

# Academics say schools system has improved opportunity

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COMPREHENSIVE education has helped to achieve greater equality of opportunity among pupils since the system was introduced 50 years ago, researchers have found.

Higher levels of academic attainment and a more positive attitude to schooling are other notable achievements of the system, according to a new report.

However, academics from Edinburgh University argue elements of the current system, such as the introduction of parental choice through placing requests, while desirable to promote freedom, have reduced equality because they have a polarising effect in some communities.

"The introduction of parental choice eroded an important feature of the original comprehensive model: namely its basis in geographically defined communities," the researchers found.

And they called for more to be done if the values of comprehensive schooling were to fully benefit all of Scotland's children in the future with the biggest predictors of a child's academic success still parents' economic status and their levels of education.

Dr Cathy Howieson, a senior research fellow, said: "Comprehensive schooling has become part of the social fabric of Scotland with the system enjoying widespread support among parents and some 95 per cent of pupils attend comprehensive schools.

"Although the system has delivered many benefits, our book challenges policymakers to understand, and learn from, the lessons of the last 50 years."

The researchers conclude: "The

concept of comprehensive education, especially when linked to the underlying values of liberty, equality and fraternity, is still a valuable concept for analysing, inspiring and guiding education systems and for exploring their possible future direction.

"Ideas of comprehensive education tend to have faded from policy debates in recent years in Scotland as elsewhere in the UK. The concept of comprehensive education should once more become a central theme of debates about the future of education."

Eileen Prior, executive director of the Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC), backed calls for a fresh examination of

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## Call to 'refresh' comprehensive school system

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the current system. She said: "Comprehensive education has become 'what we do' in Scotland and very many of us would struggle to recall the system before comprehensive schooling began.

"For that reason, there is certainly a strong argument that we need to revisit and refresh the principles behind the system we have embraced, to ensure these are front and centre of everything we do in all of our schools."

Larry Flanagan, general secretary of the EIS, the largest teaching union, said: "The

principles of fairness and equality of opportunity are central to Scotland's comprehensive education system.

"There continues to be a very high level of support

– from parents, teachers and others with an interest in education – for a Scottish comprehensive model that is designed to ensure that all young people, no matter what their background, have equal access to a quality educational experience that is appropriate for their own needs.

"There is little or no enthu-

siasm, within the EIS or else-

where in the Scottish education community, for the ideologically-driven, market-orientated approach to education that continues to be promoted south of the Border."

A conference to discuss the impact of comprehensive schooling will be held at Edinburgh University this week.

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