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I live in an inner city area, and what with the confusion of the city and county education systems over the past few years, plus the running down of the inner city schools, it would be surprising if any of the children from the inner city areas had any fair chance of an education which would give them a standard in the future.

Speaking as a mother, I was bitterly disappointed with the way my youngest son's education was carried out. He was quite an intelligent boy and did well at school. When he sat the eleven plus, being very methodical and having to get things right he didn't do enough of the paper to pass, although according to his teacher and Headmaster he did an excellent paper, and should have gone to high school, as he had a very high I.Q. and was academically suited for it. There was no way round this, so we had to agree that he should go upstairs into the senior school. My son was caught up in an experiment that year regarding the eleven plus: instead of streaming pupils as was always the system for the eleven plus, both classes 1A and 1B were thrown in at the deep end, and no extra effort put in, at least that is what I believed. It wasn't until much later that I found out that beta and alpha books were used, beta for the majority and alpha books, the more advanced book, for the few fortunate pupils whose parents were on the Parent Association, and mothers who did voluntary work in the school, and worked as dinner ladies at the canteen. This showed in the results. No beta book pupils passed and only 7 children passed from the two classes, so need I say more regarding this? You can draw your own conclusions. Perhaps if I had been involved more with the school, my son would have been one of the lucky ones.

The evening arrived for the open evening for the new pupils going into the Senior School for the new term in September. Both my husband and I went along. After meeting staff and looking at classrooms, etc., it was Question Time in the Hall. My husband asked the Headmaster what chance my son would have for taking the over age exam on the thirteen plus, as it was also known, he was told, that boys who came up from the Juniors were not High School material and were quite happy to amble through the school until school-leaving age, as many boys weren't interested in going to High School, in other words the school wasn't interested. My husband and I left there quite despondent and very concerned for my son and his future.

September came, and my son went into the Senior School. I felt I couldn't leave him there, in my view, to rot away in this system. My only alternative was to consider private education if he was going to have any chance at all. I gave this quite a great deal of thought, as I knew it would mean quite a few sacrifices to pay for it.

My son started his new school in November. His first reaction was things were very different there. He was no longer one of a number, he was an individual person with a Christian name and was treated as such. The school helped to build his character and gave him confidence in things he did. It had its drawbacks; it wasn't as good in the way of sport as it had no playing fields of its own, but the thing was my son was being educated to 'O' level standard. He found that his friends had far more pocket money than him, as they came from middle class homes and he was from a working class home. He came to terms with this and accepted that there was a difference between him and many of the pupils at the school, but he was quite happy there and was Head Boy of the school when he left. He acquired seven 'O' levels and now has a very good job with good prospects. To me the sacrifices that were made were worth it, and I know my son is grateful for the chance we gave him.

My conclusion to this is if I had left him in the Secondary Modern School, he would have been with the rest of those unfortunate pupils leaving school with no 'O' levels and very little chance or hope of getting a job. You may think after you read this, "She was lucky to be able to afford to send her son to private school", but may I add it took the money I earned as a part time domestic to pay for those five years. I was often told I was stupid to go without to educate my son, he wouldn't think any more of me for doing it. We shall see. To me, I did what any caring mother would do, sacrifices or not: to give her son a chance in life and an education.