

# Choice, schools & equity: are they compatible?

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## The effect that increased parental choice had on equity in the NSW public secondary school system

1. The education reform policies
2. Structural effects
3. Systemic effects
4. Implications of the structural & systemic changes
5. What next?

# Data

My PhD research

...looking at the issue from the perspective of teachers'

Methodology	Respondents	Aim
Focus groups	6 grps x 6 locations (n=76)	Locational; SES of students/parents/school type
Interviews	6 teachers & 6 union officials	Change over time
Secondary analysis	ABS & NSW DET stats	Structural effects
Survey	1,237 teachers	Extent of issues

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# Metherell reforms – late 1980s

## Origins of education reform and the growth of choice

### Drivers

- Economic rationalism & efficiencies generated by market competition
- Perceptions of poor educational outcomes & concerns about labour market opportunities

### Mechanisms

- Federal funding models
- Decentralisation
- Dezoning

# Policy concern

## Declining enrolments in the public system

- 1977 public sector peak – 77% of enrolments (Marginson 1985)
- 1989 – 70% of enrolments
- Metherell – ‘stop the loss’

	NSW secondary school enrolments				
Year	public			private	
	count	%		count	%
1977	303,376	76.5		92,965	23.5
1989	310,765	69.8		134,662	30.2
% Δ 1977 - 89	2.4%			44.9%	

Source: derived from figures in ABS (1978: 15; 1990: 6).

# Self-determination & Dept intervention

## School-based management

- Greater parent/community involvement
- Attracting local funding
- Differentiation
  - Extra-curricula activities
  - Program offerings

## Departmental invention

- Expansion of different types of schools
  - Shifting philosophy (Esson et al. 2002)

# School-based management

## Rationale

- Competition would weed out under-performers → cost efficiencies
- Improved allocation of resources would reduce overall costs
- The remaining 'high performing' schools/teachers would develop a more efficient and effective future labour supply  
(Apple 2001; Reid 2003)



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# Fragmenting the comprehensive system

‘Traditional’ comprehensives as share of public ‘market’

- comprehensives - 97% ➔ 71%
- ‘non-comprehensives’ - 3% ➔ 29%

Changes in public secondary school enrolments in NSW

	Year			
	1987		2010	
School type	count	%	count	%
selective	11	3	44	11
specialist	0	-	33	8
junior/senior campus	0	-	39	10
<i>non-comprehensive</i>	11	3	116	29
comprehensive	368	97	282	71
total public secondary	379	100	398	100

Sources: Esson et al. (2002: 124); ABS (1988: 8); NSW MEYA (1994: 13-14); NSW DET (2011b: 1).

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# School-based management

## Reality

- Cost reductions → insufficient funds
- Schools having to seek local funds
- Competition between schools  
(Chitty 1997; Helsby 1999)
- Parents' engagement with education system
  - increased (some) student mobility (Campbell et al. 2009)
  - coaching colleges – specialise in selective school exam
- Role of schools/teachers
  - educators, counsellors, social workers... + marketing managers!  
(Helsby 1999; Gerwirtz, 1997)

# How does the reality play out in schools?

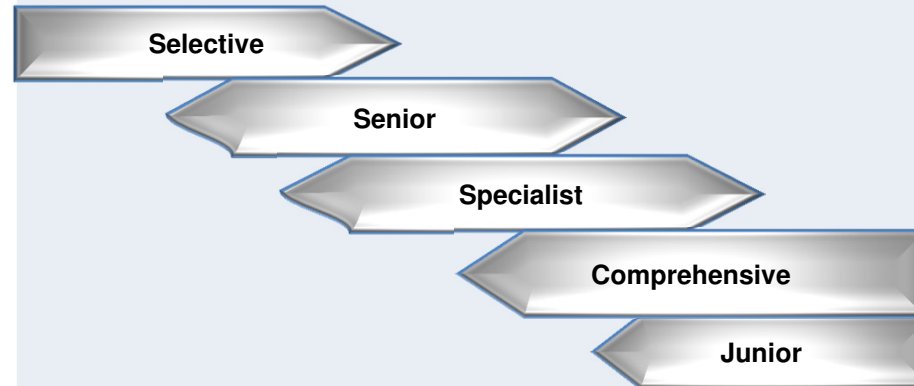
Empirical findings – my PhD – focus grps, interviews, survey

Factors that differentiate between types of public secondary schools – my empirical findings

1. Market pressures and competition
2. The nature of the student body
3. Student/teacher interactions
4. Staff profiling of the school

# How does reality play out...

## Type of public secondary school



	Selective	Junior
market	Waiting lists Competitive selection	Struggling to maintain enrolments
Student	High academic ability High motivation	Low academic ability Low motivation
Interactions	Intensive learning Rapid progression	Intensive behavioural management Repetition of lessons
staffing	Low turnover Experienced teachers	High turnover Inexperienced teachers

## Reality...at the 'bottom'

[choice]...affects the standard of the students left because you haven't got anyone there to raise the level and provide the competition or to model the kind of behaviour expected...any 'good' kids that are left are getting overwhelmed just as much as we are and then we end up losing them too. It's a vicious cycle.

...we now have three or four or even five students in a classroom that are emotionally disturbed children or have special needs and it makes it very very hard and very very stressful; not only on the teacher but on the other students too. It affects what you can actually do in the class; you have to curtail a lot of your curriculum to cater for these children who are just disturbed and [are] disturbing others.

...I spent probably three-quarters of the day disciplining students...

# Reality...at the 'bottom'

In the five years I've been [here] I can name maybe three or four staff that were here when I started and who are still here...that's out of 80-odd teachers...most just transfer out as soon as they can.

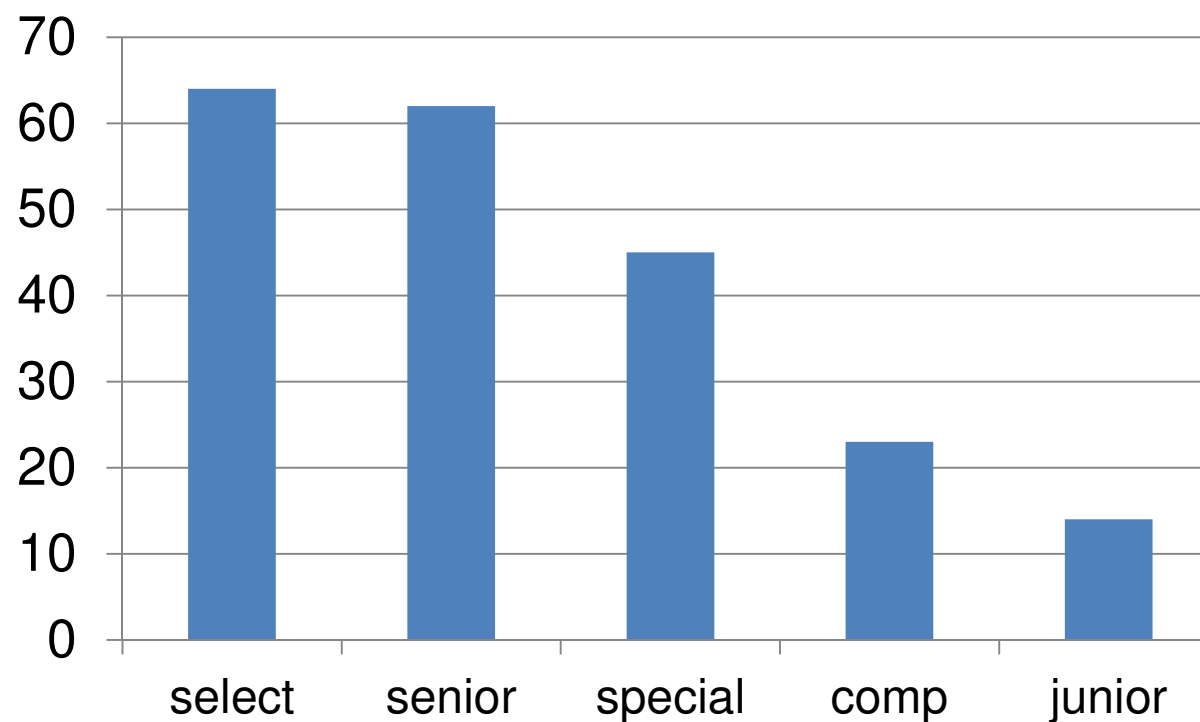
I've been here 18 months...and I'm hanging on by a thread at the moment...as soon as I can I'll transfer out of here but I may not last 'till then.



# How does reality play out...

## Increased school choice has...

**improved learning outcomes for students  
in my school (%)**

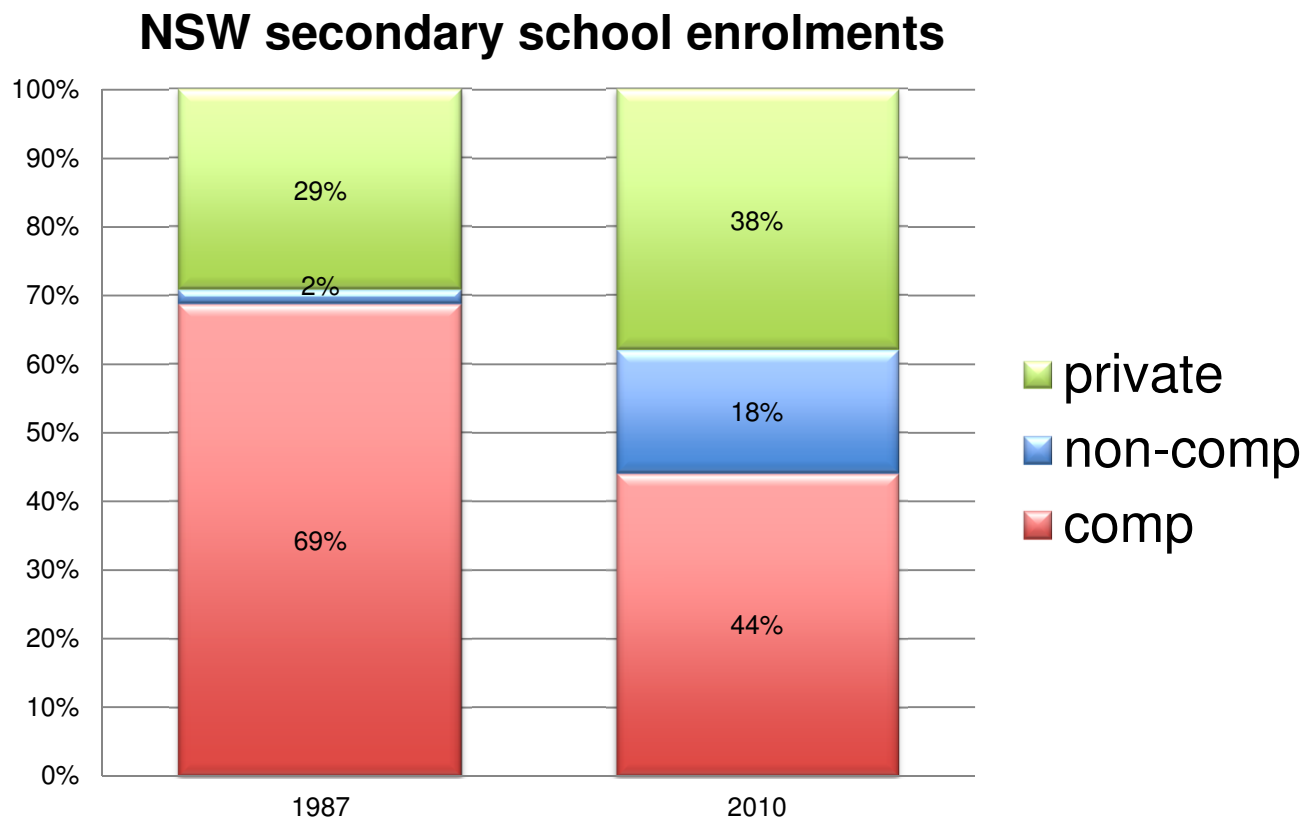


n=1,237

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# Policy outcomes

- Competition for student enrolments 1/✓
- Curtailing the 'flight to private' ✕



# Policy outcomes

- Under-performers 'weeded out' ?
  - doubts this has been realised (Apple 2004; Whitty 1997)
- Increased 'effectiveness' of schools ?
  - 'Top end' - ?
    - certainly demand but does that translate into 'effectiveness'
    - 'educational advantage' of independent schools due to calibre of student NOT to 'value add' from the school itself (Nous, NILS, MGSE 2011)
  - 'Bottom end' - x
    - low SES behind on all educational achievement metrics (Nous et al. 2011)
    - defining effectiveness in that environment?
- Equity x
  - 'Education markets' have further segregated the system
    - social, economic & cultural capital required to navigate the system

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# Future policy directions

## Funding

- Needs based funding is critical
  - More resourcing to disadvantaged students

## 'Independent' public schools

- Strategies to support effective models that link communities services to schools
  - Recognition of the key role that NGOs play in harnessing resources, and specialist expertise in support of improving educational outcomes
- Better monitoring and evaluation of programs and initiatives
  - Recent review - >40% of programs for disadvantaged students are not evaluated (ACER 2013)
- Departmental versus school/teacher accountability