

# Anti Academies Alliance



[www.antiacademies.org.uk](http://www.antiacademies.org.uk)

“A good local school for every child”

## Sweden's 'Free Schools' Schools like any other?

A summary of '*Schools like any other? Independent schools as part of the system 1991-2004*' by Skolverket, the Swedish National Agency for Education

**As the General Election looms the Tory Party have promised to put 'Rocket Boosters' on the Academies programme and to create 'thousands' of Primary Schools into Academies. They repeatedly quote the Swedish 'Free Schools' as a model.**

The report 'Schools like any other?' produced in 2004 offers some useful insights into the 'Free Schools' model. All quotes are from this report, which can be downloaded in English at [www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se). The report summarised a series of questions which were sent to Municipalities (local Authorities). Where the report refers to 'independent' schools, the Tories refer to 'Free Schools'.

158 municipalities had at least one independent school in the spring term of 2004, while 123 municipalities had only schools run by the municipality. Approximately 80 municipalities had independent upper secondary schools. Over 6% of compulsory school pupils and just over 10% of upper secondary school pupils attended independent schools. There were 800 independent compulsory schools and upper secondary schools in total.

*“All these circumstances can be seen as signs that independent schools are poorer placed than municipal schools to provide high quality education.”*

### What are 'Free Schools'?

*“Today's independent schools take various forms, from small parental cooperatives whose start-up may have been fuelled by the closure of a municipal school, to schools with a particular educational approach or subject specialism, and schools which are run by large for-profit education companies.”*

### The impact of making profits from schools

When for-profit companies started running significant numbers of schools, the Swedish government noted that *“There could be a risk of conflicts of interest for this type of independent school, i.e. problems reconciling the profit motive*

*with educational improvement. In the view of the government, the profit motive also risks increasing social and economic segregation and creating a society with wider gulfs. Furthermore, a risk was seen that schools that failed to make a profit would be closed.”*

### Selective education

The report states *“Schools with pupils from 'more favourable' backgrounds, e.g. pupils with well-educated parents, achieve better results in terms of grades.”* And this is notable in Independent Schools which have *“a larger proportion of pupils with parents who have continued in education after upper secondary school.”*

**Patrons:** Lord Roy Hattersley, Tony Benn, Fiona Millar, Professor Gus John, Michael Rosen, Alan Gibbons, Joan Sallis OBE  
**National Trade Union Affiliates:** TUC, NUT, NASUWT, ATL, UCU, UNISON, UNITE, FBU, MU, PCS

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## **Does competition improve schools?**

The existence of Free Schools has introduced competition into the schooling system

*“The majority of municipalities with a high proportion of pupils in*

*independent schools consider that relations between independent and municipal schools are largely characterised by competition.”*

79% disagreed with the statement *“competition with independent compulsory schools in your municipality has contributed to school improvement in compulsory schools in your municipality”*

## **Do they have better teachers?**

*“Studies have shown that the head teachers of independent schools as a rule are younger, fewer have been trained as head teachers and more are less experienced than head teachers in municipal schools.”*

*“The proportion of teachers with a university teaching degree is lower in independent schools than in municipal schools.”*

## **More effective use of resources?**

The Tories claim that our schools are inefficient, and one of the benefits of 'Free Schools' would be cheaper schooling.

*“Regarding the question on more effective use of resources there is fairly widespread agreement that the independent schools have not contributed towards this.”*

*“To sum up, 90 percent of the municipalities with independent schools consider that independent schools being set up led to significant increases in costs”.*

*“Municipalities with a high proportion of pupils in independent compulsory schools have a higher average cost per pupil.”*

*“The assumption that increased competition in a school's area automatically leads to lower costs can be discarded.”*

## **Segregation**

One of the concerns that campaigners in Britain have about Academies and 'Free Schools' is the

*“It is reasonable to assume that there are no obvious motives for successful independent schools or education companies to work together and share their ideas on education with other schools.”*

possibility of them leading to segregation. The report says *“Several previous studies, and statistics, show that choice in the school system has led to a tendency to segregate in terms of pupils' sociocultural background, performance and ethnic background.”*

## **More Free Schools?**

*“When asked whether or not the municipal council takes a positive view of more independent schools being set up in the municipality” over 60% disagreed.*

## **Lots of small schools?**

The Tories dream of small groups of parents setting up 'Free Schools'. In Sweden the minimum number of pupils required to set up a 'Free School' is 20. The report is concerned about this

*“The National Agency for Education has previously expressed concern that the quality of independent schools which have few pupils may be doubtful.”*

## **Innovation grinds to a halt**

It is widely recognised that change usually brings immediate results, but only real improvements bring lasting results.

*“the innovation in education which the independent schools were expected to contribute towards is taking on increasingly less importance.”*

The Anti Academies Alliance, the teaching unions, other education campaigners and academics all argue that school results are significantly affected by many factors, particularly those external to the school. We don't believe that 'entrepreneurial DNA' brings any benefit to education.

The report says this about Swedish education.

***“As far as can be judged, schools' work to improve quality, their size, the population structure in the area in which they are located, the type of municipality and other factors, are more significant to the quality of education they provide than whether they are municipally or independently run.”***