of 'goodness' in parliamentary debates

Anecdote intruded repeatedly into the debate, despite its failure to live up to the definition of evidence as prescribed for policy making (DfE, 2017) and its potential to be unethical (Gorard et al., 2017). Consequently, we searched and attempted to quantify uses

of anecdotal evidence. This use of anecdote seems worth highlighting in order to address our broader question of how evidence is being used in policy making—and ask rhetorically whether this is the best evidence for policy makers to deploy with this sort of frequency. A further advantage this exploration brings is to demonstrate that our data gathering attempted to avoid being partisan, as all parties are implicated in this debating technique.

Findings 2: Anecdote and the legitimisation of 'goodness' in parliamentary debates

Although not featuring as a top five theme across both houses, 'anecdote' is worthy of our attention and may begin to go some way to unpacking the causal mechanisms supporting the dominance of the 'good schools' debate. 'Anecdote' is the sixth most referenced theme (67 times) and interestingly is evenly distributed between Labour (26) and Conservative members (28), being used almost exclusively in the context of providing or objecting to anecdotes being used in parliamentary debates. A contextual analysis of the debates where 'anecdote' is used shows that almost half of the anecdotes (31 out of 67) are in relation to grammar schools, as opposed to faith (2), secondary modern (3), or comprehensive schools (9)—the details can be seen in Appendix 5. Just as the 'good schools' discourse can be seen to follow party political alliances, so too can the use and content of anecdote. Conservative members were shown to use anecdote in relation to grammar schools more than twice as often as Labour affiliates (18 compared to 8). This analysis also exposes the 'forgotten' nature of other aspects of the selective debate for even though comprehensive schools get little mention in comparison to grammar schools, they are mentioned four times more than the spectre of 'non-selective' schooling.

These disparities do not only exist quantitatively but additionally our contextual analysis of the debates exposes how deployment of anecdotal 'evidence' provides opportunities to develop a dominant discourse of 'goodness'. The dominance of the 'grammar schools are good schools' position can be witnessed throughout the period our research focused on. In an early debate on grammar school funding, Gareth Johnson MP (2015) (Dartford, Conservative) stated:

> I want to establish a thread to run through the debate—that grammar schools are simply good schools and that we need good schools to flourish.

Later on, this sentiment was reinforced through the Selection School Expansion Fund and the Secretary of State for Education Nicky Morgan MP (2015) explained:

> The basic principle is that we want every good school in this country to be able to expand, and that must include grammar schools.
> (School Expansion, 19 October 2015)

Finally, towards the end of the period on which our research focused, Conservative peer Lord Agnew of Oulton (2018) as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System, noted that:

> It is much more efficient for us to create good places in existing good schools. That is the logic that underpins it.

The irony is of course that the manifesto pledge and resultant policy only provide additional funding for grammar schools, *not all good schools*. In the next carnivalesque

section we shall explore the financial implications of Nicky Morgan and Lord Agnew of Oulton's pledge.

If at this stage our analysis simply reflected the findings of Stevens' moral sidestep but from an educational context, we would concede that although interesting, our research offers little new insight. But our analysis did not entirely reveal what we had initially anticipated, and it is this unexpected finding that led us to further interrogate the data and begin to articulate an alternative and novel hypothesis.

Method 3: The carnivalesque: being playful with descriptive statistics

Taking note of Aydarova's (2020) research on the Russian Federation government's plan to reform teacher education, which positioned the researcher as a Bakhtinian carnivalesque joker whose role was to:

> … disrupt 'the official truths' and to challenge the narrative reformers curated for public consumption. Getting to the unofficial truths required not being seduced by 'saturated themes' of repeated narratives, but pursuing cracks in reformers' stories, tracing contradictions in accounts they presented in different spaces, and juxtaposing interview data with data collected from other sources and sites. (p. 7)

We also stepped into the carnival, holding understandings of evidence lightly, deploying critical scepticism, to ask whether the conclusions attained (in the form of policy) arise from any rigorous engagement with the evidence, while also providing a way of exposing the warrant necessary to good research. Drawing support from Allen (2000), who also uses Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque, in particular the role it can play in liberating voices from authorial control, we contend that it is important for researchers and policy makers to be open to alternate discourses and subject position, to expose and confront dominant and resistant discourse. Perhaps the conclusions drawn by Parliament—that the funding of grammars is necessary because as 'good schools' they are worthy of increased funding to support social mobility—might not be true, and 'playfully' what it might mean if other 'good schools' were to be equally well rewarded.

School Ofsted ratings sit outside of the peer-reviewed process required for empirical research and yet, we will show, can be seen to be a more influential source of evidence. Hence our use of Ofsted's own terminology (for example, Good and Outstanding) to demonstrate a difference which is apparent but overlooked; it is a kind of sleight of hand that confuses the evidence from empirical research and that from a non-ministerial department of the UK government. Therefore, we wish to make clear, by offering a distinction between 'evidence' that conforms to the government's own definition (Coldwell et al., 2017) and that of the wider academic community, distinguishing this from the 'evidenced' ratings that emerge from Ofsted inspections that are then used to compare schools. A brief return to our descriptive statistics—with a touch of 'playfulness'—will allow us to argue that a significant influence and legitimation of the 'good school' discourse, and its association with selective education, is a facet of the government's own corporate agency that grammar schools are good schools 'as evidenced' by Ofsted.

Findings 3: The carnivalesque: being playful with descriptive statistics

It is extraordinary that during the period of our research the 163 grammar schools attracted 992 references; by comparison, the 3200 comprehensive schools were referred to only

109 times. (Reference would have been made to other types of school but our research focused on grammar and comprehensive schools; equally, this research approach could be carried out, for example, by comparing faith school and academies.) Despite being less than 5% of all secondary schools, grammar schools are named nine times more than their majority counterpart. Also, over the past 5 years, 37% of the time when grammar schools are mentioned, it occurs in conjunction with the word 'good' (374 times). Of the 163 grammar schools 159 received Ofsted ratings of 'good' or above, therefore in parliamentary debates the 159 good grammar schools received 374 mentions; so for every grammar school rated good or outstanding, the word 'good' was used in Parliament at a rate of 235%. For every comprehensive school rated good or outstanding (2850), the word 'good' was used in Parliament 49 times, representing a rate of 1.7%. To represent the number of comprehensive schools rated good or outstanding in the same proportion that grammar schools are referred to (235%, not 1.7%), the 2850 good comprehensive schools would need to be referred to in conjunction with 'good' in parliamentary debates 6698 times over those 5 years, not 49.

To continue with the carnival spirit—for its leanings to the comedic do highlight the absurdity of the positions inhabited by policy makers—we make some uncomplicated assumptions in relation to the distribution of funds. The context of our research focused on the parliamentary discussions in relation to the £50 million SSEF that, as we have seen above, sits with a dominant discourse that 'grammar schools are good schools'. If we apply the logic of rewarding and allowing 'good' schools to expand, then the implications within our 'carnival of funding' would lead to English schools receiving an extra £8 billion. We accept this is fantasy, as no account has been made for factors such as pupil numbers, additional education need or local factors like increased pupil numbers linked to housing developments, but although playful our point is a logical one that ironically exposes the illogical and hence unwarranted thinking of policy makers. How do we get to a spending of an extra £8 billion?

We first assume that if divided equally between each of the 159 'good grammars' (this includes Ofsted rankings of Good and Outstanding—Full Fact, 2016) the £50 million SSEF would provide £314,465 extra funding per school. If the logic of allowing good schools to expand, simply in relation to Ofsted rankings—after all, this is the government evidenced standard—were applied to all good schools, then this would correspond to:

- The 2850 good and outstanding comprehensive schools it could be expected that £896,226,415 (2850 × £314,465) would be budgeted for their expansion.
- 91% of the 20,925 primary schools (19,041 schools) are rated good and outstanding. Therefore, they would receive £6,580,188,679—over £6 billion.
- And the 2915 good and outstanding nurseries would receive £916,665,475.

Therefore, the total expansion budget for all good schools would be £8,393,080,569.

The findings so far do seem to point towards a clear hegemonic discourse positioning grammar/selective school as good. During the Education and Social Mobility debate, Carol Monaghan, MP (2016) (Scottish National Party) also noticed the continual reference to how good grammar schools were and without using the figures as we have above, came to a similar conclusion, stating:

> Listening to her speaking in such glowing terms about grammar schools, I wondered why we do not just make every school a grammar. That would solve the problem.

Although the genesis of this research has been inspired by the idea of a moral sidestep, our testing of this idea has not discovered a simple evasive moral sidestep that rejects evidence on the basis of citing moral concerns. Distinctively, what has begun to emerge, and will be

discussed further in the 'Findings', is a discourse that is constructive as it actively and persistently distorts the meaning of 'good'—it is a sidestep into a world of fantasised goodness, while also away from an often-unspoken world of 'badness'. This distorted discourse is further revealed by the carnivalesque 'thought experiment' of applying the proportionate judgements of 'good' to the policy making of funds allocation.

We accept that this too draws our research into the world of make believe but what we argue it does do, is to highlight the failure of policy makers to provide a warranted judgement for their decisions. Equally, we argue that pursuing the idea of a constructive sidestep is a methodological strength, showing we were open to be surprised by our own findings. Our early expectation was that we could potentially uncover an evasive moral sidestep, leading to rejection. Rather what emerges are multiple voices that construct a discourse of moral goodness.

There is also something about this discourse that hides from awareness the possibility of other types of good school that could equally be worthy of additional funding. In the final section we shall provide a close quantitative and qualitative analysis of the argument structure during parliamentary debates where grammar schools are the focus. Significantly, this will show how elected members respond to evidence, particularly whether evidence is accepted or rejected.

Method 4: Detailed qualitative analysis of a single debate

Finally, we selected the House of Commons debate on Education and Social Mobility (HoC, 2016) as worthy of further examination because this debate focuses on the question of social mobility and whether grammar schools do, as claimed, advance it. This claim was roundly discredited and dropped, so we argue that this debate might shed light on the role evidence played in dissolving this false claim. This final argumentative analysis (Stevens, 2019, citing Thompson, 1990) reconstructs politicians' arguments to identify the reasons they gave for their actions, or the ways they block or ignore evidence.

Findings 4: Detailed qualitative analysis of a single debate

The research evidence presented earlier provides a very clear case against academic secondary school selection, and yet this is routinely ignored by elected members from all sides of the house and frequently replaced by anecdote. Although we would accept that interpreting research evidence is not necessarily straightforward, there are examples of diametrically opposite understandings; for example, Philip (2017) (Croydon South, Conservative) claimed in the Budget Resolutions debate:

> I know from my experience in a south London grammar school that such schools help children from ordinary backgrounds to fulfil their potential. All the studies show that children from ordinary backgrounds who go to grammar schools do a great deal better than those who go to other schools.

Philip's contention that 'All the studies show...' defies this evidence base, and there is no mention of any of the studies that do show such success. It contrasts with Lord Cashman (2016) (Labour), who in a Lords debate on grammar schools noted that:

> Again, the evidence shows that access to grammar schools, both historically and more recently, favours more affluent children, even when comparing similarly

high-attaining 11 year-olds. Taking both these pieces of evidence together, it suggests, or rather confirms, that grammar school systems exacerbate existing inequalities across generations.

Such differences within five months of each other—it is not as though Philip was drawing on a whole new tranche of research—highlights the fundamental problem of how research evidence may or may not be used in policy making. In the same Lords debate, we can also see the influence of moral positioning, when Lord Framlingham (Conservative) offers his support to the 'brave' grammar schools that have survived repeated attempts to be converted into comprehensive schools and that have since 'thrived and have been vindicated'.

The valid interpretation and use of evidence in parliamentary debates thus appears to be of dubious quality, adhering to party stances even to the stultification of meaningful debate. This renders it no less interesting from a research perspective. In an attempt to see beyond party politics and to analyse more closely what happens when evidence is encountered, we chose to analyse the House of Commons debate on Education and Social Mobility (HoC, 2016). This single debate is worthy of further examination because of its focus on the question of social mobility and whether grammar schools do, as claimed, advance it. This claim was roundly discredited and dropped, so this debate might shed light on the role evidence played in dissolving this false claim.

The Education and Social Mobility debate contained 73 references to grammar schools, in which there were 19 exchanges with non-anecdotal evidence; six of which engaged with evidence and six which did not. On four occasions the evidence was met with an attack on the other party, while another five responses were examples of what Stevens (2019) referred to as a 'moral sidestep'. The detailed argumentation analysis below takes advantage of the word limit allowed in this publication and therefore a deliberately lengthy section of dialogue from the debate is presented. Clearly it is not possible to provide the whole dialogue but the integrity of the sequence of the debate has been maintained to provide coherent examples of how evidence is used, avoided or sidestepped.

Early in the debate, Justine Greening MP (2016a) (Conservative), the Secretary of State for Education, uses evidence:

> Social Mobility Commission's report tells us, just 5% of children on free school meals gain five good GCSEs; they are 29% less likely to take two or more of the facilitating A-levels that will help to keep their options open; and they are 34% more likely to drop out of post-16 education altogether. It is therefore no surprise that they are 19% less likely to go to university, and 47% less likely to attend a top Russell Group institution.

Siobhain McDonagh MP (2016) (Labour): responds with evidence:

> Given the excellent case the Secretary of State is laying out, how can those statistics be changed by grammar schools when currently only 3% of kids on free school meals go to grammar schools?

Justine Greening MP (2016b): responds with beliefs and values:

> I will come on to that point, but as we already have grammar schools, it is quite right for us as a Government to set out the case for how we make sure that they play their full role in driving social mobility.

I have set out a number of facts about the prospects of too many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in our country. None of these facts should be acceptable to us. They certainly are not acceptable to me or this Government. I believe that social mobility matters …

Jack Dromey MP (2016) (Labour) then replies with evidence:

How can the Government claim to be the party of social mobility when 800 children's centres have closed and 29 nursery schools have closed in the past year alone? That is letting down a whole generation of two, three and four-year-old kids, because if they fall behind at that age, they will never catch up.

Justine Greening MP (2016c) responds with belief and values and the moral imperative 'we have to …!'.

Of course early years education matters. We are investing in not only improved but more childcare for parents around the country—for working parents, in particular—because we think that having a strong start is absolutely vital. As I was saying, this is about improving not just the prospects of individuals and communities, but the prospects of our country and its economy, and we have to build our country's economy by building our people.

After a few replies, of which none address Greening's earlier assertion, Lucy Powell MP (2016) (Labour) replies, questioning how evidence is being used.

The Secretary of State is citing much of the evidence from last week's Social Mobility Commission report about the challenge our country faces. Why will she not adopt in full the recommendations of that report on how to tackle those inequalities, rather than cherry-picking the little bits that she wants to bring to the House?

Justine Greening MP (2016d) does not address evidence or its use, but instead falls back to the position of the party politics, propping up the government's 'programme' on the one hand and attacking how the opposition spends 'their entire time'. We would note this interchange as an example of Powell, in fact, seeking a warrant to Greening's claims, deploying scepticism. But there is no space for scepticism in Greening's response, only political intransigence.

The report, quite rightly, set out that we need a much longer-term programme of social reform. Alan Milburn talked about a 10-year programme. It also pointed to our focus on improving attainment in schools. The bottom line is that we will not make significant progress on social mobility until we focus on the areas of common ground, rather than the Opposition spending their entire time focusing on areas where they do not agree.

Wes Streeting MP (2016) (Labour) requests evidence specifically relating to grammar schools:

To help build a consensus around our education policy, perhaps the Secretary of State could give us one piece of evidence that suggests that grammar schools would improve educational outcomes and social mobility for the most disadvantaged.

The reply of Justine Greening MP (2016e) begins, 'We know that…' which offers no evidence but instead introduces the discourse that good things happen at grammar schools:

> We know that the education gap between children on free school meals who go to grammars and their better-off counterparts is closed during the course of their education. We know that disadvantaged children who go to grammars have a better chance of getting into university, including Russell Group universities, and that is because their attainment improves.

Her statement continues and has at its core this idea of 'good schools'. Note that here, the idea is expressed in the Ofsted 'evidenced' categories of 'good or outstanding':

> Thanks to the hard work of teachers all over the country, 1.4 million more children are being taught in schools that are good or outstanding than in 2010. That means that 1.4 million more children are getting access to an education that will allow them to make the most of their talents.

Again, she continues, this time with a distraction which relies on mentioning funding initiatives in Early Years provision and Initial Teacher Training.

> Of course, this starts with early years education. Children must arrive at school ready and able to learn if they are to take full advantage of the education on offer, which is why we are introducing 30 hours of free childcare for the working parents of three and four-year-olds. It is also why we are looking at how we can improve the quality of the early years workforce even further. Teachers are crucial in improving attainment outcomes for our young people, which is why we are reforming initial teacher training.

Suella Fernandes MP (2016) (Conservative) replies to Greening with reference to evidence from a Think Tank:

> What does my Right Honourable friend think about the independent study by ResPublica, commissioned by Knowsley Council, which concluded that in the second most deprived borough in the country, a grammar school would provide a much-needed incentive and raise the standards of education?

This is in turn answered by Justine Greening MP (2016f) with a mention of evidence, but she quickly turns to 'ideology'. Unlike in Stevens' (2019) work, where the 'moral sidestep' implicates the behaviour of the drug addict as suitable evasion of government responsibility to deal with the evidence which could help drug users, here the moral discourse sets up a bifurcation of 'good schools'—grammars—and those who support them, and the ideologues and time wasters who propose evidence which questions such support.

> I have seen that report. It shows that when people look at the evidence and are prepared to step away from political ideology, they see the reality that grammars can have a transformational impact in some of the most deprived communities in which we want to see the biggest changes.

This is followed by a series of replies that follow the pattern below:

- Labour opposition: Attack Conservatives

- Conservative government: Attack Labour
- Grammar school social mobility anecdotes.

Justine Greening MP (2016g) then tries to make progress and enters into a prolonged speech which leads to an increasing discourse of 'goodness'.

> We have to recognise that one of the biggest challenges faced by the education system is the growing need for more **good** school places. Despite the progress that we have made, too many children still do not have a place at a **good** school. There are 1.2 million children in schools that Ofsted says are not **good** enough. That was why we published the 'Schools that work for everyone' consultation, which asks important open questions about how we can use the educational expertise that exists in our country's independent schools, faith schools, universities and selective schools. We cannot afford to leave a single stone unturned as we drive up opportunity. (Authors' emphasis)

Andy Burnham MP (2016) asks for confirmation of grammar school expansion in the Conservative Party manifesto.

> The Secretary of State rightly spoke about building a consensus across the House on education policy, but I put it to her that that will be more likely to happen if the Government stick to their mandate on education. Will she read out the precise section of the Conservative party manifesto from the last election that gives her a mandate to lift the bar on the creation of new grammar schools?

Justine Greening MP (2016h) then attacks the opposition.

> We talked about excellent school places and expanding the very best schools in our country, including grammar schools. I just do not think it is viable for the Labour party to say that it does not like the grammars that we have, but to be equivocal about whether it is still its policy to shut those grammars. I will give way to the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) if she wants to confirm the position. There is a gaping hole in the official Opposition's policy on grammars. I do not think that it is tenable in a country that has grammars and selection for the Opposition to say they do not like that situation, but that they do not want us to take any steps whatever to see how we can deliver more strongly on social mobility through the schools already in place.

The response continues until an interesting intervention which highlights the problems about using evidence. Greening quotes an accurate figure of 'around 25%' of places being reserved for disadvantaged pupils, laudable though this is, it might look less so when some Birmingham non-selective schools can have as high as 73% pupil premium (Ofsted, 2014). An anecdote is then provided by Greening MP (2016i) as a moral attack the opposition's perceived weak stance on aspiration, the anecdote simply suggests a *plan* to go to Oxford.

> Last week I was at Handsworth Grammar School, where around 25% of pupils are eligible for the deprivation element of the pupil premium. Those young people talked to me about how much they value the education they are getting. One student, who is planning to go to Oxford—[Interruption.] I am not sure precisely what that young man would say about the chattering from Opposition Members, but I think he would be extremely dismayed to hear the school that is giving him

a transformational opportunity being talked down. His family had arrived in this country just two generations before. His grandparents arrived with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Within two generations of that, he is hoping to be able to go to Oxford. He talked to me about what the chance to go to a grammar school has meant for him, his family and his future prospects. It is levelling up, and that is what we want to do.

The anecdote, and those presented below, bring to mind Gorard et al.'s (2017) 'sieve of trustworthiness' for descriptive research; they note that:

… anecdotal, third hand, observational, and commercially or politically motivated kinds of evidence may appear useful, and could be occasionally effective. They are more often confused, poorly understood, distorted, unbalanced and unwarranted. Perhaps most importantly, these kinds of evidence are at least as likely to cause harm as they are to do any good, and mostly they will just waste effort, time and money that could have been used to make the lives of each cohort of participants in education better. This sounds and indeed is unethical. (pp. 3-4)

Yet, anecdote is regularly used in debates, ironically, often in relation to evidence-based practice. Further anecdotes are provided on how grammar schools provide opportunities for disadvantaged pupils. Justine Greening MP (2016j) increasingly uses moral language as a moral sidestep which avoids evidence by deflecting to more moral language.

My honourable friend is right. It is simply untenable to say to parents who want more choice, and to children who otherwise would have a place in such schools, that they cannot have it. That is simply wrong. We should at least allow local communities to decide. It is not tenable to take the approach of simply saying to parents, 'No, you can't have them; we know better,' or of saying to a child, 'You got the grades to be able to go, but you are not allowed to because we have decided.'

Many members now leave the debate which was counted as 'receiving no response—does not engage' in our research. More speeches follow which respond more to the earlier presentation by Greening than they do to each other and seem to be more due to a procedural structure than anything else.

We do not claim that this particular parliamentary debate is the only one in our period of research where evidence was engaged with, rejected in favour of attacking the other party, or in which a moral sidestep was enacted. But it is the debate that provided the most sustained engagement. What also adds to the validity of this analysis is the regular close link between a call to reintroduce or expand grammar schools so that social mobility can be enhanced. In a sense it is axiomatic as it would be expected that any debate on selective education would have made reference to grammar schools and social mobility. The Conservative Party manifesto (2017) stated:

We want to make Britain the world's Great Meritocracy: a country where everyone has a fair chance to go as far as their talent and their hard work will allow, where advantage is based on merit not privilege. To succeed, we must redouble our efforts to ensure that everyone, no matter who they are or where they are from, can have a world-class education.

Even though the phrase 'social mobility' is not explicitly used, the claim to become the 'world's Great Meritocracy' and to 'redouble our efforts to ensure that everyone, no matter who they are or where they are from, can have a world-class education', can be argued to fit within the agenda that suggests that only certain 'good schools' lead to social mobility. In the manifesto this sentence is proceeded by one which asserts that the school you attend has led to 'the greatest injustice in Britain today'. We would wish to point out that such statements themselves offer a sense of injustice and moral rhetoric; the research evidence shows that this injustice is perpetuated by selection instead of subverting it.

Within the detailed argumentative analysis, what our focus on this debate also offers is insight into what happens when the response to the evidence is used to appropriately inform the debate. In this case the evidence suggests that selective education does not enhance social mobility. Following the publication of the committee report on social mobility (Appendix 6), the analysis of Hansard shows a steep reduction in argument to references of grammar schools as engines of social mobility (only 13 mentions between 23 November 2016 and 9 March 2017). To clarify, the Education and Social Mobility debate is the one we parse; it was not the debate at which decisions were reached, but it was the one in which the most debate on the topic occurred, especially with specific reference to grammars. Appendix 6 shows that there was a burst of trying to legitimise grammars using social mobility (53 mentions between 7 September and 16 November 2016 leading up the 22 November debate) as justification despite there being no evidence for it, and that other evidence did manage to dispel this myth and its deployment. Evidence, however, has not failed to dispel the greater, more persistent, and 'evidenced' myth—that of the 'good school'.

A similar heeding of evidence can also be seen in the relation between free school meals (FSM) and grammar schools, which also has links to the debate on social mobility. The proportion of FSM children is used as a standard measure for how well a school supports social mobility and there were early frequent and then repeated mentions of free school meals (Appendix 7). The frequency of this relationship, and therefore use in parliamentary debates, also tailed off during our research period because, again, the research evidence is clear—the proportion of FSM children attending grammar schools has not changed in any appreciable manner.

Summary

Our research has shown that during debates on policy a number of rhetorical tools are used, including anecdote, reliance on party platforms, ad hominem-style attacks on the opposing party and a simple lack of response to evidence when it is raised; equating to what Gorard et al. (2017) have identified as inferior forms of evidence. We were surprised to note that despite this inferiority, and the government's own guidelines on suitable sources of evidence, these are often the preferred types. This can be seen in the debate on social mobility where democratically elected officials paid more attention to evidence provided in reports generated by Ofsted.

To these approaches to evidence, we would also add the idea of a moral sidestep, which is enacted in this case within a construct of grammar schools as 'good'—and not just 'good' as determined by their Ofsted rating, but as a moral measure. What also surprised us was that, in looking for how evidence was used, we found just how embedded the moral discourse is, enmeshed in the 'good schools' as evidenced by Ofsted, and just how successfully it is deployed in maintaining government agendas in contravention of evidence. It is noticeable, though, how by attending to evidence generated 'in-house', even this powerful discourse could be and was overcome in toppling the myth of social mobility. It may be of

interest to others presenting evidence on educational matters to take note of this stronger-than-discourse evidence and what might have made for its effectiveness.

DISCUSSION: HOW MPs USE EVIDENCE

The use of evidence and warranted judgements

The dominant discourse of 'goodness' that emerges from our findings will be discussed later, but at this stage of the discussion we wish to focus on the nature of evidence and how claims for justified warrants may or may not be legitimately drawn. What has been exposed is that in this case a discourse is constructed which poses as a warrant in its playing with what Ofsted has 'evidenced' as a form of both 'evidence' and moral imperative. In this context grammar schools, and therefore selection, is perceived as 'good' on the basis that schools of this type nearly always receive Ofsted ratings of good or above. Meanwhile, the government's own call for 'evidence-based' practice is seen to be largely ignored by the deployment of a moral sidestep. Just as academic researchers are not to foreclose on limitations and alternative explanations in their own empirical research, so Parliament might be expected—given their claim of evidence-based policy making—not to foreclose on the very evidence they demand out of preference for a predetermined discursive end. In fact, if we return to their own requirements of evidence-based practice, the failure to achieve their own standards is apparent.

> The ultimate test would be whether teachers could explain their choices and practice by referring to a robust evidence base and using logical argument and reasoning, rather than saying that they do it because Ofsted or the department has told them to. Within this, though, there must be appetite for innovation in order to further develop practice. Rather than this being unfettered development, innovation must be 'disciplined' in that it would build on existing knowledge of what works and why. (Coldwell et al., 2017, pp. 9-10)

If this is the educational research standard required of teachers—to explain their practice by evidence, not by Ofsted—then might not the same 'disciplined' innovation be required when policy making? Yet the practice of parliamentary debate in our case study is explained not by reliance on evidence, but on a discursively ambiguous 'good' which Ofsted has 'evidenced' by their own measures.

It could be argued that having a predetermined character agenda is not entirely undesirable. This might be compared, for example, with Biesta's (2007, 2010) moral judgment of what education is for. A number of factors might be at work here: First, there could be a disagreement over the way evidence is used because of a dispute with the particular fixed agenda itself, which the government in this case has chosen to advance and enforce through the Ofsted reporting agenda. If this is the case, it is not so much the method to which we should address our concerns, but to the morality and teleology of the ideological and economically driven metrics used as evidence. Second, what might be happening here is a dispute between what connects 'evidence' and 'character'. If this is the case, what we are dealing with primarily is a kind of verbal dispute, an inability to find agreement between policy makers and the academic education community as to what constitutes evidence and, more specifically, evidence which is qualified to begin making moral claims.

When evidence is called for—as it is in making education policy—it is worth taking a look at how the requested evidence is used (or not). We would wish to make it clear that there are a variety of factors that go into policy making. Neither the simplistic following of

the party line, or direct insertion of research evidence into practice will deliver the most effective changes to practice. We are not asserting that evidence of any kind is the only way. If anything, the strongest 'conclusion' one might reasonably make from our arguments is that perhaps when an educational policy—such as gross funding of grammar schools on a (false) claim of their contribution to social mobility—does have a body of evidence which supports or contradicts policy aims, that evidence might be worth heeding in order to have an intelligently constructed education policy (and not one based solely on 'what's popular').

The good school discourse: moral sidestep

Dominant throughout the parliamentary debates is the 'evidenced by Ofsted' claim that 'grammar schools are good schools', distinct and separate from the 'evidence' which the UK government had called for in policy making. Their 'goodness' is evidenced within a closed system which measures school performance (of disputable veracity, such as when off-rolling occurs) then assigns an ambiguously moral qualification of 'good'. Despite the popularity of Ofsted sourced 'evidence', its processes and outcomes do not stand up to the definitions of evidence as outlined by the government (DfE, 2017) for policy making; neither does it conform to the academic communities understanding of justified warrants. What sort of tautological inversion occurs, then, when Ofsted (or, for that matter, the proponents of an education by segregation) becomes 'the source of good and its warrant'? Perhaps it becomes a sort of policy maker *non serviam* where the evidential sources are routinely rejected.

Our research has discovered that the dominant discourse of good schools has led to an evasive moral sidestep, but also the discursive fantasy world of the 'good school', where one particular type of school is disproportionally perceived and presented as good. Indeed, our intention was to look for a moral sidestep, and we found one—which might be criticised as mere confirmation bias were it not for the fact that we found something dissimilar to that in Stevens' work. Whereas he found the dehumanisation of drug users by focusing on the illicit immorality of drug use, we instead found a discourse of 'goodness' embedded in the very measures of Ofsted, which renders grammar schools 'evidenced' by Ofsted but beyond the reach of academic evidence. Consequently, the good school moral sidestep hides from view the possibility that non-selective schools may also be good, despite the overwhelming evidence to this effect. This discourse employs the language and data of Ofsted combined with anecdote and manifesto-driven repetition to create a socially constructed object which is used to disproportionately divert educational funding to grammar schools.

In order to refute accusations that the good school terminology is used simply because it is an Ofsted rating and therefore not to be linked to the moral connotation of goodness, we would alert the reader that if the warranted judgements were about educational standards, the term 'outstanding' would be the defining terminology. In fact, more grammar schools are 'outstanding' than 'good' (133 compared to 26); it would be expected therefore that Parliamentarians pronounce grammar schools as 'outstanding'. This, though, is not the case—'good' is the chosen adjective and 'good' has moral overtones. This is a moral sidestep, evidenced by Ofsted to ignore or refute uncomfortable empirical research evidence.

We would further suggest that the continued utilisation of 'goodness' is a kind of sleight of hand that confuses or distracts from different understandings of evidence and the warranted judgements that can be drawn from them. The 'good schools' discourse is an Ofsted-derived evidenced position, which makes it all the more deceptive; it is a moral sidestep cloaked in the language of evidence, despite the presentation of empirical evidence failing to dispel the greater, more persistent, and 'evidenced' myth—that of the 'good school'. Evidence was responsible in dispelling the claim that selective education leads to greater social mobility; influential in this debate was the gathering and presentation of empirical evidence by a

parliamentary committee. It would appear that it is less easy to refute or sidestep certain evidence when it emerges from within Parliament.

The rejection of evidence by the government can be observed as they assert social mobility against all evidence; finally, when they quietly cede the point of social mobility, they continue to reject the broader evidence—that selective schooling is socially divisive and destructive. The moral concern is primarily the 'goodness' of the schools (as opposed to the 'badness' of drug users in Stevens), but it is also implied that anyone who opposes such goodness (such as the opposition) is thereby inherently bad.

CONCLUSION

We wish to address the limitations of our research before moving on to the conclusions because we are acutely aware, having already outlined the requirements for warranted justifications, that the focus may appear somewhat parochial and of minor importance. For example, we were only able to do a detailed argumentative analysis on one debate (Social Mobility and Education). The smallness of our study, though limited in its generalisability, establishes an opportunity to begin a conversation that makes up for its lack of generalisability in scepticism and playful warranting of other possible outcomes as a means to invite further exploration. With more resources, we might consider these as opportunities for further research, to look this closely at every debate on grammars, or, more broadly, every debate which has been at a critical turning point in education policy making. Also, as indicated earlier, such increases in number and scale might begin to establish greater reliability for the tentative assertion we make in this small initial study, because the implications our findings have on the effectiveness of a representative democracy are wide ranging. Other opportunities for further research include, as suggested in our summative consideration of Stevens (2019) above, the possibility of exploring whether dehumanisation and stripping of agency might be occurring in the selective education policy-making context of our research, as it did in the drug policy-making context of his.

In the present research, the context of selection and 11-plus testing has provided a case study to explore a wider phenomenon: the way in which the UK Parliament is observed to craft educational policy in response to evidence. This paper is therefore about the use of evidence in policy making and it may even be possible to imagine that the fact that we focused on grammar schools is incidental and we could equally have carried out the same research design and analysis on another area of persistent conflict (for example, the content of the curriculum, pedagogical styles or provision for children with additional educational needs).

We must also acknowledge that the data drawn from parliamentary dialogue is over 5 years old, and many of these players, as is so often the case in governmental positions, have moved along. But this debate can be distinguished from many others as it came at a critical juncture—a moment when the effectiveness of grammar schools in their promise of delivering social mobility was being trumpeted, debated and ultimately disproved. Yet despite this, the government's policies regarding extra funding for selective schools were enacted. Although a change in prime minister in July 2019 led to this policy being side-lined, it may not surprise many readers to know that, as this document is being typed, the policy may be resurrected yet again. In an interview at the recent Conservative Party conference (September 2021) the new Secretary of State for Education, Nadhim Zahawi MP, has offered his support for selective education, stating:

> I think selective schools have got a place in our ecosystem… if they are doing a good job and if they are really doing everything they can to make sure that opportunity is available to every child. (Owen, 2021)

It would appear there is still a place for moral sidesteps and an avoidance of evidence at the very highest level of education policy making. We offer advice to those academics interested to promote their findings to consider how the dominant discourse decision-makers work within may be utilised to sidestep research evidence. There are, then, two potentially conflicting paths to explore: the evidence-based path and discourse-based policy making. The conclusion to draw from the social mobility debate was taken seriously because it was gathered in a parliamentary report, suggesting the evidence taken most seriously is that which they generate themselves. Despite the clamour for evidence-based practice, our research shows that as much as these things are trumpeted, the decision making—the policy making—can come down not to evidence, but to discourse (or more colloquially, spin). This might further suggest that if evidence-based policy is to be encouraged, then it would be important to advocate for an increased provision of parliamentary-based evidence-gathering and reporting. As the debate on social mobility confirms, politicians can respond to evidence, but this was a rare case and suggests that damaging policy decisions are still susceptible to ideological influence.

What cannot be ignored is the influence of the type of research and findings that are produced by groups such as Ofsted and the way government has defined the evidence they want for educational policy making, that is, generated essentially by government for government. There is a dilemma associated with the call that practice should be evidence-based, when what emerges from our research is that insular 'evidence' (that does not conform to the government's own definitions) is seen to dominate careful and sophisticated academic research. The dilemma has two fronts; one that questions how policy making can get trapped within a particular ideology, or corporate agency; the other relates to how academics can make their research more available and accessible to politicians. We provide no solutions here other than the suggestion that careful analysis of moral sidesteps may go some way towards identifying motivators and barriers to evidential acceptance or refutation.

Our findings echo similar corporate agency processes observed by Stevens (2019); it is not too bold to consider whether such processes might begin to question if the failure to effectively use evidence is a flaw in our representative democracy. We do not think that we can expect politicians to use their floor to discuss philosophical positioning, methodology and sample sizes. What we might expect, however, is some engagement with the evidence at hand, the conclusions which that evidence presents and rationally warranted conclusions which the politicians codify into law and policy, demonstrating that they have made use of the best evidence available and not simply ignored and then sidestepped. This is idealistic thinking, admittedly, but the thinking used in this case of grammar school debates is ideological: a contrived morality of 'good schools' has supplanted other, better evidence.

One strategy could be to show that the conclusions drawn by Parliament do not attain to the research warrant which academia would insist upon for rigour. In other words, do they consider what other alternative explanations there might be, cast their own decisions within a healthy scepticism, and allow for the possibility that there are factors in their decision-making which renders it less than 'good'? Perhaps our Parliament could prove their 'merit' by rising to this level! Is it too much to ask, given their call for evidence-based policy, for them to know how to warrant their claims when deciding policy? To be provocative we could question whether Parliamentarians are meant to engage in nothing but moralist posturing and bluster? Or can we begin to ask from our democracy a similar level of criticality that is asked of 10-year-old children encountering the multiple-choice questions in the 11-plus exam? Perhaps we now go too far?

Whereas it might be asking too much of our politicians to insist that they be aware of rigorous research methods, it is not too much to hold them to a high standard of ethics and to hold them to account when their demonstrated ethics fall short, even if due to ignorance. Pointing out the warrant to them as they engage with research evidence helps them to be more critical and more ethical—desirable qualities in democratically elected officials.

Drawing on Gorard et al.'s (2020) claim that research must, when it is applied—as educational research usually is—do no harm. The lack of rigour identified in this research, exposes the absence of safeguarding in government's decision-making. Our elected members are therefore potentially making decisions that although based on moral assumptions, they may cause harm—such as, maintaining existing inequalities, having a negative impact on children's well-being and increasing the attainment gaps between socio-economic groups—and are therefore not ethical.

ETHICS STATEMENT

For research involving data available in the public domain the Canterbury Christ Church University Research and Enterprise Integrity Framework states "Research based solely on a review of literature or any form of documentary analysis is not likely to require ethical approval when it involves access to data available within the public domain. However, all research undertaken on behalf of the University must be designed and carried out with ethical consideration." We also took regard of the BERA and ESRC ethical guidelines for using data in the public domain (all ERCS ethic checklist statements were 'no').

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data used in this research has been drawn from Hansard and available as Open Access. Only material from Hansard was used.

ORCID

Alan Bainbridge 🔟 https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7783-7747

REFERENCES

Due to the large number of references from debates within the Houses of Parliament, often from a few individuals, all Hansard references have been collated and follow on from the usual list of references.

Alexander, T. (2017). *Practical politics: Lessons in power and democracy*. Trentham Books.

Aldridge, D., Biesta, G., Filippakou, O., & Wainwright, E. (2018). Why the nature of educational research should remain contested: A statement from the new editors of the British Educational Research Journal. *British Educational Research Journal*, *44*(1), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3326

Allen, G. (2000). *Intertextuality*. Routledge.

Allen, R. (2017). *Ordinary working families' won't get access to grammar schools – and government data confirms as much*. https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2017/04/ordinary-working-families-wont-get-access-to-grammar-schools-and-government-data-confirms-as-much/

Archer, M. S. (2000). *Being human: The problem of agency*. Cambridge University Press.

Asthana, A., & Elgot, J. (2016). Government to unveil plan to end ban on new grammar schools. *The Guardian*, 6 September. https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/sep/06/grammar-schools-government-will-publish-plan-end-ban-weeks

Aydarova, E. (2020). Jokers' pursuit of truth: critical policy analysis in the age of spectacle and post-truth politics. *Critical Studies in Education*. https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2020.1831566. Online ahead of print.

Bainbridge, A. (2019). Education then and now: making the case for *ecol-agogy*. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, *27*(3), 4232–4440. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2018.1517130

Ball, S. J. (2016). Neoliberal education? Confronting the slouching beast. *Policy Futures in Education*, *14*(8), 1046–1059. https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210316664259

Biesta, G. J. J. (2007). Why "what works" won't work: evidence-based practice and the democratic deficit in educational research. *Educational Theory*, *57*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2006.00241.x

Biesta, G. J. J. (2010). Why 'What works' still won't work: From evidence-based education to value-based education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, *29*(5), 491–503. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-010-9191-x

Biesta, G. J. J. (2015). On the two cultures of educational research, and how we might move ahead: Reconsidering the ontology, axiology and praxeology of education. *European Educational Research Journal*, *14*(1), 11–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904114565162

Burgess, S., Crawford, C., & Macmillan, L. (2018). Access to grammar schools by socio-economic status. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, *50*(7), 1381–1385. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X18787820

Buscha, F., Gorman, E., & Sturgis, P. (2021). Selective schooling has not promoted social mobility in England. IZA Discussion Paper No. 14640. Available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3908855. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3908855. Accessed 2 December, 2021.

Cairney, P. (2016). *The politics of evidence-based policy making*. Palgrave.

Coe, R., Jones, K., Searle, J., Kokotsaki, D., Mohd Kosnin, A., & Skinner, P. (2008). *Evidence on the effects of selective educational systems*. Sutton Trust.

Coldwell, M., Greany, T., Higgins, S., Brown, C., Maxwell, B., Stiell, B., Stoll, L., Willis, B., & Burns, H. (2017). *Evidence informed teaching: an evaluation of progress in England*. Research Report July 2017 (DFE-RR696a). Department for Education, London.

Comprehensive Future. https://comprehensivefuture.org.uk/

Conservative Party (Great Britain) & May, T. (2017). *The manifesto of the Conservative and Unionist Party. Forward, together: Our plan for a stronger Britain*. Conservative and Unionist Central Office.

Coombs, J. (2017). *Lies, damned lies and the Tory manifesto on education*. https://trak.org.uk/lies-damned-lies-and-the-tory-manifesto-on-education/

Cooper, A., Levin, B., & Campbell, C. (2009). The growing (but still limited) importance of evidence in education policy and practice. *Journal of Educational Change*, *10*(2–3), 159–171. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-009-9107-0

Danechi, S. (2020). *Grammar school statistics*. House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 1398, 3 January 2020. https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn01398/

Department for Education (2018). *Selective schools expansion fund*. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/selective-schools-expansion-fund

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2017). *Support mechanisms for evidence-based policy making in education*. Eurydice Report. Publications Office of the European Union. https://doi.org/10.2797/575942

Farley-Ripple, E. N., Oliver, K., & Boaz, A. (2020). Mapping the community: Use of research evidence in policy and practice. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, *7*, 83. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-00571-2

Farquharson, C., Sibieta, L., Tahir, I., & Waltmann, B. (2021). *2021 Annual Report on Education Spending in England*. Institute for Fiscal Studies Report Number R204. 30 November 2021. https://ifs.org.uk/uploads/R204-2021-Education-Spending-Report-1.pdf

Full Fact (2016). *How do selective school ratings compare?* https://fullfact.org/education/how-do-selective-school-ratings-compare/

Gibb, N. (2017). *The importance of knowledge-based education*. https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/nick-gibb-the-importance-of-knowledge-based-education

Gorard, S. (2002). Fostering scepticism: The importance of warranting claims. *Evaluation & Research in Education*, *16*(3), 136–149. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500790208667014

Gorard, S., & Fitz, J. (2006). What counts as evidence in the school choice debate? *British Educational Research Journal*, *32*(6), 797–816. https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920600989438

Gorard, S., & Siddiqui, N. (2018). Grammar schools in England: A new analysis of social segregation and academic outcomes. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *39*(7), 909–924. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2018.1443432

Gorard, S., See, B. H., & Siddiqui, N. (2017). *The trials of evidence-based education: The promises, opportunities and problems of trials in education*. Routledge.

Gorard, S., See, B. H., & Siddiqui, N. (2020). What is the evidence on the best way to get evidence into use in education? *Review of Education*, *8*(2), 570–610. https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3200

Gorard, S., Siddiqui, N., & See, B. H. (2021). Assessing the impact of Pupil Premium funding on primary school segregation and attainment. *Research Papers in Education*. https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2021.1907775. Online ahead of print.

Gough, D., Tripney, J., Kenny, C., & Buk-Berge, E. (2011). *Evidence informed policy in education in Europe: EIPEE final project report*. EPPI-Centre Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.

Gove, M. (2013). I refuse to surrender to the Marxist teachers hell-bent on destroying our schools: Education Secretary berates 'the new enemies of promise' for opposing his plans. *Daily Mail*. 23 March. www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2298146/I-refuse-surrender-Marxist-teachers-hell-bent-destroying-schools-Education-Secretary-berates-new-enemies-promise-opposing-plans.html

Guyatt, G., Cairns, J., Churchill, D., Cook, D., Haynes, B., Hirsh, J., Irvine, J., Levine, M., Levine, M., Nishikawa, J., Sackett, D., Brill-Edwards, P., Gerstein, H., Gibson, J., Jaeschke, R., Kerigan, A., Neville, A., Panju, A., Detsky, A., … & Tugwell, P. (1992). Evidence-Based Medicine: A new approach to teaching the practice of medicine. *JAMA*, *268*(17), 2420–2425. https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.1992.03490170092032

Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. Routledge.

Harford, T. (2020). *How to make the world add up*. Bridge Street Press.

Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.

Hitchens, P. (2021). Broken eggs, no omelette. *The Critic*. https://thecritic.co.uk/issues/may-2021/broken-eggs-no-omelette/

HoC Debate (2016). *Education and social mobility*. Hansard: House of Commons debates, 22 November, 617. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-22/debates/EA4B4222-B757-4B54-B854-293EEC1671B6/EducationAndSocialMobility

Ion, G., & Lucu, R. (2015). Does research influence educational policy? The perspective of researchers and policy-makers in Romania. In A. Curaj, L. Matei, R. Pricopie, J. Salmi, & P. Scott (Eds.), *The European Higher Education Area: Between critical reflections and future policies*. Springer.

Labour Party (2017). *Labour Party Manifesto: For the many not the few*. https://labour.org.uk/manifesto-2017/education/

Long, R., Foster, D., & Roberts, N. (2018). *Grammar schools in England*. House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 07070, 3 October 2018. https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN07070/SN07070.pdf

Lu, B. (2020a). Selection on attainment? Local authorities, pupil backgrounds, attainment and grammar school opportunities. *Educational Review*, *72*(1), 68–87. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2018.1483893

Lu, B. (2020b). *The effectiveness and equity of grammar schools in England*. Durham theses, Durham University. Durham E-Theses Online: http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/13484/

Malone, A., & Hogan, P. (2020). Evidence and its consequences in educational research. *British Educational Research Journal*, *46*(2), 265–280. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3580

Mayer, D. (2021). The connections and disconnections between teacher education policy and research: reframing evidence. *Oxford Review of Education*, *47*(1), 120–134. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2020.1842179

Newman, J., Cherney, A., & Head, B. W. (2016). Do policy makers use academic research? Reexamining the "Two Communities" theory of research utilization. *Public Administration Review*, *76*(1), 24–32. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12464

Ofsted (2014). *Heartlands academy Ofsted report*. https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/school/135907/heartlands-academy/absence-and-pupil-population

Owen, G. (2021). Angela Rayner must realise phrases like 'racist scum' are dangerous: New education secretary Nadhim Zahawi offers a word of caution as he reveals his headteacher inspired him when he was a 'very naughty' schoolboy in Iraq. *Daily Mail*. 2 October. https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10052693/Education-secretary-Nadhim-Zahawi-offers-word-caution-reveals-headteacher-inspired-him.html

Parkhurst, J. (2017). *The politics of evidence: From evidence based policy to the good governance of evidence*. Routledge.

Parliament. House of Commons (2016). *Debate Pack: The role of grammar and faith schools*. (HC CDP 2016-0204). House of Commons. https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2016-0204/CDP-2016-0204.pdf

Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (2016). *Academic evidence on selective secondary education*. POST brief 32. https://post.parliament.uk/research-briefings/post-pb-0022/

Pellegrini, M., & Vivanet, G. (2021). Evidence-Based policies in education: Initiatives and challenges in Europe. *ECNU Review of Education*, *4*(1), 25–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/2096531120924670

Phillippo, K. A. (2019). *Contest without winners: how students experience competitive school choice*. University of Minnesota Press.

Rowe, E., & Perry, L. B. (2021). Voluntary school fees in segregated public schools: How selective public schools turbo-charge inequity and funding gaps. *Comparative Education*, *58*(1), 106–123. https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2021.1942359

Sanderson, I. (2003). Is it "What Works" that matters? Evaluation and evidence-based policy-making. *Research Papers in Education*, *18*(4), 331–345. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267152032000176846

Slavin, R. E. (2020). How evidence-based reform will transform research and practice in education. *Educational Psychologist*, *55*(1), 21–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2019.1611432

Stevens, A. (2019). 'Being human' and the 'moral sidestep' in drug policy: Explaining government inaction on opioid-related deaths in the UK. *Addictive Behaviours*, *90*, 444–450. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2018.08.036

The Education Endowment Foundation Fund (2021). *Teaching and learning toolkit*. https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit

The Stationery Office. (2006). *Education and inspections act* (c.39). [Online]. The Stationery Office. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents

They Work For You. https://www.theyworkforyou.com

Van Leeuwen, T. (2007). Legitimation in discourse and communication. *Discourse & Communication*, *1*(1), 91–112. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481307071986

Wainwright, E., Aldridge, D., Biesta, G., & Filippakou, O. (2020). Why educational research should remain mindful of its position: Questions of boundaries, identity and scale. *British Educational Research Journal*, *46*(1), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3594

Weinberg, J. (2021). Who's listening to whom? The UK House of Lords and evidence-based policy-making on Citizenship Education. *Journal of Education Policy*, *36*(4), 576–599. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2019.1648877

Wrigley, T. (2018). The power of "Evidence": Reliable science or a set of blunt tools?'. *British Educational Research Journal*, *44*(3), 359–376.

Young, T. (2014). *Prisoners of the Blob: Why most education experts are wrong about nearly everything*. Civitas.

HANSARD REFERENCES

Agnew, T. (2018). Schools that work for everyone. *Hansard: House of Lords Consultation*, 14 May, 617, c. 19:25. https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2018-05-14/debates/96A4F93F-6AA4-4F29-8097-4F3249085803/SchoolsThatWorkForEveryoneConsultation?highlight=schools%20that%20work%20everyone#contribution-0FFA9673-9AC5-41D3-B197-2BF94333B89D

Burnham, A. (2016). Education and social mobility. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 22 November, 617, c. 13:20. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-22/debates/EA4B4222-B757-4B54-B854-293EEC1671B6/EducationAndSocialMobility

Cashman, M. (2016). Grammar schools. *Hansard: House of Lords Debates*, 13 October, 774, c. 13:12. https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2016-10-13/debates/611F8809-D3EF-4B69-B180-08A05361BB45/GrammarSchools?highlight=grammar%20schools#contribution-52DACF1C-7D68-4572-A7CC-60EFB655FBC8

Dromey, J. (2016). Education and social mobility. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 22 November, 617, c. 13:09. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-22/debates/EA4B4222-B757-4B54-B854-293EEC1671B6/EducationAndSocialMobility

Fernandes, S. (2016). Education and social mobility. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 22 November, 617, c. 13:16. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-22/debates/EA4B4222-B757-4B54-B854-293EEC1671B6/EducationAndSocialMobility

Johnson, G. (2015). Grammar school funding. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 13 January, 590, c. 1000. https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2015-01-13/debates/15011342000001/GrammarSchoolFunding?highlight=grammar%20school%20funding

Morgan, N. (2015). School expansion. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 19 October, 617, c. 16:51. https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2015-10-19/debates/15101917000002/SchoolExpansion?highlight=school%20expansion#contribution-15101917000003

Greening, J. (2016a). Education and social mobility. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 22 November, 617, c. 13:06. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-22/debates/EA4B4222-B757-4B54-B854-293EEC1671B6/EducationAndSocialMobility

Greening, J. (2016b). Education and social mobility. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 22 November, 617, c. 13:08. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-22/debates/EA4B4222-B757-4B54-B854-293EEC1671B6/EducationAndSocialMobility

Greening, J. (2016c). Education and social mobility. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 22 November, 617, c. 13:10. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-22/debates/EA4B4222-B757-4B54-B854-293EEC1671B6/EducationAndSocialMobility

Greening, J. (2016d). Education and social mobility. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 22 November, 617, c. 13:12. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-22/debates/EA4B4222-B757-4B54-B854-293EEC1671B6/EducationAndSocialMobility

Greening, J. (2016e). Education and social mobility. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 22 November, 617, c. 13:14. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-22/debates/EA4B4222-B757-4B54-B854-293EEC1671B6/EducationAndSocialMobility

Greening, J. (2016f). Education and social mobility. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 22 November, 617, c. 13:17. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-22/debates/EA4B4222-B757-4B54-B854-293EEC1671B6/EducationAndSocialMobility

Greening, J. (2016g). Education and social mobility. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 22 November, 617, c. 13:19. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-22/debates/EA4B4222-B757-4B54-B854-293EEC1671B6/EducationAndSocialMobility

Greening, J. (2016h). Education and social mobility. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 22 November, 617, c. 13:21. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-22/debates/EA4B4222-B757-4B54-B854-293EEC1671B6/EducationAndSocialMobility

Greening, J. (2016i). Education and social mobility. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 22 November, 617, c. 13:23. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-22/debates/EA4B4222-B757-4B54-B854-293EEC1671B6/EducationAndSocialMobility

Greening, J. (2016j). Education and social mobility. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 22 November, 617, c. 13:25. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-22/debates/EA4B4222-B757-4B54-B854-293EEC1671B6/EducationAndSocialMobility

McDonagh, S. (2016). Education and social mobility. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 22 November, 617, c. 13:07. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-22/debates/EA4B4222-B757-4B54-B854-293EEC1671B6/EducationAndSocialMobility

Monaghan, C. (2016). Education and social mobility. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 22 November, 617, c. 13:30. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-22/debates/EA4B4222-B757-4B54-B854-293EEC1671B6/EducationAndSocialMobility

Philip, C. (2017). Budget resolutions. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 14 March, 623, c. 15:04. https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2017-03-14/debates/D12598BF-C93D-4687-90AB-E93854A608F8/BudgetResolutions?highlight=budget%20resolution#contribution-31A9FAFE-6E2E-4707-A38D-BF2C3A4B8C94

Powell, L. (2016). Education and social mobility. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 22 November, 617, c. 13:11. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-22/debates/EA4B4222-B757-4B54-B854-293EEC1671B6/EducationAndSocialMobility

Streeting, W. (2016). Education and social mobility. *Hansard: House of Commons Debates*, 22 November, 617, c. 13:13. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-22/debates/EA4B4222-B757-4B54-B854-293EEC1671B6/EducationAndSocialMobility

APPENDIX 1

GRAMMAR DEBATES: HOUSE OF COMMONS THEMES AND NUMBER OF REFERENCES

• Good schools	117	• Expansion	17	• London	2
• Evidence	103	• Social cohesion	16	• Mental health	2
• Disadvantaged and social privilege	91	• Cost	15	• Social networks	2
		• Works for everyone	15	• Best possible people	1
• Selection	85	• Special needs	13	• Economic condition	1
• Underfunded	71	• Secondary modern	12	• Localism	1
• Parental choice	41	• Early years	5	• Management oversight	1
• Comprehensive	38	• Evasive	5	• Our schools	1
• Diversity	38	• Retrograde	4	• Reforms	1
• Social mobility	31	• Distraction	3	• Values	1
• Anecdote	28	• Aspiration	2	• Wait	1
• Dogma	24	• Bilateral schools	2		
• Teaching	18	• Emotive	2		

APPENDIX 2

GRAMMAR DEBATES: HOUSE OF LORDS THEMES AND NUMBER OF REFERENCES (TOP 30 THEMES–FREQUENCY >1%)

• Selection	110	• Works for everyone	19	• Independent schools	
• Evidence	57	• Diversity	18	• Tutoring	
• Good schools	47	• Free school meals	14	• Grammars sponsoring	
• Anecdote	39	• Secondary moderns	14	• London	
• Social mobility	30	• Academy	13	• Meritocracy	
• Disadvantaged	27	• Early years	13	• Party	
• Comprehensive schools	24	• Expansion	12	• Places	
• Parental choice	22	• Poor	12	• Rival schools	
• Socially divisive	21	• Attainment gap	11		
• Retrograde	20	• Controversial	11		
• Teaching	20	• Elitism	10		

APPENDIX 3

GRAMMAR SCHOOL DEBATES: TOP 25 PARLIAMENTARY THEMES (HOC + HOL)

• Selection	195	• Expansion	29
• Good schools	164	• Dogmatic	28
• Evidence	160	• Disadvantaged	27
• Disadvantaged and social privilege	91	• Secondary moderns	26
		• Socially divisive	21
• Underfunded	71	• Retrograde	20
• Anecdote	67	• Early years	18
• Parental choice	63	• Social cohesion	16
• Comprehensive schools	62	• Cost	15
• Social mobility	61	• Special needs	15
• Diversity	56	• Free school meals	14
• Teaching	38	• Academy	13
• Works for everyone	34	• Poor	12

APPENDIX 4

GRAMMAR SCHOOL DEBATES: TOP 25 PARLIAMENTARY THEMES– POLITICAL PARTY ALLIANCE

• Selection	195	• Expansion	29
• *Good schools*	*164* (125/**30**)*	• *Dogmatic*	28
• Evidence	160	• Disadvantaged	27
• Disadvantaged and social privilege	91	• Secondary moderns	26
		• **Socially divisive**	21
• *Underfunded*	71	• Retrograde	20
• Anecdote	67 **(28/26)**	• **Early years**	18
• *Parental choice*	63	• Social cohesion	16
• Comprehensive schools	62	• Cost	15
• *Social mobility*	61	• **Special needs**	15
• *Diversity*	56	• **Free school meals**	14
• **Teaching**	38	• Academy	13
• *Works for everyone*	34	• Poor	12

APPENDIX 5

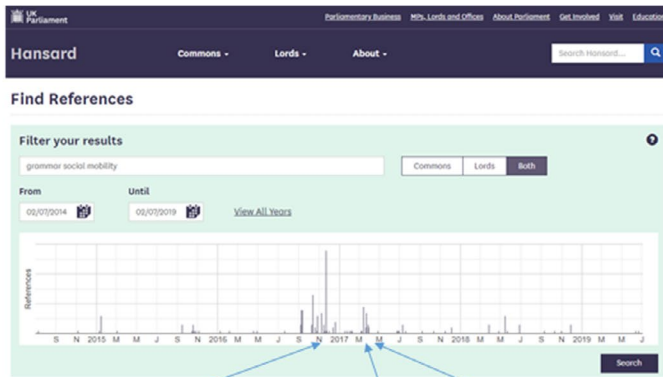## USES OF ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE IN GRAMMAR DEBATES BY AFFILIATION AND CATEGORY

HOUSE PARTY	TOTAL	GRAMMAR	COMP	2ND MOD	FAITH	ACAD	PRIVATE	11+ F	PRO	OTHER
HoC										
• CON	18	16	2							
• LAB	7	1	2		1					3
• LD	3	1	1	1	1					
HoL										
• CON	10	2		1		1	1	4		
• LAB	19	7	2	1			1	5	4	1
• LD	8	2	2					5		2
• CoE	2	2								
TOTAL	67*	31	9	3	2	1	2	14	4	6

APPENDIX 6

GRAMMAR DEBATES FINDINGS: REDUCTION IN THE USE OF 'SOCIAL MOBILITY' AS A DEFENCE OF GRAMMAR SCHOOL EXPANSION

Date range: 2 July 2014–2 July2019.

Each horizontal line represents 5 results, so the maximum number of results (Count: 28) occurs on 22 November 2016, when the Education and Social Mobility debate convened in the Commons Chamber.

Education and Social Mobility; Budget Resolutions Debate; Social Mobility

Table available at: https://hansard.parliament.uk/search?startDate=2014-07-02&endDate=2019-07-02&searchTerm=grammar%20social%20mobility&partial=False (Accessed: 9 October 2021).
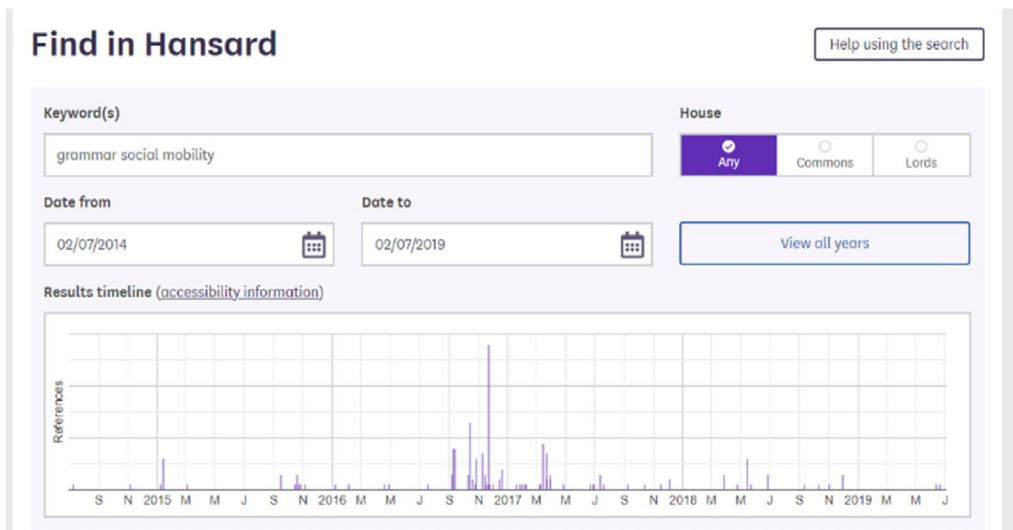
APPENDIX 7

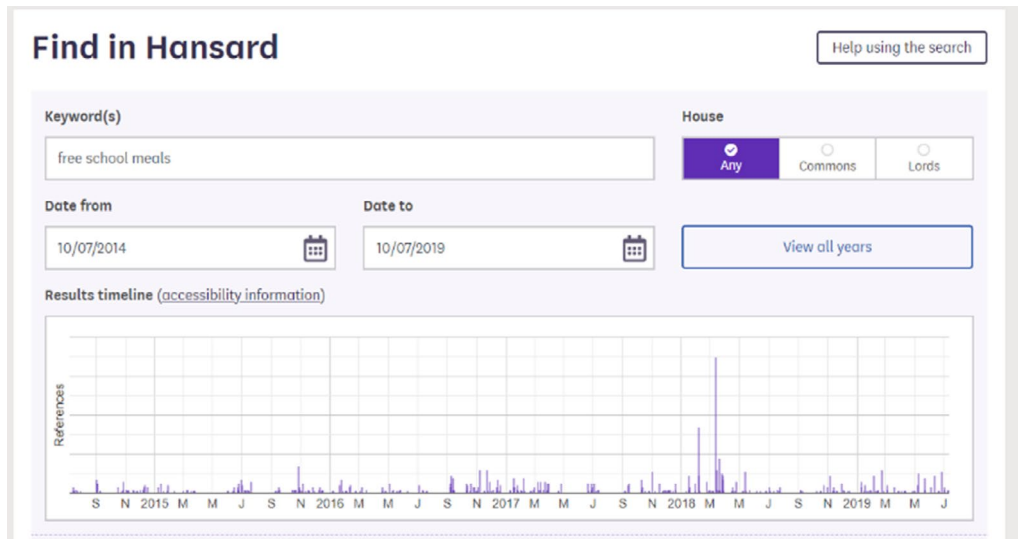### GRAMMAR SCHOOL DEBATES: FREE SCHOOL MEALS EVIDENCE

Date range: 10 July 2016–10 July 2019.

Each horizontal line represents 10 results, so the maximum number of results (Count: 70) occurs on 13 March 2018, when the Universal Credit debate convened in the Commons Chamber. The second highest results (Count: 34) occur on 6 February 2018, when the Free School Meals/Pupil Premium: Eligibility debate convened in the Commons.

NOTE: FSM are mentioned 12 times in the Social Mobility debate of 22 November 2016.

Table available at: https://hansard.parliament.uk/search?startDate=2014-07-10&endDate=2019-07-10&searchTerm=free%20school%20meals&partial=False (Accessed: 9 October 2021).

APPENDIX 8

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES ON GRAMMAR SCHOOLS

The 11 debates in Parliament which contained 'grammar' in their title in the past 5 years:

Grammar School Funding	13 Jan 2015
Grammar Schools	2 Mar 2015
Funding for Grammar Schools in Southend	12 Mar 2015
Grammar Schools	7 Sep 2016
Grammar Schools	8 Sep 2016
New Grammar Schools	8 Sep 2016
Grammar Schools	14 Sep 2016
Grammar Schools	15 Sep 2016
Grammar Schools	13 Oct 2016
Grammar and Faith Schools	8 Nov 2016
Grammar Schools	27 Jun 2018