

Secondary school admissions

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*John Coldron, Emily Tanner, Steven Finch,
Lucy Shipton, Claire Wolstenholme, Ben Willis,
Sean Demack and Bernadette Stiell*

*Sheffield Hallam University and National Centre for
Social Research*

**Research Report No
DCSF-RR020**

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Claire Wolstenholme, Ben Willis, Sean Demack and Bernadette Stiel*

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The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Findings

- Admissions in 2006 were better coordinated and more effectively regulated than in 2000. However in some areas the co-ordination role of Local Authorities ended with the offer of places in March. After this date each admission authority within the area dealt with its own appeals and any other matters and no one had responsibility for the management of admissions and appeals across the whole area.
- Appeals heard increased up to a peak of 7% of all admissions in 2000/01 and then have steadily declined to 6.1% in 2005/06¹
- In the sample, parental satisfaction was broadly similar to that in 2000. Overall about 85% of parents gained their first choice school. The figure for London parents was 72%. Nationally 93% of parents gained either their first or second preference. Once their children start at the school, the great majority of parents are satisfied with the school with 95% of parents who got their first choice being satisfied and 82% of parents whose child attended a school that was not their first preference being satisfied.
- In the sample 81% of parents said they were satisfied with the choice of schools in their locality. Satisfaction was lowest among parents living in London even though they have more schools to choose from.
- 25% of parents did not apply to their nearest maintained school. The main reasons cited were poor reputation, poor exam results and problems with behaviour/discipline².
- Socio-economic status is widely considered to be a factor in the fairness of admissions. The sample was analysed to find any associations between the outcomes of the admissions process and socio-economic status. No association was found between the chances of gaining first choice of school and the socio-economic status of parents. This suggests that either different groups of parents seek different things from their secondary school or that parents are responding realistically to their chances of gaining entry to certain schools, or both. It does not mean that there are no educational disadvantages systematically visited on some groups rather than others. It indicates rather that the way that inequality of educational opportunity continues to occur is not reducible to whether or not a parent gets their first

¹ Figures from DCSF Statistical First Releases

² This is different from the number of children who do not attend their nearest school which appears to be higher. DCSF figures supplied to the authors suggest about 50% of pupils travel further than their nearest school. Burgess et al also suggest a higher figure see Burgess S., McConnell, B., Propper, C. and Wilson, D. (2007) *The Impact of School Choice in England: Implications from the economic evidence*. Policy Studies, Vol. 28, No 2

choice of school. There were no significant associations found between appealing and parents' family characteristics.

- While less affluent and less educated parents accessed fewer sources of information there was no evidence from the analysis of those gaining their first choice of school or of those appealing that this disadvantaged them in terms of their gaining their preferred outcome.
- It is a misconception to think that the unfairness of admissions consists in some groups being denied access to 'good' schools. It does not take adequate account of how intake contributes powerfully to the public perception of schools as 'good' or 'bad'. A more adequate account focuses on how the admissions system contributes to segregated intakes and how that segregation leads to unequal educational opportunity.
- Although admissions were better regulated in 2006 compared with 2000 some schools that were their own admission authorities, in particular voluntary aided schools, were less compliant with the School Admissions Code of Practice 2003 and were more likely to covertly select than community schools.
- The most highly selective LAs (those that have the highest proportion of places allocated to children who score highest on an 11+ test) had more socially segregated schools, fewer parents gaining their first preference and a greater number of appeals.
- Admissions policy should concentrate not only on compliance with the 2007 Schools Admissions Code which is likely to reduce the incidence of direct covert selection by schools but priority should also be given to mitigating the indirect causes of segregated intakes.
- The most effective approach is likely to be a statutory requirement to take action combined with freedom at the local level to determine what methods will work in particular contexts. Admission forums, local authorities and admission authorities will need to take positive action where the outcome of local arrangements is found to be intakes that are socially distinct to an unacceptable degree.
- Policy options available for redressing indirect selection that leads to socially segregated intakes include a body to set the admission criteria for all the schools in an area, fair banding, subsidised travel for lower income families, measures to ensure balanced intakes to grammar schools, random allocation and removing the ability to select a proportion by aptitude. Procedural fairness with regard to appeals would be enhanced if Local Authority co-ordination was extended and if they fully managed appeals for all admission authorities in their area.

It is some years since a comprehensive study of admission arrangements was conducted and considerable changes to secondary school admissions have since been introduced. It is therefore timely to map the admissions arrangements and to evaluate outcomes enabling us to identify any trends since 2000 and to set a baseline against which to chart any changes following the new arrangements.

In order adequately to describe how effective the admission arrangements were we needed to be clear about the objectives of the admissions system. In general school admissions policy aims to achieve a fair system, improved standards of

education and a more cohesive society. A number of dimensions of social justice are therefore implicated. That admissions should have regard to the need for the fair distribution of educational opportunity, the need for distributive justice, is widely acknowledged. This is however often cast as ensuring access to a scarce resource of 'good' schools. This is a misconception of the problem since it does not adequately take account of the role of intake in the way schools are constructed as 'good' or 'bad' and a more adequate account is in terms of avoiding segregated intakes. An effective system would also, as far as possible, enable parents to educate their children according to their beliefs, fulfilling the need to protect individual liberty, the dimension of justice of autonomy. Less often recognised is the need to avoid another form of injustice, the concern for justice of recognition, which arises from the harm inflicted by the denigration of schools, children and communities that can accompany the process of admissions.

From these aims the following nine objectives and three valid measures of effectiveness were identified and these provided the foci of the mapping and the evaluation of the admission arrangements operating in England in 2006.

An effective admissions system would:

- Provide a means by which those who consider admissions arrangements to be unfair can refer the matter to an independent adjudicator
- Provide an effective means for parents to appeal to an independent tribunal if they are unsatisfied with the outcome
- Provide access to clear and understandable information and criteria that are transparent, and seen to be objectively applied
- Ensure that all parents are treated equally and schools do not covertly select students on the basis of social status or prior attainment
- Satisfy parents' wishes as to how and where their children are to be educated
- Not inhibit the quality of education overall and, if possible, contribute to enhancing it
- Not allow the greater achievement of some children to be at the expense of others
- Contribute to social cohesion
- Not contribute to the harm inflicted by denigration of children and communities

The measures are:

- the proportion of parents gaining their first preference
- the level of appeals
- the level of segregation of intakes.

The study consisted of three strands.

Strand One aimed to provide a comprehensive description of the admission arrangements for entry to maintained secondary schools in England in September 2006.

Strand Two was a survey of parents' and carers' to gain a representative view of the experience of those who sought a place for their children starting in Year7 in September 2006.

Strand Three gathered data about the outcomes of the admissions process in terms of the number of parents who gained a place at their first preference school, the level of appeals and the level of segregation.

Responsibility for setting admission arrangements rests with the Admission authority for each school. Regulation of the practice of admission authorities is important to reduce unfair practices. Admissions in 2006 were subject to the School Admissions Code of Practice 2003. Three mutually reinforcing measures of regulation were in place namely the requirement to consult, the requirement to have regard to the published guidance, the opportunity to object to the Schools Adjudicator.

Admission arrangements

Banding Only a small minority of schools adopted fair banding (as defined in the School Admissions Code of Practice 2003) but it is likely that it will become more widespread in future. Three Local Authorities in London had authority wide fair banding. Of these two had fewer appeals and all three had less segregated intakes than other London authorities. These systems accommodated a number of Voluntary Aided faith schools. In two of the LAs there were 5 VA schools that did not opt in to the banding arrangements.

Selection by prior attainment (general 'ability') Selection by prior attainment was found to perform relatively badly in relation to the objectives of an effective admissions system as defined above. There were selective schools in 43 Local Authorities. Twenty of these authorities had 10% or more selective places. In the 14 most selective authorities (those with between 19% and 39% of selective places) there were more appeals, fewer parents gained their first preference and the intakes were more socially segregated compared to all other authorities. Other studies suggest that there is little if any compensating gain in overall educational standards.

Selection by aptitude There has been a small increase in the proportion of schools selecting 10% of their intake by aptitude from an estimated 1.3% in 2000 to 3% in 2001 to 4% in 2006. Because of the rise in the number of schools with a specialism, this small proportionate increase means that more children in 2006 than in 2000 were subject to selection by aptitude. Voluntary-aided and Foundation schools were much more likely to select in this way than Community or Voluntary Controlled schools. There are significant differences between selection by aptitude and selection by 'ability'. Nevertheless there are strong arguments to suggest that selection by aptitude is likely to be socially selective by default. A high relative attainment in any of the subjects (even sport) will involve expense of resources of time and money for travelling, equipment and training. More affluent families have more of these resources as well as more social and cultural capital. In addition, parents from higher socio-economic groups tend to be more active in choosing a school and to be more willing for their children to travel away from their nearest school (financial resources will play a part in this as well) and so they may be more likely to apply for the aptitude places. These possibilities remain to be proven but there would appear to be a potential for unfairness.

Supplementary information Supplementary information forms that ask for extra information beyond that required to apply published criteria offer schools the means for social selection. 29% of non-Community schools ask for additional information of this kind with Voluntary Aided schools more likely to do so than any other type of school. The 2007 School Admissions Code now prohibits the use of supplementary forms which ask for any personal information that is not relevant to applying acceptable oversubscription criteria.

Subscription status In order to help parents gain a place at their most preferred school the published information is supposed to allow a parent to see whether the school is over or undersubscribed (the schools subscription status). For a very large proportion (42%) of schools it was not possible to tell their subscription status from the information given.

Over subscription criteria When schools are oversubscribed the admission authority, on the basis of criteria their admission authority has determined, decide which applicants are most eligible and therefore have higher priority. Some oversubscription criteria and the way they are implemented provide the means of covert selection by schools on the basis of social characteristics or prior attainment. Oversubscription criteria are often complex combinations of a limited number of elements. We looked in detail at the most common criteria.

The School Admissions Code of Practice 2003 recommended that authorities give top priority in their oversubscription criteria to **children in public care**. This is now a statutory requirement from September 2007. We found that 67% of all schools had this as a high priority (either first or second place) in their oversubscription criteria but for nearly 24% it did not feature anywhere in their criteria. Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools were least likely to have Child in Care as any kind of priority with nearly a half of Voluntary Aided and just over a third of Foundation schools not mentioning them at all. From the 2007/08 admissions round onwards, admission authorities are now required by law to give highest priority in their oversubscription criteria to children in care.

17% of all schools put **Medical or Social Needs** as their first priority. 53% of schools included it somewhere in their oversubscription criteria. Community and Voluntary Controlled schools and Academies were the most likely to have Medical or Social Needs as a priority. Foundation schools were less likely to do so, but Voluntary Aided schools were much less likely with only a quarter making this any kind of priority.

Issues relating to other criteria were:

- **Siblings** and **Catchment** areas were significant criteria for all types of schools.
- 61% of all schools' used **Proximity** but it was often used as a tie break for when other criteria fail to differentiate.

- 32% of all schools used **Feeder schools** somewhere in their criteria. Only 6% have it as their first priority. Voluntary Aided schools used this more often than any other type of school.
- 30% of all schools used **First Preference**. A minority of all types of schools had this criterion. This is now unlawful.
- Only 15% of all schools have any **Faith Related criteria** but for these it is a high priority. As would be expected, the great majority (nearly 90%) of Voluntary Aided schools designated with a religious character used Faith Related criteria. 60% of Voluntary Aided faith schools gave some priority to **Other Faiths**. 16% gave some priority to children of **No Faith**.
- Only 9% of all schools had **Parent Commitment** as a priority but this included nearly a third of all Voluntary Aided schools. The 2007 School Admissions Code prohibits schools from taking account of parents' personal interests or other circumstances, except for faith schools who may enquire about membership or relationship with a church or religious denomination. While there is some overlap between this criterion and faith criteria the third of VA schools appeared to go beyond the need to establish religious commitment and all of the schools represented in this 9% would be likely now to fall into the unlawful category.
- 4% of all schools had criteria that gave priority to children who were related in some way to adults connected with the school (**Associated Adults**) such as teachers or governors. This too is now unlawful.

Parents' Experience

The survey presents a picture of parents' experiences of secondary school admissions that is broadly positive and comparable with the findings of the previous study in 2000.

The broadly positive experiences of more than two-thirds of parents can easily be summarised. These parents found that information about schools was accessible, adequate and useful. They found the application process to be reasonably straightforward and the choice of school quite easy to make, focusing as it did on their local school. The outcome of the process was satisfactory as 84% of respondents were offered a place for their child at the school they had put as their first choice. There was a minority of respondents for whom the admissions process resulted in substantial disappointment (14% did not get their first preference school) and dissatisfaction (4% said that they were dissatisfied with the school that their child attended). For these parents dissatisfaction was generally focused on the outcome rather than the process.

While parents generally felt well informed about schools, there was evidence that some parents had better access to knowledge than others. School prospectuses and brochures were in plentiful supply but were used more by better educated parents than less well educated parents. The internet was playing a growing role and parents who had easy access to the internet appeared to have significantly better access to information. However, the most highly valued information was obtained informally, through school visits and talking to other parents and school staff. These trends suggest that parents with poorer educational attainment, low

internet access, poorer social networks and poorer information-gathering skills could be disadvantaged in the admissions process. It is important to stress that these findings only relate to access to the available information and we found no evidence that less well-educated parents or parents from less affluent socio-economic groups were disadvantaged in the applications because of their lower use of information. However, these findings clearly have relevance for the Choice Adviser initiative.

The survey identified some notable trends affecting a minority of parents. In areas where places were limited, particularly in London, parents were invited to express a larger number of preferences and did so, were more likely to apply to schools outside their local authority and were less likely to get a school of their choice. Special admissions arrangements, which will be more restricted under the new admissions code, increased the complexity of the process and were associated with increased special actions, such as coaching and extra tuition, by parents who were keen to improve their child's chances.

Proximity to schools was found to be central to the over-subscriptions criteria of many admissions authorities and parents had a good understanding of how this affected their chances of success. A fifth of parents had taken account of catchment areas the last time they moved home and those who hadn't done so were more likely to take other special actions to further their application. This established relationship between proximity and application success may be weakened as the School Admissions Code 2007 is implemented, with positive or negative consequences for some parents' satisfaction with the system. In this context, it is worth noting that parents' satisfaction with their child's travel arrangements was greater when the child could walk or travel by school bus than when they had to travel by car or public transport.

Outcomes and effectiveness

The system in 2006 was more efficiently managed and better co-ordinated than in 2000. The requirement to consult combined with the opportunity to object to the Schools Adjudicator made compliance with the School Admission Code of Practice 2003 more likely. Community and Voluntary Controlled schools and Academies were more likely than Foundation and Voluntary Aided schools to follow the guidance and recommendations with Voluntary Aided schools the least likely to have complied.

Procedural non-compliance on the part of schools and covert selection is only a part of the reason for segregated intakes. It is a widespread assumption that parents from lower socio economic groups are being denied access because they are less able to understand the admissions process and therefore less able to successfully negotiate it. We found no evidence to support this. While more educated parents were likely to access more information very few parents felt they were lacking basic information about secondary schools and there was no evidence that parents who were less educated had any reduced chance of gaining their first preference. Factors such as residential segregation, the likelihood of an unsuccessful application, and the disincentive of financial and social costs are

more likely to explain the social segregation of intakes than an inability to understand or negotiate a complex system.

Diversity of provision is a current policy priority. The different rationales for diversity need to be noted and the different kinds of diversity need to be distinguished. One rationale is to provide the means to realise the right of parents to educate their children according to their views and beliefs; a second arises as a pre-requisite of an effective education market. Schools are diverse in many ways. We identified four categories of diversity and considered the evidence in this and other studies of their incidence and whether or not it was increasing or decreasing. The four kinds of diversity are: Structural, Educational, Compositional and Reputational. Each school presents a different mix of these. Structural diversity has increased significantly. It is difficult to judge whether educational diversity has increased or decreased but the evidence available suggests a decrease. In relation to compositional diversity, while grammar and secondary modern schools are at the extremes of segregation by attainment, all types of schools differed in this way. Social segregation nationally has not significantly increased since the introduction of more parental choice in 1988 but is higher in areas where: the population is more dense, there is a greater number of schools nearby, there is structural and religious diversity between schools, there are more schools that are their own admission authority, the area is one of the 14 most selective. Other studies provide evidence that, despite there being no *overall* increase, social segregation is increasing in specific *localities* particularly in London and other densely populated areas. There has been no increase in ethnic segregation between schools other than that explained by the increase in the BME school population. The minority population is not evenly spread across all LAs, but is concentrated in a few areas. In these enclaves there are schools where the students are almost exclusively White and others where they are almost exclusively from minority communities. While it is important to have identified the extent of diversity on each separate dimension, there are important inter-connections between them. How schools differ in reputation is extremely salient to parents' expression of preferences but it is not amenable to measurement.

How satisfied are parents?

Appeals heard increased up to a peak in 2000/01 and then have steadily declined. Appeal rates are *higher* in Local Authorities with higher proportions of children whose first language is not English, outside London, with higher population density, where intakes are more socially segregated and where there is a high level of selection. There was no evidence that some groups of parents make more appeals than other groups.

In 2006 about 85% of parents gained their first expressed preference. This figure has remained fairly consistent since 2000. It is also a consistent finding that the percentage is lower in London at around 70% where there are more and a greater variety of schools within easier reach. First preference rates are *higher* in Local Authorities with lower population density; fewer Voluntary Aided or Foundation schools or Academies and less diversity of schools; higher proportions of pupils with English as a first language; lower rates of cross border movement (imports and exports); and that are less socially segregated.

The admission system is now more uniform across Local Authorities and more co-ordinated. The great majority of respondents (97%) received an offer for their child on the due date and parents' satisfaction with the process was generally high.

How fair is the system?

A powerful driver of the social segregation of schools is residential segregation in combination with admission arrangements prioritising proximity. Added to this is further social sorting as a result of schools' specific criteria and procedures. Voluntary Aided schools used aspects of, and particular arrangements of, admission procedures and criteria that lend themselves to covert social selection, more often than other schools. Other studies have shown that these schools have more advantaged intakes than other types of school.

While the better regulation in 2006 compared to 2000 may have reduced covert selection it did not eliminate it nor greatly mitigate residential selection. Admission arrangements such as banding, which are not widely used currently, can mitigate social segregation especially in densely populated areas. For example, segregation was much less in the three banded authorities than in comparable areas.

What are the effects on attainment?

There are three ways in which admissions might impact on attainment, positively through increased competition between schools, negatively through some children's higher attainment being at the expense of others' lower attainment as a result of social segregation and neutrally through selection to schools on the basis of attainment or aptitude. The evidence from other studies suggests that there is little if any increase in overall attainment as a result of competition but that some children are gaining at the expense of others. The evidence concerning selection and overall attainment levels is complex but it is clear that it contributes substantially to social segregation without any significant balancing educational benefit.

Policy options

Because of the central role of segregation in falling short of a number of objectives, it is useful to consider the pros and cons of policy options available to better balance intakes. The theoretical benefits of balanced intakes are considerable but the practical problems arising from the complexity of particular contexts and the need to accommodate other policy priorities are great. A requirement on admission authorities to move towards better balanced intakes while leaving the detail to be worked out at local level would seem to be wise. This is the approach embodied in the new Schools Admissions Code 2007. Policy options include a body to set or apply the admission criteria for all schools in an area, fair banding, subsidised travel for lower income families, measures to ensure balanced intakes to grammar schools, random allocation and removing the ability to select a proportion by aptitude.

A number of arrangements suggest themselves as a means of reducing social segregation. Banding is a powerful means of balancing intakes both by attainment and social characteristics. Catchments of geographical priority areas are also an effective means but may be less manageable or sustainable. Feeder schools have the advantages of predictability and sustained relationship between schools but share similar problems to catchments. Random allocation can be an efficient and effective means of allocating places especially in combination with other oversubscription criteria.

A mixture of methods is indicated, with a requirement on admission authorities to determine locally how best to better balance intakes. Schools have a strong incentive to select on the basis of social characteristics. School reputations are gained and lost in a complex and little understood process but their pupils' performance in public examinations plays an important part in the way the school is perceived by parents, local authorities and agencies such as Ofsted bolstered by comparisons in performance tables of various kinds. It is also the case that some children offer challenges that make the day to day work of teachers harder and more stressful (Thrupp 1999). It is therefore in the school's interests to attract children who are, because of their social characteristics or prior attainment level, more likely to perform well in these tests and are easier to teach. Reducing the incentives for schools to select might be achieved by changing the way schools are held accountable, making more explicit the inclusive mission of schools and providing resources according to the social characteristics of the intake. Selection by ability/attainment is currently also largely selection by social background. One option would be to abolish selection by attainment. A less drastic alternative is to take effective steps to ensure equal social representation amongst those who qualify on the 11+ test.

Some of the educational and social cohesion benefits of eliminating segregation between schools would be lost if social segregation was reintroduced within school. Procedures such as streaming and setting pose this danger.

A fairer and more effective admissions system will not solve the problems of lack of equal educational opportunity or social mobility but it can make a valuable contribution in combination with other policies.

1 INTRODUCTION

This section sets the project in the context of the debate and practical concerns about the administration of admissions. It gives an outline of the issues at the heart of the debate, explains why there is a need for greater clarification of what would be an effective admissions system and sets out the contribution this project is intended to make. Having attempted to better conceptualise what effectiveness might mean there is a discussion of how it might be measured.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Key findings

- The time is right, following considerable changes, for a comprehensive mapping of the operation of admissions to secondary school and setting a benchmark against which to measure the effects of changes from September 2007.
- The debate about admissions is about how best to achieve a fair system, improved education and a more cohesive society.
- The more social segregation of school intakes the less fair or equitable the system.
- Where there are unbalanced intakes one group is gaining at the expense of another.
- The system should not contribute to the harm inflicted by denigration of children and communities.
- In order to be able adequately to describe how different kinds of admission arrangements are operating we need to clarify what the objectives of the admissions system are.
- Nine objectives are identified.
- Three valid measures of effectiveness are identified: the proportion of parents gaining their first preference, the level of appeals, the level of segregation of intakes.

1.1.2 The aim of this study

Admissions to schools is central to the achievement of important policy objectives of successive governments over the last thirty years and is often the subject of heated debate, acting as an arena where political and moral outlooks compete. It is therefore important that there is a solid basis of fact to enrich and ground this debate and to inform policy.

A previous study (Flatley et al 2001) sought to provide a comprehensive report of the admission arrangements in place in all local education authorities in England and a nationally representative survey of parents concerning their experience of choosing a secondary school. There has been considerable change in relation to admissions in the six years since the fieldwork for that project was done. Changes include a new School Admissions Code of Practice (2003) and School Admission

Appeals Code of Practice (2003), an increase in the number of specialist schools, the introduction of Academies, the consolidation of the work of admission forums and an increased number of rulings by the schools adjudicator. To date there has been no other such comprehensive study. West and Hind's study in 2003 looked at the arrangements existing in 2001 in all authorities but did not conduct a parent survey. There have been interesting partial studies focused on London (Pennell, West and Hind 2006) and others which looked at a sample of local authorities across England (Gorard et al 2002). A report by Which (Which 2005) conducted a survey of parents but did not look in detail at the admission arrangements in Local Authorities.

In February 2007 the School Admissions Code came into force. This code has much greater power than the previous 2003 School Admissions Code and introduces a number of strong measures that admission authorities must, or should, follow. It is likely to have a significant impact on practice resulting from requirements on admission authorities concerning such details as over-subscription criteria, the prohibition of giving higher priority to those who place a school higher on their application form (usually referred to as first preference first) and information. This report aims to give an updated and comprehensive map of the details of admission arrangements as they exist prior to these changes, of parents' experiences of choosing a secondary school and of current overall outcomes and effectiveness. This will make it possible in the future to identify how and where any changes take place. In the next section we attempt to identify the objectives against which we will measure the effectiveness of admissions and consider what would count as valid measures

1.1.3 The objectives of an admission system

The debate concerning admissions

When Shirley Williams was Secretary of State for Education in 1976 she noted that she was dealing with a small, although growing, number of appeals from parents against the schools they had been allocated. Since the Education Reform Act in 1988, successive governments have adopted parental choice and the development of a 'quasi-market' in education (Le Grand 1991, 1993; Adnett and Davies 2002) as a means for the general improvement and reform of schools. A number of policies have been introduced to enable parents to choose and to introduce real competition. These include making school funding more dependent on pupil numbers and thus providing an incentive to attract pupils, standardised tests to enable comparison of the educational performance of the children who attend, regular independent and publicly available assessments of the quality of schools by OFSTED, and a greater diversity of providers of schools. Parental choice of school, together with information about school performance, was intended to create pressure on schools to improve their standards, because of the risk that parents would take their children elsewhere.

Some schools were highly sought after and others parents sought to avoid. A report in 1996 (Audit Commission 1996) highlighted considerable difficulties in the management of the process of choice with many parents feeling dissatisfied with

both the process and the outcomes. Further, Local Authorities were finding it increasingly difficult to co-ordinate the supply and allocation of school places within their area in an efficient and effective way. The problems were felt most acutely in the large urban areas and particularly London. Alongside these developments there was a growing academic critique that the introduction of parental choice and the quasi-market was disadvantaging certain social groups (Gewirtz et al 1995; Lauder et al 1999), and that schools and parents were adopting unfair practices (Woods et al 1998; West, A., Pennell, H. 1997; West, A., Pennell, H. & Noden, P. 1998). There have more recently been concerns expressed about the ethnic segregation of schools and the potential threat to social cohesion (Denham 2001; Cantle et al 2006).

The consequences of these policies are felt acutely by the various stakeholders. The way admission to schools operates directly affects the interests of parents who are looking for a suitable education for their children and previous qualitative studies reveal that many feel extremely anxious about the process³. There are implications too for local authorities because the criteria in place, the number of admission authorities that exist, and the system of co-ordination adopted directly affect the ability of officers to manage the admissions process to maximise the satisfaction of parents. For admissions managers in deeply polarised areas it presents extreme difficulties in achieving coherent regional schools provision. Schools can also suffer. Some are inundated with applications while others cannot fill the available places. For the schools which are unpopular their already difficult job is made harder and schools which are heavily oversubscribed spend a great deal of time and energy managing the process of admissions and appeals. Politicians in large urban areas face seasonal complaints from constituents and this reflects on central government which has a regulatory role and has pledged itself to ensure a fair admissions system.

The debate about admissions, while often appearing to be about arcane technicalities, does in fact go to the heart of current policies about how best to achieve social justice, an improved education system and a cohesive society. However, the interplay between detail and these underlying issues is often complex and obscure. Positions taken in the debate that reflect profound differences of political and moral outlook, are often implicit rather than explicit. Effectiveness can only be gauged in relation to clear objectives. Only when we have clarified what the objectives of a system are can we make use of evidence to judge how far the system is achieving its aims (Tough and Brooks 2007). The objectives of an effective admissions system have remained largely implicit and there has not been enough analysis of what they might be. Our first task therefore is to clarify what effectiveness might mean and in the process we will identify the

³ See Ball 2003; Coldron 1999; Lucey and Reay 2000, 2002, 2007

main threads of the debate, give a rationale for the design of the study and provide the basis for understanding the report of the empirical work.

First objectives

We may take four objectives as relatively uncontroversial. Firstly, that the admissions system should not inhibit the quality of education overall and, if possible, should contribute to enhancing it. The measure of this we take to be the average standards of achievement in public examinations of all children. However, an acceptable average could be achieved as a result of one group performing extremely well while another group performs extremely poorly and this, perhaps slightly more controversially, we take to be undesirable. We therefore need to make a second condition, that admissions should not inhibit the achievement of some children at the cost of the lower achievement of others. Thirdly, all parents should be treated in the same way in relation to the process and procedures of admissions. This means in practice that every parent should have the same access to clear and understandable information and that the criteria for admission are transparent, objectively applied and do not advantage some parents over others. Fourthly, there should be an objective and effective means for parents to appeal to an independent tribunal if they are unsatisfied with the outcome of the process.

These objectives are fairly easy to identify. However much of the heat around admissions comes from different takes on the more complex concerns for fairness and social justice and the most effective way of achieving a healthy society. One way of clarifying the different positions is to understand what kinds of unfairness admissions might seek to avoid and what kinds they might enhance (Gewirtz 1998 and 2002). Three kinds of claims to justice can be distinguished as relevant to the admissions debate; the claim that people should be able to determine their own lives as far as possible – *justice as autonomy*; the claim that resources and goods should be distributed fairly – *distributive justice*; the claim that people and groups should be accorded respect whatever their identities – *justice of and through recognition*. The first two have largely been the focus of debate but we argue that the last is just as important but has received less attention. We attempt below to make more explicit the nature of these social justice claims in relation to admissions.

Admissions and Parents' right to choose

It is important not to conflate arguments as to the right to choose with the economic arguments for choice which will be considered in later sections. It is generally regarded that it follows from the principle of autonomy that parents should have the right to bring their children up according to their views and

beliefs⁴. This has been taken to include the way in which their child should be educated. Schools are only part of a child's education, and some countries, such as France, consider that the home is where this kind of autonomy should be exercised and differences of religion and values inculcated. The school system is to be kept secular and, from the point of view of contested values, uniform. The English system has a different history and faith schools are embedded in the system. This diversity of schools means parents can express religious values through their choice of school. Independent of religion, it is arguable that, since a significant part of the education of their children is delegated by parents to schools, parents should be able to exercise some influence on the kind of schooling their child receives. This is acknowledged in, for example, the opportunity for parents to be consulted on the nature of sex education and the fact that they are allowed to withdraw them from these lessons if they wish.

Other aspects of schooling might also be important in this regard for at least some parents – for example being educated with the same sex or having a strong uniform policy. Whatever parents say is an important value can be claimed as a legitimate expression of their autonomy. The principle of autonomy therefore seems to legitimate not only what everyone would agree were personal values to be respected but also every degree of whim or prejudice. What then is the responsibility of the admissions system in relation to the principle of autonomy? The exercise of autonomy as a choice of school requires that there is a diversity from which to choose. Where all the offerings are uniform there is no choice at all. Not just any diversity will serve however. For example a parental preference for an educational experience that would advantage their child over others would not be just. Differences in religious affiliation, curriculum, social organisation, pedagogic philosophy and moral climate would seem to fit the bill. The schools on offer would need also to reflect an adequate range of the major value positions in the community they served. It is considerations such as these that provide legitimacy for the calls for state maintained Muslim schools. Measures of the effectiveness of a policy that facilitates justice as autonomy would therefore be:

- how far does it provide diversity among schools
- how far do parents have a real rather than a theoretical possibility of choice between what the parents believe to be a reasonable range of schools
- how far is there equality of opportunity for all parents to exercise such choice⁵.

⁴ There are important and difficult issues about what this means for the autonomy of the children as persons but, for the present purposes, we accept the general view. See Brighouse (2000) for an extended discussion.

⁵ The role of choice here is different from the role it plays in arguments that stress the benefits of competition or the claim that choice within a market offers the optimum means of distributing social goods.

This raises some familiar difficulties and dilemmas. Firstly there may be practical difficulties in managing a large system to provide real choice to all. Brain and Klein (1994) surveyed parents about their preferences in one English town and found that nearly twice as many secondary schools would be needed to satisfy all the preferences. Significantly, they concluded that greater diversity of provision would generate more kinds of preference and the problem of matching would have been worse. Further, real access may be radically restricted for those with financial resources to spare and all but eliminated for the rest. It may require large amounts of public resources expended on subsidising travel and maintaining surplus spaces.

Another problem is that providing *principled* choice of this kind may in fact be used by parents for social advantage. For example, where a particular faith school is a good and therefore popular school, it is not inconceivable that families will become religious in order to gain entry to the school and the social advantages that it offers.

Distributive justice and admissions

The concern of distributive justice is the fair allocation of social goods or resources. In a meritocratic, and therefore socially mobile, society our level of education would be a major means by which we are allocated to our occupations and consequently to different levels of prestige and financial reward. On this basis education is a major resource that would in a just society be allocated fairly. This does not imply equally. For, quite apart from the impossibility that every individual can attain the highest competence in all fields, if educational attainment is to serve as the criterion for allocation, it requires that outcomes differ. Some people need to do better than others. When, inevitably, some people get greater social and financial rewards than others we are persuaded to accept this inequality if we think their rewards are the result of greater ability or hard work – the meritocratic principle⁶.

If however some individuals or social groups are unfairly handicapped and others unfairly advantaged in the competition for educational success then the fairness of the system is brought into question. But, it appears that good education is not currently equally accessible to all. It is likely that there will be many, probably interrelated, factors contributing to this inequality but admissions to schools is implicated. The problem of ‘selection by mortgage’ is a good illustration. It is well established that the higher the socio-economic level of the intake of a school the greater the likelihood that it will be perceived as ‘good’ and popular with parents.

⁶ While this meritocratic argument is widely accepted as common sense the difficulty of justifying it in a rigorous philosophical argument has been a central theme in modern political theory. See Kymlicka 2002 for an introduction to these debates.

Many areas, particularly metropolitan areas, are characterised by residential segregation and accompanying geographical distribution of wealth and status (Cheshire and Sheppard 2004; Burgess et al 2004; Butler and Hamnett 2007). If the admission arrangements, such as a proximity criterion or catchment, result in most children going to their nearest school some areas will have 'good' and popular schools while others will have 'poor' and unpopular schools and hence 'selection by mortgage'.

Another aspect of potential unfairness would be if some parents more often gained access to their preferred schools than those less skilled. The evidence from studies in England (Gewirtz et al 1995; Flatley et al 2001; Ball 2003), Scotland (Echols and Willms 1992), France (van Zanten 2003), New Zealand (Lauder et al 1999) and the USA (Holme 2002) is that already advantaged parents, through a combination of selection by mortgage and successful management of the admissions process, get their children into higher attaining schools than others. On the whole these parents are more highly educated, on a relatively high income, are in professional or service occupations and own their own homes (Flatley et al 2001). Gaining access to 'better' schools, it is argued, is a way in which the already advantaged maintain and enhance their social and economic position. As we will see we found no evidence in this study that this was the case.

These arguments characterise the problem of unfairness as a result of the systematic denial of already disadvantaged groups to gain access to a scarce resource i.e. 'good' schools. If we accept this argument it follows that the objective of policy should be removing administrative or financial barriers to achieve more equal access for the less advantaged. The scarce resource sought after is taken to be the educational excellence of the school - in short, high quality teaching, management and leadership. These things are, in principle, capable of being made less scarce, and even plentiful, by improving the quality of teachers and headteachers. School improvement is, on this argument, an important objective of policy and if admissions can contribute, it should be an objective of admissions too. It is argued by those who advocate the market (see Tooley in Education and Skills Select Committee Report 2004b) that greater parental choice would both improve schools for all by ensuring providers (schools) improved their offer in competition with other schools and, through such devices as vouchers, enhance access for groups of parents previously discriminated against. Any continuing problems, they argue, would be because we have not gone far enough in allowing the market to operate and that greater fairness will result from greater deregulation so that successful schools can expand and unsuccessful schools close. But these arguments are questionable.

One problem is that, consistent with allowing the customer to decide, they conflate 'popular' with 'good' and the criterion of what makes a good school is left vague and undefined. This makes room for the assumption that parents are choosing on the basis of educational excellence. But, if they do not, the argument that schools will be improved by competition is weakened. The characterisation of the problem as one of 'good' and 'bad' schools is misconceived. An alternative approach emphasises the fact that schools are predominantly constructed as 'good' simply by the fact of their intake (Holme 2002). Schools that already have a socially advantaged intake *appear* to be educationally better (because of their better raw

exam performance), are perceived by many parents to be safer places for their children and to offer more suitable peers for their children. These schools are therefore sought after, including by the already advantaged who have the wherewithal to achieve entry and who deploy 'status discourses' (Holme 2002) to justify dividing schools into desirable and undesirable. The resource that is scarce here is not educational excellence, but a socially advantaged intake. Such segregation is a characteristic that is, necessarily, incapable of being achieved by all schools. As Burgess puts it (Burgess et al 2007),

If the main basis for choice between schools is the quality of teaching, the competitive pressure created by choice should have a positive impact...But if parents are choosing schools on the basis of peer groups for their child...the scarce resource of 'acceptable peer groups will be rationed in some way, and the middle classes are likely to emerge winners. p140

Each of these constructions implies a different approach to the use of admissions arrangements to achieve the desired end. Emphasising the enhancement of parental choice as a means of improving access to the few good schools and of providing competitive pressure for all schools to improve, would take as objectives an increased diversity of providers, parents having and making use of a real choice between schools that differ in educational quality, the elimination of socially discriminating entry criteria, the elimination of financial barriers felt by some parents and not by others (e.g. the cost of travel to a preferred school), and a robust policy of school improvement through rigorous inspection and monitoring of performance. More balanced intakes and improved schools for all may be objectives of policies but they follow as a *result* of them in time. Alternatively, emphasising the effects of intake implies the adoption of policies that seek to achieve more socially balanced intakes *prior to and as a necessary pre-condition* of the proper exercise of *educational* choice as opposed to *social* choice. This argument leads to the advocacy of arrangements that reduce segregation, a local responsibility to monitor the balance of local schools and to act on any highlighted segregation.

While the starting points and the means are clearly quite opposed, the ultimate objectives may not be incompatible. An advocate of a deregulated system would likely be embarrassed by evidence of highly segregated schools in a fully marketised system. Equally, it would be hard for someone who insisted on the need for balanced intakes to justify a highly regulated system that rode roughshod over parents' principled wishes to have some say as to which school their child attends. Given that a perfect market and perfect equality are ideals not achievable, the relevant difference is not in the ultimate ends but the means with which each would seek to achieve it. Achieving balanced intakes would require a very considerable curtailment of parental choice, particularly the ability of the already advantaged parents to segregate their children from the less advantaged. In addition less segregated intakes might, for example, result in longer journeys for young people and a disconnection of the school from its immediate neighbourhood community. Similarly, even if the optimum benefits of a fully deregulated market might seem seductive, there would be a period of radical adjustment where the popular schools would expand and the unpopular schools would slowly wither until they were closed and new providers introduced. The experience of the children

and staff in those schools would be disruptive to already vulnerable children. More importantly however this would not be a passing phase. The energy of the market comes from the difference between good and bad schools. It depends on a *continual*, not passing, characterisation of schools as better or worse, rightly popular or rightly unpopular. The effect of this denigration is suffered by, and damages, the children, families and staff of the schools at the bottom of the local hierarchy created by the market (Reay and Lucey 2000). The important point is that, even if different schools take their turn at being unpopular, there will always be children and schools at the bottom of the hierarchy as the least well regarded schools. The real damage caused to children and communities is inherently unjust and too much of a price to pay for the potential benefits. The means each would use to move towards their ultimate aims are difficult to justify, morally and politically. The ends may not be seen to justify the means. These issues of the way people are perceived take us to the final kind of social justice claim.

Justice as recognition: The problem of systematic denigration

The widespread perception that some parents are gaining at the expense of others has ironically had the effect of casting the blame on already disadvantaged parents. A deficit model of already disadvantaged parents from lower socio-economic groups is embodied in the various types of parent choosers in the school choice literature – skilled choosers’ are opposed to ‘disconnected choosers’ (Gewirtz et al 1995); ‘alert’ to ‘inert’ (Echols and Willms 1992). Seeking to explain why already advantaged parents gain access to the ‘good’ schools attention is drawn to the difference in the financial means, organisational skills, and educational and social resources to understand or engage fully in the process (Education and Skills Select Committee 2004a). Authors, trying to show how blaming schools for poor performance is often misplaced, emphasise that it is not the staff and teaching that is bad but the children who go there (Butler and Hamnett 2007; Gibbons and Telhaj 2007). Either way disadvantaged parents and children are constructed as the problem together with the scarcity of good schools. This contributes to a pattern of denigration of already disadvantaged children, families and communities.

Nancy Fraser (1996 and 1997) characterises justice as participatory parity, where everyone can share in all aspects of the social. She includes material rewards but also those that come from respect. Any arrangements that reduce the sharing of rewards relative to others are unjust. Participatory parity is affected by a just distribution of socio-economic resources (distributive justice) and by cultural and symbolic recognition of different identities (justice as recognition). She characterises injustice of recognition as cultural or symbolic and ‘rooted in patterns of representation, interpretation and communication including:

...disrespect (being routinely maligned or disparaged in stereotypic public cultural representations and/or in everyday life interactions). (Fraser, N. 1996 pp.70-71)

One of the most relevant characteristics for parents from more affluent socio-economic groups when choosing a secondary school is the intake of the school

(see Ball 2003 for an overview of the evidence). This is accompanied by 'status ideologies' (Holme 2002; Oakes et al 1997) which Holme describes as,

seemingly commonsense beliefs held by dominant status groups to explain why members of other groups seem to fail disproportionately in a society where opportunity is theoretically open to anyone with the will and drive to achieve.(Holme 2002 p 3)

The most often cited discrete criteria of academic performance, fear of bullying, moral security and quality of discipline are for many parents proxies for intake and, reflecting the residential segregation of towns and cities (Cheshire and Sheppard 2004), the populations of whole areas are considered unsuitable. As one parent said of a school she said she would not even consider (Coldron 2005):

I think Milton High is fairly heavily populated by Haringey.

In some, mainly urban, contexts the instinct of the already advantaged parents to separate themselves (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) joins with the opportunity for choice, diversity, local politics, residential segregation and admission arrangements to polarise perception of schools (Gewirtz et al 1995; Lauder et al 1999; Lucey and Reay 2002; Coldron et al 2001). This results in some schools being oversubscribed and parents struggling for entry. In the process the rejected schools, and by implication the children and their communities, are often and consistently vilified. As one London LEA officer explained in 2000:

...we've got this incredible polarisation of parental perception of schools, which just gets worse all the time...It's fuelled by the league tables...It's fuelled by the controversy we had here last year where parents took their children out of school and were refusing to go to the schools that did have vacancies and were slagging them off in the most unpleasant way in the press.

This demonisation becomes part of children's experience (Reay and Lucey 2000 and 2002) and does harm to many children as they inevitably react to the sense of inferiority and stigma of attending a school so badly perceived (Reay and Lucey 2002). Some schools too, in their need to improve their exam performance, are led to denigrate children from certain communities and use their admissions policies to change their intake. As one member of senior management in charge of school admissions explained:

...We were trying to get rid of this group, because...30%, 35% of our intake was from [the city] and we felt that was part of the problem, that bringing sort of [city] pupils into a school like this, to some extent they drag it down to

their tone...they tend to drag it down rather than us drag them up. The parents want to send them to a nice school, but they don't want the school rules to apply to their son or daughter. And we were committed with the siblings [the sibling over-subscription criterion] to a vicious circle and quite often...another terrible intake. A lot of working class families had large families and you were committed to them sort of...And that's one of the reasons why they decided to get rid of the sibling link two years ago.⁷

This wholesale vilification and denigration of less advantaged families and communities is a means by which material advantage and power are maintained and the imposition of symbolic and cultural inferiority, mal-recognition, made to appear acceptable. Admission policies that aimed to reduce this kind of injustice would seek to reduce the polarisation of perception of schools on the part of parents and reduce the motivation of schools to exclude certain groups. Admissions policies can contribute by ensuring that schools are not able to pick and choose their intakes, and that information on school performance to help parents make good choices fully recognises the value added by schools.

List of objectives against which the effectiveness of the system should be measured

We can now draw up a list of objectives which will inform our description and mapping of the system and against which we can seek to measure effectiveness. An effective admissions system would:

- Provide a means by which those who consider admissions arrangements to be unfair can refer the matter to an independent adjudicator
- Provide an effective means for parents to appeal to an independent tribunal if they are unsatisfied with the outcome
- Provide access to clear and understandable information and criteria that are transparent, and seen to be objectively applied
- Ensure that all parents are treated equally and schools do not covertly select students on the basis of social status or prior attainment
- Satisfy parents' wishes as to how and where their children are to be educated
- Not inhibit the quality of education overall and, if possible, contribute to enhancing it
- Not allow the greater achievement of some children to be at the expense of others
- Contribute to social cohesion
- Not contribute to the harm inflicted by denigration of children and communities

⁷ Quote taken from Coldron and Williams (2001)

1.1.4 Measures of effectiveness used in this study

A good set of measures would gauge overall effectiveness against those objectives and enable comparison between different sets of arrangements. We take in this report three objective measures, the level of appeals, the proportions of parents gaining which of their expressed preferences and the levels of segregation. The advantages and limitations of these measures is discussed below.

Appeals as a measure of effectiveness

We can reasonably assume that the greater the number of appeals the greater the dissatisfaction of parents with the original allocation and vice versa. The number of appeals works as an *overall* measure of parental satisfaction and therefore of effectiveness. An effective policy would result in acceptable offers to all parents using the initial procedures without recourse to the appeal process which is costly in the time of many professionals from the local authority and schools. A system that resulted in fewer appeals would therefore be more administratively and financially efficient and effective as well as in terms of parental satisfaction. But it is important to note that such an outcome is determined not just by the system in the sense of ensuring adequate information, administration or regulation important as these are. Parental perception, expectations and consequent behaviour are what ultimately determines parental satisfaction and these are affected by the way choice of school is framed by their perception of the local schools and through public discussion and policy formation at both national and local levels.

However, the validity of appeals as a *comparative* measure between the arrangements in different authorities works for some but not all Local Authorities. The level of appeals for a Local Authority's schools tells us only about the level of satisfaction of the group of parents who made applications for those schools. These are not necessarily the same set as those parents who are resident in the area. Indeed, in one London area where the schools are sought after, and where there are adjacent areas with less popular schools, up to half of applicants are non-resident and half of the resident parents apply to schools outside the Local Authority. In this case there can be no sound conclusions drawn from the level of appeals about the level of satisfaction of those Local Authority residents with the arrangements in their area or of any other identifiable cohort of parents, or of the effectiveness or otherwise of the admission arrangements in that Local Authority. However, where there is a low level of cross border traffic and the set of applicant parents is largely the same as the set of resident parents, and the field within which all parents are choosing is more or less the same for all parents, then the level of appeals does offer a way of comparing the effectiveness of the arrangements in that area.

Parents' expressed preferences as a measure of effectiveness

It is commonplace in debate about admissions to take the proportion of parents allocated the school that was their top ranked expressed preference (first preference) as a sign of the effectiveness of admissions. If a parent gets the school they put down as their first preference then it is reasonable to assume they will be satisfied. It is difficult to claim that choice exists if a significant proportion of

parents do not get the school they put as their first preference. There are however some difficulties that need to be considered.

Firstly the time for which the data is collected can affect the validity of the measure. Some of our respondents pointed out that the data for March 1st (the national offer day) do not reflect the proportion of parents who eventually get their first preference following the whole admission process including appeals and therefore may not properly reflect the real effectiveness of the system. This is true, but while all authorities have data for March 1st many do not have secure data for the end of the process. It is also the case that the March 1st figure better reflects the way the initial allocation works and this is of more relevance for judging the operation of such aspects as over subscription criteria. It remains true however that in most cases there is an improvement in the percentage between March and the beginning of the school year.

Secondly, two authorities with a high proportion of selective places were worried that the figure for first preferences would not accurately reflect the level of satisfaction delivered by the system because a proportion of parents put a selective school down as first preference but, if their child doesn't reach the right level in the test they are not then eligible for the grammar school. They argued that if, in what is misleadingly called an 'equal preference system' where the ranking of schools is used only if the child is eligible for two or more schools, the child is then offered a place at their highest preference comprehensive/secondary modern then this represents their 'first' choice. We felt that, since the grammar school was their first choice and the admission criteria had resulted in their not getting their first preference it was more accurate to count them as having gained their second choice.

Thirdly, although it does not invalidate the measure, it should be noted that a small proportion of parents do not put down the school they most preferred as their first choice on the Common Application Form. There may be a school within their field of choice that is their favourite school but, because they make a strategic decision, taking into account how likely they are to get in, they do not put it as their first or any preference. Because of this possibility the parent survey in both the 2001 and current study asked parents about this. In the 2001 study 8% of parents reported that there were other state schools they would have preferred for their children over the ones in which they had applied for a place, and there were regional differences, with London parents least likely to get a place in their favourite school. A more effective system would have a lower percentage of parents who reported doing this. However the numbers are small and the reasons for not doing so can be various.

Fourthly, some non-selective authorities that have an equal preference/default ranking system returned our request for data on each of the preferences saying that because it is 'equal preference' they do not distinguish which of the schools is most or least preferred by the parent. This we believe is an incorrect interpretation and if put into practice would badly misrepresent the wishes of most parents. It is not reasonable to assume that if a parent is invited to make a list of preferences each one of the schools on that list is equally acceptable and, that if they get one of their expressed preferences, this should count as their choice having been

satisfied. It is arguable that those who get one of their first two preferences should be counted as gaining a preferred school but this becomes difficult to sustain for lower ranked schools. But, the only sure way of knowing if parents are satisfied with the school they have been offered, wherever they put it in their ranked expressed preferences, is to ask them.

We therefore sought two measures. On March 1st, the proportion of first preferences gained by applicants in each Local Authority which gives a strong indication of the satisfaction level of the cohort of applicants to that authority but where there are a great deal of cross border applications, as in London, it does not allow us to compare the effectiveness of the admission arrangements of an area in terms of the satisfaction of *residents* of an area. The aggregate figure for all Local Authorities gives a reasonable approximation of the overall satisfaction level. Secondly, the responses from a nationally representative sample of parents as to how satisfied they were with the outcome and which of their preferences it was.

Segregation as a measure of effectiveness

We have seen that equity is one of the objectives of an admission system. No parent or group of parents should more easily gain access to 'good' and popular schools than any other parents. We have seen that there are problems in achieving this kind of equity and that socially and financially advantaged parents may well be gaining access more easily than others. Although the problem is difficult to solve it is fairly easy to measure. If all social groups had the same chances of getting into the 'best' and most popular schools the intakes of those schools would reflect the proportions of social groups in the Local Authority area. There would be no segregation. The more segregation of the intakes of popular schools the less fair or equitable the system.

Measurement of segregated populations is fairly well established and, although the technicalities with regard to the segregation of school intakes have been hotly disputed, the results from different studies are consistent. We have in this study taken Allen and Vignole's (2006) method of using two measures. The first, D (Difference), measures how many children in an area would need to move between schools to achieve a fully balanced intake. This provides a single value for each authority and allows us to explore associations between the degree of segregation in an area and the different kinds of admission arrangements. A difference measure cannot however capture whether the level of segregation in a highly segregated area is due to there being a few schools with highly advantaged intakes with the rest with more or less similar intakes (advantage skew) or, a few schools with extremely disadvantaged intakes (disadvantage skew) or, a smooth continuum from highly advantaged moving by even differences through to highly disadvantaged. The second measure S (Skew) captures this aspect.

1.2 Design of the Project

1.2.1 Key points

- The study consisted of three strands:
 - Strand One aimed to provide a comprehensive description of the admission arrangements for entry to maintained secondary schools in England in September 2006.
 - Strand Two aimed to gain a representative view of parents' and carers' experience of the admissions process for those who sought a place for their children starting in Year7 in September 2006.
 - Strand Three sought to gather data about the outcomes of the admissions process in terms of the number of parents who gained a place at their first preference school, the level of appeals and the level of segregation
- The main sources of information for Strand 1 was the composite prospectuses published by Local Authorities for entry in September 2006 and a request for supplementary information forms from all Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools
- Strand 2 was a survey of parents whose children had been admitted to year 7 of a maintained secondary school in September 2006
- The main source of information for Strand 3 was a request to Local Authorities for 2006 admissions data

1.2.2 Objectives of the study

This study aims to make it possible in the future to identify how and where any changes take place and to gauge relative effectiveness. We have identified objectives against which we intend to measure the effectiveness of admissions and have considered what would count as valid measures. Our specific objectives are therefore as follows:

- map admissions arrangements (used to allocate places for year 7 pupils for state secondary school in September 2006) across admissions authorities in England
- examine the experiences, views and expectations of parents and carers who applied for a place in a state secondary school for September 2006, including those who researched schools and made applications online;
- collate information on the outcomes for all pupils of applications for Year 7 in September 2006.

In the next sections we describe the methods pursued in each of these three strands.

1.2.3 Strand 1: Admission arrangements for entry in September 2006

Authorities and schools included

This study describes the admission arrangements for all mainstream maintained secondary schools in English local authorities. There are 150 local authorities. The City of London has no maintained secondary schools. The Scilly Isles has one school catering for all phases of education and therefore has no transfer policy. The total of eligible local authorities was therefore 148. The study does not look at the admission arrangements for independent schools funded by fees. The focus is on the arrangements for pupils transferring from the primary stage of schooling to the secondary stage. It therefore includes admission arrangements for transfer at age 11 from primary to secondary schools and those transferring at 13 or 14 from middle schools to high schools. Arrangements for Academies and, where they were included in the composite prospectus for an area, City Technology Colleges are also described. It does not include Special schools, Pupil Referral Units, or Middle schools deemed secondary.

Sources of information

In fulfilment of its responsibility to co-ordinate the admissions process the Local Authority is required to publish the admission arrangements for all participating schools in a composite prospectus for the agreed relevant area each year. The composite prospectus provides information for parents about the system for the co-ordination of admissions between the different Admission Authorities of maintained schools and Academies but not other independent schools. In addition it includes, for each school, the criteria for admission, procedures for application, and information about the relative popularity of the school in previous years. This information is intended to give parents sufficient information to express an informed set of preferences.

The composite prospectuses therefore set out the admission arrangements of every maintained school in the country and this was our main source of information. We requested the composite prospectus from all of the local authorities in England publicised to parents whose children entered Y7 in September 2006. This material had been finalised in April 2005, and issued to parents in September 2005. They were at the time of collection for the project technically obsolete but, for the majority of areas, still accessible. Of the 148 eligible authorities we were able to obtain the 2006 composite prospectus from 135 (91%). The 2006 prospectus was not available for 13 authorities (9%). For these we used the 2007 prospectus having checked as far as possible that there had been no significant changes in the arrangements between 06 and 07.

Supplementary information

It is not uncommon for schools where the governors and not the local authority are responsible for admissions (Voluntary Aided, Foundation schools and Academies) to require further information from parents on forms for which parents have to apply directly to the school. These are an important part of the admissions process for parents applying to these schools. We wrote to all of these schools requesting

copies of their supplementary information forms or confirmation that they did not ask for further information.

Contextual information

In addition to these data from schools and Local Authorities we collected the following background information about each local authority:

- population density
- level of appeals in 2005 and 2006
- level of segregation between schools
- level of cross border traffic.

1.2.4 Strand 2: Parents'/Carers' experiences of the application process for 2006

The strand used a telephone survey of parents or carers of children who started secondary school in year 7 in 2006. The aim was to achieve complete interviews with 2,000 parents, recruited through a representative sample of schools.

The sample of schools was drawn from Edubase, a database of information on all maintained schools in England held on behalf of the DCSF. Prior to sample selection, the sampling frame was ordered by region, LA selection type, the proportion of Community schools in the LA (quartiles), LA, school-level urban/rural indicator, school statutory lowest age and size based on number of children in the school.

Schools were drawn with probability proportional to size, which meant that larger schools had a higher chance of being selected than smaller schools. A 'weighted' sampling approach was used to draw the sample, whereby London schools and schools in selective LAs with 19% and higher proportion of selective places were given an increased chance of selection, enabling a large enough sample to be drawn for analysis. Sampled schools were asked to provide contact details for all parents of children in year 7.

A pilot was conducted in six schools to test the methods of contacting schools, drawing samples, and interviewing parents.

The fieldwork for the main stage was carried out between 11th December 2006 and 30th March 2007. A total of 163 schools were contacted and 59 provided useable contact details for parents (36%). Schools were contacted by a mixture of postal and telephone methods and contact details were accepted in a variety of formats by disk, email or paper. Reasons why schools did not co-operate included the administrative burden, concerns about data protection, reluctance to jeopardise the trust of parents in passing on their contact details, and pupil contact details not being up-to-date or held in a format suitable for sharing.

A total of 2,950 parents were selected from the contact details provided by schools (50 for each school). These were sent a letter to explain about the study and then

contacted for telephone interview. Telephone interviews were achieved with 2,215 of these parents, a response rate of 75%.

A two stage weighting procedure was adopted. At the first stage, selection weights were applied to correct for the selection probabilities of schools and parents. The second stage used calibration weighting to match the weighted sample (after selection weights had been applied) to the population of parents on a number of key area and school-level variables, using a logistic regression model. The following area characteristics were found to be associated with lower levels of response: being in London or non-metropolitan areas outside London, having a high proportion of community schools and being in a partially selective (rather than a non-selective) area. The following school characteristics were found to be associated with lower levels of response: having higher key stage 4 scores, being a Voluntary Controlled school and having a selective admissions policy.

The final weighted sample had an effective sample size (that is, the estimated sample size needed for an equal probability sample that would give the same standard error) of 1,564. This amounts to 71% of the actual sample size; hence the sample had an efficiency of 71%.

The topics included in the questionnaire included:

- the information parents/carers used to find out about secondary school and how this affected their choice;
- the factors parents/carers took into account in choosing a school and how this impacted on their satisfaction;
- the proportion of parents/carers that made on-line applications and their experiences of this;
- parents'/carers' experiences of the admissions application process and their levels of satisfaction with the process and outcome;
- parents'/carers' social characteristics.

Wherever possible, the same questions and structure as used in the previous study (Flatley et al., 2001) were used as a starting point. The questionnaire content was then reviewed in order to take into account changes to admission procedures since 2001.

Analysis of the survey was carried out using the SPSS and Stata software packages. Data from Strand 1 was incorporated into the survey dataset for use in analysis.

1.2.5 Strand 3: Outcomes of the application process for entry in September 2006

Number of first preferences gained

All parents are requested to express a minimum of three preferences for schools. Some authorities ask for more than three preferences, for example for all London authorities parents are asked to state six preferences. Even where there is what is called an 'equal preference' system in operation if a child is eligible (i.e. fulfils the criteria) for two or more schools the Local Authority takes the order of preference into account and allocates the school ranked highest by the parent⁸. Therefore the Local Authority has to have data on each parents' order of preferences and which one they gained.

We requested the following outcome data from all 148 LAs:

- the proportions of pupils offered a place on 1 March 2006 at their first/second/third/fourth/fifth/sixth preference school.
- the percentage of parents with children about to enter secondary school in September 2006 who declined to express any preference (either by not returning the form or by returning it blank).

Overall 106 (72%) authorities provided data. There was a higher response of 87 out of the 116 (75%) authorities outside London. There was a lower response of 19 out of 32 (59%) from London authorities and within this from Inner London 5 out of 13 (39%). Nevertheless there was representation from all regions of the country.

Level of appeals

We made use of the appeals figures published by DCSF for 2004/05 and for 2005/06 for all admission authorities in an area.

⁸ The 2003 Code recommends that parents ranking is the model adopted but it does allow coordinated admissions systems to adopt alternative criteria.

2 ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS

2.1.1 Key findings

- The great majority (92%) of all secondary age children in England attend state maintained schools;
- There are four types of maintained school - Community, Voluntary Controlled, Voluntary Aided and Foundation. Academies and City Technology Colleges are fully funded by central government but retain their independent status.
- Nearly two thirds (62%) of state funded secondary schools are Community, about one sixth (17%) Foundation and about one sixth (17%) Voluntary Aided. The remaining 4% is made up of Voluntary Controlled schools, Academies and City Technology Colleges;
- Responsibility for setting admission arrangements rests with the Admission authority for each school;
- There are five types of admission authority - one for each of the types of school (Voluntary Controlled schools come under the same admission authority as Community schools);
- The Local Authority has responsibility to co-ordinate the agreed admission arrangements in their area;
- A pan London admissions scheme operates to co-ordinate admissions across all London Boroughs and some adjacent Local Authorities;
- Admissions in 2006 were subject to the School Admissions Code of Practice 2003. All admission authorities had to have regard to the guidance published there;
- Three mutually reinforcing measures of regulation were in place namely the requirement to consult, the requirement to have regard to the published guidance, the opportunity to object to the Schools Adjudicator.

2.2 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of our mapping of the admission arrangements for secondary schools in England. Arrangements can vary at three different levels, the Local Authority, the admission authority and the School. For example, at the Local Authority level, some coordination arrangements take no account of the order of parents' preferences on the application form except when a child is eligible for two or more places (equal preference/default ranking system) while others take account from the beginning and give higher priority to parents who

make a school their first or highest preference (a first preference first system) and some are highly selective and some have no selection. Similar differences are to be found between Admission Authorities in the same Local Authority, and at the school level some will have selection by aptitude while others do not⁹. We collected data about arrangements at each of these levels.

We also collected data about two kinds of outcomes from the admissions process. The first was the proportions of parents gaining a place at one of the schools for which they had expressed a preference and the ranking of that preference; for example was it the first, or second, or third etc of their expressed preferences. The second kind of outcome data was the level of appeals. In addition we gained data about characteristics of Local Authorities, Admission Authorities and individual schools to enable us to test for any associations between these contextual characteristics, their admission arrangements and their outcomes.

2.2.1 Secondary schools in England

Our focus was all state funded secondary schools in England. Ninety two per cent of all secondary age children in England attend these schools (Coldron 2007). We did not look at admissions for independent fee charging schools. There were a total of 3122 state funded secondary schools in England listed in the 2006 composite prospectuses. Schools vary according to their governance and who constitutes the admission authority (the body responsible for deciding the arrangements for admitting pupils). There were five types of Admission authority relevant to this study:

- the Local Authority (for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools)
- the governors of a Voluntary Aided school
- the governors of a Foundation school
- the governors of an Academy
- the governors of a City Technology College.

The differences between the types of school and their admission authorities is important in understanding admission arrangements in England and our analysis.

Community schools: The Local Authority employs the school's staff, owns the school's land and buildings and is the admission authority. In 2006 these were the most numerous making up nearly two thirds (62%) of all maintained secondary schools. However local contexts vary greatly and there are local authorities where

⁹ While the admission authority sets common admission arrangements for all of its schools it is possible for there to be variation in terms of some arrangements. For example, where there are a number of Community schools in an area some may opt to select by aptitude while others do not.

there are no Community schools (e.g. Brent) and others (e.g. Cornwall) where all maintained secondaries are Community schools.

Voluntary Controlled: The Local Authority is the employer and the admission authority. The school's land and buildings (apart from the playing fields which are normally vested in the Local Authority) will normally be owned by a charitable foundation. These schools made up nearly 3% of all maintained secondaries. They are most often schools with a religious affiliation. Because the Local Authority is the admission authority these schools are, where appropriate, combined with the community schools for the purposes of analysis in this report.

Voluntary Aided: The governing body is the employer and the admission authority. The school's land and buildings (apart from playing fields which are normally vested in the Local Authority) will normally be owned by a charitable foundation. These schools made up 17% of all maintained secondary schools. The great majority (87.5%) were Christian of which 64% were Roman Catholic, 21% Church of England and 2.5% Mixed Christian (e.g. part Roman Catholic and part Church of England). 10% (fifty two) had no religious affiliation while the remaining 2.5% were made up of nine Jewish schools, three Muslim and one Sikh.

Foundation: The governing body is the employer and the admission authority. The school's land and buildings are either owned by the governing body or by a charitable foundation. These schools made up 17% of all maintained secondary schools.

Academies: Academies are all ability schools established by sponsors from business, faith or voluntary groups working in partnerships with central Government and local education partners. Sponsors and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) provide the capital costs for the Academy. Running costs are met in full by the DCSF. The school governors are the admission authority but their funding agreements contain requirements aimed at ensuring fair admissions. For example in 2006 they were required to comply with the School Admissions Code of Practice 2003. There were fifty Academies in September 2006. Some followed the criteria for the Community schools in their area.

City Technology College: These schools are independent all-ability, non fee-paying schools for pupils aged 11-18. The school governors are the admission authority but their admissions are regulated by legislation aimed at ensuring a balanced intake. There were 15 such schools in England but most have converted to Academies and there were only the four remaining found in the composite prospectuses.

Table 1

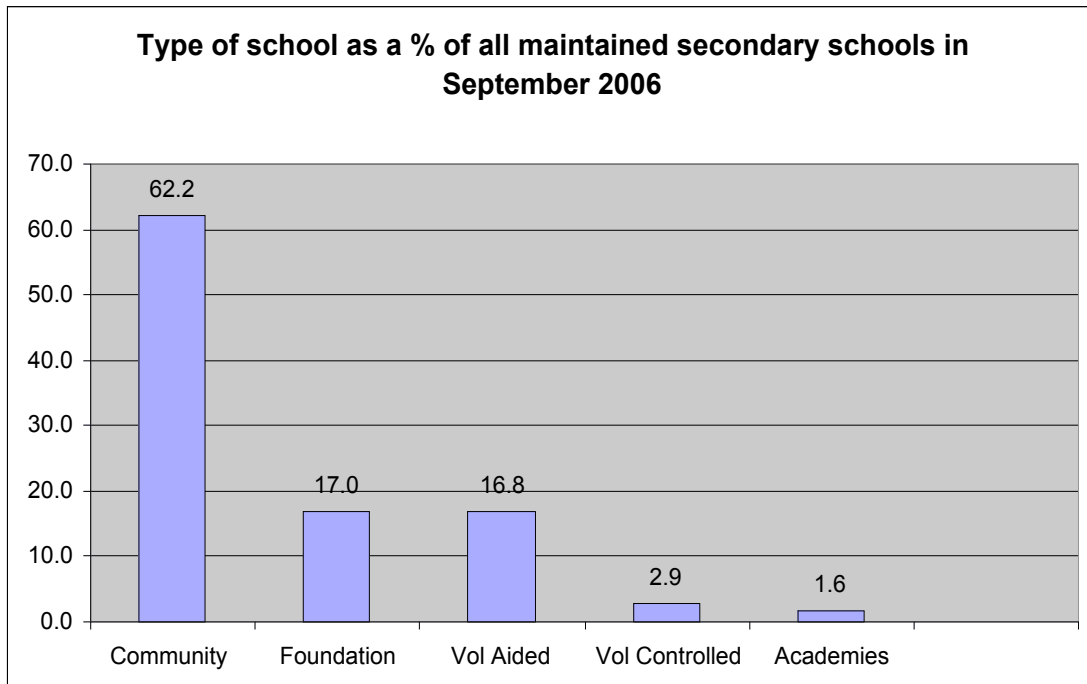
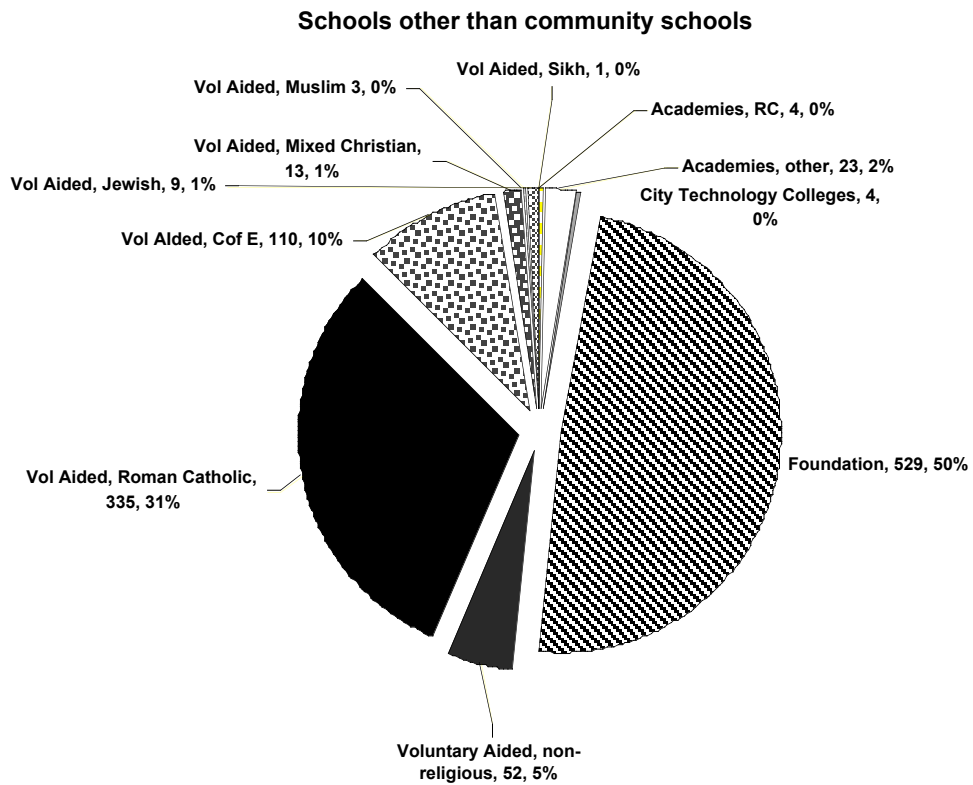


Table 2



2.2.2 Responsibilities for admissions

The criteria for admission to a school are set by the admission authority for that school. The Local Authority as admission authority has responsibility for admission to its Community and Voluntary Controlled schools and in almost all cases this means they set the criteria for more than one school. In only a very few cases this responsibility is formally devolved to the governors of the Community schools. The admission authorities for Voluntary Aided schools have formal responsibility for setting the criteria for only one school. The great majority of these schools are either Roman Catholic or Church of England and they often follow Diocesan guidance and therefore the criteria are often the same for more than one school in an area. The admission authorities for Foundation, Academies and CTCs set the criteria for only their school.

The system for the co-ordination of admissions within an area is determined by the Local Authority through local consultation within the local admission forum. If the local stakeholders cannot reach agreement within the admission forum the Secretary of State is empowered to impose a system in the best interests of children and parents. Local Authorities are responsible for administering the agreed co-ordinated admissions scheme within their area. This is a quite distinct and separate role from their being the admission authority for their Community schools. The Local Authority is required to co-ordinate admissions up to the national offer day on March 1st each year. After this date administration passes back to the separate admission authorities. Some Local Authorities are asked by the schools in their area to continue their co-ordination role after March and until all children have been placed.

The administration of admission appeals is the responsibility of the governors of each Voluntary Aided school, Foundation school, Academy and CTC. For Community schools it is the responsibility of the Local Authority. Appeals panels must be independent of the admission authority and guidance on their conduct is contained in the School Admission Appeals Code (2003) and overseen by the Council of Tribunals¹⁰. Parents also have the right to refer their case to the Local Ombudsman if they believe there has been some maladministration (Coldron et al 2002).

The arrangements for London admissions are slightly different. London is distinct in many ways from other parts of the country in ways relevant to admissions. It has a more dense and more ethnically diverse population, larger numbers of schools within travel distance, public transport that makes travelling away from the locality

¹⁰ This is now called the Administrative Justice and Tribunals Council since Oct 2007.

easier, a great diversity of types of school on offer (including independent schools) and areas with extremes of wealth adjacent to areas of extreme deprivation (Pennell, West and Hind 2005). The contrasts between sectors of the population leads to a hierarchy of schools because of the variation in the prior attainment of intakes (DfESc, 2005, p. 9). It is true that a hierarchy exists in many other areas (Coldron 2005) but it may be steeper in London. These characteristics are accompanied by a notably higher rate of cross border traffic (where children gain a place outside their area of residence) and a higher level of appeals¹¹.

This makes for an extremely complex context and one that is more difficult for parents to negotiate and for the co-ordinators of admissions to manage. The 2001 report (Flatley et al 2001) found evidence that London parents were the least likely to be offered places at their highest preference¹² school – 68% compared with 85% nationally, three times less likely to be offered a school place at the school they most wanted than parents living elsewhere and notably more likely to opt away from their nearest school.

The London Authorities agreed in 2003 to operate a Pan London Admissions scheme by 2005 where all London boroughs, the City of London and some local authorities with borders to London authorities co-operate on an agreed mode of co-ordination of school admissions (Pennell, West and Hind 2005). For example all authorities require the same number of preferences, six, on a Common Application Form and an equal preference/default ranking system is used.

2.2.3 Regulation and co-ordination of admissions

Admissions to schools are subject to various Acts and accompanying regulations. These are laid out in codes of practice on admissions and on appeals that the Secretary of State for Education is required to produce. The first code was published in April 1999 and the first cohort to which it fully applied was the intake to Year 7 in September 2000. The requirements of the *School Standards and Framework Act* (1998) and the guidance in this first code are summarised below:

- requirements for all admission authorities to consult each other on their proposed admission arrangements and criteria, with the possibility for other admission authorities (and in the case of existing partial selection arrangements, parents) to complain to the Schools Adjudicator if they think the arrangements are not in the interests of local children and parents;
- the outlawing of any new selection by ability, while allowing up to 10% selection by aptitude to be introduced for certain subject specialisms;

¹¹ DCSF website: Local Authority Cross Border Movement of Secondary School Pupils Resident in England, January 2006 (Final) and Statistical First Release on Appeals in 2006.

¹² In the report this was called their 'favourite' school.

- requiring all admissions policies, in particular over-subscription criteria, and all attainment and aptitude testing arrangements to be clear, fair, objective and published;
- encouragement for admission authorities in an area to have standard application forms and common timetables and to agree arrangements in new admission forums;
- requiring Local Authorities to publish composite prospectuses with summary admissions information for all schools in their area, including how over-subscribed they have been in the past;
- ruling out admissions interviews, except for church schools who may use it to assess religious commitment and boarding schools to check boarding suitability;
- making appeal panels independent of the Local Authorities and governing bodies who made the decisions appealed against, and smaller so as not to intimidate parents.

The legislation and guidance were a response to a number of widely acknowledged problems. Added to the growing concern about the fairness of the system as discussed earlier there was also an element of chaos and unhelpful variation in the system and in 2000 it was found (Flatley et al 2001) that Local Authorities still differed markedly in the way that they managed the process. Some Local Authorities co-ordinated the offer of places to all parents, while in others parents were required to apply to individual schools and as many as they wished. This resulted in some parents being offered multiple places while others had no place offered at all. Only 60% of Local Authorities used a common application deadline for the schools in their area and for letting parents know of the decision. This presented difficulties for parents as to whether to confirm acceptance or wait for to see if another school would offer them a place. There were different ways in which Local Authorities asked parents to express a preference. The most common, found in 75% of Local Authorities, asked parents to name a number of schools as preferences in rank order (first preference, second preference, etc.). The Local Authorities then attempted to allocate them a place at their first choice school. But nearly 13% used a system whereby parents were notified of a place allocated at a school and they were invited to confirm that particular school as their expressed preference or to name one or more alternative preferred schools. In 5% of Local Authorities parents were asked to express multiple preferences and each preference was treated as if parents would be happy for their child to attend any of the schools on the list. The Local Authority then allocated one of those preferred schools in accordance with their admission criteria. Just under 10% of Local Authorities used a single preference system where parents were invited, initially, to express a preference for just one school and if this was unsuccessful they were able to apply for an alternative school at further stages of the process.

In 2003 a revised code was introduced to be implemented no later than September 2005, which set out the means to further rationalise the process across all Local Authorities. While the 1999 Code recommended or encouraged compliance the School Admissions Code of Practice 2003 laid out recommendations and guidance to which all admission authorities and Local Authorities had to have regard. Although compliance was not mandatory it was expected that all stakeholders would do so. Objections to arrangements in an area

would be judged in the light of the guidance provided in the code. It was therefore a relatively strong measure and reinforced the regulation of the process.

In 2006 the relevant guidance and regulations in operation were still those in operation in 2003. In summary they were:

- Parents submit one application for all maintained schools applied for to their Local Authority.
- Most Local Authorities asked parents to apply for three schools which is the minimum allowed by the regulations. The maximum number of schools could vary.
- Parents are asked to list the schools in order of preference.
- The stakeholders in an area can decide how they deal with applications, either by operating a 'first preference first' system or an equal preference/default ranking system.
- Local Authorities are required to publish in one composite prospectus clear and transparent information about schools in their locality including the criteria for entry and the popularity of the schools (i.e., whether they are over-subscribed).
- All Local Authorities are responsible for making a single offer of a place to all parents on the same day in early March (ie 1 March or the next working day).
- Parents are entitled to appeal to the admission authority that refused their child a place at one of their preferred schools.

With regard to schools managing their intake the 2003 School Admissions Code of Practice states that:

- priority should be given to school place applications from children in public care¹³
- there should be no interviews¹⁴
- a protocol needs to be established between all the schools in each authority to ensure that vulnerable children are admitted fairly and not only by schools with already challenging intakes.

It also sets out guidance to ensure consultation and co-ordination between all admission authorities in an area, explicitly introduces checks and balances to manage potentially competing interests and introduces new responsibilities on Local Authorities for the administrative co-ordination of the process.

¹³ DfES 2003b para 7.22

¹⁴ DfES 2003b para 3.16

In effect, this meant that admissions to secondary school was (and continues to be) regulated at the national and local level by three mutually reinforcing measures. Firstly, the school admission authorities in an area were required to consult with each other and to try to agree a co-ordinated admissions policy. This ensured early publication of the intentions of the different admission authorities in an area. Secondly, there was the requirement to have regard to the guidance in the codes, one relating to admissions (the School Admissions Code of Practice 2003) and one relating to admission appeals (the Appeals Code of Practice 2003). Thirdly, any maintained school's admission arrangements are open to objection to the Schools Adjudicator. The Adjudicator cannot act without an objection being received, but the 2003 School Admissions Code of Practice explicitly encouraged objections to be made:

School admission arrangements should work for the benefit of all parents and children in an area. In striving to achieve admission arrangements that serve the interest of all parents and children in local communities, LEAs are recommended to refer objections to the Adjudicator on behalf of parents where necessary. If admission arrangements include practices that are stated in this Code to be bad practice, the LEA can be held to account by the Local Government Ombudsman if it does not object to those arrangements. (DfES 2003a para. 4.11)

The Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) reported a significant increase in the number of cases referred. From September 2005 to September 2006, 343 referrals were received compared to 270 referrals in 2003/2004 and 227 in 2004/2005. Of the cases received, 245 were objections to admission arrangements. 127 of these were from Local Authorities, often acting on behalf of admission forums showing, in the opinion of the OSA, that 'many local authorities and admission forums are reviewing the admission arrangements of all schools in their areas and objecting to those arrangements that seem to them to offend against the Code of Practice' (Office of the Schools Adjudicator 2006).

In February 2007 a new code (School Admissions Code 2007) came into force required to be first implemented for the cohort entering school in September 2008. Bodies must now act in accordance with the new Code which has greatly strengthened requirements making it clear where guidance must be followed. It introduces radical changes and it will be of interest in the future to see what effect it has together with the new Admission Appeals Code which comes into force on 17th January 2008.

2.2.4 The process and timing of admissions for entry to Year 7 in September 2006

Following consultation between local admission authorities the co-ordinated admissions scheme for each area was agreed by April 2005. At the beginning of the school year 05/06 the composite prospectus was sent out by each local authority to all parents and carers of children resident in their area about to transfer to secondary school and to non-residents parents who applied to schools in the local authority. Parents/carers had about six week to visit schools and gather information and advice and come to a decision about their preferences.

They were then invited to return a minimum of three preferences on a Common Application Form by a given date in late October.

By an agreed date in mid-November, the home Local Authority sent all admission authorities/ Local Authorities details of applicants for their schools. In an area that operated equal preference/default ranking the home Local Authority did not reveal the order of preference. In an area that operated 'first preference first' they did. The school admission authorities then applied their admission criteria, including any selection tests, and sent their own Local Authority a list indicating the order of eligibility for entry of all children for whom application to the school had been made. When all admission authorities had sent these ranked lists to the Local Authority in whose area they were located, each Local Authority should have had a list for each of its maintained schools (and any Academies). The Local Authority compared the lists from all schools in its area. When a child qualified for a place at more than one school, the Local Authority allocated a place at the school indicated by the terms of its co-ordinated scheme (usually if a child had been offered two schools the Local Authority allocated them to the one the parent ranked higher¹⁵). Thus both the first preference first system and the equal preference/default ranking take account of parents' ranking of schools. If any child looked like remaining unplaced, the home Local Authority considered how to place them in schools within its area. By mid-February each Local Authority then sent the schools which it maintains (and any Academies) the final lists of pupils to be allocated places, and on 1 March – the 'national offer day' for secondary schools - it wrote to every resident parent who filled in its secondary application form, to tell them of their allocated school place.

2.2.5 Parents and carers and children in care

Children have a range of carers. We have used the single term parent throughout to denote all carers who have the legal rights of a parent over a child. Children in public care are a vulnerable group in need of special attention and regulations (restated in the School Admissions Code of Practice 2003 and the School Admissions Code 2007) make a special case for the prioritisation of children in care in schools' oversubscription criteria. Who then is legally responsible for looked after children and who actually makes the decision concerning choice of secondary school for them? Local authorities are legally responsible for looked after children and are therefore 'corporate parents' with parental responsibility.

¹⁵ The 2003 Code states in section C9 that the LEA may choose to use some other criterion than parental ranking. We did not ask what criteria LAs used but we believe that most authorities use the recommended model i.e. Ranking. It is also still possible for more than one offer to be made because two Local Authorities may decide to offer a place: See section C6: *...If on exchanging information it transpires that both the home and another Local Authority intend to make an offer, either both can do so, leaving the parent to choose between them, or one Local Authority can hold back its offer in favour of the other. However, this second alternative should only be chosen if the two Local Authorities have made an agreement to that effect and explained it to parents in their composite prospectuses.*

Within the local authority the actual responsibility lies with social workers in the Local Authority's children's services.

The answer to the second question is more complicated. The social worker will apply for children in their care to go to particular schools. If the child is in long-term foster care the foster carers view would have weight in this decision also, particularly around the practicalities of getting the child to and from a school. At secondary school age, the child's view would also be taken into account- for example, if the child wanted to stay in a school they already attended, the feasibility of this would be explored. Children in care have regular reviews and the review (chaired by a reviewing officer, and involving immediate carers, other involved professionals, the child and possibly his/her natural parents) may decide on a school to apply to if it best meets the child's needs. The natural parents also have a say as they still have shared parental responsibility with the local authority for their child while he/she is in care. If for example, they wanted their child to attend a Catholic school this would be respected. Finally, all children in care have a PEP (personal education plan) which operates like an Individual Education Plan and it may be that, in reviewing this, recommendations would be made about the best school for the child to go to on transition from primary to secondary, especially if there are special educational needs.

2.3 Description of types of local authority co-ordination arrangements and their frequency

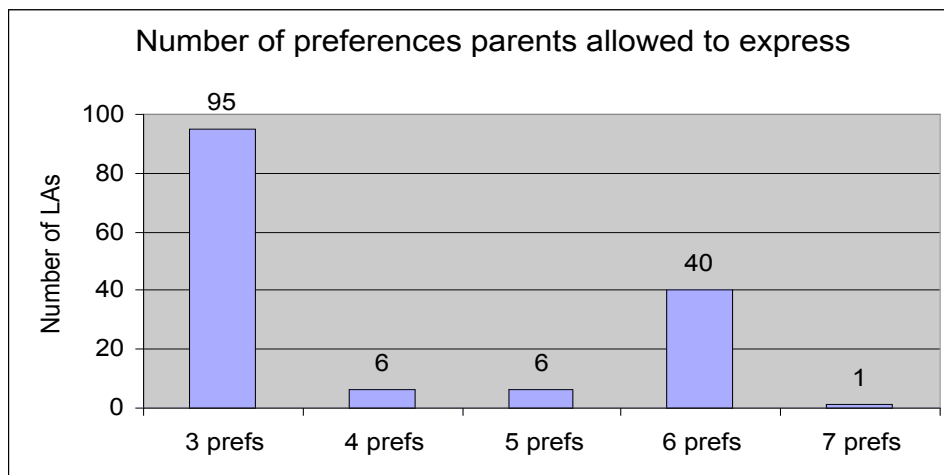
2.3.1 Key findings

- 64% of Local Authorities invited parents to express the minimum number of 3 preferences
- 27% invited six preferences
- 101 authorities use an equal preference/default ranking system and 47 use first preference first

2.3.2 Number of preferences required on the common application form:

In 2003 the regulations required that the coordinated admission system in any local authority invite parents to express no fewer than three preferences on a common application form. Most LAs (95, 64%) invited just 3 preferences, some invited 4 or 5 preferences (12, 8%) whilst a notable number invited 6 or 7 preferences (41, 28%).

Table 3



All London LAs (13 inner and 19 outer) invited 6 preferences as part of the pan-London scheme. Outside London, 16 metropolitan LAs invited more than three preferences compared with 5 non-metropolitan LAs. There are likely to be more preferences invited in areas of dense population and where there is a greater number of admission authorities. Over half of the Local Authorities using the equal preference/default ranking system invited more than 3 preferences compared with less than a tenth of LAs using the 'first preference first' system. The fourteen most selective areas (19% and above of selective places) were also more likely to invite more than three preferences - over half of these selective LAs compared with one third of other LAs.

In terms of appeals, the number of preferences invited correlates positively with the proportion of appeals lodged and heard (rho for both about 0.40). Local authorities inviting more than 3 preferences are more likely to have a relatively even mix of all types of school or to have a predominance of Voluntary Aided or Foundation schools. A higher number of preferences is associated with higher levels of segregation (specifically in terms of greater concentrations of advantage).

2.3.3 Equal preference/default ranking authorities and first preference first authorities.

An equal preference or default ranking authority wide system exists where the coordinated scheme for schools in an area is based on an agreement that all preferences should initially be considered equally against admissions and oversubscription criteria. The rank order is used later if a child is eligible for a place at more than one school. In this case the school ranked highest by the parent is offered. A first preference first authority wide system is where all or most schools in the area have an oversubscription criterion that gives priority to applications that put the school as a first preference. For oversubscribed schools this means that applications which put the school as second or third preference are not likely to get a place and that parents' have a much lower chance of getting their second and third preference schools.

There has been some controversy over the fairness of these two systems (Coldron 2005) and the Schools Adjudicator has been asked to make determinations in a number of cases e.g. Calderdale and Kent (Annual Report of the Office of Schools Adjudicator 2006). The 2003 School Admissions Code of Practice recommends the equal preference/default ranking system and, while allowing 'first preference first', presents what it sees as the problems and the benefits.

Compared to [the equal preference system], this variant is likely to result in a higher number of parents getting children into their first preference schools. But those parents who do not (because those schools are over-subscribed with first preferences and others fit the over-subscription criteria better) will be less likely to get an offer from their second or third preference schools (because they may already have been provisionally filled with higher preferences) and so have to consider taking a place at a less acceptable school. This variant may therefore lead to less parental satisfaction overall, where there is significant variability in schools' popularity and/or quality. Because – compared to [the equal preference system], – it gives more weight to preference order and less to over-subscription criteria, it is also less likely to be agreed by admission authorities who would wish to apply criteria such as partial selection by ability or aptitude or religious or denominational commitment equally to all applicants – it would mean, for example, that a Catholic school giving priority to Catholic pupils would have to put a first preference non-Catholic applicant ahead of a second preference Catholic applicant. Also, [the first preference first system] could lead to less parental satisfaction where parents cannot be sure at the time of expressing preferences whether their children will meet the admissions criteria for schools they might wish to put as first preference. An example would be a selective area, where parents do not know whether their own children will pass the 11-plus. (section C8)

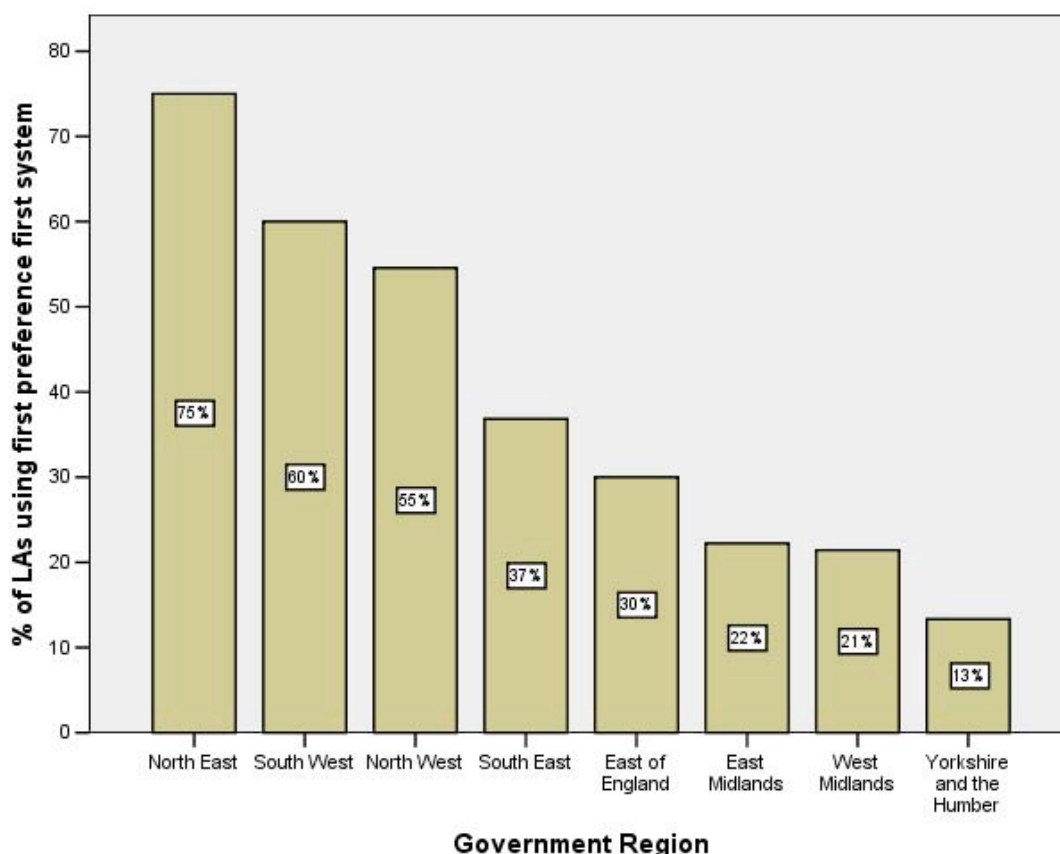
The debate is essentially about fair admissions and the tension between facilitating parental choice and reducing the evident problems where intakes are segregated both socially and by attainment. In areas like Kent or Calderdale where wholly selective grammars attract a majority of the highest attaining children, non-selective schools may wish to use the first preference first criterion so that parents who are not sure whether their children will gain a place at their preferred grammar school will be encouraged to put their preferred comprehensive as their first expressed preference. In this way the non-selective schools hope to gain a better balanced intake which evidence shows (PISA OECD 2001; OECD/Unesco 2003; Thrupp 1999; Lupton 2003 and 2004) would benefit all of the children in their school. Similar issues arise in non-selective areas where there are very popular and very unpopular comprehensive schools. However, for parents who prefer the more popular schools it reduces the value of expressing second and subsequent preferences. First preference first systems are likely to show a higher proportion of parents gaining their first expressed preference than are equal preference/default ranking authorities. This cannot be taken necessarily to mean that they are delivering greater overall satisfaction because it is also likely that fewer parents gain their second or third preferences.

Particular problems arise where parents do not get to know the results of the 11+ tests before they expressed their preferences. The 2007 School Admissions Code has now outlawed any first preference first criterion (section 2.13) and strongly encourages testing before preference (section 2.92).

It is of interest therefore on a number of counts how many authorities and schools use these criteria. Here we report on Local Authority use in 2006 and the use by schools is reported in the section on oversubscription criteria. In 2006 101 (68%) of Local Authorities used an equal preference/default ranking system whilst 47 (32%) used a first preference first system.

All inner and outer London Local Authorities had an authority wide equal preference/default ranking system. Forty two per cent (31) of metropolitan Local Authorities had an authority wide first preference first system compared with 38% (16) of non-metropolitan Local Authorities. Geographically, there were 3 government regions where a majority of Local Authorities had the first preference first system: the North East (12, 75%); South West (9, 60%) and the North West (9, 55%).

Table 4



This geographical pattern is reflected in two other measures: average population density (higher for equal preference/default ranking LAs) and the average number of admissions dealt with (also higher for 'equal preference/default ranking LAs). Analysis of attributes associated with these modes of co-ordination revealed that:

- On average lower proportions of first preferences are seen amongst equal preference/default ranking LAs (mean=84%, median=88%) compared with first preference first LAs (mean=93%, median=94%).
- In terms of appeals, on average LAs using the equal preference/default ranking system had a greater proportion of appeals lodged (mean=11%, median=9%; compared with mean=9%, median=8%) and heard (mean=8%, median=7%; compared with mean & median=6).
- The proportion of appeals heard that were successful was greater amongst the first preference first LAs (mean=45%, median=46%) compared with equal preference/default ranking LAs (mean & median=32%).
- A higher proportion of LAs using equal preference/default ranking are among the fourteen most selective (11, 11%) compared with first preference first LAs (2, 4%).
- In terms of diversity, a greater proportion of LAs classed as predominantly non-autonomous (19, 34%) or diverse (26, 33%) have an authority wide first preference first system compared with LAs classed as predominantly autonomous (2, 17%)¹⁶.
- On average, LAs using the equal preference/default ranking system had a greater proportion of autonomous schools (mean=39%, median=35%) compared with LAs using the first preference first system (mean=30%, median=30%). We can conclude that first preference first is associated with lower relative autonomy of schools at the LA level.
- In terms of social segregation, on average, the 2004 dissimilarity index was slightly larger for equal preference/default ranking LAs (mean=0.29, median=0.28) compared with first preference first LAs (mean=0.27, median=0.27). For both, the average skew was towards concentrations of advantage – slightly sharper for equal preference/default ranking LAs (mean=0.08, median=0.06) compared with first preference first LAs (mean=0.06, median=0.03).

It is important to put these associations into context and to be cautious about drawing conclusions. Most importantly we should not assume that either of the systems *causes* the attributes with which they are associated. For example, we know that selective areas are associated with higher appeals and greater segregation and that the most selective areas are more likely to have equal preference systems. So it may be that being selective explains both the greater number of appeals and the greater segregation found in authority wide equal

¹⁶ A Predominately autonomous LA is defined as one where :25% or less of the LA's schools are community/VC.

A Predominately non-autonomous LA is defined as one where 25% or less of an LA's schools are VA/F/AC.

A Diverse LA is defined as one where the number of autonomous schools were in the range of 26% to 75%

preference systems and not that they adopt equal preference. Further, the difference between the two systems in the numbers of parents gaining their first preferences should not be interpreted as necessarily meaning that equal preference systems lead to less parental satisfaction overall. In a first preference first area, if the schools a parent puts as first, second or third are oversubscribed they risk not getting in to their first preference school and are also likely not to get their second or third choice because they do not fit the first preference over-subscription criterion of those schools. This means that the first preference system to some extent restricts parents' room for manoeuvre, reduces their options and constrains them to put preferences for schools that are not their real preferred choice.

2.4 Banding

2.4.1 Introduction

Banding is where a school uses test results of attainment to allocate children to a range of attainment bands so as to determine a particular range of attainment of the intake. Where the intention is to ensure that the range of pupils admitted contains a greater proportion of higher attaining children this is selective banding. In contrast 'fair banding' is defined in the School Admissions Code of Practice 2003 (Section 3.26) where it is used to try to ensure that the intake includes a proportionate spread of children of all abilities. The 1998 Standards and Framework Act allowed new fair banding arrangements to be introduced but prohibited the introduction of new selective banding. It did however allow the continuation of selective banding where it had been in place prior to September 1997 (DCSF 2007). Because schools must accept applicants if there are places available, as in the case of an undersubscribed school, banding only operates when the number of applications exceeds the number of places.

The banding procedure for new banding arrangements as described in the School Admissions Code of Practice 2003 is required to apply to the *applicants* to a *single* school. This is a significant feature. Applicants are the reference group for allocation to bands:

For any banding arrangements introduced since the start of the 1997/98 school year to be lawful, they must ensure that the intake represents the range of applicants' abilities, not, for example, a national or LEA average. (Section 3.27)

It is therefore possible that the average attainment of the applicants to a particular school might be higher or lower than the average of all children in a Local Authority. In this case it is still possible for intakes to be more or less advantaged relative to other schools in the area. This is in contrast to arrangements where the reference group is not applicants but a national or Local Authority average. In this case some bands may not be filled by applicants who have put the school as first choice and, consequently, those who have put the school as a lower preference could be allocated a place. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 allows a wider range of reference groups.

Banding is permitted by Section 101 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 ('1998 Act') as amended by Section 54 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 ('2006 Act'). Admission authorities may now adopt admission arrangements that band applicants to produce an intake that is representative of any one of:

the full range of ability of applicants for the school (or group of schools banding jointly);

the range of ability of children in the local area; or

the national ability range.

(Section 4 Information Note on Banding 2007 DfES website)

2.4.2 Key findings

- Only three Local Authorities had authority wide banding, all in London
- Two had fewer appeals and all three had less segregated intakes than the average for other London authorities
- 35 autonomous schools outside these authorities also banded their intake. The great majority were in London
- The numbers are small, but of these, twice as many Voluntary Aided schools (18) banded their intake compared to Academies (9) and Foundation schools (8).
- The great majority had 'fair banding'
- One school used 'selective banding'.

2.4.3 Authority wide banding:

Authority wide banding aims to achieve in every school an intake representative of the whole attainment range in that authority. Prior to the application process, children are sorted according to attainment into as many bands as the authority decides on the basis of an LA wide measure. Each school in the authority is allowed only to take from its applicants a proportionate group of people depending on the size of the band. For example, for those with five equal sized bands this would be an equal proportion of children (20%) in each band. Others may have three bands of 25%, 50% and 25%. It is sometimes called 'fair banding' with reference to the problems associated with intakes segregated by attainment or social background (Levacic 2007). Over-subscription criteria are applied *to each band* should there be more applicants for that band than there are places. The 'fair banding' label distinguishes it from other banding arrangements where unequal proportions are taken from each band, a system operating only at the level of 2 schools in non-banded authorities and which will be discussed below.

There were only three banded local authorities in 2006. The 2007 School Admissions Code endorses banding as good practice (Chapter 2 section 2.79). This, together with the requirement on Local Authorities to become proactive with regard to segregation of intakes (Chapter 4 section 4.6) makes it likely that more authorities will look at the possibility of using banding in their areas. The three LAs using authority wide 'fair' banding in 2006 were Lewisham and Tower Hamlets in Inner London and Greenwich in Outer London. The details of their arrangements are given in the table below.

Table 5: Details of arrangements in the three banded authorities

	Method of measuring attainment	Number of bands	Proportions in each band	Reference Group
Greenwich	Optional reading and maths SATs in Y5	5	20%	LA
Lewisham	Optional reading and maths SATs in Y5	5	20%	LA
Tower Hamlets	Optional reading SATs in Y5	4	25%	LA

All three used the optional SATs in Y5. All three local authorities had a variety of types of school and a significant proportion of specialist schools. Three of Lewisham's eight specialist schools selected a proportion of their intake by aptitude.

Only in Greenwich were all the area's schools banded. In the other two there were non-community schools that were not part of the 'LEA wide' scheme.

Table 6: Lewisham schools banded and not banded

	Community	VA (RC)	VA (CofE)	VA (not rel)	Academy (RC)	Academy (not rel)	Total
Banded	6	0	0	1	1	2	10
NotBanded	0	1	1	1	0	0	3
Totals	6	1	1	2	1	2	13

Table 7: Greenwich schools banded and not banded

	Community	VA (RC)	VA (CofE)	VC	Academy (RC)	Total
Banded	8	2	1	1	1	13
Not Banded	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	8	2	1	1	1	13

Table 8: Tower Hamlet schools banded and not banded

	Community	VA (RC)	VA (CofE)	VA (not rel)	VC	Total
Banded	9	0	2	1	1	13
Not Banded	0	2	0	0	0	2
Totals	9	2	2	1	1	15

Appeals heard in Greenwich and Tower Hamlets were fewer than average for their region and for London as a whole, while Lewisham was above average on this measure. But, as outlined in section 1.1.4, the limitations of appeals as a

comparative measure in London should be remembered. All three had less segregated intakes than the average for London (Allen and Vignoles 2006).

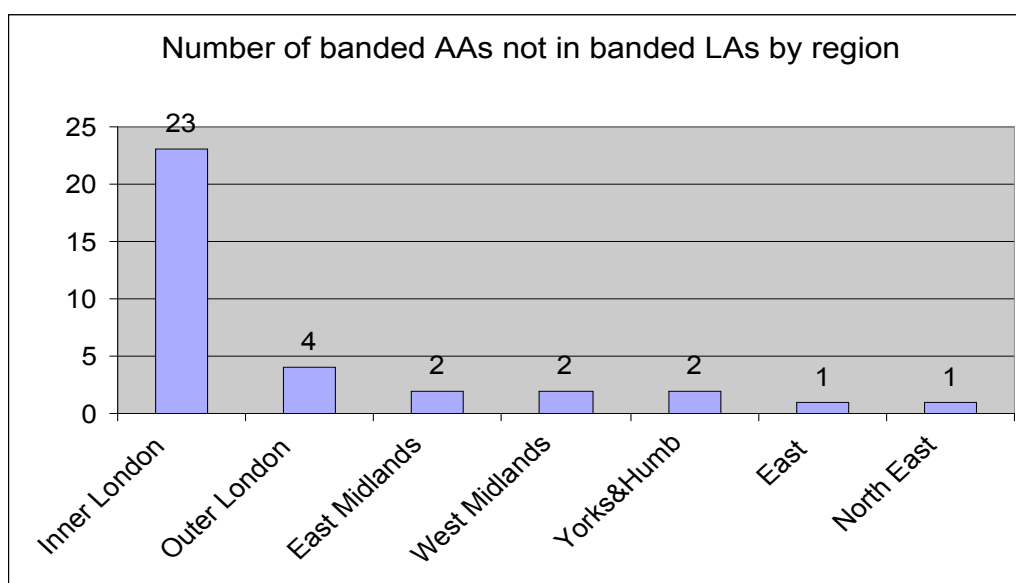
Table 9: Levels of appeals and segregation in the three banded authorities

	Appeals Heard as a % of all submissions	Segregation (lower = less segregated)
Greenwich	7.4	0.20
Lewisham	13.4	0.22
Tower Hamlets	7.2	0.27
Inner London	10.7	not available
Outer London	8.6	not available
London	9.3	0.29

2.4.4 Banding in Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools and Academies

Banding is also found in schools that are their own admission authorities that are not in banded LAs. In 2006 there were 35 such admission authorities. The great majority of these were in London. The table below excludes those schools in banded Local Authorities.

Table 10



Twice as many Voluntary Aided schools (18 or 3.4% of all VA schools) banded their intake compared to Academies (9 or 21% of all Academies) and Foundation schools (8 or 1.5% of all Foundation schools).

Table 11

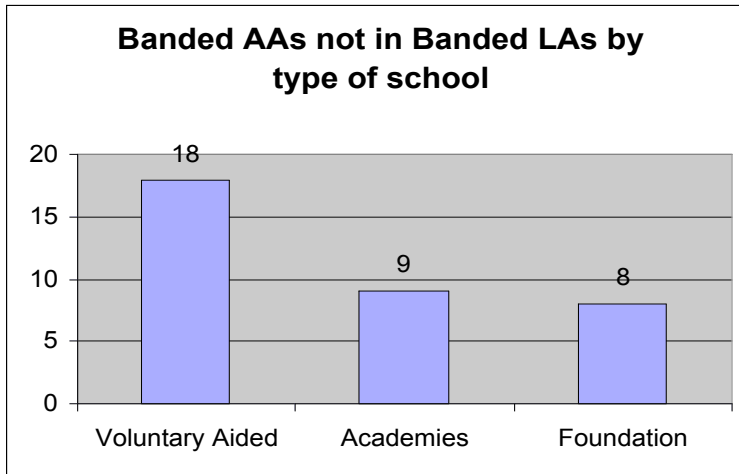
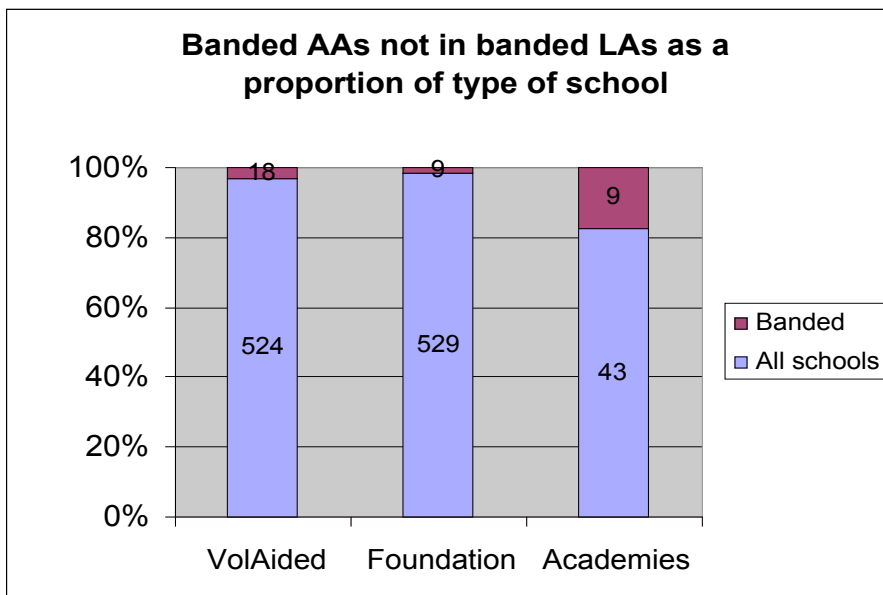


Table 12



Most of these schools used banding to get a balanced intake by attainment (fair banding) but two schools in Lambeth (one Voluntary Aided and one Foundation¹⁷) used it to select an intake of higher attainment e.g. by having three bands and

¹⁷ The Foundation school moved to a 25%, 50%, 25% policy in 2007.

taking 40% from the highest attaining group, 40% from the middle attaining group and 20% from the lowest attaining group. As with the banded Local Authorities, various standardised tests were used including those developed by NFER (2007) and the optional SATs results.

The reference group used to construct the parameters of the bands is important. The 2003 School Admissions Code of Practice required this to be the applicants to the school. This meant that if the average attainment of the group of applicants was different to that across the Local Authority the intake of the banded school might still be skewed by attainment compared to other schools in the area. The 2006 Education and Inspections Act now allows the reference group to be:

- a) applicants for the school(s) or a group of schools; or
- b) children in the local area; or
- c) the national ability range¹⁸.

Thirty one out of thirty five of the schools had applicants as their reference group, three of the remaining four used an authority wide measure and the reference group for one was unknown.

2.5 Selection

2.5.1 Key findings

- 10 out of the 14 most selective authorities required parents to opt in for the tests, in 3 they had to opt out and one was variable
- In the 14 most selective authorities there were, on average, more appeals, fewer parents gained their first preference and the intakes were more socially segregated than in the other authorities
- There are more grammar schools that are Foundation schools than any other type
- Selection and social segregation appear to go hand in hand.
- There has been a small increase in the proportion of schools selecting by aptitude from an estimated 1.3% in 2000, 3% in 2001 to 4% in 2006
- Voluntary-aided and Foundation schools were much more likely to select pupils by aptitude than Community/Voluntary Controlled schools¹⁹.
- By far the most common form of test for aptitude was a live trial or audition

¹⁸ See 2007 School Admissions Code (para. 2.80)

¹⁹ This may partly be explained by the smaller proportion of Voluntary Controlled and Community schools with specialist status.

- For a large proportion of schools for whom we do not know the method of selection it means that their admission arrangements are not transparent and this is worrying because of the potential for covert selection.

2.5.2 Authorities with schools that select by attainment

Some schools select all (grammar schools) or part (partially selective schools) of their intake by attainment as measured in a test. There are 43 local authorities with schools that use such selection by prior attainment as part of their admissions criteria. In areas where a substantial proportion of the total places are allocated to those who score highest and where all children take the 11+ test than all places are effectively selective in both grammar and secondary modern schools. However in some areas that have substantial proportions of 'grammar' places not all children take the test and the non-grammar schools in the area may be called comprehensive or all-ability schools and aspire to a non-selective intake. This despite the fact that their intakes will be affected by the selective process of the explicitly selective schools. Then there are the areas where there is only a small proportion of the places allocated on the basis of prior attainment and here the non-selective schools may truthfully claim to have an all-ability intake although with fewer higher performing children. For the sake of simplicity, in the table below and subsequent discussion we have labelled places allocated to the highest scoring children 'selective places' and all others as 'non-selective places' but the complexity outlined above needs to be borne in mind. The table shows all places allocated to children achieving the highest scores in an 11+ test in local authorities as a percentage of all the secondary places available in that area.

Table 13

		Total Places	Selective Places	Non-Selective Places	% Selective Places	% Non-Selective Places
1	Trafford	3066	1200	1866	39.14	60.86
2	Southend-on-Sea	2178	750	1428	34.44	65.56
3	Buckinghamshire	5794	1980	3814	34.17	65.83
4	Slough	1557	530	1027	34.04	65.96
5	Kent	16781	4830	11951	28.78	71.22
6	Bexley	3451	991	2460	28.72	71.28
7	Sutton	2641	737	1904	27.91	72.09
8	Medway	3714	954	2760	25.69	74.31
9	Lincolnshire	8665	2065	6600	23.83	76.17
10	Poole	1705	360	1345	21.11	78.89
11	Wirral	4472	938	3534	20.97	79.03
12	Reading	1127	234	893	20.76	79.24
13	Kingston upon Thames	1441	284	1157	19.71	80.29
14	Torbay	1275	240	1035	18.82	81.18
15	Bournemouth	1888	312	1576	16.53	83.47
16	Barnet	3513	569	2944	16.20	83.80
17	Plymouth	3217	414	2803	12.87	87.13
18	Calderdale	2763	310	2453	11.22	88.78
19	Gloucestershire	7251	810	6441	11.17	88.83
20	Wandsworth	1926	194	1732	10.07	89.93
21	Brent	2872	240	2632	8.36	91.64
22	Birmingham	13033	999	12034	7.67	92.33
23	Warwickshire	6495	428	6067	6.59	93.41
24	Telford and Wrekin	2230	146	2084	6.55	93.45
25	Bromley	3919	242	3677	6.18	93.82
26	Enfield	3473	180	3293	5.18	94.82
27	Walsall	3864	192	3672	4.97	95.03
28	North Yorkshire	8123	340	7783	4.19	95.81
29	Stoke-on-Trent	2891	120	2771	4.15	95.85
30	Croydon	3776	138	3638	3.65	96.35
31	Wolverhampton	3008	108	2900	3.59	96.41
32	Lancashire	14667	524	14143	3.57	96.43
33	Hertfordshire	13802	434	13368	3.14	96.86
34	Kirklees	5158	150	5008	2.91	97.09
35	Essex	17212	484	16728	2.81	97.19
36	Liverpool	6063	161	5902	2.66	97.34
37	Cumbria	6726	120	6606	1.78	98.22
38	Devon	8209	120	8089	1.46	98.54
39	Redbridge	3246	27	3219	0.83	99.17
40	Surrey	10891	85	10806	0.78	99.22
41	Southwark	2416	18	2398	0.75	99.25
42	Peterborough	2412	12	2400	0.50	99.50
43	Dudley	4135	16	4119	0.39	99.61

Over half of the local authorities have fewer than 10% selective places. In some cases these may be the result of single grammar schools in an area with predominantly all ability schools. However in other cases the selective places may be concentrated in towns which in effect create a small highly selective subset of schools. In urban areas where there is little cross border traffic and the admissions context is relatively self contained the existence of even a small percentage of selective places can have an effect on the intakes of other schools. There are fourteen authorities with percentages between nearly 19% and 39% with an average of 27%. For the purposes of analysis we have used these fourteen most selective authorities (shaded in the table above) to test for associations.

A significant aspect of the process of admission to selective schools is how children get to take the 11+test. In 2000 Flatley et al (2001) found three methods in highly selective areas. One was the *universal opt out* system where children were automatically tested in their primary schools or elsewhere. It provides universal access and raises no obvious equity issues beyond those generally associated with selective systems. A second method was where parents were *invited to opt in* to the test. In this case they had to apply to the school for their child to be entered for the test which may have been held in a place other than the primary school and at a given time which was often a weekend. Finally, some areas entered children on the primary school's recommendation (with parents able to include them by request). As can be seen from the table below, in 2006 in the fourteen most selective areas we found the first two systems in operation but none based entry to the test solely on the primary schools' recommendation.

Table 14

Local Authority	Entry system
Bexley	Opt in
Buckinghamshire	Universal opt out
Kent	Universal opt out
Kingston upon Thames	Opt in
Lincolnshire	Variable
Medway	Opt in
Poole	Opt in
Reading	Opt in
Slough	Opt in
Southend-on-Sea	Opt in
Sutton	Opt in
Torbay	Opt in
Trafford	Universal opt out

Wirral	Opt in
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The fourteen most selective areas were more likely to have a higher proportion of non-Community schools than the remaining 134 areas and selection is clearly associated with relatively higher levels of school autonomy at the Local Authority level²⁰. On average, appeals were more common in these most selective Local Authorities with around 13% of admissions resulting in an appeal being lodged (compared with less than 10% in all other LAs). The percentage of first preferences was, on average, lower (mean=78%, median=79%) compared with the other Local Authorities (mean=88%, median=92%).

Other studies have found that grammar schools have a significantly more advantaged intake than other schools in their area (Levacic and Marsh 2007). We also found that selection and social segregation appear to go hand in hand. On average the 2004 dissimilarity index was substantially larger for the fourteen most selective Local Authorities (mean=0.36, median=0.37) compared with the other LAs (mean & median=0.27). For both, the average skew was towards concentrations of advantage – this was sharper to a striking degree for the fourteen most selective LAs (mean=0.23, median=0.19) compared with other LAs (mean=0.06, median=0.04).

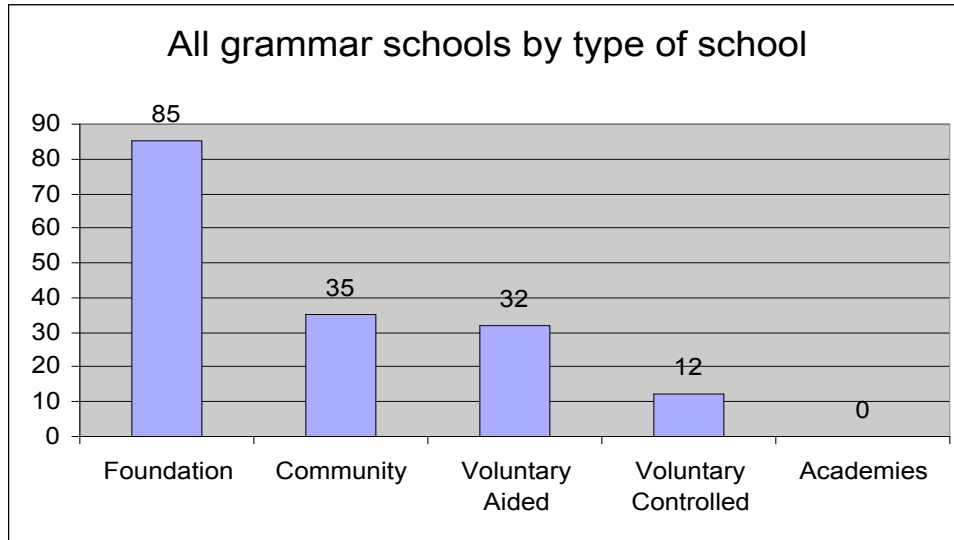
2.5.3 Grammar schools

In this section we look at the characteristics of the grammar schools themselves. There are 164 grammar schools in total. The majority (108) are in the fourteen most selective areas with 56 in the other areas. Inevitably, when grammar schools and all ability schools co-exist in the same area and serve the same population, the effect on the intake of the all ability schools will be to depress the average attainment level of their intakes.

There are more grammar schools that are Foundation schools than any other type. Sixteen percent of Foundation schools, 7% of Voluntary Aided schools, and 2.3% of Community/Voluntary Controlled schools are grammars.

²⁰ The reasons for this association are complex and may be linked to historical issues such as grant maintained status. We cannot infer causes from statistical associations.

Table 15



2.5.4 Partially selective schools

Selective arrangements that had been in place prior to 1997 are allowed to continue but any new selective arrangements other than for fair banding or to select up to a total of 10% for aptitude are prohibited. This meant that a number of schools in 2006 were allowed to continue selecting all or part of their intake by general ability (i.e. attainment in an 11+ test) and some were allowed to continue to select more than a total of 10% by aptitude. In this section we report only on those that select part of their intake by general ability through an 11+ test. Those schools that selected more than 10% by aptitude are considered in the next section.

In 2006 we found only 37 schools that select part of their intake by general ability making only 1% of all secondary schools and they are spread between 20 different local authorities (see table below). 19 are Foundation schools, 14 Voluntary Aided and 4 are Community schools. They are found in different types of local authority with 3 in Outer London, 2 in Inner London, 8 in other Metropolitan areas, and 7 in non-metropolitan areas. The percentage of the intake selected by attainment ranges from 9% to 43%.

Table 16 Schools that select part of their intake on general ability/attainment

Local Authority	Type of school	Name of school	% Selected by attainment	% Selected by aptitude
Bexley	C	Erith School	20	0
Croydon	F	The Archbishop Lanfranc School	15	0
Croydon	F	Shirley High School	15	0
Croydon	F	Edenham High School	15	0
Croydon	VA	Riddlesdown High School	15	0
Dorset	F	Budmouth Technology College	30	0
Dudley	VA	Old Swinford Hospital	27	0
Essex	F	The King John School	15	0
Hertfordshire	F	Queens' School	35	10
Hertfordshire	F	Rickmansworth School	35	10
Hertfordshire	VA	Dame Alice Owen's School	33	10
Hertfordshire	VA	Parmiter's School	35	10
Hertfordshire	VA	St Clement Danes School	10	10
Hertfordshire	VA	Watford Grammar School for Boys	35	10
Hertfordshire	VA	Watford Grammar School for Girls	35	10
Kent	F	The Archbishop's School	15	0
Kent	F	Homewood School	20	1
Kingston	VA	The Holy Cross School	13	0
Lincolnshire	C	King Edward VI Spilsby	25	0
Liverpool	VA	St Margaret's CofE High School	15	0
Liverpool	VA	St Hilda's CofE High School	15	0
Peterborough	VA	The King's School	10	0
Poole	F	Poole High School	10	0
Reading	F	Reading Girls' School	24	0
Redbridge	F	The Chadwell Heath F School	15	0
Southend	F	Cecil Jones College	10	0
Southend	VA	St Bernard's High School	43	0
Southend	VA	St Thomas More High School for Boys	21	0
Southwark	VA	St Saviour's & St Olave's CofE School	15	0
Surrey	F	Glyn Technology School	15	0
Surrey	F	Rosebery School	10	10
Surrey	F	The Winston Churchill School	9	15
Torbay	F	Westlands School	25	0
Wandsworth	C	Ernest Bevin	33	0
Wandsworth	F	Burntwood School	25	0
Wandsworth	F	Graveney School	25	0
Warwickshire	C	Ashlawn School	12	0

Two further schools in Lambeth, Archbishop Tenison and London Nautical²¹, continued to use a 40%, 40%, 20% split between bands to select a higher attaining intake and these should also be considered partially selective schools.

The actual impact of partial selection will depend on the specific context and the detailed knowledge required for this is beyond the scope of the present study. However, bringing together data at the area level with the findings about each of these partially selective schools offers some interesting findings. In 16 of the 20 areas partially selective schools make up a small proportion of all schools but in Croydon, Southend, Hertfordshire and Wandsworth they appear to have a more significant presence. We look at each of these areas in more detail.

In 2006 Croydon had four partially selective schools out of twenty one. Three were Foundation schools and one a Voluntary Aided. Each selected 15% by attainment. None of these four selected by aptitude but four other schools in the area did so. Being outer London there is a high level of cross border traffic with about 18% imported i.e. children from other authorities attending Croydon secondary schools and about 23% exported i.e. Croydon resident pupils attending secondary schools in other authorities²²..

Southend-on-Sea had three partially selective schools out of twelve. The three include both of the two Voluntary Aided schools in the Borough and one Foundation. The Foundation school selected 10%, and the two Voluntary Aided schools 21% and 43%. The latter school described itself as bi-lateral with separate selective and non-selective streams. None of the three schools selected by aptitude but two other schools in the area did. There was a wholly selective system in operation with four grammar schools in addition to the three partially selective schools. This is a highly selective context with more than a third (34%) of all secondary school places being on the basis of attainment tests. Southend had a much higher level of imports (17.5%) and exports (11.5%) of pupils than the average for the East of England (4.7% and 4.2% respectively), and was comparable with London levels. The great majority of imports are from Essex.

Hertfordshire had seven partially selective schools out of seventy six. Five were Voluntary Aided and two were Foundation schools. What is distinctive about these schools is that all but one, which selects 10%, select around a third of their intake (33 to 35%). In addition all seven select a further 10% by aptitude along with seven other schools in the local authority. Hertfordshire imports a slightly higher

²¹ London Nautical moved in 2007 to a 25%, 50%, 25% split between bands but continued to select on nautical ability.

²² DfES Local Authority Cross Border Movement of Secondary¹ ² School Pupils Resident in England, January 2006 (Final). Statistical First Release

proportion of pupils (7.7%) than the regional average (4.7%) and exports slightly fewer (3.1%) than the regional average (4.2%). The imports come largely from the adjacent London boroughs and counties of Essex, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire. The area has no wholly selective schools but the selective intake of the seven partially selective schools equate to about two fully selective grammar schools.

In 2006 Wandsworth had three partially selective schools out of ten. Two out of the five Foundation schools selected 25% and one of the two Community schools selected 33% of their intake. This amounted to 10% of the total number of pupils admitted to Wandsworth secondary schools. None of these three selected by aptitude but three other schools did. Two of the remaining three Foundation schools used fair banding to gain a balanced intake. There is a great deal of cross border traffic. Wandsworth exports a slightly smaller percentage of pupils (28%) than the average for Inner London (29%) and imports substantially more (37%) than the area average (25%). Many of the imported pupils come from the London Boroughs of Lambeth, Merton and Hammersmith and Fulham. There are no wholly selective schools in Wandsworth but, as for all London schools, the level of competition is high.

We may conclude that while partial selection is found in a small minority of schools there are a number of schools in some areas that select a substantial proportion of their intake and this is likely to have a significant impact on the balance of intakes within their local context. However, more detailed knowledge of the specific cases would be needed to draw further conclusions.

2.5.5 Selection by aptitude

Schools are allowed to select up to 10% of their intake on the basis of aptitude for certain subjects. This does not apply only to schools in the Specialist Schools Programme; any admission authority may decide to give priority in this way. In 2000 (Flatley et al 2001) it was found that 43 schools, that is 1.4% of all secondary schools, selected by aptitude. West and Hind (2003) calculated that, in 2001, 90, or 3% of all secondary schools did so. Since then the number of schools on the specialist school programme has increased greatly and in 2006 there were 2076 designated schools. In 2006 we found 129 schools selected by aptitude making an increased proportion of 4.13% of all schools and 6.2% of specialist schools.

West and Hind (2003 p10) also found that in 2001 Voluntary-aided and Foundation schools were much more likely to be partially selecting pupils by attainment/aptitude than community/voluntary controlled schools. Our study found this same tendency in 2006. Analysed by type of school, there were far more (one in two) Foundation schools that selected by aptitude. Voluntary Aided schools were also more likely to select in this way (just over one in four) whereas Community, Voluntary Controlled schools (one in eight) and Academies (one in twelve) were much less likely to do so. This may partly be explained by the smaller proportion of Voluntary Controlled and Community schools with specialist status.

Table 17: Proportions of each type of school selecting by aptitude

School Type	NumSchools	% of all Schools of the type that select by aptitude
Foundation	68	53
Voluntary aided	35	27
Community	15	12
Academies	11	9

The 1998 Standards and Framework Act allowed schools to continue with selection arrangements if they were in place in 1997 prior to the Act. This included selection by aptitude for more than the 10% maximum allowed for any new arrangements. We found 10 schools (8% of all schools that select by aptitude) that selected more than 10% of their intake. Five of these selected between 15% and 17% of their intake, three between 20% and 27%, one 40%, and one did not specify.

Table 18 Schools with pre-existing partial selection over a total of 10%

LA	School	% Selected by aptitude	Specialisms	Type of school
Barnet	Mill Hill School	25%	Technology, Music and Dance	Foundation
Birmingham	Ninestiles School	27%	Tech, Maths/Comp and Science	Foundation
Buckinghamshire	Waddesdon C of E School	15%	Music	Voluntary Aided
Havering ²³	Coopers' Company & Coborn	Not specified	Sport, Music, Drama and others	Voluntary Aided
Kent	Chaucer	15%	Technology	Foundation
Lancashire	Ripley St Thomas CE High	15%	Modern Foreign Languages	Voluntary Aided
Liverpool	Archbishop Blanch CE High School (Girls)	15%	Arts, Maths/Comp, Music, Science, Sport, Tech.	Voluntary Aided
Liverpool	King David High School	17%	Music	Voluntary Aided
Liverpool	St Edward's College	20%	Music	Voluntary Aided
Wandsworth	Chestnut Grove	40%	Art, Modern Foreign Languages	Foundation

For the great majority of schools (86%) that select by aptitude this remains the only formal means of selection. However 18 schools combined selection by aptitude with selection of part or the whole of their intake by attainment.

The schools that selected by aptitude were not evenly spread geographically. A quarter were in London, spread equally between Inner and Outer London.

²³ See Appendix D

Table 19: Spread of schools that select by aptitude

Area	NumSchools	% of all Schools that select by aptitude
London	33	26
London - Inner	16	12
London - Outer	17	13
Elsewhere	96	74

In response to concerns about the difficulty of separating selection by aptitude from selection by general ability, the specialisms for which schools could introduce new arrangements to select by aptitude were restricted to the following:

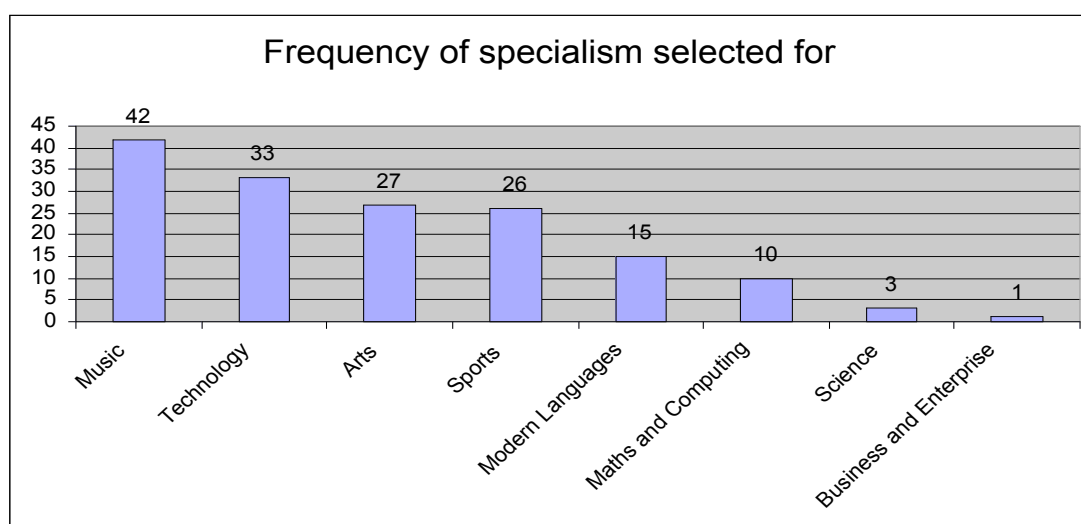
- physical education or sport or one or more sports
- the performing arts or one or more of those arts
- the visual arts or one or more of those arts
- modern foreign languages or any such language
- design and technology and information technology.

Schools that were already selecting for other subjects prior to this regulation were allowed to continue.

In response to the Education Select Committee (2004a), the Government has from 2008 withdrawn the option for schools to introduce selection by aptitude in design and technology and/or information technology (School Admissions Code 2007) whilst allowing schools already using such criteria to continue to do so.

The frequency of specialisms selected for in 2006 are given in the following chart.

Table 20



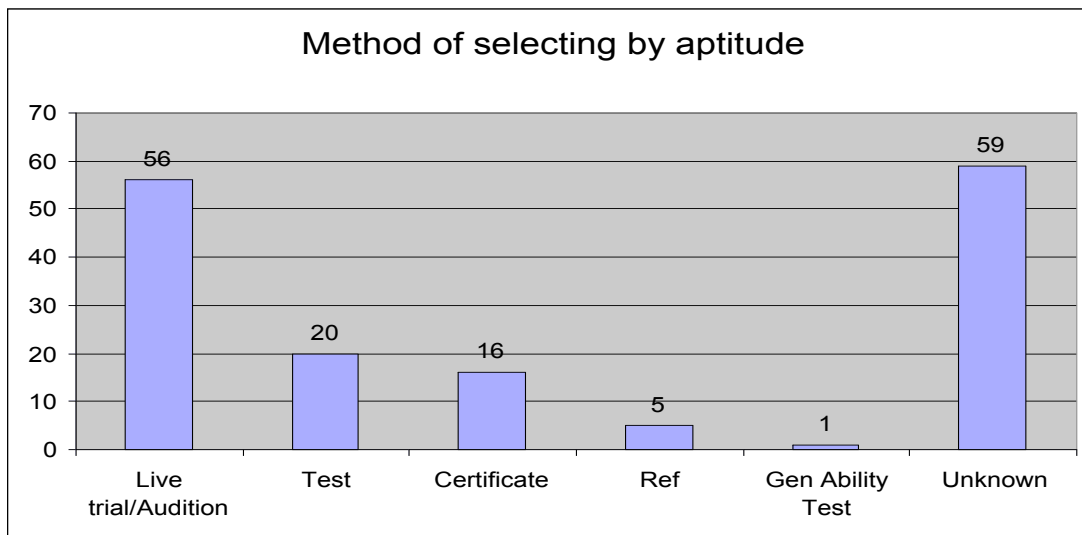
There has also been scepticism expressed about how schools can fairly establish aptitude without at the same time selecting by attainment (Education and Skills Select Committee 2004a; West and Hind 2003). In addition, some forms of test of

aptitude such as live auditions, are subject to the same criticism as interviews in that they provide the means for selection on social grounds. While the 2003 School Admissions Code of Practice stated that there should be no interviews (DfES 2003b para 3.16) and interviewing is now outlawed (see section 1.46 School Admissions Code 2007) the use of interviews or live auditions is allowed:

solely for the purpose of assessing a child's suitability for a boarding place, or to auditions, or other oral or practical tests in order to ascertain a child's aptitude in a particular subject at schools with a permitted form of selection by aptitude. (section 1.46 and 1.47)

Given this debate it is of interest what methods the schools in 2006 used. We found the following categories in the composite prospectuses and give their frequencies in the chart below²⁴. The most common category was a live test or audition and this included auditions for music and drama, and sports trials.

Table 21



The variety and frequency of kinds of test for each specialism are given in Table 22.

²⁴ The category "Test" included tests for specific modern languages as well as unspecified test for Technology.

Table 22: Frequency of methods of assessing aptitude

	Live trial/ Audition	Ref	Certificate	Test	Gen Ability Test	Unknown	Total
Music	19	0	8	0	0	15	42
Technology	0	0	1	18	1	13	33
Arts	13	3	3	0	0	8	27
Sports	8	2	3	0	0	13	26
Languages	9	0	1	2	0	3	15
Maths&Comp	6	0	0	0	0	4	10
Science	1	0	0	0	0	2	3
Bus&Ent	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	73	5	16	3	1	59	157

For the large proportion of schools for whom we do not know the method of selection it means that their admission arrangements are not transparent and this is worrying because of the potential for covert selection.

There are significant differences between selection by aptitude and selection by 'ability'. Nevertheless there are strong arguments to suggest that selection by aptitude is likely to be socially selective by default. A high relative attainment in any of the subjects (even sport) will involve expense of resources of time and money for travelling, equipment and training. More affluent families have more of these resources as well as more social and cultural capital. In addition, parents from higher socio-economic groups tend to be more active in choosing a school and to be more willing for their children to travel away from their nearest school (financial resources will play a part in this as well) and so they may be more likely to apply for the aptitude places. These possibilities remain to be proven but there would appear to be potential for unfairness.

2.6 Supplementary information

2.6.1 Key findings

- 50% of Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools and Academies did not ask for any supplementary information. 21% asked only for evidence to apply published criteria including confirmation of faith, or proof of residence or related to a confirmation of aptitude and 29% asked for additional information beyond this purpose.
- Voluntary Aided schools were more likely than any other type of school to request supplementary information other than to apply published criteria
- The most frequent categories of information requested beyond evidence to apply published criteria were Personal information about the child, Reasons for application, Background details of family or child and Commitment to school

2.6.2 Introduction

Some Voluntary Aided and Foundation school admission authorities require parents to submit information in addition to that required on the common application form. The frequency and nature of the supplementary information requested by schools is pertinent to the fairness of admissions because such information can reveal the social or academic background of a child or because judgements about such information are subjective. Pennell, West and Hind (2005) in their survey of London secondary schools concluded that 'the supplementary forms used by some schools provide opportunities to select more 'desirable' pupils'. Admissions officers that they interviewed also reported concerns about the use of these forms for that reason. Pennell et al's concerns were that in some cases parents were asked to provide information that did not seem to be related to the school's admissions criteria (e.g., whether parents were living in bed and breakfast accommodation or parents' occupations). This provided opportunities for discriminating between applicants on social grounds. They were also concerned that the length of some forms and the requirement, in some cases, that parents and children write extensively about their reasons for wanting a place at the school, could systematically deter some parents/carers (e.g. those with few or no educational qualifications) from applying and such information could only be judged subjectively. It is important to keep in mind that a request for this kind of information only offers the *opportunity* for discrimination by intention or by default. Evidence that such information is actually implicated in causing differences in the social background of the intakes would by its nature be difficult to gain. But it is the case that these schools have higher than average attainment and are more socially advantaged.

The current study offered the opportunity to map the incidences of such requests across all schools and enabled us to see how far the findings from London were replicated across the country. We wrote to all Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools and Academies and City Technology Colleges for copies of their supplementary information forms, or confirmation that they did not ask for further information, and analysed the kind of information required from parents²⁵.

2.6.3 Representativeness of the respondents

Given the sensitivities around the issue and the possibility that schools would fear attracting criticism, we were concerned that some might not wish to provide us with the forms. In the event 722 (67%) schools responded and they were closely

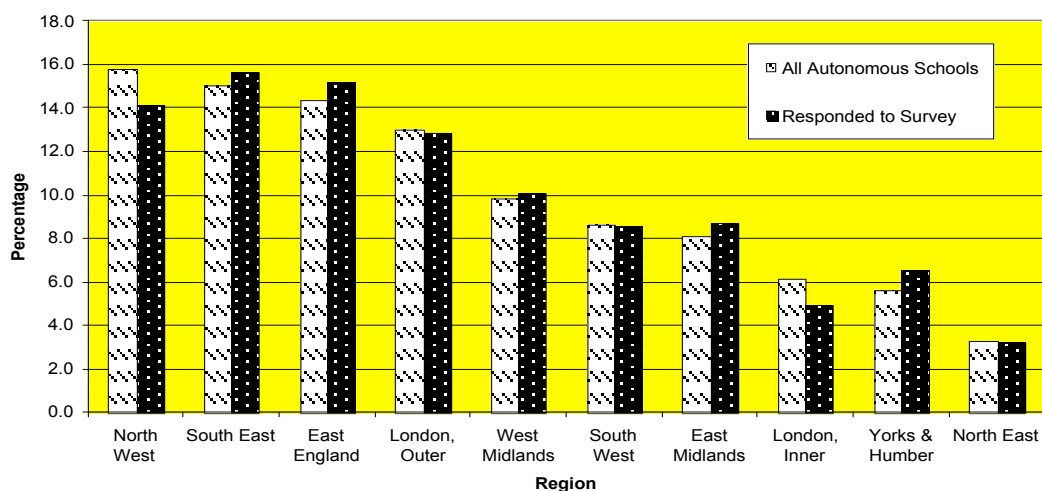
²⁵We did not ask the 90 Voluntary Controlled schools since they have the same arrangements and criteria as Community schools.

representative of all Voluntary Aided, Foundation schools and Academies by region, type of school and denomination²⁶.

They were also representative by region. Table 23 compares the proportion of respondents in our sample (black bars) from each type of school with the actual proportion of those schools regionally (white bars). It shows that the proportions differ by no more than one percentage point, except for the North West and Inner London which are slightly under-represented.

Table 23

Proportions of VA and Foundation schools that responded to survey by region



²⁶ Some caution needs to be expressed however in that it is possible that they are representative in terms of the characteristics stated without being quite so representative in terms of admission arrangements due to some schools with some relevant common characteristics being reluctant to respond.

Table 24

Proportions of types of schools that responded to survey

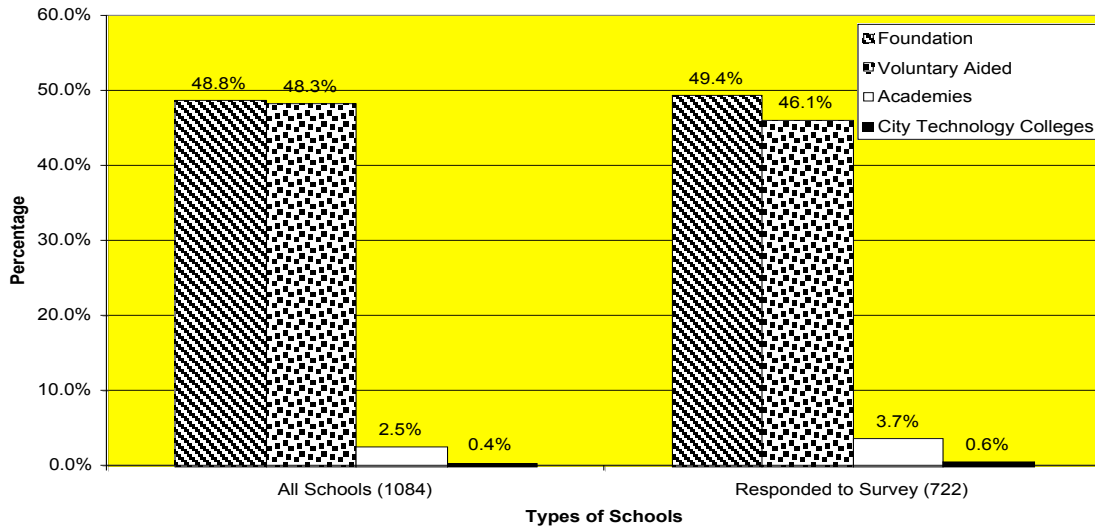
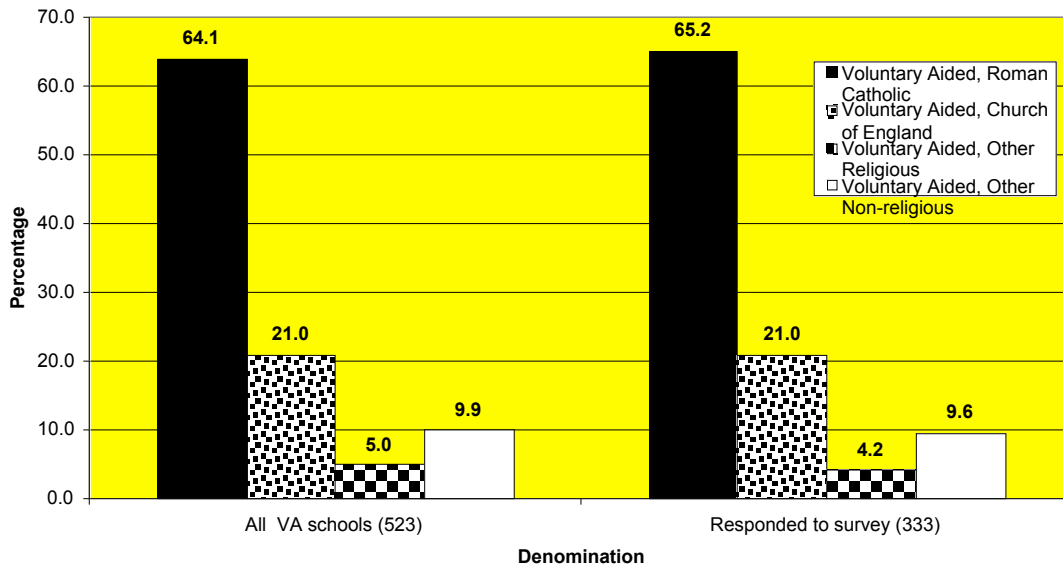


Table 25

Proportions of Voluntary Aided schools that responded to survey- By denomination



50% of the responding schools did not ask for any supplementary information. 21% asked only for evidence to apply published criteria including confirmation of faith, or proof of residence or related to a confirmation of aptitude. 29% asked for additional information beyond this purpose.

2.6.4 Categories of supplementary information

The additional information beyond evidence to apply published criteria fell into the following categories:

Personal information about the child Includes photograph, ethnicity, information about extra-curricular interests or child's reasons for wanting to attend the school.

Reasons for application Including reasons for wanting to attend a Catholic school if non-Catholic.

Background details of family or child Often requested separately. Includes parents' occupation/s or request for signatures of both parents.

Commitment to school Mostly commitment to school ethos, often religious ethos, but also includes commitment to fundraising or PTA participation.

Registration fee Request for cash, including cost of administration and postage.

Child's linguistic or cultural learning Includes child's first language and aptitude for schools with specialism in foreign languages or international schools.

Family attended/s school Beyond the often published criterion of sibling in school, a request for information about previous family members attending the school.

Previous school Requested as further information. Includes signature of primary school head.

Reasons for leaving previous school

Reference from primary headteacher Includes asking if primary head may be contacted about application.

Academic record Information about SATs results or any other academic tests or records.

Other Includes cross border information and marketing devices such as how they heard of school and Views of the school after visit.

Altogether 146 (43.8%) of the 333 Voluntary Aided schools that responded requested information in at least one of these categories and of all types of non-Community school, they are the most likely to request this kind of supplementary information²⁷.

²⁷ Discounting the Roman Catholic Academies because of their very small number.

Table 26

Number of each type of school that requested supplementary information other than to apply published criteria (number of respondents in brackets)

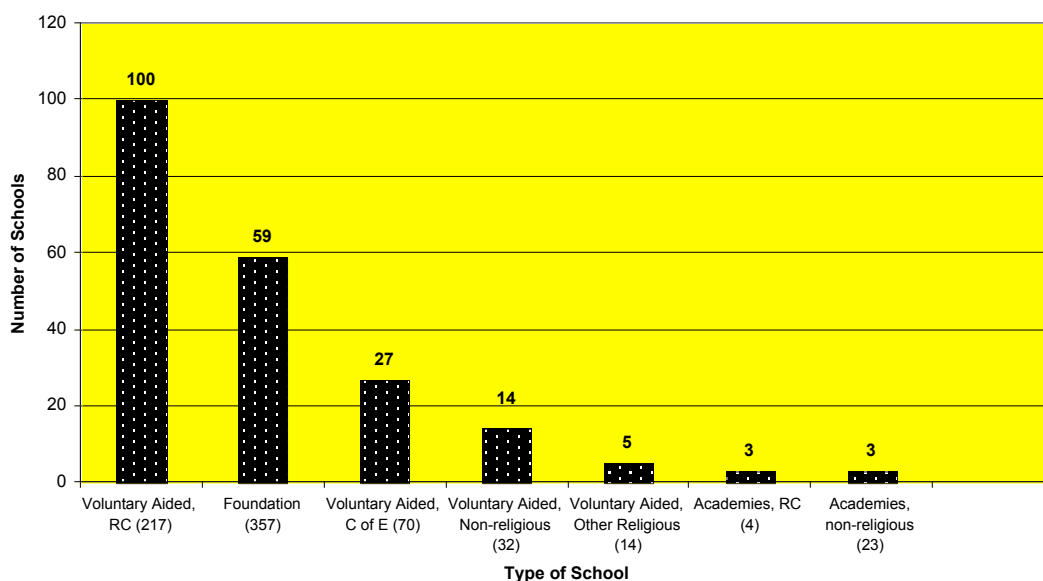
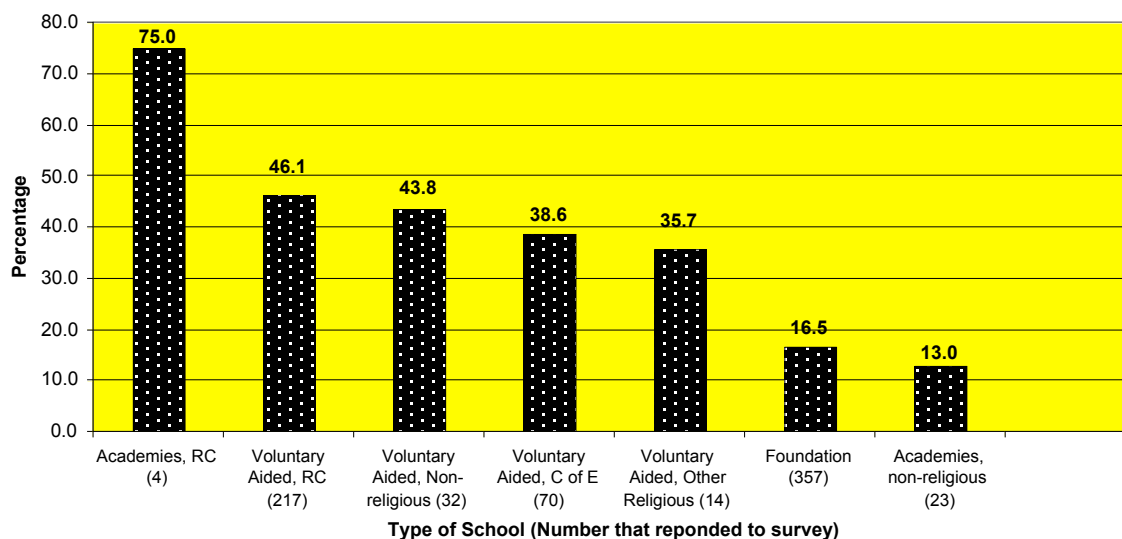


Table 27

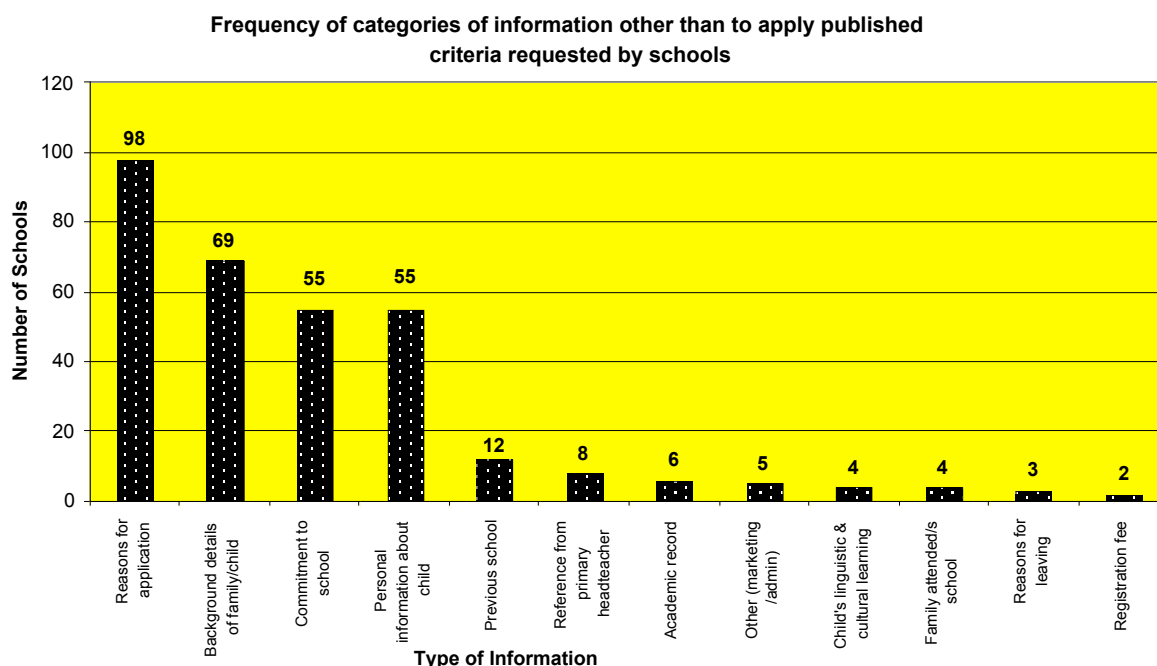
Percentage of each type of school that requested supplementary information other than to apply published criteria (number of respondents in brackets)



A greater proportion (27%) of London non-community schools requested supplementary information than the proportion (18%) for other areas of the country.

While examples of each one of the categories of additional information has been found in some school's admission arrangements it is useful to establish their scale of use. The frequency of each category of request is given in the table below.

Table 28



61% of schools asked for only one category of information other than that to apply admissions criteria. The remaining 39% asking for two or more categories.

Table 29 Number of questions in each supplementary information form

Number of questions requesting supplementary information	1	2	3	4
Number of schools that asked only this many questions	128	61	17	5

2.6.5 Examples of types of requests

In this section we give examples of the range and tone of the requests discussed above. The first exemplifies the many requests that simply asked for information to apply published criteria. The other two are examples of information asked beyond this purpose, many of which are now unlawful. Indeed the 2007 School Admissions Code precisely and explicitly identifies as unlawful a number of potential means of discrimination through the use of supplementary information (DCSF 2007 1.7.1 to 1.7.3).

Example A: A supplementary information form from a Foundation School located in the Midlands.

The supplementary information form used by this school simply requests information to apply published criteria. Details requested include information of any siblings currently attending the school and the name of the present school which the child currently attends.

Example B: A supplementary information form from an oversubscribed, Voluntary Aided, single sex, Roman Catholic School, located in a wholly selective area in the south of England.

The form contains a combination of categories. Some are used to apply published criteria such as details of siblings currently attending the school, proof of residence and confirmation of faith. However, the form also requests additional details.

These include the parents' church or parish where they were married along with a copy of the marriage certificate. The form also requires details of the child's and the family's involvement with the parish, or the life of the church, as well as an explanation as to why the child's parents are unmarried (if applicable) or why the marriage was civil rather than a Roman Catholic Church ceremony. Signatures are also required from both of the child's parents.

Example C: A supplementary information form from a Voluntary Aided Church of England School in the south of England.

As well as requesting information to apply published criteria, such as whether the child is in the care of the Local Authority and sibling information, the form from this school also requests further details from applicants.

Additional requests include a promise from parents that the child will commit to the rules and ethos of the school. It is also requested that parents include additional information about the child such as their interests in the school, their favourite subject, their hobbies and the child's character. Signatures are required from both parents.

2.7 Schools that are over or undersubscribed

2.7.1 Key findings

- For a large proportion (42%) of schools it was not possible to tell their subscription status from the information given in the composite prospectus
- Given these difficulties we estimate that about 33% of schools are undersubscribed, 25% oversubscribed and 1% evens and about 42% unknown.
- Using these estimated figures, rates of oversubscribed schools are higher in Local Authorities that are located outside London, use the equal preference/default ranking system, are among the 14 most selective authorities and have a majority of autonomous schools.

2.7.2 Introduction

The policy of parental choice of schools encourages parents to discriminate between better and worse schools. Whether or not the policy has created or facilitated it, in most areas parents perceive a hierarchy of schools. Some schools are more popular than others. Schools cannot easily expand and contract to take all who apply from year to year and it is expensive to allow schools to operate with too much spare capacity as a contingency. As a result admission authorities draw up criteria to allow them to choose between which applicants should have priority for admission. These are the oversubscription criteria and we examine the kinds and frequencies in the next section.

The concern has been widely expressed that popular schools are choosing the children and not the parents choosing the school. Schools have a strong incentive to select on the basis of social characteristics and attainment. School reputations are gained and lost in a complex and little understood process but their pupils' performance in public examinations plays an important part in the way the school is perceived by parents, local authorities and agencies such as Ofsted bolstered by comparisons in performance tables of various kinds. It is also the case that some children offer challenges that make the day to day work of teachers harder and more stressful (Thrupp 1999). It is therefore in the school's interests to attract children who are, because of their social characteristics or prior attainment level, more likely to perform well in these tests and who are easier to teach. Further, it is feared that some parents can better manage the admissions system to their advantage and will therefore stand a better chance of getting in to the oversubscribed schools.

Whether a school is oversubscribed and what criteria they have to meet to get a place is very significant information for parents to enable them to make realistic choices. The 2003 School Admissions Code of Practice states²⁸ that information to parents must include "numbers of places and applications for those places in the previous year." This is intended to ensure that parents are given an indication of the likelihood of their children being able to gain a place at any particular school. This is meant to be achieved by publication of the criteria for admission together with information as to the relative popularity of each school. If a school is heavily over-subscribed then some parents who do not meet the oversubscription criteria may be wasting one of their options if they express a preference for it. In this section we look at the subscription status of secondary schools for admissions in 2006.

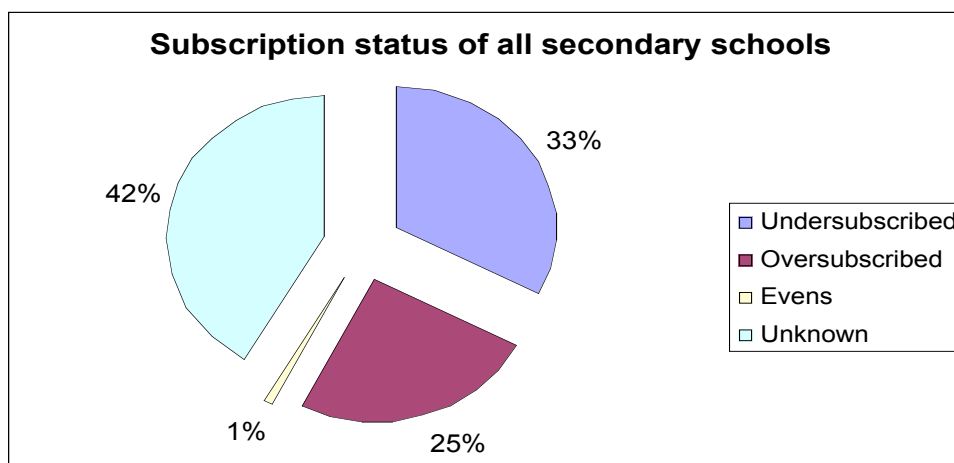
2.7.3 Subscription status of schools

We categorised schools as Undersubscribed, Oversubscribed, Evens²⁹ and Unknown. For the purposes of this study a school is defined as Oversubscribed if more parents put it as their first preference than there were places in the school in terms of their published admission number for that school year and undersubscribed if the converse. This is an apt definition given that first preference ranking of the school by parents is used to allocate places at two stages, first by the school if it has first preference as an over subscription criterion and secondly by the LA if the child is eligible for more than one school irrespective of whether there is a first preference first system or an equal preference/default ranking system. These are the definitions that are relevant to parents.

²⁸ "The information which must be published is: the name and address of the school and contact details; the school's classification; a summary of the admissions policy (it is not sufficient to refer parents to the school for details of its admissions policy); a statement of any religious affiliation; and (for secondary schools) numbers of places and applications for those places in the previous year." *Section A22 Annex A: School Admissions: The Law:*

²⁹ The number of schools will be extremely small where there is an exact fit of applicants with the number of places available. We needed an Evens category that captured schools that were neither heavily over nor heavily under subscribed. A school was defined as in the Evens category if the number of applicants who put it as their first preference differed by 5% from the places available i.e. a school with 100 places that got between 105 and 95 first preference applications was categorised as evens.

Table 30



Note: Because of rounding figures sum to more than 100

There is a surprisingly large proportion (42%) in the unknown category. For these we found that it was not possible unequivocally to tell whether or not a school was oversubscribed. Local authority composite prospectuses reported subscription status in different ways. Sometimes where the subscription status was knowable the prospectus clearly stated for each school the number of first preference applicants in the previous year and the published admissions number (PAN) for Sept 2006 in table form in the appendix. These local authority prospectuses also stated under which oversubscription criteria places were offered. In another set of examples, again where the subscription status of each school was knowable, the prospectus states the subscription status in writing for each school: e.g.: 'As the school was undersubscribed last year, we offered places to all children who applied from any area'. Where the subscription status was not knowable the prospectus might state the available places (PAN) and the total number of applicants received for each school, but does not differentiate between first and other preferences.

This large number of unknowns is a significant finding. If we, as seasoned readers of composite prospectuses, could not find adequate evidence even to estimate a school's subscription status then parents are unlikely to be able to gain that information from the prospectus either. Of course, parents have other sources of information. 41% of respondents to the parent survey (reported in detail in section 3.3.9 of the next chapter) cited the prospectus but also five other sources (Ball and Vincent 1998) but it appears that while the letter of the law may be being observed the spirit may not be. It may be that Local Authorities were loath to emphasise undersubscription for fear of increasing the unpopularity of some schools. It is possible therefore that parents are told when a school is oversubscribed but the information is fudged when a school is undersubscribed.

2.7.4 Analysis of attributes of schools associated with subscription status.

The 59% of schools whose subscription status is known came from only 55 (37%) out of the 148 LAs and therefore some degree of caution is needed when

considering the statistical findings below. The full analysis is given in the Appendices together with a missing value analysis.

Only a limited number of associations were found between the percentage of oversubscribed schools in a Local Authority and other variables. Rates of oversubscribed schools are higher in Local Authorities that

- *are located outside London*: metropolitan Local Authorities have the highest rates of oversubscribed schools (mean=35%, median=41%) then non-metropolitan LAs (mean & median =26%), then inner London (mean=27%, median=12%) and finally outer London (mean=22%, median=14%);
- *use the equal preference/default ranking system of coordination*: on average, higher proportions of over subscribed schools are seen amongst equal preference/default ranking Local Authorities (mean=31%, median=20%) compared with first preference first Local Authorities (mean=26%, median=21%).
- *are among the 14 most selective*: on average, the percentage of oversubscribed schools is strikingly higher in the 14 most selective LAs (mean & median=47%) compared with other LAs (mean=28%, median=20%).
- *are predominantly autonomous*: LAs with predominantly autonomous schools have higher rates of oversubscribed schools (mean=47%, median=42%) than those LAs with predominantly non-autonomous (mean=30%, median=21%). Diverse LAs (mean=26%, median=19%) i.e. with roughly equal proportions of the different types of school, have the fewest oversubscribed schools.

The association with segregation was somewhat equivocal but there was evidence that there were lower proportions of oversubscribed schools in areas with schools with 'low skew and low segregation' (mean=22%, median=13%) and higher proportions in areas with 'low skew, high segregation' (mean=34%, median=37%).

Given the large number of areas that did not give enough information to establish subscription status a missing values analysis is of interest. On average, the 93 LAs without detail on oversubscription were more likely to

- have lower population density
- be outside London
- not to be one of the 14 most selective
- have lower numbers of admission authorities.

2.8 Oversubscription criteria

2.8.1 Key findings

- Some oversubscription criteria are a potential source of unfairness because when schools are oversubscribed the admission authority, on the basis of criteria their admission authority has determined, decide which applicants are most eligible and therefore have higher priority. Some oversubscription criteria and the way they are implemented provide the means of covert selection by schools on the basis of social characteristics or prior attainment.
- Oversubscription criteria are often complex combinations of a limited number of elements.
- 67% of all schools put Child in Care as a high priority (either first or second place) in their oversubscription criteria
- 77% of all schools had Child in Care somewhere in their oversubscription criteria
- Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools were least likely to have Child in Care as any kind of priority with nearly a half of Voluntary Aided and just over a third of Foundation not mentioning them at all.
- Community/Voluntary Controlled schools and Academies were the most likely to have Child in Care as a criterion with 86% and 79% respectively.
- While considerably fewer Voluntary Aided schools made any mention those that did were more likely to put Child in Care as the first priority (60%).
- 17% of all schools put Medical or Social Needs as their first priority. 53% of schools included it somewhere in their oversubscription criteria.
- Community (62%) and Voluntary Controlled (61%) schools and Academies (58%) were the most likely to have Medical or Social Needs as a priority. Foundation schools (47%) were less likely to do so, but Voluntary Aided schools (22%) were much less likely with not quite a quarter prioritising these children.
- Siblings was a significant criterion for all types of schools and the most frequently used overall appearing in 91% of all schools.
- 65% of all schools used catchment. The great majority of Community and Voluntary Controlled schools used Catchment, a half of the Foundation and Voluntary Aided schools and a third of Academies.
- Catchment areas do not necessarily overlap with proximity to a school, but may do
- 61% of all schools' use proximity but often it has a low priority. It is often used as a tie break for when other criteria fail to differentiate.
- 32% of all schools used Feeder schools somewhere in their criteria. Only 6% have it as their first priority. Voluntary Aided schools used this more often than any other type of school.
- 30% of all schools used First Preference. A minority of all types of schools had this criterion.
- Only 15% of all schools have any faith related criterion but for these it is a high priority

- 60% of Voluntary Aided faith schools gave some priority to other faiths. 16% gave some priority to children of no-faith (i.e. who had no religious affiliation).
- 5 (0.9%) of Voluntary Aided faith schools did not have any faith criteria in their published arrangements. They were all Church of England schools.
- Only 9% of all schools used Parent Commitment but this includes nearly a third of all Voluntary Aided schools.
- 4% had criteria that gave priority to children who were related in some way to adults connected with the school such as teachers or governors.
- On each of three measures Voluntary Aided Schools have markedly more complex oversubscription criteria than any other type of school. They have more oversubscription criteria, twice as many items per oversubscription criteria and twice as many items in total.

2.8.2 Introduction

As we noted in the previous section, where more parents have expressed a preference for a particular school in a particular year than it has places in that year, there need to be criteria for deciding which applicants will be offered a place. The 2003 School Admissions Code of Practice stated:

A.51 The admission authority has a fairly wide discretion in deciding what these oversubscription criteria should be, provided that:

- *the criteria are not unlawful;*
- *the admission authority has properly considered the factors which it believes to be most important in ensuring that children receive an efficient and suitable education, and has had regard to the guidance in this Code;*
- *the criteria are clear, fair and objective and are published.*

The ability to set such criteria is particularly important for Faith schools who wish to maintain a distinct religious community. There have been concerns expressed about the nature of some of the oversubscription criteria that some popular schools apply. For example West and Hind (2003) found that in 2001 some grammar schools added a further element of selectivity through the use of their oversubscription criteria and in further work on London admissions Pennell, West and Hind (2005) found that:

A minority of schools,...mainly those that were their own admission authority, reported criteria that appear to be designed to select certain groups of pupils but exclude others....They were also less inclusive in that they did not prioritise to the same extent as community/voluntary controlled schools, vulnerable children. p22

The Schools Adjudicator has also upheld objections against schools on the basis that their criteria were unfair, or not compliant with the 2003 School Admissions Code of Practice in operation at the time. For example the issue of children in public care was one for which objections were made in 2005/06 (Office of the Schools Adjudicator 2006). They are a group of children who are very vulnerable but who often present significant challenges for schools. The 2003 School Admissions Code of Practice recommended that all admission authorities give

these children top priority in their oversubscription criteria but West and Hind (2003) found that in 2001 this was a criterion for only two per cent of schools. As we report this has since risen and is likely to do so again following the requirements summarised in the 2007 School Admissions Code.

2.8.3 The nature of the data on oversubscription criteria

In order for parents to make the best of the process they need to know and be able to understand the oversubscription criteria for the schools they prefer. The 2003 School Admissions Code of Practice requires that:

the oversubscription criteria must be set out clearly and unambiguously, making clear not only what the criteria are but also the way in which they will be applied, including the order in which they will be applied. (section A50)

For this study we logged the criteria for every secondary school in England. Each admission authority in drawing up its oversubscription criteria was having to respond to a variety of imperatives. Firstly they had to comply with the law on discrimination; secondly they had to have due regard to the School Admissions Code of Practice 2003 (although as we have seen this allows for wide discretion); thirdly they had to consult and respond to other schools in their area – for Faith schools this could include sister Roman Catholic or Church of England Secondaries through the Diocese; fourthly they had to consult, and if necessary negotiate with, the wider family of schools in their area through the admission forum; and finally, they tried to be true to the ethos of the school and to serve its best interests. There is evidence (Gewirtz et al 1995; Woods et al 1998; Lauder et al 1999) that schools also feel the need to brand themselves to gain a strong position in the local ‘school market’. In some cases the criteria were extremely complex. That complexity may pose more problems in negotiating the process for some parents than others and act as a social filter although we later express caution about accepting this commonplace assumption. We therefore analyse the complexity later in this section.

Although there were many possible combinations there were in fact a limited number of categories of criteria that were frequently used as elements to build the compounds. We found the following categories of elements in use in 2006:

- Children in public care
- Medical or Social needs
- Special educational needs
- First preference
- Sibling
- Catchment areas
- Feeder schools
- Proximity to school
- Faith related
- Parental commitment
- Associated adult (ie parents/grandparent attended school or child of a teacher/governor etc)

The last two listed, Parental Commitment and Associated Adult are now unlawful but were not so in 2006. Instances of each of these categories was found either on its own or in some combination. The actual oversubscription criteria were in a priority order showing which category of children would be admitted before others and each ranked oversubscription criterion was often a combination of instances of the categories above. Sometimes, and this was particularly the case for Voluntary Aided faith schools, the school identified categories of places e.g. religious places and non-religious places and then applied slightly different criteria within each category. Faced with this complexity, creating a record of a limited number of explicit criteria for each of the 3122 schools that captured the significant features in rank order was a difficult task. We logged 1084 different combinations or compounds. The following instances of actual criteria give a feel for the complexity and extended examples are given in the Appendix. Each example is of an individual criterion listed by a school:

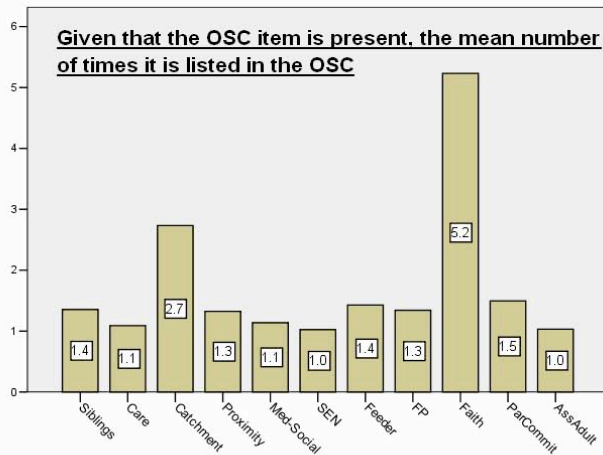
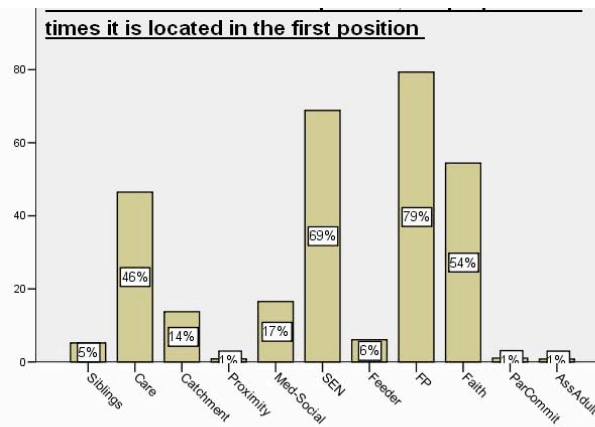
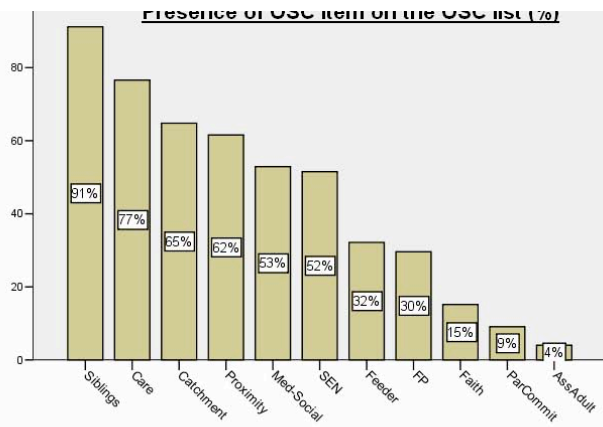
- Example 1 Child who is baptised *and* attends (*name of Church*), *and* not living in the catchment area *but* attending a primary school in the catchment area, *and* with a sibling attending the secondary school
- Example 2 Child who is baptised *and* is in public care *and/or* has special medical/social needs, *and* lives in the catchment area
- Example 3 Child in public care, *and* who is baptised, *and* lives in the catchment area *and* attends a feeder primary school, *or* a Roman Catholic primary school *and* who lives within 2 miles of the schools measured in a straight line
- Example 4 Child who has a brother or sister attending the school, *and* is baptised, *and* whose parents actively want a faith school, *and* who lives within the catchment area.

2.8.4 Frequency and importance of each category of oversubscription criteria

To consider variations in the use and importance of the above elements, four perspectives are taken:

1. *Presence of oversubscription criterion*: if an oversubscription criterion is present on the list (%)
2. *Presence of oversubscription criterion in position 1*: Given that the oversubscription criterion is present, the proportion of times that it is located in the first position (%).
3. *Number of appearances*: Given that the oversubscription criterion is present, the number of times it appears on the list.
4. *Average highest position of oversubscription criterion*: Given that the oversubscription criterion is present, the mean highest position it takes on the list.

The significance of each separate oversubscription criterion is then considered separately. In the following tables the numbers have been rounded to whole values and so what is given as 0% on the bar graph may in some cases still represent a very small number of schools but only ever less than 0.5% of that type of school.



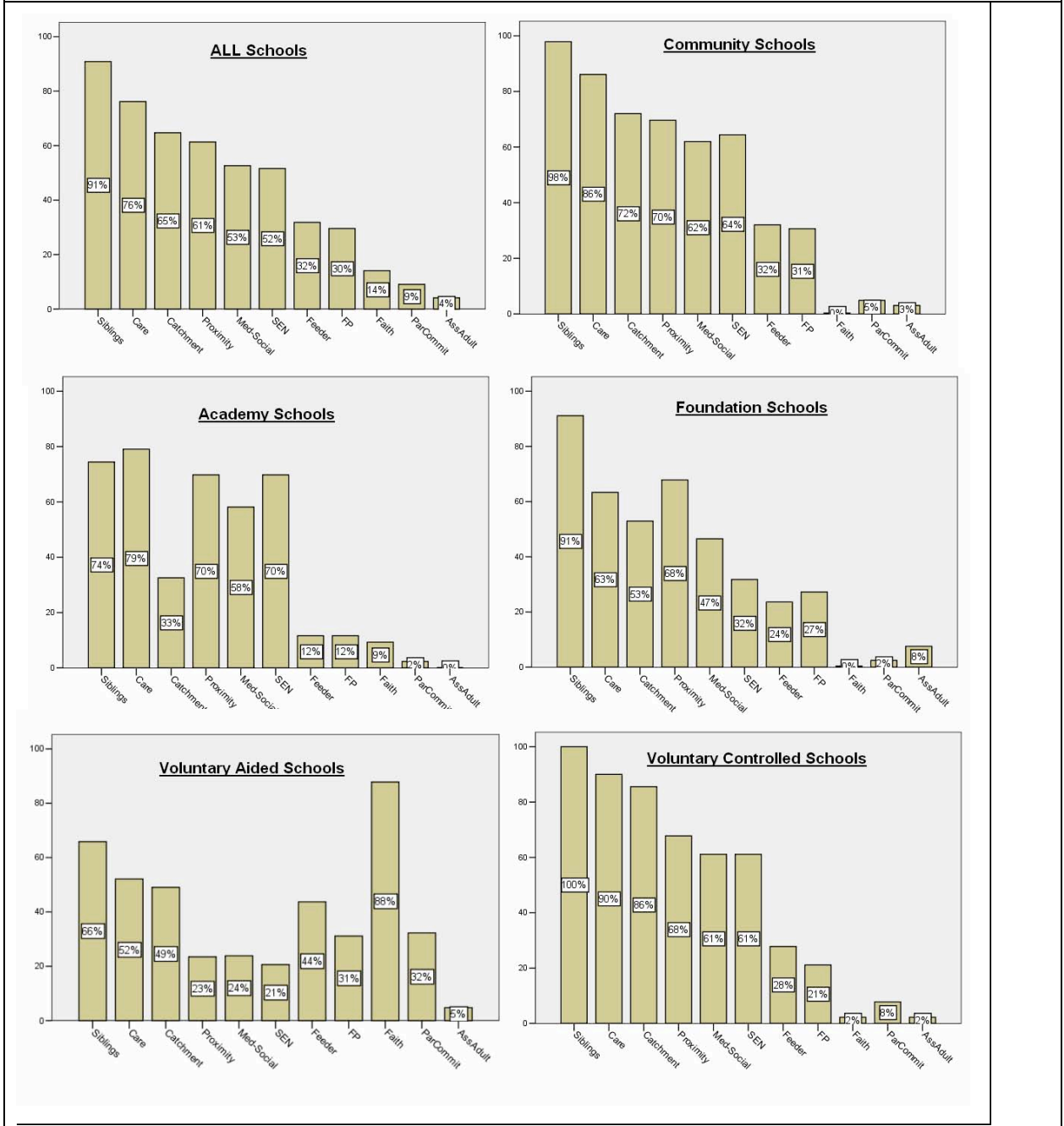
The initial figure (presence of OSC item on the OSC list) was based on the entire school sample (n=3,122).

The proportions in this, initial, figure determine the subsample sizes in all the other 3 figures - these therefore vary depending on the OSC item. For example, for the siblings item, the actual number of schools with this present on the list is 91% of 3,122 (actually 2,836 - see below). The order of these graphs is taken from the initial figure and so subsample sizes decrease as we move down the list.

Siblings (n = 2,836); Care (n = 2,378); Catchment (n = 2,020); Proximity (n = 1,915); Med-Social (n = 1,643); SEN (n = 1,611); Feeder (n = 993); FP first (n = 923); Faith (n = 440); Parental Commitment (n = 283); Associated Adult (n = 128).

Table 32

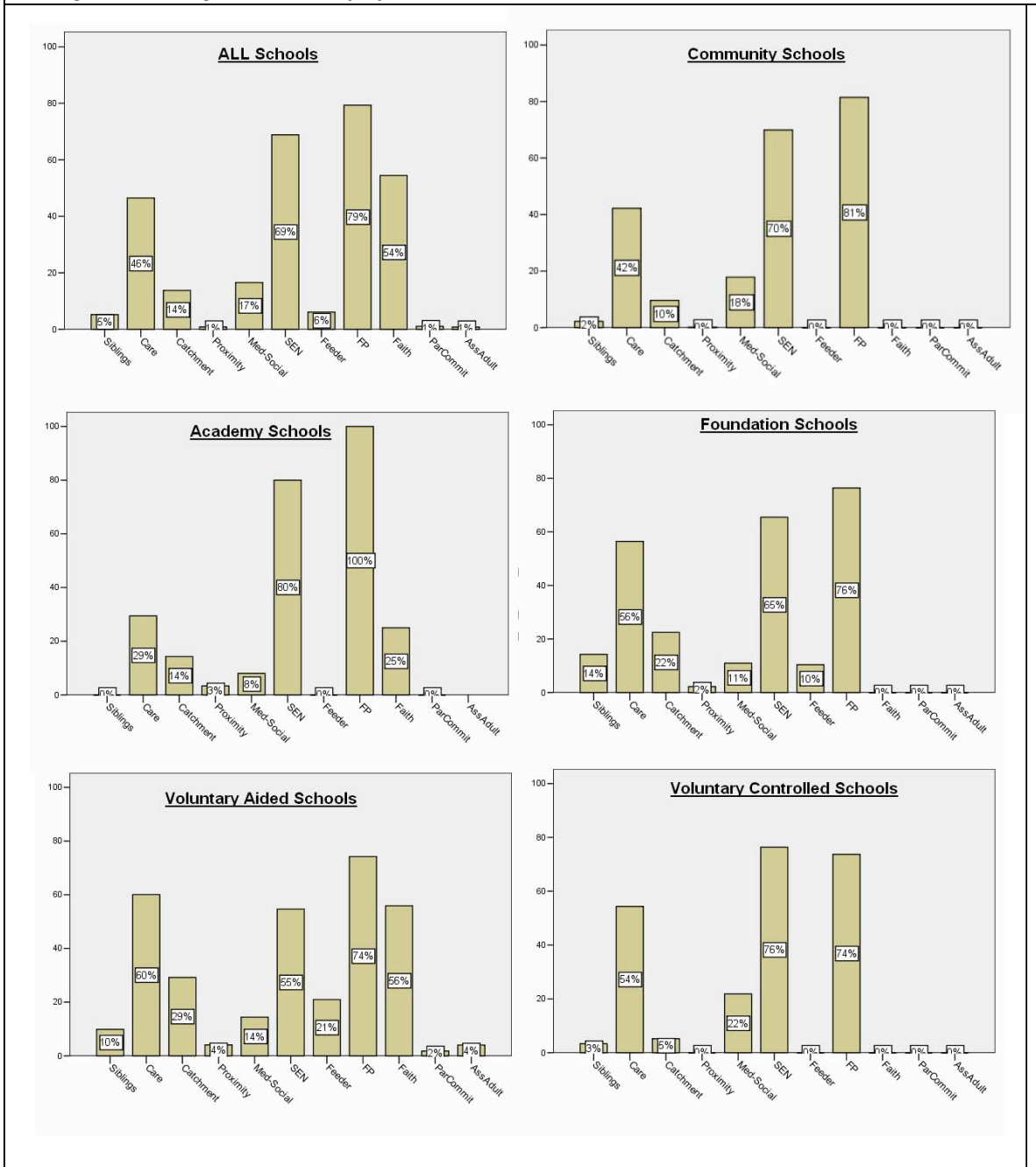
Presence of oversubscription criterion on the list (%) across types of AA



For the initial, all schools figure, n=3,122. The subsample sizes of the other 5 figures reflects the total number of schools that come under each AA type. Community Schools (n = 1,936); Academies (n = 43); Foundation Schools (n = 529); Voluntary Aided (n=524); Voluntary Controlled (n = 90).

Table 33

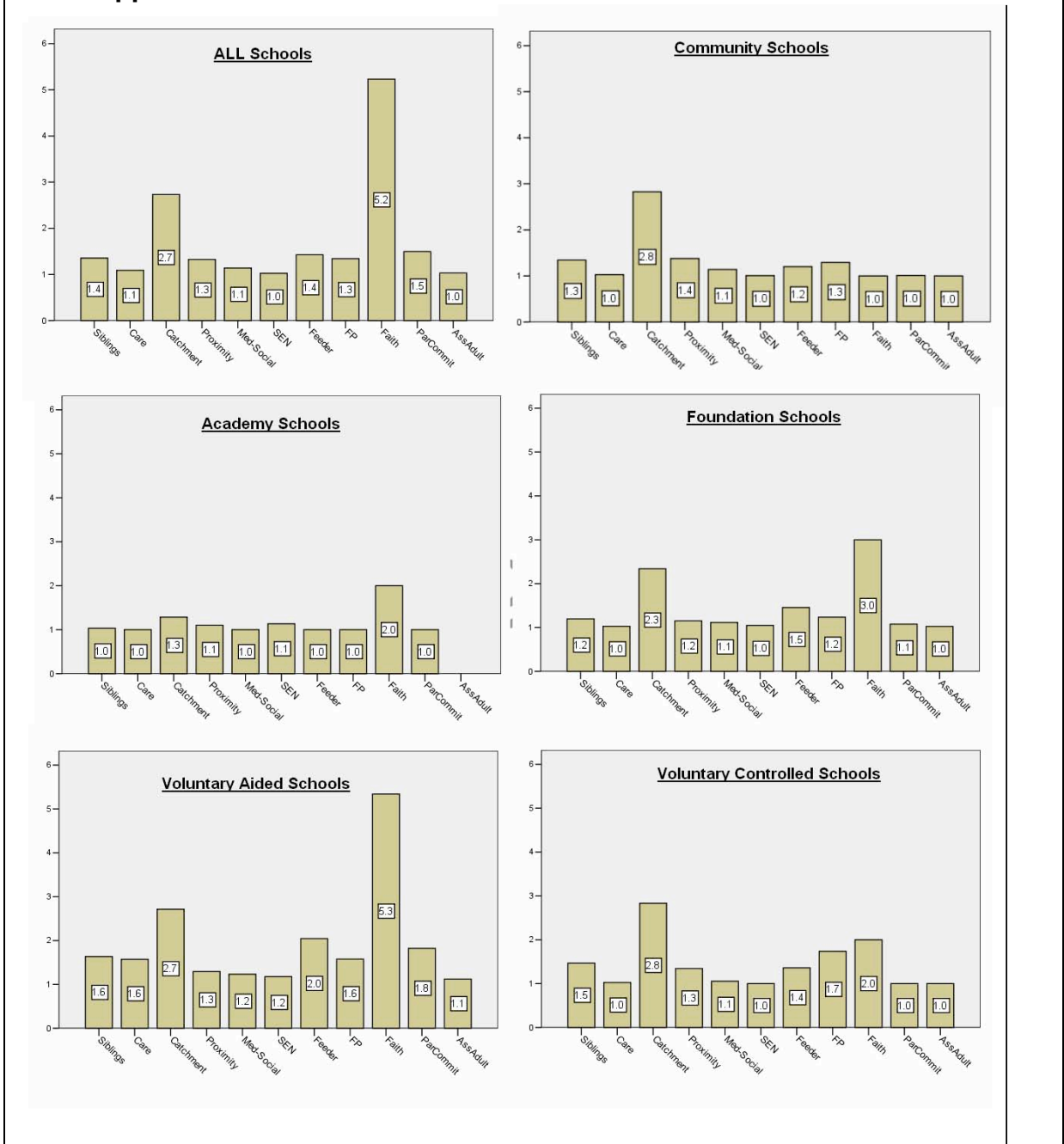
Given that the oversubscription criterion is present, the proportion of times it is placed in position 1 (%)



For the initial, all schools figure, as the subsample sizes for each item are determined by whether they are actually present (as described under Table 33) i.e. the subsamples are: Siblings (n = 2,836); Care (n = 2,378); Catchment (n = 2,020); Proximity (n = 1,915); Med-Social (n = 1,643); SEN (n = 1,611); Feeder (n = 993); FP first (n = 923); Faith (n = 440); Parental Commitment (n = 283); Associated Adult (n = 128).

Table 34

Given that the oversubscription criterion is present, the mean number of times that it appears



For 'all schools', subsample sizes: Siblings (n = 2,836); Care (n = 2,378); Catchment (n = 2,020); Proximity (n = 1,915); Med-Social (n = 1,643); SEN (n = 1,611); Feeder (n = 993); FP first (n = 923); Faith (n = 440); Parental Commitment (n = 283); Associated Adult (n = 128).

Children in Care

In 2000 one admission officer reported:

When an LEA is only the admission authority for [a minority] of secondary schools... fulfilling our statutory responsibilities in finding school places for looked-after children and various other difficult to place children...including excluded pupils is very challenging. section 9.4 p 64

Evidence has increased that this admission officer's experience was by no means unique. Some schools in a variety of ways seek to admit children who are easier to educate and reduce the number of those who are harder (West and Hind 2003). Looked after children often present schools with greater educational and pastoral challenges than other children and therefore schools may be reluctant to admit them. West and Hind (2003) found that in 2001 only 2% of schools put this as their top priority. Since then awareness has grown of the needs of children in public care. As part of meeting these needs the School Admission Code of Practice 2003 stated that:

Children in public care are a disadvantaged group who have very low average levels of attainment, often related to frequent changes of school because their care placements change. It is recommended that all admission authorities give these children top priority in their oversubscription criteria. section 3.14

It is therefore notable that in 2006, despite this recommendation, only 76% of all schools had Child in Care somewhere in their oversubscription criteria and only 67% of all schools put Child in Care as a high priority (either first or second place) in their oversubscription criteria in such a way as to ensure the child would be admitted. A striking 24%, nearly a quarter of all schools, made no mention at all of children in care in their criteria. Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools were least likely to have it as any kind of priority with a half of Voluntary Aided and a third of Foundation not mentioning them at all. Community/Voluntary Controlled schools and Academies were the most likely to have it as a criterion with 86% and 80% respectively. However, while considerably fewer Voluntary Aided schools made any mention, those that did were more likely to put it as the first priority (61%). In 2005/06 24% of the 245 objections concerning admission arrangements made to the Schools Adjudicator concerned the lack of adequate criteria giving priority to children in public care.

Table 35: Proportions of each type of school where Child in Care is present

School Type	Child In Care	All Schools	% Child In Care
Voluntary controlled	81	90	90%
Community	1667	1936	86%
Academies	34	43	79%
Foundation	335	529	63%
Voluntary aided	272	524	52%

These figures replicate the findings of Pennell et al (2005) in their study of London schools. It is important to remember that while this criterion is a very high priority for many schools, and is crucial for the well being of this very vulnerable group of children, it affects only a tiny proportion of the intake.

Medical/social needs and special educational needs

There are two other categories of children that many schools have traditionally prioritised because of their unusual needs - those with special medical or social circumstances, and those with special educational needs. Schools that accord these children and families high priority are sending an important message about inclusivity; that, despite potential greater difficulties for the school, it is their role to prioritise the most vulnerable. Schools that do not so prioritise, either by putting it as a low priority or not including it as a category at all, are sending another message.

Seventeen percent of all schools put Medical or Social Needs as their first priority. Fifty three percent (1642) of schools included it somewhere in their oversubscription criteria. Just under a half of all schools did not list it as a priority. Community and Voluntary Controlled schools and Academies were the most likely to have this as a priority. Foundation schools were less likely to do so, but Voluntary Aided schools were much less likely with, just under a quarter prioritising these children.

Table 36: Proportions of each type of school where the criterion of Medical or Social (MedSoc) needs is present

School Type	MedSoc	All Schools	% MedSoc
Community	1200	1936	62%
Voluntary controlled	55	90	61%
Academies	25	43	58%
Foundation	246	529	47%
Voluntary aided	116	524	22%

The category of Special Educational Needs is more difficult to interpret. When found in the composite prospectus this referred to two categories of children. The first was any child who had named the school on their *statement* of special education needs. In this case the school is bound to take that child following consultation. The second was children with unusual educational needs but who had not reached the statementing stage. The former does not operate as an ordinary oversubscription criterion because it is not discretionary on the part of the

school and, whether or not it appears in their published criteria, they would be required to admit the child following consultation. The latter however is optional and again sends a strong signal of inclusivity and educational mission.

Fifty two percent (1611) of schools included it somewhere in their oversubscription criteria. Just under a half of all schools did not list it as a priority. Community and Voluntary Controlled schools and Academies were much the most likely to have this as a priority. Foundation schools were less likely to do so, but Voluntary Aided schools were much less likely with, just over a fifth prioritising these children.

Table 37: Proportions of each type of school where SEN is present

School Type	SEN	All Schools	% SEN
Academies	30	43	70%
Community	1247	1936	64%
Voluntary controlled	55	90	61%
Foundation	168	529	32%
Voluntary aided	111	524	21%

Again it is important to note that, like Child in Care, these criteria affect only a tiny proportion of the intake of children to secondary schools each year. The next three to be looked at, Siblings, Catchment and Proximity affect the great majority.

Siblings attending the school

This was the most frequently used criterion. It is important, for a variety of practical and emotional reasons, for parents to be able to gain a place at the same school as their other children should they so wish. Almost all Community, Voluntary Controlled and Foundation schools used this criterion, and the great majority of Academies and Voluntary Aided schools did so too. It was rarely the first priority with only 5% of all schools placing it as number one but its mean highest position (3.3.) showed it to be a significant criterion for schools.

Table 38: Proportions of each type of school where Sibling is present

School Type	Siblings	All Schools	% Siblings
Voluntary controlled	90	90	100%
Community	1895	1936	98%
Foundation	482	529	91%
Academies	32	43	74%
Voluntary aided	346	524	66%

Catchment

A catchment criterion prioritises applications from children who are resident in a clearly defined geographical area. It need not be related to proximity although distance to the schools is a major consideration in the drawing of the boundaries of a catchment area. They are affected by geographical, demographic and historical factors and these can sometimes create anomalies and difficulties in managing admissions as things change over time. The drawing up of catchments can offer a means of affecting the intake of schools and for that reason can often be extremely contentious. The parent survey found that 22% of parents had taken

catchment areas into account when they last moved house. Faith schools and grammar schools, if they have this criterion, will of necessity draw from a larger catchment area than non-religious or all ability schools.

In 2006 65% of all schools used this criterion. There were differences between types of school. The great majority of Community and Voluntary Controlled schools used Catchment, nearly a half of the Foundation and Voluntary Aided schools and only a third of Academies. It was a significant criterion with a mean highest position of 2.8. This criterion can reinforce the problems of residential segregation and selection by mortgage but can also be used as a device for affecting intakes through the choice of residential areas to include or exclude as part of the catchment. Given the importance of location in determining the intake of a school (Gordon and Monastiriotis 2007) it would have been interesting to look at the different locations caught by different types of schools catchments. We could not do this for the present project but it would be an interesting topic for further research. Interestingly, use of this criterion varies with population density. Schools in less dense areas use it more often than schools in more densely populated areas.

Table 39: Proportions of each type of school where Catchment is present

School Type	Catchment	All Schools	% Catchment
Voluntary controlled	77	90	86%
Community	1394	1936	72%
Foundation	280	529	53%
Voluntary aided	255	524	49%
Academies	14	43	33%

Only 14% of all schools put this as their first priority. There were differences in the proportions of each type of school so doing, with Voluntary Aided schools most likely (29%) and Community (10%) and Voluntary Controlled schools (6%) least likely.

Table 40: Proportions of each type of school with Catchment as first priority

School Type	Catchment	All Schools	% Catchment
Voluntary aided	152	524	29%
Foundation	116	529	22%
Academies	6	43	14%
Community	194	1936	10%
Voluntary controlled	5	90	5%

Proximity

This criterion appears in 61% of all schools' criteria. However it is often used as a tie break when other criteria fail to differentiate. It is one of the least likely to be placed as the first priority with only 1% of schools doing so. Its mean highest position of 5.1 is only just above parent commitment at 6.8. Almost the same proportion of Community, Voluntary Controlled, Foundation schools and

Academies use this criterion. The exception is some Voluntary Aided schools which, of necessity, draw from a wider geographical area. This criterion can reinforce the problems of residential segregation and selection by mortgage but beyond this does not lend itself as a short term device for affecting intakes³⁰ although it may be an important factor in maintaining social segregation.

Table 41: Proportions of each type of school where Proximity is present

School Type	Proximity	AllSchools	%Proximity
Academies	30	43	70%
Community	1348	1936	70%
Voluntary controlled	61	90	68%
Foundation	358	529	68%
Voluntary aided	121	524	23%

Feeder

A feeder school criterion identifies a number of primary schools the children of which the secondary school will prioritise for entry. This provides some welcome predictability for parents, children and the secondary schools. It can also be a convenient means of administering admissions. It offers a means of affecting intakes through the choice of feeder primary schools. Only 6% place it as their first priority and 32% of all schools used this criterion somewhere in their list. Voluntary Aided schools used this more often than any other type.

Table 42: Proportions of each type of school where Feeder is present

School Type	Feeder	All Schools	% Feeder
Voluntary aided	231	524	44%
Community	620	1936	32%
Voluntary controlled	25	90	28%
Foundation	125	529	24%
Academies	5	43	12%

First preference first

This criterion states that those parents who have put the school down as their first expressed preference will have priority over parents who have put it as any other preference. The issues arising from the first preference first system as an area wide criterion have been discussed in section 2.2.3. Where the area wide system operates, all the schools in that area have First Preference First entered in our database as their first oversubscription criterion.

³⁰ Although some recent studies have suggested that simply having a proximity criterion for all schools would produce still segregated but *more* balanced intakes than the current system.

Where the area wide system is equal preference/default ranking there may still be some individual schools within the area who adopt First Preference First. This has been the subject of objections to the adjudicator because it has the effect of constraining parental choice in areas where there are very popular oversubscribed schools. If a parent wishes to try for one of these schools but their second and third preference schools have a First Preference First criterion, parents are faced with the possibility that they would not get into any of their chosen schools. This is particularly acute in areas where there are grammar schools (Coldron 2005) because of the unpredictability of the 11+ test. In these areas the non-selective schools have used the First Preference First criterion as a partial defence against the grammar schools taking all of the high attaining children. It is also valued by schools as a means of attracting only those parents who really want their children to come to the school and are committed to what it offers.

In 2005/06 the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (Annual Report 2005/06) dealt with 73 objections concerning first preference. Adjudicators upheld 68 of these objections on the grounds that the use of such criteria is normally confusing to parents in areas where equal preference/default ranking systems are used for most schools and it can sometimes appear to act more in the interests of the school than the parents.

It was because of the difficulties faced by parents that the School Admissions Code 2007 now outlaws First Preference First as a criterion. In 2006 it was still legitimate and 30% of all schools used it. A minority of all types of schools had this criterion and the proportion of each type of school was roughly the same except for Academies which were the least likely to use First Preference First. By its nature this criterion when used is most often put as the first priority.

Table 43: Proportions of each type of school where First Preference First is present

School Type	1st Pref	All Schools	% 1st Pref
Voluntary aided	162	524	31%
Community	593	1936	31%
Foundation	144	529	27%
Voluntary controlled	19	90	21%
Academies	5	43	12%

Faith related criteria

This criterion applies exclusively to faith schools. They wish to provide a religious education for the community of their faith. The great majority of faith schools are Voluntary Aided while others became Voluntary Controlled. Some Foundation schools and a significant proportion of Academies are designated as having a religious character although some academies with a religious character do not have faith based Over-subscription criteria. Faith related criteria do not of themselves affect the social characteristics of the intake beyond the practice of a particular faith. However, in so far as there are correlations between membership of religious communities and socio-economic status then this criterion could affect

the social characteristics of the intake. For example, if it were the case that families who were part of the Anglican community also tended to be more affluent and more educationally qualified, then a Church of England school with an over subscription criterion to be active in the faith would be likely to have a more advantaged intake.

Faith schools often wish to give priority to families and children who are most devout and this leads to sometimes extremely complex combinations of criteria and evidence which attempt to provide a means of differentiating the more religiously committed from the less.

Only 15% of all schools have any faith related criterion. By ‘faith related criterion’ we mean criteria to do with the core faith, or other faiths, or no-faith.

Table 44: Proportions of each type of school where Faith Related is present

School Type	Faith Related	All Schools	% Faith Related
Voluntary aided	460	524	88%
Academies	4	43	9%
Voluntary controlled	2	90	2%
Foundation	2	529	0.4%
Community	6	1936	0.3%

Where it is used, only 54% of schools put it as their first priority but its mean highest position is 1.7 showing that it has generally high rank. One worry about this criterion has been its potential contribution to the segregation of faith communities and the possible exacerbation of religious and social tensions between different Christian faiths and, with the possibility of more Muslim and Sikh schools and schools for adherents of other world religions, between ethnic communities. In view of these concerns about social cohesion, there have been calls for faith schools to admit a proportion of children from different faiths and of no-faith. 60% of Voluntary Aided schools gave some priority to other faiths. A smaller proportion (16%) gave some priority to children of no-faith.

Parent commitment

Parental commitment is important to schools in at least two ways. Firstly, schools would like to maximise parents’ willingness to support the school’s policies on such things as uniform, homework and discipline, and to inculcate a generally positive attitude towards learning. Secondly, they would like to prioritise those who positively want their school and what it offers. This oversubscription criterion is not now lawful and is proscribed in the School Admissions Code 2007.

We have included in this category oversubscription criteria such as the following:

- Parent actively wanting a faith school
- Parent actively wanting single sex education
- Parent who shows commitment to the ethos of the school
- Parent who shows commitment to the expectations of the school

By far the most frequently found of these was the first, *parents actively seeking a religious school*. It is arguable that this criterion should have been included with Faith Related and specifically with Non-Faith. Indeed the Non-Faith criterion was often combined with a need to demonstrate that they actively wanted a religious school. Nevertheless, it is not about membership or relationship with a church or religious denomination and there is value in looking at it separately because the criterion has the potential for social discrimination and unfairness. Most often the evidence required was a supporting letter from the parents explaining their reasons for applying and, through what they write, demonstrating commitment. This would be a subjective judgement on the part of the admission authority members. In addition it is a complex writing task and is likely to be done better by more educated parents and would provide ample clues as to the social class of the applicants.

Its mean highest position of 6.8 shows it to be a low priority and only 9% of all schools used this criterion but, there are striking differences in the proportion of each type of school doing so. Nearly a third of all Voluntary Aided schools did so while the proportions for all other types of schools was in single figures. This difference follows from the fact that actively wanting a religious school was included but it remains a significant means of social discrimination not used by other schools.

Table 45: Proportions of each type of school where Parent Commitment is present

School Type	Parent Commitment	All Schools	% Parent Commitment
Voluntary aided	167	524	32%
Voluntary controlled	7	90	8%
Community	94	1936	5%
Foundation	13	529	2%
Academies	1	43	2%

Associated adults

A very small proportion of schools (4%) had criteria that gave priority to children who were related in some way to adults who had been or (more commonly) were still connected with the school such as teachers or governors. In 2005/06 the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (Annual Report 2005/06) received 28 objections to priority being given to children of staff and siblings of former pupils. 18 of these were upheld on the grounds that they were unfair to other children who would be displaced as a result. The other 10 were not upheld. This oversubscription criteria is no longer lawful.

Table 46: Proportions of each type of school with where Associated Adults is present

School Type	Assoc Adults	All Schools	% Assoc Adults
Foundation	40	529	8%
Voluntary aided	27	524	5%
Community	59	1936	3%
Voluntary controlled	2	90	2%
Academies	0	43	0%

2.8.5 Levels of complexity

Over subscription criteria are ordered lists that are used by AAs to determine the allocation of places in a popular secondary school. Each ordered item in the oversubscription list is made up of single or multiple parts. Parents need to know and understand the oversubscription criteria of popular schools in order to be able to negotiate the admissions process and make realistic decisions. Some parents *may* find complexity a barrier to accessing their preferred schools. We analysed the complexity of oversubscription criteria. One definition of something being complex is that it consists of many different and connected parts. We first examined the number of oversubscription criteria used and second, the number of items (or elements) that appear within each of the oversubscription criteria. These two variables were then used to create a third (the average number of items per oversubscription criteria). To give an illustration. The following set of ranked oversubscription criteria has 5 OSCs, a mean of 1 item per oversubscription criterion, and a total of 5 items or elements.

1. Looked After Children
2. Special Educational Needs (SEN)
3. Catchment Area
4. Brothers and Sisters (Sibling)
5. Attendance at a designated Feeder School

Table 47: Number of OSCs, individual items in OSCs & number of items per OSC

OSC Criteria	Number of OSCs	Number of Items in OSCs	Number of Items per OSC
Mean	6	9	1.3
s.d	2.3	6.5	0.49
Lower Quartile	5	5	1.0
Median	6	6	1.2
Upper Quartile	7	10	1.6
Min	1	0	0.0
Max	22	59	4.5

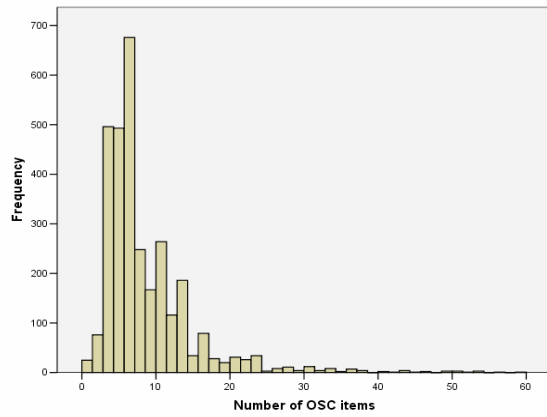
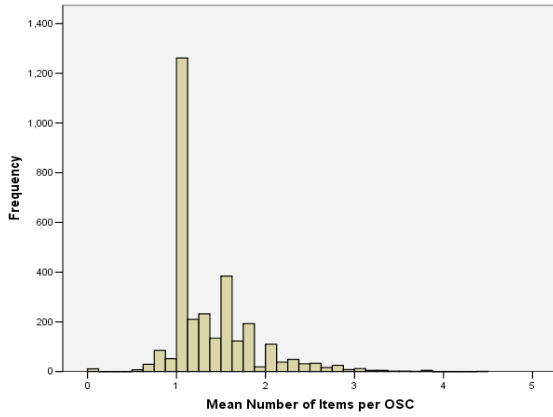
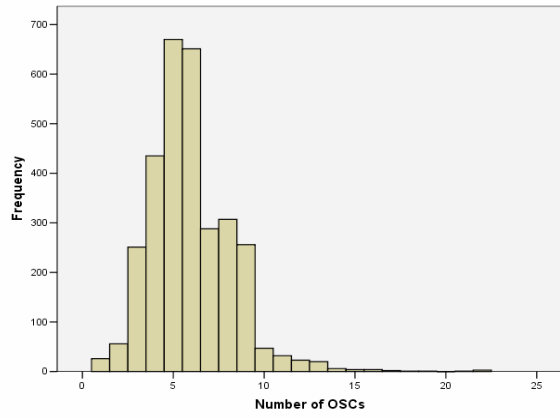


Table 47 cont.

	No of OSCs		No of items		Items per OSC	
	Mean	Med	Mean	Med	Mean	Med
Academy	4.5	5.0	5.0	5.0	1.1	1.0
Community	5.9	6.0	7.5	6.0	1.2	1.0
Foundation	4.8	5.0	5.6	5.0	1.1	1.0
VA	7.6	7.0	16.2	14.0	2.0	2.0
VC	6.0	6.0	8.0	7.0	1.3	1.1

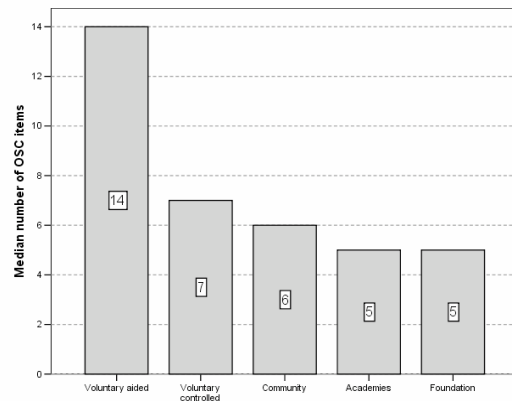
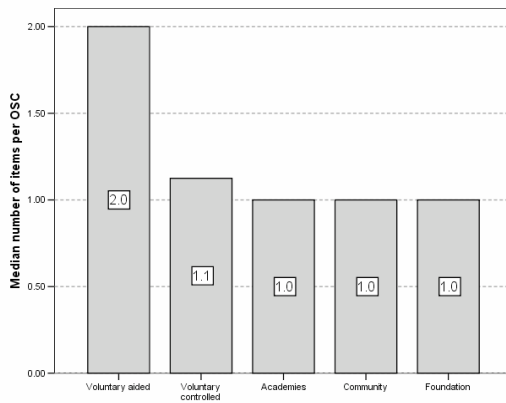
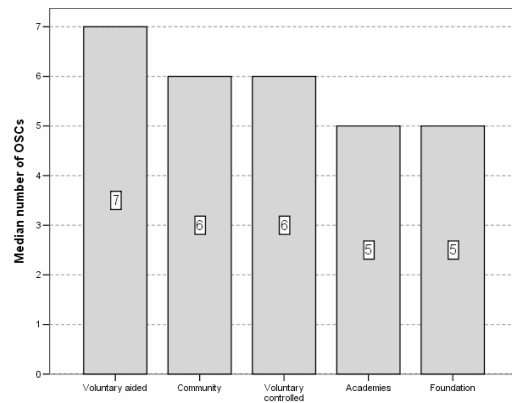


Table 47 shows that the average number of separate categories in the published criteria for a school is 6, that each of these six categories are on average made up of between one or two different elements or items and that the average total of different items used is 9. The second figure shows that on each measure Voluntary Aided schools are more complex than other types of schools. They have more OSCs, twice as many items per OSC and twice as many items in total.

3 PARENTS' EXPERIENCES

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Background to admissions process and survey comparisons

When the parents in the 2006 survey applied for secondary schools on behalf of their child, they were doing so under the 2003 School Admissions Code of Practice³¹ and legislation³² which required Local Authorities to coordinate the admissions process for their areas. The key features for parents of this admissions framework can be summarised as follows:

- Local authorities must publish information about the admissions criteria of schools in their locality including data on volume of applications for the available places in previous years (i.e. showing whether they are over-subscribed).
- Parents submit all their applications for maintained schools on a single form returned via their home local authority.
- They must be invited to express a minimum of three preferences
- In almost all local authorities, parents are invited to apply for between three and six schools.
- Parents are asked to list the schools in order of preference.
- Local authorities vary in how they deal with applications, some operating a 'first preference first' system and others using an 'equal preference' system.
- Local Authorities send parents a single offer of a school place on the same day at the beginning of March
- Parents are entitled to appeal to the relevant admission authority against their refusal to offer a place.

The experiences of parents in the 2006 survey and those in the 2000 survey differed in part because of the different admissions systems in operation. In 2000 parents had to apply separately to different local authorities and/or admission authorities whereas now they apply for all maintained schools, even those in other Local Authorities, on a common application form. They would therefore in 2000 have more than one ranked lists of preferences whereas in 2006 there can only be one. It was also the case that, in 2000, parents could be offered more than one

³¹ Department for Education and Skills (2003) School Admissions Code of Practice London, DfES. <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/sacode>

³² Section 89B of the School Standards & Framework Act 1998 as inserted by s48 of the Education Act 2002

place for their child whereas now the Local Authority has a duty to offer only one place. Where these differences affect the comparisons that can be made between the 2000 and 2006 findings, they are highlighted in the chapter.

Since the 2006 parents applied for secondary schools a new School Admissions Code (2007)³³ has been introduced that will affect the 2008 intake. The emphasis of the new Code is on improving fair and equal access to schools for pupils from different backgrounds. Admission authorities are required “to act in accordance with” the new code rather than “have regard to its guidance” as was the case previously. The code prohibits covert selection practices that may operate through oversubscription criteria, supplementary information, interviewing children and parents and the type of school uniform required. These changes will affect subsequent cohorts of parents applying for secondary schools.

³³ Department for Education and Skills (2007). School Admissions Code. London, DfES.
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/sacode>

3.1.2 Summary of research methods

The research methods used in this parent survey were presented in outline in the earlier section describing the design of the whole project and are described in detail in the technical report. They are summarised briefly here.

A random stratified sample of 163 schools was selected from all maintained schools in England (including the new Academies and CTCs). Schools were contacted in writing and requested to provide the names and contact details of pupils in the lowest year group in the school (usually Year 7). 59 of the schools provided complete and accurate contact details, a response rate of 36%³⁴.

50 parents were randomly selected from the lists provided by each school and were invited by letter to take part in a 25 minute telephone interview. Of the 2,950 parents in the issued sample, 2,215 (75%) took part in the telephone survey.

Questions covered a range of topics including the following: different types of information used to find out about schools, the process of applying for schools including special admission arrangements, factors taken into account when choosing schools, applications to over-subscribed schools, offers and appeals, travel arrangements to the current school and background information about the family. The schools applied for (as well as nearby schools and favoured schools not applied for) were coded during the interview using a programme that matched school names to the list of schools provided by the Department. This enabled additional information about schools to be included in the analysis.

The analysis in this chapter is divided into the following sections:

- How parents find out about schools
- The application process
- Making choices
- Parents' satisfaction with the application process and outcomes.

At the start of each section, the key findings are highlighted and comparisons drawn between the 2000 and 2006 surveys.

³⁴ These 59 schools covered 48 Local Authorities. The stratified random sample of 163 schools was 5.2% of all secondary schools. The achieved parent sample drew from each of these 59 Local Authorities.

3.1.3 The format of regression tables

Included in this chapter are several tables presenting the results of logistic regression analyses that showed the associations between parents' experiences of applying to secondary schools and background characteristics of family, area and schools.

The independent variables used in these regression analyses were identified through preliminary tests of association. Variables that were significantly associated with the statistic of interest were then entered into forward step-wise logistic regression analyses, removing duplicate measures of the same item. To maximise the possibility of drawing comparisons with the 2000 data, similar variables were chosen where possible. The final regressions were run in Stata, using weighted data. The tables present only those variables found to be significant in the final regression and show the following data:

- The level of significance of each independent variable: $p < 0.05$, $P < 0.01$ or $P < 0.001$.
- The unweighted number of cases in each category.
- The odds ratio compared with the reference category value of 1.0. Odds ratios greater than one indicate higher odds of the outcome variable occurring and odds ratios less than one indicate lower odds.
- The 95% confidence interval for the odds ratio. These may be used to judge the significance. If the interval does *not* include one it is significant (for example 1.5-3.1) and if the interval *does* include one it is not significant (for example 0.4-2.7).

The following groups of independent variables were considered for inclusion in the regression models:

Family characteristics: Household income, Standard Occupational Classification (SOC)³⁵ of main earner in household, Whether at least one parent in household in employment, Marital and employment status combined, Highest qualification level of mother, Highest qualification level of parents, Age mother left education, Housing tenure, Respondent ethnicity, Maternal ethnicity, Actively practising religion, Parent religion, Took any special actions to get child into school, Current school was first preference, Had previous experience of applying to secondary school, Age of mother, Number of schools applied for, Whether took into account catchment areas when last moving house, Child has special needs.

³⁵ The 2000 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) is a classification of occupations that was developed for use in national statistics. Parents were classified into SOC groups based on the occupation of the main income earner in their household.

Area characteristics (based on parent's LA): Type of local authority (London, metropolitan, non-metropolitan), Population density, Index of multiple deprivation quintiles, Diversity of admissions, Preference system (equal, first), Rate of appeals as proportion of admissions in 2004-5.

Characteristics of current school attended: Admission policy, Type (community, Foundation etc), Faith based, Urban/rural, Selective (wholly, partially, not), Gender, Area (Inner London, outer London, rest of England – met, rest of England – non-met), Specialist status.

3.2 How parents³⁶ find out about schools

This section investigates the types of information that were used by parents to help them find out about secondary schools, reporting where parents accessed different types of information and how useful they were in helping parents choose which schools to apply to.

Access to and use of information is a key aspect of choice and this section explores whether any family and area characteristics are associated with use of information in a way that suggests some parents are more limited in their access to information than others.

3.2.1 Key findings of section

- 82% of parents used formal written sources of information to help them find out about schools and 87% of parents used informal sources of information.
- The main changes to the use of formal sources of information since 2000 were associated with growing usage of the internet. A quarter of parents reported finding out about schools through their websites.
- Each of the information sources was considered to be very or fairly useful by over 80% of the parents who used them, but informal sources were more likely to be considered very useful than formal sources.
- The most useful sources of information were school visits and talking to others.
- Multivariate analysis showed that four factors were independently associated with use of formal sources of information. These were mothers having degree level qualifications, parents being in employment, parents having no previous experience of secondary admissions and the local authority mainly using the equal preference/default ranking system for admissions.

³⁶ In this chapter, the term 'parent' is used synonymously with 'respondent' as 99% of respondents were parents, foster parents, adoptive parents or step-parents. In most cases (85%) the respondent was the mother.

- Parents accessed formal written sources of information from a variety of sources of which schools (primary and secondary) and the local authority were the most important. The OfSTED website was used for accessing school achievement and attainment data³⁷ and OfSTED inspection reports.
- Multivariate analysis showed that four factors were independently associated with use of school achievement or attainment data. These were mothers having qualifications, especially if these were at degree level, parents being owner occupiers, parents being non-white, and the local authority being London or metropolitan.
- The most widely cited source of information was school visits, most of which were for a school open day or parents evening.
- The most influential aspects of schools during visits were pupil appearance and behaviour, school facilities and the teaching staff.
- 93% used at least one source of information mentioned in the survey and of those who used no information, the majority knew about schools already, for example, because an older sibling attended secondary school. It appears, therefore, that very few parents were lacking basic information about secondary schools.

3.2.2 Comparison with 2000 survey

The main changes to the use of formal sources of information since 2000 were associated with growing usage of the internet. Thus, 25% of parents in 2006 reported finding out about schools through their websites whereas this information category was not listed in the 2000 survey. Aside from this change, the proportion of parents using each of the formal sources of information was broadly similar to 2000. Although a smaller proportion of parents used school prospectuses in 2006 than 2000 (59%, 69%), this would appear to be partially explained by use of the internet as there were 6% of parents in 2006 who did not mention this source but did mention using school websites.

A similar proportion of parents used achievement and attainment data in 2006 and 2000³⁸, but there were differences in where parents accessed these data. In 2006, only 32%³⁹ of parents saw the data in newspapers compared to 56% in 2000. Instead, parents in 2006 were quite likely to access the data from the OfSTED website (19%), the DfES website (6%) or another Internet source (4%) whereas fewer than 4% of parents in 2000 had used the Internet for this purpose. The proportions of parents accessing the data from schools and the local authority were similar, although, in 2006, parents were more likely to access the information from school websites and less likely to use school prospectuses than in 2000.

³⁷ Previously known as 'league tables'.

³⁸ The 2000 report referred to these as 'performance tables'.

³⁹ 32% of parents who used the data accessed them from *either* a national *or* local newspaper.

In 2006 as in 2000, the most widely used form of information was school visits (71%, 78%). A slightly smaller proportion of parents talked to other parents in 2006 compared to 2000 (57%, 70%). Although a three-point scale was used to measure the usefulness of information in 2006 and 2000, the coding of the answers was slightly different. In 2000, the categories were 'most useful', 'of some use' and 'of little or no use' whereas in 2006 they were 'very useful', 'fairly useful' and 'of little or no use'. Even so, in both years, school visits were considered the most useful type of information by parents.

As in 2000, over 90% used at least one of the information sources asked about in the survey.

3.2.3 Use and usefulness of formal sources of information

The different types of information about schools used by parents are discussed under the headings of formal and informal since it is possible that some parents may be more inclined to draw on written printed material and others on word of mouth. This section investigates the use of formal sources which are defined as official printed documents including those published on the internet.

Table 3.1: Proportion of respondents using different types of formal sources of information to help them find out about schools

Information source	2000 Column %	2006 Column %
School prospectuses or brochures	69	59
Local authority booklets	45	44
School achievement and attainment data	39	44
Ofsted inspection reports	25	29
School websites	0	25
None of the above	na	18
Unweighted N	2170	2215

Base: All respondents

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

na = this figure from 2000 is not available

The most widely used type of formal information was that published by secondary schools themselves either in the form of printed school prospectuses or information on school websites. In total, 65% of parents used one or other of these types of information with most using printed material in preference to internet downloads. Smaller proportions looked to other sources of information about schools. Local authority booklets (formally known as composite prospectuses) are published by every local authority and should be available to all parents. They contain key information about schools such as whether they are over-subscribed. There was only partial overlap between the use of local authority booklets, achievement and attainment data and Ofsted reports. Approximately half of the

parents who used the latter two sources of information did *not* use local authority booklets.

Logistic regression analysis was undertaken to identify what characteristics were independently associated with the use of formal sources of information. Four variables were found to be significant:

- The level of educational qualifications of the mother: mothers who had education qualifications were more likely to use formal sources. Mothers who had qualifications at level 4 or higher (degree level) were three times as likely to use formal sources as those who had no qualifications.
- Having previous experience of applying for secondary schools: parents who had no previous experience of applying for a place were more likely to use formal sources.
- Marital and employment status: families with parents who were in employment were more likely to use formal sources than either lone parent families or two-parent families where one or both parents did not work.
- Predominant preference system in the local authority: parents in authorities that mainly used an equal preference/default ranking system were more likely to use formal information.

Table 3.2: Logistic regression: factors associated with the use of at least one formal source of information (family and area characteristics, previous experience of choosing secondary school)

Used formal information	N	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval
Highest qualification of mother (p<0.001)			
No qualifications	385	1.0	
NVQ level 1 or 2 or equivalent	864	2.1*	1.5 -3.1
NVQ level 3 or equivalent	349	2.6*	1.7 -4
NVQ level 4 or equivalent	398	3.0*	1.8 -4.8
Previous experience of applying to secondary school (p<0.01)			
No previous experience	931	1.0	
Had previous experience	1065	0.7*	0.5 -0.8
Marital and employment status (p<0.01)			
Couple, both employed	1037	1.0	
Couple, both non-employed	78	0.5*	0.3 -0.9
Couple, one employed	426	0.6*	0.4 -1
Lone parent, employed	267	0.7	0.5 -1
Lone parent, non-employed	188	0.6*	0.4 -0.8
Predominant preference system in local authority (p<0.01)			
Equal preference/default ranking	1550	1.0	
First preference first	446	0.7*	0.5 -0.9
Unweighted N	1996		

Base includes only those cases that have values for all variables in the model.

*these odds ratios denote the individual categories that were significantly associated with the outcome variable at the 95% confidence level. If an odds ratio is significant, a value greater than one indicates higher likelihood of the outcome variable occurring for that category compared to the reference category, and odds lower than one indicate lower likelihood.

Parents accessed local authority booklets from a variety of sources but the most common were the child's primary school and directly from the local authority.

Table 3.3: Where parents accessed local authority booklet

Where parents accessed LA booklet	Column %
A copy was circulated by the primary school	46
A copy was sent by the local authority/from the local authority (or authorities)	36
A secondary school	11
The local authority website	4
The local library	3
A friend, relative or neighbour	*
Don't know	1
Other specific answer	1
Vague or irrelevant answer	*
Unweighted N	1041

Base: Respondents who used LA booklets to help them find out about schools.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

74% of parents who used school prospectuses got them from secondary schools, including from their websites. Overall, 94% of parents who used school prospectuses got them from either a secondary school or their child's primary school.

Table 3.4: Where parents accessed school prospectus(es)

Where parents accessed school prospectus	Column %
Secondary schools	72
Child's primary school	21
The local authority	5
Downloaded from the school's website	2
Friend, neighbour, relative	1
Don't know	1
Other specific answer	1
Vague or irrelevant answer	*
Unweighted N	1294

Base: Respondents who used school prospectuses or booklets to help them find out about schools.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

More parents accessed achievement and attainment data from newspapers (32%) than any other single source. 29% of parents accessed the information either from a school brochure or the school website. 19% of parents accessed the data directly from the OfSTED website.

Table 3.5: Where parents accessed school achievement and attainment data

	Column %
Where parents accessed school achievement and attainment data	
Local newspaper	26
Brochure published by the secondary school	21
Ofsted website	19
From secondary school website	9
From local authority website (or printed materials)	8
National newspaper	7
From child's primary school	7
From the DfES website	6
Other source on the internet (e.g., BBC)	4
Can't remember where seen	4
Friends, neighbours, relatives	2
Other	2
Vague or irrelevant	1
Unweighted N	972

Base: Respondents who used school achievement and attainment data to help them find out about schools.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

The majority of parents who used achievement and attainment data, did so to find out about academic results. A substantial proportion were interested in the value added score. This is a measure that takes into account prior attainment of pupils on entry into the school as well as a range of other contextual factors such as income deprivation and first language. Value added information has been used in achievement and attainment data since 2002 and is considered by many to be a better indicator of school effectiveness and pupil progress.

Table 3.6: What parents looked for in school achievement and attainment data

What parents looked for in achievement and attainment data	
	Column %
GCSE results/A-level results/SATS results	80
Value added score	36
Attendance	2
Size of school (number of pupils)	2
Change over time/trends	1
Proportion with special needs	1
Other	3
Vague or irrelevant	1
Unweighted N	972

Base: Respondents who used school achievement and attainment data to help them find out about schools.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

Logistic regression analysis was undertaken to identify what characteristics were independently associated with the use of school achievement or attainment data. Four variables were found to be significant:

- The level of educational qualifications of the mother: mothers who had education qualifications were more likely to use such data. Mothers who had qualifications at level 4 or higher (degree level) were nearly three times as likely to use these data as those who had no qualifications.
- Housing tenure: parents who were owner occupiers were nearly twice as likely to use such data as parents who rented their property from the council.
- Ethnicity: non-white mothers were more likely to use the data.
- Type of local authority: parents in London and metropolitan areas were more likely to use such data than those in non-metropolitan areas.

Table 3.7: Logistic regression – factors associated with the use of school achievement or attainment data

Used achievement and attainment data	N	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval
Highest qualification of mother (p<0.001)			
No qualifications	332	1.0	
NVQ level 1 or 2 or equivalent	750	1.9*	1.3 -2.8
NVQ level 3 or equivalent	315	2.0*	1.4 -3
NVQ level 4 or equivalent	344	2.8*	2 -4
Housing tenure (p<0.01)			
Owner occupier	1240	1.00	
Rented from council/housing association	361	0.6*	0.4 -0.8
Rented from private landlord/other	140	0.7*	0.4 -1.1
Maternal ethnicity (p<0.05)			
White	1525	1.0	
Non-white	216	1.6*	1.1 -2.3
Type of LA (p<0.05)			
London	286	1.0	
Metropolitan	590	1.0	0.8 -1.2
Non-metropolitan	865	0.7*	0.5 -0.9
Unweighted N	1741		

Base includes only those cases that have values for all variables in the model.

*these odds ratios denote the individual categories that were significantly associated with the outcome variable at the 95% confidence level. If an odds ratio is significant, a value greater than one indicates higher likelihood of the outcome variable occurring for that category compared to the reference category, and odds lower than one indicate lower likelihood.

These findings were consistent with those for the 2000 survey when parents who had higher qualifications, were owner occupiers or lived in London were found to have made greater use of performance data.

The OfSTED website was the principal place where parents accessed OfSTED inspection reports for schools. Most of the parents who looked at the reports on the OfSTED website also referred to secondary school websites for this information. However, there was little overlap between those who used the internet to find OfSTED reports and those who accessed printed copies from schools, demonstrating that it is important to retain both internet and printed sources of information.

Table 3.8: Where parents accessed Ofsted report(s)

Where parents accessed Ofsted inspection reports	Column %
OfSTED website	44
Hard copy from secondary school	25
Summary on secondary school website	9
Hard copy from child's primary school	9
Elsewhere on internet	6
Other parent, friend or neighbour	4
Local authority (including website)	2
Local library	1
Other specific answer	3
Vague or irrelevant	2
Unweighted N	647

Base: Respondents who used Ofsted inspection reports to help them find out about schools.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

Over 80% of parents who used each type of formal information reported that it was very or fairly useful in helping them choose which schools to apply for. School prospectuses were considered to be the most useful information by parents. School websites fared the worst which may be because the development of school websites varies greatly.

Table 3.9: Perceived usefulness of formal sources of information in helping parents choose which schools to apply for

Information source	Very useful	Fairly useful	Little or no use	Row %
				Unwt N
School prospectuses or brochures	43	46	11	1294
Local authority booklets	37	49	14	1041
School achievement and attainment data	35	51	14	972
Ofsted inspection reports	41	46	13	647
School websites	35	47	18	581

Base: Parents who used at least one formal source of information to help them find out about schools. (include missing data in base)

3.2.4 Use and usefulness of informal sources of information

Whereas formal sources of information are based on written material, informal information was defined as based on talking to others and shared opinions. Overall, a slightly higher proportion of the sample took advantage of informal than formal information (87%, 82%).

Table 3.10: Proportion of respondents using different types of informal sources of information to help them find out about schools

Information source	Column %
Visited schools	71
Talked to other parents, friends, neighbours	57
Talked to primary school staff	41
Newspaper articles	17
Talked to other professionals	9
Other specific answer	2
Vague or irrelevant answer	*
None of the above	13
Unweighted N	2215

Base: All respondents.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

Visiting schools was the most widely used type of informal information and will be explored in greater detail below. Over half the sample talked to other parents, friends and neighbours to find out about schools and a little under half talked to primary school teachers. Among the other professionals that parents talked to were health and social care professionals, faith representatives, local authority employees and school governors.

Table 3.11: Perceived usefulness of informal sources of information in helping parents choose which schools to apply for

Information source				Row %
	Very useful	Fairly useful	Little or no use	Unwt N
Visited schools	77	19	4	1589
Talked to other parents, friends, neighbours	51	39	8	1273
Talked to primary school staff	57	33	10	944
Newspaper articles	33	54	14	366
Talked to other professionals	76	20	5	251

Base: Parents who used at least one informal source of information to help them find out about schools. (include missing data in base)

90% or more of parents who visited schools and talked to others found these sources of information useful in helping them choose which schools to apply for. Visiting schools and talking to other professionals were considered the most useful sources of information. Overall, informal information was considered by parents to be more useful than formal information.

3.2.5 School visits

Since visiting schools was both the mostly widely used source of information used by parents as well as considered to be the most useful, it is explored in further detail in this section.

About seven-in-ten parents (71%) visited a secondary school to help them find out about it while three-in-ten (29%) did not. Approximately a third of the sample visited one secondary school, one-in-five visited two schools and one-in-ten visited three schools. Nearly all of the parents who did not visit a school for this purpose said that this was because they already knew about the schools that their child might go to.

Table 3.12: Number of schools visited by parents

Number of schools visited	Column %
None	29
1	31
2	20
3	11
4	5
5 or more	3
Unweighted N	2215

Base: All respondents.

The main occasion or reason for visiting secondary schools was to attend a school open day or parents evening – an event specifically designed for prospective parents. A quarter of parents who visited secondary schools did so to observe the school during a normal school day.

Table 3.13: Events or occasions for school visits

Events or occasions for school visits	Column %
School open day or parents evening	96
To see the school during a normal school day	24
Meeting with member of staff	15
Other school event	9
Other	*
Unweighted N	1589

Base: Respondents who visited schools.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

The main source of information about visiting secondary schools was the child's primary school. A third of parents found out about opportunities to visit schools directly from the secondary school and a smaller proportion relied on information accessed through the local authority.

Table 3.14: Where parents found out about opportunities to visit schools

Where parents found out about opportunities to visit schools	Column %
Child's primary school	50
Secondary schools (including prospectus, website, letter, by phone)	34
Local authority (including booklets, flyers)	15
Local newspaper	8
Talking to other parents, friends or neighbours	4
Talking to someone else	1
Respondent had direct contact with school (e.g., through job)	*
Other	1
Unweighted N	1589

Base: Respondents who visited schools.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

There were many different aspects of schools that parents considered influential when visiting schools including those that were observed, those talked about by teachers and written policies and records. In the table below, they were grouped into three categories of teaching and learning, school characteristics and child characteristics. The aspect considered influential by most parents was pupil behaviour and appearance including school records on bullying and attendance. Similar proportions of parents were influenced by the school's facilities (44%) and by the head teacher or other school staff (45% mentioned either of these). Interestingly, academic achievement ('pupil achievement, results or league tables') was not the most influential factor and was mentioned by about a third of parents who visited schools.

Table 3.15: Aspects of schools considered influential by parents when visiting schools

Aspects of schools considered influential	Column %
<i>Teaching and learning</i>	
Other school staff (including friendliness, approachable, interaction with pupils)	38
Pupil achievement/results/league tables	32
The headteacher	22
Availability of extra-curricular activities/after-school provision	14
Curriculum/subjects offered/ timetable/trips	4
Teaching style, class sizes	2
School specialism in particular subject	1
Presentation during open day	1
<i>School characteristics</i>	
Facilities	44
School ethos/religion	31
The appearance of the school buildings	23
Classroom environment/work displays	23
Distance from home/travel/convenience	6
General atmosphere/impressions	4
Special needs provision (including languages, food)	4
Policy on discipline/bullying	3
Size of school	1
Reputation/opinions of friends/neighbours	1
School administration	*
Other aspect of the area (e.g., crime)	*
Mixed/single sex	*
<i>Child characteristics</i>	
Pupil behaviour/appearance (including records on bullying/attendance)	46
Child's impression	3
Other pupil characteristics (e.g., ethnicity, class, diversity)	*
Other specific answer	5
Vague or irrelevant answer	3
Unweighted N	1589

Base: Respondents who visited schools.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

29% of parents responding to the survey did not visit any secondary schools and of these, 89% said they knew about schools for a different reason. Therefore, only 3% of the total sample chose not to visit any secondary schools and did not have an independent source of information about schools.

Of the parents who did not visit schools because they knew about schools for a different reason, just over half cited the fact that the child's sibling attended the school. A further 24% said they had a family member, friend or neighbour who had attended the school and 18% knew the area and local schools by reputation.

Table 3.16: Reasons why parents already knew about schools

Reasons why parents already knew about schools	Column %
Sibling(s) attended the school	53
Parent, family member or friend/neighbour attended the school	24
Knew the area/local schools/reputation	18
Feeder/link school/faith based school	5
Found out about school through talking to others	5
Has direct contact with school (e.g., through job/school activities)	4
Knew about school for other specific reason	3
Found out about school during application for sibling	1
Other specific answer	1
Vague or irrelevant	3
Unweighted N	547

Base: Respondents who did not visit schools and said they knew about schools for a different reason.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

3.2.6 Overall use of information

Only 7% of the sample did not use any sources of information to help them find out about secondary schools. Of these parents, most either had a child at secondary school already or said that they knew about the schools already. The number of parents who did not have access to information about secondary schools therefore appears to be minimal.

3.2.7 Summary

The findings in this section suggest that most parents had access to useful information about the schools available to them. Only 7% of parents had not obtained any information and most of them professed to already know what they needed to know.

The internet was now used much more than at the time of the last survey in 2000. A quarter of parents looked at school websites and Ofsted reports and achievement and attainment data were often inspected online. However, school prospectuses remained the most common information source and local authority booklets were also commonly referred to, so the internet had not yet revolutionised provision of school information. School prospectuses were typically obtained direct from the school or from a primary school. Local authority booklets tended to be circulated through primary schools or directly to parents. Attainment data were most commonly accessed through newspapers.

Use of formal information about schools was associated with parental characteristics and information need. Parents with lower education qualifications were less likely to use formal information sources and attainment data, suggesting that there may be an unmet need among some of the parents who will be targeted by the Choice Adviser initiative. Other parents made less use of information because they had less need of it, for example those who already had children in a secondary school and those who lived in areas where most schools were non-autonomous and so admissions arrangements were more straightforward.

While formal information sources were generally felt by parents to be useful, informal sources such as school visits (including open days) and talking to other parents, primary school staff and other professionals were valued most of all. Parents reported that their visits to schools had been influential in forming positive views about the behaviour and appearance of pupils, the quality of the school's facilities and the teaching staff.

3.3 The application process

3.3.1 Background to the application process

This section investigates parents' experiences of the application process, starting with the mode of applying to schools and the number of schools applied for. Each of the schools applied for was coded using computer assisted coding during interview which enabled additional information about the schools to be linked to the survey data from a national database of secondary schools⁴⁰. The analysis explores the characteristics of schools applied for including type and special admission arrangements.

This section also explores parental experience of applying to schools that were over-subscribed, meaning that more parents listed the school as a first preference than there were places available. Parents were asked whether they considered and applied for over-subscribed schools, where they accessed information about oversubscription criteria, and the usefulness of such information. This section also reports on the criteria that parents expected schools to take into account and whether their child met the criteria.

Accessing places in over-subscribed schools is a key indicator of fair admissions policy and has been subject to considerable scrutiny over recent months with the publication of the 2007 School Admissions Code and the decision by some local authorities to use a lottery system to distribute sought after places. The analysis will contribute to this debate by examining whether family and area characteristics are associated with applications to over-subscribed schools.

3.3.2 Key findings of section

- 99% of parents in the sample completed an application form for starting secondary school in 2006.
- Only 2% of parents completed an application via the internet although this option was available in about a third of the local authorities covered by the research (it has subsequently been introduced in all other authorities). However this is significantly lower than the national average in the subsequent application year (2006/07) which was 18.2%. Frequently cited reasons for not using the internet included not having access to a computer, lack of confidence and being given a paper copy.

⁴⁰ A version of Edubase accessed in September 2006 was used as the basis for coding schools. Since this database did not contain unique identifiers for the new Academy schools and City Technology Colleges, these were coded after interviews were complete.

- One third of parents applied for three schools. Of those who applied for fewer than three schools (63%), the main reason was believing that the child would be successful at the listed school(s), for example because an older sibling already attended the school.
- Parents living in London were significantly more likely than parents living elsewhere to apply for schools outside their local authority (27% in London compared with 6% elsewhere).
- Controlling for other factors, parents who chose to apply for schools outside their local authority were more likely to have a first preference school that they believed to be over-subscribed, to be applying for a larger number of schools and to live in London.
- Voluntary aided schools were more likely to request supplementary information than schools of other types. The most frequently requested type of supplementary information requested was to verify published oversubscription criteria relating to religious affiliation.
- 38% of parents who completed an application form applied for at least one school that they reported to be over-subscribed. Schools listed as first preference were more likely to be over-subscribed than other school preferences.
- The most frequently cited oversubscription criteria that parents expected schools to take into account were catchment area and sibling attendance at the school.
- Multivariate analysis showed that five factors were independently associated with parents listing as first preference a school that they believed to be over-subscribed. These were parents having higher incomes, mothers having qualifications, especially if these were at degree level, parents practising religion, the child not having special needs and the parents taking special actions to maximise the child's chances of gaining a place⁴¹.

3.3.3 Comparison with 2000

The comparisons between the findings from the 2000 report and 2006 report are more limited for this section. This is due in part to the changes in the admissions procedures introduced by the 2003 School Admissions Code of Practice. Most notably, in 2006, parents applied to only one admission authority. Parents were also asked differently about over-subscribed schools in 2006, replacing parental report of whether they knew the oversubscription criteria with parental understanding of what the oversubscription criteria were. About a quarter of parents in each year reported that the oversubscription criteria of schools had influenced their choice (24% in 2000, 25% in 2006).

⁴¹ Interpretation of these findings requires some caution but the reasons are likely to include residential segregation, differences in the time and resources available to make travel to more distant schools practically feasible and different choice criteria between parental groups.

Although parents applied to only one admission authority, they were able to include in their list of preferences schools that were located in other local authorities. In both 2000 and 2006, parents living in London were most likely to apply for a school in another local authority (in 2006, this was done by 27% of parents in London and 6% of parents elsewhere).

It is also possible to compare the experience of special admission arrangements across the two surveys. A similar proportion of parents reported that a test formed part of the application process for at least one of the schools for which their child had applied. In 2000, 10% of parents reported that their child had been interviewed by at least one of the schools they had applied for. Since interviews with parents and pupils were discouraged under the 2003 School Admissions Code of Practice, the 2006 survey asked about parent and child attendance at a 'formal meeting as part of the application process'. About one-in-six parents (17%) reported attending such a meeting in 2006. Although this figure seems quite high in the context of the 2003 School Admissions Code of Practice, it should be treated with some caution as some parents may have included information-seeking meetings in schools as formal meetings.

3.3.4 Mode of applying for schools

99% of the parents in the sample completed an application form⁴². Of this number, only 2% did so via the internet, despite the fact that about a third of local authorities allowed online applications at that time⁴³. The small proportion applying on the internet spanned 26 of the 78 local authorities covered by the survey, although half of the parents making online applications lived in one county (Hertfordshire) suggesting that the likelihood of applying via the internet depends largely on the commitment to this mode by the local authority. Online applications have subsequently been introduced in all local authorities, with on average, 18.2% of parents making secondary applications online in 2006/07 so this mode of application will be more important in the future.

The majority of parents found the process of applying for schools easy whether on paper or online. This is to be expected of online applications since it is likely that only those parents who are confident using this method would choose this approach.

Table 3.17: How easy or difficult respondents found it to apply for schools online and on paper

	Very easy	Fairly easy	Neither easy nor difficult	Fairly difficult	Very difficult	Row % Unwt N
Paper applications	77	19	3	1	*	2124
Online applications	86	13	0	2	0	65
Total						2189

Base: All respondents who completed an application form excluding one respondent who did not know whether they completed an application form online.

The base includes those who answered 'don't know' to this question (1 respondent who completed the form online and 8 who completed the form on paper.)

⁴² The base through this section is the parents who completed an application form (unweighted N=2190).

⁴³ The administrative data collected from the composite prospectuses in Strand 1 indicated that 55 out of 148 local authorities had an internet option at that time.

The main reason cited by parents for applying on paper rather than online was that they didn't know or think it was possible, which was probably true for most parents who gave this answer. Two other most common reasons were lack of access to a computer or the internet (17%) or lack of confidence with these (11%). 16% of respondents said that they didn't apply by internet simply because they had been given a paper copy, while 6% said that this was because they had applied through their primary school.

Table 3.18: Reasons for applying on paper rather than online

Reasons for not applying online	Column %
Didn't know (or think) it was possible	41
No access to a computer or internet	17
Was given a paper copy	16
Not confident using internet/computer (or can't use computer)	11
Applied through primary/junior school	6
Thought method less reliable than by post	5
Easier on paper	3
Worried would make a mistake	1
Didn't consider it	1
Couldn't think of a reason	1
Other	3
Unweighted N	2124

Base: Respondents who applied on paper rather than online.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

3.3.5 Schools applied for

Parents are encouraged to apply for the maximum number of preferences allowed. This is a minimum of three schools in all local authorities but some (e.g. all London Authorities) may apply for more (usually six). Most local authorities emphasise to parents that to list fewer than the maximum will place them at a disadvantage. Despite this, of the parents in the survey who completed an application form, only a third applied for three schools and 63% applied for either one or two schools. Of the parents who applied for three or fewer schools, 76% lived in local authorities where three preferences were allowed and 21% lived in local authorities where more than three preferences were allowed.

5% of parents applied for more than three schools. Of the parents applying to more than three schools, 64% lived in London.

The main reason given by parents for applying for fewer than three schools was that they believed their application would be successful with the school(s) listed, for example because a sibling already attended the school or because they met the oversubscription criteria in some other way. A little under a third applied for only one or two schools because they didn't want their child to attend any other schools and a quarter cited the fact that other schools were not reasonably accessible.

Table 3.19: Reasons for applying for fewer than three schools

Reasons for applying for fewer than three schools	Column %
Knew child would be successful at listed school(s)/ sibling goes there/ met oversubscription criteria	45
Didn't like some schools/ Didn't want child to go to any other schools	30
Some schools were not within reasonable distance/ Fewer than three schools in area/transport difficulties	25
Greater chance of success if applied to fewer	6
Limited choice of faith schools/ only wanted religious school	3
Other	6
Vague or irrelevant	2
Don't know	1
Unweighted N	1287

Base: Respondents who applied for fewer than three schools.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

The table below presents the characteristics of schools listed by parents as first preference. Further on in the report, these characteristics are compared to the schools nearest to parents' homes that parents did not apply for.

Table 3.20: Characteristics of first preference schools

Characteristics of schools	1 st preference schools in survey	Column %
Type		
Community		53
Foundation		23
Voluntary aided		19
Voluntary controlled		4
Academy		1
CTC		*
Selection type		
Wholly selective		12
Partially selective		19
Non-selective		69
Gender		
Mixed		89
Boys		4
Girls		6
Religion		
Does not apply/none		78
Roman Catholic		16
Church of England		5
Christian		*
Jewish		0
Muslim/Sikh		0
Admission policy		
Comprehensive		88
Selective		4
Modern		7
Specialist status		
Specialism		87
No specialism		12
Area		
Inner London		4
Outer London		8
Other metropolitan		24
Non-metropolitan		63
Density		
Rural		14
Urban		86
Unweighted N		2190

Base for the survey data: First preference schools listed by parents.

Percentages do not add up to 100 for all breakdowns in the table for the following reasons:

1. Some characteristics were missing for Academy and CTC schools: religion, admissions policy and specialism.
2. 9 of the first preference schools could not be coded. The base includes these parents but the breakdowns are missing from the table.
3. A small number of schools were missing data for gender and urban-rural.

The focus of the survey was on applications to maintained schools, but parents were also asked whether they had also applied for any independent schools. Given that all the parents in the sample had children currently attending maintained secondary schools, the figures do not include all parents who applied to both sectors. However, it provides an indication of the parents who considered private schooling.

2% of parents whose children attended a maintained secondary school had also applied for at least one private independent school. The proportion was higher (4%) among parents living in London.

3.3.6 Applying for schools outside the LA

Parents living on the boundaries of their local authority are more likely than others to apply for schools in a different local authority to the one in which they live because they may be within a reasonable distance. This section investigates whether there are any other factors associated with applying for schools outside the parent’s local authority. Unless parents live in a particularly sparsely populated area or near the local authority boundary, applying for schools outside the local authority is an indicator of the pro-activity of parents, partly because it requires them finding out about schools beyond their own area and also because it indicates a commitment to potentially more complicated and expensive travel arrangements.

The table below shows a clear relationship between living in London and applying for schools outside the local authority. The density of population and schools in London means that schools outside the parent’s local authority may be as accessible as those within. Moreover, as London authorities invited parents to express six preferences, parents there had more opportunity to express a preference for a school that was outside their area. We will return to this issue in the next section when considering the factors that influenced parents’ choices about schools.

Table 3.21: Proportion of parents applying to at least one school outside their local authority (according to parent report) by type of local authority in which parents live

Type of local authority in which parents live	Row %	Unweighted N
London	27	385
Metropolitan	7	735
Non-metropolitan	6	1061
Total	9	2181

Base: Respondents who completed the application form and who knew whether they applied to schools outside their local authority.

Base includes one respondent who was classified as living in Wales.

Logistic regression analysis was undertaken to identify what characteristics were independently associated with applying for schools outside the local authority where they lived. Three variables were found to be significant:

- The number of schools applied for: the more schools parents applied for, the more likely they were to include a school outside their local authority.
- Whether the first preference school was over-subscribed: where parents' first choice schools was over-subscribed it was nearly twice as likely that either that school or another one that the parents had applied to was outside their local authority.
- Region: parents in London were more than three times as likely than those in other areas to apply for schools outside their local authority.

Table 3.22: Logistic regression showing factors associated with applying for schools outside LA (family and area characteristics)

Applied to a school in another LA	N	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval
Number of schools applied for (p<0.001)			
1	701	1.0	
2	585	2.1*	1.2 -3.7
3	738	3.5*	1.8 -6.9
4+	164	10.2*	5.3 -19.7
Oversubscription of 1st preference school (parent report) (p<0.01)			
Not over-subscribed	1481	1.0	
Over-subscribed	707	1.9*	1.2 -2.9
Type of LA (p<0.001)			
London	386	1.0	
Metropolitan	737	0.3*	0.1 -0.6
Non-metropolitan	1065	0.3*	0.2 -0.5
Unweighted N	2188		

Base: Respondents who applied for schools on the common application form.

Base includes only those cases that have values for all variables in the model.

*these odds ratios denote the individual categories that were significantly associated with the outcome variable at the 95% confidence level. If an odds ratio is significant, a value greater than one indicates higher likelihood of the outcome variable occurring for that category compared to the reference category, and odds lower than one indicate lower likelihood.

A similar regression analysis for the 2000 survey found that parents in London were more likely than those elsewhere to apply to more than one admission authority.

3.3.7 Applying for faith schools

Since the publication of the 2000 parent survey, there has been increasing interest in the relationship between faith schools and fair admissions. Faith schools which are Voluntary Aided (of which the majority are Roman Catholic or Church of England) are their own admission authority and by implication have the power to set their own criteria for awarding places when over-subscribed (albeit in consultation with the local authority and having regard to the admissions School Admissions Code of Practice). Such schools have been criticised for being highly unrepresentative of their local communities⁴⁴ tending to be popular among advantaged parents who may also be better informed about the oversubscription criteria. The 2007 School Admissions Code has prompted renewed debate about the way in which faith schools allocate places on the basis of religious affiliation with some schools specifying the level of religious commitment within their oversubscription criteria. There has also been a challenge to schools to admit a quota of pupils who are of no faith or a different faith. It is therefore timely to investigate parents' experiences of applying to faith schools.

17% of schools nationally are faith schools. Among parents in the survey, 20% listed a faith school as first preference and 30% of parents applied to at least one faith school.

At a different point in the interview parents were asked to state their religion and, if they had one, whether they actively practised. Overall, 89% of parents stated that they had a religion and 29% said that they actively practised. Among parents who made a faith school their first choice, 95% stated that they had a religion and 56% that they actively practised.

3.3.8 Schools with special application requirements

Depending on their type, some schools are allowed to impose special application arrangements beyond simply completing the application form submitted to the local authority. Schools that are their own admission authority (such as Voluntary Aided schools) may request supplementary information to decide whether the child may be suitable for the school. Under the 2003 School Admissions Code of Practice, schools were discouraged from conducting interviews with children or parents but some schools continue to meet parents and children on a one-to-one basis.⁴⁵ Selective schools, such as grammar schools, are able to test the general ability of candidates while schools with a specialism (now the majority of

⁴⁴ Tough, S. and Brooks, R. (2007) Fair Choice – Choosing a Better Admissions System. Institute for Public Policy Research.

⁴⁵ The 2006 Education and Inspections Act has now made interviews unlawful.

Community schools) are allowed to select a small proportion of pupils on the basis of aptitude in the area of specialism by test, sports trial or audition. Three local authorities, and some individual schools, have banding arrangements where pupils are tested to ensure an intake that is representative of the full range of attainment levels (see section 2.3.2 and 2.3.3 for full details)⁴⁶.

This section investigates the relationship between parental experience of special application arrangements and the type of school applied for. Applying to a school with special application arrangements often requires a certain level of commitment on the part of the child and his/her parents and the analysis explores whether certain family or area characteristics are associated with applying to such schools.

40% of parents applied for at least one school that had special admission arrangements. The most common type mentioned (by 17% of parents) was a formal meeting between the school and either the parent or child. However, as explained above, this figure should be treated with some caution as it may be the case that parents included information-seeking meetings with schools rather than formal meetings that were held as part of the application process. It is surprising that tests of aptitude and auditions/sports trials were not more frequently mentioned given the increasing number of schools with a specialism. It is possible that, despite the explanation provided during the parent interview, some parents were confused between tests of ability (for selective schools) and tests of aptitude for schools with a specialism.

⁴⁶ 1% of the parent sample (weighted) lived in these local authorities. However, a further 19 local authorities have within them at least one admission authority (e.g., an autonomous school) that uses banding.

Table 3.23: Proportion applying for *at least one school* requiring special admission arrangements

Special admission arrangements	Column %
Supplementary information	12
Tests of ability	12
Tests for banding	3
Tests of aptitude	2
Auditions/sports trials	2
Formal meeting between parent/carer and head teacher	15
Formal meeting between child and head teacher	17
Any special admission arrangement	40
Unweighted N	2190

Base: All respondents who completed application form.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

The table below shows the proportion of parents applying for first preference schools with special admission arrangements broken down by type of school. This analysis was limited to first preference schools partly because they were the most important schools for parents and also because parents were more likely to remember the arrangements for their preferred school⁴⁷. The proportions for all schools (in the final column) are fairly similar to the previous table, with formal meetings being mentioned the most often and supplementary information and selective tests being mentioned by approximately one-tenth of the sample.

Supplementary information was required by a greater proportion of Voluntary Aided schools than schools of other types as was found in the results from the analysis of the composite prospectuses in the previous chapter. Voluntary aided schools are owned by a voluntary organisation (often a church) and can set their own admissions policy in consultation with the local authority. The type of supplementary information most commonly requested was proof of religious affiliation (Table 4.26).

Tests of ability were required by nearly a quarter of Foundation schools, a greater proportion than schools of other types, again echoing the findings from the composite prospectuses. These schools are similar to Voluntary Aided schools in that the governing body owns and runs the school, employs the staff and sets the admissions policy while the local authority funds the school.

⁴⁷ The school type was linked from Edubase, not reliant on parent report.

There was little difference in the proportions of schools of different types requiring formal meetings with parents and children, supporting the hypothesis mentioned above that parents included information-seeking meetings in this category⁴⁸. However, the 2007 School Admissions Code reinforces the ban on admission interviews for parents or children imposed by the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Table 3.24: Proportion whose first preference school required special admission arrangements by type of school

	Comm -unity	Found- ation	Voluntary aided	Voluntary controlled	Academy/ CTC	Column % All schools
Supplementary information	3	6	35	10	[20]	10
Selective tests (of ability)	4	23	7	4	[50]	9
Banding tests	1	5	2	1	[19]	2
Aptitude tests, auditions, trials	1	4	1	5	[6]	3
Formal meetings for parents	15	12	19	12	[20]	15
Formal meetings for pupils	16	15	16	15	[13]	16
Unweighted N	960	588	517	79	40	2184

Base: First preference schools that were coded by type.

Logistic regression analysis was undertaken to identify what characteristics were independently associated with listing as first preference a school that had special application requirements. Three variables were found to be significant:

- The type of first preference school: the school was more likely to be a Foundation or Voluntary Aided school than a community or Voluntary Controlled school.
- Taking action to maximise their child's chances: parents who took special action such as coaching their child or arranging extra tuition were roughly twice as likely to apply for a first preference school that had special application requirements (see section 3.4.7).

⁴⁸ Particularly in the case of formal meetings with parents since parents often meet with heads and other staff to find out about schools. The proportion of meetings with pupils in Voluntary Aided schools is the same as found in the following paper:

West, A., and Hind, A. (2003) Secondary School Admissions in England: Exploring the extent of overt and covert selection. Research and Information on State Education Trust. www.risetrust.org.uk/admissions.html

- Selection type of first preference school: parents who were applying to a wholly selective school were more likely than those applying for partially selective or non-selective schools to have to deal with special application requirements.
- Type of local authority: parents in London were more than twice as likely as those in metropolitan or non-metropolitan areas to apply for a school that had special application requirements.

Table 3.25: Logistic regression showing factors associated with listing as first preference a school with special application requirements (family, school and area characteristics)

Listed as first preference a school that had special application requirements	N	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval
Type of first preference school (p<0.001)			
Community/Voluntary controlled	1039	1.00	
Foundation	588	1.9*	1.1 -3.3
Voluntary aided	516	4.1*	2.4 -7.1
Academy/CTC	40	4.0	0.9 -18.5
Took actions to maximise child's chances (p<0.001)			
No	1722	1.00	
Yes	461	2.2*	1.7 -2.9
Selection type of first preference school (p<0.001)			
Not selective	1473	1.0	
Wholly selective	435	2.7*	1.5 -4.9
Partially selective	275	0.8	0.4 -1.4
Type of LA (p<0.01)			
London	385	1.0	
Metropolitan	736	0.4*	0.2 -0.8
Non-metropolitan	1062	0.4*	0.2 -0.7
Unweighted N	2183		

Base: Respondents who applied for schools on the common application form.

Base includes only those cases that have values for all variables in the model.

*these odds ratios denote the individual categories that were significantly associated with the outcome variable at the 95% confidence level. If an odds ratio is significant, a value greater than one indicates higher likelihood of the outcome variable occurring for that category compared to the reference category, and odds lower than one indicate lower likelihood.

The association between supplementary information and faith schools is evident in the table below. Proof of religious affiliation (included under ‘information to apply published criteria’) was the primary type of information sought by schools. However, parents also mentioned other types of information that they were asked to provide which from the next round of school admissions will no longer be permitted. The 2007 School Admissions Code prohibits schools from assessing parents’ work, financial, marital or social status. It also bans schools from giving priority to children on the basis of their interests and hobbies.

Table 3.26: Types of supplementary information requested

Types of supplementary information requested	Column %
Information to apply published criteria	67
- proof of religious affiliation	59
- attendance at place of worship	9
- proof for home address	5
Personal information about the child	13
Reasons for application	12
Other information	11
Background details of family	9
Academic record	5
Unweighted N	323

Base: All respondents who applied to a school requiring supplementary information.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

Note: This was an open question that was coded after the interviews were complete and was then recoded to converge with the analysis of the composite prospectuses in Strand 1.

3.3.9 Over-subscribed schools

This section examines parents' experiences of applying to over-subscribed schools and considers the implications of their experiences for fair admissions. When asked whether any of the schools they had actively considered applying to were over-subscribed, just under half of parents (44%) said that at least one was while a further 12% said that they didn't know. Of those who said they did actively consider over-subscribed schools, 25% said the oversubscription criteria influenced their choice of which schools to apply to and 85% actually applied to a school that was over-subscribed. Of all the parents who completed an application form, 38% applied to at least one school that they reported to be over-subscribed.

When applying to an over-subscribed school, it is important for parents to know the chances of their child being offered a place as this will affect the other schools that parents express a preference for. The majority of parents found out about the oversubscription criteria from an official source – the secondary school that was over-subscribed, the local authority or the child's primary school. A minority relied on word of mouth and general knowledge about schools.

Table 3.27: Where parents found out about oversubscription criteria

Where parents accessed oversubscription criteria	Column %
The secondary school that was over-subscribed (including prospectus, website)	41
The local authority booklet	31
Talking to other parents, friends or neighbours	17
Child's primary school	14
Talking to someone else	3
General knowledge	3
Other	2
Unweighted N	265

Base: Respondents whose choice of schools was influenced by the oversubscription criteria.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

Of those who accessed the oversubscription criteria, the majority of parents found them useful to helping them choose which schools to apply to but one-fifth thought they were of little or no use. This may be because of the complexity of oversubscription criteria in some admission authorities or because the criteria do not provide certainty about whether or not a child will be offered a place.

Table 3.28: Usefulness of over-subscription criteria in helping parents choose which schools to apply to

	Very useful	Fairly useful	Little or no use	Row % Unwt N
Oversubscription criteria	36	42	20	265

Base: Parents who used oversubscription criteria to help them find out about schools.
The 6 respondents who replied 'don't know' are included in the base.

Based on parents' reports of oversubscription⁴⁹, a third listed an over-subscribed school as their first preference. Of the other schools, between 15% and 20% were over-subscribed. This shows that over-subscribed schools were more likely to be parents' first choice than to be listed as a 'back-up' school.

⁴⁹ Although the over-subscription status of all schools was collected for Strand 1, it is not possible to compare parent report with the administrative data because the over-subscription status was unknown for over 40% of schools within each preference category.

Table 3.29: Proportion of parents whose preferred schools were over-subscribed (according to parent report)

	Row %	Unwt N
1 st preference school	32	2189
2 nd preference school	19	1487
3 rd preference school	15	902
4 th preference school	19	164
5 th preference school	18	76
Applied for at least one over-subscribed school	38	2190

Base: Respondents who completed an application form.

Note that one respondent did not know how many schools they applied for and is excluded from this table.

Fewer than 50 respondents applied to 6, 7 or 8 schools and are not included in the table.

Parents who applied to an over-subscribed school were asked which factors they expected the schools to take into account in allocating places. The most frequently cited reasons were living within the catchment area and sibling attendance at the school. The importance of the location of the family's home in relation to the school is clearly evident in the mentions of catchment and proximity in this list.

Table 3.30: Factors that parents expected over-subscribed schools to take into account

Oversubscription criteria parents expected schools to take into account	Column %
Catchment related	57
Sibling related	43
Proximity related	23
Faith related	20
Feeder related	13
First preference	8
Medical/social	6
Children of associated adults	1
Other (including child ability)	26
Unweighted N	856

Base: Parents who applied to an over-subscribed school.

Note: The number of times criteria were mentioned sum to more than the base because multiple responses were allowed.

Under the 2007 School Admissions Code, schools will not be permitted to take into account performance in primary school, whether the school was listed as first preference or whether a parent teaches at the school.

Of the parents who reported that their first preference school was over-subscribed, 76% thought their child met the oversubscription criteria and 8% didn't know. This

shows that a quarter of parents felt that there was some risk that they would not be awarded their first preference school. The proportion of parents stating that they met the oversubscription criteria declined with each additional over-subscribed school applied for (55% for the second school and 38% for the third school). This shows that there was a strong correlation between the order of preference and parents' perceptions of how likely the application was to be successful.

Logistic regression analysis was undertaken to identify what characteristics were independently associated with listing as first preference a school that they reported to be over-subscribed. Five variables were found to be significant:

- Household income: parents with higher incomes were much more likely to apply to over-subscribed schools.
- The level of educational qualifications of the mother: mothers who had education qualifications were more likely to apply to over-subscribed schools. Mothers who had qualifications at level 4 or higher (degree level) were four times as likely to apply to such schools as those who had no qualifications and twice as likely as those whose highest qualification was at Level 2.
- Active practising of religion: parents who actively practised religion were more likely to apply to an over-subscribed school.
- Child's special needs: parents of children who had special needs were *less* likely than other parents to apply for over-subscribed schools.
- Taking action to maximise their child's chances: parents who took special action such as coaching their child or arranging extra tuition were more likely to apply for a first preference school that was over-subscribed.

Table 3.31: Factors associated with listing as first preference a school that was over-subscribed

Listed as first preference a school that was over-subscribed	N	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval
Household income (p<0.001)			
£0-£9,999	119	1.0	
£10,000-£24,999	923	2.5*	1.4 -4.4
£25,000-£39,000	344	3.5*	2.1 -5.9
£40,000-£59,999	140	2.5*	1.3 -4.7
£60,000+	68	4.7*	2 -10.9
Highest qualification of mother (p<0.001)			
No qualifications	270	1.0	
NVQ level 1 or 2 or equivalent	685	2.2*	1.4 -3.5
NVQ level 3 or equivalent	290	3.8*	2.1 -6.8
NVQ level 4 or equivalent	349	4.2*	2.9 -6.1
Parent actively practising religion (p<0.001)			
No	1060	1.0	
Yes	534	1.6*	1.1 -2.2
Child has special needs (p<0.001)			
No	1365	1.0	
Yes	229	0.5*	0.4 -0.7
Took actions to maximise child's chances (p<0.05)			
No	1250	1.0	
Yes	344	1.6*	1.1 -2.3
Unweighted N	1594		

Base: Respondents who applied for schools on the common application form.

Base includes only those cases that have values for all variables in the model.

*these odds ratios denote the individual categories that were significantly associated with the outcome variable at the 95% confidence level. If an odds ratio is significant, a value greater than one indicates higher likelihood of the outcome variable occurring for that category compared to the reference category, and odds lower than one indicate lower likelihood.

3.3.10 Summary

The findings in this section show that making an application was fairly straightforward for most parents while a minority experienced significant elements of complexity or risk.

The application form itself was felt to be easy to complete in its paper form. Although internet options were available in some areas and were felt to be acceptable there, they were not yet a large part of the process.

The process of choosing schools also appeared to be straightforward for the majority of parents. Most used fewer than the three or more preferences available to them because they were confident of getting a school of their choice. Indeed, most parents stated that none of the schools they applied for were over-subscribed. Where oversubscription applied, parents generally felt able to access the information that they needed about the oversubscription criteria, usually from the school itself or the local authority. Many of those who noted that their first preference school was over-subscribed were nonetheless confident of a successful application because they believed that they met the oversubscription criteria.

The application process was more complex for parents who applied to a school outside their local authority (one-in-ten parents did this). These parents tended to include a larger number of schools on their list of preferences and were more likely to apply to schools that were over-subscribed. Many of them lived in London, where competition for places was stronger than average, as in 2000.

Another area of complexity was special admissions arrangements such as formal meetings, supplementary information and tests. The most commonly required supplementary information was the proof of religious affiliation that was requested by faith schools (for which 20% of parents expressed their first preference). Parents who applied to a school that had special admissions requirements were more likely to be applying to a Voluntary Aided school or Academy, to live in London and to have taken special action in furtherance of their child's application. These sorts of special actions are considered in the next section which explores how parents made their choices.

3.4 Making choices

All parents were asked to list the schools they applied for in order of preference. This section focuses on how parents made their preferences for schools, including the factors that led them to choose or reject a school, the proportion applying for their nearest school and reasons for not applying to a preferred school. The section also examines other aspects of choice such as receiving advice about how to order the schools on the application form and taking special actions to maximise the chances of securing a place for the child at their preferred school.

3.4.1 Key findings of section

- The main reasons given for favouring schools were good reputation, good exam results and the child wanting to go there.
- 25% of parents did not apply to their nearest maintained school. The main reasons cited were poor reputation, poor exam results and problems with behaviour/discipline.
- Controlling for other factors, parents who chose not to apply to their nearest maintained school were more likely to live in areas with high population density or where admissions appeals were relatively high. In terms of their personal characteristics they were more likely to actively practice religion. They were less likely to have taken account of secondary school catchment areas when they last moved and more likely to have taken special action to maximise the chances of success with their child's application.
- Where parents chose not to apply to the maintained school that was nearest to where they lived the school they preferred was more likely than the nearer school to be a Voluntary Aided or Foundation school, to be a single sex school, to have a religious affiliation, to have a specialism or to be a larger school. Only 5% of parents did not apply to their favourite school and the main reason was to do with location and travel inconvenience.
- Of those who applied to more than one school, 95% said they listed the schools in the order they really preferred and 38% received advice about the order in which to list schools. The main source of advice was the child's primary school.
- In most cases, both parents were involved in choosing and applying for schools. Mothers were involved to a much greater extent than fathers.
- About one-in-five parents had taken special actions such as providing coaching or extra tuition to maximise their child's chances of getting into their preferred school. 22% of parents had taken catchment areas into account when they last moved house.

3.4.2 Comparison with 2000

Although the categorisation of reasons for liking or disliking schools in the 2006 survey differed from that used in 2000, the findings were quite similar. The most common reason given by parents for wanting a place in their favourite school in 2000 was academic outcomes while in 2006 the first two reasons given were good reputation and good exam results.

A similar proportion of parents chose not to apply to their nearest maintained school in 2000 and 2006 (28%, 25%). Poor academic results, behaviour and discipline were the main reasons in both years.

A similar proportion of parents in 2000 and 2006 reported that there were other maintained schools that they would have preferred over the ones they applied for (8%, 5%).

3.4.3 Reasons why parents wanted a place at their preferred school

We are aware of the limitations and criticism of asking parents to list their reasons for choosing and then ranking them in a list⁵⁰. It risks giving the false impression that parents make choices on the basis of a small number of discrete criteria in a highly rational way whereas the qualitative literature shows that parents think of the individual criteria as subtly inter-linked and that many decide as much on the basis of 'feel', intuition and trust in what they hear on the grapevine as on what one might be thought of as a cool and rational approach on the basis of objective criteria. As long as these considerations are kept in mind there is still some value in reporting on what parents said about their choices when asked in this survey.

Parents who applied to more than one school were asked which school they most wanted their child to attend and why⁵¹.

⁵⁰ For a critique of the 'market research' approach to parental choice see Bowe et al (1994). For the variety of meanings parents give to their reasons for choice see Coldron and Boulton 1991 and 1996; For the anxiety accompanying choice of school see Reay and Lucey 2000, and Coldron 1999; for how parents put trust in the grapevine see Ball and Vincent 1998; for an overview of all of this and how and why parents invest in school choice see Ball 2003.

⁵¹ It was not assumed that parents would list their favourite school as their first preference since there is evidence that some parents make tactical decisions in ordering their schools depending on the type of schools and whether they are over-subscribed.

Parents gave a wide range of reasons for favouring their preferred school. The reason mentioned by the most parents was that the school had a good reputation in the community. Also important were good exam results, the child wanted to go there, sibling attendance and good facilities.

Table 3.32: Reasons for parents wanting a place in their preferred school⁵²

Reasons for wanting place in preferred school	Column %
School has good reputation in the community /good Ofsted report	40
School has good exam results	33
Child wanted to go there	31
Sibling goes there	28
Facilities are good	22
Friends are going there	20
It's the local school	20
School has good discipline/behaviour	19
Other characteristics of school particularly liked (e.g., mixed, size)	13
Pupil social characteristics	10
Religious reasons	6
Subject specialism	5
Convenient to get to/distance from home	5
Had previous positive experience of school	5
General – the best school for the child	4
Other child-related reasons (e.g., special needs)	3
Other	3
Missing	1
Unweighted N	1487

Base: Respondents who applied to more than one school.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

⁵² Unfortunately, only parents who applied for more than one school were asked the reasons for favouring their preferred school so we do not have this information for parents who only applied to one school.

3.4.4 Reasons for not applying to the nearest maintained school

In order to find out what characteristics are associated with unpopular schools, parents were asked whether they had applied to their nearest maintained school (which would probably be the most convenient and obvious choice in most cases) and if not, the reasons why. 25% of parents did not apply to their nearest maintained school.

Parents living in non-metropolitan areas were the most likely to apply for their nearest maintained school probably because distances between schools are further and it would be more inconvenient to travel to a different school than for parents living in more densely populated areas.

Table 3.33: Proportion of parents not applying to their nearest maintained school by type of local authority in which they lived

Type of LA in which parents live	Row %	Unweighted N
London	30	385
Metropolitan	29	735
Non-metropolitan	21	1061
Total	25	2181

Base: Respondents who completed the application form.

Base includes one respondent who was classified as living in Wales.

The main reason for not applying to the nearest maintained school was that it had a poor reputation in the community. Other more specific reasons included poor exam results, problems with behaviour and discipline, religious reasons, the child did not want to go there and the sibling did not go there. These reasons largely mirror those for favouring the preferred school.

Table 3.34: Reasons for parents not applying to their nearest maintained school

Reasons for not applying to the nearest maintained school	Column %
School has poor reputation in the community	38
School has poor exam results	21
School has problem with behaviour/discipline	21
Religious reasons	18
Child did not want to go there	16
Sibling doesn't go there	11
Pupil social characteristics	7
The facilities are poor	5
Preferred a different school	5
Friends not going there	4
Unlikely to get a place	4
Other characteristics of school not liked (e.g., mixed, size)	9
Other child-related reasons (e.g., special needs)	2
Didn't like area	1
Other specific reason	10
Vague or irrelevant	2
Unweighted N	611

Base: Respondents who did not apply for their nearest maintained school.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

This question was asked separately of those who had applied to one school and those who had applied to more than one school. The original code frame had 7 codes for one and 8 codes for the other as 'friends not going there' was accidentally excluded. The codeframe was expanded during the edit of open 'other' answers to include codes from 'religious reasons' onwards.

Logistic regression analysis was undertaken to identify what characteristics were independently associated with parents not applying to their nearest maintained school. Five variables were found to be significant:

- Population density: parents living in more densely populated areas were more likely to not to apply to their nearest school. This is unsurprising as this group of parents would be more likely to have multiple schools within convenient travelling distance.
- Proportion of appeals: parents in local authorities where between 10% and 19% of admissions decisions were appealed were more likely than parents in areas where fewer decisions were appealed not to apply to their nearest school.
- Active practising of religion: parents who actively practised religion were roughly twice as likely as other parents not to apply to their nearest school (presumably many of these parents were applying to the nearest school of their own religious affiliation).

- House moving: parents who had not taken school catchment areas into account when they last moved house were more likely than other parents not to apply to their local school.
- Taking action to maximise their child's chances: parents who took special action such as coaching their child or arranging extra tuition were more likely not to apply to their local school.

Table 3.35: Logistic regression: factors associated with not applying to nearest maintained school

Didn't apply to nearest maintained school	N	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval
Population density of LA (p<0.01)			
Least dense (0-1.7)	218	1.0	
(1.7-9.1)	352	1.0	0.4 -2.2
(9.1-22.3)	429	0.9	0.5 -1.4
(22.3-40.3)	562	1.4	0.8 -2.6
Most dense (40.4-854080.4)	619	2.1*	1 -4.1
Appeals as proportion of admissions in 2004-5 (p<0.05)			
0-10%	1181	1.0	
11-20%	843	1.7*	1.1 -2.5
21-32%	156	0.9	0.5 -1.8
Parent actively practising religion (p<0.001)			
No	1453	1.0	
Yes	727	1.9*	1.5 -2.3
Took into account secondary school catchment areas when last moving house (p<0.001)			
No	1703	1.0	
Yes	468	0.7*	0.5 -0.9
Took actions to maximise child's chances (p<0.001)			
No	1720	1.0	
Yes	460	1.6*	1.3 -2.1
Unweighted N	2180		

Base includes only those cases that have values for all variables in the model.

*these odds ratios denote the individual categories that were significantly associated with the outcome variable at the 95% confidence level. If an odds ratio is significant, a value greater than one indicates higher likelihood of the outcome variable occurring for that category compared to the reference category, and odds lower than one indicate lower likelihood.

The table below focuses on parents who chose not to apply to their nearest school and compares the characteristics of that school with the characteristics of the school they chose to apply for instead (the final column on the tables shows the characteristics of all first preference schools).

It is evident that the type of school had an impact on parental attitudes. Five differences between the preferred school and the nearer one were observed:

- The preferred school was more likely to be a Foundation or Voluntary Aided school (58% compared with 18%).
- The preferred school was more likely to have a religious affiliation, especially Catholic (38% compared with 13%).
- The preferred school was more likely to be single sex (14% compared with 5%).
- The preferred school was more likely to have a specialism (88% compared with 70%).
- The preferred school was likely to be larger than the nearer school (an average of 1169 pupils compared with 998 pupils).

Table 3.36: Characteristics of nearest maintained schools not applied for compared with schools listed as first preference

Characteristics of schools	Parents not applying to nearest school		Column %
	Nearest schools	1 st preference school	All parents 1 st preference schools
Type			
Community	72	38	53
Foundation	11	22	23
Voluntary aided	7	36	19
Voluntary controlled	1	2	4
Academy	3	1	1
CTC	1	*	*
Missing	5	*	*
Selection type			
Wholly selective	15	15	12
Partially selective	21	22	19
Non-selective	59	63	69
Missing	5	*	*
Gender			
Mixed	86	85	89
Boys	2	6	4
Girls	3	8	6
Missing	9	2	1
Religion			
Does not apply/none	82	62	78
Roman Catholic	5	31	16
Church of England	4	5	5
Christian	*	1	*
Jewish	0	0	0
Muslim/Sikh	0	0	0
Missing	5	*	*
Specialist status			
Specialism	70	88	87
No specialism	21	10	12
Missing	5	2	*
Total	611	611	2190
Average number of children at school	998	1169	1159
Unweighted N (schools with pupil data)	582	608	2184

Base: parents who did not apply for their nearest maintained school and all parents who completed an application form.

3.4.5 Favourite schools that parents chose not to apply to

Parents were asked whether there were any maintained schools other than those they applied for that they liked better. Only 5% of parents said that there was such a school that they favoured but chose not to apply to. There is no direct comparison for this figure from the 2000 survey as parents were then able to apply to multiple authorities and it was harder to establish what the first preference school. However, 8% of parents in 2000 identified another state school that they would have preferred for their child over the ones which they had applied for. So it is possible to conclude that the proportion of parents choosing not to apply to a school that they regarded as their favourite was no higher in 2006 than in 2000.

Nearly half (43%) of parents in 2006 who chose not to apply to their favourite school gave as their reason that the school was over-subscribed and their child did not meet the oversubscription criteria (whether based on proximity, religion or a test). This finding provides another indication that the oversubscription criteria are important in influencing parents' preferences. The next most common reasons were that the school's location was inconvenient (29%) and that the child did not want to go there (19%).

Table 3.37: Reasons why parents did not apply to their favourite maintained school

Reasons for not applying to favourite school	Column %
Difficult to get to/inconvenient location	29
Over-subscribed – not meet distance criteria	21
Child did not want to go	19
Over-subscribed – not meet religious criteria	12
Over-subscribed – unlikely to pass test	10
Sibling doesn't go there	7
Transport costs too high	7
Over-subscribed – not meet other criteria	7
Don't know	1
Other specific answer	17
Vague or irrelevant	2
Unweighted N	121

Base: Respondents who did not apply for their favourite school.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

7% of parents cited transport costs as a barrier. From 2008 there will be additional support for parents for travel costs. It will be of interest to see if this influences this proportion in the future.

Parental perceptions of the favourite schools not applied for were similar to those of the schools listed as first preference.

Table 3.38: Characteristics of favourite schools not applied for

Characteristics of favourite school not applied for	Column %
Good exam results	52
Good reputation in the community	44
Good facilities	27
Other characteristics of school particularly liked	23
Good bullying/anti discipline policy	19
Children well-behaved	8
Pupil social characteristics	8
Child wanted to go there	4
Child's friends are going there	4
Religious reasons	4
Sibling goes there	3
It's the local school	3
Convenient to get to/distance from home	3
Had previous positive experience of the school	2
General – the best school for the child	2
Subject specialism	2
Other child-related reasons	*
Other specific answer	3
Vague or irrelevant	1
Unweighted N	121

Base: Respondents who did not apply to their favourite school.

3.4.6 Ordering schools

There is evidence to suggest that parents do not always list schools in the order they most prefer which may be related to selective admission policies and oversubscription. In the parent survey, 95% of parents who expressed a preference for more than one school said they listed schools in the order they really prefer. 38% (of the same base) received advice about the order in which to list schools and 3% weren't sure/couldn't remember.

The main source of advice for ordering schools on the application form was the child's primary school, followed by the local authority and the secondary schools. Of those who received advice on how to order their schools, 14% changed the ordering of schools after receiving advice⁵³. Advisers funded by the Choice Advice initiative were not in place for the 2006 parents.

Table 3.39: Source of advice about ordering schools on the application form

Source of advice about ordering of schools	Column %
Child's primary school	36
Local authority	27
Secondary schools	19
Advice given with application documents	14
Friends, relatives and/or other parents	10
Social services/health professionals/education welfare officer	1
Priest/other faith representative	*
Other specific answer	2
Vague or irrelevant	1
Unweighted N	585

Base: Respondents who said they received advice about the order in which to list schools.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

The majority of parents (62%) spent between two and 12 months finding out about secondary schools before making their application. 22% of the sample spent just one month finding out about schools while 13% spent more than a year.

⁵³ The question did not distinguish between changes made before and after an application was submitted.

Table 3.40: Length of time spent by parents finding out about schools before applying

Time spent finding out about schools before applying	Column %
1 month	22
2 – 6 months	33
7 – 12 months	29
1 to 3 years	9
Over 3 years	4
Missing	3
Unweighted N	2215

Base: All respondents.

3.4.7 Involvement of family members and actions taken

Table 3.41: Level of involvement of the other parent depending on relationship of respondent to child

How involved was the other parent?	Respondents who were mothers	Column % Respondents who were fathers
Very much	53	76
Partly	19	11
Not at all	26	8
Don't know	*	1
Missing	2	4
Unweighted N	1872	312

Base: Respondents who were parents of the child starting secondary school. 'Mother' includes foster mother and step-mother and 'father' includes foster father and step-father.

The parent who responded to the survey was asked to indicate the extent to which the child's other parent was involved in choosing and applying for schools. In 85% of cases, the respondent was the mother. 72% of mothers reported that the father was involved at least partly in the process, but in a quarter of cases the father was not involved at all. This proportion is likely to include fathers who do not live in the home. Of the fathers who responded to the survey, 87% reported that the mother was at least partly involved. Given the proportion of mothers and fathers responding to the survey, it is clear that mothers took the primary responsibility for choosing and applying for secondary schools.

79% of respondents⁵⁴ said that the child was very involved in choosing and applying for secondary schools and 16% said they were partly involved. Only 4% of parents reported that their children were not at all involved.

⁵⁴ The base for this figure is all respondents (N=2215).

It is a frequent argument that some parents, given their social characteristics, are better placed to take special actions to maximise their child's chances of securing an offer from their favoured school. Parents in the survey were asked whether they had taken any special actions such as moving house or joining a place of worship specifically for the purpose of their child's schooling.

One-fifth of the sample reported that they had taken special actions, the most common being the parent coaching the child. 5% made sure their child attended a particular primary school that may have had links with the secondary school. A small minority paid for extra tuition and arranged extra-curricular activities for the child.

Table 3.42: Actions taken to maximise chances of securing a place at preferred school

Actions taken	Column %
Coach child yourself	8
Get child into a particular primary school	5
Pay for extra tuition	4
Arrange extra-curricular activities for child	4
Move to the catchment area or rent a house there	3
Join a church or other place of worship	1
Ask someone with influence in the process to recommend your child	1
Use the address of a relative in the catchment area	*
None of these	81
Other specific answer	*
Vague or irrelevant	*
Unweighted N	2190

Base: Respondents who completed an application form.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

Parents were also asked whether they had taken into account the catchment areas of secondary schools when they last moved house and 22% had done so. These parents were more likely to have taken special actions than parents who had not considered catchment areas when moving (25% compared with 17%). These figures suggest that a substantial minority of parents go to considerable lengths to maximise their child's chances in education.

Logistic regression analysis was undertaken to identify what characteristics were independently associated with taking special action to maximise their child's chances of getting a school place. Three variables were found to be significant:

- Previous experience of applying to a secondary school: parents who had not applied to a secondary school before were more likely to take special action.
- House moving: parents who had taken school catchment areas into account when they last moved house were more likely than other parents to take special action. We can surmise that in many cases these parents' house purchases will have secured their choice of school under proximity rules.
- Ethnicity: Non-white parents were twice as likely as white parents to take special action.

Table 3.43: Logistic regression: factors associated with taking special action to maximise the chance of an application being successful

Didn't apply to nearest maintained school	N	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval
Previous experience of applying to secondary school (p<0.01)			
No previous experience	846	1.0	
Had previous experience	1000	0.6*	0.5 -0.8
Took into account secondary school catchment areas when last moving house (p<0.01)			
No	1436	1.0	
Yes	403	1.6*	1.1 -2.4
Maternal ethnicity (p<0.001)			
White	1615	1.0	
Non-white	231	2.0*	1.4 -2.8
Unweighted N	1846		

Base includes only those cases that have values for all variables in the model.

*these odds ratios denote the individual categories that were significantly associated with the outcome variable at the 95% confidence level. If an odds ratio is significant, a value greater than one indicates higher likelihood of the outcome variable occurring for that category compared to the reference category, and odds lower than one indicate lower likelihood.

3.4.8 Summary

The findings in this section show that parents explained their choice of a school in terms of it having a good reputation and good exam results and their child wanting to go there. Where parents chose not to apply for their nearest school they explained their decision in terms of the absence of these characteristics, saying that the school had a poor reputation, poor exam results or poor discipline. This pattern was extremely consistent with the 2000 survey.

For three quarters of parents the nearest maintained school to where they lived satisfied these concerns and was their first preference. Only 5% of parents identified a 'favourite' school that was different from their first preference but was not selected due to some barrier such as the school's location, the child's preference or a perceived low chance of gaining a place.

The quarter of parents who chose not to apply to their nearest school tended to live in more densely populated areas where more schools were accessible and where admissions appeals were common, indicating stronger competition for places. They were less likely than other parents to have taken account of school catchment areas when they last moved house and were more likely to actively practice religion. The schools that these parents preferred to their nearest schools had different characteristics, being more likely to be a Voluntary Aided or Foundation school, to be a single sex school, to have a religious affiliation, to have a specialism or to be a larger school.

About a fifth of parents took special steps such as coaching or extra tuition in furtherance of their child's application and, as the previous section showed, these steps were more common where schools had special admissions arrangements. A similar proportion of parents had taken account of school catchment areas when they last moved house in order to maximise their chance of success with a school of their choice.

3.5 Parental satisfaction with the application process and outcomes

This section investigates parental satisfaction with the outcome of applications made for schools in 2006 and aspects of the process. Objective measures of satisfaction include the proportion of parents offered a place for their child in their first preference school and the proportion making appeals against the decision of their admission authority. Alongside these objective outcomes, this section reports on subjective measures of parental satisfaction with the application process and outcomes.

3.5.1 Key findings of section

- The majority of respondents (97%) received an offer for their child in early March 2006.
- 84% of the whole sample were offered their first preference school. This was lower for parents living in London (70%). Following appeals, these proportions rose to 86% of parents overall and 72% of parents in London.
- Multivariate analysis showed that four factors were independently associated with parents who were offered a place at their first preference school. These were parents applying to only one school, applying in a local authority where first preference first was the dominant preference system, having already got an older sibling at the school (or otherwise having prior experience of secondary school admissions) and being white. We cannot explain why white parents appear to have been more successful with their applications than non-white parents.
- Of those who were offered a school, 97% accepted the offer and 3% appealed.
- Multivariate analysis identified five factors that were independently associated with making an appeal. These were not getting the first preference school applied for, applying to three or more schools, applying to a first preference school that was believed to be over-subscribed, applying for a wholly selective school and living in a local authority where admissions arrangements were predominantly diverse.
- Satisfaction with the process was generally high. Over 90% of parents were satisfied with the overall provision of information and the formal sources of information (except school achievement and attainment data and oversubscription criteria).
- 43% were very satisfied and 38% were fairly satisfied with the choice of schools in their locality. Satisfaction was lowest among parents living in London.
- Satisfaction with the current school attended by the child varied according to whether or not it was the parents' first preference. 95% of parents whose child currently attended their first preference school were satisfied, compared to 82% of parents whose child attended a school that was not their first preference.
- Multivariate analysis showed that, controlling for other variables, parents who did not get their first preference school were five times more likely than other parents to be dissatisfied with the current school that their child attended.

- However, for parents who were not awarded their first preference school, nearly half (48%) were more satisfied once their child had started the school than they were beforehand.
- The most common means of travelling to and from school was by foot with 49% walking at least part of the journey, 31% travelling by car, 19% by public transport bus and 17% travelled by school bus (percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple answers were allowed). Satisfaction with travel arrangements was highest among parents whose children walked and used no other form of transport.
- Of the 10% of parents who were dissatisfied with their child's travel arrangements, the main reason was that they had to pay the cost of travel (39%). Other reasons included worrying about the child's safety (29%) and the poor condition of public transport (27%).

3.5.2 Comparison with 2000

The 2000 survey differentiated between the proportion of parents offered their *first preference* school and those offered their *favourite* school. This was because under the admissions system that was in place at the time, parents could apply to more than one admission authority, for example to their own local authority, to another local authority and to a school that was its own admission authority. For the purpose of analysis, the *first preference* schools referred to those listed first in the application to the parents' own local authority, then schools which were their own admission authority and finally to local authority schools in other local authorities. By contrast, the *favourite* school was the one that the parents said they most wanted their child to attend.

In 2006, 84% of parents received a first offer for their first preference school. There was no comparable statistic in 2000 because parents were then required to make separate applications to more than one school because the applications process was not co-ordinated by the local authority. In 2000, 92% of parents reported receiving a 'first preference' offer while 85% reported receiving an offer at their 'favourite' school. Allowing for the changes to admissions systems and the differences in questioning, it seems safe to conclude that the proportion of parents who gained a place at their most favoured school was fairly consistent between 2000 and 2006⁵⁵.

⁵⁵ In other words, we think that the school listed first under the admissions system in 2006 might correspond better with the 'favourite' school than with the school listed first under the admission system in 2000, since under that system parents could apply for more than one school as a first preference, i.e. there were multiple expressions of first preference and (potentially) multiple offers of 'first preference' schools. The 'favourite school' in the 2000 report distinguishes which of these expressed 'first preferences' was actually their most preferred.

In both years, parents living in London were least likely to be offered a place for their child in their first preference school but only in 2000 was the reported rate of appeals higher in London.

In both years, the overall rate of appeal in the sample was similar (5% in 2000 and 3% in 2006). The national rate of appeals for the whole of England as recorded by the DfES (DfES 2007) was 6.1%.

Overall satisfaction levels with the application process were high across both years. As in 2000, the satisfaction with outcome for parents in 2006 depended on whether their child was offered their first preference school.

In both 2000 and 2006, about one-in-ten parents felt less satisfied with the outcome than they had before their child started attending secondary school, more than one-in-three said they were more satisfied and about half felt the same.

3.5.3 Offers

All parents who applied for maintained secondary schools were meant to be offered a place in one school for their child on or near the 1st March 2006. The survey findings showed that 97% of parents received an offer at this time, 2% did not and 1% did not know⁵⁶.

Overall, 84% of parents in the sample were offered a place in the school that they had listed as first preference and 95% were offered one of the schools they had listed. 2% were offered a place in a school that they had not applied for and 2% said they did not receive an offer.

The proportion of parents who were offered a place at their first preference school was lower in London than elsewhere (70% compared with 86%).

Logistic regression analysis was undertaken to identify what characteristics were independently associated with parents receiving an offer at their first preference school. Four variables were found to be significant:

- The number of schools applied for: parents who had applied to a single school were more likely to get their first preference than those who applied for multiple schools. This finding is what we would expect since it is likely that many parents who only listed a single school did so because they were very confident of getting their first choice perhaps because they had high priority for selection under the admissions criteria, for example because they had another child already at the school, because their child had attended a feeder school or because the school was known to be under-subscribed.
- The dominant preference system in the local authority: parents in local authorities that operated first preference first systems were more likely than those in local authorities operating an equal preference/default ranking system to get an offer at their first preference school. "This difference is likely to reflect the greater weighting given to first preferences under the first preference first system. Although this system results in more first preference offers, it does not necessarily result in a higher proportion of offers that are acceptable to parents. This is because some parents make strategic choices about which schools to list first and second preferences have much reduced chances of resulting in an offer. First preference first systems are no longer permitted under the School Admissions Code 2007.

⁵⁶ The base for this figure is all parents in the sample, not just those who said they completed an application form because some of the parents who said they didn't complete a form were nevertheless offered a place.

- Previous experience of applying to secondary schools: parents who had an older sibling at the school or otherwise had previous experience of applying for a secondary school were more likely to get an offer at their first preference school. Clearly, siblings rules, which the analysis of the composite prospectuses found were the most frequently used category of oversubscription criteria, would have been an important element of this trend.
- Ethnicity: white mothers were more likely than non-white mothers to get an offer at their first preference school. We cannot tell from the data whether this difference reflected some form of differential treatment or just some differences in the types of applications made by white and non-white parents that were not captured by other variables in the regression analysis.

It is notable that socio-economic factors such as income and employment status were not found to be significant in this regression analysis. So there was no indication that the level of application success differed according to social class.

Table 3.44: Logistic regression: factors associated with receiving offer of *first preference* school (family and area characteristics, whether action taken by parents, school characteristics including whether over-subscribed)

Child currently attends first preference school	N	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval
Number of schools applied for (p<0.001)			
1	587	1.00	
2	482	0.2*	0.1-0.4
3	640	0.3*	0.2-0.4
4+	136	0.1*	0.0-0.1
Dominant preference system of LA (P<0.05)			
Equal preference/default ranking	1426		
First preference first	419	2.3*	1.0-6.9
Previous experience of applying to secondary school (p<0.01)			
No previous experience	845	1.00	
Had previous experience	1000	1.6*	1.2-2.2
Maternal ethnicity (p<0.05)			
White	1614	1.00	
Non-white	231	0.5*	0.3-1.0
Unweighted N	1845		

Base includes only those cases that have values for all variables in the model.

*these odds ratios denote the individual categories that were significantly associated with the outcome variable at the 95% confidence level. If an odds ratio is significant, a value greater than one indicates higher likelihood of the outcome variable occurring for that category compared to the reference category, and odds lower than one indicate lower likelihood.

3.5.4 Appeals

Of the parents who were offered a school in March 2006, 97% accepted the offer and only 3% appealed. Surprisingly, the rate of acceptance and appeal was not higher in London – 96% accepted the offer and 1% appealed. As noted earlier the national rate of appeals for the whole of England was 6.1% and the rate of appeal in 2006 for London as a whole was 9.3%, as recorded by the DfES (DfES 2007).

The number of parents appealing was small, so the proportions in the table below should be treated with caution⁵⁷. Half of the parents who appealed were offered their second preference school and one-third were offered a school that they didn't apply for. Three parents appealed despite being offered their first preference school. This may occur because a family's personal circumstances have changed or because parents listed as first preference a school that was a tactical safe bet while actually preferring the second school listed⁵⁸.

Table 3.45: Proportion of parents appealing broken down by the preference number of the school that they were originally offered

Preference number of school originally offered to those who appealed	Column %
1st preference	5
2 nd preference	50
3 rd preference	11
4 th preference	3
A different school	33
Unweighted N	49

Base: Respondents who appealed

⁵⁷ To provide some context for the survey appeals figures, the following proportions are from the national figures for 2004-05. The proportion of appeals per LA (as a percentage of the number of admissions) varied from 1% to 32%, with a mean of 11%. The proportion of appeals that were successful varied from 0 to 61% across Local authorities with a mean of 26%. The difference in proportions between the appeals figures for the survey data and for 2004-05 may be due to the small number of appeals in the survey data or may be because of those who appealed (and particularly, those who were unsuccessful in their appeal) a proportion exited the maintained sector and took up places in independent schools, therefore not appearing in this sample.

⁵⁸ Among the three parents who appealed despite being offered their first preference, two said that the school they listed as second preference was in fact their favourite and one said that their first choice was their favourite, so their circumstances probably changed.

Logistic regression analysis was undertaken to identify what characteristics were independently associated with parents making an appeal. Five variables were found to be significant:

- Whether current school had been first preference: as we would expect, appeals were more common where parents had not gained their first preference school.
- The number of schools applied for: parents who had applied to three schools were much more likely than parents who had applied to fewer schools to have made an appeal.
- Whether the first preference school was reported to be over-subscribed: as we would expect, parents who reported that their first choice school was over-subscribed were more likely to have been unsuccessful with their first preference and to appeal.
- Selection type of the first preference school: appeals were more common where the first preference school was wholly selective than when it was not selective.
- Diversity of admissions in the LA: parents in admission authorities that were predominantly diverse were less likely than those in authorities that were predominantly non-autonomous to make an appeal.

These findings are what would be expected. It is interesting that there were no significant associations between appealing and parents' family characteristics.

Table 3.46: Logistic regression: factors associated with making an appeal (family, school characteristics)

Made an appeal	N	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval
Whether current school was first preference (p<0.05)			
No	339	1.0	
Yes	1844	0.5*	0.3 -1
Number of schools applied for (p<0.001)			
1	701	1.0	
2	582	1.2	0.6 -2.5
3	737	4.8*	2.7 -8.4
4+	163	2.4	0.8 -7.6
Oversubscription of 1st preference school (parent report) (p<0.001)			
Not over-subscribed	1477	1.0	
Over-subscribed	706	4.8*	2.5 -9.4
Selection type of first preference school (p<0.01)			
Not selective	1473	1.0	
Wholly selective	435	2.6*	1.1 -6.3
Partially selective	275	0.5	0.2 -1.2
Diversity of parent LA schools in groups (p<0.05)			
Non-autonomous (0-25%)	848	1.0	
Diverse (25-75%)	1233	0.3*	0.1 -0.9
Autonomous (75-100%)	102	0.6	0.1 -5.7
Unweighted N	2183		

Base includes only those cases that have values for all variables in the model.

*these odds ratios denote the individual categories that were significantly associated with the outcome variable at the 95% confidence level. If an odds ratio is significant, a value greater than one indicates higher likelihood of the outcome variable occurring for that category compared to the reference category, and odds lower than one indicate lower likelihood.

Of the 56 parents in the survey who appealed, 91% appealed for one school, 8% for two schools and 1% for three schools.

Sometimes, it is possible to resolve appeals without taking it to a hearing. Of the parents in the survey who appealed, 48% took the appeal to a hearing. The national figure for the proportion of appeals lodged that are taken to a hearing is 73.5%. 80% of those who didn't take the appeal to a hearing gave the reason that they were offered their preferred school without going to a hearing. Of those who appealed, 68% won the appeal, twice that (36.4%) recorded by DfES statistics and 8% didn't know the outcome.

Following the appeal procedure, the number of children offered a place in their first preference school increased. In the end, 86% of parents secured a place for their child in their first preference school (72% in London).

3.5.5 Satisfaction with application procedures

Parents responding to the survey were asked to rate their satisfaction with a range of aspects of the application process providing a subjective measure of satisfaction. In each case, satisfaction was measured with a five-point scale ranging from very satisfied to very dissatisfied. Following the wording used in the 2000 survey, parents were asked how satisfied they were that the information was 'easy to follow'⁵⁹.

Parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the formal sources of information used. 81% of parents thought that school achievement and attainment data were easy to follow and 90% and over thought that the other types of information were easy to follow.

Table 3.47: Parental satisfaction with formal sources of information

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Row % Unwt N
Local authority booklets	59	36	3	2	*	1041
School prospectuses or brochures	65	32	2	1	*	1294
School websites	47	43	5	4	2	581
School achievement and attainment data	30	51	8	10	1	972
Ofsted inspection reports	44	47	5	3	1	647

Base: Respondents who used the information sources listed.

94% of parents said they were satisfied that they had all the information they needed to help them decide which schools to apply for and only 3% expressed dissatisfaction⁶⁰.

⁵⁹ Similar questions were asked in 2000 in relation to local authority booklets and school brochures. In both cases the proportions expressing satisfaction were similar to 2006.

⁶⁰ This question was asked in the same way in 2000. A slightly lower proportion (87%) were satisfied in 2000.

Table 3.48: Overall parental satisfaction with the provision of information

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Row % Unwt N
Overall satisfaction with information	63	31	4	2	1	2215

Base: All respondents.

80% of parents who considered applying to over-subscribed schools were satisfied that the oversubscription criteria were easy to follow and 8% were dissatisfied.

Table 3.49: Parental level of satisfaction that oversubscription criteria were easy to understand

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Row % Unwt N
Satisfaction with oversubscription criteria	43	37	10	4	4	265

Base: Respondents who considered over-subscribed schools and for whom the oversubscription criteria influenced their choice.

3% replied 'don't know' to this question.

81% of parents were satisfied with the choice of schools in their locality. This varied by the type of local authority in which parents lived. Parents living in London were the least satisfied with the choice of schools (70% satisfied, 22% dissatisfied) despite the greater density of schools than elsewhere in the country. Parents living in other metropolitan areas expressed the highest level of satisfaction (82%).

Table 3.50: Parental satisfaction with choice of schools in locality by local authority type

Local authority type	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Row % Unwt N
London	35	35	8	12	10	385
Metropolitan	43	39	8	5	4	736
Non-metropolitan	45	38	6	7	5	1065
All	43	38	7	7	5	2186

Base: Respondents who completed an application form.

3 respondents replied don't know and are not included in the table.

1 respondent included in the overall base was classified as living in Wales.

Two thirds of survey respondents who had appealed won their appeal whereas the proportion of successful appeals nationally was about one third, suggesting that unsuccessful appeals were either under-reported or under-represented in the survey sample. Most survey respondents who appealed expressed satisfaction with the appeal procedure. However, the level of satisfaction was affected by the outcome of the appeal and those who lost their appeals tended to be very dissatisfied with the procedure.

Table 3.51: Parental satisfaction with the appeal procedure

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Row % Unwt N
Satisfaction with appeal procedure	26	28	4	8	26	49

Base: Respondents who appealed.

3.5.6 Satisfaction with application outcomes

Overall, 73% of parents were very satisfied and 20% were fairly satisfied with the school that the child currently attends. Only 4% were dissatisfied. Understandably, the level of satisfaction with the current schools varied according to whether the current school was the school preferred by parents. Where the child secured a place in the first preference school, 95% of parents were satisfied and where they did not, 82% were satisfied. It is interesting that the level of satisfaction is high among both groups of parents.

Table 3.52: Parental satisfaction with current school by school preference

Satisfaction with current school	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Row % Unwt N
Current school was 1 st preference	75	20	2	2	1	1807
Current school was not 1 st preference	57	25	5	5	7	340
All	73	20	3	2	2	2147

Base: All parents who responded to the question about satisfaction with school.

Of the parents whose child attended a secondary school that was not their first preference, nearly half said that they were more satisfied now than before the child started the school and 16% were less satisfied. Taken together with the previous table, it seems that the majority of parents become reconciled to the school offered to their child regardless of their preferences. Only 12% of parents who did not secure their first preference remained dissatisfied once their child had attended the school for a term.

Table 3.53: Current level of satisfaction with current school compared to before child started last September by school preference

Current satisfaction compared with before child started school	More satisfied than then	Less satisfied than then	Feel the same	Row % Unwt N
Current school was 1 st preference	38	7	5	1807
Current school was not 1 st preference	48	16	36	340
All	39	9	53	2147

Base: All parents who responded to the question about satisfaction with school.

Logistic regression analysis was undertaken to identify what characteristics were independently associated with parents being dissatisfied with the school that their children attended. Two variables were found to be significant:

- Whether the current school was first preference: parents whose child was not attending the first choice school were five times more likely to say that they were dissatisfied.
- The number of schools applied for: although this variable was significantly associated with dissatisfaction, the pattern was not consistent and so it was unclear how applying for more schools was related to dissatisfaction.

Table 3.54: Multiple regression: factors associated with dissatisfaction with outcome (family, area and school characteristics, application outcome)

Dissatisfied with current school attended	N	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval
Current school was first preference (p<0.001)			
No	344	1.0	
Yes	1845	0.2*	0.1-0.5
Number of schools applied for (p<0.01)			
1	702	1.0	
2	585	1.3	0.7-2.3
3	738	0.5	0.2-1.2
4+	164	1.7	0.5-6.0
Unweighted N	2185		

Base includes only those cases that have values for all variables in the model.

*these odds ratios denote the individual categories that were significantly associated with the outcome variable at the 95% confidence level. If an odds ratio is significant, a value greater than one indicates higher likelihood of the outcome variable occurring for that category compared to the reference category, and odds lower than one indicate lower likelihood.

3.5.7 Travel arrangements

Travel to and from school is an influential aspect of school choice and satisfaction. As reported above, the main reason for parents not applying for their favourite school was travel inconvenience and the government has recognised that unequal access to transport can affect fair admissions⁶¹. This section investigates the means by which children travel to and from their current school and parental satisfaction with the arrangements.

Some children used more than one means of transport to get to and from school, but half the sample said they usually walked, 31% usually took the car, 19% usually went by public transport bus and 17% usually travelled by school bus (percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed).

Of those who used forms of transport other than walking and cycling, 31% of respondents said that the local authority paid for the child's travel and 69% said that the parent/carer paid⁶².

Table 3.55: Use of different forms of transport to get to or from school

Mode of transport	Column %
Walk	49
By car	31
By public transport bus	19
By school bus	17
By bicycle	4
By rail/overground train	3
By underground train/metro	1
taxi	1
Private/special bus/coach	*
Other specific answer	*
Unweighted N	2215

Base: All respondents.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

⁶¹ 2007 Code of Admissions.

⁶² 1% gave other answers.

Most parents whose child used a school bus reported that the main criterion for using it was the distance from home to school. Religion was mentioned as a criterion by 8% of parents.

Table 3.56: Criteria for using school bus for current school according to parent report

Criteria for using school bus	Column %
Distance of home from school	73
Living near the bus route	10
All children entitled/no criteria for use	9
Religion	8
Low income	1
Special needs	1
Other specific answer	4
Vague or irrelevant answer	2
Unweighted N	385

Base: Respondents whose child uses the school bus.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

Overall, 65% of parents were very satisfied with their child's travel arrangements and 22% were fairly satisfied. These figures varied according to the form of transport used with the highest levels of satisfaction expressed by those whose child walked to and from school. The lowest level of satisfaction was expressed by parents whose child took a public bus to travel to and from school.

Table 3.57: Satisfaction with travel arrangements to and from current school by mode of transport

Mode of transport	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Row % Unwt N
Walk only	88	10	1	1	1	670
Car only	50	25	9	10	7	318
Public transport bus only	37	34	4	12	13	305
School bus only	61	28	4	6	1	314
All respondents	65	22	4	6	4	2215

Base: All respondents.

Of the parents who were dissatisfied with their child’s travel arrangements, the main reasons were that they had to pay travel costs, were worried about their child’s safety and thought the quality of public transport was poor.

Table 3.58: Reasons for parental dissatisfaction with current travel arrangements

Reasons for dissatisfaction	Column %
Have to pay travel costs	39
Worried about child’s safety	29
Poor public transport (including timing, conditions)	27
Too far to travel	13
Long journey time	14
Issues with school bus (unreliable, crowded, expensive, smoking, bullying)	14
No school bus provided	5
Other specific answer	6
Vague or irrelevant	3
Unweighted N	226

Base: All respondents who expressed dissatisfaction with child’s current travel arrangements.

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 because multiple responses were allowed.

3.5.8 Summary

The findings in this section show that in 2006, as in 2000, most parents got the secondary school place that they wanted for their child. Information was generally felt to be good and the oversubscription criteria, when applicable, was generally felt to be capable of being understood. Accordingly, satisfaction with the system was generally high.

However, there was a minority of parents whose applications ended with disappointment. 16% were not offered a place at their first preference school (30% of parents in London). These parents were less satisfied with the admissions system than other parents. They were often dissatisfied with the school that they were allocated, although half of them said that they were more satisfied with the outcome once their child had started at the school. As in 2000, parents in London were less likely to be successful in their application and more likely to be dissatisfied than parents in other areas.

The survey found that most parents were very satisfied with the arrangements for their child's travel to secondary school. Parent's whose children could walk, or travel by school bus, were more satisfied than those who had to travel by car or public transport. This aspect of parental satisfaction may assume increased importance if proximity becomes less decisive in admissions criteria.

A minority of parents who were not offered their school of choice appealed. Parents who lost appeals tended to say that they were 'very dissatisfied' with the system and with the appeal procedure.

3.6 Chapter Summary

The survey presents a picture of parents' experiences of secondary school admissions that is broadly positive and comparable with the findings of the previous study in 2000.

The broadly positive experiences of more than two-thirds of parents can easily be summarised. These parents found that information about schools was accessible, adequate and useful. They found the application process to be reasonably straightforward and the choice of school quite easy to make, focusing as it did on their local school. The outcome of the process was satisfactory as 84% of parents were offered a place for their child at the school they had put as their first choice.

While parents generally felt well informed about schools, there was evidence that some parents had better access to knowledge than others. School prospectuses and brochures were in plentiful supply but were used more by better educated parents than less well educated parents. The internet was playing a growing role and parents who had easy access to the internet appeared to have significantly better access to information. However, the most highly valued information was obtained informally, through school visits and talking to other parents and school staff. These trends suggest that parents with poorer educational attainment, low internet access, poorer social networks and poorer information-gathering skills could be disadvantaged in the admissions process. It is important to stress that these findings only relate to access to the available information and we found no evidence that less well-educated parents or parents from less affluent socio-economic groups were disadvantaged in the applications because of their lower use of information. However, these findings clearly have relevance for the Choice Adviser initiative.

The survey identified some notable trends affecting a minority of parents. In areas where places were limited, particularly in London, parents were invited to express a larger number of preferences and did so, were more likely to apply to schools outside their local authority and were less likely to get a school of their choice. Special admissions arrangements, which will be more restricted under the new admissions code, increased the complexity of the process and were associated with increased special actions, such as coaching and extra tuition, by parents who were keen to improve their child's chances.

Proximity to schools was found to be central to the oversubscriptions criteria followed by many admissions authorities and parents had a good understanding of how this affected their chances of success. A fifth of parents had taken account of catchment areas the last time they moved home and those who hadn't done so were more likely to take other special actions to further their application. This established relationship between proximity and application success seems likely to be weakened as the new admissions code is implemented, with positive or negative consequences for some parents' satisfaction with the system. In this context, it is worth noting that parents' satisfaction with their child's travel

arrangements was greater when the child could walk or travel by school bus than when they had to travel by car or public transport.

Despite the majority position of parental satisfaction, there remained a small proportion of parents for whom the admissions process resulted in substantial disappointment and dissatisfaction. For these parents, dissatisfaction was generally focused on the outcome rather than the process.

4 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ADMISSIONS SYSTEM IN 2006: CURRENT OUTCOMES AND MEASURES OF THE SUCCESS OF ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS

4.1 Introduction

We identified at the beginning of this report some objectives against which the effectiveness of the admissions system can be measured. They broadly concerned procedural integrity and fairness, enabling parents to educate their children according to their views and contributing to every child having a good education while no child receives a better education at the expense of another. In this section we use the results of our mapping of admissions, the data provided about outcomes, and findings from other studies to look at how the present system fares in relation to these objectives.

The objectives were to:

- Provide a means by which those who consider admissions arrangements to be unfair can refer the matter to an independent adjudicator
- Provide an effective means for parents to appeal to an independent tribunal if they are unsatisfied with the outcome
- Provide access to clear and understandable information and criteria that are transparent, and seen to be objectively applied
- Satisfy parents' wishes as to how and where their children are to be educated
- Ensure that all parents are treated equally and schools do not covertly select students on the basis of social status or prior attainment
- Not inhibit the quality of education overall and, if possible, contribute to enhancing it
- Not allow the greater achievement of some children to be at the expense of others
- Contribute to social cohesion
- Not contribute to the harm inflicted by wholesale denigration of children and communities

4.2 Procedural efficiency, integrity and fairness

4.2.1 Key findings

- The system in 2006 was more efficiently managed and better co-ordinated than in 2000.
- In some areas the LA continued to co-ordinate admissions after the national offer date and in others this role ended at that point.
- The requirement to consult made compliance with the School Admission Code of Practice 2003 more likely

- Community and Voluntary Controlled schools and Academies were more likely than Foundation and Voluntary Aided schools to comply with the regulations and guidance stated in the 2003 School Admissions Code of Practice
- Voluntary Aided schools were the least likely to comply compared with all other types of school
- Procedural non-compliance is only a part of the reason for segregated intakes
- There was no evidence for the view that parents from lower socio economic groups are being denied access to popular schools just because they are less able to understand the admissions process.
- More educated parents were likely to access more information but very few parents felt they were lacking basic information about secondary schools
- There was no evidence that parents who were less educated had any reduced chance of gaining their first preference.

4.2.2 The co-ordination and regulation of admissions

The system in 2006 was more efficiently managed and better co-ordinated than in 2000. 99% of parents completed an application form for starting secondary school in 2006. The majority of respondents (97%) received a single offer for their child on the same day in March 2006. The co-ordination role of the Local Authority was important in delivering this efficiency giving them oversight of the needs of all children and parents. The legislation and guidance governing this co-ordination was aimed at ensuring a single offer.

The purpose of co-ordinated admission schemes is to establish mechanisms for ensuring, so far as reasonably practicable, that every parent of a child living in the LEA area who has applied for a school place in the 'normal admission round' receives an offer of one, and only one, school place on the same day. (School Admissions Code of Practice 2003 para 6.1)

Consequently, in the model timetables offered as guidance the co-ordination responsibility of LA's ceases after the national offer day of March 1st. In some areas this co-ordination role did end with the offer of places in March and, following that, each admission authority dealt with its own appeals and any other matters and no one had responsibility for the management of admissions and appeals across the whole area. In others it appeared that agreements had been reached that the LA should continue to have a role. There is evidence from previous research (Coldron et al 2002) that there is more likelihood that Foundation and Voluntary Aided schools are less likely to comply with the legislation and guidance on the management of appeals and that where the LA manages the process standards are higher. There is also a case for better co-ordination for in-year admissions. We were unable in this project to gather data as to how many LAs did or did not extend their co-ordination role. It would be of considerable interest to gather that data and to try gauge any consequences for parents, children and schools as a result.

It was not part of the project to gather data about admission forums or whether or not the schools had actually consulted but, assuming all schools consulted as required within the admission forum, this was likely to make compliance with the School Admission Code of Practice 2003 more likely overall because the greater transparency made timely objections more possible. However admission authorities were only required to have regard to the code and objections may not have been made against non-compliant proposals. These may partly explain the different levels of compliance we found but further research would need to be done to find how admission forums were working and how effective the consultation and objection process was in policing the system. Our data shows that the admission arrangements of Community and Voluntary Controlled schools and Academies as found in the composite prospectuses were more likely to comply with the regulations and guidance in the 2003 School Admissions Code of Practice than those of Foundation and Voluntary Aided schools.. This was particularly the case for Voluntary Aided schools – many more requested supplementary information other than to apply published criteria, fewer prioritised children in care and more made parental commitment a criterion. Each of these provided a means of covert selection of children. Although it is not possible to establish beyond doubt that this was a cause, it is the case that Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools have an intake that is more socially advantaged and has higher prior attainment than Community schools⁶³. It is not possible to say how much this non-compliance actually works against certain groups of parents gaining fair access to all schools but given the incentives schools have to select the easier to educate children⁶⁴ it is likely to make a contribution. The fact that Community comprehensive schools also differ markedly in their intake (Gibbons and Telhaj 2007) shows that segregation of intakes is not the result of these procedural issues on their own. The cumulative effect of these means of selection together with other factors is what maintains segregation, and we look at this in more detail in a later section.

4.2.3 Transparency, Information and the manageability of the process

If parents are to be able to make conscientious choices they need information about schools and they need to be able to manage the process. If some parents have more information or can manage the information and process better than others then there is a potential problem of equality of opportunity and for conscientious choice.

In the survey of parents in 2000 (Flatley et al 2001) nearly nine in ten parents (87%) said that they were satisfied they had all the information they needed to

⁶³ For the latest in a long line of studies that reveal that schools that are free to set their own admissions criteria have a more advantaged intake see Gibbons, S. and Telhaj, S. (2007).

⁶⁴ See section 2.7.2

help them choose a school. However only 57% of parents reported they knew about the oversubscription criteria of their schools. Parents in the higher occupational groups, who were owner occupiers, and educated to degree level were more likely to know. But, despite this, gaining their first preference school did not vary significantly by class.

The current parent survey seven years later also found that more educated parents were likely to access more information but that very few parents felt they were lacking basic information about secondary schools. 80% of parents who considered applying to over-subscribed schools said that the oversubscription criteria were easy to understand. Furthermore, there was no evidence that parents who were less educated had any reduced chance of gaining their first preference.

This suggests some caution about the claim that parents from less affluent socio-economic groups are failing to get into high performing schools because they are not as able as more affluent or well educated parents to *understand* the process and the information. They may have less adequate social networks to gain good references, or poorer writing skills that give clues as to their social status and educational attainment and therefore aid covert social selection. If, as the evidence suggests, all social groups are gaining their first preference schools in equal measure, but that a substantial proportion of social segregation persists in schools, then it seems that less advantaged parents are expressing first preference for schools with less socially advantaged intakes. This is more likely to be a result of having less financial capital to move to the catchment area of a school, or that they wish to go to schools within their own community, prioritising solidarity rather than rejection of people like themselves.

Nevertheless there are some interesting findings concerning information. Firstly, the analysis of the levels of complexity of the oversubscription criteria showed that, on each measure, Voluntary Aided schools are more complex than other types of schools. They have more OSCs, twice as many items per OSC and twice as many items in total. Secondly, some composite prospectuses do not reveal the subscription status of schools.

4.3 Diversity

4.3.1 Key findings

- It is important to distinguish the different rationales for diversity in debates about admissions. One arises from the right of parents to educate their children according to their views and beliefs and a second arises as a pre-requisite of an education market.
- Schools are diverse in many ways. For analytical purposes we identify four: Structural, Educational, Compositional and Reputational and each school will present a different mix of these
- There are significant differences in how, and how far, parents can gain information about them
- Structural diversity has increased significantly.

- It is difficult to judge whether educational diversity has increased or decreased. The evidence available suggests a decrease.
- Other studies show that while grammar and secondary modern schools are at the extremes of segregation by attainment, all types of schools differed in this way. Social segregation nationally has not significantly increased since the introduction of more parental choice in 1988. Despite there being no *overall* increase, segregation is increasing in specific *localities* particularly in London and other densely populated areas. Most children live in White-majority areas and attend schools where there is a White-majority of students. Approximately one-tenth of students attend schools with a non-White majority but with a significant White minority. A small proportion of students attend schools where one minority group predominates. There has been no increase in ethnic segregation between schools other than that explained by the increase in the BME school population. The minority population is not evenly spread across all LAs, but is concentrated in a few areas. In these enclaves there are schools where the students are almost exclusively White and others where they are almost exclusively from minority communities.
- Social segregation is higher in areas where: the population is more dense, there is a greater number of schools nearby, there is structural and religious diversity between schools, there are more schools that are their own admission authority, the area is one of the 14 most selective.
- While it is important to have identified the extent of diversity on each separate dimension, there are important inter-connections between them.
- How schools differ in reputation is extremely salient to parents' expression of preferences but it is not amenable to measurement.

4.3.2 Kinds of diversity

There are two reasons for considering diversity. Firstly, satisfying parents' wishes as to how and where their children are to be educated requires appropriately different *kinds* of schools and enough of each kind actually available. Secondly, a diversity of providers is relevant to a policy of raising overall school quality through the operation of a quasi-market. It is important to emphasise that these reasons are different. The first arises from the liberal egalitarian view of society and the need to provide for the autonomy of individuals. It is therefore about giving as much room as possible that is compatible with social cohesion and respect for others. It is an argument underpinning the existence of faith schools but would also be relevant to other differences in the curriculum, educational approach and composition of a school. The second kind of diversity is aimed at removing monopolies and provider capture by introducing competition. Advocates of the market argue that the two are connected in that by making school survival dependent on what parents want, while enabling schools to respond, will eventually provide optimum diversity and optimum satisfaction. It is relevant therefore to ask, How much diversity is there and what is the range of schools from which parents can actually choose?

Firstly however we need to be clear about what we want to mean by diversity. This varies in current debate depending on the focus, and the often polemical role the concept of diversity plays in popular, political or academic debates. What we might

call *structural diversity* is emphasised in relation to the introduction of a greater variety of providers of schools which is, in turn, justified by reference to the market concepts of provider capture and competition, the empirical claim that parents want more choice and to the liberal concept of free choice to protect the autonomy of the individual. *Educational diversity* is emphasised where the focus is on school performance or the right of parents to choose a religious education or the individual needs of the pupil. Diversity of intake or *compositional diversity* is emphasised in discussions of educational equality or the fairness of the admissions system. Each of these is, potentially, of considerable significance to parents and any study of parental responses or attitudes to diversity needs to take account of all of these kinds⁶⁵.

We distinguish the following kinds of diversity

Structural Diversity which includes

- how the school is governed i.e. constitutional arrangements
- how the school is financed
- who is held accountable and how
- who has control over staff employment and the material assets of the school.

Educational diversity which includes

- what the school teaches
- how the teachers teach/the educational experience of the children
- exam performance
- ethos
- educational principles
- organisation for learning (e.g. mixed ability or setting)

Compositional diversity (diversity of intake) which includes

- sex
- ability/attainment on entry
- religion
- socio-economic group
- ethnicity

Reputational diversity

- a judgement conferred by groups of parents, or communities about the quality and status of the school in relation to others

⁶⁵ A fuller version of these arguments can be found in the discussion paper commissioned by the RISE (Research into State Education) Trust (Coldron 2007)

The first three capture actual differences between schools, by which we mean differences that are either part of the formal constitution of a school, or are (at least in theory) capable of being objectively evidenced. They are attributes of the school. The *reputation* of a school can not be so evidenced but is an extremely significant contribution to a parent's decision. Previous studies (Gewirtz et al 1995; Ball and Vincent 1998; Which 2005) found that when parents are asked what it is about schools that most informs their choices the different reputations of schools are highly significant. The parent survey for this study confirmed the importance of reputation for parents with it being the most frequently cited reason for wanting their preferred school. However, we do not know what parents mean by reputation⁶⁶. For each parent it is likely to be an amalgam of many things and it is clearly affected by the other kinds of diversity while being different from them.

Each school will present a different mix of structural, educational, compositional and reputational diversity. Gaining adequate information about these kinds of diversity is important for parents but some kinds of diversity may more easily be discerned by parents than other kinds. The varieties of structural diversity are evident, if parents are interested in looking for them, some aspects of educational diversity such as exam performance can be got from the league tables and aspects of compositional diversity such as single sex or religious affiliation are to be found in school admission criteria. However, it is not so easy objectively to know the average social status of the intake of a school but, judgements are never the less made on the basis of characteristics such as area of residence and the look and behaviour of the children attending. It is far from straightforward to judge the quality of teaching and management and their effect on the educational attainment of the children even with OFSTED reports and the measures of value added. It is next to impossible, even with intimate experience over a period of time, to know how all the teachers teach, or what the day to day experience of the children is likely to be. Further, even the most informed observer could not predict, even broadly, what an individual child's experience is going to be in a particular school. There are simply too many unknowns and variables at play including people's idiosyncratic responses and the myriad of personal/professional relationships. In the following sections we assess the level of each kind of diversity.

4.3.3 Structural diversity

Since 1988 there has been an increase in the variety of forms of governance and types of school. Prior to the reforms of the Conservative governments from 1988 to 1997 local government was the sole financier of state schools. In order to

⁶⁶ Previous studies on other criteria that parents frequently cite such a *happiness of their child* (Coldron and Boulton 1991) and *discipline* ; (Coldron and Boulton 1996) have shown how varied these vague but important criteria are.

introduce a quasi-market some schools opted to be independent of the local authority while still being fully financed from public funds. The subsequent Labour governments from 1997 have continued a policy of greater diversity of providers. There are now the five types of school in the sector as described earlier (section 2.2.1) and a sixth, Trust schools, is proposed in the new legislation⁶⁷. There are some authorities where all schools are Community (e.g. Cornwall) and some where they are all either Voluntary Aided or Foundation or Academies (e.g. Brent). Academies, while only a small proportion of all schools, are targeted at particular areas where parental preference is likely to be more polarised. These new types of school are likely therefore to have a considerable impact within those areas. An important aspect of structural diversity is thought to be that the different providers should be their own admission authority and able, in consultation with other admission authorities in the area, to set their own admission arrangements.

There is no doubt therefore that this kind of diversity has been enhanced over the last decade but the evidence from the parent survey suggests that it is not an important factor in parents' choice of school. As we will see in later sections this kind of diversity is associated with less effectiveness on measures of parental satisfaction and of segregation and the evidence from the literature suggests that there has been little or no gain in overall attainment that is attributable to the competition between providers.

4.3.4 Educational diversity

As structural diversity has been enhanced there has been a concerted attempt to decrease the educational differences between schools. Successive governments have sought to make all schools high performing as measured by examination results. They have also prescribed more closely what goes on in secondary schools through the National Curriculum, the Literacy and Numeracy strategies, high stakes inspections (including the new 'light touch') that judge schools according to a strict framework laying down the criteria for success, the personalisation agenda and encouragement to set according to ability.

There is evidence that greater competition between schools leads to greater homogenisation. The PASC study (Woods et al 1998) found that schools tend to 'privilege' the academic aspects of their provision over other parts of the educational mission. They also try to appeal to a broad group of parents rather than focusing on a niche and they do not try to be sharply distinct from other schools. There seemed to be little incentive to innovation. Schools therefore tended to converge rather than offer something different.

⁶⁷ Education and Inspections Bill 2006

More recently the work of Fielding et al (2005) on the transfer of good practice supported this earlier finding of Woods et al (1998). They found that competition between schools tended to inhibit innovation and risk taking. Stakes were high because of the prevalent 'badging' of institutions where explicit comparison of schools was encouraged using a small number of linear dimensions such as exam performance. This led to schools being categorised for policy purposes (as Beacon schools for example), and therefore labelled or 'badged' publicly, as superior or inferior. They concluded that:

staff and schools will not take risks if the consequences of doing so are likely to adversely affect their identity, their jobs, the continued well-being of the schools in which they teach and the young people whom they serve. (p73)

While these government actions and their effects have worked to reduce educational diversity one major initiative has been introduced as the means to enhance it –specialist schools. Specialist schools offer educational diversity in so far as they offer relatively high standards of teaching and of exam performance in the area of specialism (Castle and Evans 2006). However, there is no way that parents would be able to identify what form that excellent teaching took apart from the assumed connection with results. Being a specialist school provides no information about educational organisation, teaching methods, ethos, or educational principles and, because all specialist schools are required to teach the full curriculum, there is no difference in what the school teaches. However, where the school is over-subscribed and selects 10% by aptitude in the specialist subjects, it is likely to have a marginally more advantaged intake than neighbouring schools (West and Hind 2003). The parent survey found that 5% of parents spontaneously mentioned subject specialism when asked why they wanted a place in their preferred school.

One of the most important considerations for parents is the educational experience of their children in the school of their choice, but parents do not make sharp distinctions between the educational experience and the emotional and social experience (Coldron and Boulton 1991; Coldron and Boulton 1996). Parents are sensitive to the 'feel' of a school and the respondents to the parent survey reported that the most useful source of information was school visits where they could experience at first hand the ethos of a school and the approach to education and the care of their children. There was little emphasis on schools' organisation for learning by respondents in the parent survey either in their reasons for preferring or avoiding a school. This may point to a lack of any shared public language to talk about and identify significant aspects of school and the educational experience of children. Helping to enrich discussion between all stakeholders and particularly parents about educational diversity and how it affects the experience of their children would be a prerequisite to parents being able to take full advantage of the existence of educational differences between schools.

4.3.5 Compositional diversity

Differences in the intake of schools have been the focus of criticism about the fairness of educational provision and the admissions processes (West and Hind

2003; Lupton 2004; Coldron 2005; Gibbons and Telhaj 2007; Webber and Butler 2007; Gordon and Monastiriotis 2007). There is a great deal of theoretical and empirical work that points to this being one of the most important criteria for parents and why it matters a great deal to them who their children's peers will be (Holme 2002; and Ball 2003 for an overview). There is overwhelming evidence of the social and attainment segregation of intakes which is a predicted outcome of these explanations. However when parents were asked in our parent survey about their reasons for choice only 10% volunteered social composition. However 33% cited the correlated feature of good exam results, and 59% the socially influenced perceptions of discipline/behaviour and reputation. The same pattern is found when asked about why they rejected their nearest school – 21% poor exam results, and 59% the socially influenced perceptions of discipline/behaviour and reputation. The following sections look at the evidence of compositional diversity in English secondary schools.

Single sex and co-education

A minority (13%) of all secondary schools have a single sex intake with slightly more schools for girls to be educated on their own than for boys. A significantly larger proportion of Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools (23% and 20% respectively) are single sex compared to Community and Voluntary Controlled schools where the proportion is only 8%⁶⁸.

⁶⁸ DfES data <http://www.edubase.gov.uk/>

Table 1: Proportions of each type of school with single sex intake

	Comm*	%	VA	%	Found	%	All	% of All
Girls	106	5	63	12	54	10	223	7
Boys	65	3	59	11	53	10	177	6
Total	171	8	122	23	107	20	400	13

*Includes Voluntary Controlled schools

Ability/attainment on entry

There are 43 local authorities with some schools that select all (grammar schools) or part (partially selective schools) of their intake by general ability as measured in a test. 22 of these local authorities have fewer than 10% selective places. While this level of selection will not be without local effect on the intake of some neighbouring schools, particularly in self-contained urban areas, it may be considered a low level of selection especially in rural authorities.

As we have seen in section 2.5 there are 8 Local Authorities with more (some considerably more) than 25% of selective places and the remaining 75% plus attend what are in effect secondary modern schools although a number of different names are now used. In addition there are 6 other authorities where the proportion of selective places is over 18%. There are six other authorities where there are some grammar schools but they take less than 18% of the admissions in the area but more than 10%. Here, all other schools are comprehensive, there is no authority wide 11+ exam and the comprehensive schools aspire to an all ability intake. The existence of the grammar schools in these areas sometimes means that sub-areas, for example Colchester in Essex and Salisbury in Wiltshire, are effectively wholly selective because parents have little practical choice but to choose within that area. In other areas, such as Calderdale and Plymouth, the effect is less but intake of the comprehensives is still significantly affected because the majority of the highest attaining pupils are taken by the grammars thus skewing the attainment range of the remainder.

In a recent analysis Gibbons and Telhaj (2007) confirmed that, while grammar and secondary modern schools are at the extremes of segregation by attainment, all types of schools differed in this way, including schools in areas with no selective places. They found no evidence that the level of attainment segregation had increased between 1996 and 2002 but there were interesting differences between types of school. Voluntary Aided, and to a lesser extent Foundation, schools generally draw higher-attaining pupils with a narrower range of attainment than in their local area overall. They also found evidence that, on the part of Voluntary Aided schools, it is more likely to be because the schools are in some way selecting (p1297). Specialist schools also seemed to attract slightly higher-attaining pupils.

Religious affiliation

Approximately 15% to 16% of schools offer an explicitly religious character and prioritise entry of children of the faith. In 2006 two thirds of these were Roman Catholic and about one third Church of England with a very small proportion of other religions.

Table 2

Maintained secondary schools designated as religious (excluding academies)⁶⁹

Religion	n	% of all religious schools	% of all secondary schools
Roman Catholic	334	63	10
Church of England	163	31	5
Other Christian	20	4	1
Jewish	9	2	0
Muslim	3	1	0
Sikh	1	0	0
Seventh Day Adventist	1	0	0
Total	531	100.0	16

All but six local authorities have faith schools. The six that do not are predominantly rural⁷⁰.

Socio-economic grouping

There has been a great deal of debate about the level of social segregation between schools (Gibson and Asthana 2000; Goldstein and Noden 2003; Gorard 2002). Much of the debate has focused on the increase or decrease of such segregation and the causes. For example, whether or not this was as a result of the marketisation of education, and what role is played by residential segregation and interaction with admission policies. There has also been a great deal of discussion about the most appropriate means of measuring segregation. This has focused on technical differences in the mathematical modelling of segregation.

Despite the heated debate there are key points of agreement on the facts although not necessarily on the interpretation of those facts. Firstly, social segregation

⁶⁹ DfES data for 2006 <http://www.edubase.gov.uk/>

⁷⁰ The six LAs without religious schools are Cornwall, North Somerset, Rutland, Shropshire, South Gloucestershire and Wokingham.

nationally has not significantly increased since 1988. Secondly; social segregation is higher in areas where:

- the population is more dense
- there is a greater number of schools nearby
- there is structural and religious diversity between schools
- there are more schools that are their own admission authority
- the area is wholly selective.

Recent work by Allen and Vignoles (2006) provides evidence that, despite there being no *overall* increase, segregation is increasing in specific *localities* particularly in London and other densely populated areas. Their segregation curve approach to measuring segregation also helpfully highlights the different patterns of separation that occur in different LAs. For example, for three LAs with the same Dissimilarity index (a measure of overall segregation) one may have a small proportion of schools with a predominantly high socio-economic intake with all of the others equally sharing the remaining students (Advantage segregation), while another LA might have a small number with a predominance of low socio-economic students (Disadvantage segregation) while a third has a smooth continuum of segregation from most to least segregated. These different patterns would pose significantly different contexts of choice for parents. In this report we have used both measures D and Skew in analysing segregation.

Ethnicity

Schools differ in terms of their ethnic composition and this is strongly connected to the level of residential segregation. Johnston et al (2006a) found that for most people, the norm is that they live in White-majority areas and attend schools where there is a White-majority of students. However, approximately one-tenth of students attend schools with a non-White majority but with a significant White minority. They also found that only a small proportion of students attend schools where one minority group predominates. They conclude that across England as a whole,

...(1) both Blacks and South Asians are substantially more segregated in schools than they are in neighbourhoods; and (2) South Asians are more segregated than Blacks. p8

Nationally, there has been no increase in ethnic segregation between schools other than that explained by the increase in the BME school population (Johnston et al 2006b). It is the case however that the minority population is not evenly spread across all LAs, but is concentrated in a few areas:

...the presence of ethnic enclaves is a feature not only of London and other large cities (especially Birmingham) but also a number of other urban centres which have attracted substantial numbers of migrants in recent decades. p15

In these enclaves there are schools where the students are almost exclusively White and others where they are almost exclusively from minority communities.

This, together with the finding that segregation of school populations is greater than the residential segregation in the area, suggests that post-residential processes such as admissions procedures and parental choice may be part of the explanation. In terms of the ethnic composition of schools, significant diversity is evident only in this minority of areas.

4.3.6 The inter-connection of dimensions of diversity

While it is important to identify the extent of diversity on each separate dimension, there are important inter-connections between them. For example Voluntary Aided schools are associated with compositional diversity by religion but also by social-composition with voluntary aided schools having fewer children on free school meals than other schools in the area. Research conducted for the Sutton Trust (Sutton Trust 2006), found that in voluntary aided (faith) schools, the average proportion of pupils on free school meals was 5.6% compared with 14.6% for the surrounding areas. Other examples of inter-connection are where Pakistani and Bangladeshi families are over-represented in the lower socio-economic groups; and, schools with intakes largely drawn from the lower socio-economic groups are more likely to have a relatively poor exam performance.

4.3.7 Reputational Diversity

With each of the other kinds of diversity we asked the question “How much of this diversity exists?” and the way to answer seemed more or less straightforward. With this fourth category it is not so obvious. One way to operationalise the concept is whether or not a school is over or under-subscribed. If we take it that a school with an excellent reputation is equated with it being highly desired by parents *relative* to other schools in the area then, where a school is over-subscribed this would indicate a relatively high reputation and vice versa. Since we are concerned to measure diversity within parents' actual field of choice this would be a good measure. As we have seen from the results of our study of the composite prospectuses this information is not currently available across the country.

However there is strong evidence that this kind of diversity exists in many areas, is accessible to parents in their field of choice (Ball and Vincent 1998; Which 2005), and that in particularly urban areas there is a remarkable consensus on a hierarchy of desirability on the basis of reputation (Coldron 2005). It is also extremely salient to parents' expression of preferences - in the current parent survey the most often cited reason for choosing or rejecting a school was reputation.

4.3.8 The number of schools from which parents can choose?

Other things being equal it seems reasonable to assume that parents would wish to choose a school within comfortable travel distance. Defining nearby schools as those within a 10 minute drive of the place of residence, Burgess et al (2004) estimated that Londoners had around 17 schools nearby, parents in other urban areas about 7 and those in rural areas 1. While parents can legally choose any school, in reality the practicalities of travel, the admissions criteria of schools and

parents' own preferences, radically restrict the range from which they feel they can effectively choose. It is therefore not surprising that some parents complain that there is no real choice (Which Report 2005) and that the theoretically available schools translate into two or three 'real' choices.

In the parent survey for this study 81% of parents said they were very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the choice of schools in their locality. Satisfaction was lowest among parents living in London even though they appear to have more schools to choose from. The nationally representative survey for the *Parents' Experience of Choosing a Secondary School* project (Flatley et al 2001) found that 28% of the respondents said their child did not attend their nearest school. This is lower than current estimates. For example DCSF figures based on the School Census Data supplied to the authors suggest about 50% of pupils overall (but varying by FSM status and geographical location) travel further than their nearest school⁷¹. In the parent survey for this current study 25% of parents reported that they *did not apply* to what they considered to be their nearest maintained school.

4.4 How satisfied are parents?

4.4.1 Key findings

- Appeals heard increased up to a peak in 2000/01 and then have steadily declined⁷².
- The decreases in the level of appeals appears to be evidence that the various codes on admissions have had a beneficial effect.
- When other factors are controlled, appeal rates are higher in Local Authorities with lower proportions of pupils with English as a first language; not based in London; with higher population density; with a higher school segregation score (D); that are one of the 14 most selective
- The evidence of the parent survey is that there are no significant differences in the social characteristics of those who make appeals
- In 2006 about 85% of parents gained their first expressed preference.
- Nationally 93% of parents gained either their first or second preference
- The first preference figure has remained fairly consistent since 2000. It is also a consistent finding that the percentages are lower in London with around 70% gaining first preference and about 82% gaining either their first or second preference

⁷¹ Burgess et al (2007) also suggest a higher figure see Burgess S., McConnell, B., Propper, C. and Wilson, D. (2007) *The Impact of School Choice in England: Implications from the economic evidence*. Policy Studies, Vol. 28, No 2

⁷² Data from DCSF Statistical First releases

- The great majority of parents nationally are satisfied with the outcome of the admission arrangements but there can be considerable variations between areas
- First preference rates are higher in LAs with: lower population density; lower proportions of autonomous schools; higher proportions of pupils with English as a first language; lower rates of cross border movement (imports and exports); fewer admission authorities; that use the first preference first system of coordination; and have a lower school segregation score (D):
- On average just over 1% of parents did not apply for a school on the Common Application Form.

4.4.2 Results of the appeals measure

Appeals give a good indication of the level of parents' satisfaction with the outcome of the admission arrangements. A fair system would allow appeal against decisions. In such a complex system of allocation, under tight deadlines where people have strong feelings about the outcomes, there will always be appeals. But where the level of appeals is too high or rising this is a sign either that the procedures are not working effectively or that the issues presented to it are inherently problematic and perhaps insoluble, or both. In any case, appeals gives a broad indication of overall effectiveness of admissions and of parental satisfaction.

The trend of appeals over time

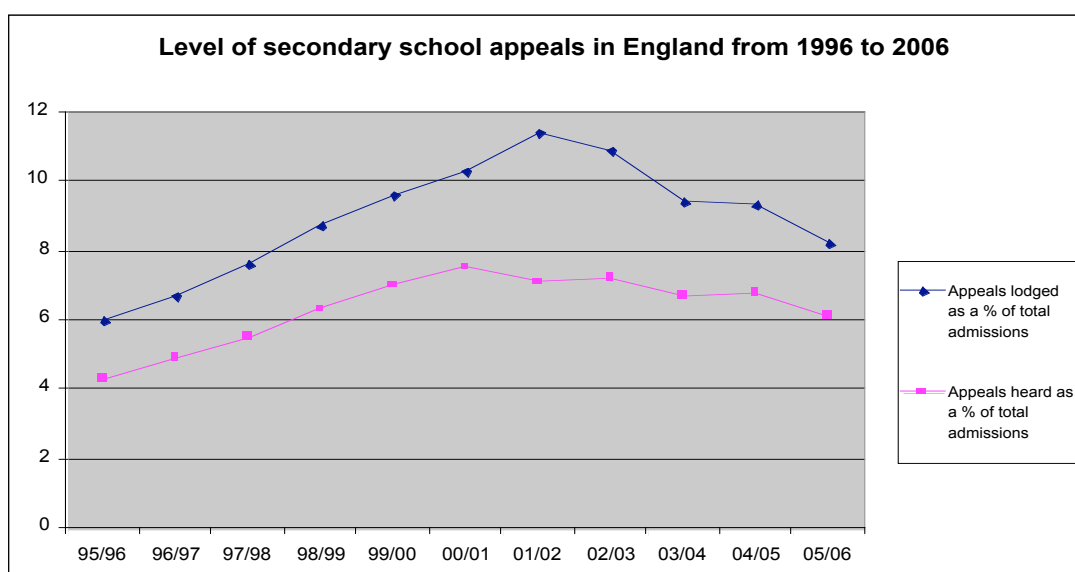
We analysed data on appeals down to LA level for all years since 1995⁷³. Parents who are unhappy with the result of their application notified on March 1st may at that point notify the admission authority that they wish to appeal. These are the number of appeals lodged. On average about two or three percent of the problems raised by parents are resolved before the need for the Admissions Panel to be asked to make a ruling. There are therefore two measures of appeals, those lodged and those heard. We report on both measures when looking at the trend since 1995/96.

⁷³ All figures used in the Tables 3, 4 and 5 are calculated from DCSF Statistical First releases except for the figures for 2002 and 2003 which were calculated from figures supplied separately by DCSF.

Table 3: Appeals lodged and heard against non-admission of children to maintained secondary schools in England 1995/96 – 2005/06

	95 /96	96 /97	97 /98	98 /99	99 /00	00 /01	01 /02*	02 /03*	03 /04	04 /05	05 /06
Appeals lodged as a % of total admissions	6.0	6.7	7.6	8.7	9.6	10.3	11.4	10.9	9.4	9.3	8.3
Appeals heard as a % of total admissions	4.3	4.9	5.5	6.3	7.0	7.5	7.1	7.2	6.7	6.8	6.1

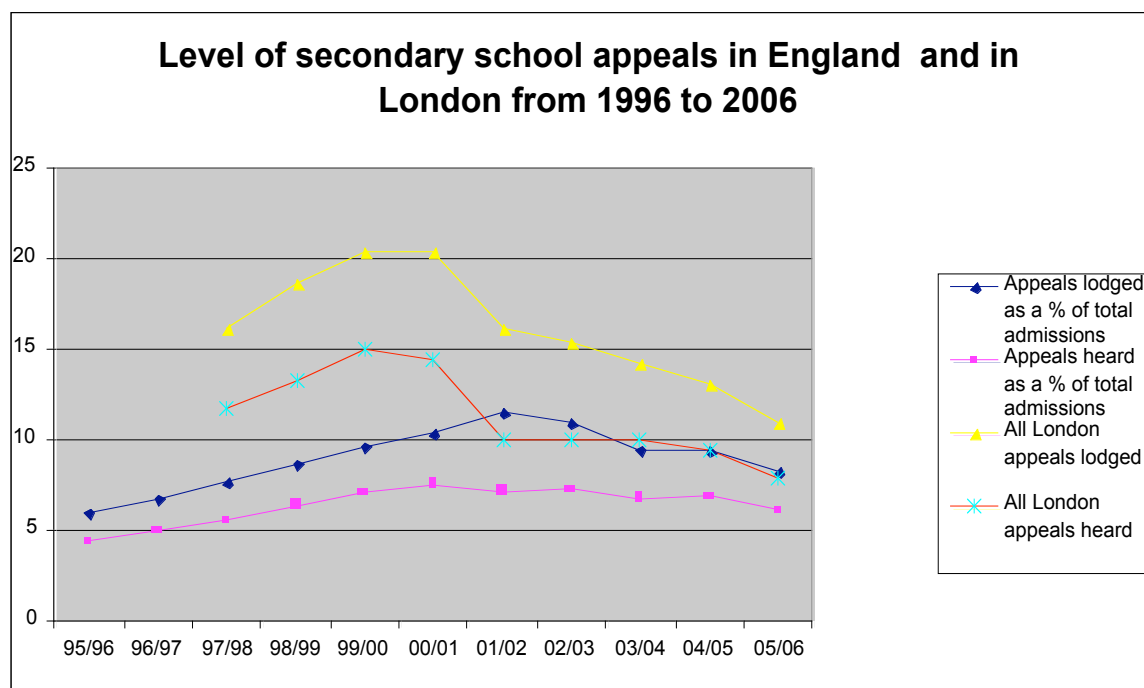
Table 4



When figures for all schools are combined, both measures show a similar upward trend for appeals up to a peak in 2000/01 for those heard and in 2001/02 for appeals lodged and then a decline to 2005/06 the latest date for which figures are available. 2001/02 was the second year after the first full code on admissions came into force. A further decrease coincides with the second code on admissions that was published in 2003 and was implemented voluntarily by some authorities in September 2004 with all authorities required to comply by September 2005. It appears to be evidence that these codes had a positive effect on this measure.

The results for London authorities follow a slightly different pattern. They are consistently higher than the average for all English authorities on both measures and they peak in 1999/00 and 2000/01. Since that time there has been a sharp decrease and, while the level is still higher than the English average, the gap is smaller than previous years.

Table 5



The first cohort to be affected by the pan-London scheme was that entering Year 7 in 2005. It will be interesting to see if this coincides with further reductions in London's rate of appeals in future years.

Factors associated with the level of appeals

In order of importance, when other factors are controlled, appeal rates are *higher* in LAs

- *with lower proportions of pupils with English as a first language*: Higher rates of appeals are found in LAs with lower concentrations of pupils with English as their first language. Expressing the pattern in percentage units, if two LAs were identical on all other measures but differed in their concentrations of pupils with English as their first language by 10 percentage points, the one with the higher concentration would be expected to have lower rates of appeals (by between 1 and 2 percentage points).
- *not based in London*: Once other factors are controlled for, being located in London seems to have an additional negative impact on appeal rates (there are lower rates of appeals in London). This is somewhat surprising considering the impact of high population density with all but 3 (Bromley, Havering & Hillingdon) of the 32 London LAs having population densities above the 75th centile. For the other 29 London LAs, the (negative) impact of population density is cancelled out by the (positive) impact of being located in London.
- *with higher population density*: Population density remains positively correlated with rates of appeals once other factors are controlled for. On average, rates of appeals for LAs with a population density above the 75th centile were higher by 4 percentage points in 2005 and 2 percentage points in 2006.
- *with a higher school segregation score (D)*: Higher rates of school segregation are associated with higher appeal rates

- *that are one of the 14 most selective*: Whether an LA was highly selective or not seems to have an impact on appeal rates once other factors are controlled for. On average, rates of appeals for the 14 most selective LAs were higher by about 2 percentage points in 2005 and 2006.

It has been suggested (Taylor et al 2001) that advantaged parents, being more active in choosing a school, are more likely to appeal but the evidence of the 2001 parent survey and the current parent survey is that there are no significant differences in the social characteristics of those who make appeals. This should not be surprising. When the individual experience of the appeal process for parents is understood (Coldron et al 2002), reasons become evident as to why we might expect disadvantaged parents to appeal. Making an appeal is hard work and often distressing and the odds of winning an appeal are only about 1 in 3. The fact that advantaged parents have greater social educational and financial resources to devote to the management of the admission process would suggest that they would less often reach the appeal stage. Conversely, parents who have fewer such resources will less often get the place they wanted and are therefore more likely to have to appeal. There is no doubt that some advantaged parents use appeals as a means of maximising their options and that some disadvantaged parents are disengaged altogether from the process. The variation in the number of appeals reflects the greater complexity and competition for school places in densely populated areas.

4.4.3 Results as to which of their expressed preferences applicants received

Although we gained data, and report below, on which of their preferences parents gained we argued in section 1.1.4 that only the proportion of first preferences gained by applicants in each Local Authority gives a reliable indication of the satisfaction level of the cohort of applicants to that authority. However the figures for those receiving their second preference and of those who received one of their expressed preferences are also of interest and are reported here. The subjective responses from the nationally representative sample of parents as to how satisfied they were with the outcome and which of their preferences they gained also give important measures of satisfaction.

The rank of preferences that parents gained

The data set compiled from the returns from the request to all Local Authorities contains detail for 106 (72%) of the 148 local authorities. This was a disappointing response. Given the importance of this measure we conducted a missing value analysis for the 42 authorities (Appendix B). Across all 148 Local Authorities there were a total of 686,079 admissions. The 106 Local Authorities dealt with 510,570 of these admissions (74%) of which 441,398 (86%) got their first preference secondary school. This measure is very close to the percentage (84%) of parents who reported in the nationally representative survey that they had been offered the school that they had ranked on the common application form as their first preference. A parent survey in 2005 (Which 2005) found that 89% of parents got their first preference school.

The changes in the procedure since 2000 mean that we must be cautious in making comparison. In 2000, parents could apply to a number of different authorities and therefore put different schools as an expressed first preference. It was just this that the School Admission Code of Practice 2003 was intended to eliminate. The 2000 survey (Flatley et al 2001) asked which, of all of the schools for which they had expressed a preference, was the parents' favourite. In 2003 parents only applied on one form and therefore their expressed first preference was their favourite in the terms of the earlier survey and the one that the current measure should be compared with and not what the 2000 survey called 'expressed first preference'. None of these figures is definitive but it seems safe to conclude that in 2006 around 85% of parents gained their first expressed preference and that this figure has remained fairly consistent since 2000. It is also a consistent finding that the percentage is lower in London at around 70%⁷⁴.

The percentage of parents gaining either their first or second expressed preference was 93%. The 93% figure, whilst taking into account the caveats expressed about assuming that the second choice is equally acceptable, might reasonably be taken as an indication of satisfaction albeit less robust than the figures for gaining first preference. This measure of those gaining either first or second preference is roughly comparable with the 2000 survey measure of a first preference offer. In the system in operation in 2000 parents had to apply separately to different local authorities and/or admission authorities. They would therefore have more than the single ranked lists of preferences required in 2006 and consequently would have had more than one school that could be described as their 'first preference' school. While they might have had a favourite school among these expressed first preferences they had expressed a positive preference for all of them. In so far as one can assume that the first and second preferences on the 2006 Common Application Form are positive preferences then the 2000 and 2006 measures are comparable. With those assumptions in mind we note that the 2006 figure of 93% for those gaining first or second preference is very close to the 92% of parents in 2000 who reported receiving a 'first preference' offer. This is a national average and there are considerable variations between areas. The figure for London parents is lower with an estimated 82% gaining their first or second preference.

Factors associated with higher or lower proportions gaining their first preference

Bearing in mind the differences between the Local Authorities that responded and those that did not, the results of a multi-variate analysis were as follows. In order of importance, once other factors are controlled for, first preference rates are *higher* in LAs with:

⁷⁴ The Which report in 2005 and the 2000 parent survey put it at 68%.

- *Lower population density*: on average, rates of gaining first preference in LAs with a population density above the 75th centile were lower by 10 percentage points.
- *Lower proportions of autonomous schools*: on average, rates of gaining first preference in LAs where schools are predominantly autonomous are lower by about 10 percentage points
- *Higher proportions of pupils with English as a first language*: if two LAs were identical on all other measures but differed in their concentrations of pupils with English as their first language by 10 percentage points, the one with the higher concentration would be expected to have higher rates of gaining first preference (by about 1.7 percentage points).
- *Lower rates of cross border movement (imports and exports)*: LAs with high levels of cross border movement have lower rates of gaining first preference
- *Fewer admission authorities*: LAs with more admission authorities tend to have lower rates of gaining first preference.
- *That use the first preference first system of coordination*: on average, rates of gaining first preference in LAs that used the equal preference/default ranking system of coordination are lower by about 3 percentage points.
- *A lower school segregation score (D)*: Higher rates of school segregation are associated with lower first preference rates. For example, If two LAs were identical on all other measures but differed in their school segregation scores by 0.1, the one with the higher concentration would be expected to have lower rates of gaining first preference (by about 1.6 percentage points).

Being located in London does seem to have an additional negative impact on first preference rates when examining the full model. However, the vast majority of the 'London effect' is accounted for within the other variables (e.g. population density, cultural diversity, poverty & segregation etc.) and this variable can be excluded without reducing the model's explanatory power. Whether an LA was one of the 14 most selective or not contributed very little to the model and could be excluded without reducing the model's explanatory power.

Multi-variate analysis of the data in the parent survey also found that applying in a local authority where first preference first was the dominant preference system and being white were independently associated with parents being offered a place at their first preference school.

4.4.4 Acceptability of the school offered

The parent survey for this current study found that for 97% of parents who were interviewed the school they were offered was acceptable. Some may have accepted their offer even though they were not satisfied with it. The survey will also not have included those parents who found their offer unacceptable and opted for a private independent school. We do not know how many parents this applies to. Of the parents in maintained school who accepted the offer the great majority were satisfied with the current school attended by their child. As might be

expected the proportion of satisfied parents for whom this was their first choice school was higher (95%) than for those for whom it was not their first preference (82%). We may conclude that the great majority of parents in 2006 were satisfied with the outcome of the admission arrangements, but that there were significant regional variations.

4.4.5 Results on those who expressed no preference

Some authorities did not collect this information and only 79 (53%) authorities were able to give us the required data. These show that the average for these authorities was 1.3% with a maximum figure in one authority of 7.2% and a minimum of zero. The parent survey found that 1% of respondents had not applied for a school on the Common Application Form. The figures will include those who are missing because they opt for a private independent school those who have moved away from the area and a proportion who failed to fill in a form due to family stress or other reasons for being disengaged. These last are one of the groups of parents that the new Choice Advisers are intended to help. It is likely that this will be of considerable benefit to the individual parents targeted but, the small proportion is unlikely to have a significant impact on overall outcomes.

4.5 Efficiency of the procedures

4.5.1 Key findings

- The admission system is now more uniform across Local Authorities and more co-ordinated.
- The great majority of respondents (97%) received an offer for their child on the due date
- Parents' satisfaction with the process was generally high.

4.5.2 Co-ordination of the system

The admission system is now more uniform across Local Authorities and more co-ordinated. The measures introduced in the School Admission Code of Practice 2003 have reduced the dysfunctional variations and made the process more predictable for parents while preserving the ability of admission authorities to set their own criteria. Evidence of efficiency comes from the parents survey where the majority of respondents (97%) received an offer for their child on the same day in early March 2006 and where satisfaction with the process was generally high with over 90% of parents satisfied with the overall provision of information and the formal sources of information. An evaluation of the pan-London admissions scheme which embodied these changes (Pennell, West and Hind 2006) found that a high proportion (90%) considered that there were advantages of the scheme compared with the previous year and were satisfied with the number of preferences allowed, the liaison with local authorities, liaison with individual schools and with the timetable adopted. Over 80% thought the scheme had eliminated – or partially eliminated – multiple offers and reduced the numbers of children without places.

Further evidence suggesting that the School Admission Code of Practice 2003 had a beneficial impact is the downward trend of appeals beginning in 2004 (the first year of the implementation of the code's recommendations) following a peak in 2003.

4.6 How fair is the system?

4.6.1 Key findings

- Schools that are their own admission authority, particularly Voluntary Aided schools, used aspects of admission arrangements that lend themselves to covert social selection more than other schools.
- Grammar schools were more likely to have a socially segregated intake
- The most powerful driver of the social segregation of schools is residential segregation in combination with admission arrangements prioritising proximity.
- Segregation was much less in the three banded authorities than in comparable areas.
- The system in 2006 may have reduced covert selection but it did not eliminate it nor mitigate residential selection.

4.6.2 Introduction

A fair system would not only be procedurally objective but would contribute to every child having a good education. Bearing in mind the difficulty in separating what makes a successful school from the effect of its intake it remains that if all social groups had the same chances of getting into the most popular schools the intakes of those schools would reflect the proportions of social groups in the area. There would be no social segregation. The more social segregation of school intakes the less fair or equitable the system.

Further, a fair system would ensure that no child receives a better education at the expense of another. It is the case that children of all abilities perform better in the company of relatively advantaged peers and do worse in the company of those who are disadvantaged. It follows that where there are unbalanced intakes one group is gaining at the expense of another. Measures of segregation therefore indicate the level of this kind of fairness.

In addition, the system should not contribute to the harm inflicted by wholesale denigration of children and communities. Where already advantaged parents seek to avoid schools with a concentration of less advantaged children there is often an accompanying discourse of denigration and vilification that does considerable harm to children, schools and communities (Reay 2007; Holme 2002).

4.6.3 Segregation by socio-economic class

We reviewed previous evidence in section 4.3.5. Residential segregation (selection by mortgage) is one of the main causes of social segregation (Gordon and Monastiriotis 2007; Webber and Butler 2007). Another possibility that we do not explore here is that the social class of parents who are practising Christians is on average higher thus leading to the intake of faith schools being relatively socially segregated. A third is the active but covert social selection by schools through the use of a variety of means including the legitimate and illegitimate use of the admission process. We have seen that all schools have incentives to select children with a higher socio-economic background, but, only those that are already popular and therefore oversubscribed have the means to do it.

The Sutton Trust (Sutton Trust 2006) implicated admissions in the greater segregation of the 200 top performing comprehensive schools that are their own admission authorities. They found that there was a difference between schools that were their own admission authority (Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools) and those that were Community schools. The autonomous schools were highly unrepresentative of the geographical community within which they were located with 5.8 per cent of their pupils eligible for free school meals compared to 13.7 per cent of the pupils in their local area. By contrast, the Community schools in the top 200 were roughly representative of their area. The recent IPPR report (Tough and Brooks 2007) cited Allen as finding that more generally, schools that are their own admission authorities are much more likely to have 'high ability' children and in this sense to be more highly unrepresentative of their local areas than Community Schools. The same finding is reported by Webber and Butler (2007).

We found in this current study that schools that are their own admission authority, particularly Voluntary Aided schools, used more than other schools, aspects of admission arrangements that lend themselves to covert social selection. They more often:

- request supplementary information beyond the need to apply published criteria
- use oversubscription criteria that have the potential to socially discriminate
- select by aptitude
- use face to face meetings as part of the selection process
- have relatively complex arrangements
- have special application requirements about which parents had to be proactive

They less often:

- prioritised children in care or who had special educational needs

We also found that grammar schools were more likely to have a socially segregated intake and there is a strong correlation between prior attainment and social class in all schools. However, the most powerful driver of the social segregation of schools is residential segregation. The parent survey found that 22% of parents had taken catchment areas into account when they last moved

house. The proximity and catchment oversubscription criteria reinforce this while banding by attainment works to balance by social background as well as attainment. Segregation was much less in the banded authorities than in comparable areas.

The evidence suggests therefore that the system in 2006 may have reduced covert selection but it did not eliminate it nor mitigate residential selection. The School Admissions Code 2007 includes measures aimed at addressing social segregation and covert selection by schools. It will be important to measure the effect of these measures for future cohorts.

4.7 Do the current admission arrangements contribute to better levels of attainment?

4.7.1 Key findings

- There are three ways in which admissions might impact on attainment, through increased competition, through some children's higher attainment being at the expense of others' lower attainment as a result of social segregation and through selection to schools on the basis of attainment or aptitude.
- The evidence suggests that there is little if any increase in overall attainment as a result of competition and that some children are gaining at the expense of others.
- The evidence concerning selection and overall attainment levels is complex but it is clear that it contributes substantially to injustice of distribution without any significant balancing educational benefit.
- Selection by aptitude is not the same as selection by attainment to grammar schools. It has a significantly different meaning.

4.7.2 How admissions might impact on attainment

There are three ways in which admissions might impact on attainment. The first is through increased competition where advocates of the quasi-market argue that overall standards will improve if the admissions system supports a quasi-market in which schools must compete for popularity with parents. To be popular they must offer what parents want and it is implicitly assumed that parents want good schools which includes higher educational standards. The second kind of impact would be if some children's higher attainment was at the expense of others' lower attainment through the difficulties arising from social segregation of intakes. The third is selection to schools on the basis of attainment. A proper description of the working of the admissions system would want to be able to say whether or not these effects are found, their size and whether different arrangements reduce or increase the effects.

This is a complex task. As one recent report that reviewed the evidence for the first two kinds of impact on attainment put it:

We... face complex evidence about the impact of choice on segregation, the impact of segregation on the level and pattern of attainment, and the impact of competition on school performance. (Tough and Brooks 2007)

Following their review they concluded that:

- *the clearest link is between segregation and polarisation of results with evidence that peer effects in schools full of high-attaining pupils pull their results up further while peer effects in schools full of low-attaining pupils push them down further*
- *there is some evidence to suggest that segregation of pupils causes inefficiency in the school system*
- *there is little evidence that the introduction of choice-based admissions policies has increased levels of segregation*
- *while there is some evidence of a relationship between competition and school performance in the US, the evidence from England is not positive.*

The third way in which admissions might impact on attainment is selection by attainment or aptitude. Schagen and Schagen (2002; 2003a and 2003b) and Atkinson and Gregg (2004) found that while standards at school level (i.e. between grammar and secondary modern schools) were very different the standard at LEA level showed little difference compared with non-selective LEAs. However they are strongly associated with social segregation. Grammar schools are populated by the more affluent while secondary modern schools are populated by the less affluent. Just 5.8% of all pupils eligible for free school meals attend grammar schools compared to 26.4% of all other groups. Twelve percent of pupils in secondary modern schools are on free school meals and only 2% in grammar schools. Further, grammar school selection is not solely on the basis of ability. Atkinson and Gregg (2004) found that if you were of high ability but poor you would stand less chance of gaining a place with poorer children only half as likely to attend a grammar school as other children with the same underlying ability. This is compounded by grammar schools receiving more resources per child than secondary modern schools (Levacic, R. and Marsh A. 2007).

Evidence as to the link between social selection and accompanying educational advantage is also found at the international level. The PISA study looked at the different performance of national systems (OECD/UNESCO-UIS 2003). This study was concerned to investigate any relationship between school and student characteristics and student performance. They found that the socio-economic background of the school intake was much stronger than the effect of any other variable (Ch. 7 p219) and that academic selection is correlated with socio-economic segregation (Ch 7 p220). Selection by attainment therefore contributes substantially to injustice of distribution without any significant balancing educational benefit. It also imposes a widespread sense of failure on those who

are not 'selected' contributing to disrespect and social stigma of social groups and individuals (see Ireson and Hallam 2001 for an overview).

Our results show that there has been a growth in selection by aptitude. There are important differences between selection to specialist schools by aptitude and selection to a grammar school. The distinction we wish to draw is not on what is purported to be measured (it is difficult to find a definition of aptitude that is sufficiently distinct from ability) nor on the systematic bias toward selecting children from higher socio-economic families, but rather on the meaning or symbolic effect. Grammar schools maintain and reinforce a structural and symbolic hierarchy of schooling that contributes significantly to unequal outcomes and the kind of denigration described earlier. The narrative in which they are embedded is that of *ability* - an objectively verifiable, unchangeable and fateful attribute that evokes different life paths starting with being allocated to a grammar or secondary modern - and this narrative is imposed on all children within an area. It is experienced collectively as a member of the selected few or the rejected many. Specialist schools' selection by aptitude on the other hand is part of a different narrative - that of individual achievement and extraordinary talent.

Nevertheless both selection by aptitude and attainment allows some already popular schools to manage their intakes to include easier to educate children from already advantaged backgrounds. Wholly selective schools in particular are associated with higher social segregation, higher appeals and to a lesser extent lower proportions of parents getting their first preference. They are also associated with the denigration and low self esteem of the majority of children who are deemed to have 'failed' to be selected for the higher status school.

4.8 Summary

The system in 2006 was more efficiently managed, better co-ordinated and better regulated than in 2000. Procedures and regulations were fair and the opportunity was fully available to gain redress through appeal. However there was incomplete compliance with the regulations despite the presence of a clear system for making objection about non-compliant admission authorities. Nevertheless parents' satisfaction with the admissions process and outcomes was high with the great majority of parents nationally gaining either their first or second preference. A majority also expressed satisfaction with the school their child attends. There were however notable differences between areas.

Any perceived unfairness in the system does not seem to come from the inability of parents from lower socio-economic groups to understand the system or to gain their first preference school. There was no evidence for the view that parents from lower socio economic groups are being denied access because they are less able to understand the admissions process. While it was the case that more educated parents were likely to access more information very few parents felt they were lacking basic information about secondary schools. More importantly there was no evidence that parents who were less educated had any reduced chance of gaining their first preference. They are gaining access to the schools they want but they

are not the same ones as more advantaged parents. This again raises the question of how a good school should be defined.

Despite this high level of satisfaction across all social groups and the well drafted and comprehensive regulations for policing admissions the evidence suggests that the outcomes of the system are in some important respects still unfair. For some schools, especially those that are Voluntary Aided or Foundation or selective, there is an accumulation of factors (some to do with admissions and some not) that lead to them having more socially advantaged intakes than other schools, particularly those that are Community or Voluntary Controlled. This segregation of intakes means that some, already advantaged, children have the considerable educational benefit of being with predominantly socially advantaged peers while other, already disadvantaged, children have the further educational handicap of being predominantly with harder to educate, peers. One group's higher average attainment is at the expense of the other group's lower average attainment. While the admission arrangements have not made segregation of intakes worse, neither have they managed yet to substantially mitigate the problem which arises from patterns of behaviour deeply embedded in our social structure and expressed, for example, through residential segregation which directly affects admissions.

This study gathered no direct evidence about the wholesale denigration of children and communities that sometimes accompanies the admissions process. There is evidence from other studies that, where there is greater social segregation or selection by prior attainment, there is a consequent polarisation of the parental perception of schools which in turn leads to the vilification of schools, their staff, the children who attend, their families and their communities (Reay and Lucey 2000, 2002, 2007; Holme 2002) . This problem is not sufficiently acknowledged in public debate.

With regard to whether admission arrangements had any effect on attainment other studies suggest that there is little if any increase in overall attainment as a result of the competition supported by the admission arrangements current in 2006. Selection by prior attainment to grammar schools also appears to have little if any effect on increasing the overall educational performance of children in the area. It does however contribute substantially to the creation of socially segregated intakes.

5 DISCUSSION OF POLICY OPTIONS

5.1 Direct and indirect social selection

Segregated intakes occur as a cumulative result of a number of processes of social selection. We might usefully discriminate direct social selection resulting from admission criteria or covert use of procedures from indirect social selection that is the result of conditions or circumstances not under the control of the school's admission authority but nevertheless result in a socially skewed intake⁷⁵.

Direct and indirect social selection can each reinforce the other. Where a school wishes to maintain its advantaged intake it will have regard to the indirect processes at work in its particular context and these can vary markedly. Criteria in one context can work very differently in another. For example one school may wish to have a sibling oversubscription criterion to maximise the number of children from the advantaged families it already largely serves. But for a school that draws largely from a multiply disadvantaged area the sibling criterion can be seen as a problem⁷⁶. This is an argument in favour of the approach of the new legislation and guidance of ensuring close monitoring by the admission forum of the level of segregation in each school and the requirement to take local action to mitigate any discovered social selection.

As already reported, we found evidence of potential direct and covert social selection especially in Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools which, in combination with residential segregation, probably contributed to their socially segregated intakes. Covert direct selection can be reduced by the effective enforcement of regulations regarding criteria and procedures. The School Admissions Code 2007 is much stronger than the 2003 Schools Admissions Code of Practice and the current approach to this policing is to respond to objections made by local stakeholders but to put on local authorities, as champions of children and parents interests, a *duty* to object. The new regulations and guidance are likely to have a considerable impact although further research will be required to confirm just how far this prediction is fulfilled. Another, less complex, approach would be to allow the admission arrangements for schools in an area to be set by an independent body rather than each individual admission authority. This could

⁷⁵ These are close to the terms 'covert' and 'default' social selection but 'direct' avoids the assumption of intention implied by the usual term 'covert' and 'indirect' is better than 'default selection' precisely because 'default' is in danger of masking what is often an explicit intention to benefit from indirect selection e.g. when a parent moves into a catchment area

⁷⁶ This is illustrated by the words of the member of senior management in charge of school admissions quoted earlier on page 10 in the section on Justice as Recognition.

accommodate religious criteria for faith schools and would be likely to increase compliance with regulations and make it easier for Local Authorities to fulfil their duty to move towards less segregated intakes.

While direct social selection may well be amenable to such policing, counteracting indirect social selection is likely to require pro-active policies. The new code explicitly addresses some of these issues too.

5.2 The effects of balancing intakes

The aim of balancing intakes vies with other policy priorities⁷⁷ and must overcome the practical difficulties of reducing segregation in different and highly complex local geographical and social contexts. In the following sections some of the policy options available to better balance intakes are discussed, but first we look at the theoretical gains of balancing intakes. For the purposes of illustrating the potential benefits of balancing intakes it is useful to speculate as to what might follow if the intake of each school in an area perfectly reflected the social and ethnic composition of the population that they served. In this highly theoretical case:

- each school in an area would have the same composition;
- the incentive for parents to choose on the basis of the social or ethnic intake of a school would be removed;
- school performance would unequivocally be the result of the quality of teaching, management and facilities and not a result of the intake;
- there would be a narrowing of the range of performance of schools i.e. a drastic reduction in the number of failing schools and a proportionate reduction in the number of schools with outstanding results;
- evidence suggests that educational standards overall would improve because the negative peer effect in schools with concentrations of disadvantaged children would be diluted and, because diluted, it would not have a proportionate negative effect on the performance of the balanced intakes;
- there would be an opportunity for the foregrounding of genuine differences in educational approach and other kinds of diversity which might provide more choice for parents according to their views and beliefs;
- the denigration of whole schools would be reduced as a result of eradicating the division into highly desirable and highly undesirable schools on the basis of social composition.

⁷⁷ For example, prioritising perfectly balanced intakes would only be compatible with parental choice only in the very unlikely event of an equal number of every type of parent expressing a preference to each of the schools.

5.3 Practical difficulties of balancing intakes

It can readily be seen that such perfectly balanced intakes across a Local Authority cannot easily be achieved in practice for the following reasons. Social groups are not evenly distributed across a geographical area. Many cities and towns are characterised by residential segregation both social and ethnic. In rural areas with relatively low density of population the distances between schools is much greater than in more densely populated areas. Some metropolitan Local Authorities have geographical outlying sectors which would intolerably exacerbate the problem of travel for some parents (and would have environmental implications) because fully balanced intakes would probably result in more children travelling away from their nearest schools⁷⁸. Of note in relation to this is the finding of the parent survey that parents were more satisfied when their children walked or travelled by bus to school. A successful policy of balancing intakes might also cut across the preference of some parents and children to be with sufficient others of their own community⁷⁹.

These complexities suggest that an approach that required admission authorities to move towards better balanced intakes while leaving the detail to be worked out at local level would be wise. This appears to be the current policy. The School Admissions Code of Practice 2003 strongly encouraged practices that helped balance intakes but admission authorities ultimately only had to have regard to the guidance. Now since February 2007 they must act in accordance with the new Schools Admissions Code 2007 which adds to strong encouragement the requirement to take action:

1.67 Admission authorities and governing bodies must ensure that their admission arrangements and other school policies are fair and do not disadvantage, either directly or indirectly, a child from a particular social or racial group, or a child with a disability or special educational needs... Admission authorities and governing bodies should develop and implement admission arrangements, practices and oversubscription criteria that actively promote equity, and thus go further than simply ensuring that unfair practices and criteria are excluded.

⁷⁸ This already happens in the case of religious and selective schools which draw from a much wider geographical area than their immediate neighbourhood and for many non-religious schools which also draw from wide areas as a result of parental preference. Currently 25% of parents already opt away from their nearest school. It is therefore difficult to judge how far fully balanced intakes would affect new groups of children i.e. those who would not already be opting away from the nearest school or how far the total miles travelled would be reduced or increased.

⁷⁹ This is not just a point about black and minority ethnic children. Indeed there is anecdotal evidence that some parents from ethnic communities are keen for their children to attend schools with a full ethnic mix and to avoid schools with too large a proportion from their own ethnic community. It is just as much an issue for children of different life style cultures, what Bourdieu calls 'habitus'.

1.90 It is good practice for admission authorities to analyse information on their intakes, and where possible their applicants, to find out whether they attract a wide range of families or whether their school fails to attract all sections of the local community.

*1.91 Admission authorities for all schools **must** act upon any information that suggests that the school's or admission authority's policies or practices appear to be unfairly disadvantaging one group of children compared to another...*

We look in the next section at the pros and cons of a number of possible admission arrangements available to admission authorities and local authorities that offer the potential for reducing segregation namely, banding, random allocation (lottery), subsidised travel, the drawing of catchments and some other means to reduce direct and indirect social selection. It is the case that some of these measures are oversubscription criteria and in practice apply only to the most popular, and therefore oversubscribed, schools. The onus will be on those popular schools to take action to reduce their proportion of children from higher socio-economic status families and to increase their proportion of children from lower socio-economic status families. This is not something they will necessarily be willing to do and highlights the importance of the requirement on admission authorities to take action (see section 1.91 in the quotation above) and of the gathering of robust and trustworthy data about the level of segregation of schools in a local area.

5.4 Fair Banding

Fair banding achieves many of the effects of balancing intakes described in 5.2 above. It eliminates segregation by ability/attainment between the schools in the banding arrangement and, because ability/attainment is significantly correlated with socio-economic groupings, significantly reduces social segregation and gains the potential benefits listed above. It is likely to improve educational results overall and to significantly reduce performance differences between schools. In so doing it would mitigate the hierarchy of schools, making local schools more acceptable to parents. It can be combined with a variety of other oversubscription criteria to be applied for each band.

Some of the disadvantages are as follows. Some schools' overall results would improve and others would worsen. It is likely to lead to some children travelling away from their nearest school but it is not clear whether overall this would be more or less than happens already or whether it would be children who would not otherwise have done so. Fair banding is necessarily incompatible with grammar schools and the existence of selective schools in the area would reduce the benefits. It is also possible for admission authorities, including those of Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools, to remain outside any banding arrangements thus reducing the overall effect. However they may then become the focus of objections resulting from the checks and balances built into the system. Only by monitoring and analysing robust evidence of the actual trends in particular areas over time will we be able to tell whether any change takes place as a result of banding.

The examples of the three local authorities currently using area wide fair banding show that faith schools can be accommodated in fair banding arrangements. However, where the group of applicants to faith schools have notably different social characteristics (e.g. if their families are on average more wealthy, or have more educational qualifications) than parents applying to non-faith schools in the area, then some differences of intake might still occur.

An important aspect of the previous legislation covering fair banding was that it had to apply to the applicants to the school or group of schools. This protected the element of parental preference but also could have reduced the beneficial impact on intakes within an area. As noted earlier (in section 2.3) the current legislation now allows admission authorities to choose between the following three reference groups:

- the full range of ability of applicants for the school (or group of schools banding jointly);
- the range of ability of children in the local area; or
- the national ability range.

This makes it significantly more possible to balance intakes across a number of schools.

5.5 Geographical Priority Areas (Catchments)

Geographical Priority Areas, or catchments, operate as an oversubscription criterion. Catchments can, be but need not, be drawn to enable those nearest to a school to have priority. A notable number are not. Without a detailed study of the geography of each school's catchment it is not clear how far the catchment criterion was also a proximity criterion. The advantage of a catchment criterion that does not overlap with proximity is that it addresses one of the main causes of segregated intakes, namely residential segregation. By prioritising children from a defined catchment that includes residential populations with a range of social and ethnic characteristics this criterion can work to ensure a better balance of the intake of, and fair access to, an oversubscribed school. This would have a positive effect on the intakes of other schools and would offer the potential benefits already identified that follow from better balanced intakes.

In addition to the possibility of an increase in the travel times for some children, the disadvantages are that, unlike the measure of attainment used for fair banding, the social characteristics of residential areas change over time not least in response to school admissions. The material investment parents make and the market values of properties attached to the perceived quality (or more precisely the popularity) of particular schools mean that changing catchments can be politically very difficult. In addition, boundaries are visible and appear arbitrary (e.g. down the middle of a street) and can be difficult to defend for policy makers. If associated with polarisation of reputation it can be hard to manage to maximise parental satisfaction. Nevertheless catchments, together with other criteria, can be a means of contributing to balanced intakes.

5.6 Feeder primary schools

Schools can prioritise in their oversubscription criteria children who already attend named primary schools. This provides a degree of security, predictability and continuity for children and parents and there can be educational and organisational benefits from a close relationship built over time between a secondary school and its feeder primaries. In so far as the intake of each of the primary schools is predominantly from a particular area then this can operate like the catchment criterion to balance intakes but it suffers from the same problem of the changing social character of areas. They may also require longer journeys and, like catchments, can cause socially segregated intakes. It has the additional difficulty that, if the secondary school is highly popular or unpopular, parental preferences for the primary school may not be based on its quality but on the popularity of the secondary school it feeds.

5.7 Random allocation

The School Admissions Code 2007 has for the first time stated that random allocation can be good practice as an over subscription criterion in combination with other criteria. Under current legislation it has to accommodate parental preference and places can not be allocated at a school without parents having expressed a preference for that school: it works like a lottery and you have to buy your ticket first to be entered in to the draw. An applicant meets the oversubscription criterion by being randomly chosen and the process is free from any kind of bias. As such it guards against covert discrimination and can make access to popular schools fairer. It can operate as a good tie breaker where other criteria have failed to determine the more eligible applicants. It could actively work to mitigate indirect segregation in the same way as banding if parents applied to a group of schools and then were randomly allocated to each of the schools in the group.

In the theoretical case that sometime in the future it were possible randomly to allocate applicants to all schools in an area it would certainly achieve more balanced intakes across a whole local authority, because it makes no attempt to accommodate different needs or the preferences of parents and children. However, apart from its incompatibility with parental choice, it would also lead to some children travelling perhaps some miles away from their nearest school.

5.8 Closing schools

If a school with a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils is closed the redistribution of those pupils may substantially reduce the level of segregation within the area. Falling secondary rolls over the next few years will give opportunities for such closures. The drawbacks are that the children would not necessarily be evenly distributed between all schools. It is more likely that removing the school at the bottom of the local hierarchy may simply mean that a new slightly adjusted hierarchy is created with a different school at the bottom. Further, the threat of closure puts a blight on recruitment of staff, makes it even more likely that parents will not put it as a preference and can mean that students and staff seeing the school 'out' as it were, have a very poor experience over a

considerable time. Further, it is unpopular schools that are under threat but some of these unpopular schools are very good and losing them we lose expertise acquired over many years in meeting the needs of more difficult to educate children. Finally, the reception of the redistributed children in other schools may reinforce negative views about them, their families and communities and may not lead to greater social cohesion.

5.9 Effects of the wider policy context

Schools have a strong incentive to select on the basis of social characteristics. Some of these incentives are as a result of the criteria and discourse of accountability currently in place. Secondary schools are largely, and still fairly crudely, judged by their children's performance in public examinations. It is therefore in the school's interests to attract children who are, because of their social characteristics or prior attainment level, more likely to perform well in these tests. Changing the way schools are held accountable, making more explicit the inclusive mission of schools and providing resources according to the social characteristics of the intake (i.e. extra money for schools with the harder educational task), would reduce these incentives and thereby encourage schools not to select in this way.

5.10 Subsidised travel

Residential segregation, in combination with schools' criteria and processes, is one of the drivers of indirect social selection⁸⁰. Proximity is used explicitly as an oversubscription criterion by 61% of schools and the catchment criterion (used by 65% of schools) also overlaps to an unknown extent with proximity. Close location in relation to a particular school is an important determinant of parents' success in gaining a place and this in turn reinforces the effect of residential segregation. Making it more possible for parents successfully to apply for schools further away would reduce this effect. Some parents may wish to opt away from their nearest school but do not do so because of the financial cost of the extra travel. Providing subsidised travel to schools other than the nearest would encourage this group to apply for more distant schools. The new legislation has introduced an increased subsidy specifically for low income parents. However it does not increase the chances of gaining a place if they do not meet the oversubscription criteria of the more distant school. It will be of interest to monitor what effect the extended subsidy has on the patterns of application and the patterns of acceptance.

⁸⁰ There is emerging evidence that if all children went to their nearest school the segregation of intakes would be reduced but not eliminated. This is clear evidence of post-residential sorting through direct and indirect means.

5.11 Selection by prior attainment or aptitude and indirect social selection

Selection by prior attainment is currently also largely selection by social background (Atkinson and Gregg 2004). This affects the social as well as the attainment characteristics of the intakes of all schools in the area. One option would be to phase out selective schools⁸¹. Another option is to require the admission authorities for grammar schools to take effective steps to ensure equal social representation amongst those who qualify on the 11+ test. If it is granted that general ability is to be found in the same proportion in all social groups then it would seem to be a duty under the current legislation on the part of the admission authorities of selective schools to achieve a socially balanced intake. Steps that might be taken are:

- changing to universal opt out methods of testing;
- where opt in methods of testing are used, effectively encouraging all potentially successful candidates, especially pupils from under-represented social groups, to take the test;
- not use additional selection by aptitude.

We have argued that selection by aptitude is different from selection by general ability. Nevertheless, selection by aptitude not only offers a means of direct selection, but it is also likely to lead to social selection by default. The great majority of specialist schools do not use selection in order to fulfil their specialist school mission. Just 129 schools in 2006 selected by aptitude that being 4.13% of all schools and 6.2% of specialist schools. Some of the 129 combined it with selection by attainment and the much more segregated Voluntary Aided schools select by aptitude more than other types of school. Removing the ability to select a proportion by aptitude is therefore an option to be considered to achieve fair admissions.

5.12 Faith schools

We have seen that Voluntary Aided schools have socially segregated intakes. Part of the explanation is that they more often use criteria and procedures that offer direct means of social selection⁸². It is possible to require faith schools to enter into banding agreements either in federations or authority wide. Another option is to

⁸¹ There would be a need separately to consider arguments *for* selective schooling that are not to do with the admissions objectives identified here.

⁸² It would be of considerable interest to test whether it is the case that there is further indirect social selection as a result of a greater likelihood that members of the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church, especially those who are active enough to gain positive references, will also be members of higher socio-economic groups. The 2001 census data shows a small level of association between higher social groups and Christian households as compared with those with no religion but it did not discriminate between different Christian denominations nor does it provide any evidence of how active self-declared adherents are.

require faith schools to admit a proportion of children who are not adherents of any faith. Currently only 16% of faith schools give some priority in their oversubscription criteria to children of no-faith and the criterion is at such a low priority that in effect few children of no faith are admitted. In some cases however faith schools allocate a definite number of places. Nevertheless 84% of faith schools do not have oversubscription criteria that offer any places to children of no faith⁸³. This could be required of all faith schools.

5.13 Mixed methods under local control

It is unlikely that any one of the methods could or should be implemented on their own or that any set will work for every local authority. There needs to be, in each area and for each admission authority, a judiciously crafted set of arrangements aimed at achieving the explicit objectives of fairness and better balanced intakes. Legislation requires stakeholders in each local area to consult and to try to reach a consensus. Each admission authority now has an explicit responsibility to work towards fairer procedures and better balanced intakes. The Local Authority and the admission forum have explicit responsibilities to act wherever they find arrangements not to the benefit of all children. These are powerful regulatory incentives to develop better local arrangements. Their effect depends however on gathering data that demonstrates the state of segregation within a Local Authority. It is not clear how far the means exists within authorities to gather this data to the standard necessary.

5.14 Other considerations

We have concluded in this report that the system in 2006 was more efficiently managed and better co-ordinated than in 2000 and that the co-ordination role of the LA was important in this improvement. We also found that in some areas the admission authorities had agreed that the LA should extend this role beyond the national offer date. There is a need to gather further information about the frequency and effects of this variation as a basis for reconsidering the guidance and legislation on the co-ordinating role of LAs.

While the effects listed in 6.1.3 would seem to follow directly from perfectly balanced intakes, they would be dependent on how schools managed their internal organisation. According to the available evidence, better balanced intakes should lead to an overall improvement in educational standards. If having eliminated or reduced social segregation *between* schools, it was reintroduced *within* schools the positive peer effects for those in the higher attaining streams

⁸³ This does not mean that those faith schools do not admit children of no faith. If they are undersubscribed they cannot refuse a place to any applicants.

might continue to be preserved at the expense of negative peer effects for the lower attaining children and as a result could still subdue the educational opportunities for the most vulnerable children. There is a danger that practices such as streaming and setting could result in severe social segregation (Boaler 2005 and 1997).

We should not presume that better balanced intakes would necessarily reduce the vilification and stigmatisation of children, families and neighbourhoods (Coldron 2005b; Holme, J. 2002; Lucey, H. and Reay, D. 2002; Reay, D and Lucey, H. 2000). The effects cannot be separated out from how the school approaches its task, how effectively it develops an inclusive ethos for example. Vilification might continue (or get worse) rather than be reduced as a result of the moral anxiety of parents from higher socio-economic groups and their perception of an increased risk of 'contamination' from 'rough' pupils previously educated in separate schools. School communities can be divided or cohesive and much depends on the philosophy of education schools are able to practice.

In conclusion we should enter a note of realism. The fact that, despite the widespread commitment to meritocracy, the already advantaged groups in society successfully bequeath their considerable advantages to their children and that education appears to enable and legitimate this process, is a phenomenon found in all industrial societies (Marshall, Swift and Roberts 1997). The problem of social mobility through differential access to educational qualifications is deep seated and will not be solved by changes to admission arrangements. They however can contribute quite significantly in conjunction with other social policies such as a reduction in the currently very large differences in income, a reduction of child poverty, investment in early years and policies to widen participation in higher education. Fair and just policies on school admissions are an important mark of commitment by governments to equality of opportunity and outcome.

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7 APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix A Glossary

Admission Authority

The body responsible for setting and applying a school's admission arrangements. For community or voluntary controlled schools, the Local Authority is the admission authority; and for foundation or voluntary aided schools, the governing body of the school is the admission authority. For Academies the funding agreement states who is responsible for applying admissions arrangements (in most cases the Academy itself) but Academies can only set or alter their admission arrangements with the prior agreement of the Secretary of State.

Admission Arrangements

The overall procedure, practices and oversubscription criteria used in deciding the allocation of school places.

Admissions Criteria (see also 'oversubscription criteria')

The list of criteria an admission authority must adopt for its school(s) which are used only when the school is oversubscribed to assess which children will be offered a place. Once determined, admissions criteria, including the admission number, must be published by the school and in the local authority composite prospectus at least 6 weeks before parents express their preferences.

Admission Forum

A statutory local body charged with co-ordinating the effectiveness and equity of local admission arrangements with a statutory right of objection to these. Consists of representatives of admission authorities, dioceses, the local community, parent governors and academies.

Admission Number (or Published Admission Number)

The number of school places that the admission authority must offer in each relevant age group of a school for which it is admission authority. Admission numbers are part of a school's admission arrangements, and must be consulted upon with the rest of a school's admission arrangements and be published with those arrangements in the school's prospectus and the local authority composite prospectus. .

Banding (Fair Banding)

A system of oversubscription criteria in which all children applying for a place at a banding school are placed into bands based on their performance in a test or other assessment. Places are then allocated so that the school's intake either reflects the attainment profile of those children applying to the school, those children applying to a group of schools banding jointly, the local authority attainment profile or the national attainment profile.

Catchment area (geographical priority area)

A geographical area, from which children may be afforded priority for admission to a school. A catchment area is part of a school's admission arrangements and must therefore be consulted upon, determined and published in the same way as other admission arrangements.

Children in Public Care; Looked After Children; Children in Care

Children who are in the care of local authorities as defined by section 22 of the Children Act 1989. In relation to school admissions legislation a 'looked after child' is only considered as such if the local authority confirms he or she will be in public care when he or she is admitted to a school.

Choice Advice

An independent service commissioned by local authorities to support families who need the most help during the admissions round to make the best and most realistic choice of secondary school for their children. Choice advisers assist parents through the decision making process but must not take the decision for them.

Common Application Form

The form parents complete and submit to local authorities listing their preferred choices of schools when applying for a school place for their child as part of the local co-ordination scheme during the normal admissions round. Parents must be allowed to express a preference for a minimum of 3 secondary or 1 primary school on the relevant common application form as determined by their local authority. Local authorities may afford parents a higher number of preferences if they wish.

Composite prospectus

The prospectus that a local authority is required to publish at least six weeks before parents express their preferences for schools. This prospectus must include detailed admission arrangements of all maintained schools in the area (including admission numbers and catchment areas).

Co-ordination/Co-ordinated scheme

Co-ordinated schemes must be consulted upon across all relevant admission authorities and determined in the year prior to which they are to apply. All local authorities are required to co-ordinate primary and secondary admissions for all schools in their area. Although individual admission authorities rank all applicants in order of priority for admission, offers are sent out by the local authority on 1 March for secondary pupils and on an agreed date for primary pupils.

Diverse LA:

An LA was defined as Diverse if the number of autonomous schools were in the range of 26% to 75%

First Preference First

Oversubscription criterion that gives priority to children according to the order of other schools named as a preference by their parents, or only considering

applications stated as a first preference. The First Preference First oversubscription criterion is prohibited by this Code.

Governing Bodies

School governing bodies are bodies corporately responsible for conducting schools with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement. Governing bodies have three key roles: setting strategic direction, ensuring accountability and monitoring and evaluation.

Grammar Schools (designated)

These are the 164 schools designated under section 104(5) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 as grammar schools. A 'grammar school' is defined by section 104(2) of the Act as a school which selects all (or substantially all) of its pupils on the basis of general (i.e. academic) ability.

Home-School Agreements

A statement explaining: the school's aims and values; the school's responsibilities towards its pupils who are of compulsory school age; the responsibilities of the pupil's parents; and what the school expects of its pupils.

Local Government Ombudsman

An independent, impartial and free service that investigates complaints about maladministration of certain public bodies.

Looked After Children (see Children in Public Care above)

National offer date

The date on which local authorities are required to send the offer of a school place to all parents of secondary age pupils in their area. The national offer date is the 1 March each year, or next working day.'

Oversubscription

Where a school has a higher number of applicants than the school's published admission number each year. In this study we define a school as oversubscribed if it has more applicants who have put the school as their first preference than the school's published admission number.

Oversubscription criteria (see also 'admissions criteria')

This refers to the published criteria that an admission authority applies when a school has more applications than places available in order to decide which children will be allocated a place.

Predominately autonomous LA:

Defined as 25% or less of an LA's schools are community/VC.

Predominately non-autonomous LA:

Defined as 25% or less of an LA's schools are VA/F/AC.

Relevant Area

The area for a school (determined by its local authority and then reviewed every two years) within which the admission authority for that school must consult all other prescribed schools on its admission arrangements.

Schools Adjudicator

A statutory officer who is appointed by the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families but is independent of him. The Adjudicator decides on objections to published admission arrangements and variations of determined admission arrangements. The Schools Adjudicator comes under the supervision of the Council on Tribunals.

Statement of Special Educational Need (SEN)

A legal document issued by the local authority specifying the particular needs, resources and provision required to support the child, and can include a named school that is suitable for providing education for that child.

Waiting Lists

A list of children held and maintained by the admission authority when the school has allocated all its places, on which children are ranked in priority order against the school's published oversubscription criteria. There is no statutory requirement for admission authorities to set up and maintain waiting lists but where they do places must be allocated in accordance with the school's published admission arrangements.

7.2 Appendix B Examples of oversubscription criteria

7.2.1 Example One

Admission procedure and oversubscription criteria for a Voluntary Aided (Roman Catholic) Boys' School in a metropolitan local authority in the North West

ADMISSION NUMBER- 215 PUPILS

TOTAL NUMBER OF PUPILS ON ROLL JANUARY 2006- 1324

(Name of School) is a Foundation School. The School has agreed to co-ordinate with the (City) Children's Services admission arrangements. However, should the College be oversubscribed, the Governors will apply the policy stated below. Applicants attending the primary schools listed in Criterion 1 should be aware that if they do not select (Name of School) as a first choice then the application will be considered under Criterion 2.

Procedure for applying to the College for admission to Year 7 in advance of the date on which Year 7 boys are admitted to the College.

In recent years the Governors have agreed to admit 215 boys into Year 7 each September. Unless the Governing Body decides otherwise or there is an alternative legally binding determination the annual admission number (AAN) for future years will be 215.

Where appropriate due consideration will be given by Governors to applicants reasons for applying to the College.

In order to apply to the College for boys to be admitted into Year 7, parents must take the following action:

Complete an application form in addition to (NOT instead of) the form issued by the Local Authority and send it directly to the College before 3 November.

An application may be regarded as invalid if the form contains inaccurate information or if it is not fully completed. The Governors reserve the right to inspect the baptismal certificate of a Catholic boy for whom application is made before a place is offered.

If the application procedures are completed for more boys than there are places available, then the available places will be offered according to the following criteria in order of priority.

Roman Catholic Looked after Children will be given priority without reference to the criteria.

CRITERION 1

In allocating places the Governors will give first priority to Roman Catholic boys attending the primary schools of the parishes listed below if (Name of School) is stated on the Local Authority Application Form to be the school of first preference. Such applications will be regarded as "Criterion 1" applications. If a preference is expressed for any other school over (Name of School), then the application to (Name of School) will be treated as an application under Criterion 2.

List of 11 Roman Catholic parishes.

Under Criteria 2, 3 and 4 the Governors of (Name of School) will use the Equal Preference Scheme determined by the (City) Children's Services when allocating places.

CRITERION 2

After places have been allocated under Criterion 1, available places will next be allocated, irrespective of whether (Name of School) is the school of first preference to boys attending Roman Catholic primary schools whose parish priests confirm they are parishioners. In allocating available

places under this criterion the Governors will give priority to those boys thought most likely to contribute to the published religious aim of the College, in particular, the provision of a Christian environment in which pupils can receive a specifically Christian education during their College years.

The contribution a boy would be likely to make to achieving the published religious aim of the College will be assessed according to the system of points indicated below. The higher the number of points generated by an application, the higher will be the priority of the boy concerned in the allocation of available places.

- (a) If a boy has made his First Communion. 2 points
- (b) If the parents have other children of school age and they all attend Catholic schools. 2 points
If parents have no other children of school age. 2 points
- (c) Points will be allocated by the Governors on the basis of confidential assessment by the boy's Primary School Headteacher as follows (maximum 14).

	Below Average	Average	Good	Excellent
Effort in RE work	0	1	2	4
Contribution to the Pastoral Life of the school	0	1	2	4
Likely benefit from Catholic secondary education (Account may be taken of such factors as parental supporting religious practice and the boy's own participation in local church activities)	0	1	2	4
Contribution to school liturgy	0	1	2	4

- (d) Up to 12 points will be allocated by the Governors on the basis of the religious affirmation completed by parents on the College application form. The Governors will take account of the documentary support for the affirmation e.g. School RE reports, letters of support from priests, individual teacher comment on religious commitment etc. (This is not an exclusive list of acceptable supportive documentation). The Governors appointed to this task by the Governing Body will not know the identity of applicants.

Maximum = 30: possible range = 1 to 30

(At their discretion the Governors may accept evidence that a boy is a bona fide Roman Catholic other than confirmation by the parish priest that they are parishioners).

In the event of applications generating equal numbers of points, priority will be given to those where the religious declaration has generated a greater total. If priority still remains undecided then reference points totals will be used. Should priority still not be established, the tie break will be the proximity of the child's home to the school as measured by the shortest walking distance from the college's main entrance, with those living nearest being accorded the highest priority.

CRITERION 3

Boys of other Christian denominations, whose parents express a wish for their children to attend (Name of School), may be admitted if the number of Roman Catholic children seeking admission falls below the annual admission number, irrespective of whether (Name of School) is the school of first preference.

Should the Governors receive applications from: Christian Looked After Children then they will be given priority within this category.

The Governors have defined "Christian Church" as being any church in membership of, or sharing the statement of belief, ("the Basis") of Churches Together in England.

The application procedure would be similar to the procedure under Criterion 2. In this case points would be allocated only under headings (c) and (d).

In the event of applications generating equal numbers of points, priority will be given to those where religious declaration has generated a greater total. If priority still remains undecided then reference points totals will be used. Should priority still not be established, the tie break will be the proximity of the child's home to the school as measured by the shortest walking distance from the College's main entrance, with those living nearest being accorded the highest priority.

CRITERION 4

Within this criterion priority will be given to Non-Christian Looked After Children.

Boys who are not Christians may be admitted to the College if the number of applications in Criterion 1, 2 and 3 falls below the admission number, irrespective of whether (Name of School) is the school of first preference. In this case priority will be given on the basis of the religious statement / affirmation made on the College application form. Should priority still not be established, the tie break will be the proximity of the child's home to the school as measured by the shortest walking distance from the College's main entrance, with those living nearest being accorded the highest priority.

If a place is not offered and a subsequent appeal is unsuccessful, the Governors will not re-determine an application unless there has been a significant change in the circumstances of the application.

LATE APPLICATIONS

Applications received before the Governors have decided to whom places will be offered will be processed in the normal way. Applications received later than this date will be assessed but will only be successful if a place becomes available and if the assessment would have resulted in the offer of a place if the application had been made at the "correct" time. At any appeal hearing, the representative of the Governors will state whether a late application would have been successful if it had been "on time".

WAITING LIST

Any places which are offered but declined up to 31 July in any year will be reoffered automatically on the basis of the priority established by the oversubscription criteria. After 31 July no waiting list will be maintained.

If you wish to apply for a place at (Name of School) you must complete a school application form as well as placing the school as a preference on your Home Education Authority's Preference Form / Common Application Form.

In previous years (Name of School) has been oversubscribed for admission into year 7.

The closing date for the school application form is **3 November**.

7.2.2 Example Two

Admission procedure and oversubscription criteria for a Voluntary Aided (Church of England) Girls' School in a metropolitan local authority in the North West

ADMISSION NUMBER- 140 PUPILS

TOTAL NUMBER OF PUPILS ON ROLL JANUARY 2006-884

The Governors of (Name of School) have agreed to follow the Equal Preference Scheme determined by (City) Children's Services.

Category A1: Christian applications. In the first instance, 100 places will be awarded to girls from committed Christian families - to be measured by reference to attendance, involvement and long-standing commitment to a Christian church. The Governors have defined "Christian Church" as being any Church in membership of, or sharing the statement of belief ('the Basis') of, Churches Together in England. A minimum degree of commitment (i.e. two points) must be demonstrated for admission through this category.

Category A2: Muslim applications. Up to eight places will be awarded to girls from committed Muslim families - to be measured by reference to attendance, involvement and long-standing commitment to a local Mosque and a local Madrassa. A minimum degree of commitment (80% of the maximum points available) must be demonstrated for admission through this category.

Category A3: Other World Faith applications: Up to one place will be awarded to a girl from a family that has demonstrated commitment to one of the other major World Faiths (viz Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, or Sikhism) - to be measured by reference to attendance, involvement and long-standing commitment to the relevant faith community. A minimum degree of commitment (80% of the maximum points available) must be demonstrated for admission through this category.

Category B: Academic applications. Up to 21 places (15% of the total) will be awarded by reference to aptitude in Art, Maths, Science, Music, PE or Technology, to be measured by way of a test; the number of admissions in each category will be determined in proportion to the number of applications received for each category (subject to a minimum of 1, and subject to adjustment in the Maths / Science category to ensure the correct total number of places are awarded). There are five sub-categories; applicants may only apply under one of these five.

Category B1: Application by Aptitude in Art;

Category B2: Application by Aptitude in Music;

Category B3: Application by Aptitude in PE;

Category B4: Application by Aptitude in Technology; and

Category B5: Application by Aptitude in Maths / Science

Category C: Medical / Social / Pastoral applications. Up to 10 places will be awarded to girls with exceptional medical, pastoral or social needs. Automatic places will be offered to:

1. Any girl in the care of the Local Authority (commonly referred to as "Looked After Children");
2. Any girl with Special Educational Needs whose statement specifically names (Name of School) as their school; and
3. Any girl whose twin (or triplet etc) sister of the same age has been offered a place in the same Admissions Round.

In all cases, need must be verified by way of a letter from a suitably qualified professional, unless exceptional circumstances apply. Should more girls automatically qualify for admission under this category, the Governors will reduce the number of places offered in Category A1 so that they may be accommodated.

Applicants may apply through any or all of the three main categories (A, B or C) but may only apply once within each category (so, for example, Category B applicants can only apply through one of the Sub-categories B1, B2, B3, B4 and B5).

The places will be offered in the following order:

- Category A1 (if less than 100 places are awarded in this category, the remainder shall be awarded to any unsuccessful applicants from category A2, in order of priority and subject to the 80% minimum described above; if there are still places remaining, the remainder shall be awarded to any unsuccessful applicant from category A3, in order of priority and subject to the 80% minimum described above; thereafter places will be allocated to unsuccessful candidates from any category, with those living closest to the school as measured below given the highest priority);
- Category A2 (if less than eight places are awarded in this category, the remainder shall be awarded to any unsuccessful applicants from category A1, in order of priority);
- Category A3 (if less than one place is awarded in this category, it shall be awarded to any unsuccessful applicants from category A1, in order of priority);
- Category B (if less than 21 places are awarded in this category, the remainder shall be awarded to any unsuccessful applicants from category A1, in order or priority); then
- Category C (if less than ten places are awarded in this category, the remainder shall be awarded to any unsuccessful applicants from category A1, in order of priority).

Each category of admission has its own oversubscription criteria, as detailed below:

Category A1: Christian Applications: Information will be gathered from parents and an appropriate religious official. A points system will be used to score each application form, as described in the document entitled "Arrangements for Admitting Students to Year 7". Should two or more girls have secured exactly the same number of points in each of the seven areas where points are awarded, priority will be given to girls whose permanent home address is closest to the school. The distance will be measured by the shortest suitable walking route between the child's permanent home address and the main entrance to the school, using the same definition as is currently in use by the Local Authority. Should two or more girls live an equal distance away from the school, random selection will be used to determine which girl(s) is / are offered a place.

Category A2: Muslim Applications: Information will be gathered from parents and appropriate religious officials. A points system will be used to score each application form, as described in the document entitled "Arrangements for Admitting Student to Year 7". Should two or more girls have secured exactly the same number of points in each of the areas where points are awarded, random selection will be used to determine which girl(s) is / are offered a place.

Category A3: Other World Faiths Applications: Information will be gathered from parents and an appropriate religious official. A points system will be used to score each application form, as described in the document entitled "Arrangements for Admitting Students to Year 7". Should two or more girls have secured exactly the same number of points in each of the seven areas where points are awarded, priority will be given to girls whose permanent home address is closest to the school. The distance will be measured by the shortest suitable walking route between the child's permanent home address and the main entrance to the school, using the same definition as is currently in use by the Local Authority. Should two or more girls live an equal distance away from the school, random selection will be used to determine which girls(s) is / are offered a place.

Category B: Academic Applications: In the first instance, the test will be used to determine whether or not aptitude has been demonstrated. If more girls have demonstrated aptitude than there are places available in that category, the test itself will be used to determine who is admitted, with higher scores having priority over lower scores. Should girls achieve identical test scores, the points awarded under the religious criteria (if an application has been made under this category) will determine who is admitted, with higher scores having priority over lower scores and with Christians given priority over Muslims, and Muslims over those from another World Faith. Should a

further tie-break be required, priority will be given to girls who live closest to the school, as defined above. In the event that this is unable to separate different applications, random selection will be used to determine which girl(s) is / are offered a place.

Category C: Medical / Social / Pastoral Applications: In the first instance, places will be offered to any girl who automatically qualifies for admission through one (or more) of the criteria listed above. Thereafter, priority will be given to girls whose applications demonstrate that (Name of School) is the school best placed to meet their needs. Thereafter, if necessary, applications will be ranked by the extent to which they demonstrate that (Name of School) will be able to meet their needs and places awarded to those the school is most able to help. In order to demonstrate this clearly, need must be verified by way of a letter from a suitably qualified professional, unless exceptional circumstances apply.

Category A1: Christian Applicants: In the religious Category A1 (Christian applicants), all application forms are processed by the school based on the objective application of points to information validated by an appropriate leader at the church. A point scoring system will be used, as follows:

- (a) To award up to twelve points for attendance by the child at a main weekly act of worship in the calendar year before the proposed admission into Year 7.
- (b) To award up to nine points for parental attendance at the main weekly act of worship in the calendar year before the proposed admission into Year 7. The Governors have defined 'parent' in the context of the religious categories to be a parent, legal guardian, or grandparent of the girl for whom admission is sought.
- (c) To award up to nine points for attendance by the child at the main weekly act of worship in the calendar year prior to that considered in part (a) above.
- (d) To award up to six points for parental attendance at a main weekly act of worship in the calendar year prior to that considered in part (b) above
- (e) To award up to three points for the degree of involvement in church life over the past two years demonstrated by the parent.
- (f) To award up to three points for the degree of involvement in church life over the past two years demonstrated by the child.
- (g) To award up to two points if, in the opinion of the leader of the church, both parent and child have been as committed as possible to Church life given the family's circumstances.
- (h) To award up to ten points (five for each year) for at least monthly attendance by both parent and child in each of the two years preceding the calendar year considered in parts (c) and (d) above.
- (i) To award one point if the place of worship attended is an Anglican church, or part of a Local Ecumenical Project within the Anglican communion.

A total of 55 points are therefore available to applicants in religious category A1 (54 points for non-Anglicans). Applicants are then ranked in points score order. Should two applicants have identical totals, the applicant with the higher score in (a) above would be ranked higher; should the two have the same score in (a), the applicant with the highest score in (b) above would be ranked higher; and so on down to category (h).

Category A2: Muslim Applicants: In the religious category A2 (Muslin applicants), reference will be made to both the local Mosque and the local Madrassa. Applicants must demonstrate a minimum level of commitment in order to be awarded a place. This is set at 80% of the maximum points available. All application forms are processed by the school based on the objective application of points to information validated by appropriate leaders at the Mosque and Madrassa. A points scoring system will be used, as follows:

- (a) To award up to nine points for attendance by a parent at the Mosque in the calendar year before the proposed admission into Year 7. The Governors have defined 'parent' in the context of the religious categories to be a parent, legal guardian, or grandparent of the girl for whom admission is sought;
- (b) To award up to 10 points (five for each year) for parental attendance at the Mosque in each of the two years preceding the calendar year considered in part (a) above;

- (c) To award up to 12 points for attendance by the child at a Madrassa in the first seven months of the calendar year prior to that considered in part (a) above;
- (d) To award up to nine points for attendance by the child at a Madrassa in the calendar year preceding the seven months considered in part (c) above;
- (e) To award up to three points for the degree of involvement by the child in the Madrassa during the two periods considered in parts (c) and (d) above;
- (f) To award five points if the child attended the Madrassa at least monthly in the calendar year prior to that considered in part (d) above.

A total of 48 points are therefore available to applicants in religious category A2.

Applicants are then ranked in points score order. Should two applicants have identical totals, the applicant with the higher score in (a) above would be ranked higher; should the two have the same score in (a), the applicant with the higher score in (b) would be ranked higher; and so on down to category (e).

Category A3: Other World Faith Applicants: In the religious category A3 (Other World Faith Applicants), reference will be made to a leader of the applicant's place of worship. Applicants must demonstrate a minimum level of commitment in order to be awarded a place. This is set at 80% of the maximum points available. All application forms are processed by the school based on the objective application of points to information validated by appropriate leader at the place of worship. A points scoring system will be used, as follows:

- (a) To award up to nine points for attendance by a parent at a main weekly act of worship in the calendar year before the proposed admission into Year 7. The Governors have defined 'parent' in the context of the religious categories to be a parent, legal guardian, or grandparent of the girl for whom admission is sought;
- (b) To award up to three points for family involvement in the place of worship over the year considered in part (a) and the year before that;
- (c) To award up to two points if, in the opinion of the leader of the Church, both parents and child have been as committed as possible to Church life given the family's circumstances.
- (d) To award up to 15 points (five for each year) for at least monthly attendance by both parent and child in each of the three years preceding the calendar year considered in part (a) above.

A total of 29 points are therefore available to applicants in religious category A3. Applicants are then ranked in points score order. Should two applicants have identical totals, the applicant with the higher score in (a) above would be ranked higher; should the two have the same score in (a), the applicant with the higher score in (b) above would be ranked higher; and so on down the category (c).

Category B: Academic Applications: In the academic categories (B1, B2, B3, B4 and B5), a test will be administered to determine (a) whether an aptitude has been demonstrated, and (b) to what extent it has been demonstrated. Places will only be awarded in this category to pupils who have shown an aptitude in the relevant subject area.

LATE APPLICATIONS

Because of the time it takes to verify information and / or to arrange for testing to take place, the Governors will not be able to consider applications after the published closing date unless exceptional circumstances apply. If the parents believe that such exceptional circumstances apply, a covering letter should be submitted with the application form for the Governors consideration.

WAITING LIST

All unsuccessful applications for the normal round of admissions into Year 7 will be held in a waiting list. The waiting list will be ordered in categories using the same criteria as for normal admissions. In the event of a place becoming available, the Admissions process will be run again to determine which applicant is offered a place. Normally this will mean that if the vacancy occurs because of the withdrawal of a Christian applicant, another Christian applicant will be offered a place. The waiting list for the normal round of admissions will be maintained until the end of Year 7.

If you wish to apply for a place at (*this*) High School you must complete a school Application Form, as well as placing the school as a preference on your home education authority's Preference Form / Common Application Form.

In the previous three years this school has been oversubscribed for admission to Year 7.

The closing date for the school application form is **3 November**.

7.2.3 Example Three

The King's Church of England School

The King's School, Tettenhall is a Voluntary Aided Church of England comprehensive school, to which the Governors admit children without reference to ability or aptitude.

1. a) During September 2006, families resident within Wolverhampton, will be issued, via the child's Primary School, with a booklet from the Local Authority (LA) entitled 'Secondary Education in Wolverhampton 2007/08' which contains full details of the admissions criteria and processes as well as copies of the Governor's Supporting Evidence Form and the LA's Common Application Form (CAF1).
- b) Families resident outside Wolverhampton will also receive information from their 'Home LA' which will include a common application form.
2. In October 2006, brochures and Supporting Evidence Forms will be available at The King's School. Brochures will also be available from the Headteacher of your child's Primary School.
3. Parents may call at the School or write to the Admissions Officer requesting a brochure and/or Supporting Evidence Form. A self-addressed 10" x 14" envelope, with at least a 55 pence stamp, should be enclosed.
4. Families who wish to visit the School may do so on Tuesday 26th September 2006 between 6.30pm and 8.30pm or between 7.00pm and 9.00pm and Wednesday 27th September 2006 and Thursday 28th September 2006 between 9.30am and noon.

- 5a) Families resident within Wolverhampton must complete the LA's Common Application Form (CAF1), indicating a ranked preference for The King's School and return the form to the 'School Admissions and Transfers Section' at the Civic Centre in Wolverhampton or to your child's current Wolverhampton Primary School, before 3rd November 2006. The CAF1 can also be completed on line. Visit www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/admissions

Please note that you must include The King's School on the Common Application Form CAF1 to enable the Governors to consider your application.

or

- b) Families resident outside Wolverhampton must complete the appropriate common application form issued by their 'Home LA' and return it to them in accordance with the information issued, indicating a ranked preference for The King's School.

Please note that you must include The King's School on the Common Application Form to enable the Governors to consider your application.

6. The Governors' Supporting Evidence Form must be completed by all families and returned directly to the Admissions Officer at The King's School before 4.00pm on 1st December 2006 and not to your Home LA or the child's Primary School.

You should enclose a self addressed stamped envelope if you require an acknowledgement of receipt.

The Governors will consider applications from those who have only completed the common application forms. However, parents should note that, when the Governors assess the applications, they pay particular attention to the detailed information contained on the Supporting Evidence Form.

A member of the clergy/faith community must be asked to support the application on the Supporting Evidence Form, confirming the details of membership supplied by the applicant.

Applications made under Category A for 'Parish Residential Places' also require signature from the Church of England Priest confirming residence within the Parish.

. On 1st March 2007, families will be advised, by their own Local Authority, of the School at which a place has been allocated.

Admissions Criteria

Part One

- a) 150 places will be offered by the Governors each academic year for entry into Year 7. In the event of oversubscription, places will be offered in accordance with the following categories detailed below.
- b) All applicants, in a Personal Letter, must explain why they feel that the education offered by The King's School is most suitable for their child. Recognising that the School is based upon the teachings of The Church of England and that the curriculum reflects its Visual Arts, Sports with Science status, families must state clearly why this is important to them.
- c) Applicants must indicate on the Supporting Evidence Form, the category/categories under which they wish to be considered. In cases where no indication is made, the Governors will consider the application under the category/categories most appropriate, based on the evidence offered.
- d) In accordance with the 'School Admissions; Code of Practice' issued in February 2003, Governors will offer places to children in receipt of a Statement of Special Educational Needs, where The King's School is named in the schedule.

Within each category, first priority will be given to those who fully satisfy the criterion, but who also have a brother or sister already in attendance at the School.

Appendix 2b

Voluntary Aided Schools - Admission Arrangements - 2007/08

Part Two

Category A

Up to 80 Parish Residential Places will be offered, in the proportions as indicated below, to children of families of any faith or none, whose usual place of residence, defined as being the family home at which the child resides regularly on weekdays, is within one of the following parishes:-

- 1) Tettenhall Regis/Tettenhall Wood/Perton up to 40 places
- 2) St Andrew's, Wolverhampton up to 25 places
- 3) St Jude's, Wolverhampton up to 15 places

The Supporting Evidence Form must:

- be signed by the appropriate vicar/rector to confirm residence within the declared Parish Boundary and
- include a Personal Letter (see Part One b)

In the case of oversubscription in any the sub-criteria 1) or 3), places will be allocated to families on the basis of the following order or priorities, considering each sub-criterion individually, to children who, living within the declared parish boundary:

1. have specific pastoral, medical/social reasons, fully identified to the Governors by the family and/or its supporters at the time the application is made, which can be met particularly well within the environment of The King's School,
2. have well established close family connections with The King's School and/or, the former Regis School, belong to families who most fully demonstrate in their Personal Letter, supported by their appropriate faith leader, commitment to the life, work and witness of their faith and for whom, as such, a place at the School would be particularly appropriate.

Category B

Up to 35 Foundation Places will be offered to children of practising Church of England families whose membership, confirmed by the clergy, is characterised by frequent worship.

The Supporting Evidence Form must:

- be supported by the family's vicar/rector and
- include a Personal Letter (see Part One b)

In the case of oversubscription, places will be allocated on the basis of the evidence in the Personal Letter and on the Supporting Evidence Form by the family, and confirmed by the clergy, of the frequency and years/months of church attendance and/or contributions to the life, work, worship and witness of the Church.

Category C

Up to 20 Governors' Places will be offered to children of practising Christian families of a denomination other than Church of England whose membership, confirmed by the minister/faith leader, is characterised normally by frequent worship.

The Supporting Evidence Form must:

- be supported by the family's minister/faith leader and
- include a Personal Letter (see Part One b)

In the case of oversubscription, based upon the evidence provided on the Supporting Evidence Form by the family, and confirmed by the minister/faith leader, of the frequency and years/months of church attendance and/or contributions to the life, work, worship and witness of the Church, places will be allocated in the following priority order, to children of families.



1. whose church is in membership with Churches Together in Wolverhampton or other body affiliated to Churches Together in England or the Wolverhampton Evangelical Federation or equivalent for their local area.
2. whose church does not fall into 1) above.

Category D

Up to 10 Faith Community Places will be offered to children of families who practice a non-Christian faith and whose membership, confirmed by the faith leader, is characterised normally by frequent attendance at the place of worship.

The Supporting Evidence Form must:

- be supported by the family's faith leader and
- include a Personal Letter (see Part One b)

In the case of oversubscription, based upon the evidence provided by the family in the Personal Letter and on the Supporting Evidence Form of their commitment to the life, work and witness of that faith, places will be allocated in the following priority order, to children of families.

1. whose faith group belongs to the Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group or equivalent group for the local area.
2. of other faiths/groups.

Supporting evidence from a Christian faith leader will also be taken into account.

Category E

Up to 5 Pastoral Places will be offered to families of children whose families must provide evidence at the time the application is made, of particular educational, social or medical needs which can be

met especially well within the caring Christian environment of The King's School. Families must already be in receipt of support from the Church of England or other recognised appropriate faith community in meeting these needs.

The Supporting Evidence Form must:

- be supported by the family's minister/faith leader, and
- include a Personal Letter (see Part One b)

In the case of oversubscription, based upon all the relevant information offered, particularly the evidence provided by the family in a Personal Letter and confirmed by the clergy/faith leader (and professional bodies, as appropriate), places will be allocated in accordance with the following tie breakers, to children

- 1) who, in accordance with Section 22 of the Children's Act 1989, are designated a 'Looked After Child' and for whom evidence is provided which demonstrates a commitment to a recognised faith community.
- 2) belonging to a faith group which is in membership with Churches Together in Wolverhampton or other body affiliated to Churches Together in England, The Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group or the Wolverhampton Evangelical Federation or equivalent for their area.
- 3) belonging to a faith or group which does not fall into 1) or 2) above.

If the supporting evidence is of equal strength, proximity to the school site is the deciding factor within either tie-break situation. This is decided by measuring, in a straight line, the distance from the normal place of residence of the child to the school's nearest boundary.

Appendix 2b

Voluntary Aided Schools - Admission Arrangements - 2007/08

Category F

Other Places - In the event of under subscription for any of the individual Categories A to E above, Governors will reconsider all other applications not allotted a place during the initial allocation.

In the case of oversubscription, places will be allocated to children of families who reside closest to the school, determined by measuring, in a straight line, the distance from the child's usual place of residence to the school's nearest boundary.

Waiting List

In the event of a place not being offered, you can request to be placed on the waiting list, provided you have ranked The King's School on the common application form higher than the school at which you have been offered a place. You should lodge your requests with Admissions and Transfers Section at the Civic Centre before 23rd March 2007. The Governors will then be advised by the Local Authority of your request.

Formal Appeals

In the event of a place not being offered, notice of the intention to appeal to the Independent Appeals Panel, established under Section 94 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, must be made to the Chairman of Governors via the Admissions Officer at the school before **14th March 2007**.

In due course, parents will be sent the necessary Appeal Form by the Admissions Officer, and details as to when and where the Appeal will be held will be forwarded to the parents after the Appeal Form has been lodged.

7.3 Appendix C Missing value analysis for local authorities who did not return first preference data

On average, the 106 LAs with detail on first preference rates tended to:

- have a bias towards authorities with lower population density. On average, the population density for the included 106 authorities was lower (median = 12.4) than that of the missing 42 (median=20.9)
- be more representative of non-London authorities. But, within each of the 4 Local Authority types, a majority of Local Authorities provided details; varying from 58% (Inner London); 62% (Outer London), 73% (Metropolitan) to 79% (non-metropolitan).
- be more representative of first preference first authorities (81%) than. equal preference/default ranking LAs (66%)
- be more representative of authorities that are *not* one of the 14 most selctive. 6 of the 14 authorities (43%) are missing compared with other Local Authorities (27%).
- have a bias towards authorities with lower proportions of autonomous schools.
- have a bias towards authorities with lower proportions of FSM uptake. The average percentage taking FSM for missing LAs is higher on average (mean=12.7, median=11.6) compared to the 106 (mean=11.4, median=9.8).
- have a bias towards authorities with higher proportions of white pupils. The average percentage of white pupils in the missing LAs is lower (mean=73%, median=84%) than the included 106 (mean=82%, median=89%)
- have a bias towards authorities with higher proportions of pupils with English as a first language. The average percentage of pupils with English as a first language is lower for the missing LAs (mean = 82%, median=90%) compared with the 106 included (mean=89%, median=92%).
- have a bias towards authorities with lower levels of cross border movement.

7.4 Appendix D Criteria in the composite prospectus for Coopers' Company and Coborn school relating to specialist criteria.

The Coopers' Company and Coborn School, is a specialist sports college. They do not select by percentage for this however, the third admissions criteria is as follows.

3) Children who demonstrate significant involvement in activities relevant to the ethos of the School (definition below).

Activities Relevant to the Ethos of the School

Significant involvement in activities relevant to the ethos of the School is defined as:

- 1) Active and current membership of the brownies/ cubs, girls/boys brigade or equivalent church or religious organisation for a minimum of 2 years.
- 2) Playing of a musical instrument for a minimum of 2 years.
- 3) Active and current membership of a Drama/Theatre/Dance group for a minimum of 2 years.
Alternatively, participation and progression in an organised artistic interest for a minimum period of 2 years.
- 4) Current Membership of and regular, active participation within a competitive sports team (not connected with 1 above) or in individual competitive sports for a minimum of 2 years.

Applicants will need to provide documentary evidence covering the time elements of the above and copies of any certificates.

The Admissions Panel would expect applicants to provide evidence covering at least 2 aspects from the above.

Applications from disabled children unable to comply with the above will be considered by the Admissions Panel providing evidence of the level of disability is supplied.

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