Do you think they should...

What are the purposes of education? (why go to school?)

Activity (class)

This activity is a 'warm-up' for this section which is about what schools are for. Not all the reasons might be as obvious as you think. Here is a chance for you to say:

1 The reasons you have for coming to school.
2 The reasons why 'society' requires you to come to school.

Divide a piece of paper into two and make a list of each of the two sets of reasons. See if you can match up the two sets of reasons by putting those most closely related opposite each other on the lists. Somebody should put their lists on the board. Discuss.

There are two ways of looking at why people go to school. First, there are the individual's own reasons and, second, there are the reasons why 'society' requires school attendance. Figure 4.1 compares these two types of reasons:

Figure 4.1

Individual's reasons	**Society's needs**
Ambition	*Preparation/selection for job*
1 To get good qualifications in order to get a better job	To prepare and sort out (select) pupils for the type of job to which they seem best suited
Self-development	*Socialisation*
2 To develop more fully as a person	To make sure the population is educated to the level of being able effectively to participate in social and political life
Compulsion	*Social control*
3 Because you *have* to be there	'Storage' of the young in school to 'keep them off the streets'

We will now discuss each of these pairings:

1 *Ambition — preparation/selection for jobs (economic purpose of education)*

Preparation:

The link between school-work and employment is a *general* one. Most people do not receive specific job training before the age of seventeen, but they do acquire the general skills and attitudes to get by in the world of work. Such matters as learning to relate to authority and concentrate on work, whether or not it is interesting, prepares pupils for similar situations they will meet as employees. Such learning is part of the *hidden curriculum* of schools (see next section).

Selection:

The public examination system grades pupils according to different levels of attainment. This greatly affects the jobs they get. To some extent, grading reflects intelligence and ability, but by no means completely. Thus:

- Working class and black children perform *on average* below their measured intelligence.
- Despite anti-sex discrimination laws, girls still tend to choose subjects which lead to less well paying jobs, e.g. home economics rather than craft, design and technology.

Two more comments can be made about qualifications and selection: Most employers say that their greatest need is for people with a sound *general* education (particularly in maths and English), rather than people with specific vocational training — they say most 'voc' skills can be picked up on the job. However, there *are* skills shortages — especially in engineering and computing. Second, 'qualification inflation' has taken place. The same qualifications now 'buy' you less in the job market than twenty years ago. For instance, the qualifications required for being a teacher or a librarian have 'gone up'.

So, there is no nice easy 'fit' between ability, qualifications, and the job you get!

2 *Self-development/socialisation*

Self-development:

For many teachers, the main purpose of education is to help pupils become more fully developed people. They believe that in studying the range of subjects typically offered in schools, most pupils will learn to think more clearly and to develop their appreciation of the best of human achievement. Of course, this is very optimistic, and many teachers have grown weary and, indeed, ill trying to persuade pupils to pursue these ideals! Yet many pupils are aware that a good education might increase their appreciation of life, as well as improve their chances of getting a good job. Even so, what young people find interesting and enjoyable is probably influenced much more by their peers (own age group) than by teachers. George Michael is no doubt preferred to Mozart by many of today's teenagers, just as, twenty years ago, the Beatles were preferred to Beethoven.

Socialisation:

Socialisation in schools should help self-development but it can hinder it. The school is the first *secondary* agency of socialisation. In contrast to the family, it is based on *formal rules and organisation.*

There are two aspects to secondary socialisation at school:

1 The formal curriculum (subjects learned).
2 Learning how to behave in a formal organisation.

Pupils learn to work hard — often in silence, to keep time, and to recognise authority — all skills required in the 'real' world of work that comes next. Because this non-classroom part of learning is not written down or often referred to, it is called the *hidden curriculum.*

3 *Compulsory schooling/social control*

Compulsory schooling (and training):

'I don't want to go to school,' cries the child.

'Well, you *have* to,' answers the parent.

Few of us grow up without taking part in some version of that conversation. We do, indeed, 'have to go'. And the age at which we 'have to go' has gone on steadily rising. Since the First World War, the minimum school leaving age has been raised, first to fourteen, then to fifteen, and, more recently, to sixteen. Since the sharp rise in youth employment of the late 1970s, there has been an increase in the numbers of sixteen-plus year olds staying on in schools, going into further education, or joining job training schemes. At first, the Youth Training Scheme was voluntary, but in 1987 it was announced that those who refused a place would be liable to lose supplementary benefit entitlement.

Social control:

Most people take it for granted that we stay on at school to obtain qualifications to get a better job. But some sociologists take the opposite view. They argue that in the post-war period, young people have not been needed in the job market, especially as increasing numbers of adult women have sought full or part-time work. School has solved the problem of where to put or 'store' young people. From this point of view, teachers are seen as enforcers of social control, 'soft cops' rather than educators.

The comprehensive system and the problem of class

Perhaps the hopes that the comprehensive system would soon provide a much broader avenue of opportunity for all children were unrealistic. All the sociological research into the matter in the 1950s and 1960s found that the social-class background of children greatly affected their academic attainment. Here is a summary of the home-background factors that are known to be related to academic success. On all of them, working-class children are more likely to do less well than middle-class children:

- Parental attitudes to education.
- Educational level of parents.
- Family size (generally, it is an educational disadvantage to be a member of a large family).
- Quality of maternal care of young children.
- Material prosperity of the home.
- Neighbourhood disorganisation.
- Problems in family background (for example, a 'broken' home).

No school system — whether tripartite or comprehensive — can be expected to make up fully for disadvantages of home background. We shall see *how* class disadvantages tend to carry over into the classroom and school situation in the next section. First, however, we need to look at some more evidence of the effects of class background on educational success and failure.

Labelling in the classroom

Certain groups may get favoured in school and others disadvantaged as a result of what sociologists term *labelling*. Labelling is referring to a particular person or group in an over-simple and rigid way. 'All the kids from that part of town are thick' is an example of labelling. The labels people are given can affect the way they behave. They can become like their labels. This is called *self-fulfilling prophecy*. For instance, perhaps many males seem to be bad at needlework or cookery because in the past most people, including teachers, have labelled this 'women's work'. As a result, boys might feel that they would be considered 'sissies' if they did these things. So, they 'learn' to dislike doing them, to be 'bad' at doing them.

Don't confuse labelling with the *typing* of people and groups that we all do. There are, of course, certain types of behaviour that we *tend* to expect of given groups. Thus, we expect clowns to be funny and priests to be concerned about religion. It is only when we see people simply as types and not as individuals that labelling occurs. Labelling is not typing but *stereotyping* (which is another word for labelling). Labelling is like putting a person in a box, tying it up and sticking a label on.

Schools can make a difference

Although most people remain in the class that they were born in, about one in three working-class children move up the social scale, and about the same proportion of middle and lower-middle move down. Individual intelligence is one reason that partly explains upward movement, and going to a good school is another. But what *is* a good school?

Michael Rutter's study *Fifteen Hundred Hours* examined this problem. Rutter and his team looked at only twelve Inner London secondary schools so it is important not to over-generalise their findings. Rutter's research is summarised below:

Factors measured	*Factor linked with success in these four areas*
Attendance	Teachers who are:
Academic achievement	Punctual
Behaviour in school	Well organised
Rate of delinquency outside school	Patient
	Encouraging
	Inspiring
	Willing to share extra-curricular activities with pupils
	Consistent