Chapter 3
PARENTAL CHOICE AND DIVERSITY OF PROVISION

This chapter shows how choice is an increasingly important mechanism for parental demand. Countries are moving towards greater parental freedom to making choices with better information available to make their decisions. There are also significant moves to widen the diversity of programmes and schools among which choices can be made, including through private provision and, in some countries, home schooling. The evidence does not permit any comprehensive evaluation of different choice mechanisms but it does show that individuals and groups are not responding in the same way. The better educated, middle class parents tend to exercise their choice options more frequently. There are differences between urban and rural areas, partly a reflection of the social profile in these areas and partly because of the greater number and range of schools in towns and suburbia.

In recent years in the countries covered here, the basic model of a school within the district of residence and close to the family home, sometimes with an elite private system co-existing alongside, has been modified. This chapter outlines the range of change that has taken place along the dual axes of promoting diversity and establishing room for the exercise of parental choice. In the change which has taken place on both axes, parental demand has clearly been an important factor, whether at the broad level of political demand from influential stakeholder groups (including educated parents) which governments have been keen to satisfy or at the local level with parental behaviour influencing provision on the ground.

The concept of demand enters in more than one way. Enhancing the range of options can be regarded as a means for schooling better to respond to different demands – individual and collective – with parents, families and community interests seen as the "clients" of education. We have also seen in the previous chapter that those who have actually exercised choices, such as through taking their child from the neighbourhood public school to attend

another, often have higher measured levels of satisfaction. The exercise of choice among similarly-organised schools of different profile or among different types of school altogether is an example of "exit" behaviour – to return to the Hirschman (1970) distinction that has informed our analysis – in that accessing a chosen different school, or even abandoning formal schooling altogether, means to leave another school behind. The consequences of different choice structures and decisions need to be examined empirically. We can be clear nevertheless that this report is not premised on the assumption that maximising choice is a universal policy objective; and the attention given to enhancing demand should not be equated with a commitment to maximise choice.

Schooling policies and the room for choice

This section reviews features of the current situation regarding parental choice of school. The issue of parental choice policies has long been controversial. Critics insist that policies to promote it imply acceptance that some students will enjoy a better education than others, that market principles have found their way inappropriately into the public enterprise of schooling, and that the cohesion of a shared national project has been abandoned. Advocates regard it as a route to higher quality through the injection of a modicum of competition, and the healthy reflection of the principles of sensitivity to demand and diversity into the uniformity of education systems. In the countries reviewed, choice options have been widened though this is a much more central element of the policies of some than others.

Denmark illustrates well the different arguments. Policies on school choice have triggered a public debate. Free choice exercised by the better educated and better off may be to the detriment of the rest, an effect which is seen at odds with Danish ideas about equity. In Denmark, parents have had the right to enrol their children in a municipal school other than the district school if the school was willing to take the children. Now, the municipal council may decide to let parents choose freely, within the guidelines set out by the municipal council, between district schools and other schools in the municipality. More than 75% of Danish municipalities offer a choice between the district school and other schools in the municipality. The proportion is highest among the large municipalities. The number of rejections of students who apply to transfer to a school other than their district school is very limited. Approximately 9% of students want to go to a school other than the district school and 86% of these requests are granted. The majority of rejections is because the municipality has decided on a class-size limit that they do not wish to exceed by transferring further

students (Danish Ministry of the Interior and Health, 2004). Recently, the room for choice has been further extended to allow freedom of choice across municipal borders which will be given a trial period of two school years.

In Finland, students may apply to a school other than the one assigned to them, which may admit them at the discretion of the education provider. Currently, the majority of students in basic education are admitted to their local school. When selecting students for a non-assigned school, all applicants must be subject to equal selection criteria. If a school has developed a special profile, it may use tests to determine students' aptitudes and other selection criteria have included the presence of siblings, students' language choices, and the school's curricular emphases. Nevertheless, the local authority may decide that children living within its area should be given priority in education that it provides. Clearly, in a sparsely populated country like Finland, the distribution of choice is very uneven: in small municipalities, which may only have one comprehensive school, there is little choice; in the major cities, there are plenty of options.

A fairly conventional and stable situation exists in Austria. Each child belongs to a certain school district and if parents want their children to attend another establishment, this is also possible if a place in the school of choice is available. There are, however, considerable regional differences influencing the opportunities for school choice. At the lower secondary level, the academic track is available mostly in urban areas. At the upper secondary level, the supply is concentrated to cities. Some types of special schools are available only in one or very few localities. Access to primary education is basically regulated on a local matching model which gives each child access to a particular school. However, there is room for choice of another school if parents find a school that accepts the child. Choice thus depends on the supply of accessible schools which is related to population density and opportunity for mobility. Transport costs are covered by public funds.

In Hungary, pre-schools and primary schools are not allowed to hold entrance exams, and the school of the parent's choice is obliged to enrol any child of compulsory education age living in the district. To those living outside their district, admission may only be denied due to lack of places. Due to the decrease in the number of children, lower secondary schools in Hungary have free capacities to develop special profiles responding to demand in recent years. The Hungarian data suggest that there is a clear-cut correlation between social class and expectations and behaviour with regard to making decisions about schooling. In households where the head of the household has only the lower-level secondary school qualification, 90% of children attend the district school, while this ratio is 73% in the case of parents with university or college qualification. Better educated parents in

many cases choose a school for reasons other than it being closest to their home.

When the state monopoly on education was eliminated in 1990 in Poland, the supply of education diversified: individuals, organisations and churches were given the opportunity to establish schools. Instead of mandatory enrolment of a child at the nearest school, the reforms gave parents the freedom to choose a school for their children. Legally, parents are free to choose any school, but in reality choice is limited. Tuition fees charged by non-public schools and admission procedures deter certain families from choosing these schools. Parents choosing civic schools (see below) do so because they believe they offer better relations between the teachers and students, more individualised teaching and learning, smaller classes, and richer educational opportunities.

In the Spanish Constitution parents are given the right to choose the appropriate education for their children. Autonomous Communities apply criteria in the selection of students when demand outstrips the supply of places. Apart from criteria such as the proximity to the family home or simultaneous attendance of siblings at a particular school, *centros concertados* (publicly-funded private schools), use the previous attendance of children in the non-compulsory pre-school within the same school as a criterion and are thereby shifting the main pressure of demand down from the first compulsory grade (at age 6) to the first pre-school grade (at age 3). In Spain, the criterion most mentioned by parents for choosing a school is the proximity to their home, given by nearly half of both Spanish (42%) and immigrant families (47%). The quality of school preparation is the second criterion (29% and 20%, respectively). But then, the item "diversity of students" as a positive reason for choice is seen differently by Spanish (only 3%) and immigrant families (13%).

In England, parents have the right to say which school they would prefer their child to attend, regardless of the school's location, but there is no guarantee of a place at the school if there are more children wanting to attend that school than there are places available. Nationally, nearly three-quarters of parents applied for a place in their nearest state school. Parents in metropolitan areas are often able to choose from a range of local schools and London parents are less likely to apply to their local school (some 60 000 children attend schools outside their home Local Educational Authority's [LEA] area). The admissions authority follows a set of rules to decide who should be offered a place, which authorities may use different criteria in different areas. If the child is not offered a place at the parents' preferred school, they have the right to appeal to an independent panel and if this is upheld, the admission authority is under a duty to admit the child to the school. Out of the approximately 70 000 appeals lodged in England

against non-admission to a secondary school in 2002/2003, about one-third were decided in the parents' favour. According to Flatley, Connolly and Higgins (2001) over 80% of parents were offered a place in the school they most wanted, and not surprisingly, the large majority of parents were satisfied with the selection process. However, in London, fewer than 70% of parents were offered a place in the school they most wanted.

The most common reason parents gave for choosing a school was good academic outcomes at around 40% of parents, and conversely the most frequently-cited reasons given for not selecting the nearest school were poor discipline, rumours of bullying and poor academic results. Batterham (2003) found that the six top reasons of London parents for sending a child to a school in a different LEA were: the school was higher in the performance tables than those in their area; religious ethos; the good reputation of other schools; the school was easier to travel to than schools in their home area; the poor reputation of the schools in their home LEA; and their child's happiness. In England, the groups most likely to cite academic reasons for choosing a school were those living in London, non-white ethnic groups, owner-occupiers, and families with mothers in higher occupational classes. Groups least likely to do so were: those living in rural areas, those renting in the social sector, white ethnic groups, and families where the mother had never worked.

Promoting diversity

Promoting diversity is a natural accompaniment to promoting choice: if provision is perceived to be broadly similar there is no need to expect parents to be clamouring to change from one school to another. The English government has in recent years pursued a policy of diversifying supply. A 2002 Act requires the local authority (LEA) to announce where a new secondary school is required. Then any interested party can put forward proposals for a new school: a community or religious group, an LEA or another public, private or voluntary body can publish proposals, which are judged on the basis of their educational merits, value for money and the outcome of consultation. At the same time, English state schools have been given considerable freedom to specialise and to offer additional benefits and services. Specialist schools place particular focus on their chosen subject area while meeting the National Curriculum requirements. Any state school in England can apply to be designated as a specialist school in one (or two) of ten areas: arts, business and enterprise, engineering, humanities, language, mathematics and computing, music, science, sport and technology. City Technology Colleges (CTCs) are independent non-fee-paying schools for students aged 11 through 18 that offer students in urban

areas the opportunity to prepare for gainful employment. They also offer a wide range of vocational qualifications post-16 – alongside those qualifying for university entry. Academies are publicly funded all-ability independent schools that attempt to provide a first-class free education for local students.

There are approximately 7 000 schools with religious affiliation in England within the state education system of which the large majority (about 6 400) are at primary level. The vast majority of those 7 000 schools are Church of England (4 700) or Roman Catholic (2 100). The other religious groups represented – Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Greek Orthodox, and Seventh Day Adventists – make up the other 3%. All faith schools are required to teach the national curriculum and for religious education, they may opt either to teach their own faith or to follow locally agreed religious education syllabuses.

In Hungary, schools organise the education and teaching of their students according to their own school curriculum based on the National Core Curriculum. Many general and secondary schools offer an advanced programme in one or more subjects, most often in a foreign language, mathematics, science, physical education and music. Some offer subjects that are not taught at other schools (*e.g.* history of art, drama, spatial informatics). Some general secondary and specialist schools (*e.g.* dual-language or artistic vocational schools) organise entrance examinations, but the majority of secondary schools do not. The Ministry has now ruled that only those institutions with at least twice as many applicants as places may do so. The majority of schools now rank students by their educational performance at the previous school and admit them based on this ranking. This performance ranking has a strong correlation to the school attainment of parents and makes the system very selective. Well-qualified parents in particular are ready to send their children to another school if the one their children attend does not meet their expectations. Alternative schools are financed by local government and of these the Steiner network is the most extensive, with a few Freinet, Montessori and Rogers schools as well. There are dual language schools where some or all subjects are taught in a foreign language. Church schools are increasingly under pressure to admit students from any background; Catholic schools, however, usually ask for credentials concerning the belief of the parents while other denominations are more permissive.

Czech legislation provides for the establishment of schools and classes with a specific focus that provide extended teaching in foreign languages, physical education, mathematics and natural sciences, music, visual arts or information technologies. Ten per cent of all students attend these schools. Parents show great interest in extended teaching in languages and sports and demand is around twice as high as the number of places available. In the

Slovak Republic, centrally managed schools, as in communist times, proved unable to respond to the new requirements of society and the labour market. Recent governments have therefore pursued a gradual decentralisation of the system, with greater autonomy given to individual establishments. At primary level, parents are now able to choose from a range of schools including those with alternative philosophies such as Steiner and Montessori. It has now become the aim of policy makers to increase the supply for education through a range of opportunities allowing for individual choices to be made.

Secondary general schools in Poland have considerable freedom in developing their curriculum and differentiate salary schemes resulting in different levels of quality. Some educational programmes which go beyond the basic curriculum standards can only be provided in richer communities and in urban areas. Strong competition and school rankings as popularised by the media help to maintain a high quality of education in these cases and the gap between urban and provincial schools is thus widening. Students are admitted in line with the decision of the school director, which is taken on the basis of the results of the entrance examination, results of previous education and other evidence of capability. Most parents exercising their right to choose schools scoring well in public rankings are from the highest socio-economic status, leading to a growing concern about a social selection of students. *Gimnazja* are willing to enrol outstanding students from outside their own area and sometimes even put them into separate classes offering better educational conditions.

Curriculum choice among options

Another source of choice and diversity, which is not about choosing between schools, is through options within schools themselves. In Finland, choices are most commonly made in relation to language studies. Elective additional courses may also be selected in mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and geography. The majority of those studying the first three of these subjects are boys, whereas the gender distribution for the last two, biology and geography, is fairly well balanced. Conversely, optional languages are more commonly chosen by girls than boys. In England, students have some degree of choice over the subjects they study at key stage 4 (age 14-16). In Japan, senior high schools can offer various subjects and courses, and students may select the school and the course from academic to vocational courses, or select various programmes in the newly introduced comprehensive departments. The school curriculum at the compulsory education level is by and large standardised across the country, but at junior high school level, students may choose additional subjects in

accordance with their career choices, interests or special ability. This system of optional subjects is not yet fully driven by the diversity of "demand".

A more demand-driven system is currently considered for the post-compulsory education level in Japan. The Central Council for Education advocated a diversification of curricula in its reports of 1996 and 1997 ("The Model for Japanese Education in the Perspective of the 21st Century"). The Council stated the necessity of paying special attention to children with learning difficulties and of further developing more individualised forms of education responding to individuals' abilities and aptitudes. At the high school stage, programmes called "Super-Science High School" and "Super-English Language High School" have been developed to improve "opportunities for the talented and well-motivated students in specific fields".

The Slovak education system developed from the position of a unified school system prior to the revolution to the current diversified, democratic and humanist school system. The system of training and education responds to the fact that each student is a unique personality. It gives the student the possibility to choose one course from a group of subjects, according to his/her interest besides the compulsory curricula subjects. In the lower grades, the possibility of selection is more modest, however, while in the higher grades it more fully suits the requirements of students. In Poland, students of institutions of compulsory education have no influence on the choice of teaching programmes and textbooks, though they are sometimes able to choose additional afternoon classes.

Diversity as a consequence of collective demands

This chapter discusses choice and diversity; however, there is strong connection to voice. It is often specific and strongly-voiced demands of collectives that generate diversity in the education systems. In most countries, demand is expressed most strongly for educational services not yet or not sufficiently offered by the state. It is expressed to make policy makers aware of gaps in the public provision of education. Examples of this would be the demand for pre-school education and after-school programmes. Improved nursery and kindergarten education has been widely discussed, for example, in connection with the improving of the employment situation of women. Moreover, several reports single out demands coming from parents asking for faith-based instruction as do the parents of children with special needs.

Ethnic and linguistic demands

Ethnic and linguistic diversity has for a long time been a social reality in many OECD countries. Most countries seek to accommodate the needs of their diverse student population in some form and this section describes some of these rights and opportunities. However, these also raise some of the most fundamental and controversial questions arising in schooling today. What is schooling for? Where should the balance be struck between system-wide integration of all populations and basic uniformity, or else the recognition, even nurturing, of difference? In particular, what role should the formal public school system play? The recognition of diversity and competing claims raises particular questions for enhancing sensitivity to parental demands. Several reports mention the strength and frequency of demands made by parents asking for faith-based instruction (as they do for parents of disabled children).

In Finland, the Swedish minority, which represents about 6% of the population, has the right to education in their own mother tongue. Similarly, members of the Sami population, an indigenous community, are guaranteed the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture. Students speaking the Sami language must primarily be provided with basic education in that language, should their parents so choose. In Finland, the language of instruction at an institution providing general upper secondary education is either Finnish or Swedish. Other possible languages of instruction are Sami, Roma or sign language, and it is also possible to provide instruction primarily or entirely in other foreign languages as part of a separate teaching group or institution. In the matriculation examination, a foreign-language student may, instead of participating in the mother tongue test intended for Finnish-, Swedish-speaking or Sami-speaking students, take a test in Finnish or Swedish as a second language.

Children of an age for compulsory schooling who have entered Finland either as refugees or asylum seekers may receive preparatory instruction in their own group for six months before they start comprehensive school. At comprehensive school, these children, like other immigrant students, are usually put into classes appropriate for their age and skills. There is a special appropriation for providing immigrant students with the opportunity to receive special remedial instruction and instruction in their mother tongue. The objective of immigrant education is to prepare immigrants for integration into the Finnish education system and society and to support their cultural identity, so that, in addition to Finnish or Swedish, they will also have a command of their own native language.

The Slovak Constitution guarantees the members of national minorities a right to education in their native language, namely Hungarian and

Ukrainian. In Hungary, the diversity of supply is increased by national minority pre-schools and schools in which education is provided in the languages of the seven fairly small national minority groups (Greek, Croatian, German, Romanian, Serb, Slovak, Slovenia). In these educational institutions, the language of the particular national minority is taught as a foreign language to those whose first language is different. The same holds true for the Polish minority education in the Czech Republic. In Poland, the visible renaissance of national and ethnic identity has led to the foundation of separate schools or classes for children from national minorities. Members of national minorities have the right to education in their national language. Larger minorities with the appropriate number of students can form a class or school of their own. In view of the fact that other minorities are dispersed throughout the country and the number of students is small, their right to education is exercised in the form of complementary programmes subsidised by the state. Members of the German minority enjoy support in the form of extended teaching of German at lower-level secondary schools and the establishment of bilingual lower-level secondary schools.

In the Central European countries, the education of Roma children and children of migrating parents remains a very serious challenge. In Poland, special classes have been established to prepare Roma children before they enter lower-level secondary school. In the Czech Republic they attend special classes before entering a primary school. The schooling of Roma children, whose educational attainment is far behind the national average, has become a policy priority in Hungary. Whether this is because of increasing demand expressed by Roma special interest groups, or because society perceives Roma education to be inadequate deserves further exploration. The fact that education is not provided in the Roma language due to the lack of parents' demand, might indicate that the new interest in Roma general education is actually driven by those other than the Roma themselves. The Hungarian government tries to prevent a segregated education of Roma children and legitimates the Roma schools only if they are established or supported by the Roma minority self-governments.

In the United States (Plank, 2005), increasing opportunities for school choice and other policies that facilitate exit from the traditional state-centred education system have created space for the articulation and accommodation of a variety of heterogeneous demands. The most important of these are efforts to institutionalise educational opportunities responsive to, and supportive of, the cultural and religious preferences of particular groups. Among charter schools, for example, diversity manifests itself primarily on the dimensions of ethnicity and language, and not on the dimensions of curriculum and instructional strategy (Fuller, 2003). Many parents who

school their children at home have chosen this option in order to protect cultural and religious values that they feel are not sufficiently honoured in the traditional public school system.

Religious education

There is no uniform policy trend across countries with regard to the provision of religious education in schools. Some countries have made provisions for students to be educated in their respective religion/denomination, whereas others pursue a secular line by keeping religious education separate from public education. Even in those countries where religious education based on a particular faith is offered, parents (and students above a certain age) are allowed to decide whether they want to take part in the lessons or alternatively take religiously neutral classes in "ethics".

The overwhelming majority of Polish inhabitants are Catholic, and the norms and values of the Catholic Church are thus perceived as "general norms". Religious education has become a permanent element in the Polish school curriculum. The Catholic religious education curriculum is defined by the "Catechetic Directorate of Catholic Church in Poland" (2001), a document supplementing Vatican instructions. Initially this was welcomed, because formerly religion could only be taught outside the education system. However, the dominant place of Catholic religious instruction in the school curriculum soon came to be criticised by liberal circles. A 1999 law enables parents to decide whether their child should attend religious education classes or ethics classes. The importance of religious schools, most of them Catholic, among non-public schools has grown since 1990 – in the school year 1999/2000 they accounted for 23% of non-public primary schools, 35% of *gimnazjum* and 47% of upper secondary schools of general education.

Students in all schools in Finland have the right to religious instruction in accordance with their own denomination. About 85% of comprehensive school students participate in Lutheran religious instruction and students who are not members of that Church may choose between religious instruction and ethics, a multi-disciplinary subject that includes elements of philosophy, social sciences and cultural sciences. When parents of at least three students demand non-Lutheran religious instruction at a school, it must be provided. In upper secondary schools, students themselves can demand it. The National Core Curricula determine the contents and objectives of religious instruction in accordance with the beliefs of the respective church. The curricula for other religions are drawn up in accordance with general objectives set for religions within the National Core Curricula. In the Czech Republic religious education is taught as a voluntary subject in those schools

where parents of at least seven students express their request to have this class opened. There is a debate now about the establishment of ethics as a mandatory and religiously neutral subject.

The diversity of religious (and non-religious) student backgrounds poses important questions with regard to educational demand. Should schools respond to demands for instruction in specific religious beliefs? Should they respond to religiously motivated demands concerning the content of school curricula? Or should schools, in principle, act as counterweights to religion, offering a secular "citizenship education" for all? Given the number of immigrants from different religious backgrounds, few countries are spared these tough questions, made more acute by the growing presence of religious fundamentalism which is not restricted to any single tradition or faith. Far from the religious factor quietly disappearing from the educational policy agenda as secularisation grows – which assumption underpinned thinking in many countries in the latter half of the 20th century – it is a very prominent issue with no obvious sign of disappearing in the 21st century.

Demands for recognition of special needs

Several countries report that parents of disabled students have been very vocal in demanding change. In the past, disabled children have often been catered for by separate schools, a situation that parents frequently perceived as leading to the isolation and marginalisation of their disabled children. Many countries have responded to the requests of those parents and parent associations by making provisions for disabled children to be integrated into mainstream schooling.

In Austria and the Czech Republic, for instance, based on the wishes of parents of disabled children, new regulations for integration into school have been amended step by step in the last decade. There are regulations which give additional resources for integrated classes. Basically, there is now a right for disabled children to be educated in the mainstream of primary and lower secondary schools. Parents have to apply, going through a formal procedure. Schools have also a say in the decision whether they want to set up the preconditions for integration, mainly providing a second teacher for integrative classes. In Hungary, kindergarten-level children with special educational needs are usually integrated, whereas there are segregated special schools by types of disability or special classes in regular schools at the primary and secondary level. Similar to the Austrian policy, at parents' request, however, there are opportunities for disabled students to participate in integrated education. In the Czech Republic, parents can request an integrated education for their disabled child, but the child needs to pass through an assessment procedure and the school must be able to offer an appropriate infrastructure. In England, the great majority of disabled students are educated in ordinary schools.

Parents with special needs, then, tend to be very articulate in expressing their demands to the educational system. This opens up a range of interesting questions for the overall notion of demand. It would be interesting to do further research on the question whether other special interest groups, whose children potentially suffer from discrimination in the educational system, have been as articulate in expressing their specific demands and have been similarly successful in achieving certain aims. Have the parents of recent migrants, for example, wished and been able to express demands for special language tuition? Such examples can build up a picture of the power of "voice" to widen "choice" and the ability of specific groups to "work the system" in pursuit of their wishes.

Diversity through alternative forms of schooling

This section examines diversity in more marked forms – not diversity of programmes or emphasis within a shared structural model but through different models: selective and non-selective schools, public and private schools, and formal schooling and home schooling. Several countries have moved to greater diversification of public education, allowing for different types of schools accommodating different student ability levels or parents' educational preferences. The role of demand is clearly a central element in their emergence and differing fortunes. This in turn is closely, but not exclusively, related to the familiar factors of social advantage and reproduction as well as to critical issues of value choices and beliefs. The two are not unrelated and parents may choose, say, publicly-funded private schools of religious denomination to gain social advantage for their children as well for reasons of belief, apart from any more neutral perception of educational quality.

Selective and non-selective schools

Those countries with a selective school system – in this study, Hungary, Austria, Poland, the Czech Republic and to some extent England – report that privileged parents tend to send their children to them. These parents expect that, owing to strong selection, their children will be learning among better-motivated students with a similar background, among which serious behaviour problems and drug abuse are less frequent. In the Czech Republic, admission to *gymnázia* (selective schools leading to university education), is based on selection consisting of written and oral examinations, and sometimes intelligence tests. The school intake is determined by the school administration and ranges from 6 to 14% of the relevant age group, depending on the region, with the number of applicants double the intake number. *Gymnázia* were re-established in 1990 and aim to provide a more demanding, academic form of education. They are predominantly supported by parents with a high level of education and social status, and often seen as unjust by

parents with lower-level educational degrees. The Czech School Inspectorate concluded that the segregation of more talented students has resulted in a gradual decrease in the standards of lower-level secondary schools. There is thus much debate on the issue, and the new education bill approved in 2004 stipulates only one national curriculum for both types of lower secondary education, an equal number of teaching periods and an identical level of pay of teachers. However, the selective admission procedures for *gymnázia*, which penalises children with lower cultural capital, have been preserved.

Research conducted in Hungary has also shown the familiar correlation in the distribution of students between schools of different standards and the school attainment of parents (Andor and Liskó, 2000). Students attending general secondary schools account for nearly 80% of children of parents with a university qualification, falling to 60% of children of parents with a college qualification, 40% of children of parents with a secondary school-leaving certificate and only 20% of children of parents with a vocational training qualification. Neither conservative nor liberal governments have abolished the six- or eight-grade general secondary schools due to the explicit demand of the most powerful parents' stakeholder groups. In Poland, civic schools which select students based on results of entrance tests are dominated by children of white-collar workers and businessmen. Research by Zawadska (1992) showed that parents from Warsaw were more positive towards civic schools than parents from smaller cities. As many as one third of respondents in rural areas claimed that the creation of private schools was a negative phenomenon, though at the same time the majority of respondents considered such schools to be better than state ones. This might well reflect a sense of growing inequality by the inhabitants of rural areas where civic schools are not as readily available as elsewhere.

In England, the majority of schools do not select on ability. A 1998 government act ruled out any new selection by ability, except for post-16 education and banding arrangements. Existing grammar schools and schools that already had selective admission arrangements were allowed to continue with those arrangements. In a survey by Taylor, Nelson and Sofres (2003), the public was asked to say whether "children should go to a different kind of secondary school according to how well they do at primary school" or whether "all children should go to the same kind of secondary school no matter how well or badly they do at primary school." Opinion was evenly divided on this issue in 2002, with 49% selecting each option. However, the population share supporting non-selective schools increased from 40% in 1984 to 49% in 2002 whereas the proportion endorsing selective education remained the same with fewer "undecided". Parents' views on selection are similarly divided. According to an earlier MORI survey cited by Lambert (2002), 52% of parents believed independent school standards were higher

than those in the state sector, and 68% believed that there was a role for the independent sector in the UK educational system. This study also found that 53% of parents would choose an independent school for their child if they could afford it, stating higher standards as their reason.

The role and perception of "private" schooling

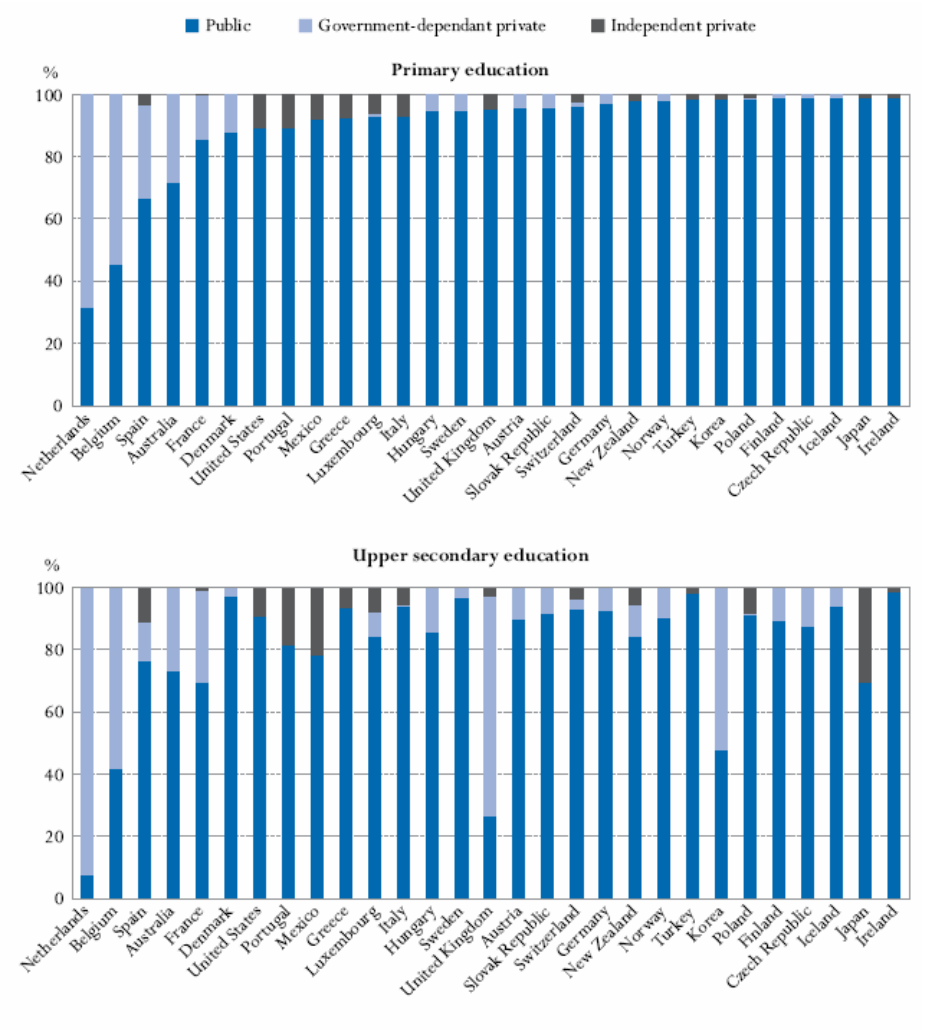
Schooling tends to be primarily a public service, as shown in Figure 3.1. There is more variation the higher up the system one goes from primary to lower secondary to upper secondary. Even though public education, publicly financed, remains the dominant model, there are a number of countries where there are significant departures from this even at primary level – especially in the Netherlands and Belgium. The purely private provision is also discussed later in this chapter. Though numbers of students may not be high in most countries, its social role and importance can far outweigh any simple balance of numbers (as in the United Kingdom). The figure does not suggest that there is yet a major departure from the core model in OECD countries. But it does usefully illustrate that there is already a degree of variation. And, as this chapter shows, the trend is for the range of choice and diversity to be getting wider.

Even if private schools are limited in most OECD countries, most school systems offer parents the choice between public and private schools, and this is revealing of the extent to which education is regarded as a "good" that people should be able to buy and how far alternatives to public provision are tolerated, even funded by the state. Countries pursue different policies on this issue: in some, private education is fully or partly funded by the state, in others it is fully paid by parents. The extent to which parents opt for private rather than public education can also be interpreted as a strong indicator of "exit" behaviour, depending on how far it represents a genuine cost to the household (not just another publicly-funded alternative). The school systems covered in this report are all predominantly public, but most countries make provisions for the establishment of schools based on private initiative.

Especially in the Central European countries (Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic), private education has been defined as a political and civil right and is seen as one means of contributing to a pluralistic society in the post-Soviet era. The creation of a large number of alternative schools in the Central European countries has been largely parent-driven and is a sign of an increasing readiness to express specific "demand" in the domain of education. Many, in some systems the great majority of, private schools are operated by religious denominations, while attendance in them does not necessarily indicate a religious commitment of parents. It is often motivated by the demand for a quality education set in a normative pedagogical framework: private schools are often selected because of their smaller class size, a focus on developing individual interests and sometimes their innovative curriculum and

methods. Most systems have created a legal framework in which reformist schools can be founded and to a certain extent financially supported. In Spain and Finland, for example, private schools are financed by the state and are not allowed to charge fees. Private schools in England and Poland, on the contrary, are largely financed through fees.

Figure 3.1. Distribution of enrolled students, by type of institution (2003)



Note: Countries are ranked in descending order of the percentage of students enrolled in the private institutions in primary education.

Source: *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators 2005*, OECD, Paris, Table D5.1.

Japan is an example of a country where the number of students enrolled at private schools is extremely small at the compulsory education stage. In addition to conventional public schools, which are publicly maintained and managed, the Ministry of Education has admitted schools established by public authorities and managed by private companies or bodies. For now, it is limited to kindergartens and senior high schools and excludes other schools of compulsory education. Schools with a religious affiliation are always private in Japan. State schools are not supposed to provide any religious education because of the principle of secularism and the separation of church and state laid down in the Japanese constitution. Currently only 0.9% of all elementary schools in Japan are private, according to the Ministry's 2003 School Basic Survey Report.

The Scandinavian tradition is also one of a very strong public sector, but the numbers in private schools are certainly higher than in the Japanese case and tend to be growing. In Denmark, the number of students at private independent primary and lower secondary schools is relatively stable with showing a slight, continuous increase. These schools must meet the standards of what is generally required at *folkeskolen* and there is a requirement for a minimum number of students. These private schools define their own basic principles and evaluate their teaching themselves. They are managed by a board of governors with a majority of private individuals. The schools are supervised by parents and by an additional person chosen by the parents to supervise whether the school's overall teaching meets the *folkeskolen* standards. The schools are granted an operating subsidy paid out according to the number of students per annum, calculated on the basis of the corresponding public expenses at *folkeskolen*, less the parents' fees (that are comparatively low, currently under one-fifth of public subsidies). Private independent schools in Denmark are diverse: urban schools with a focus on traditional academic and cultural values, specialised boarding schools, religious or church schools, small schools based on progressive ideas, schools with a specific educational objective like Steiner schools, immigrant schools or German minority schools.

Education in Finland is free of charge for students and private schools are not allowed to collect student fees. The majority of private schools in Finland are publicly funded and under public supervision. They follow the national core curricula and the requirements of the competence-based qualifications confirmed by the National Board of Education. In order to receive the same amount of public funding as municipal schools, they have to apply for a licence at the Ministry of Education. As part of granting a licence to provide basic education, the government may also assign a specific task to the provider. Such a task has been assigned, for example, to Steiner schools, religious schools and foreign-language schools. Even if the

licence is not granted, the private school concerned may still be established, but it will remain outside public supervision and will not receive public funding. There are very few private schools. Currently, only about 1% of schools providing basic education are private, and students at these schools account for 2% of all students in basic education.

The national authorities in Hungary pay a *per capita* grant for each student which covers about 60 to 80% of the costs of providing an education. The remainder is covered by whoever runs the school, most often the municipal government in the case of public schools. Private schools try to raise the remainder from parents' contributions and the donations of other supporters. The financing of church-run schools is different because since 1997 all denominational schools in Hungary have received the amount that covered the costs of a child's schooling the year before. Currently, 90% of the younger children (aged 3 through 14) attend a government or municipal pre-school or lower-level secondary school financed from the central budget. In secondary education, the percentage of students at private schools is considerably higher than at the primary level with a sixth of general secondary school students at church schools. This high percentage does not necessarily indicate the religious commitment of the parents but often the demand for a quality education.

Private schools in Poland can be divided into: i) fully private schools, owned by individuals or private entities; ii) civic schools, founded and owned by civic organisations; and iii) religious schools run by the Catholic Church, orders and other religious organisations. Most private primary and secondary schools are civic schools, established by organisations of parents and teachers, and these function as non-profit organisations. In this regard, they are thus distinct from the *centros concertados* in Spain. The subsidy allocated to those schools now covers 100% of expenses incurred per student. They are known for their extra-curricular activities and their innovative curricula. The schools in the private sector proper, on the other hand, tend to be exclusive establishments with high monthly fees enabling the schools to offer a rich curriculum and comfortable classrooms in order to meet parents' expectations of returns for their private investment. In the 2003/2004 school year, private sector units ran 4% of all primary schools, attended by 1.3% of all primary school students; 8.3% of all *gimnazja*, attended by 1.8% of the total *gimnazja* students; and 19% of post-primary schools and post-*gimnazjum* secondary schools, attended by 4.1% of those students. Private schools were mostly created by the highly-educated, among those many self-employed entrepreneurs.

A debate about educational equality started with the creation of the first private schools in Poland in 1998. Some people saw the main aim of schools to be in reducing educational inequality and demanded that all schools be

open to all students. Others tolerated inequality and accepted private schools financed mostly by parents, at the same time calling for lower taxes for those who pay for their children's education themselves (Putkiewicz, Wilkomirska and Zielinska 1997). The difference between the two sides of the debate is reflected in the two types of non-public schools – civic and private. Civic schools stake their claims in the needs of the local society with the co-operation of parents, teachers and students while private schools stress their professionalism in offering educational services to students and parents treated as "clients".

The overall proportion of pupils in private schools in Austria is about 7% and this has increased slightly in recent years. About two-thirds of all private schools are run by religious organisations: 90% by the Catholic Church (under public regulation, according to agreements with the Vatican), 5% Protestant, and the rest by others. Except for a very few elite establishments and some alternative schools there are no marked differences between private and public schools nor a strong distinction between these systems, because the private sector is mainly under public regulation, and the largest group among them, the Catholic schools, receive public funding for teacher salaries. Different rules for public subsidies apply for different kinds of private schools. Most private schools, except for the Catholic ones, charge high fees. Private schools are more strongly represented in Vienna and are equally divided between the compulsory and post-compulsory cycles. Over the last few decades, other types of free or alternative private schools have also developed that follow their own pedagogical models. To get official credentials, students from those types of private schools have to pass external examinations. However, the numbers of those free schools are quite small (less than 50 schools with less than 1 000 children in total).

In Spain, too, there is far less of a distinction between public and many privately-run schools because of the high level of public subsidies to the latter. In this case, however, the number of students and schools is much higher than in Austria. There are three different types of schools: public, private, and private schools with public funding, the *centros concertados*. Public schools are basically financed by the Autonomous Communities, and partially funded by the City Councils; they represent approximately 63% of the total of the compulsory-level schools. All Spanish nationals have the freedom to create and direct private schools except under exceptional circumstances (a criminal record, etc.). Parents and teachers are by law involved in the control and management of all schools receiving public funds, namely public schools and *centros concertados,* through the school council, each one of which develops its own "educational project" on the basis of the common core curriculum.

In England, private schools – including the so-called "Public Schools" – are not funded by the state and obtain most of their financing through fees paid by parents and income from investment. All independent schools, both day and boarding, must be registered with the central authorities (the Department for Education and Skills) and must reach and maintain standards set out in specific regulations covering the quality of education provided, the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students, the suitability of proprietors and staff, the premises and accommodation, the provision of information for parents, and the way in which complaints are dealt with. Those standards are inspected either by the Office of Standards in Education (Ofsted) or by the Independent Schools Inspectorate every six years. In January 2004, the majority of students (91%) went to state schools, about 7% attended independent schools and 1% attended maintained and non-maintained special schools. The share of students aged 16 or over in private schools is comparatively high since students in independent schools are more likely to remain in education beyond the statutory leaving age.

Home schooling

Another, more extreme dimension of "exit" is through choice of home schooling, where this is permitted. Opting out altogether of the education system provided by the state is a form of rejection of available public supply. Tolerance, even encouragement, of home schooling also reflects the extent to which a society considers education to be a public or a private matter. The largest number of students schooled at home live in the United States, where home schooling is a legal right in all 50 states. The other end of this spectrum in the countries covered is Japan, which has a strong "obligation of attending schools" and does not permit home schooling. Twenty-eight states in the United States require home-schooled children to undergo some kind of official evaluation, either by taking standardised test or submitting a portfolio of their work. Thirteen states simply require parents to inform officials that they are going to teach their children at home. According to the *Economist* (2004), the US Home School Legal Defence Association claims that as many as 2 million students are currently schooled at home in the United States. A 1999 survey by the Department of Education put the number at 850 500 students. It is unclear from such figures how far the traditional "home school family", coming from religious groups who reject institutionalised education, remains the typical profile.

Whatever the actual numbers involved, home schooling is not of equal interest in the European countries participating in the study; in these, it is still a marginal phenomenon involving mostly children who are seriously ill, disabled or exceptionally gifted, as well as some who fit the religious profile outlined above. In Denmark, children must be taught but they do not have to

attend a school. Parents may teach children at home, ensuring that they receive an education on a par with that required at *folkeskolen*, but this is in fact very limited. In Finland, there is no obligation to attend a school and the compulsory period of education may also be completed by studying at home. In such cases, the municipality of residence is obliged to verify a child's progress in his/her studies. As in Denmark the number of those studying at home is very small. Similarly, it is "education" that is compulsory in England, not schooling *per se*. About 1.5% of children of school age in the United Kingdom are currently educated at home (Lambert, 2002). Parents are not required to follow the National Curriculum or to keep school hours; they do not need to be teachers or to hold any other special qualifications. If a child has never attended a school, the parents do not need to take any action prior to starting home education. If the child has already been in school, the parent must formally deregister the child by writing to the principal. Local education authorities must ensure that parents are providing suitable education for their child.

In the Central and European countries, the number of students schooled at home is also very small. What is of particular interest in these cases is the key role of the school and its principal in the decision-making process, rather than an authority or inspectorate further removed from local provision. In Poland, home schooling is still a marginal phenomenon, but interest in it has been growing steadily. Parents who want to exercise this right must obtain the permission from the principal of a public school within the boundaries in which the child lives, who also specifies the requirements that must be met and the way of checking the child's development. In Hungary, compulsory education may be achieved through home schooling. The school principal, the authorities and the child welfare services must examine whether the parent's choice is in the interest of the children. Students schooled at home are obliged to take exams in compulsory subjects. If children with special educational needs, learning difficulties or behaviour problems are home schooled, teachers prepare them for exams while those schooled at home at their parents' request must rely on their parents for examination preparation. New legislation permits home schooling at the primary level based on a request from the parents to the director of the school where the student has been admitted. Principals may grant permission to a student with special learning needs or unusual talents to proceed according to an individual education plan. The student's parents or guardians must show serious reasons for this form of individual education and ensure appropriate conditions for learning at home. The home educator must have completed secondary education.

A controversy about the abuse of home schooling was triggered in 2001, when there were several complaints which alleged that parents of children

seen as problematic were persuaded to home school their children. It was alleged that in some cases parents were threatened that unless they did so their children would be expelled from the school. Since then, the Ministry of Education has supplemented the law to prevent schools from using the option of home schooling as a means of discriminating against Roma students.

General discussion

Chapter 1 proposed that demand-led schooling implies a different role for voice and a greater role for choice. The countries covered in this study show indeed that they are moving towards greater choice: greater parental freedom to choose, a more diverse supply, and better information about the supply for parents to base their choice on. In almost all countries, parents are increasingly entitled to choose the school they consider most appropriate for their children. Most often this takes the form of allowing parents to send children to a school outside their own school district. The information available to parents has improved as well. Policies have sought to make the public sector more transparent by increasing public accountability. For schools this may mean that their academic results or profiles are available to the public. Demographic factors are playing their part: with fewer children born, and funding often based on student numbers, schools are increasingly competing for students instead of selecting them.

All this is in line with the position of the earlier OECD/CERI choice review (Hirsch, 2002) which observed that the notion of "choice" has had a real if varied impact on education systems, and that a situation in which many families exercise an active choice over which school a child should attend, rather than taking it for granted that it will be the local one, has become a permanent feature of education systems. It also suggested that in parallel with policies to allow more choice of school, education systems have moved away from a model in which such decisions are taken solely by those who deliver the system – the professionals and administrators. This trend may be recast in the terms of this report – that such change may be seen as about making education systems more "demand driven". The question we may still ask is: "yes, how far?'.

This chapter has also examined a critical aspect of choice through the diversity in what is offer. There are the choices and diversity of programmes within a shared structural model. But more fundamentally perhaps, there is the diversity that comes through the creation or encouragement of different models: selective and non-selective schools, public and private schools, and even the choice of home schooling in preference to formal education. Arguably, these forms of choice opportunities are likely to have an even

more profound impact than giving parents greater freedoms to choose between putatively similar schools.

Several countries have moved to greater diversification of public education, allowing for different types of schools accommodating different student ability levels or parents' educational preferences. Most systems offer parents the choice between public and private provision albeit with different understandings about what these terms cover: in some, private education is fully or partly funded by the state, in others it is fully paid by parents. Most countries make provisions for the establishment of schools based on private initiative, including in recognition of value choices and beliefs. Opportunities for choice between different schools, within the public system and between public and private provision, have become the rule rather than the exception. Even the Nordic countries, where belief in schooling for public good and equity is as strong as anywhere, have seen significant reforms in this regard. This has been to recognise, even encourage, the use of "exit" strategies as well as shift the balance between public and private behaviour in shaping education systems.

It is meaningless in an educational context to be "in favour of" or "against" choice in general – it all depends what these choices are, who is able to exercise them and what the impact of one set of choices is on the opportunities of others. Even so, it is clear that analogies with demand from private markets have definite limits. Parents in free education systems do not express demand by their willingness to pay a particular price for the service, and there are limits on how much they want to switch between "products" in response to quality judgements given the disruption it would cause for their children.

The equity concerns about increasing choice are familiar and well-rehearsed. This report does not permit any kind of systematic assessment of different choice arrangements against equity criteria. But, it does confirm that better educated, middle class parents are more likely to avail themselves of choice opportunities and send their children to the "best" school they can find. Reinforcing cycles can become vicious circles: with a higher intake of better-performing students the performance of the school will go up, improving further the status of the school; for the other schools the cycle works in the opposite direction with the danger of an increasing gap between highly-performing and under-performing schools. There are also clear differences between urban and rural areas, in part for the simple reason of the greater number of schools to choose from in urban areas. Public policy must take into account these possible consequences when redesigning educational systems.

The chapter has raised other concerns which go beyond judgements about the social equity of different choice options. They relate back to the distinction made in Chapter 1 between individual and collective voices in demand. How far should particular community demands be met through the school system? This simple question raises some of the most controversial issues arising in schooling today. How far is the school about system-wide integration of all populations and nation-building, part from any specific academic ambitions? Or else should it be the crucible for the recognition, even cultivation, of difference? When does healthy multi-culturalism stop and the promotion of anti-social, inward-looking particularism begin? Is school *par excellence* a secular institution or a legitimate place for the expression of religious beliefs? More generally, what is education for and within that the specific role of the formal public school? Enhancing sensitivity to parental demands takes us straight into these fundamental questions. They do not sit easily with an essentially technocratic view of policy, which assumes that issues can be decided by reference to an evidence base.

We can also ask how "choice" relates to "voice" as discussed in the next chapter. If parental choice of schools is encouraged, parents might look for alternatives and eventually take their children out of a school instead of changing or improving it. On the other hand, providing options for choice can be a response to demand and may provide powerful incentives for development, both in those schools and classes being chosen and in those rejected. These are important political and educational questions, and it is as yet unclear how far they are about trade-offs or instead mutually compatible ends.

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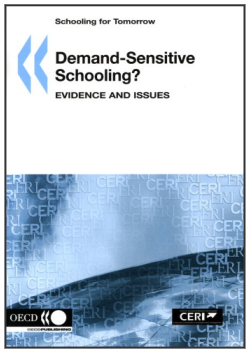

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