Worlds Apart
social variation among schools

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Foreword

Ensuring fair admissions to our schools has been a priority for the Sutton Trust's work for several years now. Who gets into which schools remains one of the key and most contentious debates in education. The reason is simple: the secondary school you attend can have a profound impact on your future life prospects.

The fundamental problem with school admissions is that the odds are stacked heavily against those children from non-privileged backgrounds. They are far less likely to attend the top performing schools, and subsequently often do not receive the support and expertise that allows them to fulfil their academic potential. Equally, schools with a disproportionate number of children from poorer homes face an uphill struggle to raise attainment against the odds.

Five years ago, the Trust published a ground-breaking study which for the first time compared the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) - a basic measure of deprivation - at the top performing 200 secondary state schools, with the proportion of children on free school meals in the postcode areas in which the schools were sited. The findings revealed significant differences between the intakes of schools and their local communities: 3% of children at the schools were on free school meals, compared with 12.3% in local areas, and 14.3% nationally.

This latest study, by the Centre for Education and Employment Research at the University of Buckingham, in many ways provides an update to this earlier analysis. The research uses a new powerful indicator of deprivation - based on the numbers of children on income benefits in a particular postcode - which has for the first time been mapped onto the pupil intakes of state schools in England. Considering the 100 most socially selective comprehensive schools in England, for example, the analysis reveals that on average 8.6% of children are from income deprived homes - despite being situated in localities where 20.1% of children are income deprived.

What should be done to address such stark social segregation in our school system? The researchers remain unconvinced that either the current admissions code, or 'supply-side' reforms to create a new cadre of independently run state schools will provide the solution.

However, one step that would help to provide more balanced school intakes – and give poorer parents a better chance and give poorer parents a better chance of gaining a coveted place - would be wider introduction of ballots, or random allocation, to decide who gets places in over-subscribed schools when other selection criteria have been met.

In 2007 a public poll commissioned by the Trust found that ballots may not be as unpopular among parents as might be assumed. The Ipsos Mori survey found for example that when given the specific scenario of an oversubscribed comprehensive school, nearly as many people thought that a ballot is the fairer way of deciding which pupils get a place as those who thought it is fairer to decide on how near families live to the school.

For ballots to be used widely as a tiebreaker, faith schools would also have to adopt simple binary selection criteria - children judged to be of the faith, or not, rather than using subjective gradations of faith. We also believe that ballots could work alongside fair banding and 'pupil centred' catchment areas - created by allowing every child to apply to up to 6 of the closest schools to their home (rather than ranking children by how close they live to the school gates).

At the same time, successful schools should be allowed more freedom to expand where possible. Crucially, any newly created schools should automatically adopt ballots as a tiebreaker for oversubscribed school places.

Politicians often oppose the use of ballots arguing that no child's education should be decided by the roll of a dice. But deployed alongside other selection criteria, ballots are the fairest way of deciding school places in over-subscribed schools. There has to be some way of choosing which pupils are admitted, and ballots offer the same chances to all children irrespective of their background.

We are extremely grateful to Alan Smithers and Pamela Robinson for producing this timely analysis as the political parties prepare for a General Election, and hope that it will stimulate further debate on a critical issue for parents, policy-makers and politicians alike.

Sir Peter Lampl
Chairman
The Sutton Trust

Executive Summary

Key Findings

- This analysis is the first to use a new powerful indicator of social deprivation to investigate social segregation in secondary schools in England. A Social Selectivity Index has been calculated for every state secondary school in the country, comparing the proportion of pupils at the school with parents on income benefits with the proportion of similarly deprived children in the localities from which the school intake is drawn.

Social Segregation in State Comprehensives

- The 2,679 state comprehensive schools in England are highly socially segregated: the least deprived comprehensive in the country has 1 in 25 (4.2%) of pupils with parents on income benefits compared with over 16 times as many (68.6%) in the most deprived comprehensive.

- The social make-up of a school's intake partly reflects where it is located, but is mainly due to which pupils apply and are selected.

- In the 100 most socially selective comprehensive schools in England, on average 8.6% of children are from income deprived homes - despite being situated in localities where 20.1% of children are income deprived.

- In the 100 comprehensive schools in England with the least advantaged intakes, on average 38.9% of children are from income deprived areas - despite being situated in localities where 30.3% of children are income deprived.

Social Selection and Academic Selection.

- Social selection is not the same as academic selection. Considering all secondary schools in England (including grammars, academies, city technology colleges, secondary moderns and comprehensives), 91 of the 100 most socially selective schools were comprehensives, eight were grammars and one a secondary modern.

- Both the 164 grammars and the 164 most socially selective comprehensives drew pupils from areas where about a fifth of children were income deprived, but the comprehensives were the more socially selective taking only 9.2% compared with the grammars 13.5%. Nearly all (97.7%) of the pupils in grammars attained five good GCSEs including English and maths compared with 66.7% in the comprehensives.

- Parents' school preferences are not based solely on examination results. Of the 100 most socially selective comprehensives, one had just 35% achieving five good GCSEs, another 44%, and six altogether had 50% or fewer. In only three did 90% or more pupils obtain five good GCSEs.

- Parents tend to seek out schools where children similar to their own go. In addition to ability and income level, ethnic background and faith play a part. Of the 100 most socially selective schools 65 had intakes that were at least 90% White British compared with 48 of the most income deprived; 11 of the most socially selective were faith schools compared with 5 of the deprived.

Predicting Social Selectivity

- It was possible to predict with 92.5% accuracy whether a comprehensive school would be in the top ten per cent for social selectivity.

- The most socially selective schools tended to be in charge of their own admissions, to have a sixth form, to be large, and to have adopted an academic rather than a practical specialism. Pupils entered with high Key Stage 2 scores and achieved good GCSE results, were from similar ethnic backgrounds, and relatively few had special educational needs.

Policy Challenge

- As we approach the 2010 Election there is a challenge to be faced by the political parties: are you content with the current extent of social variation among secondary schools and, if not, how do you propose to tackle it? Parental preferences will never exactly match the places available and there will always be a pecking order of schools, so there will always need to be a means of allocating oversubscribed school places.

Current System and Existing Proposals

- There is an Admissions Code which has been continually modified since it was first introduced in 1998 in attempts to prevent it being manipulated by schools and gamed by parents. Each modification has made it more complex and the Code for 2010 runs to 89 pages.

- It is sometimes suggested that creating more good schools would reduce the need for schools to select, but even so some schools would inevitably be more popular than others and would have to decide who would get the places.

- A 'pupil premium' for disadvantaged pupils has been mooted as a way of incentivizing schools to become less socially selective, but whether it would be sufficient to cause schools to change their practices in the light of league tables is open to question.

Ballots to Address Social Segregation

- Random allocation is potentially the fairest method of deciding admissions and the one that is most likely lead to a more equitable educational system. It would, however, challenge accepted principles in school admissions, such as local children being given priority for local schools, and siblings being guaranteed admission to the same school, as well as calling into question the existence of faith schools.

- However, we believe that the Government should adopt random allocation - ballots - as the principal means of deciding school places when schools are over-subscribed. It would be fair and sweep away much of the complexity and bureaucracy of present arrangements.

- Random allocation could be used in conjunction with other criteria depending on the view that was taken of the desired composition of schools. Eligibility to enter the ballot could be determined, for example, by ability bands, localities, and faiths. Places could be reserved for siblings.

- At the same time, successful schools should be allowed more freedom to expand where possible, and any newly created schools should automatically adopt ballots as the principal means of allocating oversubscribed school places.

1. Introduction

1. Secondary education in England is socially very diverse. Since it is now over fifty years since the country began to move towards a comprehensive system of secondary schools intended to bring equivalent opportunities to all children, it might be thought that the social differences between schools had largely disappeared or at least mainly reflected where they were. But this is far from the case.

2. The extent of the differences has been glimpsed already by comparing schools in terms of the proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals. Using this measure the Sutton Trust[1] found that some comprehensive schools were more socially selective than grammar schools. Of the 100 most socially selective secondary maintained schools, 83 were comprehensive with the highest grammar in 31st place. Of the 83 comprehensives in the list, 55 were either voluntary aided or foundation schools, responsible for their own admissions.

2. Social Selectivity Index

3. In this report we extend the analysis using a new indicator developed by the Department of Communities and Local Government called IDACI[2]. The acronym stands for Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index. It records (DCSF, 2009) the proportion of children in 32,482 defined areas[3] who are in families in receipt of income support[4]. IDACI is expressed in two ways. Each area of about 1,500 people is given a score based on the percentage of children aged under 16 who are living in families that are income deprived. The areas are also ranked with 1 assigned to the most income deprived and 32,482 to the least. IDACI records children who experience deprivation but who are not receiving free school meals since it includes those where the parents are in paid employment and those who do not claim the free school meals for which they are eligible.

4. We have created for each maintained secondary school a Social Selectivity Index from the IDACI scores. The DCSF kindly made available to us its National Pupil Level Database, including IDACI scores and ranks for 2007-2008. We have aggregated the pupil level scores to the school level, so from the individual pupils we are able to calculate an average pupil IDACI score for each school. We are also able to calculate an average IDACI score for the areas from which the pupils are drawn. In the Social Selection Index we divide the average for the intake by the average for the area and express this as a mean of 500 with a standard deviation of 100. A high score indicates that a school takes fewer pupils from income deprived homes than would be expected from the locality, a low score that the school takes more pupils from income deprived homes than to be expected, and scores about the mean that the intake is broadly in line with the locality.

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[1] Sutton Trust (October 2008). *Social Selectivity of State Schools and the Impact of Grammars*. London: Sutton Trust.
[2] Department for Children, Schools and Families (March 2009). *Deprivation and Education: The Evidence on Pupils in England, Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4*. London: Schools Analysis and Research Division.
[3] The country is divided into 32,482 units called Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOA), each with an average population of about 1,500.
[4] Income Support, Income Based Job Seekers Allowance, Pension Credit, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit.

5. We have been able compile a dataset for all maintained schools in England, including city technology colleges and academies, for pupils that took their GCSEs in 2008. We have supplemented the data from the National Pupil Level Database with information obtained from three other DCSF sources: the School and College Achievement Tables, the Standards Site and Edubase. In our dataset each school is described by 83 variables covering the nature of the school, where it is located, the characteristics of the intake, and outcome measures such as GCSE performance.

Chart 1: Least and Most Income Deprived

	100 Most Deprived	100 Least Deprived
Social Background		
Index	298.9	698.3
Area Average IDACI	30.3	20.1
Pupil Average IDACI	38.9	8.6
%Eligible FSM	26.3	3.2
Attainment		
Key Stage 2 Score	25.0	28.5
Key Stage 3 Score	30.7	37.3
%Five Good GCSEs (inc English and maths)	26.3	67.2
Value Added Score	1004.2	1003.4
%Gifted and Talented	11.5	18.2
National Challenge	67	0
Ethnic Background		
%White British	79.7	90.5
%Afro-Caribbean	3.6	1.4
%Indian	2.1	2.7
%Chinese	0.2	0.5
%Pakistani/Bangladeshi	9.9	0.8
%Other White	2.0	1.8
%Other	1.6	1.0
%Not Known/Refused	1.7	1.3
Special Needs		
%Action	18.6	8.6
%Plus	11.7	3.1
%Statemented	3.0	2.0
School Characteristics		
Sixth Form	37	77
Own Admissions	16	33
Faith	5	11
Year 11 Pupils	160	250
Community School	83	64
Practical Specialism	66	22
%Girls	47.9	47.9

3. Social Segregation in State Comprehensives

6. What does our Social Selectivity Index show? One way of considering the extent of social selection across the sector is to compare the extremes: those with the most and least income deprived intakes with respect to their localities. Chart 1 sets out the school and pupil characteristics of the 100 comprehensives with the most income deprived intakes and contrasts them with those of the 100 comprehensives with the least income deprived intakes.

7. Considering the 100 most socially selective comprehensive schools in England (out of 2,679), the analysis reveals that, on average, 8.6% of children are from income deprived areas - despite being situated in localities where 20.1% of children are from income deprived homes. Meanwhile in the 100 comprehensive schools in England with the least advantaged intakes, 38.9% of children are from income deprived areas - despite being situated in localities where 30.3% of children are income deprived. This has to be see in the context of a range in which the least deprived comprehensive in the country has 1 in 25 (4.2%) of pupils from homes on income benefits compared with over 16 times as many (68.6%) in the most deprived comprehensive.

8. These two very different groups of schools are associated with starkly different educational performance, as one might expect. In the least income deprived, 67.2% of the pupils in 2008 obtained five good GCSEs including English and maths compared with only 26.3% in the most income deprived. Of the 100 schools in this group, 67 were involved in the National Challenge tackling schools where 30% or fewer obtained good GCSEs, but none of the 100 most socially selective were included. These differences stem, at least in part, from the different levels of attainment on entry.

9. Chart 1 also reveals other differences. The socially selective schools tended to be larger, and more had sixth forms, were in charge of their own admissions, were faith schools, and had adopted academic rather than practical specialisms. Their pupils by definition came from more prosperous homes, were less likely to have special educational needs, and differed in ethnic background from the income deprived schools. There was no difference, however, in gender composition.

4. How do the Differences Arise?

10. In order to get handle on how social selectivity arises let us first consider two comparisons of neighbouring schools[5].

Pen Portrait I

11. School A is at the slightly more prosperous end of town drawing its intake from areas[6] where on average 27% are classed as income deprived. The comparable figure for School B is 33%. The intakes, however, differ by considerably more with School A having an average intake of 16% and School B 37% income deprived. Dividing intake by area and standardising gives School A's Social Selectivity Index as 614 and School B's as 383. Thus School A is more than a standard deviation above the mean and School B's more than a standard deviation below. Two-thirds of the pupils in School A obtained five good GCSEs[7] compared with only 28% in School B. School A receives

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[5] All are actual examples but we have not named them.
[6] Average of each of the LSOAs from which the intake is drawn.
[7] Five good GCSEs in this report always refers to five GCSEs grades A*-C including English and maths.

nearly four times as many applications as there is room for while School B struggles to fill its places. The local authority at one stage proposed merging the schools, but this was hotly opposed by the parents, and following the intervention of the local MP the plan was dropped. School B is now to be replaced by an academy.

12. Parents wanting to be sure of their children getting a place at School A pay a premium on house prices to live as near to it as possible. Once various statutory obligations, for example to children in the care of the local authority, have been met the main basis for deciding who gets a place is distance from the school.

Pen Portrait II

13. Schools C and D are neighbours in the same London borough. School C draws its intake from a somewhat more income deprived area than School D, though there is considerable overlap. The average percentage of children from families on benefits in the catchment of School C is in round figures 37 compared with 34 for School D. Nevertheless, School C's intake has fewer income deprived children than that of School D - 32% against 38%. More parents seek out School C which is oversubscribed and in consequence has to engage in selection. School C get much better GCSE results than School D with 64% achieving five good passes in 2008 compared with 40% in School D. The differences seem to arise because School C is regarded as a good school locally, perhaps not unconnected with the memory that it was once a grammar school.

Components of Selectivity

14. There are thus two components to social selectivity. The first is the income background of the parents who apply to a school and the second is how a school chooses among applicants when there are more than can be given a place.

Parental Preferences

15. What prompts parents to apply for one school rather than another is not always easy to see, but it is possible to distinguish beliefs about the quality of the school from extrinsic factors. What sets a school apart as a 'good school' can be word of mouth sharing of personal experiences. Another factor is the school's history. Former grammars in many cases retain their reputations and over a fifth of the most selective comprehensives had at one time been grammars. However it happens when a school gets the reputation of being good it becomes reinforcing. 'Good' schools find it easier to recruit teachers and enjoy other advantages, so it becomes something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Parents compete to get their children in. So the pupils have the benefit of high quality teaching and parental support, and obtain good results.

16. Social variation between schools is, in part, a consequence of allowing parent to choose schools (strictly speaking to express preferences). But those choices are not always based on perceptions of quality. Extrinsic factors can intrude. A recent study has considered in detail applications in a small unitary authority comprising six secondary schools[8]. It found that three secondary schools took a lot more free school meals pupils than the other three in relation to their postcodes. What seemed to distinguish the two groups were the costs. Taking into account the charges for uniform, PE kit, school visits, music lessons and contributions to the school fund, the socially selective schools were more than three times as expensive. The costs and ease of transport to the schools

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[8] Waterman, C. (November 2006), *Free Admission? A System on Report*. London: Institute for Research in Integrated Strategies.

also differed. The constraints on parental preferences may therefore be to some extent income related.

Selection by Schools

17. Schools with more applicants than they have room for necessarily have to select. The Government has attempted to set out an equitable basis for doing this in a series of Admissions Codes[9] introduced since the School Standards and Framework Act of 1998. Each revision has sought to plug gaps and close loopholes. At first voluntary, the Code since 2008 has been mandatory. The current version runs to 89 pages. It would seem to have been painstakingly put together, but there is still wriggle room for schools that want to ensure a favourable intake to enable them to show up well in league tables.

18. Voluntary aided and foundation schools, unlike community and voluntary controlled schools, are responsible for their own admissions and can set their own criteria within the Code. Schools with a religious affiliation can give preference to people of the faith. Some comprehensive schools have retained the right from when they were grammar schools to select a proportion of their intakes by ability, and some specialist schools are able to select up to 10% by aptitude. Schools can use distance from the school as a criterion and this may tend to exclude low income homes if it sits in a prosperous area. Schools are required to show that their admissions arrangements are procedurally fair and are also equitable for all groups of children, but this remains to be tested in a court of law by any families who consider they have been unfairly excluded. It has, however, been recommended that oversubscribed schools should invite an independent observer to their allocation meetings[10].

Respective Impacts of Location and Intake

19. A school will come out as having a high social selectivity score on our scale if better-off parents show a preference for it, or it in some way selects pupils so that pupils from more prosperous homes are admitted. The location of the school correlates 0.446 with social selectivity, but over and above this intakes vary so that correlation with social selectivity is even greater at 0.733 (for 2,679 comprehensive schools).

5. Predicting Social Selectivity

20. We can gain further insight into which schools are socially selective by attempting to predict membership of the top and bottom deciles (each with 268 schools) using binary logistic regression. With this approach we were able to achieve 89% accuracy of prediction: 92.5% for the top decile and 85.8% for the bottom decile. Chart 2 shows the main predictors. It reveals that a National Challenge school (30% or below with five good GCSEs) was 167 times more likely to fall in the bottom decile than the top (there was one in the top group!). A school with a quarter or more of the intake from ethnic backgrounds other than White British was 13 times more likely to be in the bottom decile.

21. Other notable contributions to the predictive success were special educational needs, school size, whether the school had opted for an academic specialism, whether it had a sixth form and whether it was its own admissions authority. Among the variables that did not appear to add anything were whether the school was single sex, whether it was a

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[9] See paragraphs 42-46, pages 12 and 13 of this report.

[10] Waterman, C. (2006), *Free Admission? A System on Report*. London: Institute for Research in Integrated Strategies.

faith school (most of this variance was accounted for by including whether the school was in charge of its own admissions), and whether the school was in London.

Chart 2: Logistic Regression

Characteristic	Odds Ratio
National Challenge School[1]	166.67
White British	13.36
Special Education Needs[1]	8.33
Size	5.05
Academic Specialism	2.96
Sixth Form	2.59
Own Admissions Authority	2.29

1. Predicts membership of bottom decile.

22.   The picture that emerges is thus of parents seeking out schools which had good results, had sixth forms, were large, had academic specialisms and took children mainly from a similar ethnic background. Income deprived pupils tended to end up in schools with poor GCSE performance and above average (more than 0.5 standard deviation) special needs (which are mainly defined in terms of slow progress).

Chart 3: Correlations with Social Selectivity

Variable	Correlation
Key Stage 2 Score	0.715
Key stage 3 Score	0.711
Five GCSEs at Grades A*-C including English and Maths	0.655
Eligible for Free School Meals	-0.623
Special Educational Needs[2]	-0.363
Slow Progress[3]	-0.324
White British	0.303
Size	0.297
Gifted and Talented	0.111
Contextual Value Added	-0.033
Percentage Girls	-0.018

1. For 2,679 cases all the correlations are significant beyond the one per cent level except for Contextual Value Added and the percentage of girls.

2. School Action Plus (special educational needs referred to local authorities) and Statements.

3. School Action (response to slow progress).

23.   These comparisons are borne out by correlations of continuous variables across all comprehensive schools, not just those at the extremes. Chart 3 shows that the strongest associations were with performance measures, and fittingly, given that we are inferring school selection, with Key Stage 2 scores providing the highest correlation. There is a close link to free school meals[11] which serves to validate the index, but also confirms

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[11] Relationship is negative because, on the one hand, we are measuring social selectivity and, on the other, eligibility for free school meals.

that our measure is tapping into other things (approaching 40% of the variance was overlapping). Special educational needs, ethnicity, and school size which emerged in the comparisons of the top and bottom deciles come out again as strongly implicated.

24. The number of children identified in schools as gifted and talented varies greatly, and seems not to be closely related to school performance. Neither is it strongly linked with social selectivity, but is nevertheless statistically associated, bearing in mind that there are 2,679 cases. The only variables not to be significantly associated with the Social Selectivity Index were contextual value added (which could be regarded as a triumph since the measure is designed to eliminate background effects), and confirmation that the gender make-up appears unimportant in this respect.

25. On the basis of these variables, leaving aside eligibility for free school meals, which is an attempt to measure the same thing, it is possible in linear regression to account for 59% of the variation in the Social Selection Index. GCSE results make the largest contribution followed by Key 3 and 2 results, size and ethnic background. The linear regression of continuous variables across all schools, therefore, bears out the binary logistic regression of the extremes in Chart 2.

6. Social Selection and Academic Selection

26. Although, as Chart 3 confirms, there is a close association between home background and school performance, social selection is not the same as academic selection. Of the 100 most socially selective schools, 91 were comprehensives, eight grammars and one a secondary modern. In Chart 4 we compare the 164 grammar schools with the 164 most socially selective comprehensive schools. Both drew pupils from areas where about a fifth of children lived in income deprived homes, but the comprehensives had, on average, an intake of only 9.2% compared with the grammars 13.5%. In terms of the Social Selectivity Index the comprehensives came out at about a standard deviation higher than the grammars at 684.4 compared with 593.2. Interestingly, a comparison in terms of free school meals pointed in the opposite direction with 3.4% eligible in the comprehensives against 2.1% in the grammars. We can speculate that proud parents with children in grammars would be less likely to claim the free meals - another reason for preferring IDACI.

27. The academically selective grammars outscored the socially selective comprehensives on all the attainment measures. Their intakes did significantly better at Key Stage 2 and the gap had widened by Key Stage 3. By age 16, 97.7% of the grammar school pupils achieved at least five good GCSEs, but for the socially selective comprehensives it was only 66.7%. Of the 164 socially selective comprehensives only three scored 90% and above (the highest was 92%) and 11 scored 50% or below (the lowest was 35%). In contrast, all but three of the grammars scored 90% or above (50 achieved 100%) and the lowest was 79%.

28. Chart 4 also shows that the intake of the grammars was more ethnically varied than the intake of the socially selective comprehensives. A higher proportion of the ethnic minority sub-groups were admitted to the grammars, but particularly those from Indian and Chinese backgrounds. Eighteen of the grammars had fewer than 50% White British entrants compared with only one of the socially selective comprehensives.

Chart 4: Social Selection and Academic Selection

School Types	Socially Selective Comprehensives	Grammars
Social Background		
SSI	684.4	593.2
Area Average	20.1	20.3
Pupil Average	9.2	13.5
%Eligible FSM	3.4	2.1
Attainment		
Key Stage 2	28.5	31.8
Key Stage 3	37.2	43.3
%Five Good GCSEs	66.7	97.7
Value Added	1003.0	1003.0
%Gifted and Talented	18.1	35.4
Ethnic Background		
%White British	91.1	79.7
%Afro-Caribbean	1.4	2.3
%Indian	2.4	8.1
%Chinese	0.4	1.4
%Pakistani/Bangladeshi	0.7	2.3
%Other White	1.7	2.8
%Other	1.0	2.1
%Not Known/Refused	1.3	1.4
Special Needs[2]		
Action	8.6	3.1
Plus	3.3	1.3
Statemented	1.9	0.2
Total	164	164

29. When they have the choice, it seems that parents tend to seek out schools which take children similar to their own. This may help to explain why a school where only 35% of the pupils got five good GCSEs appears in the list of the 100 most socially selective comprehensives. In addition to ability and income level, ethnic background and faith play a part. Of the 100 most socially selective schools, 65 had intakes that were at least 90% White British compared with 48 of the most income deprived. As we saw in Chart 1 those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi, and Afro-Caribbean background, also tend to cluster, so that it appears to occur generally across the ethnic groups. Faith also plays a part; 11 of the most socially selective comprehensives were faith schools compared with five of those with the most income deprived intakes.

7. Features of Socially Selective Schools

30. There are huge differences in the social composition of comprehensive schools, which we can quantify using our Social Selectivity Index.

Chart 5: Social Selectivity Among Comprehensives

School Types	N	Mean Social Selectivity Score
Funding		
Community	1,636	484.8
Voluntary Aided	469	510.5
Voluntary Controlled	72	519.5
Foundation	502	521.2
Gender		
Girls	142	478.4
Boys	100	495.8
Coed	2,437	498.2
Faith		
Church of England	140	520.1
Roman Catholic	308	507.2
Other Christian	22	515.9
Other Faith	14	482.3
Secular	2,195	494.1
GCSE		
National Challenge[1]	390	394.1
Other	2,289	514.6
Special Needs[2]		
Yes	609	437.4
No	2,070	514.6
Ethnicity[3]		
White British	2,067	512.4
Other	612	445.2
Partly Selective[4]		
Yes	44	538.2
No	2,635	496.4
Sixth Form		
Yes	1,492	513.6
No	1,187	476.2
Size[5]		
99 or Fewer	104	436.2
100-149	450	454.2
150-199	866	490.1
200-249	760	512.9
250-299	349	528.7
300 or More	150	553.9
Total	2,679	497.0

1. 30% or fewer achieving five GCSEs A*-C including English and maths.

2. Special needs defined as more than 0.5 standard deviation above the mean of the combined percentage of School Action Plus and statemented.

3. White British defined as more than 75.0% from this ethnic background.

4. Some comprehensives have retained the right to admit part of their intake on the basis of a selection test eg Watford Boys Grammar and Parmiter's.

5. Numbers at end of Key Stage 4.

31. Chart 5 shows the average scores of various school types. Large schools, those with sixth forms, Christian schools, and voluntary aided, voluntary controlled and foundation schools all emerge as being among the more socially selective. Forty-four nominally comprehensive schools have retained or gained the right to select part of their intake and they, too, are more socially selective. National Challenge schools, those with higher levels of special needs and those with more than a quarter from ethnic groups other than White British were more likely to be taking more income deprived children than to be expected from the locality.

32. Not all these school groupings are independent. Faith schools are often voluntary aided and responsible for their own admissions, so these three features are linked. But the associations with size and having a sixth form appear to be independently related to social selectivity. It is not just that schools with sixth forms tend to be larger. Our analysis showed that for all school sizes those with sixth forms tended to be the more socially selective. Size could come into to play because it is possible that some schools have grown in response to the press of applicants.

33. The main features of comprehensive schools that are socially selective, in the sense of taking many fewer children from income deprived homes than to be expected from the locality, as revealed by the analyses are:

   School Characteristics:
   - responsibility for own admissions;

   - has a sixth form;

   - large;

   - academic rather then a practical specialism;

   - in a few cases, academically selective.

   Pupil Characteristics:
   - high Key Stage 2 scores;

   - high GCSE attainment;

   - few special needs;

   - distinctive ethnic backgrounds.

8. Policy Implications

34. The Social Selection Index demonstrates that there are big differences between schools in the average income background of pupils. Much of this reflects where the school is located. Schools in areas of high poverty, such as the poorer parts of London like Tower Hamlets, and Liverpool and Manchester, have higher proportions of pupils from lower income homes than schools in more prosperous areas like Oxfordshire, North Yorkshire and Northamptonshire. But our Social Selection Index shows that over and above these geographical differences, particular schools seem to get more of their pupils from relatively prosperous homes than neighbouring schools. These imbalances arise partly because fewer of the low income parents put their children forward, but also from selection on the part of the school when the places are over-subscribed.

35. We saw this in operation when, in paragraphs 11-13, we compared neighbouring schools with socially very different intakes. Considering all state comprehensives, the socially selective tended to be large, to have sixth forms, and to be faith or foundation schools deciding their own admissions. National Challenge schools, schools with high levels of special needs, and schools with high percentages from ethnic backgrounds other than White British are taking more children from income deprived homes than to be expected from where they are located.

36. We have also compared the extremes of social selectivity in the school system. Of the 100 most socially selective comprehensive schools in England, on average, 8.6% of children came from income deprived areas when to reflect their localities it might have been expected to be 20.1%. Meanwhile in the 100 comprehensive schools in England with the least advantaged intakes, 38.9% of children came from income deprived areas, despite there being 30.3% in the locality.

37. The first question prompted by these findings is: does it matter that there are these differences? It could be argued that it is only to be expected if the policies of successive governments have given parents choice of schools and created diversity to give them something to choose among. Social segregation is an inevitable consequence of parental choice, so why get fussed? But the contrary view, and one to which we subscribe, is that it has to be taken seriously because social selectivity impedes both social mobility and the integration of society.

Social Mobility
38. The socially selective schools take the more able pupils at age 11 and achieve the better GCSE results at age 16. Whether this is because the parents of more able children seek out these schools or the schools somehow contrive to pick out the more able is less important than that it happens. It means that, for example, a child with real talent in science may never get to know this because the school that he or she ends up in does not have the science teachers to develop that potential. But if their parents had got them into the school down the road there would have been.

39. A range of evidence has demonstrated that schools rather than the individual talents and interests of children can determine the educational pathways they pursue. A recent report for the Sutton Trust, for example, found that highly able pupils attending the most deprived schools were ten times more likely to be put on an intermediate GNVQ than high ability pupils in the most advantaged schools[12].

Integrated Society
40. Social selectivity also results in children of different income backgrounds, abilities, ethnicity and faiths being clustered in different schools. Children may be taught in environments very different from the diversity of population outside the school gates. Over a quarter of comprehensive schools (696 or 26%) had intakes of particular ethnic minorities more than two standard deviations above the mean[13]. This partly reflects where the schools are located, but also the tendency of parents to seek out schools where children similar to their own go.

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[12] http://www.suttontrust.com/reports/Attainment_deprived_schools_summary.pdf
[13] 150 Afro-Caribbean, 106 Pakistani/Bangladeshi, 98 Indian, 98 Chinese, 74 Other White, 109 Other Ethnic, 61 Refused.

9. Current Policies

41. The lever available to any government wishing the influence the spread of children across schools is the admissions system. The Labour Party sees its Admissions Code as the best way of securing fair access, the Conservative Party hopes to side-step the issue by creating more good schools and introducing a pupil premium, and the Liberal Democrats also propose a pupil premium, would crack down on all forms of selection and empower local authorities to oversee admissions.

Admissions Code

42. The Government has attempted to establish an equitable basis for allocating school places through a series of admissions codes[14]. The School Standards and Framework Act of 1998 paved the way and the first Code was published in 1999 applying to admissions in 2000. It allowed wide discretion but deemed certain criteria to be acceptable: 'sibling links, distance from the school, ease of access by public transport, medical or social grounds, catchment area and transfer from named feeder schools, as well as parents' ranking of preference'. This has been superseded by a succession of revised codes each designed to plug gaps. A second Code in 2003 recommended priority be given to 'looked after' children and cautioned against giving preference to children whose siblings had previously attended the school or to the children of teachers.

43. Schools at first only had to 'have regard to' the Code, but since September 2008 it has been mandatory. Interviews were ruled out in 2006, and the 2007 Code emphasized that admissions must not be made on subjective criteria. The latest Code lists 15 prohibitions, including not giving priority to: first preferences or the order in which applications were received; to parents willing to support the school financially or in other ways; to the educational achievement or background of parents; or to taking into account the behaviour of other members of the child's family. Furthermore, the application form has to be minimal, parents cannot be interviewed or asked for supplementary information, and the school must not ask for a photograph of the child (unless it is among the few allowed to test the children when use of a photograph is permitted to confirm identity).

44. Parents not getting their preferred place can appeal to an Independent Appeals Panel. There is also the Office of the Schools Adjudicator which determines the legality of admissions arrangements referred to it by a local authority, the Secretary of State, or that come to its attention by other means. The Schools Adjudicator can be sometimes placed in the position of having to make the judgement of Solomon. He found himself at one stage having to decide what is ability and what is aptitude[15]. He has been asked to adjudicate on what it is reasonable for a faith school to do in order to test the strength of a person's religious commitment. In a recent determination[16] the Adjudicator was asked to rule on whether a catchment area was legal, given the 1989 Greenwich and 1997 Rotherham Judgements which ruled that it is unlawful to automatically allocate

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[14] Code of Practice on School Admissions, Department for Education and Employment, 1999; Code of Practice on School Admissions, Department for Education and Skills, 2003; Compliance with the Schools Admissions Code, Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2008; School Admissions Code 2010, Department of Children, Schools and Families.

[15] *Secondary Education: School Admissions*, Volume I, House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, Fourth Report of Session 2003-04, Chief Schools Adjudicator, Dr Philip Hunter, paragraph 197, page 63.

[16] Determination ADA/001661, 16 October 2009.

school places to children living in a catchment area because that did not give sufficient choice to parents from outside that area. A parent in Warwickshire complained that her child was excluded from the nearest school because they did not live in the defined zone and the boundary between them and the school ran along the perimeter of the local authority. However, the Adjudicator ruled that the County Council had a duty to ensure provision of places for children in the county and there is nothing unlawful in part of a county boundary being used to define a catchment area if there is good reason. Accordingly, the objection was not upheld.

45.   We have spelt out the detail to illustrate that although in theory an admissions code should ensure fairness its specification and enforcement becomes complex. The Code, as we have seen, has had to be frequently revised to close loopholes. Even so the Code is still open to 'game playing'. Parents can move house so as to be close to the desired school, once they have got one child in they are free to relocate because their other children will be given places, or they can take pains to demonstrate they are active members of a particular faith. A lot of time can be consumed in appeals and adjudications, so the code is bureaucratically wasteful. A recent survey concluded that the admissions system remains too complex, and not sufficiently clear to many parents or carers[17].

46.   The Government is likely to argue that the Admissions Code now in force now is much tighter than the 2003 Code under which the pupils of this report were admitted, and that there is likely to be less social variation in the coming years. That is arguable. It is undeniable, however, that the Admissions Code in operation is complicated, time-consuming and causes a lot of heartache to parents. Rather than having to continually plug holes and elaborate case law, it is worth asking: could not the admissions process be made simpler and intrinsically fairer?

More Good Schools

47.   The Conservative party's current solution to oversubscription is to create more good schools[18]. They point to Sweden where private providers responding to demand for places which could not be met have opened new schools. But there are reasons for doubting whether this approach would make secondary education less socially selective, because the schools are likely to be set up by particular groups of parents concerned mostly with the interests of their own children. Neither would it solve the immediate issue for a parent who could not get their child into a preferred school since the new school would take time to get up and running. Trying to overcome the problem of school social selection by creating more good schools requires that many more surplus places be left in the less popular schools. This is a difficult case to make given the financial state of the country. And however many new schools are opened it is a remote possibility that parental preferences will ever exactly match the opportunities available. There will, therefore, always have to be a means of allocating the places.

Pupil Premium

48.   The Conservatives are also proposing the creation of a 'pupil premium' whereby schools would be allocated extra funds for taking the most disadvantaged children. But it

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[17] West, A., Barham, E. and Hind, A. (2009). *Secondary School Admissions in England: Policy and Practice*. Research and Information on State Education. http://www.risetrust.org.uk/Secondary.pdf
[18] For more details, see: http://www.conservatives.com/Policy/Where_we_stand/Schools.aspx

remains to be seen how this would work in practice[19]. How large would it have to be to change current behaviour and which existing budgets would have to be cut to provide the extra funds? The Liberal Democrats meanwhile have also proposed a pupil premium for disadvantaged pupils, and would empower local authorities to oversee the Admissions Code. They propose to stop the establishment of new schools which select by ability, aptitude or faith, and to reduce radically all existing forms of selection[20].

10. Other Solutions

49. The Sutton Trust and others have proposed a number of ways in which the current system - and indeed a future free schools model - could be improved, and which they hope would lead to less socially segregated pupil intakes. This includes using the ideas of behavioural economics to allow poorer students to be automatically entered as a candidate for the local high performing school unless they chose to 'opt-out', or giving explicit priority to poorer children in the school selection process so they are given a place before other children. Another suggestion has been to simplify the selection criteria for faith schools so that children are simply asked whether they are from a particular faith or not.

50. Libertarians have suggested that the logic of autonomous schools should be followed through and, as in the independent sector, all state schools should be allowed to decide for themselves how they allocate places. Parents could be given a voucher to 'buy' places. But while this would strip out the bureaucracy and restrictions of the Admissions Code, it is likely to lead to the education system becoming even more diversified.

51. Two other possible ways of allocating places can immediately be ruled out. First-come-first-served would lead either to ambitious parents putting their children's names down before birth or, if it were organised differently, to Wimbledon-type queues that snaked round the block for several weeks in advance of the list being opened. Neither is controlling entry through fees an option. Even our independent schools do not compete on price, but select using entrance tests.

52. Then there is capacity to benefit educationally. Admitting students on ability is not as outrageous as it is sometimes presented. Such a system would have the advantage of identifying people with talent irrespective of their background and providing high quality education to enable them to make the most of their gifts. In this study we found the grammar schools to be ethnically more diverse than the socially selective comprehensive schools.

53. The emotion whipped up against the old 11 plus has made it hard to think straight about the issue. It has led to the absurd situation that we have what in name are specialist schools but which are not able to admit on talent for the subject. Allocating places on educational merit does not have to be at age 11. Experience elsewhere suggests that 14 is a more appropriate age. Nor does it have to be by a single test. Other countries use a combination of tests, school reports and assessment activities of various kinds[21].

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[19] The Institute For Fiscal Studies has recently produced a report on how the pupil premium might operate in practice. See: http://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/4775

[20] For details, see: http://www.libdems.org.uk/education.aspx

[21] Smithers, A. and Robinson, P (2009). *Physics Participation and Policies: Lessons from Abroad.* Buckingham: Carmichael Press.

54. However, we recognise that, since the main political parties have ruled it out and reorganising education with age 14 as the watershed would involve considerable upheaval, its time has not yet come.

11. Ballots

55. But there is a radical possibility which, although it could pose electoral difficulties[22], is in principle the fairest method of allocating school places and the one that is most likely lead to a more equitable educational system. This is random allocation - which we are referring to as admission by ballot rather than as admission by lottery since 'lottery' carries negative overtones[23]. In essence, parents would be able to express preferences, as now, but when more wanted their child to go to a school than could be accepted the places would be allocated by random allocation. All parents who applied would thus have an equal chance of their child getting in, rather than just those who knew how to manipulate the system. It is allowed within the current Admissions Code, after giving priority to children in care and those with statements of special educational needs, both as the sole means of allocating places or alongside other oversubscription criteria. But it is not much used and any political party favouring this approach would have to publicise its advantages.

56. Moving towards random allocation among applicants, however, might not be popular. Imagine the horror of parents who had bought their houses close to the popular school, denoted as School A in paragraph 11, currently secure in the knowledge that their children will move smoothly on from the local primary to this very desirable school. How are they going to feel when they learn they may lose out in the ballot and have to take a place at the failing School B. They are not likely to vote for a political party that dares to propose such a thing. And as our statistics show, there are many School As across the country. Admission solely by ballot also leaves open the possibility that children from the same family might be scattered across different schools. Moreover, in a pure form, it calls into question the existence of faith schools and would put politicians at odds with the Church and other religions.

57. These difficulties were highlighted in 2009 when the Secretary of State for Education asked the Chief Schools Adjudicator to review the use of ballots in admissions after expressing concerns that they can be 'destabilising' for children – splitting them up from their local friends, during what is already an unsettling experience moving from primary to secondary school. The review found that ballots had been deployed by a minority of local authorities and schools but only in the last resort as tie-breaker for deciding admissions in oversubscribed schools[24]. The determination concluded that the Admissions Code should remain unchanged in this respect.

58. However, ballots (used alongside other criteria) may not be as unpopular among parents as might be feared. An Ipsos Mori poll commissioned by the Sutton Trust found that when given the specific scenario of an oversubscribed comprehensive school, nearly as many people (32%) thought that a ballot is the fairer way of deciding which pupils get a place as those who thought it is fairer to decide on how near families live to the school (35%)[25]. An international review for the Trust found that ballots have been deployed

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[22] 'School lottery system divides Brighton and Hove', *The Argus*, 12 May 2009.
[23] Hicks, G. (2009). *Fate's Bookie*. Brimscombe Port Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press.
[24] http://www.schoolsadjudicator.gov.uk/RMS_upload/random%200809.doc
[25] http://www.suttontrust.com/reports/BallotsInSchoolAdmissions.pdf

extensively across the world, in both school and university admissions - including many of the Charter schools in the US, cited as examples of the 'free schools' proposed for the UK by the Conservatives.

59. In order to use ballots it has to be transparent who is eligible to enter the ballot and whether there can be reserved places. Is it to be an open ballot so that parents can express a preference for any school regardless or do there have to be some qualifying criteria? If it were desired to protect faith schools, parents would have to be able to demonstrate that they are of the faith. In order to ensure that children from the same family went to the same school once the first had been successful in a ballot siblings would also be given places. More contentious is whether applications should only be allowed within defined zones. The apparent contradiction between catchment areas and the Greenwich and Rotherham Judgements (see paragraph 44) would have to be cleared up in law.

12. Banding

60. Ballots can also be used in combination with ability testing to secure a distribution across the ability range. Testing is conducted not with a view to identifying the most able pupils but to put them into ability bands. Parents state their preferences for schools and where there are more applicants than allowed under the band quota the places are decided by ballot.

61. This admission process is already in use in some schools and does lead to more balanced intakes, but it is not without its querks. There tends to be more intense competition in the upper bands of popular schools than in lower bands where almost all the pupils may be admitted. It does not take long for parents to work this out and there are suspicions that some parents are telling their children to do badly in the admissions tests, which must be very confusing for children, but will do wonders for a school's value added.

The Challenge

62. As the 2010 Election approaches we challenge the political parties to say whether they are content with the current extent of social variation among secondary schools and, if not, what do they propose? The key lever at their disposal is the admissions process. At the root of the current imbalances seems to be the manipulability of the present arrangements. We have considered Labour's Admissions Codes, the Conservative's policy of creating more good places, and the Liberal Democrat's favoured pupil premium.

63. We have also reviewed the arguments relating to the various ways of allocating places in a school system running on parental preferences. Our view is that the principal means should be by ballot. It would be fair and lead to a more equitable education system. It would also greatly simplify the process by sweeping away much of the complexity and bureaucracy entailed by the present arrangements. It could be used in conjunction with other criteria, for example ability, faith, or location, but ultimately parental preferences and ballots should settle places where necessary. Do you agree?