

# CHAIN EFFECTS 2016

## The impact of academy chains on low-income students

Merryn Hutchings, Becky Francis and Philip Kirby  
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Improving social mobility  
through education



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## Foreword

Academies were started in 2000 to alter the fortunes of failing schools that disproportionately served students from some of the nation's poorest communities. By helping these schools with the support of philanthropic, educational and business partners, the intention was to improve the lives of young people from the least privileged backgrounds by ensuring they gained better exam results and improved opportunities for higher education and work.

Since then, the size of the programme has increased dramatically. Five years ago, there were about 200 academies. At the time of writing, there are well over 5,000 covering both the primary and secondary sectors. Of these, about one third are sponsored academies, while two thirds are more successful schools that have converted to gain academy funding and freedoms.

While converter academies can be high-performing schools, which have chosen the academy path for greater autonomy, sponsored academies conform more to the original purpose of the academy project: to improve the fortunes of the UK's most under-performing schools. Sponsors are many – from business leaders, to charities, to successful state and independent schools, to religious organisations – but all share this same goal.

In this report, academy chains are examined: those academies that share a sponsor. More specifically, the report is interested in the performance of secondary academies within chains, especially those that have been under the control of a single sponsor for some time. Given the remit of the sponsoring process, have sponsors had a positive effect on the schools in their chains?

In 2014, the Sutton Trust examined this issue for the first time, and we repeated the exercise last year. Our two previous reports found that while some chains had seen significant improvement (as compared to the average for all mainstream schools – maintained and academies), there were also some that had not. This report returns to the same question (and many of the same academy chains) to analyse the current state-of-play, and compare results across years.

The report suggests that, while there have been some outstanding performers, too many chain sponsors, despite several years in charge of their schools, continue to struggle to improve the outcomes of their most disadvantaged students. While converter academies, as you might expect, perform significantly better than other mainstream secondary schools, sponsored academies still lag behind. In this report, we also show that there are eight chains which are neither attaining nor improving above the average for all secondary schools (including academies).

This is a particularly important issue at a time when the government is committed to a rapid expansion of the academies programme, and raises real issues about the capacity of the system to meet such elevated expectations. I was pleased that Nicky Morgan, the education secretary, accepted our recommendation that only successful chains should expand. It is vital therefore that far more is done to build the capacity of successful schools – of which Outwood Grange in Yorkshire is a good example – to support weaker schools in local multi-academy trusts.

Our Chain Effects reports have already created a new transparency around academy chains, and the Government's White Paper has promised more in the future. We hope that this year's report will continue to contribute to the important debate around academy chains, and academies more broadly.

I would like to thank Professors Merryn Hutchings and Becky Francis for all their work on this report, and Dr Philip Kirby, the Sutton Trust Research Fellow.

Sir Peter Lampl

Chairman, The Sutton Trust and Education Endowment Foundation

## Executive summary

1. Successive governments have promoted academy sponsorship as a way to improve the educational achievement of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. As the academies programme has developed, policymakers have increasingly seen academy chains (especially multi-academy trusts) as the best method for fostering professionalism, value for money and school-to-school collaboration – and hence the best way of working to improve the performance of previously struggling schools and the educational outcomes of their often disadvantaged pupils. The White Paper *Educational Excellence Everywhere* explicitly presents multi-academy trusts as the preferred vehicle for academisation. Yet there has been limited attention to the relative success of academy chains, and our *Chain Effects* annual reports remain the only analysis of the success or otherwise of this policy strategy in impacting positively on the attainment of disadvantaged young people.<sup>1</sup>
2. Our *Chain Effects* report series addresses this gap, analysing school performance data to review how well disadvantaged pupils achieve in academy chains. This report re-runs our analysis for a third year, this time based on 2015 exam results. As previously, we included chains in our analysis only if they had at least three academies in 2015, and at least two sponsored secondary academies for a three year period from September 2012. This means that academies are included in our analysis only when there has been sufficient time for the sponsor chain to have some impact on performance.
3. We reviewed outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in sponsored secondary school academies across a range of measures, including progress in English and mathematics, and the English Baccalaureate, in addition to the main measure of five good GCSEs or equivalents including English and mathematics. This is intended to reflect changes in performance measures introduced by the present Government, and the resulting change in emphasis in the league tables from 2016; as well as to ensure that chain performance is evaluated from a range of angles. We also reviewed our findings this year in comparison to those from our last two reports.
4. Our analysis reveals:
  - The sponsored academies in this analysis have lower inspection grades compared with the national figures for all secondary schools and academies ('mainstream schools'). The academies in our analysis group (which have all been sponsored academies for at least three years) are twice as likely as mainstream schools to be below the floor standard and twice as likely to be judged Inadequate by Ofsted. Four in ten of the academies in the analysis group are not yet regarded as Good by Ofsted.
  - There continues to be very significant variation in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, both between and within chains. This year we identified seven out of 39 chains that are performing significantly above the national average for all mainstream schools (maintained and academies), for their disadvantaged pupils. Around half (18 out of 39) are improving faster than the national average. However, we found 13 that are attaining significantly below the national average. Of particular concern are the eight chains in which both attainment and improvement were below the mainstream average.
  - Those chains that were most successful with disadvantaged pupils also tended to be successful with their more affluent pupils, while less successful chains tended to have poor results for both groups.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the report we use disadvantaged to mean those pupils who have been eligible for Free School Meals at any time in the last six years, those recorded as having been looked after for at least one day and those recorded as having been adopted from care. This is the DfE definition.

- In 2015 chains entered fewer young people to the EBacc than in 2014, but a greater proportion of those pupils entered succeeded in achieving the EBacc.
- The proportion of chains in our analysis group performing above the mainstream average for their disadvantaged pupils has fallen year on year from 2013 to 2015.
- Our longitudinal analysis, over the three years of our reports, shows relatively little change to the ranking of our sample chains. Only a minority of chains have moved up or down in our overall analysis of attainment– most of those that were above average or below average last year remain in the same category this year too. A handful of chains have performed consistently and significantly above the mainstream average for attainment across the last three years.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, a similar number have remained consistently in the significantly below average group for attainment across three years,<sup>3</sup> and further chains have appeared in the significantly below average group in two years out of three.<sup>4</sup>

So, a handful chains continue to achieve impressive outcomes for their disadvantaged students against a range of measures, demonstrating the transformational impact on life chances that can be made. However, a larger group of low-performing chains are achieving results that are not improving and may be harming the prospects of their disadvantaged students. Our longitudinal analysis shows that, in spite of some marginal movement, including improvement in a few poorly performing chains, and the falling back of a few chains previously performing at the national average, the main picture is one of a lack of transformative change over the period, including a very slow growth in number of those chains which are succeeding in the original aims of the sponsor academies programme. The Government, and its new infrastructure of Regional Schools Commissioners, needs to act radically and rapidly to ensure that the promise of the policy programme is realised in improving the educational experiences and outcomes for disadvantaged children. Otherwise there is a real danger that the programme becomes part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

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<sup>2</sup> ARK, *City of London*, Harris, and Mercers. Outwood Grange moved up into this category in 2014, and *David Meller* this year.

<sup>3</sup> *Diocese of Salisbury*, Learning Schools, SPTA and Woodard. (Chains in italics have only two academies in the analysis group.)

<sup>4</sup> AET, Greenwood Dale, *Midland* and *UCAT* have also now been in this group two years in a row. Cabot featured as significantly below the mainstream average for attainment in 2013 and again in 2015.

## Recommendations

### For policy makers:

1. The Government, National Schools Commissioner and Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) must act urgently to create mechanisms to ensure the spread of good practice from the best academy chains to the rest. This should include:
  - Creating a taskforce led by the National Schools Commissioner, and comprised of trustees and senior and middle leaders from chains demonstrating significant success, to act as mentors to those sponsors struggling to realise their potential.
  - Commissioning robust research on governance, structural arrangements, leadership, and teaching practice in chains that are providing transformational outcomes to their disadvantaged students, to analyse what enables them to succeed.
2. The Government must also concentrate on the development of capacity, including supporting successful schools to create new multi-academy trusts and improving existing chains, ensuring that any expansion is at a rate that ensures success. Too rapid expansion of chains endangers those prospects.
3. The Education Secretary told the Education Select Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2016 that new chains should not be allowed to expand until they have a track record of success in bringing about improvement in their existing academies, a recommendation of last year's report. It is vital that this commitment is followed through.
4. RSCs should continue to tighten the quality criteria for sponsorship, based on quality, capacity, strategic model and track record.
5. Given the urgency of improvement, and the simultaneous need to tighten rigour in sponsor commissioning, the Department for Education (DfE) should allow RSCs to expand their pools of school improvement providers beyond academy sponsors, prioritising quality and track record over type, and providing system leadership training to enable successful schools to create new trusts.
6. RSCs should continue to sharpen and make more transparent sponsor accountability processes, acting to remove academies from failing chains and closing those chains with poor records. As more academies are moved between chains, the DfE must work with RSCs to ensure that the progress of these schools can be tracked and closely monitored, and improvement ensured.
7. Measures must be taken to enable parents and the wider public to assess the quality of chains. We welcome the DfE's commitment to future publication of results for different chains. However, we continue also to advocate the benefit of independent, accessible information, and believe that at present Ofsted is best placed to provide this. The Government should reiterate its commitment to the original vision and purpose of the sponsored academies programme, to transform the prospects of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and should openly evaluate the outcomes of the policy programme against this intention.
8. Where free schools form part of academy chains this should be made clear on the DfE's list of free schools, so that any analysis can include all the schools in each chain.

### For sponsors and schools:

9. Sponsor chains – but especially those needing to improve - should seek out successful practice and reflect on what their own chain could learn from it, encouraging this outward-

facing approach among practitioners at all levels within their academies. In particular, multi-academy trust directors should ensure there are clear lines of responsibility and accountability for school improvement and performance within the chain.

10. There is growing evidence on the most effective strategies for school improvement, including the Sutton Trust/Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Toolkit, which focuses on effective strategies to improve results for disadvantaged students.<sup>5</sup> Sponsors and schools should make full use of this growing body of evidence to improve pupil outcomes.

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<sup>5</sup> Sutton Trust & EEF (2016).



# 1 Introduction

Successive governments have promoted academy sponsorship as a way to promote the educational achievement of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>6</sup> Since our last report, the Conservative government has extended its commitment to the expansion of academy chains (referred to as multi-academy trusts or MATs), and continue to seek new sponsors to secure educational improvement. The initial demand that all maintained schools join or begin planning to join a MAT by 2020, featured in the 2016 White Paper, *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, has been diluted, but the emphasis on academies and MATs as the preferred model remains.<sup>7</sup> The White Paper states:

We want schools to operate in strong, resilient structures which raise standards so that external intervention is only necessary in exceptional circumstances. This means that most schools will form or join MATs – allowing proven educational models to be scaled and the system’s best leaders to run more than one school. MATs are the only structures which formally bring together leadership, autonomy, funding and accountability across a group of academies in an enduring way, and are the best long term formal arrangement for stronger schools to support the improvement of weaker schools. (para 4.15)

The DfE also claims that “The growth in sponsored academies has transformed the performance of the most disadvantaged pupils by turning around the worst performing schools in the country, helping to realise our vision for real social justice and a good education for all.”<sup>8</sup>

The sponsored academies programme has been developed and expanded since its initial introduction by the Labour government in 2000. As the academies programme has developed, policymakers have increasingly seen academy chains as best fostering professionalism, value for money and school-to-school collaboration; and hence most effective in improving the performance of previously struggling schools, and the educational outcomes of their (often disadvantaged) pupils. ‘Chains’ comprise a group of schools sponsored by a charitable trust (usually MATs – but also other arrangements such as umbrella trusts). Until 2014, there had been very little analysis of the success or otherwise of this policy strategy in positively impacting the attainment of disadvantaged young people: our first *Chain Effects* report (2014) set out to address this gap, investigating which academy chains have had most success in advancing the outcomes of low income students.<sup>9</sup> The impact and interest was such that the Sutton Trust have promoted the analysis as an annual series: this is the third report, following last year’s *Chain Effects 2015*.<sup>10</sup> The reports provide scrutiny of the extent to which academy chains are fulfilling their intended purpose in supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds, analysing which academy chains have raised attainment and progress for disadvantaged students, and which have not, and making recommendations to government accordingly.<sup>11</sup>

## 1.1 Background

Education is key to the government’s social mobility agenda. The education system is expected to prepare young people with the knowledge and skills they need to secure successful futures as workers and citizens, and to delineate merit through success in exams. Yet the evidence shows that in England, schooling at best replicates and at worst exacerbates existing inequality.<sup>12</sup> Children from low socio-economic groups are already behind their more advantaged counterparts when they begin

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<sup>6</sup> The DfE define disadvantaged pupils as those known to have been eligible for free school meals in the past six years, those recorded as having been looked after for at least one day and those recorded as having been adopted from care.

<sup>7</sup> DfE (2016a).

<sup>8</sup> DfE (2015a), p.20.

<sup>9</sup> Hutchings, Francis & De Vries (2014).

<sup>10</sup> Hutchings, Francis & Kirby (2015).

<sup>11</sup> Prior to the election, the then Coalition government responded to recommendations by the Education Select Committee (which drew on the 2014 *Chain Effects* report and recommendations), that it publish data on the attainment of different chains, by publishing data and analysis on chains and comparison with Local Authorities (DfE, 2015b). This has not happened since, but the present Government has pledged in their White Paper to publish performance tables for MATs (DfE, 2016a). We welcome these steps towards transparency.

<sup>12</sup> DfE (2016b).

school.<sup>13</sup> But far from narrowing this gap, the gap widens through school.<sup>14</sup> Educational outcomes remain closely correlated with social class.<sup>15</sup> Despite the policy attention to this issue, the gap has remained largely consistent in the secondary sector in recent years: there is evidence of some narrowing of the gap for primary school outcomes, but the gap at secondary level (GCSE) remains stubbornly stable,<sup>16</sup> and has even grown by a percentage point since last year from 27 to 28 percentage points in 2015.<sup>17</sup>

### Attainment gaps 2015

There was a 28 percentage point gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils in the key indicator of 5 A\*-C including Maths and English at GCSE.

Only 11.2% of disadvantaged pupils achieved the English Baccalaureate, compared to 29.2% of all other pupils.

Only 6.7% of those pupils not achieving Level 4 for Key Stage 2 achieved 5 A\*-C including Maths and English at GCSE.

It is important to highlight that these differentiated outcomes cannot be solely attributed to the education system: family income, job prospects, health, housing, social capital and social culture are all important. Analysis suggests that, overall, schools contribute only between 7% and 20% of the variability in pupil outcomes.<sup>18</sup> But system-level factors are also well documented, including the high levels of social segregation in the UK system,<sup>19</sup> with the result that disadvantaged pupils are often concentrated in schools judged to be poorer quality.<sup>20</sup> They are also more likely to be subjected to practices which do not support their progress.<sup>21</sup> Hence those most in need tend to be those least likely to access good educational provision, facing 'double-disadvantage'.

In relation to social segregation and unequal access to high quality provision, these problems demand that we:

- Ensure that access to the best schools is equally available to all;
- Improve poor schools to ensure all provision is of a high standard.

Previous and current governments have sought to address the second point through the establishment of sponsored academies, increasingly promoting academy chains to secure quality and capacity. The present Government is seeking to precipitate a radical growth in MATs as the mechanism to ensure this quality and capacity is spread into areas where attainment outcomes are poorer<sup>22</sup> (and these areas are typically correlated with a low socio-economic demographic).

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<sup>13</sup> Cabinet Office (2011); Jerrim & Macmillan (2014).

<sup>14</sup> DfE (2016b). Lupton & Thomson, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Lupton et al. (2009); Clifton & Cook (2012).

<sup>16</sup> Lupton & Thomson (2015).

<sup>17</sup> DfE (2016b). The DfE has introduced a new measure of the attainment gap: the national Disadvantaged Pupils Attainment Gap Index is based on a mean rank difference based on the average point score for attainment in English and mathematics. See DfE (2014a). Using this methodology, the attainment gap similarly increased slightly between 2014 and 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Wiliam (2010), Rasbash et al. (2010).

<sup>19</sup> OECD (2010).

<sup>20</sup> This is illustrated by work such as that of Lupton (Lupton et al. 2009; Lupton 2010) and Francis (2011), which demonstrate the over-representation of working class children in poorer quality schools.

<sup>21</sup> Dunne et al., 2007; Francis & Wong, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> DfE (2016a).

## 1.2 What the Government is trying to achieve in promoting MATs

The academies programme was instigated by the Labour government in 2000, with the opening of the first 'City Academies' in 2002. These academies replaced schools with a history of underperformance, located in areas of social deprivation, and represented an effort to resource and revitalise these schools for the benefit of their (disadvantaged) students.<sup>23</sup> As we have observed previously, this exclusive focus of the academies programme on regenerating England's lowest performing schools was diversified and diluted with the Coalition government's drive to turn many of the most successful schools into academies<sup>24</sup> through its 'conversion' programme.<sup>25</sup> This initiative, focusing on school autonomy rather than social justice, received strong take-up among secondary schools, meaning that since 2011 the majority of academies are converter academies, and have not followed the original sponsor take-over route. Nevertheless, the Coalition government simultaneously enacted its pledge to maintain and significantly develop the sponsored academy programme; continuing to encourage struggling schools to voluntarily join a sponsor; and forcing underperforming schools to become academies. The present Conservative government has maintained and extended this approach (for example, by seeking to broaden the category of local authority schools eligible for mandatory academy sponsorship, through the identification of 'coasting' schools). And meanwhile, increasing numbers of converter academies have also joined academy chains.

The development of academy chains has proceeded simultaneously to that of the academies programme, becoming a key feature of it. Some of the earliest sponsors had set out to grow groups of schools reflecting the philanthropic aspirations of sponsors.<sup>26</sup> However, it was not until the failure of some solo academies to improve became evident in the later years of the Labour government that the growth of chains came to be overtly promoted in policy.<sup>27</sup> Outcomes for the sponsored academy programme have been mixed,<sup>28</sup> and its impact on pupil achievement remains a topic of controversy and debate.<sup>29</sup> (This includes the impact of academies on outcomes for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds; the demographic of interest for this report.)<sup>30</sup> Chains and groups of schools have therefore been encouraged by successive governments, to mitigate risks associated with 'standalone' academies, and to facilitate the school-to-school support integral to the notion of a self-improving system.<sup>31</sup> The DfE now routinely refers to academy chains as MATs, even though many of these organisations are not in fact set up as MATs.<sup>32</sup> In this report, for greater accuracy, we continue to refer to groups of academies led by a sponsor as chains (see discussion in Section 1.3).

As we have discussed in previous reports, the research literature identifies both strengths and risks of investment in academy chains.<sup>33</sup> Our first report showed that, on average, academies in chains achieve higher attainment than 'standalone' academies.<sup>34</sup> But there has also been debate on the role of chains within the academies programme - for example, in relation to the notion of school autonomy. Nevertheless, sponsor chains have been a lynch-pin of academies policy for the current and previous government, with active encouragement of both philanthropic sponsorship and of school-led sponsorship.<sup>35</sup>

Our reports for the Sutton Trust remain the only systematic annual analysis of the impact of chains. However, since Chris Cook first explored the relative success or otherwise of different chains for the

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<sup>23</sup> Mahony & Hextall (2012); Academies Commission (2013).

<sup>24</sup> Those schools graded by Ofsted as 'Outstanding', and later 'Good' with Outstanding features.

<sup>25</sup> As it was now many of the best schools – where more advantaged children tend to be concentrated – that gained as a result of generous funding arrangements and autonomy (Francis, 2010; Academies Commission, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Including, e.g., Harris and ARK

<sup>27</sup> Academies Commission (2013).

<sup>28</sup> NAO (2012), NfER (2014), Education Select Committee (2015).

<sup>29</sup> Machin & Veroit (2010); Machin (2012); Academies Commission (2013); Wrigley & Kalambuka (2012); Machin & Silva (2013); Education Select Committee (2015).

<sup>30</sup> NAO (2012).

<sup>31</sup> For a full account of the rationale and history of the development of academy chains, see Academies Commission (2013).

<sup>32</sup> The complexity here is significant. Some chains are umbrella trusts/SATs, rather than MATs. Some chains have more than one sponsor. For example: AET has two separate MATs with different names and a SAT; Diocese of London includes 3 SATs and 4 separate MATs - two of which include only one school despite being called MATs; the Barnfield academies are a MAT but currently have no sponsor (despite the fact that they are sponsored academies) (DfE 2016c).

<sup>33</sup> Hill (2010); Hill et al., (2012); Ofsted (2014); Education Select Committee (2015).

<sup>34</sup> Hutchings, Francis and De Vries (2014).

<sup>35</sup> E.g. DfE (2010); DfE (2016a).

*Financial Times* in 2013, research attention to this topic is gradually growing. Our own *Chain Effects* report for the Sutton Trust (2014) was followed by analysis of the performance of different chains against the performance of local authorities by the DfE (2015b). This latter appeared as a response to recommendations from the Education Select Committee (2015) for the DfE to publish its data on chains; a recommendation repeating our own call 2014's *Chain Effects* report. This DfE publication has not been repeated since, but a commitment to do so features in the recent Government White Paper.<sup>36</sup> Since then, in addition to our *Chain Effects* 2015 report there have been various investigations on the outcomes of chains,<sup>37</sup> and frequent coverage and analysis in the education press.<sup>38</sup> These various analyses have tended to present a mixed picture. Our own research has shown the impressive achievements of a few chains, which have secured outcomes significantly above the national average for their disadvantaged pupils (and often for those who are not disadvantaged as well); but also the problematic underperformance of some others. While some chains thrive, the problems with others are increasingly emerging (the Education Select Committee [2015] noted that 25 academy chains were 'paused' and prevented from further expansion in 2014; and the issue of warning notices, or removal of schools from chains, have become regular stories in the education press).<sup>39</sup> This is arguably, to some extent, unremarkable given the number of academies and chains; and even indicative of the effectiveness and/or robustness of the Regional Schools Commissioners structure (as RSCs are intended to hold sponsors to account for their performance). However, the mixed picture in identified outcomes certainly illustrates that it is unwise to believe MATs or chains to represent a straightforward solution to improvement, or to anticipate consistent quality among them.

In spite of this increased attention to chains, and of the overt intention of the sponsored academies programme to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged young people, there has been little attention to the effectiveness of different chains in raising attainment for disadvantaged pupils: our annual Sutton Trust *Chain Effects* reports remain the only investigation specifically focused on this topic.

### 1.3 Academies and chains: the current picture

Academies are publicly funded schools, independent from a local authority. In May 2010, there were 203 academies. The academy list published in May 2016 shows 5,302 (primary, secondary and special schools). The incentivising of maintained schools to convert to academy status through the offer of autonomy, specific freedoms and a generous funding allocation in the early years of the Coalition administration led to an astonishingly rapid expansion of the programme.<sup>40</sup> In May 2016, 66% of maintained secondary schools in England are academies or free schools, but a smaller percentage of primary schools (Table 1).

**Table 1: Percentage of state-funded schools that are academies, free schools and LA maintained schools**

Type of establishment	Primary	Secondary	Total
Academies	18%	59%	25%
Free Schools (including studio schools and UTCs)	1%	7%	1%
LA Maintained	81%	34%	74%

Source: DfE (2016c)

<sup>36</sup> DfE (2016a); Centre Forum (Education Policy Institute) is using this methodology in its report to be published in July 2016.

<sup>37</sup> E.g. NFER (2014), PwC (2016).

<sup>38</sup> Notably Schools Week

<sup>39</sup> BBC (2014). The DfE (2015a) report that between August 2013 and July 2014 they issued 38 'pre-warning notices' to academies, and three 'warning notices'; and that during this time period five academies (all secondary, sponsored academies) were transferred to new sponsors.

<sup>40</sup> See Bassett et al. (2012); Academies Commission (2013).

Despite continued policy and media attention focusing on sponsored academies and free schools, the vast majority of academies are now converter academies; of the 5,302 academies on the DfE list in May 2016, only 30% are sponsored.<sup>41</sup>

In our previous reports, we have focused on academy chains, using the DfE definition of a chain as a group of three or more academies with a single sponsor.<sup>42</sup> As stated above, we have continued to use this unit of analysis, despite the current policy focus on MATs. This is because some chains are not set up as MATs, but rather as collections of single academy trusts (SATs) or a combination of SATs and MATs. Our focus is the sponsor rather than the structure.

Table 2 shows the number of chains in May 2016, using this definition. The vast majority of chains are made up of both sponsored and converter academies.

**Table 2: Number of academy chains by size of chain, May 2016**

Chain size	Number of chains	Total no. of sponsored academies in these chains	Total no. of converter academies in these chains
30 and over	8	248	107
20-29	12	190	95
10-19	35	231	219
7-9	40	151	157
4-6	118	311	259
3	101	178	125
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>1309</b>	<b>962</b>

Note: This table only shows groupings which include a sponsored academy. Some MATs consisting only of converter academies are listed by the DfE as having a sponsor, but the majority are not; they are included in the next table. Based on figures in DfE (2016c).

In May 2016 there are 314 chains meeting our definition.<sup>43</sup> They are extremely varied; the largest has 67 schools but the majority are very much smaller (Table 2). A further 195 sponsored academies are in groups of two (the majority of these consisting of one converter and one sponsored academy), and 102 are stand-alone sponsored academies. Thus over 80% of sponsored academies are in chains consisting of three or more academies. If we consider only secondary sponsored academies, the focus of this report, almost 75% are in chains of three or more academies (of any sort).

The majority of these chains are made up of both sponsored and converter academies; just 27 (of the 314) are only of sponsored academies. The larger the chain, the more likely it is to have a majority of sponsored academies.

In addition to these chains, there are a number of groupings of converter academies; the vast majority of these are MATS without a sponsor, but a minority have sponsors. In general these are much smaller, as Table 3 shows. A further 220 converter academies are in groups of two, but the overwhelming majority (1,834) are stand-alone.

**Table 3: Trusts of three or more schools consisting only of converter academies**

Trust size	Number of groups	No. of converter academies
10-11	2	22
7-9	9	68
4-6	62	281
3	60	180
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>551</b>

<sup>41</sup> DfE (2016c).

<sup>42</sup> See Hutchings, Francis & De Vries (2014) for discussion.

<sup>43</sup> Note that this figure includes only chains which include sponsored academies.

Note: Based on figures in DfE (2016c).

Overall, then, sponsored academies are more likely to be in chains than to stand alone, while converters are more likely to stand alone. Despite the policy moves to encourage larger chains/MATs, most remain small; only one fifth of all academies are in chains/MATs of ten or more academies.

A further source of complexity is that many academy sponsors have also set up free schools, which essentially are managed in the same way as academies. However, the list of free schools that the DfE provides does not routinely identify the sponsors, though these are sometimes evident in the school names.<sup>44</sup> This means it is not possible to bring together for analysis all the academies and free schools in each chain.

This hints at the complexity involved in any discussion of academies, chains and other types of schools in the contemporary English system. As we have said in our previous reports (and the Education Select Committee has concurred),<sup>45</sup> the level of complexity and fluidity has made it notoriously difficult to analyse the impact of academies (and academy chains) on educational outcomes for young people. Analysing the attainment of schools that have only recently gained academy status, or of chains that have been in very rapid development and contain a mixture of school types, can lack validity. However, given the specific intention of the sponsored academies programme to improve the outcomes for disadvantaged young people, and the encouragement of academy chains as a means of best facilitating these outcomes, it is vital to assess their impact.

#### **1.4 Aims of the research**

So what has been the impact of sponsored academies on the outcomes of the disadvantaged pupils they were initiated to help? Which academy chains have had most success in advancing the outcomes of low income students? These are the questions that we, again, apply in our analysis for this updated report.

In doing so, we provide information about the relative impact of different sponsor chains on various facets of pupil progress and attainment, especially for disadvantaged pupils (as indicated primarily by eligibility for free school meals).

Clearly a key question is what the successful chains have in common, and what they are doing to achieve their success. Chains' school improvement strategies are beyond the scope of this report, but we reiterate the recommendation that the DfE urgently commission robust research to address this vital question.<sup>46</sup> However, as in previous reports, we do consider the characteristics of successful chains.

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<sup>44</sup> For example, Harris is listed as having nine open free schools and a further five opening in 2016 (DfE, 2016d).

<sup>45</sup> Education Select Committee (2015).

<sup>46</sup> Hutchings, Francis & De Vries (2014); Hutchings, Francis & Kirby (2015). See also NAO (2014).

## 2 Research design

### 2.1 The academies included in the analysis

This research is concerned with outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in secondary sponsored academies. As in last year's report, we have included as chains all instances where one sponsor is listed for three or more academies (sponsored or converter, following the DfE usage). However, we acknowledge that in some cases these are not organised as MATs, and that some schools have multiple sponsors; thus the organisations we include may not all consider themselves to be chains, and may not have primary responsibility for the schools listed against them.<sup>47</sup> And, as previously, we have analysed the results only of academies that have consistently been part of the chain for three years prior to results (now shifting our sample to include those that have been part of a chain since September 2012). While this inevitably limits the number of academies and chains included in the analysis, we have done this because the majority of pupils taking GCSEs in 2015 in these academies will have undertaken at least the most recent three years of their secondary education within the chain, and so it seems reasonable to relate their outcomes and progress to the chain.<sup>48</sup> However, we have not included chains where only one secondary sponsored academy was part of the chain for the whole period since September 2012, because this would result in taking the performance of a single school as representing the chain as a whole. Similarly, we excluded chains where only one academy had pupils taking GCSEs during the period from September 2012 to June 2015.

This year we had hoped to provide an analysis of the outcomes for converter academies which have joined chains. However, DfE data specifying which chains converter academies have joined is only available from December 2013, and so we cannot tell whether they have been part of the chain for the whole of the period we are reviewing. We also considered including primary sponsored academies, which have existed since September 2012. However, chains tended to have very small numbers of primaries that had been in existence since 2012, (and the total number of pupils the analysis would be based on was also low), so we have decided to defer this.

The 39 chains included in the analysis group are listed in Table 4,<sup>49</sup> which also shows the number of schools for which we were able to analyse data for the whole period, together with the total number of academies in the chain in June 2015 (including converters, and primary and special schools).<sup>50</sup> While the total number of schools may in some cases give the impression that our analysis focused on only a tiny minority of the academies in the chain, this is perhaps misleading. In more than a third of chains our analysis included all the sponsored secondary academies in the chain. In most other chains we included the vast majority of these. It is only in a few fast-growing chains that a minority of the sponsored secondary academies are included: *Northern*, *Outwood Grange* and *Creative Education*.

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<sup>47</sup> For further discussion, see Hutchings, Francis & De Vries (2014).

<sup>48</sup> This is the same approach as Cook used in his 2013 analysis of chains' effectiveness, and we applied this approach in our previous *Chain Effects* report.

<sup>49</sup> Table 1 uses the chain titles given on the DfE list of academies, June 2015 (2015d); throughout the remainder of this report we have shortened these titles by removing words such as 'Trust', 'Federation', 'Foundation', 'Group' etc.

<sup>50</sup> We have provided the 2015 figure because this matches the end date of the attainment analysis; many chains have grown further since that time. This figure given may still under-represent the total size of some chains, as some include Free Schools, and others, independent schools.

**Table 4: Chains and numbers of academies included in the analysis**

	No. of schools in analysis	Total schools in chain		No. of schools in analysis	Total schools in chain
Academies Enterprise Trust (AET)	17	67	Harris Federation	10	28
Aldridge Foundation, The	4	7	Kemnal Academy Trust, The (TKAT)	3	41
ARK Schools	7	27	Landau Forte Charitable Trust	3	6
Brooke Weston Trust	4	8	Learning Schools Trust	3	4
Cabot Learning Federation	6	12	Leigh Academies Trust	3	10
CfBT Education Trust	3	15	<i>Mercers Company, The</i>	2	3
<i>City of London Corporation</i>	2	4	<i>Merchant Venturers, The Society of</i>	2	4
Co-operative Group, The	3	7	<i>Midland Academies Trust, The</i>	2	4
<i>Creative Education Academies Trust</i>	2	12	<i>Northern Education Trust</i>	2	20
<i>David Meller</i>	2	3	Oasis Community Learning	12	42
David Ross Education Trust (DRET)	3	33	Ormiston Academies Trust	15	29
<i>Diocese of London</i>	2	18	Outwood Grange Academies Trust	4	15
Diocese of Oxford	3	14	Priory Federation of Academies Trust, The	4	4
<i>Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust<sup>51</sup></i>	2	24	<i>RSA Academies</i>	2	4
<i>Dixons Academy Trust</i>	2	4	School Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA)	6	43
E-ACT	11	23	<i>UCAT</i>	3	7
Emmanuel Schools Foundation	3	3	United Learning	18	40
Grace Foundation	3	3	<i>University of Lincoln</i>	2	3
Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust	5	25	Woodard Academies Trust	4	5
Haberdashers' Aske's Federation	3	5			

Notes: This list uses sponsors as recorded on the DfE list published in June 2015. Some of these academies have since changed sponsor. All academies opened prior to September 2010 are classified as sponsored by the DfE, as well as those that subsequently became academies because they were identified as under-performing.<sup>52</sup> Italicised chains are those in which only two academies are eligible for inclusion in the analysis. See Section 2.3.

## 2.2 The data

### 2.2.1 National changes to attainment data

The data used in this report are derived from the DfE school performance database for schools in England.<sup>53</sup> There have been a number of changes to performance data in the last few years which mean that the figures for 2015 cannot be directly compared with those for previous years. In 2014, the list of qualifications that can be counted as GCSE equivalents was reduced; there was a move to linear exams; and changes to the English GCSE.<sup>54</sup> No qualification could count as larger than one GCSE, and the number of non-GCSEs that could be included in performance measures was capped at two per pupil. From September 2013, the result of a pupil's first attempt at an English

<sup>51</sup> On the June 2015 academies list, the Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust had two secondary sponsored academies that fitted our criteria, and so it is included in this report. However, the sponsorship of one of these has now been taken over by Ambitions Academies Trust.

<sup>52</sup> For a discussion of the characteristics of schools prior to their becoming academies, including City Technology Colleges and independent schools that became academies, see Hutchings, Francis & De Vries (2014, p. 23).

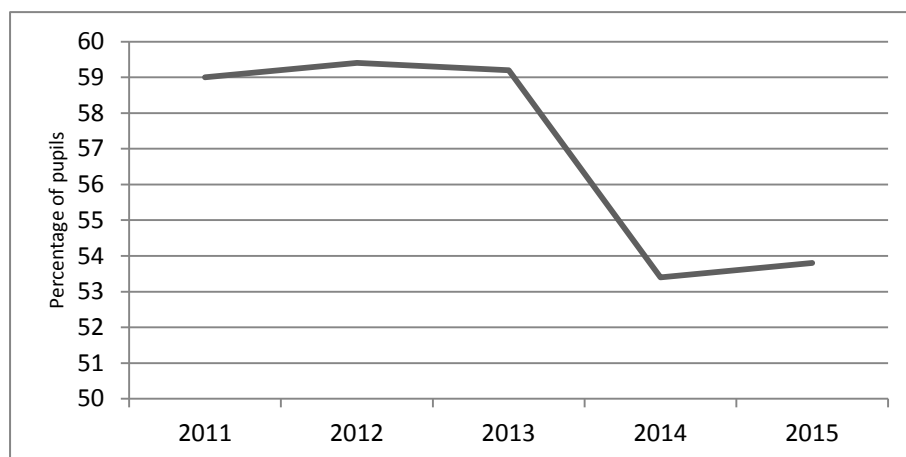
<sup>53</sup> DfE (2016e).

<sup>54</sup> For full details see DfE (2015c, Section 10).



Baccalaureate (EBacc) subject was counted in league tables, rather than their best attempt.<sup>55</sup> The effect of these changes is that nationally the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A\*-C GCSEs or equivalent including English and mathematics (5A\*CEM) was lower in 2014 than it was in 2013 (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Percentage of pupils in England achieving 5A\*CEM, 2011-15**



Source: DfE (2016b)

In this report, we are concerned with attainment in 2015 and change between 2013 and 2015, and so it is to be expected that most chains will show a drop in percentage of pupils achieving 5A\*CEM. However, this does not impede our analysis, because our focus is on whether each chain has improved more (or declined less) than have schools nationally, rather than the actual percentage point change. These comparisons are with the performance of all state-funded mainstream secondary schools, including both maintained schools and academies.

An added complication in interpreting attainment figures is that in 2016, the main accountability measure for secondary schools will be Progress 8. This measure is based on pupils' progress measured across eight subjects: English; mathematics; three other English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects (drawn from sciences, computer science, geography, history and languages); and three further subjects, which can be from the range of EBacc subjects, or can be any other approved, high-value arts, academic or vocational qualification. In 2015, schools could opt to be assessed against the floor standard for Progress 8 rather than the previous measure, although only a minority chose to do so. From 2016, Progress 8 will be the main measure. Inevitably all secondary schools are altering the subjects they offer to pupils in preparation for this change. To some extent, then, the attainment tables for 2015 reflect the extent to which schools have moved towards the new measure.

### 2.2.2 Data used in this report

The figures for chain-level performance have been calculated from the relevant attainment measure, such as percentage of students attaining 5A\*CEM for each sponsored secondary or all-through academy consistently present in the chain for the three academic years (2012-13, 2013-14, and 2014-15). We have used the average for each academy, weighted by the absolute number of pupils of the relevant type (all pupils, disadvantaged pupils, or those who are not disadvantaged).

We have also calculated the averages for the following groups of mainstream schools, and used them for comparison:

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<sup>55</sup> In 2015 this was extended to all subjects, but this had little effect on results because schools did not generally enter pupils early for non-EBacc subjects. See DfE (2016b).

- all mainstream secondary schools and academies
- three main types of school: however, in this case we have only included those that have had that status since September 2012:
  - sponsored academies whether in a chain, a pair or solo (N = 370);
  - converter academies (N = 1,036);
  - LA maintained schools (including community, foundation, VA, VC)
- two specific sub-groups of sponsored academies (again, including only those that have had that status since September 2012):
  - the entire analysis group: sponsored secondary or all-through academies in chains which have been consistently in the same chain since September 2012 (N = 187);
  - solo sponsored secondary academies: those not in a chain or pair which were under the same sponsor throughout the period from September 2012, and had attainment data for each year (N=59);
- all London secondary schools (N = 425): attainment in London is higher than in other regions. Some academy chains are based entirely in London, and their attainment is perhaps more usefully compared to London schools' attainment rather than that of all mainstream schools.

Chain-level characteristics have been collected from published data. These include the composition of the chain and the characteristics of pupils in the analysis group of academies in the chain (such as percentage of disadvantaged pupils). These are again the weighted average of the figures for each school in the chain.

The main indicator of disadvantage we have used is the DfE definition. Disadvantaged pupils include all those known to be eligible for free school meals in the previous six years, those recorded as having been looked after for at least one day and those recorded as having been adopted from care.<sup>56 57</sup> This is the group that is eligible for the government's pupil premium.

## 2.3 Limitations

Research focusing on academy chains is inevitably limited by the ongoing and rapid growth in the number of academies and chains. An analysis of past attainment has to focus on the chains and schools that existed a few years ago. This is necessary so that pupils will have experienced a sufficient part of their education within the chain, and attainment can fairly be attributed to the work of the academy and the chain (rather than to the predecessor school). While in June 2015 there were 128 chains with at least three schools including a secondary sponsored academy, only 39 of these met the criteria to be part of our analysis group.

Moreover, of the 39 chains included in our analysis, 13 had only two secondary academies open throughout the period we are analysing. This is obviously a limitation. One school having particular difficulties could change the chain's data substantially. On the other hand, if researchers do not analyse chain performance until a chain has had at least three schools for at least three academic years, very large numbers of pupils would have benefited or been disadvantaged before this attracted attention. Some of the newer chains have already grown substantially, yet only two of their schools have existed long enough to be included in this analysis. We have italicised the names of these 13 chains throughout the text of the report and on tables so that readers are clear which they are. On graphs we have the names of the larger chains in capitals to show the distinction.

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<sup>56</sup> DfE (2016b).

<sup>57</sup> Crawford & Greaves (2013) examined a range of indicators of educational disadvantage, and concluded that the most effective was eligibility for Free School Meals at any time in the last *three* years; however, this is not available on the school performance tables.

This research focuses entirely on sponsored academies. Sponsored academies are deliberately the focus because part of the rationale for creating them was that they would improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.

## **2.4 Structure of the report**

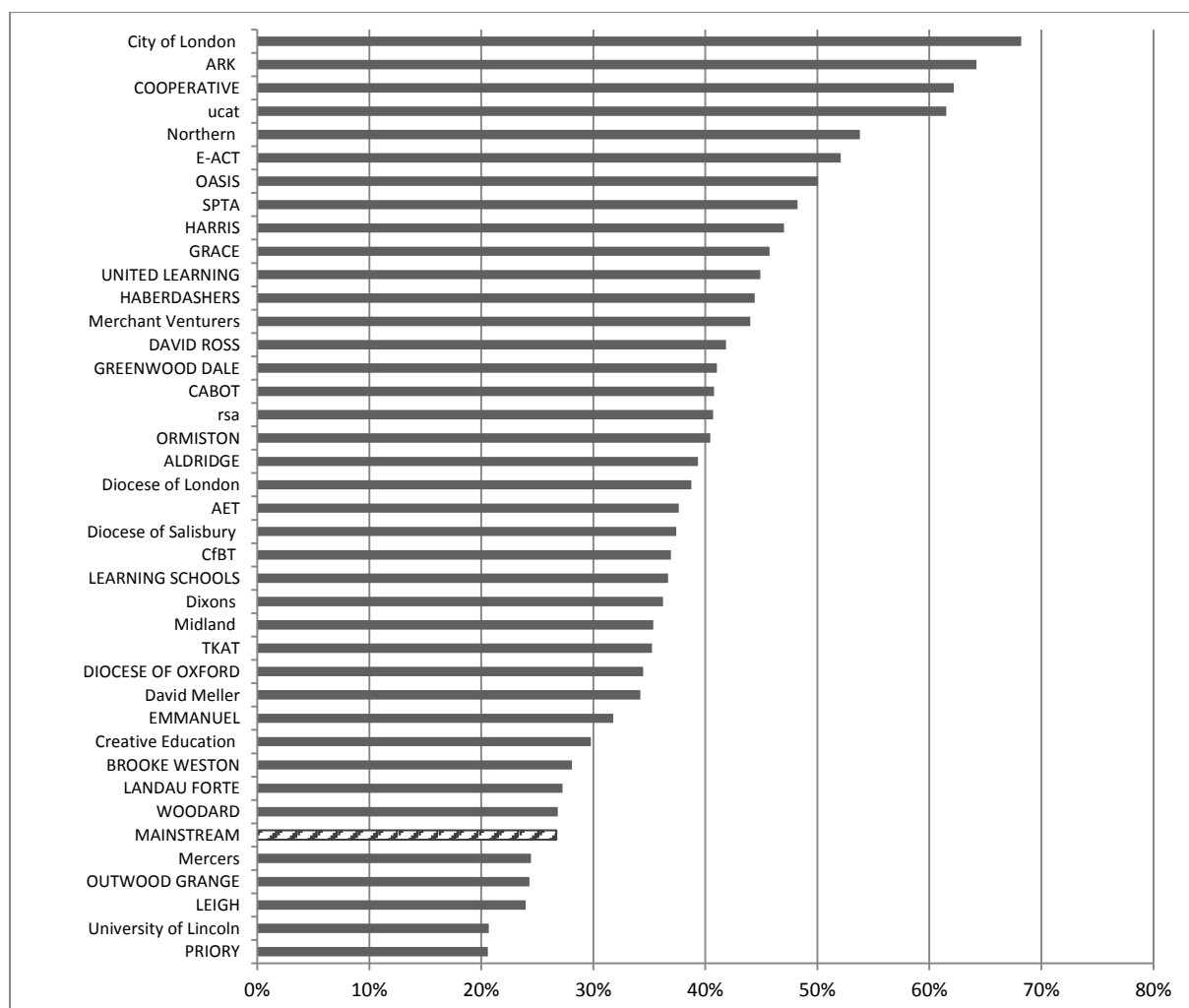
In the next section, we review various characteristics of the chains that may impact on their performance. After that, we analyse the attainment of disadvantaged pupils within the analysis group, identifying the chains that over the period from September 2012 to June 2015 have been most effective in relation to improving disadvantaged pupils' attainment. We then review the characteristics of the most and least successful chains. The final section discusses the findings.

### 3 Chain characteristics that may impact on attainment

This section identifies a range of chain characteristics that may impact on attainment. When comparing the attainment of pupils in different schools, pupil characteristics have been identified as particularly important. These characteristics include gender and ethnicity, socio-economic and social class background (as indicated by wealth, level of parental education, and so on), and also birth date within the school year, as well as prior attainment.<sup>58</sup> It is important to note, however, that while pupils with certain characteristics tend to attain less well, this is not inevitable. Some schools 'buck the trend'. A key aspect of the creation of sponsored academies was the assumption that they would 'break the cycle of disadvantage'.<sup>59</sup>

The **pupil intakes of schools** within the analysis group of chains vary considerably. Figure 2 illustrates this for the proportion of disadvantaged pupils, the specific focus of this report. Nationally, 27% of all pupils taking GCSEs were defined as 'disadvantaged'; the figures for the analysis group of chains varied from 20% to almost 70%.

**Figure 2: Percentage of Year 11 students in each chain in analysis group who are disadvantaged (2015)<sup>60</sup>**



Source: Authors' analysis based on School Performance Tables<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup> For commentary on the impact of some of these factors on pupil attainment, see Lupton et al. (2009); Strand (2014); Education Select Committee (2014).

<sup>59</sup> See Blunkett (2000).

<sup>60</sup> The pupil characteristics of chains given in Figure 2 and 3 are calculated as the weighted average of the school level proportions given in the DfE School Performance Tables.

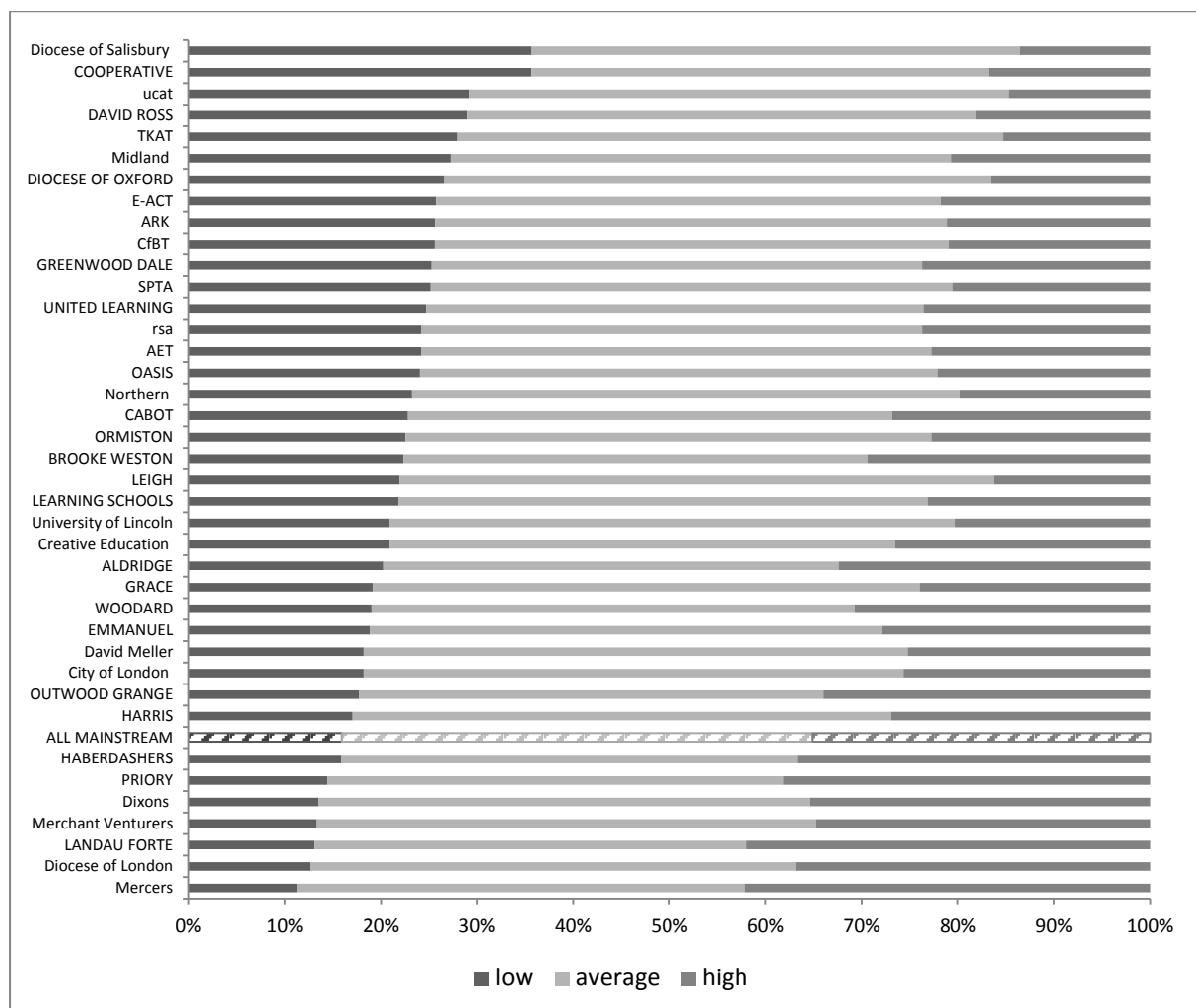
This shows that, by and large, the sponsored academies within these chains were retaining their intended purpose of serving disproportionately disadvantaged demographics (including a few with more than twice the national percentage of disadvantaged students).

Another important pupil characteristic is prior attainment. The DfE statistics distinguish three groups of pupils; those whose attainment at Key Stage 2 (KS2, normally the end of primary schooling) was average (they achieved Level 4 in National Curriculum tests); below average (achieved below Level 4) and above average (achieved Level 5 or above). In 2015, the percentages of pupils in each of these groups achieving 5A\*CEM at age 16 varied widely.<sup>62</sup>

Primary attainment	% nationally who achieved 5A*CEM
Low	6.7
Average	51.9
High	91.1

Figure 3 shows the proportions of pupils whose attainment was low, average and high in each chain:

**Figure 3: Proportions of pupils in each academy chain whose prior attainment was low, average and high taking GCSE in 2015**



Source: Authors' analysis based on School Performance Tables

<sup>61</sup> DfE (2016e).

<sup>62</sup> DfE (2016b).

We can see from Figure 3 that most chains include higher than average numbers of pupils with low prior attainment, and, generally, lower numbers of pupils with high prior attainment. However, the proportion with low prior attainment varies between chains, ranging from just 11% of pupils to 36%. At the level of the individual academy within our analysis group, the range is even greater (from 1% of pupils to 44%).

Thus pupil characteristics pose very varied levels of challenge to the chains in the analysis group. Two chains – *Mercers* and the *Priory* – have lower percentages than the national figures of both disadvantaged pupils and those with low prior attainment, so it might be expected that their attainment at GCSE level would be above average. At the other extreme, *Cooperative* and *UCAT* academies in the analysis group face very high levels of challenge.

We recognise that pupil characteristics are not easily summed up in metrics; there is undoubtedly a difference in outlook and prospects between disadvantaged pupils living in a depressed area where long-term unemployment is endemic and those living in a more affluent area where it is possible to get jobs.<sup>63</sup> The challenges facing schools will differ in each case. Thus we are not suggesting that all disadvantaged pupils, or all those with low prior attainment are the same. But we need to use definitions that enable us to distinguish between groups of pupils; recognising that this may oversimplify reality.

In our first report, we reviewed many other chain characteristics that might potentially impact on a chain's success. These included:

- the history and growth of the chain;
- the total number of schools;
- the form the chain takes (multi-academy trust, umbrella trust or looser configuration);
- the nature of the sponsor (e.g. successful school, business, diocese, faith or non-faith based charitable organisation, corporate sponsor, further or higher education institution, philanthropic individual);
- the geographical distribution of the schools (nationally dispersed or within a specific area);
- whether the chain is concentrated in London, where average attainment across all types of school is consistently higher than it is outside London;
- the characteristics of the schools prior to becoming academies (while the majority were 'failing' schools, some were city technology colleges or independent schools and others are new schools);
- the mix of schools within the chain (many chains include converter academies as well as sponsored; and primary as well as secondary);
- the leadership of the chain including the degree of central direction and the arrangements for school improvement;
- the extent to which individual schools have additional sponsors not listed on the DfE list.

A more detailed discussion of all these factors can be found in our first report.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Sammons et al. (2014).

<sup>64</sup> Hutchings, Francis & De Vries (2014).

## 4 Overview of analysis group chains and schools at the end of the 2014-15 academic year

The main analysis in this report focuses on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. This short section gives an overview of how successful the chains in our analysis group have been against a range of accountability measures.

### 4.1 Ofsted

First we consider the most recent Ofsted overall judgement for the school (as at 31 August 2015).<sup>65</sup>

**Table 5: Ofsted: most recent overall effectiveness judgement as at 31 August 2015**

	Outstanding %	Good %	RI %	Inadequate %
Schools in our analysis group	16	45	27	12
All secondary schools <sup>66</sup>	21	53	21	5

Table 5 shows that a higher proportion of schools in the analysis group were judged as Requires Improvement (RI) or Inadequate than the national average; 12% of them were rated Inadequate compared to 5% of all secondary schools. Sponsored academies are, of course, schools facing particular challenges, often with a history of low attainment often including poor Ofsted grades. However, given that all the academies in our analysis group had been academies for at least three years, and some very much longer, and sponsored academies are intended to receive particular support in improving, it is surprising that nearly four in ten of these academies is not yet regarded as Good by Ofsted.

Table 6 shows that in 14 of the 39 chains, the average Ofsted grade was between 1 and 2 (at, or better than, Good), and in nine of these *all* the academies in the analysis group were rated Good or Outstanding. At the other extreme, there were eight chains in which the average Ofsted grade was between 3 and 4 (at, or worse than, RI) and in four of these *all* the academies in the analysis group were rated RI or Inadequate) (Table 3).

**Table 6: Chains grouped by Ofsted's most recent judgement for overall effectiveness as at 31 August 2015 (academies in the analysis group only)**

Average inspection grade at or above Good	Average inspection grade at or below Requires Improvement
ARK	<i>Diocese of Salisbury</i>
Cabot	E-ACT
CfBT	Grace
<i>City of London</i>	Learning Schools
<i>Diocese of London</i>	<i>Midland</i>
Haberdashers	TKAT
Harris	UCAT
Landau Forte	Woodard
Leigh	
<i>Mercers</i>	
<i>Merchant Venturers</i>	
Outwood Grange	
RSA	
<i>University of Lincoln</i>	

<sup>65</sup> Ofsted (2015a). For inspections that took place after 31 August 2015, the previous inspection outcome was used.

<sup>66</sup> Ofsted (2015b).

The Education and Adoption Act (2016) makes it clear that in future every school failing to meet government benchmarks will be turned into an academy.<sup>67</sup> This was justified by the claim that

Hundreds of schools, often in disadvantaged areas, are already being turned around thanks to the help of strong academy sponsors - education experts who know exactly what they have to do to make a failing school outstanding.<sup>68</sup>

Following a House of Commons debate as the Bill progressed through Parliament, this stipulation was extended to academies. This implies increasing movement in the sponsor academies landscape as those academies that are rated Inadequate are moved to other 'stronger' sponsors.

#### **4.2 Attainment: Floor standards**

A second way of considering the overall standing of a chain is by the number of schools below the floor standard in 2015. A school was deemed to be below floor if:

1. Less than 40 per cent of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 achieved five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grade A\* to C, including English and mathematics GCSEs (5A\*CEM)

*and*

2. The proportion of pupils making expected progress in English and mathematics was below the median percentage for all state-funded mainstream school. The median school score for pupils making expected progress in English was 73% and in mathematics was 68% in 2014/5.<sup>69</sup>

However, from 2016 Progress 8 will be used, and in 2015, schools could opt to be judged on their Progress 8 score rather than the measure above. Of the 187 academies in the analysis group, 17 opted for Progress 8.

Nationally 11% of secondary schools were below the floor standard in 2015. Of the 187 sponsored academies in the analysis group, 42 (22%) were below floor in 2015.

Nineteen of the 39 chains had a least one school (that is, one school that had been consistently part of the chain for at least three years) below the floor standard.

#### **4.3 Attainment: Coasting schools**

In the Education and Adoption Bill the Conservative government refer to coasting schools, which, under the provision of the Bill, will be eligible for intervention. A coasting school has been defined as one which falls below a new 'coasting' level for three years. 'In 2014 and 2015 that level will be set at 60% of pupils achieving five good GCSEs or an above-average proportion of pupils making acceptable progress. From 2016, the level will be set based on Progress 8.'<sup>70</sup>

We have reviewed the number of schools in the analysis group which would fall into the coasting category in both 2014 and 2015 (though recognise that the intention is to judge over the results from three years). Of the 187 academies in the analysis group, 66 (35%) were below the 'coasting level' in 2014 and 26 of the 39 chains had one or more schools in this group.

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<sup>67</sup> UK Parliament (2016).

<sup>68</sup> DfE (2015e).

<sup>69</sup> DfE (2016b).

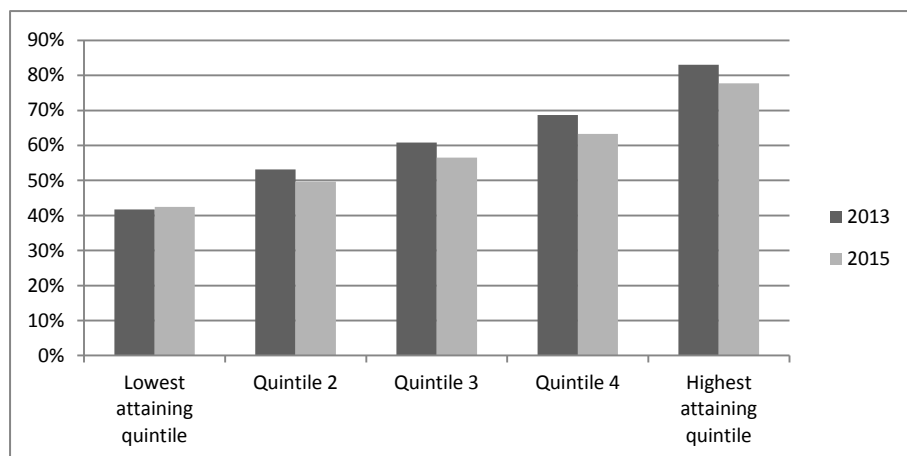
<sup>70</sup> DfE (2015f).



#### 4.4 Improvement 2013-15

Previous sections focused on 2015 attainment. It is also useful to consider changes over time. Most sponsored academies were created from ‘failing’ schools with low attainment, so their focus must be on improving attainment in each successive year. Nationally, schools with low initial attainment show greater improvement over time, whereas those with high initial attainment tend to worsen. This is represented on Figure 4 which divides all schools nationally into five groups and shows the average change for each group between 2013 and 2015.<sup>71</sup>

**Figure 4: Percentage of all pupils in all mainstream schools achieving 5A\*CEM, 2013 and 2015, by 2013 quintile**



We have used this notion to review how much each chain’s overall performance changed between 2013 and 2015. In 2013, two-thirds of the chains in our analysis were in the lowest two quintiles – which reflects the origin of sponsored academies as low-attaining schools

**Table 7: Change 2013-15 in the performance of chains in the analysis group on 5A\*CEM in comparison to change for all mainstream schools, by quintile (within bands, chains are ranked alphabetically)**

Change 2013-15, compared to quintile average	Quintile 1 (lowest attaining quintile in 2013)	Quintile 2	Quintile 3	Quintile 4	Quintile 5 (highest attaining quintile in 2013)
<i>Significantly better</i>					<i>Dio London</i>
<i>Slightly better</i>	Grace Landau Forte	Brooke Weston United Learning <i>Uni Lincoln</i> Emmanuel	ARK <i>Creative Ed</i> <i>City of London</i>	Priory	Outwood Grange
<i>Average</i>	Cabot Cooperative Dio Oxford TKAT			<i>Merchant Venturers</i>	
<i>Slightly worse</i>	E-Act Learning Schools SPTA <i>UCAT</i> Woodard	AET Aldridge CfBT <i>David Meller</i> David Ross <i>Northern</i> Oasis Ormiston	<i>Dixons</i> Haberdashers RSA	Harris <i>Mercers</i>	
<i>Significantly worse</i>	<i>Dio of Salisbury</i>	Greenwood Dale <i>Midland</i>		Leigh	

<sup>71</sup> As a result of the changes to examinations and performance tables, the graph shows that only those with the lowest attainment in 2013 had, on average, higher attainment in 2015 than in 2013.

Table 7 shows that less than a third of academy chains in the analysis group have shown greater improvement than schools nationally that had similar initial attainment. A majority of the chains showed less improvement than similar schools nationally, and four of them were significantly worse. In particular, a majority of the chains with below-average 2013 attainment (in quintiles 1 and 2) improved less than those schools with comparable attainment nationally. This is worrying, since the rationale for changing a low-attaining school into a sponsored academy is to ensure that it has strong support from school improvement experts and therefore improves rapidly.

#### **4.5 Variability within chains**

In this report, the unit of analysis is the academy chain. However, it should not be assumed that schools within each chain are necessarily similar to each other. There is considerable variability within some chains in terms of their Ofsted outcomes and attainment. There is also wide variation in most chains in the characteristics of the intake of each academy and the attainment figures.

These differences tend to reflect the different routes through which schools became sponsored academies; some of the original sponsored academies were private schools or former City Technology Colleges and some had been high-attaining state schools but had chosen to become academies before conversion was possible. In most, but not all cases, these schools still have much higher attainment than the former 'failing' schools. Where chains are relatively small, this does skew the overall attainment figures we are using. Another historical difference is between academies that were former failing schools and academies that were created as new schools (today the latter would be termed Free Schools).

#### **4.6 Overview: summary**

This overview highlights considerable variation within and across the chains in our analysis group. Some appear to be flourishing, with good Ofsted grades, schools above the floor target and coasting level, and improving more than others with similar initial attainment. But others are failing to improve, even moving backward relative to the mainstream average. The next section considers how this variation impacts on disadvantaged pupils.

## 5 Outcomes for disadvantaged and under-attaining pupils

Some 27% of those taking GCSEs in 2015 were disadvantaged (see definition in Section 2.2.2).

**Table 8: Attainment at GCSE for disadvantaged pupils, 2015**

	No of eligible pupils	5A*CEM %
Disadvantaged pupils	151,193	36.7
All other pupils	402,026	64.7
Attainment gap		28.0

Source: DfE (2016a).

We review the attainment of disadvantaged pupils on four key measures:

- five or more A\*-C grades in GCSE or equivalent qualifications including English and mathematics GCSE (5A\*CEM);
- pupil progress during their secondary school career in mathematics and English;
- average (capped) point score (with and without equivalents); and
- the English Baccalaureate (EBacc).

Further details of these measures can be found in Appendix 1, together with information about Progress 8 which will become the main measure to be used in school performance tables from 2016.

As explained in Section 1.2, changes to qualification and to performance tables mean that overall, the percentage achieving 5A\*CEM was lower in 2015 than it had been in 2013.

In this section, we also analyse data relating to pupils whose attainment at primary schools was below the expected level (Level 4). Such pupils are disproportionately from disadvantaged groups. Nationally, only 7% of the low prior attainment group achieved 5A\*CEM in 2014. We review how successful the analysis group of academy chains have been in producing better outcomes for these pupils.

### 5.1 Five A\*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent

#### 5.1.1 Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected level

Figure 4 shows the mean school percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving 5 A\*CEM in 2013 and 2015 in all mainstream schools and in various other groups.

We have compared the outcomes in sponsored academies, converter academies and local authority maintained (LA) schools (in each case including only those that have had that status for three years).<sup>72</sup> Unsurprisingly the converter academies have the highest results, reflecting their success before conversion, and sponsored academies the lowest, which reflects the fact that the majority of them originated from 'failing' schools.

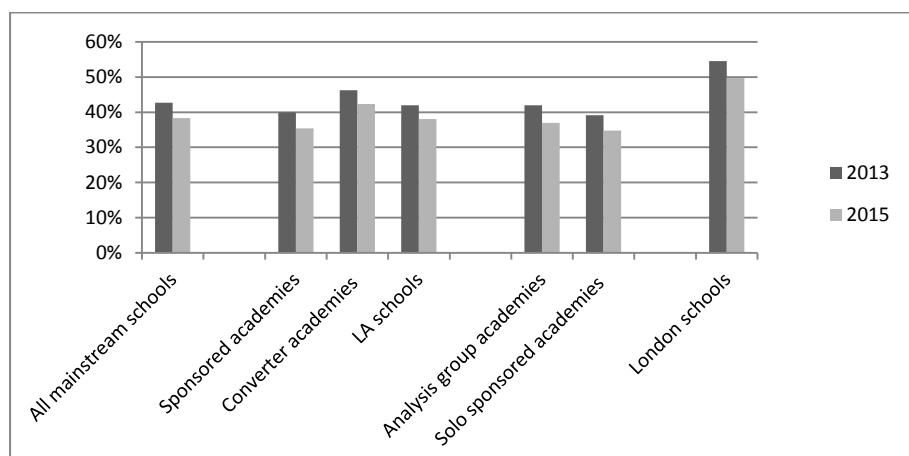
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<sup>72</sup> Local authority maintained schools include community, voluntary aided, voluntary controlled and foundation schools currently funded through the local authority.

Figure 4 also compares the analysis group of academies in chains with solo or stand-alone academies (again including only those with that status for three years) and suggests, as our previous reports have done, that those in chains have slightly higher attainment for disadvantaged pupils. We cannot tell whether this relates to membership of a chain or to other characteristics.

Finally, the results for all London schools are included. Later in the report we consider whether the performance of academy chains in London reflects, or indeed, contributes to, the general London effect.

**Figure 4: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving 5A\*CEM, 2013 and 2015**

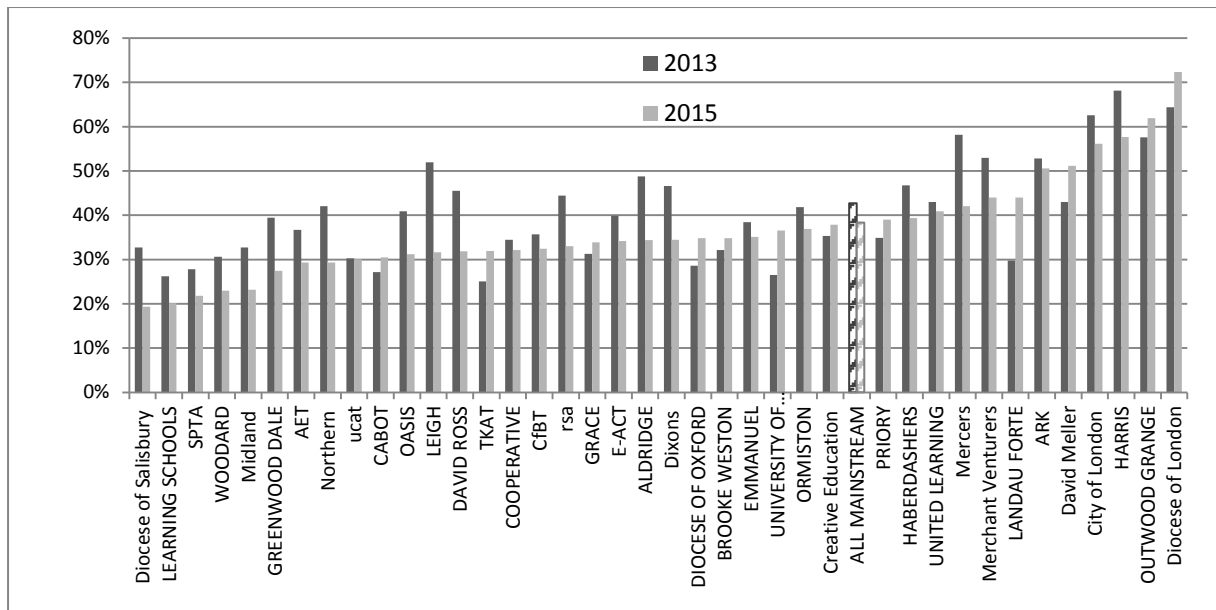


Source: Authors' analysis based on School Performance Tables.<sup>73</sup> Note that in this, and subsequent graphs of this type, the four academy groups include only schools that have had that status continually for three years.

Figure 5 shows the mean percentage of disadvantaged pupils in sponsored academies reaching the expected level in each of the chains in the analysis group in 2013 and 2015. In 2012, there was considerable variation across chains. This may relate to the previous history of the schools in the chain, how long they had been academies, attainment in their predecessor schools, or other factors. But the extent to which this figure had increased or decreased by 2014 clearly reflects the effectiveness of the strategies of the chain and the schools that make up the chain in bringing about improvement in the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

<sup>73</sup> The analysis of attainment is entirely based on data from the School Performance Tables; thus we have not repeated the source under each figure.

**Figure 5: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving 5A\*CEM, 2013 and 2015**

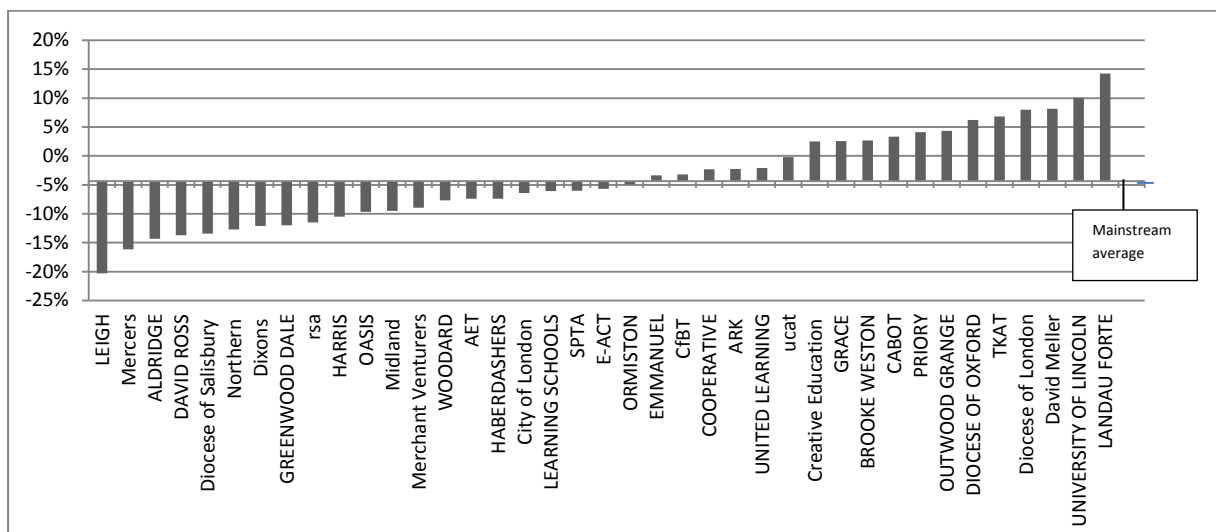


Note: on this and subsequent graphs, those chains shown in capital letters have three or more schools included in the analysis, while those in lower case have only two.

The chains with the highest proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieving 5A\*CEM in 2015 were the *Diocese of London*, *Outwood Grange*, *Harris* and *City of London*.

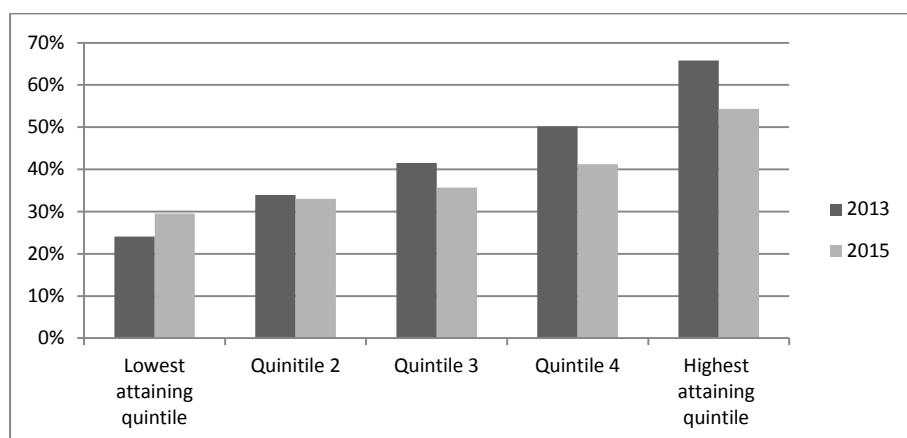
Our main focus is on the change between 2013 and 2015 compared with the change nationally. Figure 6 shows that in 2015 about half the chains in our analysis group showed either greater improvement (or less fall) in attainment than all mainstream schools (for example, *Landau Forte*, *University of Lincoln*, *David Meller*), while the other half showed a relative decline in results for their disadvantaged students (e.g. *Leigh*, *Mercers*, *Aldridge*).

**Figure 6: Change in percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving 5A\*CEM between 2013 and 2015 compared with change for all mainstream schools nationally**



It would be expected that those with the lowest initial attainment would show the greatest improvement, because it is clearly easier to improve from a low baseline. This is also the pattern normally found: on average, low attaining schools always show greater improvement than high attaining schools. This was illustrated in the quintile analysis for all pupils in Section 3.4. Here we repeat the same analysis, but using only attainment of disadvantaged pupils. This is illustrated in Figure 7. All mainstream schools have been divided into five groups (quintiles) on the basis of the 2013 percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving 5A\*CEM. Figure 7 shows the mean 2013 and 2015 attainment for the schools in each quintile, together with the mean improvement made. While the average percentage achieving 5A\*CEM increased by 5% in the lowest quintile, the three highest achieving quintiles of schools had a lower percentage of pupils achieving 5A\*CEM in 2015 than was the case in 2013.

**Figure 7: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils in all mainstream schools achieving 5A\*CEM, 2013 and 2015, by 2013 quintile**



If we then review the performance of the analysis group of chains in this light, it is possible to identify those that improved outcomes for disadvantaged pupils less or more than schools with comparable 2013 attainment (Table 9). This analysis shows that while in 15 chains, improvement between 2013 and 2015 has been above the mainstream average for schools with similar 2013 attainment, 18 chains have shown below average improvement on this measure. That so many are below average is a concern when the rationale for sponsored academies is that they will improve more rapidly than LA maintained schools.

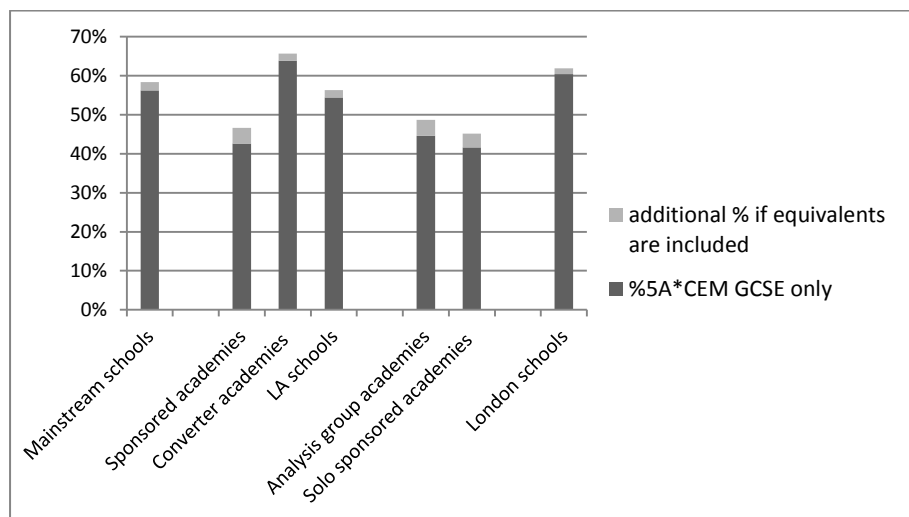
**Table 9: Change 2013-15 in the performance of chains in the analysis group on 5A\*CEM for disadvantaged pupils in comparison to change for all mainstream schools, by quintile (within bands, chains are ranked alphabetically)**

Change 2013-15, compared to quintile average	Quintile 1 (lowest attaining quintile in 2013)	Quintile 2	Quintile 3	Quintile 4	Quintile 5 (highest attaining, quintile in 2013)
<i>Significantly better</i>			<i>David Meller</i>		<i>Dio London</i> <i>Outwood Grange</i>
<i>Slightly better</i>	Landau Forte TKAT <i>Uni Lincoln</i>	Brooke Weston <i>Creative Education</i> Grace Priory	Emmanuel United Learning	ARK Haberdashers	<i>City of London</i>
<i>Average</i>	Dio Oxford	<i>UCAT</i>	E-ACT Ormiston	<i>Merchant Vs</i>	Harris
<i>Slightly worse</i>	Cabot Learning Schools SPTA	AET CfBT Co-operative <i>Midland</i> Woodard	Greenwood Dale <i>Northern</i> Oasis RSA	Aldridge David Ross <i>Dixons</i> Leigh	<i>Mercers</i>
<i>Significantly worse</i>		<i>Dio. of Salisbury</i>			

Previous research on sponsored academies has drawn attention to the extent to which some have relied on alternative 'equivalent' qualifications, rather than GCSEs, to boost attainment figures.<sup>74</sup> It is clearly important that some high quality vocationally oriented courses are included in the curriculum, and that these may serve to engage less academic pupils. However, it is a concern if pupils are encouraged to take such subjects to enhance their school's position on the league tables, rather than to benefit the pupils themselves.<sup>75</sup> Concerned about the extent to which equivalent qualifications were taken, the Coalition government vastly reduced the number of equivalent qualifications that would count for the 2014 league tables, leaving only those that demonstrate rigour and have a track record of taking young people into good jobs and higher education.<sup>76</sup>

While the school performance tables give the overall percentage of 5A\*CEM GCSEs only (without equivalents), this is not provided for disadvantaged and other pupils. Changes to what counts in the league tables have brought about a dramatic reduction in use of equivalents, but sponsored academies continue to use them more (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Mean percentage of 5A\*CEM with and without equivalents, all pupils, 2015**



However, there was considerable variation between chains in this; *Northern, Creative Education, Brooke Weston* and *Leigh* had the highest use of equivalents. We will return to this issue in relation to the average point score, for which figures for disadvantaged pupils are available.

### 5.1.2 Pupils who are NOT disadvantaged reaching the expected level

In this section we turn to the other students in academies: those pupils who are not categorised as disadvantaged, a group we call the 'non-disadvantaged'. They are not the main focus of this report, but it is of interest to see whether the chains that have the highest attainment for disadvantaged pupils are equally successful with other pupils.

As in previous years, the attainment of pupils who were not disadvantaged was lower in sponsored academies than in mainstream schools. A key reason for this lower attainment may be that there is much greater economic diversity among those who are 'not disadvantaged' than there is among the disadvantaged group; sponsored academies are generally located in deprived areas where the families of 'non-disadvantaged' pupils may be only marginally better off than those classed as disadvantaged, and this may impact negatively on attainment. However, it is also possible that some

<sup>74</sup> National Audit Office (2010); Wrigley & Kalambuka (2012).

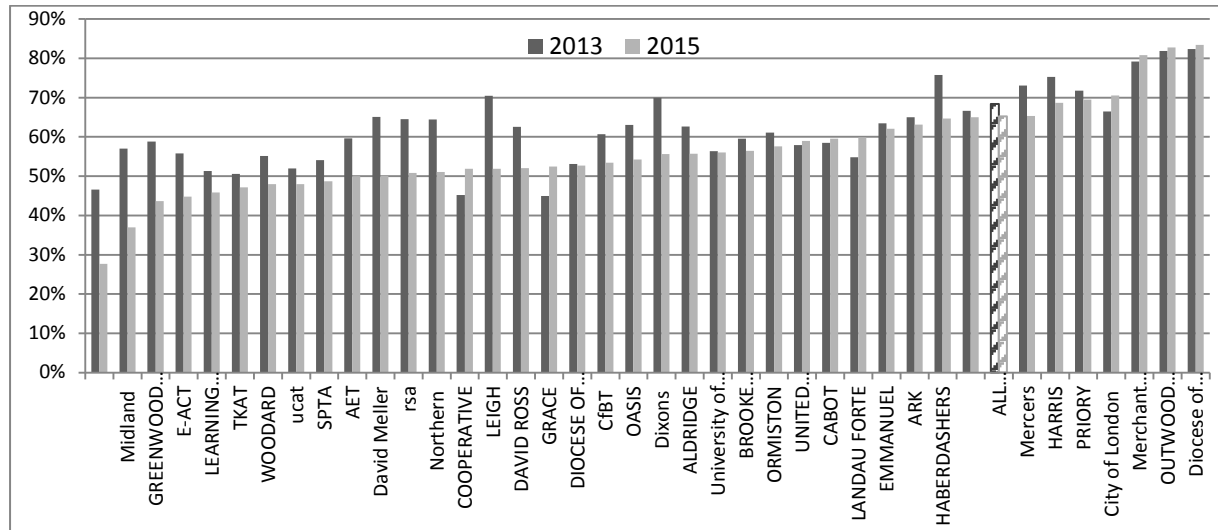
<sup>75</sup> Wolf (2012).

<sup>76</sup> DfE (2012).

sponsored academies are focusing most of their attention on disadvantaged pupils and neglecting those from more affluent backgrounds; this possibility will be examined by comparing the performance of disadvantaged and other pupils within each chain (the attainment gap).

Figure 10 shows the percentages of pupils who are not disadvantaged reaching the expected level in 2013 and 2015 and Figure 11 shows how this has changed, in comparison to the national change.

**Figure 10: Percentage of non-disadvantaged pupils achieving the expected level (5A\*CEM), 2013 and 2015**



**Figure 11: Change in percentage of non-disadvantaged pupils achieving 5A\*CEM between 2013 and 2015 compared with change for all mainstream schools nationally**

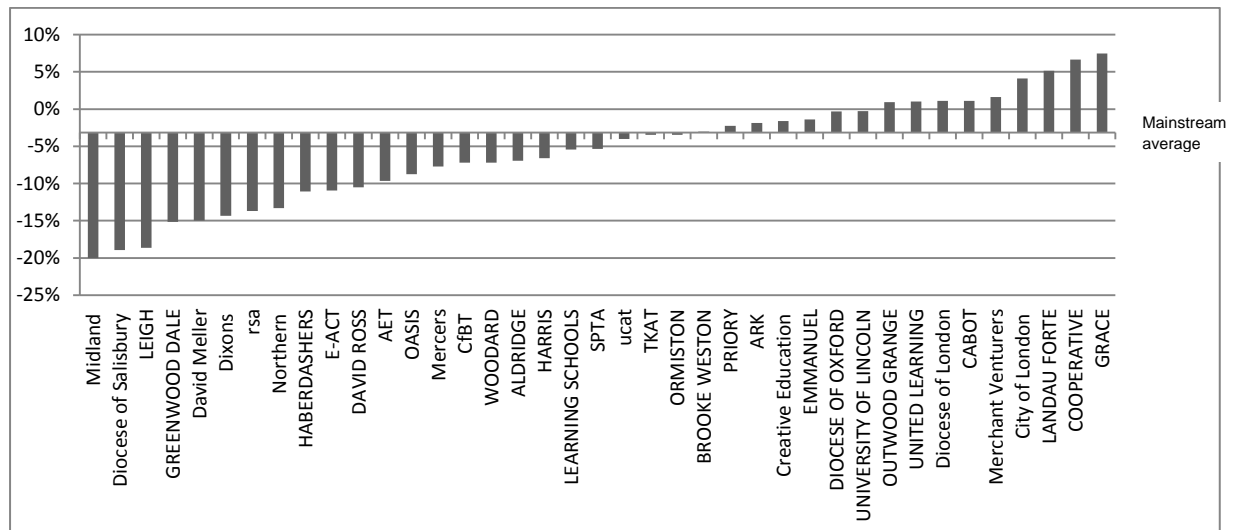


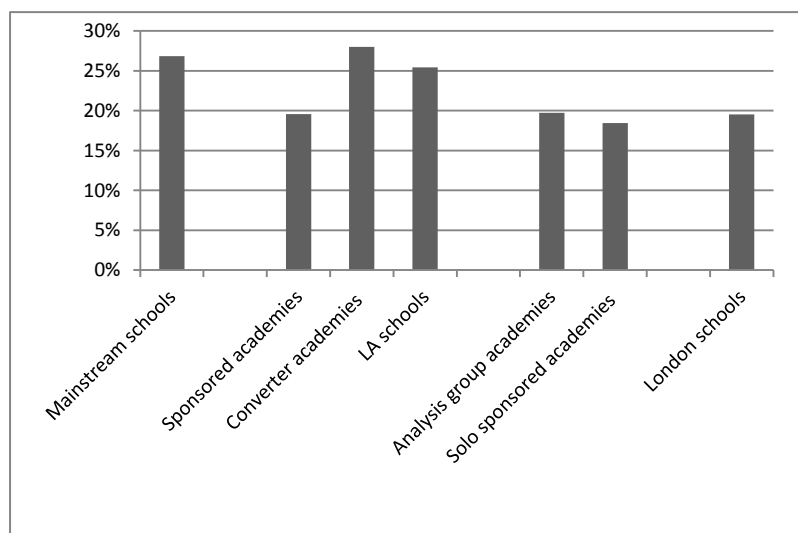
Figure 10 shows that some of the chains that achieved the best for disadvantaged pupils in 2015 were also among the most effective for those who are not disadvantaged. This relationship is generally expressed as the attainment gap, to which we now turn.



## 5.2 The attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils

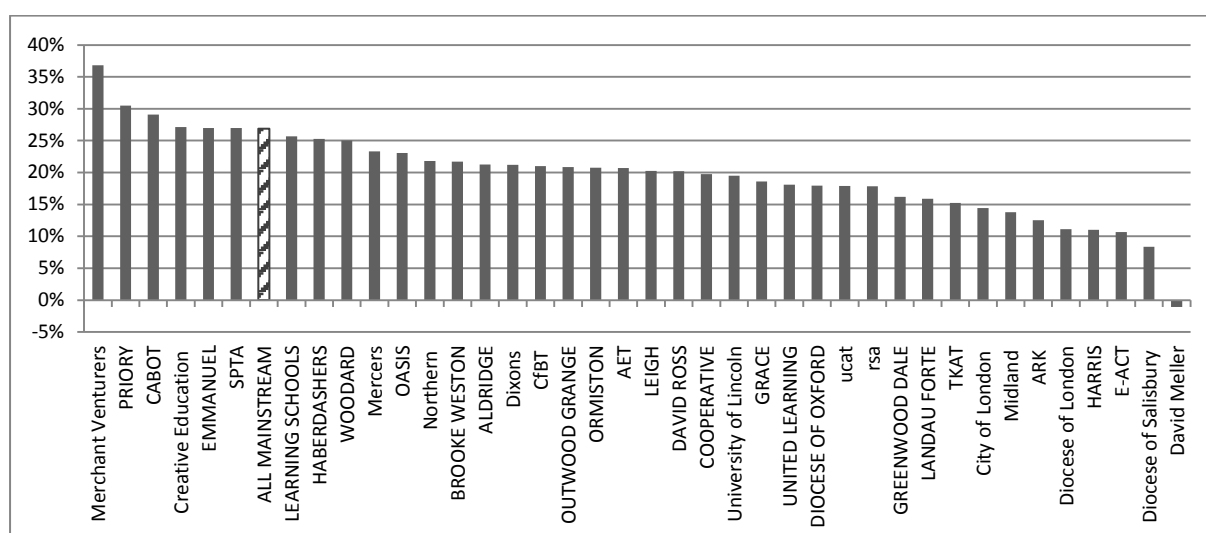
The attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers is a government impact indicator, and reducing the gap is a policy priority. The mean attainment gap in the academies in the analysis group was substantially smaller than the gap for all mainstream schools (19.7% v 26.9%).<sup>77</sup> This, and the pattern of gaps for other groups shown on Figure 12, is similar to that in our previous reports.

**Figure 12: Mean attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils, 2015**



Of more interest is the variation in the gap across academy chains; this ranged from 37% for one chain down to minus 1% in another (the non-disadvantaged pupils performing marginally better than their peers).

**Figure 13: Mean attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils in analysis group chains, 2015**



The pattern of gaps is similar to that recorded in our previous report; the same chains tend to have large or small gaps each year, though the small chains show greater fluctuation.

<sup>77</sup> The figures here refer to mainstream state-funded schools only (i.e. they exclude special schools). Thus they differ from those in the Introduction. Throughout the analysis special schools are excluded because the inclusion of one special school in a chain's results could, depending on the nature of the special school, have a significant impact.

While the size of the gap clearly matters, this figure is of little use without knowing the level of attainment of each group. There is little merit in having a small attainment gap if the non-disadvantaged pupils are underachieving. On Figure 14, therefore, we have mapped the percentages of disadvantaged and other pupils achieving 5A\*CEM in each chain, and also showed how they compare with the figures for all mainstream schools.

Figure 14: Percentage achieving 5A\*CEM: disadvantaged pupils compared to other pupils

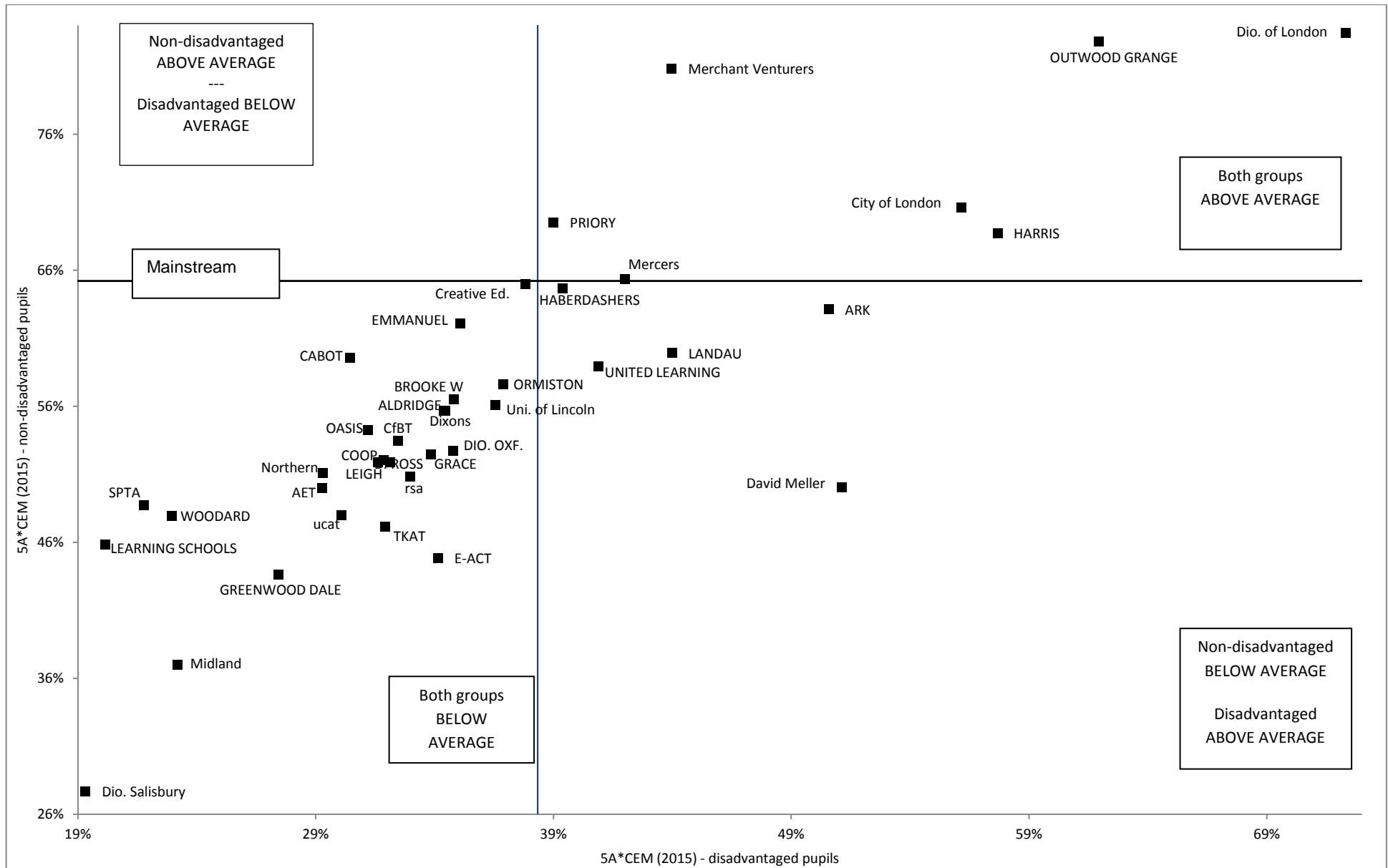
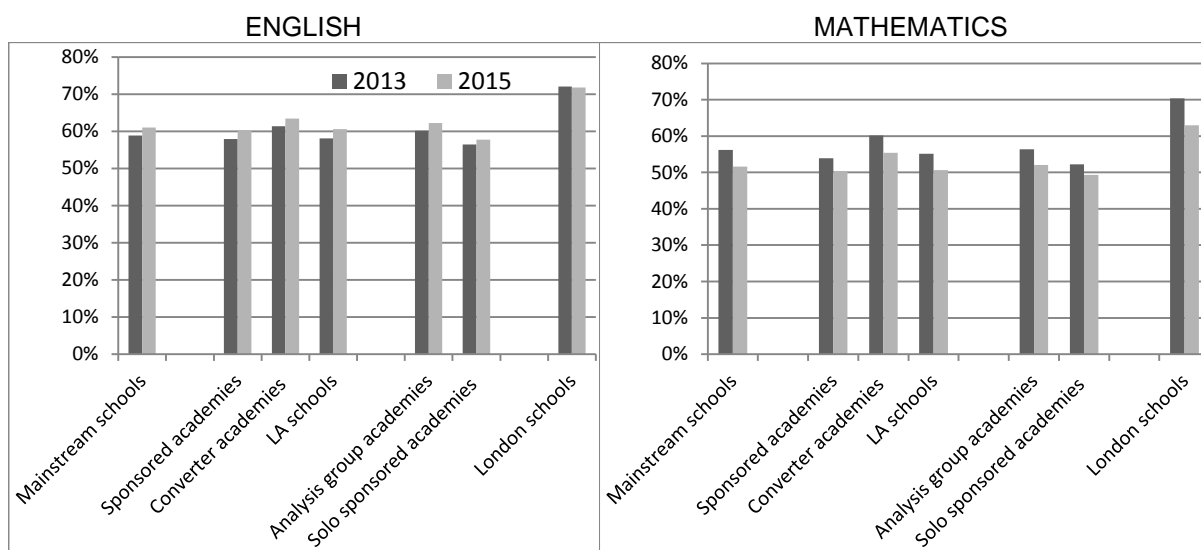


Figure 14 shows that there is a strong correlation between the attainment of disadvantaged and other pupils ( $R = 0.82$ ). Some chains do well for both groups, while others (the majority) are below average for both groups. Only a few chains lie outside this pattern: *David Meller* did comparatively better for disadvantaged pupils, and *Merchant Venturers* for those who are not disadvantaged (though in this chain both groups exceeded the mainstream average).

### 5.3 Progress in English and mathematics

Figure 15 shows that disadvantaged pupils in our analysis group made, on average, marginally better progress than did disadvantaged pupils in all mainstream schools or LA schools.

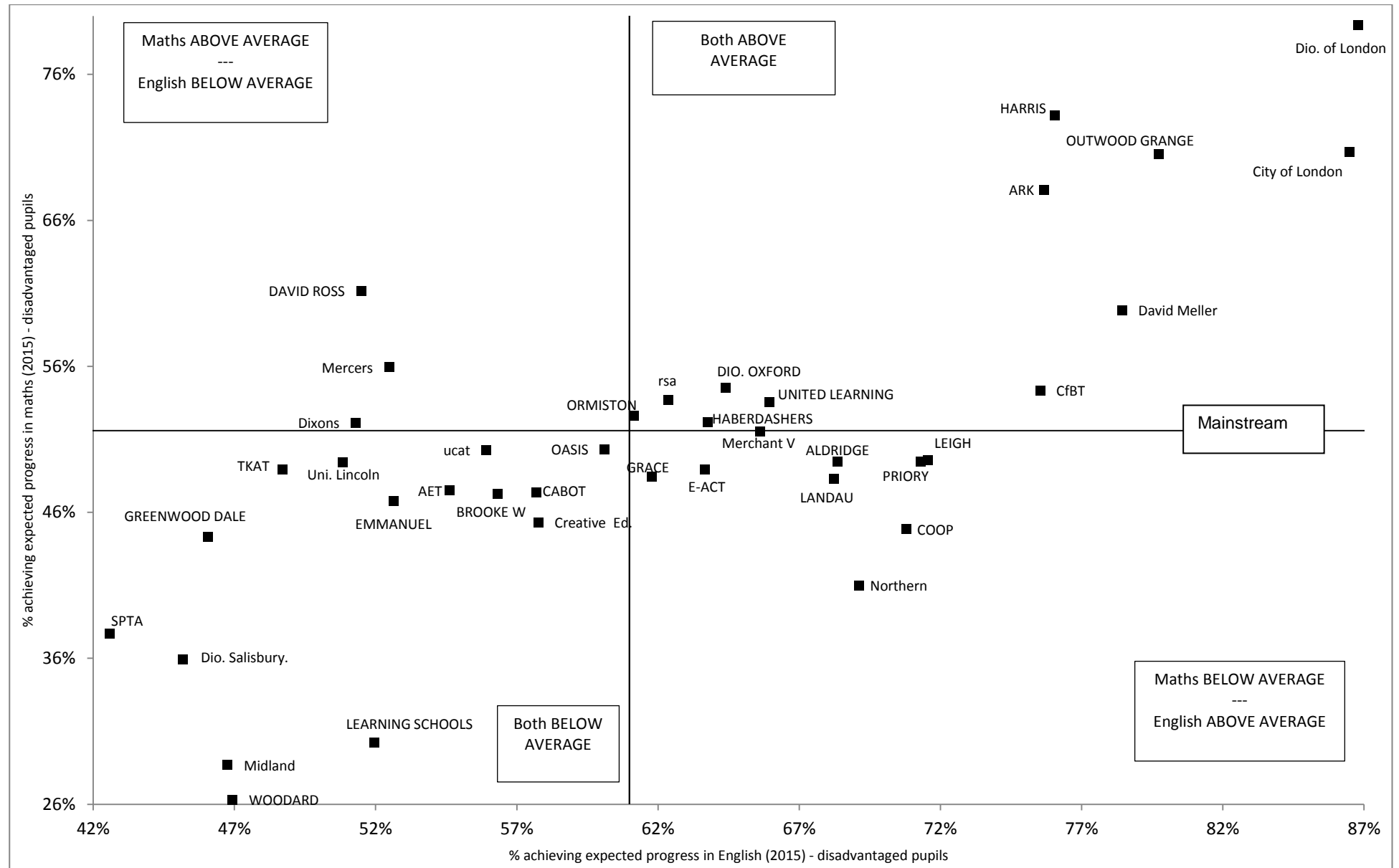
**Figure 15: Mean percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving expected progress, 2013 and 2015**



Since our analysis group is of schools that have been sponsored academies since September 2012, and have remained in the same chain throughout that period, it would be expected that the chain has had an impact on the progress of the pupils taking their GCSEs in 2015, as the majority of them will have spent three years in that chain. Yet for chains in the analysis group, Figure 16 shows a considerable difference between the highest and lowest proportions of disadvantaged pupils making expected progress in English and mathematics.

These figures show a less positive picture than in 2014: in 2015, 38% of chains were below average for both English and maths progress, compared with 26% in 2014. The chains in which the proportions of disadvantaged pupils making progress in English and mathematics are above average are generally those with high proportions of disadvantaged pupils achieving 5 A\*CEM: *Diocese of London*, *Harris*, *Outwood Grange*, *City of London* and *ARK* were the best. It is also encouraging to see some chains that were below average in one or both subjects last year improving this year: for example, *Diocese of Oxford*.

Figure 16: Mean percentage of disadvantaged pupils making expected progress in English compared to mathematics 2015



## 5.4 Average capped point score

### 5.4.1 Disadvantaged pupils' average capped point score

Capped point score, like 5A\*CEM, fell between 2013 and 2015 as a result of changes to the school performance tables. This decrease was greater in sponsored academies than in other types of school because of their previous reliance on equivalents.

**Figure 17: Average capped point score for disadvantaged pupils 2013 and 2015**

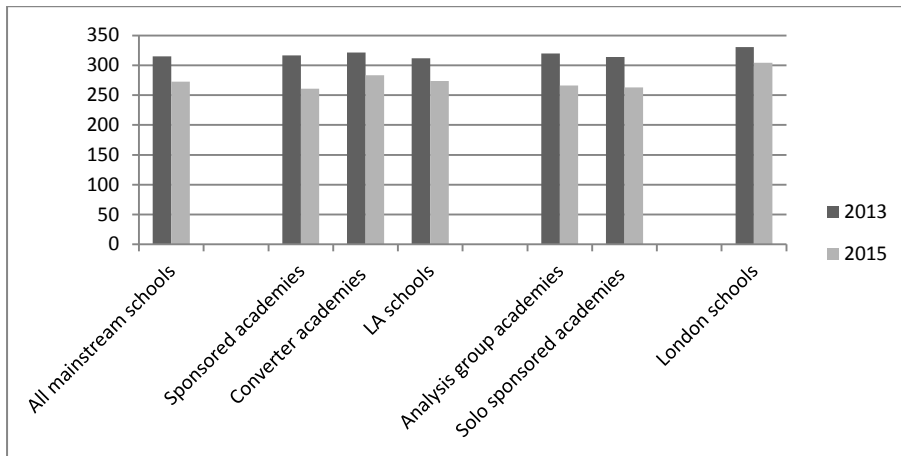
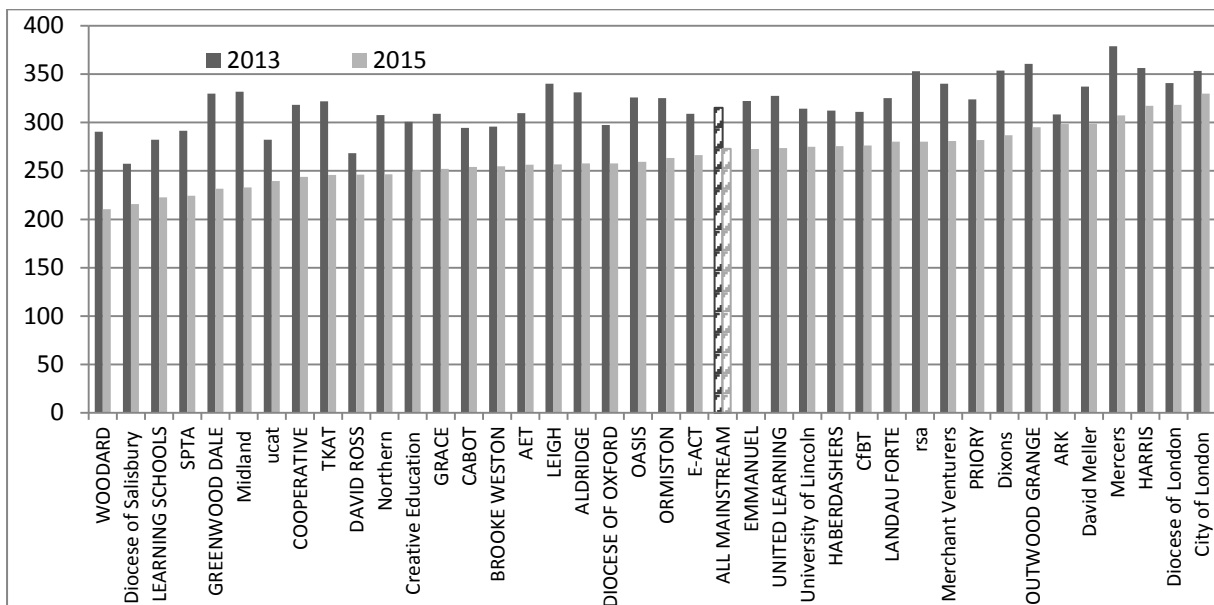


Figure 18 shows the 2013 and 2015 point scores for the analysis group chains.

**Figure 18: Average capped point score achieved by disadvantaged pupils, 2013 and 2015: chains in the analysis group**

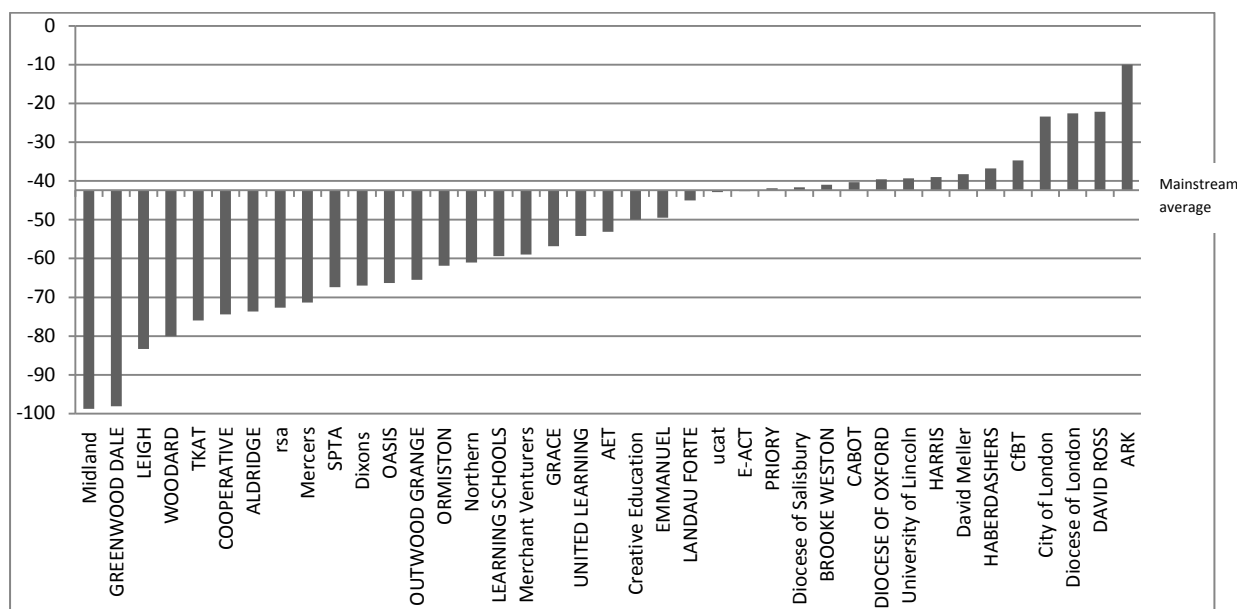


While almost every chain had very much lower point scores in 2015 than in 2013, the highest average capped point scores in 2015 were achieved by *City of London*, *Diocese of London*, *Harris* and

*Mercers*. Three of these chains also had the leading point scores in 2014; *Diocese of London* is included in the analysis for the first time.

Figure 19 shows the change in point scores for disadvantaged pupils between 2013 and 2015. All chains had lower point scores in 2015 than 2013; but four did very much better than the mainstream average, and ten more did marginally better.

**Figure 19: Change in point scores for disadvantaged pupils between 2013 and 2015 in comparison to mainstream schools**



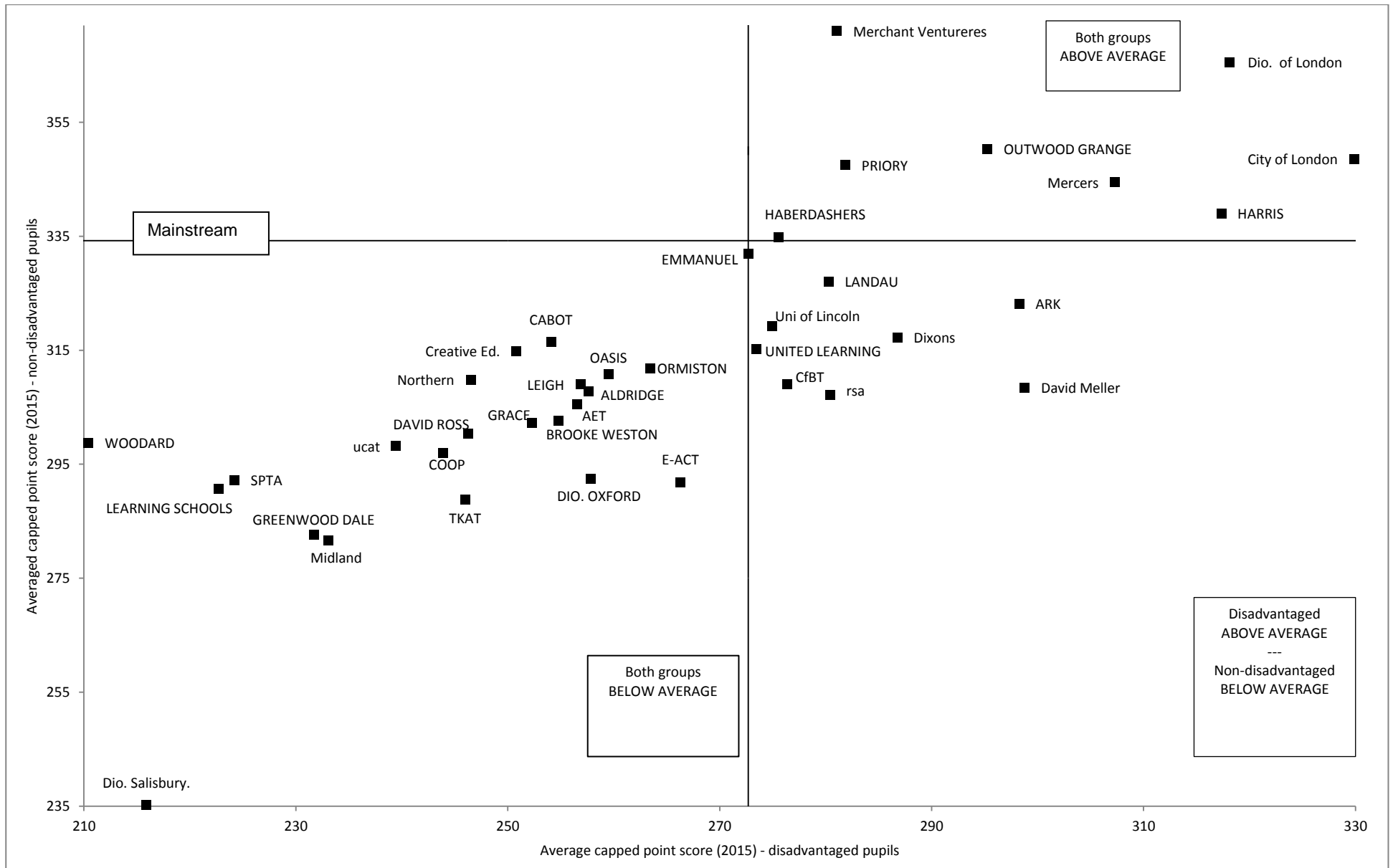
When we compare the mean percentage of pupils achieving 5A\*CEM and the mean average (capped) in score for each chain in the analysis group, there is a strong correlation. Both Outwood Grange and *Diocese of London* did markedly better on 5A\*CEM, suggesting a focus on that target.

#### 5.4.2 Non-disadvantaged pupils and the attainment gap using average capped point score

The average capped point score for those students who are not disadvantaged was also low in comparison to mainstream schools; only eight chains exceeded the average mainstream capped point score.

Figure 20 compares the attainment of disadvantaged and other pupils using average capped point score. It is thus comparable to Figure 14 which looked at the percentage reaching the expected level. It shows that more than half the chains are below the mainstream average for both groups, and just eight chains above for both groups. In the remaining chains the disadvantaged pupils achieve above the national average, but the other pupils do not. None of the chains had the reverse pattern (those who are not disadvantaged above average, disadvantaged below). This was also the case when considering 5A\*CEM.

Figure 20: Average (capped point score) - disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils, relative to the mean performance of these groups in mainstream schools





## 5.5 Average GCSE capped point score

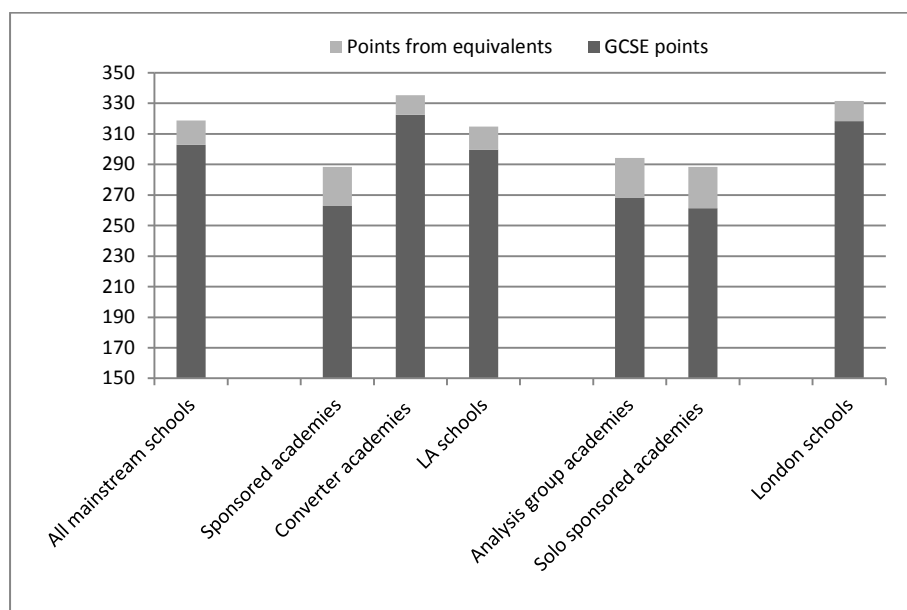
As discussed earlier, sponsored academies in general made much greater use of ‘equivalent’ qualifications, which boosted their position on league tables. In 2014, the least rigorous vocational qualifications could no longer be counted in the league tables, so overall, the proportion of points from equivalent qualifications dropped substantially. The decision to enter a student for vocational qualification may be in their best interest; however, as more equivalent qualifications will be dropped from the school performance tables over the next two years, use of these qualifications may reduce school scores.

The performance tables provide capped point score data with, and without, equivalents and break this down for disadvantaged and other pupils. This enables us to investigate:

- whether sponsored academies make above average use of equivalent qualifications;
- whether disadvantaged students are taking more equivalent qualifications than other students;
- whether some academy chains are using more equivalent qualifications – and whether this is disproportionately for disadvantaged students.

Figure 21 shows that on average, sponsored academies still gain more of their points from equivalent qualifications than mainstream schools, converter academies or London schools.

**Figure 21: Average capped point score 2015 with and without equivalents: all pupils**



The figures shown on Figure 21 represent a considerable reduction in the use of equivalent qualifications in the last two years, as shown on this table:

	<i>Percentage of points from equivalents</i>	
	Sponsored academies*	All mainstream schools
	%	%
2013	33	17
2014	13	7
2015	9	5

\*Sponsored academies that have had that status since Sept 2012

However, sponsored academies still use more than other types of school.

Using the capped point score data, we are able to investigate whether equivalents are disproportionately taken by disadvantaged pupils. Nationally, a higher proportion of the total point score of disadvantaged students came from equivalents in 2015 (8% for disadvantaged v. 4% for other students). In sponsored academies, a higher proportion of the points came from equivalents than the national figures, but this is the case for both disadvantaged and other pupils (12% v. 7%). Thus in both sponsored academies and other schools, disadvantaged pupils take more equivalents, but sponsored academies use more equivalents than other schools for all their pupils.

Figure 22 shows the average point score with and without equivalents for disadvantaged pupils.

**Figure 22: Average capped point score 2015 with and without equivalents: disadvantaged pupils**

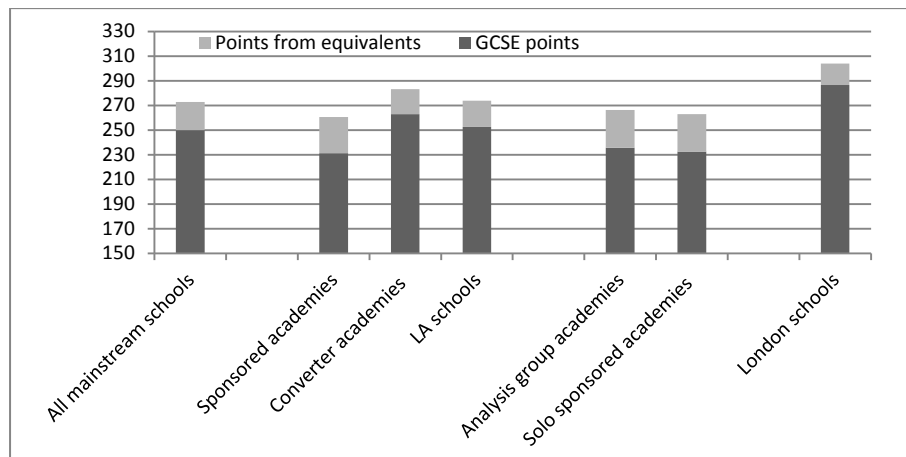
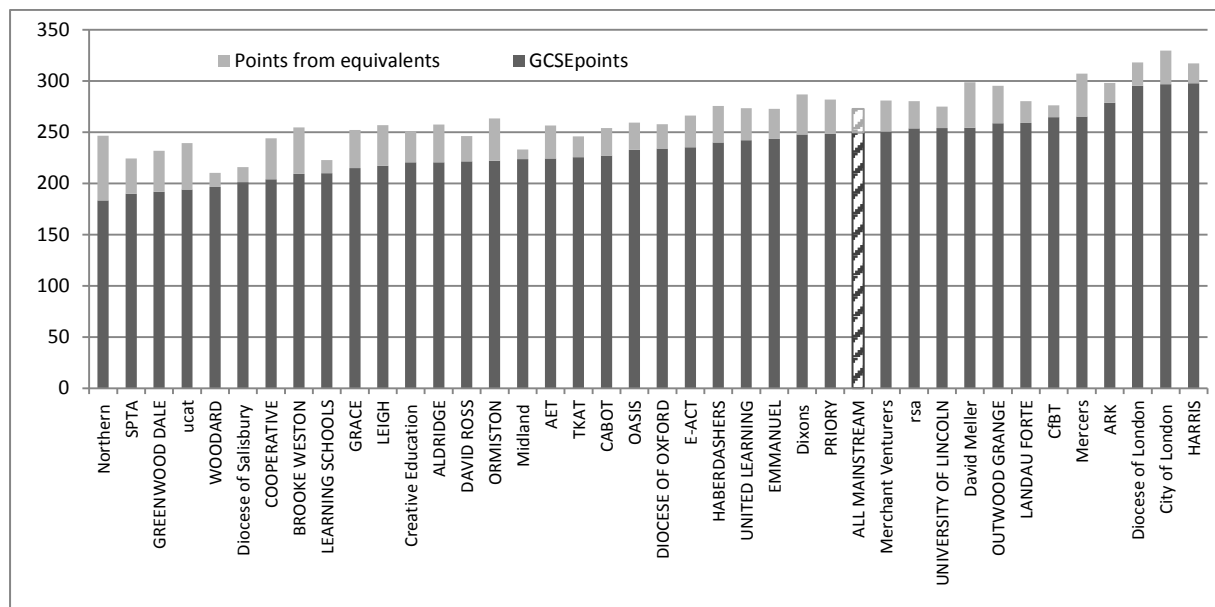


Figure 23 then shows the 2015 average capped point score for disadvantaged pupils in sponsored academies in each chain, with and without equivalents.

**Figure 23: Average capped point score for disadvantaged pupils with and without equivalents: chains in the analysis group**



It shows that there is some variation across chains in the extent to which equivalent qualifications are taken by disadvantaged pupils. Across all mainstream schools the average percentage of points from equivalents was 8% for disadvantaged students. Ten chains had less than 8% of total points from equivalents (the lowest being *Midland* and *CfBT*, at 4%). However, four chains had more than twice

the national average percentage of points from equivalents: *Northern*, Greenwood Dale, *UCAT* and Brooke Weston. These chains may be less well prepared for the move to Progress 8 next year, particularly *UCAT* and *Northern* which also had a low GCSE point score.

When we consider the points achieved from GCSEs alone, the most successful chains are: Harris, *City of London*, *Diocese of London* and ARK.

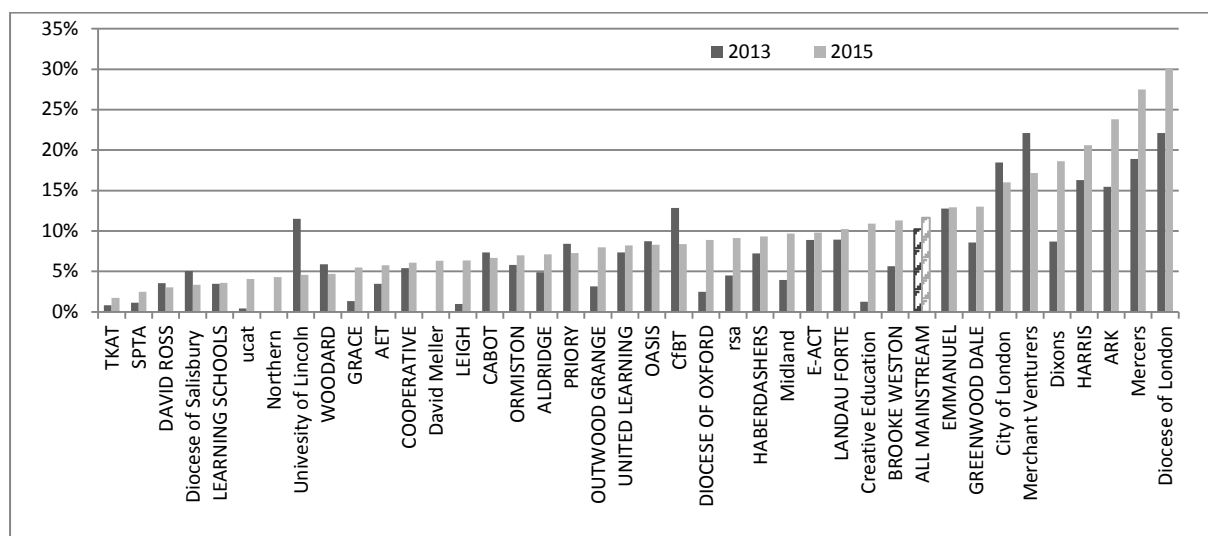
## 5.6 EBacc

### 5.6.1 Disadvantaged pupils achieving EBacc

The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) has become much more important to schools with the decision to make it a key performance indicator, and EBacc subjects an element of Progress 8. The EBacc is a measure of success in academic subjects – including English, Maths, Science, languages and history or geography.

The 2015 data (Figure 24) shows that in some (but not all) chains, there was an increase in the percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving EBacc between 2013 and 2015. There is also considerable variation between chains, ranging from more than a fifth of disadvantaged pupils in *Mercers*, *Diocese of London*, Harris and ARK achieving the EBacc, to only 2% in TKAT and SPTA.

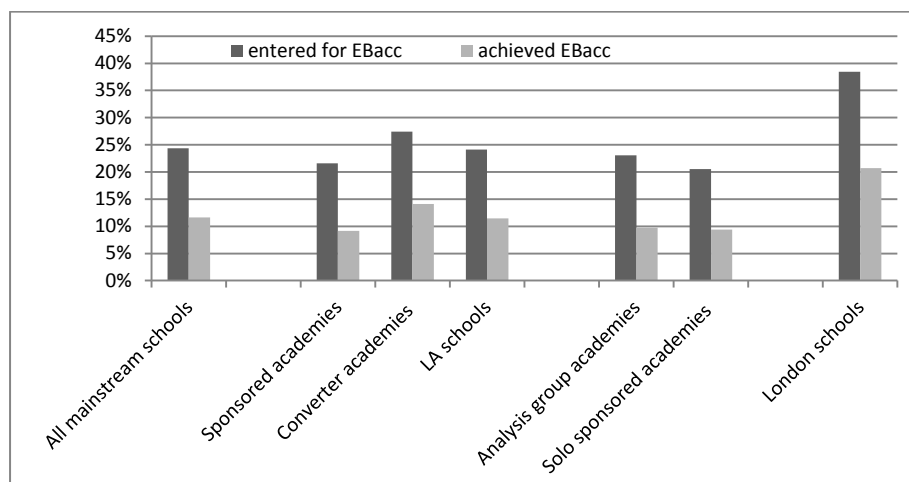
**Figure 24: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving EBacc in chains in the analysis group 2013 and 2015, compared with all mainstream schools**



A better indicator of how chains are addressing the policy changes through which EBacc subjects are becoming much more important is the percentage of pupils entered for all EBacc subjects. Nationally, about twice as many pupils are entered for all EBacc subjects as achieve EBacc. Whereas in 2014, sponsored academies in the analysis group entered a higher percentage of pupils for EBacc than all mainstream schools, (with a lower percentage achieving success), in 2015 they reduced the numbers entered but improved their success rate.<sup>78</sup> This is to be welcomed as supporting the interests of the young people concerned. However, as Figure 25 shows, for all types of schools the wide discrepancy in numbers of disadvantaged pupils entered for EBacc, and those achieving it, is worryingly wide. As last year, academies in chains entered a higher percentage of their pupils than solo academies.

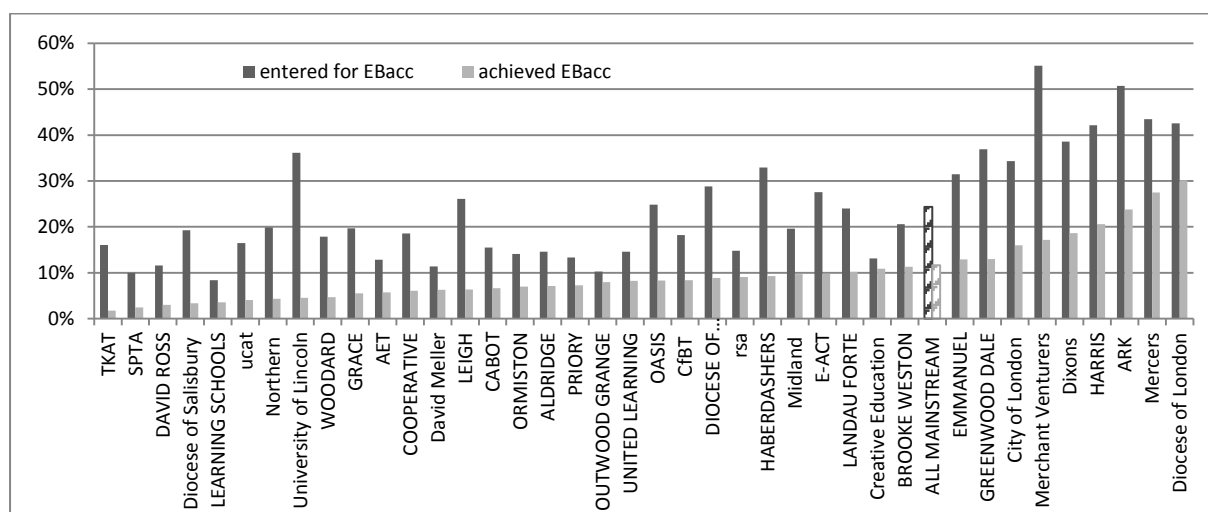
<sup>78</sup> Note, though, that the chains and schools in the analysis group in the two years are not identical.

**Figure 25: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils a) entering all EBacc subjects and b) achieving EBacc, 2015**



However, there is considerable variation across chains, ranging from *Merchant Venturers* and *ARK* which entered more than half of their disadvantaged pupils for all EBacc subjects to *Learning Schools* which entered just 8% (Figure 26). The success rate was highest in *Creative Education* and *Outwood Grange*, both of which entered relatively low numbers, but recorded over 75% of those entered succeeding.

**Figure 26: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils a) entering all EBacc subjects and b) achieving EBacc, 2015, by chain**

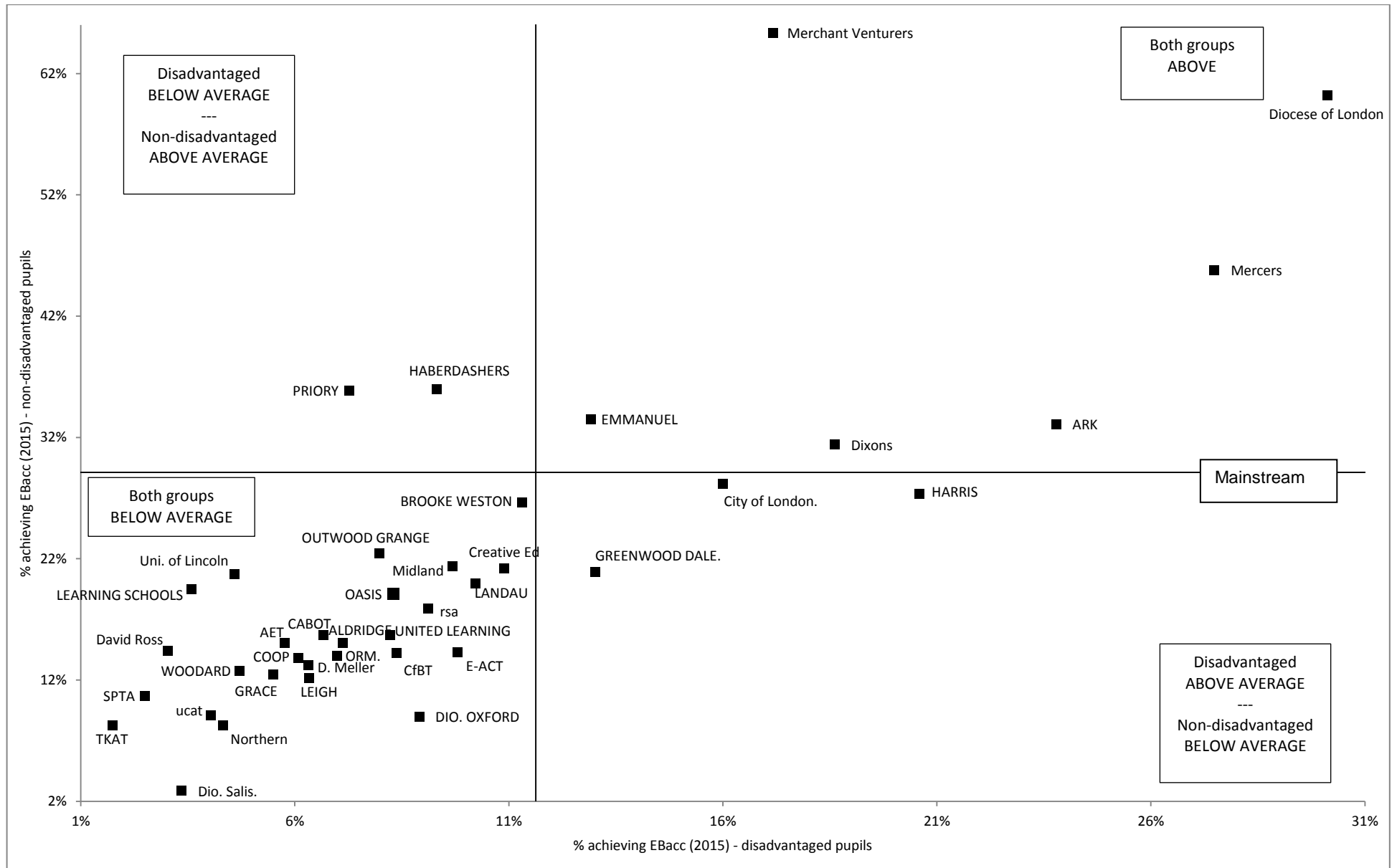


### 5.6.2 Non-disadvantaged pupils and the attainment gap using EBacc

The percentages of pupils who are not disadvantaged pupils achieving EBacc for chains in our analysis group were generally below the national average in 2015.

Figure 27 compares the EBacc outcomes of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils and so is comparable to Figures 14 and 20 which presented equivalent data for 5A\*CEM, and for average point score. Again, there is a strong correlation between performance for the two groups ( $r = 0.8$ ) Since the analysis group were generally below the national average on EBacc, particularly for non-disadvantaged pupils, only six chains performed above average for both groups. While there are some notable high performers, most chains are well below the average for all mainstream schools on this measure.

Figure 27: Percentage of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils achieving EBacc, relative to the mean performance of these groups in mainstream schools, 2015



## 5.7 Pupils with low attainment in primary school

In this section we review the secondary school attainment of those pupils who did not achieve the expected level (Level 4) at age 11. In 2015, nationally only 7% of this group achieved 5A\*CEM at secondary school, compared to 52% of those who achieved Level 4 and 91% of those who achieved level 5 or 6.

Clearly improving outcomes for the lowest achieving pupils, who are often also disadvantaged, is important for promoting life chances.

**Figure 28: Percentage of pupils whose prior attainment was below Level 4 achieving 5A\*CEM, 2015**

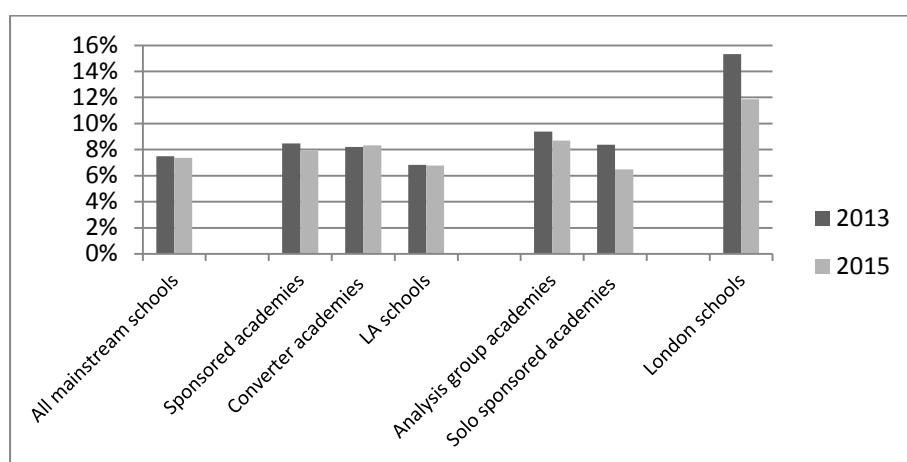
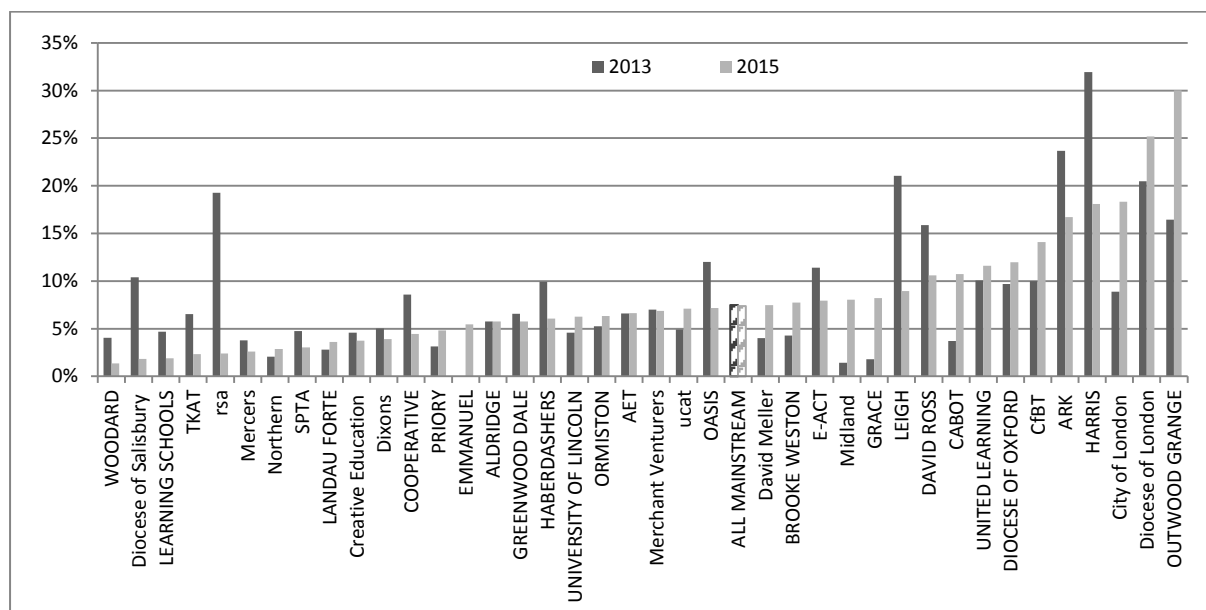


Figure 28 shows that, on average, these pupils fared better in the sponsored academies in the analysis group than in mainstream schools, solo academies or converter academies – a pattern consistent with that identified in our previous reports, despite the falls across the board. However, attainment for this group has tended to fall slightly over the last four years, possibly as a result of changes to the subjects that count in the league tables.

Figure 29 then shows that some chains have been very much more effective than others with this group of pupils. Whereas in all mainstream schools 7% of pupils with low prior attainment go on to achieve 5A\*CEM, five of the chains in the analysis group achieved more than double this figure in 2015: ARK, Harris, *City of London*, *Diocese of London* and Outwood Grange. However, ARK and Harris both did less well than in 2013 (as did half the chains in the analysis group). The greatest improvements were recorded by Outwood Grange, *City of London*, Cabot, *Midland* and Grace.

In contrast, some chains performed very poorly, including some that have fallen back from already poor results for their low-attaining pupils.

**Figure 29: Percentage of pupils whose prior attainment was below Level 4 achieving the expected level (5A\*CEM) 2013 and 2015**



Clearly, although very important, it is not sufficient for a chain to produce above average results for those entering with low attainment. We have also reviewed the achievements of those with average and high prior attainment. This showed *Diocese of London* and *Outwood Grange* were in the top three places for each group, with *ARK*, *Harris* and *City of London* also in the top ten.

### 5.8 Summary: which chains are the most effective for disadvantaged pupils?

It is clear from the analysis that there are differences between chains (and the schools within these chains) in the targets they have been prioritising. This was particularly striking in 2015 when schools could choose which measure to be assessed by: Progress 8 or 5A\*CEM (with progress in English and maths).

We have therefore combined the following measures of attainment of disadvantaged pupils in 2015: to provide an overall index. The various elements are weighted as shown:

- percentage achieving 5A\*CEM – 50%;
- average capped GCSE point score - 20%;
- percentage making expected progress in English – 10%;
- percentage making expected progress in mathematics – 10%;
- percentage achieving EBacc – 10%.

The rationale for the high weighting given to 5A\*CEM is that it is still the key measure on which schools are assessed, in conjunction with pupil progress in English and maths, which together receive a further 20% of the weighting. GCSE capped point score is of interest because it excludes equivalents, and both that measure and EBacc give some indication of how the chain is responding to the government drive for more academic qualifications which will be increasingly reflected in future league tables.

Each chain's score has been calculated using the difference between the chain and all mainstream schools for each of the above measures, weighted in the proportions given. Table 10 shows the

chains performing above and below the average for mainstream schools in this weighted attainment measure.

We then followed the same strategy to present data related to improvement on each measure between 2013 and 2015, yielding a score for improvement weighted in the same way as the overall score for attainment. Table 11 gives the chains performing above and below the average for mainstream schools in this weighted improvement measure.



**Table 10: Chains performing above and below the mainstream average on the key measures of 2015 attainment for disadvantaged pupils**

	5A*CEM	Expected progress English	Expected progress maths	EBacc	GCSE capped point score	Overall rank
Sig. above ave.	ARK <i>City of London</i> David Meller <i>Diocese of London</i> Harris Outwood Grange	ARK CfBT <i>City of London</i> Cooperative David Meller <i>Diocese of London</i>	ARK <i>City of London</i> David Meller David Ross <i>Diocese of London</i> Harris Outwood Grange	ARK <i>City of London</i> <i>Diocese of London</i> Dixons Harris <i>Mercers</i> <i>Merchant Venturers</i>	<i>City of London</i> <i>Diocese of London</i> Harris ARK CfBT David Meller Landau Forte	ARK <i>City of London</i> David Meller <i>Diocese of London</i> Harris <i>Mercers</i> Outwood Grange
	Above average	Haberdashers Landau Forte <i>Mercers</i> <i>Merchant Venturers</i> Priory United Learning	Harris Leigh Outwood Grange Priory Aldridge <i>Diocese of Oxford</i>	CfBT <i>Diocese of Oxford</i> Dixons Haberdashers <i>Mercers</i> Ormiston RSA United Learning	Emmanuel Greenwood Dale Brooke Weston <i>Creative Education</i> Landau Forte	<i>Mercers</i> Outwood Grange RSA <i>University of Lincoln</i> Dixons <i>Merchant Venturers</i>
Below average		Aldridge Brooke Weston <i>Creative Education</i> <i>Diocese of Oxford</i> Dixons E-ACT Emmanuel Grace Ormiston RSA <i>University of Lincoln</i>	E-ACT Grace Haberdashers Landau Forte <i>Merchant Venturers</i> <i>Northern</i> RSA United Learning Ormiston AET Brooke Weston Cabot <i>Creative Education</i>	AET Aldridge Brooke Weston Cabot Cooperative <i>Creative Education</i> E-ACT Emmanuel Grace Haberdashers Learning Schools Leigh <i>Midland</i> <i>Northern</i> Oasis SPTA TKAT UCAT Woodard	AET Aldridge Cabot Cooperative David Meller David Ross <i>Diocese of Oxford</i> <i>Diocese of Salisbury</i> E-ACT Grace Haberdashers Learning Schools Leigh <i>Midland</i> <i>Northern</i> Oasis Oasis Ormiston Outwood Grange Priory RSA SPTA TKAT UCAT United Learning Woodard	<i>Merchant Venturers</i> Priory AET Aldridge Cabot <i>Creative Education</i> David Ross <i>Diocese of Oxford</i> E-ACT Emmanuel Grace Haberdashers Leigh <i>Midland</i> Oasis Ormiston TKAT United Learning
	Sig. below average	AET Cabot CfBT Cooperative David Ross <i>Diocese of Salisbury</i> Greenwood Dale Learning Schools Leigh <i>Midland</i> <i>Northern</i> Oasis SPTA TKAT UCAT Woodard	David Ross <i>Diocese of Salisbury</i> Dixons Greenwood Dale <i>Midland</i> SPTA TKAT <i>University of Lincoln</i> Woodard	TKAT UCAT <i>University of Lincoln</i> <i>Diocese of Salisbury</i> Learning Schools <i>Midland</i> <i>Northern</i> SPTA Woodard	SPTA TKAT UCAT United Learning <i>University of Lincoln</i> Woodard	Brooke Weston Cooperative <i>Diocese of Salisbury</i> Greenwood Dale Learning Schools <i>Northern</i> SPTA TKAT UCAT Woodard

Top tier: Significantly above average (15+% better performance than mainstream), second tier: above average (>1% & <15% better); third tier: average (within 1% of mainstream); fourth tier: below average (>1% & <15% worse); bottom tier: significantly below average (15+% worse). Within categories chains are in alphabetical order. Average attainment for disadvantaged students in all mainstream schools: 5A\*CEM= 38.3%, Expected progress in English=61.0%, Expected progress in maths=51.6%, GCSE capped point score=249.9, EBacc=11.6%.

**Table 11: Chains performing above and below the mainstream average on the key measures of improvement 2013-15**

	5A*CEM	Expected progress English	Expected progress maths	EBacc	GCSE capped point score	Overall rank
Sig. above ave.	Landau Forte <i>University of Lincoln</i>	Landau Forte	Aldridge	ARK	Diocese of Oxford	ARK
Above average	ARK	ARK	Brooke Weston	Brooke Weston	Grace	Brooke Weston
	Brooke Weston	Brooke Weston	Cabot	<i>Creative Education</i>	Outwood Grange	Cabot
	Cabot	Cabot	CfBT	<i>David Meller</i>	RSA	CfBT
	Cooperative	CfBT	<i>City of London</i>	<i>Diocese of London</i>	AET	Cooperative
	<i>Creative Education</i>	<i>City of London</i>	<i>Creative Education</i>	Diocese of Oxford	ARK	<i>Creative Education</i>
	<i>David Meller</i>	Cooperative	<i>David Meller</i>	Dixons	Brooke Weston	<i>David Meller</i>
	<i>Diocese of London</i>	<i>David Meller</i>	David Ross	Grace	Cabot	<i>Diocese of London</i>
	Diocese of Oxford	<i>Diocese of London</i>	Diocese of Oxford	Greenwood Dale	CfBT	Diocese of Oxford
	Grace	Diocese of Oxford	Emmanuel	Harris	Cooperative	Grace
	Outwood Grange	Grace	Grace	Leigh	<i>Creative Education</i>	Landau Forte
	Priory	Haberdashers	Landau Forte	<i>Mercers</i>	<i>David Meller</i>	Outwood Grange
	TKAT	Learning Schools	Ormiston	<i>Midland</i>	David Ross	Priory
	UCAT	Leigh	Outwood Grange	<i>Northern</i>	<i>Diocese of Salisbury</i>	RSA
	United Learning	<i>Northern</i>	Priory	Outwood Grange	<i>Dixons</i>	TKAT
	Average	CfBT	Outwood Grange	RSA	RSA	Greenwood Dale
E-ACT		Priory	SPTA	UCAT	Landau Forte	United Learning
Emmanuel		SPTA	TKAT	AET	Learning Schools	<i>University of Lincoln</i>
Ormiston		UCAT	UCAT	Aldridge	<i>Merchant Venturers</i>	AET
Below average	AET	United Learning	United Learning	Cooperative	<i>Midland</i>	<i>City of London</i>
	Aldridge	<i>University of Lincoln</i>	<i>University of Lincoln</i>	E-ACT	Oasis	E-ACT
	<i>City of London</i>	E-ACT	AET	Haberdashers	Ormiston	Emmanuel
	David Ross	Oasis	<i>Diocese of London</i>	Landau Forte	Priory	Learning Schools
	<i>Diocese of Salisbury</i>	Ormiston	<i>Diocese of Salisbury</i>	Ormiston	SPTA	<i>Midland</i>
	Dixons	AET	E-ACT	SPTA	TKAT	Ormiston
	Greenwood Dale	Aldridge	ARK	TKAT	UCAT	SPTA
	Haberdashers	<i>Creative Education</i>	Cooperative	United Learning	United Learning	Aldridge
	Harris	David Ross	<i>Dixons</i>	Cabot	Aldridge	David Ross
	Learning Schools	<i>Diocese of Salisbury</i>	Greenwood Dale	CfBT	<i>City of London</i>	<i>Diocese of Salisbury</i>
	<i>Mercers</i>	<i>Dixons</i>	Haberdashers	<i>City of London</i>	E-ACT	<i>Dixons</i>
	<i>Merchant Venturers</i>	Emmanuel	Harris	David Ross	Harris	Greenwood Dale
	<i>Midland</i>	Greenwood Dale	Learning Schools	<i>Diocese of Salisbury</i>	Leigh	Haberdashers
	<i>Northern</i>	Harris	<i>Mercers</i>	Emmanuel	Emmanuel	Harris
	Oasis	<i>Mercers</i>	<i>Merchant Venturers</i>	Learning Schools	Haberdashers	Leigh
RSA	<i>Merchant Venturers</i>	<i>Midland</i>	<i>Merchant Venturers</i>	<i>Mercers</i>	<i>Mercers</i>	
SPTA	<i>Midland</i>	<i>Northern</i>	Oasis	<i>Northern</i>	<i>Merchant Venturers</i>	
Woodard	RSA	Oasis	Priory	<i>University of Lincoln</i>	<i>Northern</i>	
Sig. below	Leigh	TKAT	Woodard	<i>University of Lincoln</i>	Woodard	Oasis
	Woodard	Woodard	Leigh	Woodard	<i>Diocese of London</i>	Woodard

Top tier: Significantly above average (greater than 1.0 Standard Deviations better improvement than mainstream), second tier: above average (0.1 to 1.0 SDs better); third tier: average (within 0.10 SDs of mainstream); fourth tier: below average (-0.10 & -1.0 SDs worse); bottom tier: significantly below average (less than -1.0 SDs worse improvement than mainstream). Within categories chains are in alphabetical order. Average improvement for disadvantaged students in all mainstream schools: 5A\*CEM=-4.4%, Expected Progress in English=2.1%, Expected progress in maths=-4.6%, GCSE capped point score=+26.7, EBacc=1.4%.

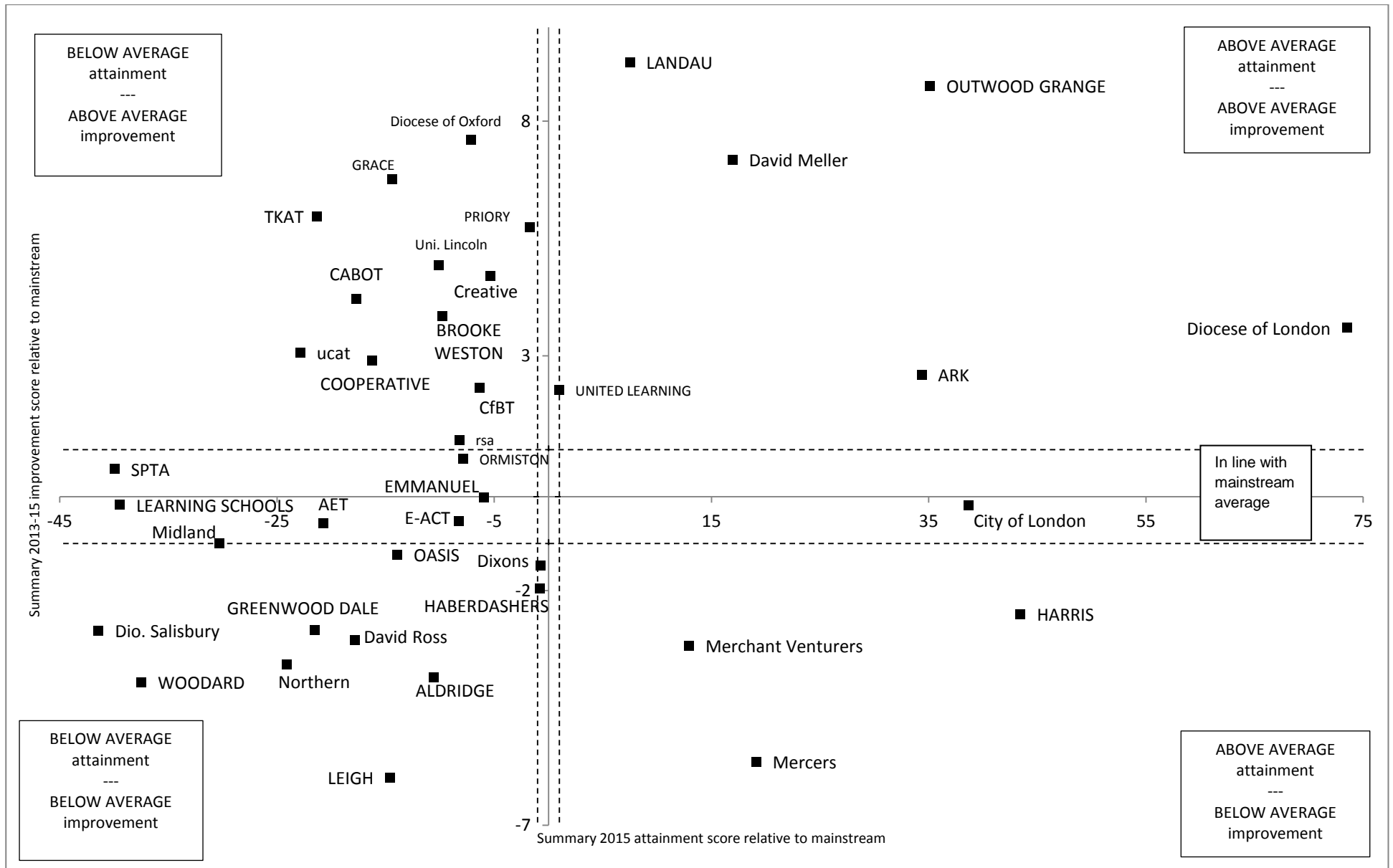
Table 10 shows that three chains achieved significantly above average against all five measures of attainment for disadvantaged pupils: *City of London*, *Diocese of London*, and Harris. ARK was ranked above or significantly above average on four measures and above average on the one. The highest scoring chains on our composite measure of attainment were ARK, *City of London*, *David Meller*, *Diocese of London*, Harris, *Mercers* and Outwood Grange.

Three chains performed significantly below average against all five attainment measures: *Diocese of Salisbury*, SPTA and Woodard. A further nine chains were ranked below or significantly below average against all five measures: AET, Brooke Weston, Cabot, *Creative Education*, Learning Schools, *Midland*, Oasis, TKAT and *UCAT*. It is noticeable that the some of the same chains have been below average on all measures in each year we have undertaken this analysis, while other chains have improved.

The six chains that have improved more than average on all measures are Brooke Weston, *David Meller*, Diocese of Oxford, Grace, Outwood Grange and *UCAT*. Diocese of Oxford and Grace were among the low performers in our 2013 and 2014 reports, and it is encouraging to see that they have improved.

Figure 30 compares the overall score for the combined measures of attainment for disadvantaged pupils with that for improvement since 2012.

Figure 30: Attainment for disadvantaged pupils (as in Table 10) compared with improvement (as in Table 11)



It is noticeable that more chains showed above average improvement in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils than above average attainment. This, of course, is exactly what one would expect of a sponsored academy in the early stages of its life – below average attainment but above average improvement. However, what is evident on Tables 10 and 11 is that more a fifth of the chains were below average both for improvement and attainment. Since all the academies in the analysis had been consistently part of the same chain for three years, it might have been expected that they would be improving rapidly.

We are acutely aware that each chain is dealing with different issues (discussed in the next section) and that strategies may vary. This analysis should therefore in no way be considered the final word on the effectiveness of any given academy chain, but as a basis for future discussion on how academy chains can best help to improve the prospects of their disadvantaged students.

## **5.9 Change since 2013**

The overall ratings shown on Tables 10 and 11 have also been compiled in our previous reports, and thus we can compare 2015 outcomes with those from 2014.

### *5.9.1 Attainment table*

There has been little change since our last report in the combined index for attainment of disadvantaged pupils. All five of the chains that were significantly above average last year remain in that band (ARK, *City of London*, Harris, *Mercers* and *Outwood Grange*), and similarly eight of those in the significantly below average band in 2013 remain there in 2015 (AET, *Diocese of Salisbury*, *Greenwood Dale*, *Learning Schools*, *Midland*, SPTA, *UCAT* and *Woodard*). A few chains are placed very much higher in 2014 than they were in 2013: Most strikingly, *David Meller* has moved from significantly below to significantly above, and *Landau Forte* from significantly below to above average. It is also encouraging to see that *Diocese of Oxford* and *Grace*, which were both significantly below average in 2013 and 2014, have now moved up the table.

### *5.9.2 Improvement table*

This table inevitably shows more volatility. In 2015, no chains improved significantly more or less than the mainstream average overall. *David Meller*, which was below average in 2014 is above average in 2015.

## **5.10 How do chain characteristics relate to performance**

In our first report we included a full discussion of the very varied characteristics of academy chains and how this relates to their performance for disadvantaged pupils. We showed that the chains showing the greatest success for disadvantaged pupils varied in terms of size; management style and centralised policies; and working practices. However, all shared:

- a pattern of steady expansion over a number of years; and
- a focus on a specific geographical area.

In addition, three of the most successful chains were based in London, where, as we have shown, average attainment on all measures is significantly higher than in the rest of the country. We argued that the 'London factor' may have contributed to their success.

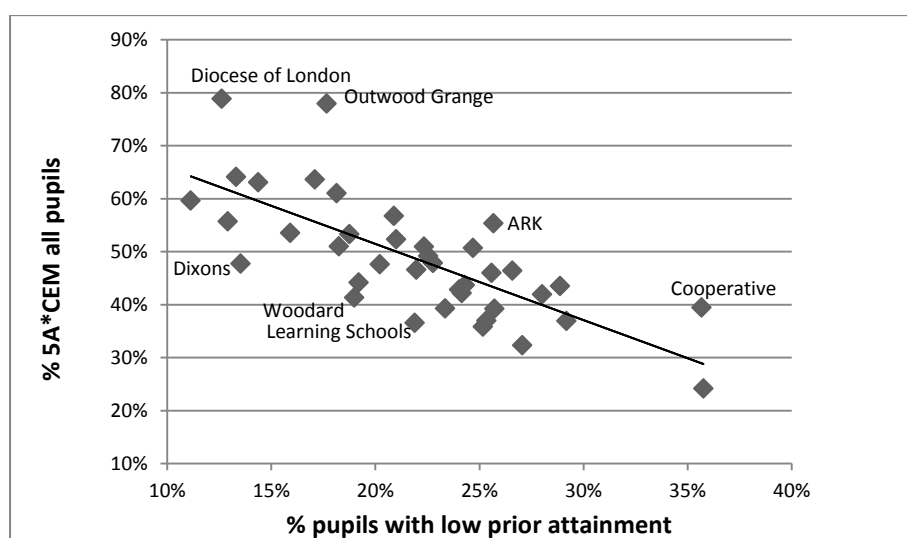
In this report we investigate in more depth the relationship between pupil characteristics and chain attainment, and the London effect.

### 5.10.1 Pupil characteristics

Nationally at secondary there is a strong relationship between pupils' prior attainment and GCSE results. It is this that has led to the change of focus from attainment (represented by 5A\*CEM) to progress, in the new Progress 8 Measure.

As Figure 31 showed, the chains in the analysis group ranged from 11% to 36% of pupils with low prior attainment, and so it would be expected that this would impact on their attainment. There is a strong correlation ( $r = -0.73$ ) between the percentage of pupils with low prior attainment and the overall 5A\*CEM figure for each chain, shown on Figure 31. The chains that are doing better and worse than the general trend are labelled.

**Figure 31: Percentage of low attaining pupils compared with 5A\*CEM all pupils**



Similarly, correlation coefficients and the pattern of outliers can be found in correlations between percentage of pupils with low prior attainment and for other attainment measures for disadvantaged pupils, and for the overall index. However, it is obvious that even when the variation in percentage of pupils with low prior attainment is taken into account, the same chains stand out as being more or less successful.

### 5.10.2 The London effect

For several years now London secondary schools have had higher attainment than other areas of the country. Various explanations have been put forward: the London Challenge, the high number of minority ethnic pupils, the greater regional prosperity, and so on.<sup>79</sup>

We have noted that in each of our reports, chains based entirely or partly in London have had particularly high attainment figures (Harris, *City of London*, ARK, and so on). We have therefore conducted a further analysis to explore whether these chains (or the London schools within mixed chains) are attaining better and/or improving more than other London schools. The data is presented in Appendix 2. We acknowledge, of course, that there is immense variation across London in the issues schools are facing and their success in achieving good results, just as there is across the country as a whole. But, given the continuing high attainment of London schools, it is of interest to review how well chains are doing in that context.

The analysis shows that disadvantaged pupils in the following chains have higher attainment on 5A\*CEM than the London average:

<sup>79</sup> Hutchings et al. (2012) ; Baars et al. (2014); Burgess (2014); Greaves et al. (2014).

- *Diocese of London*
- United Learning (based on three London schools)
- Harris
- *City of London*

ARK (London schools only) had attainment which matches the London average. But the London schools in four other chains were below the London average (Oasis, Haberdashers, AET and Learning Schools).

We reviewed improvement in attainment for disadvantaged pupils using a quintile analysis, as described in Section 4.4. This showed that the chains with above average attainment had improved more than other London schools with similar initial attainment. However, those chains where attainment in 2013 was below average also showed less improvement than other London schools with similar levels of attainment. This fits the pattern we have previously noted in which there is a sharp divide between successful chains with above average attainment and improvement, and those which are below average and fail to improve as much as comparable schools.

Thus, in terms of attainment and improvement for disadvantaged pupils in London, the chains are very much in line with other London schools. See Appendix 2 for full analysis.

## 6 Discussion

This analysis builds on our previous findings concerning the impact of different academy sponsors on the attainment of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, their peers, and on school improvement. As always, we have sought to be transparent about the complexities that any rigorous analysis of the impact of academy chains on pupil outcomes must take into account, and the consequent methodological challenges to effectively monitor developments. Nevertheless, we reiterate that, given the scale of activity, the impact of schooling on young peoples' lives and outcomes, and the financial and strategic policy investment in sponsors and chains for educational improvement, it is imperative that such analysis is maintained.

Thus far, the report has focused mainly on 2015 results. In this section we consider trends in the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils over time.<sup>80</sup> There are now more chains in the analysis, and some of these chains now include additional schools that were not eligible for inclusion in our first report. Nevertheless, it is striking how little change there has been to the ranking of our sample chains since last year's report. Only a minority of chains have moved up or down in our overall analysis of attainment—most of those that were above average or below average last year remain in the same category this year too.<sup>81</sup> A handful of chains have performed consistently significantly above the mainstream average for attainment across the last three years: ARK, *City of London*, Harris, and Mercers. Outwood Grange moved up into this category in 2014, and *David Meller* this year.<sup>82</sup> Meanwhile, a similar number have remained consistently in the significantly below average group for attainment across three years: *Diocese of Salisbury*,<sup>83</sup> Learning Schools, SPTA and Woodard. And further chains have appeared in the significantly below average group in two years out of three.<sup>84</sup>

While it is pleasing to see chains that originally performed well generally continue to do so, it is equally worrying that many of those that were below average, or significantly below, average continue to be in that position.

A second worrying finding is that the proportion of chains performing above the mainstream average has fallen year on year. For example, the percentage of chains above the mainstream average for 5A\*CEM has fallen from 48% in 2013 to 36% in 2014 and only 31% in 2015. This may be a reflection of a focus on moving towards Progress 8 outcomes, though the percentage of chains above average for EBacc has remained similar each year. Our overall index, which combines different measures of attainment, similarly shows that the percentage of chains above the mainstream average has also fallen year on year, though less dramatically (from 32% in 2013 to 23% in 2015).

One would hope that even if academies' attainment is below average, pupils would be making good progress, and our previous reports have shown chains in our sample to be doing comparatively well on this measure. But in 2015 they have fallen back slightly: in 2015, 38% of chains were below average for both English and maths progress, compared with 26% in 2014.

We have also considered improvement in attainment over a two-year period. In each of our three reports, about half the chains have improved more than the mainstream average, which is precisely what the sponsored academy programme was intended to achieve. But about a third of the chains have improved by less than the mainstream average. While in some cases this is because attainment was high, our quintile analysis shows that many have improved less than mainstream schools with similar initial attainment.

Each year we have compared improvement and attainment, as shown in Tables 7 and 8. In 2015, five chains were above average for both. Two of these achieved their second successive year in this group (ARK, and Outwood Grange); two that have moved from below or significantly below average (*David Meller* and Landau Forte) and a new entrant (*Diocese of London*). Eight chains were below average for both improvement and attainment, three of these for the second successive year (Greenwood Dale, Oasis and Woodard).

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<sup>80</sup> For the overall rankings for attainment and improvement from 2013 and 2014, see Appendix 3.

<sup>81</sup> Two went from below average to above average, two from average to below, and one from above average to below average.

<sup>82</sup> The *David Meller* chain has moved from below average attainment in 2013 to significantly above average in 2015, and Landau has moved from significantly below average attainment in 2013 to above average in 2015.

<sup>83</sup> As indicated earlier, a particularly low-attaining academy in this chain moved to a new sponsor in June 2015. Thus in this case, the issue of underperformance has been addressed.

<sup>84</sup> AET, Greenwood Dale, *Midland* and *UCAT* have also now been in this group two years in a row. Cabot featured as significantly below the mainstream average for attainment in 2013 and again in 2015.



Thus our conclusions of last year remain consistent – that some chains are demonstrating *outstanding capacity and impact*; that a large number of chains are concentrated around the mainstream average for improvement and/or attainment (albeit our analysis also shows movement within this group in both directions); and that *a small number of chains* – but notably a larger group than the high achieving chains – are significantly underperforming and are failing to improve.

For the third time in a row, our analysis demonstrates the strikingly mixed success of the sponsor academies programme. The stunning success of some chains shows the strong effectiveness of this intervention in a small number of cases. As we observed in *Chain Effects 2015*:

“despite the small numbers of chains achieving these levels of success, their achievements across a whole range of measures are dramatic, demonstrating the holistic quality of their provision, and suggesting depth and strength of the structures and teaching and learning underpinning it. These chains show the genuine potential of sponsorship to make transformative improvement. It is important that the extent of these successes, and the extent of their achievements over the mainstream average, be acknowledged, celebrated, and learnt from.

*“Nevertheless, the Government must not ignore the negative impact that a number of chains at the other end of the spectrum are having on school quality and (consequently) the life chances of the young people they serve.”*

Our present analysis shows the urgency of acting on these findings, for the sake of the disadvantaged young people concerned. To be clear, to find cases of chains where attainment for disadvantaged young people is significantly low and has not improved in three years, within an intervention specifically designed to improve the prospects of this group of young people, is alarming. For three years in a row we have reiterated our original finding that “Far from providing a solution to disadvantage, a few chains may be exacerbating it”, yet often these chains do not appear to have been strongly or consistently challenged, or supported to improve. We recognise that in some cases RSCs are taking steps to address these problems, and we hope that the information in this report can support the urgency of such interventions.

Action is also urgently needed to ensure that the achievements of the most successful chains are extended to others. The number of significantly successful chains has grown slightly over three years but remains small – at present it is questionable whether it comprises sufficient evidence for the level of investment and faith in chains as a key route to school improvement<sup>85</sup>. If the Government is to pursue this faith and investment it, in conjunction with the National Schools Commissioner, needs to take firm action to ensure that developing chains learn from the best; including investment in robust research, and incentives for chains to work together. David Carter’s suggestion for MAT collaboration<sup>86</sup> is an encouraging development here, though we would suggest the need for an overt focus on quality credentials within this initiative to ensure the spread of effective practice. Also in last year’s report we suggested that the Government should resource a taskforce, comprised of senior and middle leaders and Governors from the most successful chains, to share expertise and constructive review of those chains which are not actually failing but which have not yet met expectations on improvement. Leadership of such a taskforce would sit well with the revitalised remit of the National Schools Commissioner.

Meanwhile, our prior focus on the import of effectiveness in processes of sponsor commissioning and accountability, and our argument that “the Government stores up trouble for the future by optimistically assuming that all sponsors have the capacity to improve schools”, are amply supported by our further year’s analysis. Last year we noted the findings of the Education Select Committee (2015) concerning the very small number of sponsor applications that have been rejected, and argued the need to ensure that sponsors are subject to rigorous criteria on entry, and demonstrate prior success in improvement before being awarded further schools. The Government seems to recognise this in its articulations but not in its behaviour: While the Secretary of State for Education has pledged that only MATs which can demonstrate strong performance will be allowed to grow<sup>87</sup>, some chains still continue to grow rapidly despite not having had time for their school improvement record to be established.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> We reiterate our assertion (*Chain Effects 2015*) that improvement services for struggling schools and academies should be identified on the basis of quality, capacity and track record, rather than type.

<sup>86</sup> See Vaughan & Wiggins, 2016.

<sup>87</sup> As she stated to the Education Committee, 2016. This commitment was reiterated by the National Schools Commissioner in oral evidence to the Committee on June 15th 2016, who said that if a trust’s record of improvement is not proven, it should

The implications of more systematic accountability for academy chains are for urgent removal and re-brokering of long-term struggling academies (and the potential closure of problematic MATs). *Schools Week* recently found that of 277 academies rated Inadequate between 2010 and 2015, only 84 have been re-brokered,<sup>89</sup> so it seems that in spite of previous recommendations,<sup>90</sup> this approach has not yet been robustly applied. It is worth also reiterating that where academies are moved from one sponsor to another it is vital that the new sponsor should have a strong track record of school improvement. We must not end up with a situation where the worst performing schools are simply passed from one sponsor to another.

And although we advocate urgent efforts to learn from the best chains, the shortage of chains with which to exemplify excellence was recently highlighted by both Her Majesty's Chief Inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw, and Sir David Carter, in oral evidence to the Education Select Committee.<sup>91</sup> Given challenges with capacity and quality in the supply of potential sponsors, we reiterate our assertion that improvement support for struggling schools and academies should be identified on the basis of quality, capacity and track record, rather than type. The expansion of potential improvement agencies – which should include giving strong practical support and training to enable more successful schools to develop their own MATs or other federations - would aid regional schools commissioners to expand the potential pool of providers while simultaneously raising the bar in commissioning sponsors (and while removing academies from struggling sponsors more systematically). We set out our suggested criteria for school improvement interventions (including sponsorship) in the prior report (see Appendix 4).

There has been much discussion of the appropriateness, or otherwise, of Ofsted's potential inspection of academy chains. While we are mindful of arguments that Ofsted inspectors may not be equipped to assess specific aspects of chain governance, we also worry that such preoccupations illustrate a moving away from the centrality of school outcomes which surely illustrate the success or otherwise of a chain (and of its governance). Parents ought to be able to assess the success or otherwise of particular chains, especially if they are to be empowered to petition for a local school to leave a chain, as indicated in the 2016 White Paper.

We must not forget the original purpose of the sponsor academy programme; to revitalise schools containing large proportions of disadvantaged young people, to improve these young people's achievement – and hence to improve their futures. This focus on the sponsor academies programme as a mechanism for social justice has been maintained by successive Governments. However, the connection between MATs and improving outcomes for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds was not overtly articulated in the 2016 White Paper. Hence, we hope this report provides a timely reminder of the original purposes of the programme, and of the measures against which the sponsor academies programme must be assessed. We hope that the information in this report again makes a contribution to supporting policymaking and practice in delivering better outcomes for young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Our recommendations are set out at the beginning of this report.

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not grow. <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/news-parliament-2015/multi-academy-trusts-evidence2-16-17/>

<sup>88</sup> Reach2 comprise a notable case (*Schools Week*, 2016). As we explained in the Methods section, many chains – including many with numerous schools – are not yet well enough established for inclusion in our analysis.

<sup>89</sup> Dickens (2016)

<sup>90</sup> See e.g. Academies Commission, 2013; Sutton Trust Chain Effects 2014 and Chain Effects 2015; Education Select Committee, 2015.

<sup>91</sup> Education Select Committee, first session of its Inquiry into MATs, 15.6.16. Sir Michael Wilshaw remarked on the intention of Ofsted to report on the practices of “good, well performing academy trusts” but explained, “we were struggling to find them, quite honestly”. <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/news-parliament-2015/multi-academy-trusts-evidence2-16-17/>

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## Appendix 1: Performance indicators

The measure of pupil progress in English and mathematics was published for the first time in 2009. From Key Stage 2 (age 11) to Key Stage 4 (age 16) pupils are expected to make three levels of progress. Thus a pupil who achieved Level 4 (the expected Level) at age 11 would be expected to gain a C grade in GCSE. But a pupil who achieved Level 5 at age 11 would be expected to achieve a B at GCSE, while one who was below Level 4 would have made the expected amount of progress if they achieved a GCSE grade below a C. This measure clearly helps school with low-attaining intakes to demonstrate that they are adding value for their pupils. Thus it may be of particular importance for some sponsored academies.

Attainment based on the other measures (average point score and EBacc) has also been reported, but has had less significance. Average (capped) point score is calculated from the best 8 GCSE or equivalent results a pupil achieves, and therefore encourages schools to ensure that all pupils take eight subjects. Average capped point score is also reported for GCSs only, excluding equivalent qualifications.

The EBacc, introduced in 2010, involves achieving A\*-C passes in English, maths, two science subjects, a modern or ancient language and history or geography. Its aim was to create an incentive for schools to offer these subjects, in order to give students 'a properly rounded academic education'. Part of the concern was that too many pupils – especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds - were taking 'non-academic' or non-traditional subjects, which would not facilitate access to the most prestigious higher education institutions and/or professions. Hence one of the aims of the EBacc measure is to incentivise practices that support social mobility.<sup>92</sup> It was unclear when this measure was introduced how much importance was to be accorded to it, and the extent to which schools have changed their curriculum in response has varied.

However, the government has announced that from 2016, a new performance indicator, Progress 8, will be used. The Progress 8 measure is designed to encourage schools to offer a broad and balanced curriculum at KS4, and reward schools for the teaching of all their pupils. The new measure will be based on students' progress measured across eight subjects: English; mathematics; three other English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects (sciences, computer science, geography, history and languages); and three further subjects, which can be from the range of EBacc subjects, or can be any other approved, high-value arts, academic, or vocational qualification. From 2016, the floor standard will be based on schools' results on the Progress 8 measure rather than 5A\*CEM, and in 2015 schools could opt to be judged on Progress 8.<sup>93</sup> Thus in 2015 some schools were already directing their effort towards Progress 8 whereas others were not.

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<sup>92</sup> See, for example, Michael Gove (2013).

<sup>93</sup> DfE 2014b

## Appendix 2: Analysis of London academies in analysis group chains

For several years now London secondary schools have had higher attainment than other areas of the country. Various explanations have been put forward: the London Challenge, the high number of minority ethnic pupils, the greater regional prosperity, and so on.<sup>94</sup>

We have noted that in each of our reports, chains based entirely or partly in London have had particularly high attainment figures (Harris, *City of London*, ARK, and so on). We have therefore conducted a further analysis to explore whether these chains (or the London schools within mixed chains) are attaining better and/or improving more than other London schools. We acknowledge, of course, that there is immense variation across London in the issues schools are facing and their success in achieving good results, just as there is across the country as a whole. But given the continuing high attainment of London schools, it is of interest to review how well chains are doing in that context.

### Academies analysed in this appendix

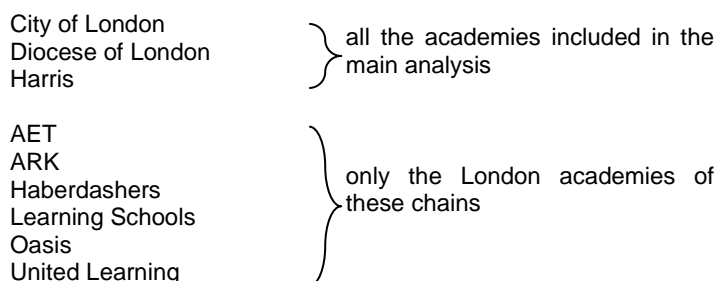
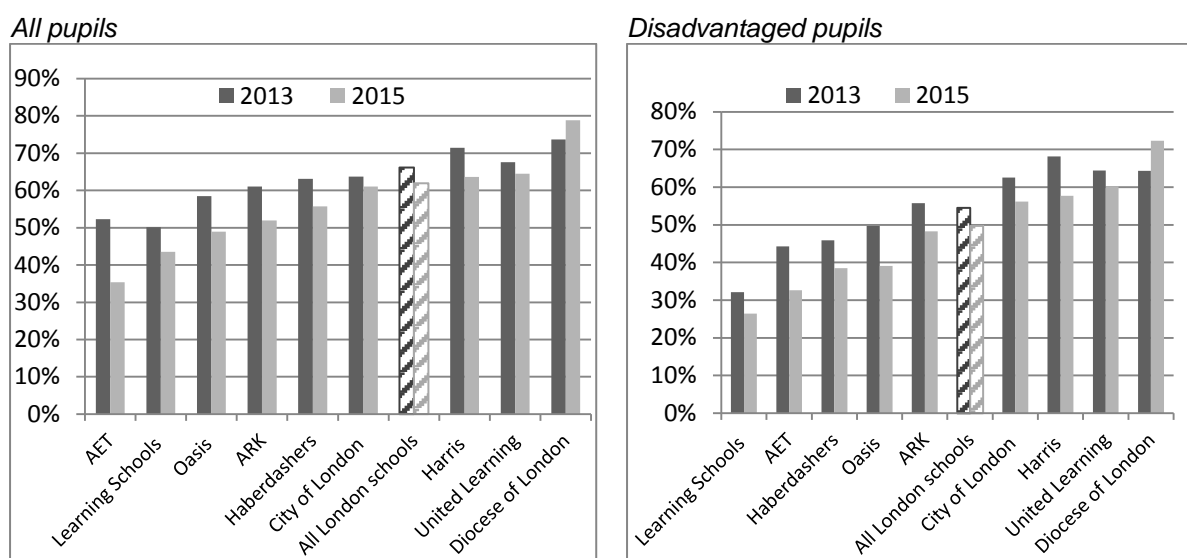


Figure A shows that while Harris, United Learning and *Diocese of London* have higher attainment for all pupils and for disadvantaged pupils than the London average, their advantage is less when compared with this group than it was in comparison to all schools nationally. City of London did better than average for disadvantaged pupils, the other chains were below London average for both groups.

**Figure A Percentage of pupils achieving 5A\*CEM 203 and 2015, including only those academies in each chain which are in London**



<sup>94</sup> Hutchings et al. (2012), Baars et al. (2014); Burgess (2014), Greaves et al. (2014).



We have also considered change between 2013 and 2015 using a quintile analysis which uses London schools as a base.

**Table A: Change 2013-15 in the performance of London chains (or parts of chains) in the analysis group on 5A\*CEM in comparison to change for all mainstream London schools, by quintile (within bands, chains are ranked alphabetically)**

**a) for all pupils**

Change 2013-15, compared to quintile average	Quintile 1 (lowest attaining quintile in 2013)	Quintile 2	Quintile 3	Quintile 4	Quintile 5 (highest attaining quintile in 2013)
Significantly better					Diocese of London
Slightly better			City of London United Learning		
Average					
Slightly worse	Learning Schools	ARK Oasis	Haberdashers	Harris	
Significantly worse	AET				

**b) for disadvantaged pupils**

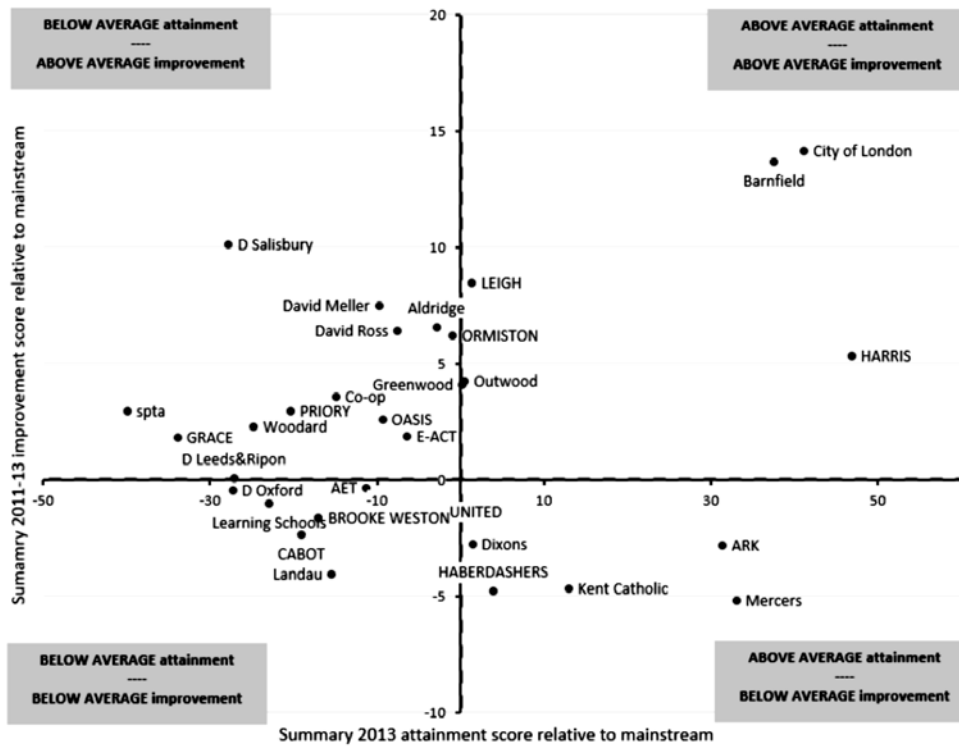
Change 2013-15, compared to quintile average	Quintile 1 (lowest attaining quintile in 2013)	Quintile 2	Quintile 3	Quintile 4	Quintile 5 (highest attaining quintile in 2013)
Significantly better					Diocese of London
Slightly better				City of London United Learning	Harris
Average			ARK		
Slightly worse	Learning Schools	AET Haberdashers Oasis			
Significantly worse					

The improvement made by *Diocese of London* (for all pupils and for those that are disadvantaged) is significantly better than that of other schools in the same quintile (but note that within London, it is in quintile 4 whereas nationally it was in the highest attaining quintile). AET did significantly worse than other schools in the lowest attaining quintile for all pupils. None of the other chains stood out, but for six chains, overall improvement between 2013 and 2015 was less than in London schools with comparable 2013 attainment.

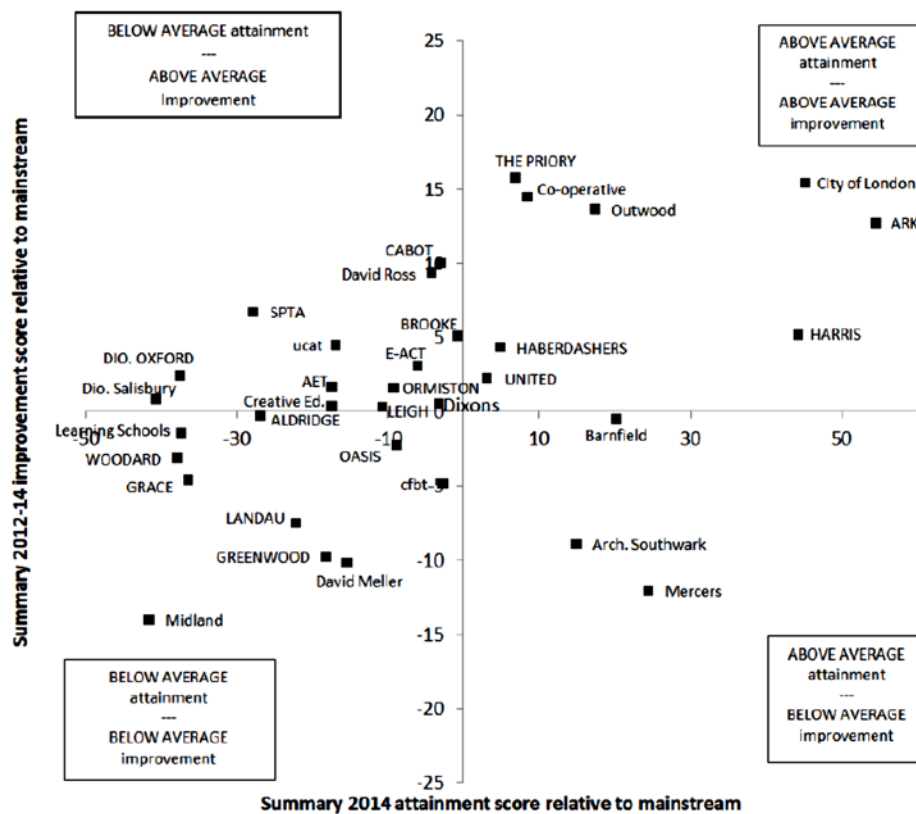
The improvement for disadvantaged pupils in London academes in our analysis group was generally better than overall improvement. The chains with initial above average attainment for this group improved on this slightly more than London schools with comparable 2013 attainment, but those below the average also failed to improve as much as comparable schools. This fits the pattern we have previously noted in which there is a sharp divide between successful chains with above average attainment and improvement, and those which are below average and fail to improve as much as comparable schools.

## Appendix 3: Chains' performance on the key measures of attainment and improvement in 2013 and 2014

Attainment for disadvantaged pupils compared with improvement (*Chain Effects 2014 report*)



Attainment for disadvantaged pupils compared with improvement (*Chain Effects 2015 report*)



## **Appendix 4: Suggested criteria for sponsorship and school improvement commissioning (*Chain Effects 2015*)**

Criteria should be:

- Quality (including attainment record and offer to students);
- Capacity;
- Vision and strategic model (including school improvement strategy, approach to expansion and regional coherence, governance model, sponsor vision and ethos, etc.);
- Track record (against transparent criteria).

Clearly for new sponsors with no prior record, strength against the other criteria will need to be especially convincing.

## **Appendix 5: Profiles of chains that score highly on attainment measures in this report**

### **Outwood Grange**

Outwood Grange Academies Trust were named after its first academy, Outwood Grange. Currently, the chain has 19 primary and secondary academies.. Outwood Grange Academy is located in Wakefield, and the Trust has expanded into other areas of Yorkshire, the East Midlands and North East.

Four schools were included in our report, which had a relatively low proportion of disadvantaged pupils overall (fourth lowest of the chains considered) and pupils with low performance at primary school (ninth lowest). Outwood is in the top five chains for attainment on our overall ranking, and second highest for improvement. It showed the highest level of improvement for GCSE capped point score of all the chains analysed. All of the schools analysed in the chain were rated 'good' or 'outstanding'.

### **Harris**

Harris Federation is a chain with 37 primary and secondary academies, as well as some free schools, strongly clustered in and around South London. The federation was founded in 1990, and was originally based around one city technology college. It opened its first academy in 2003.

Ten schools were included in our analysis, all in London, with their proportion of disadvantaged pupils averaging 47%. The percentage with low primary school attainment (17%) was only just above the national figure (16%). Harris was top ranked on GCSE capped point score (thus use of equivalent qualifications is low) and its improvement matched the national average for similar schools. Harris was also significantly above average in its performance on percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving five GCSEs at A\*-C (including English and maths), expected progress in English and maths, and the EBacc. All of the schools analysed in the chain were rated 'good' or 'outstanding'.

### **ARK**

Ark is an international education charity which runs schools in the UK and education programmes across the globe. In 2006, ARK opened their first school, ARK Burlington Danes Academy, in West London. Since then they have grown to 34 primary and secondary schools in the UK.

Seven ARK academies form part of this analysis, four of which are located in London. They have a very high percentage of disadvantaged pupils (just over 64%), and over a quarter entered with attainment below Level 4 – a much higher percentage than other high-attaining chains and the national average (16%). In our overall ranking, ARK were significantly above average in attainment for disadvantaged pupils, and above average for improvement. All of the schools analysed in the chain were rated 'good' or 'outstanding'.

## Author biographies

**Professor Merryn Hutchings** is Emeritus Professor in the Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London Metropolitan University. She started her career teaching in London primary schools, then moved into teacher training. For the last twenty years she has worked mainly in research, leading a wide range of projects focusing on teachers and schools, and the impact of policies designed to raise school standards. Her most recent project investigated the impact of accountability measures on children and young people.

**Professor Becky Francis** is Director of the UCL-Institute of Education (IOE). Before this, she was Professor of Education and Social Justice at King's College London. She has followed a research career focusing on education and social justice, incorporating education policy work, for example in her previous roles as Director of Education at the RSA, and as Standing Advisor to the Parliamentary Education Select Committee.

Becky is best known for her work on gender and achievement. Her policy research and analysis has focused particularly on school quality, and academies policy, in relation to social equality. Her academic expertise and extensive publications centre on social identities (gender, 'race' and social class) in educational contexts, social in/equality, and social identity and educational achievement, and gender theory. Becky was a member of the REF 2014 sub-panel for Education, and has acted as a judge for various practitioner awards panels, including the National Pupil Premium Awards and the TES Teacher of the Year awards. She is currently directing the Education Endowment Foundation-funded project 'Best Practice in Grouping Students', a mixed methods study involving 140 English secondary schools, investigating attainment and non-attainment grouping in relation to social inequality.

**Dr Philip Kirby** is the Sutton Trust Research Fellow. His most recent report for the Sutton Trust is *Degrees of Debt: Funding and Finance for Undergraduates in Anglophone Countries*, with previous reports on teacher qualifications, apprenticeships and the educational backgrounds of the UK professional elite. He holds a PhD in political geography from Royal Holloway, University of London, and was formerly Associate Research Fellow at the University of Exeter.