Tracking. Is it really so bad for pupils' outcomes?

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Tracking. What is it?

- Dividing children into different schools based upon their academic achievement / potential.
- Used extensively in some countries (e.g. Germany, Netherlands)…….
- ….not used in others (e.g. Sweden, Finland).

<u>Potential advantages</u>

- Easier to teach to same ability. Tailor lessons/environment to pupil needs.

<u>Potential disadvantages</u>

- Socially segregating. Increases inequality.

Previous research

- Lots of *cross-national research* on this topic.....
- …..compare countries that track versus those that don't.
- Why? Need a counterfactual!
- Overall message:

  - No increase in overall achievement.

  - Some increases in socio-economic inequality.

  - Within selective systems, those who don't make it into selective track lose.

Problems with using cross-national data to investigate this issue

- Limited "sample size" (number of countries)…..
- Age/extent of tracking differs across countries….
- Lots of other things differ across countries (can't control for them all)…..
- Limited data on children to control/investigate differences……
- Cross-sectional rather than longitudinal data

This project/presentation

- Look at tracking within a single country (England)…….
- Uses rich, longitudinal data…..
- Range of outcome data (test scores, socio-emotional skills)…..

- Helps overcomes a lot of challenges with existing literature

Doesn’t England have a comprehensive school system?

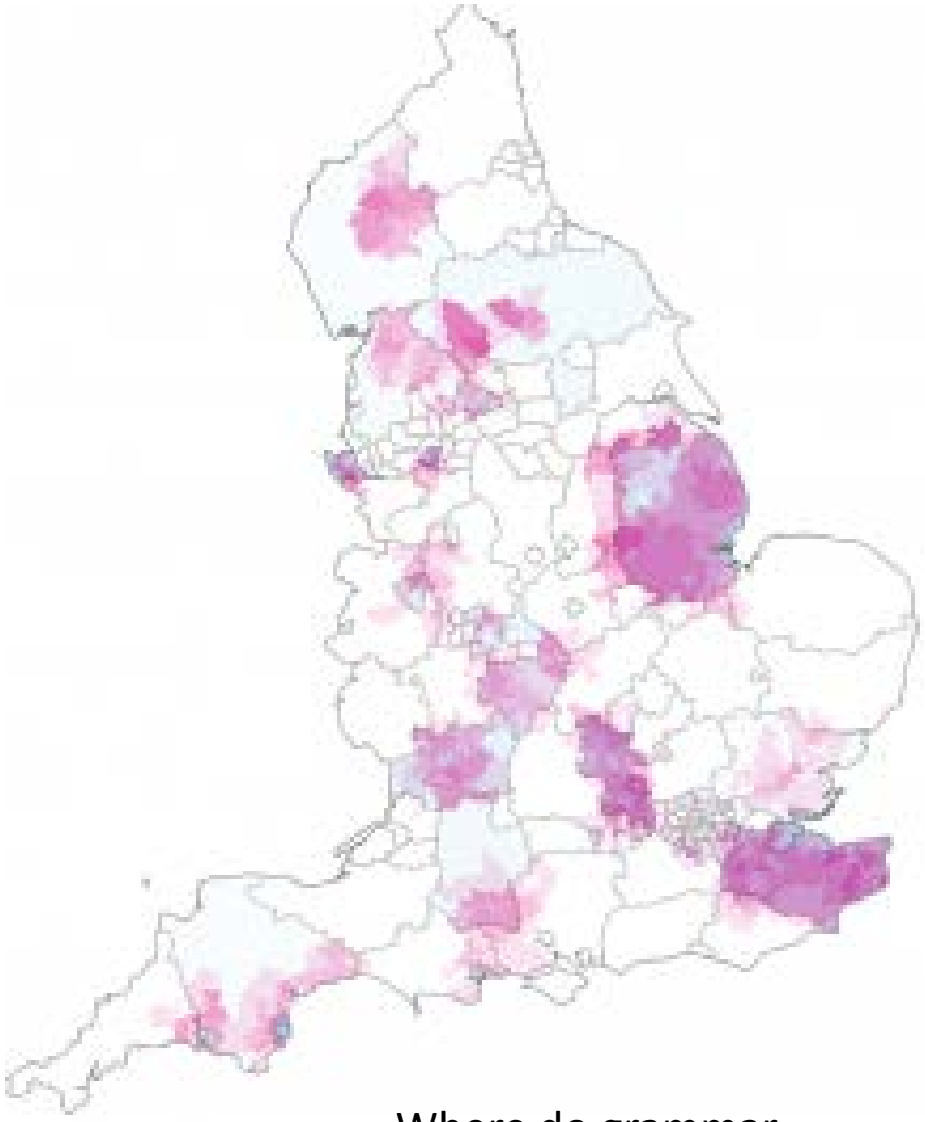
- Not entirely!
- Use to have a tracking system up until 1960s/70s.
- Most areas then ended academic selection…….
- …….but some kept it. Known as “grammar school” areas

<u>The grammar school system</u>

- Kids take a test at end of primary school (age 10)
- Pass the test = go to grammar school
- Fail = Go to a non-grammar school
- Little opportunity to move in-between the tracks afterwards.

Geographic spread of grammar schools in England

Location of grammar schools



Where do grammar pupils live?

What this study adds…….

- Most studies focus upon academic outcomes alone.
- Most recent investigations use the NPD – which has issues.
    - Excludes private school pupils
    - Limited controls for selection into areas?

- We focus upon socio-emotional outcomes using the MCS.
    - SDQ scores
    - School engagement (e.g. How often do you try your best at school?)
    - Self-esteem (e.g. I am able to do things as well as most other people)
    - Mental health (e.g. I thought I could never be as good as other kids'
    - Educational expectations (0-100 scale on how likely will go to uni)

Empirical approach

OLS / matching

- Compare “similar” pupils who live in selective + comprehensive areas
- Selective = 10 selective LEAs + any MSOA where >10% go to grammar
- Comprehensive = MSOA where no kid when to grammar in last 5 years.
- Controls through to age 7 for:
    - Child demographics (e.g. gender, ethnicity)
    - Parental characteristics (e.g. income, ethnicity)
    - Local area characteristics (e.g. IMD)
    - Child outcomes up to age 7 (e.g. SDQ scores, cognitive test scores etc)

Diff-in-Diff

- Compares trends in kids outcomes over time in select / comp areas…..
- Do these trends differ at the point we think impact of selection kicks in?

The MCS data

Sample size

- Around 1,100 kids live in a selective education area
- Around 3,700 kids live in a comprehensive area

Age 11 survey

- Most conducted January-June of Year 6 (end of primary school)
- After kids taken 11+ test and know the results
- Hence we capture socio-emotional outcomes of kids soon after they have been through the selection process

Age 14 survey

- Year 9. Three years into secondary school.

Results. Selective vs comprehensive

Age 11 outcomes overall

	Model M3	
	Effect	**SE**
Age 11 outcomes		
Academic motivation and beliefs		
School engagement	0.08	0.04
Academic self-concept	0.01	0.05
Academic well-being	0.06	0.04
Behaviour and well-being		
Wellbeing	0.05	0.04
Rosenberg self-esteem	0.03	0.04
SDQ total score	0.01	0.03
Controls		
Child demographics	Y	
Parental characteristics	Y	
Local area characteristics	Y	
Child outcomes up to age 5	Y	
Child outcomes up to age 7	Y	

Summary

Positive figures = outcomes better in selective than comprehensive areas.

All effect sizes small and insignificant……

Age 14 outcomes overall……

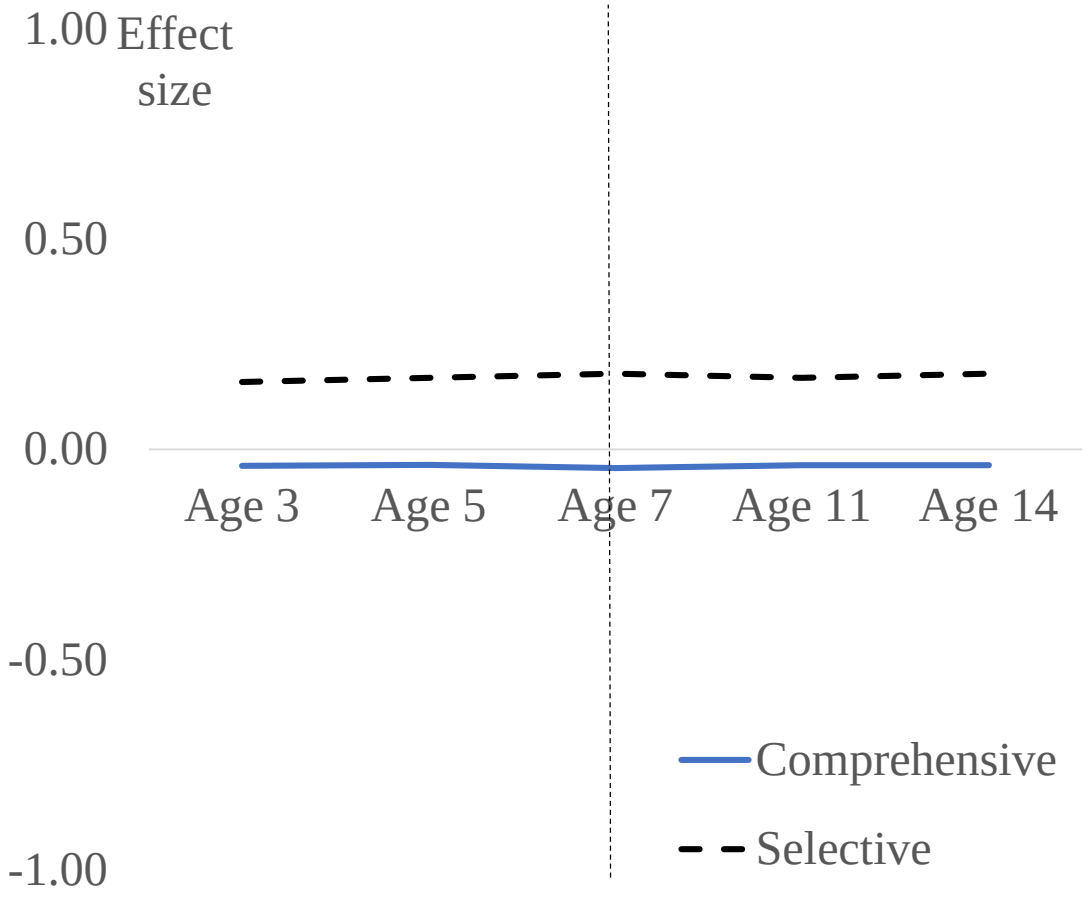
	Model M3	
	Effect	**SE**
Age 14 outcomes		
Academic motivation and beliefs		
School engagement	0.05	0.05
Academic self-concept	-0.02	0.04
Academic well-being	0.03	0.05
Behaviour and well-being		
Wellbeing	0.05	0.05
Rosenberg self-esteem	0.08	0.04
SDQ total score	0.01	0.04
Mental Health	0.01	0.04
Academic achievement		
English vocabulary skills	0.01	0.04
Educational expectations		
Child expects to stay in school post-16	-0.02	0.05
Child expects to go to university	-0.04	0.04
Parent expects child to stay in school post-16	0.00	0.02
Parent expects child to go to university	-0.03	0.02

Summary

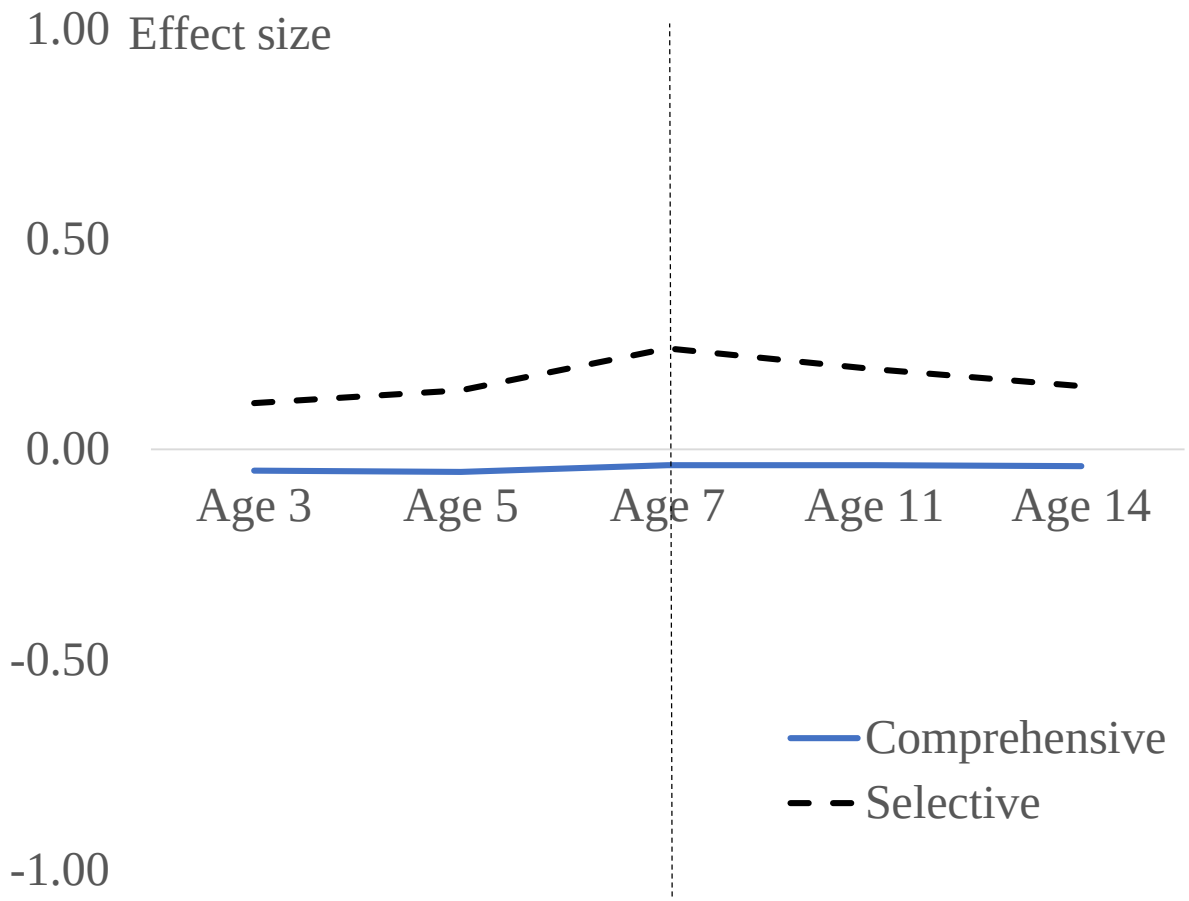
Positive figures = outcomes better in selective than comprehensive areas.

All effect sizes small and insignificant……

Diff-in-diff results



SDQ scores



English scores

Inequality by family-income (above/below median)

	Effect	SE
Academic motivation and beliefs		
School engagement	0.08	0.09
Academic self-concept	**0.19***	**0.08**
Academic well-being	-0.15	0.09
Behaviour and well-being		
Wellbeing	-0.11	0.08
Rosenberg self-esteem	0.02	0.08
SDQ total score	-0.04	0.07

Age 11

	Effect	SE
Academic motivation and beliefs		
School engagement	**0.27***	**0.08**
Academic self-concept	0.08	0.09
Academic well-being	**0.25***	**0.11**
Behaviour and well-being		
Wellbeing	0.18	0.10
Rosenberg self-esteem	0.12	0.10
SDQ total score	0.08	0.08
Mental Health	**0.20***	**0.10**
Academic achievement		
English vocabulary skills	0.08	0.09
Educational expectations		
Child expects to stay in school post-16	-0.03	0.09
Child expects to go to university	0.08	0.10
Parent expects child to stay in school post-16	0.02	0.04
Parent expects child to go to university	-0.03	0.04

Age 14

Mixed evidence of increase in inequality…..

Summary of other results

- Little evidence of increase in inequality by prior achievement……
- Little diff in outcomes when we make grammar pupils to equivalent pupils in comprehensive areas…..
- Little diff in outcomes when we match non-grammar pupils within selective areas to equivalent pupils in comprehensive areas…..
- Looking within selective areas, only small benefits of getting into a grammar

Conclusions / discussion

Summary

- Average outcomes v. similar across comp and selective areas
- Some limited evidence of small increase in inequality by income
- No evidence in inequality looking in other dimensions
- Getting into grammar seems to offer only small +ive benefits (if any)

Policy

- No evidence for supporting expansion of grammars……
-…but evidence not really strong enough for getting rid of the ones that still remain (given the costs / effort / other areas of greater priority)