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The Effects of English Secondary School System Reforms (2002-2014) on Pupil Sorting and Social Segregation: A Greater Manchester Case Study

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The English secondary school system has been undergoing rapid change. 60% of secondary schools are now Academies. Opponents of these changes fear, among other things, greater social segregation, while supporters argue that Academies will raise standards for all, reducing inequalities. What actually unfolds will depend a lot on local arrangements and dynamics. This paper takes a close up look at the effects of the changes in four local authorities in Greater Manchester: Manchester, Salford, Trafford and Bury.

- The extent of academisation is widely different between areas. For example, Bury had no academies by 2014, while in Trafford, nearly 70% of secondary schools were Academy converters.
- There have been changes in segregation by Free School Meal (FSM) status since 2002, when there were no Academies. Intakes to secondary schools in Salford and Trafford became **more** segregated while in Bury they became **less** segregated. Manchester saw a down then up pattern.
- But these changes cannot be accounted for by changes in school types. Patterns are explained by wider demographic changes and by local factors such as schools opening and closing, or drawing from different geographical areas. In some cases neighbourhoods changed in their socio-economic composition.
- Changes to Ofsted inspection frameworks make it hard to say whether school quality overall improved in this period. In fact the data show an apparent polarisation with more high quality and more low quality schools.
- In all the years we looked at, children on FSM were less likely to be in the best schools in Greater Manchester and more likely to be in the worst, regardless of their prior attainment. These children were also more likely to be in the worst schools in their local authority area, so that even when school quality was generally high in an area, children on FSM were less likely to be in the most sought after schools.

These findings suggest that looking for broad-brush answers to questions about the effects of Academies are likely to be unproductive, since the effects of these system changes depend so much on local implementation and context. Perhaps more importantly, while it is important to understand the effects of

Academies, policy-makers should not miss the 'elephant in the room' - the significant and persistent differences in opportunity that exist for students from poorer and richer homes and the other kinds of pupil sorting present in systems (e.g. by sex, academic ability or religious ethos).

Introduction

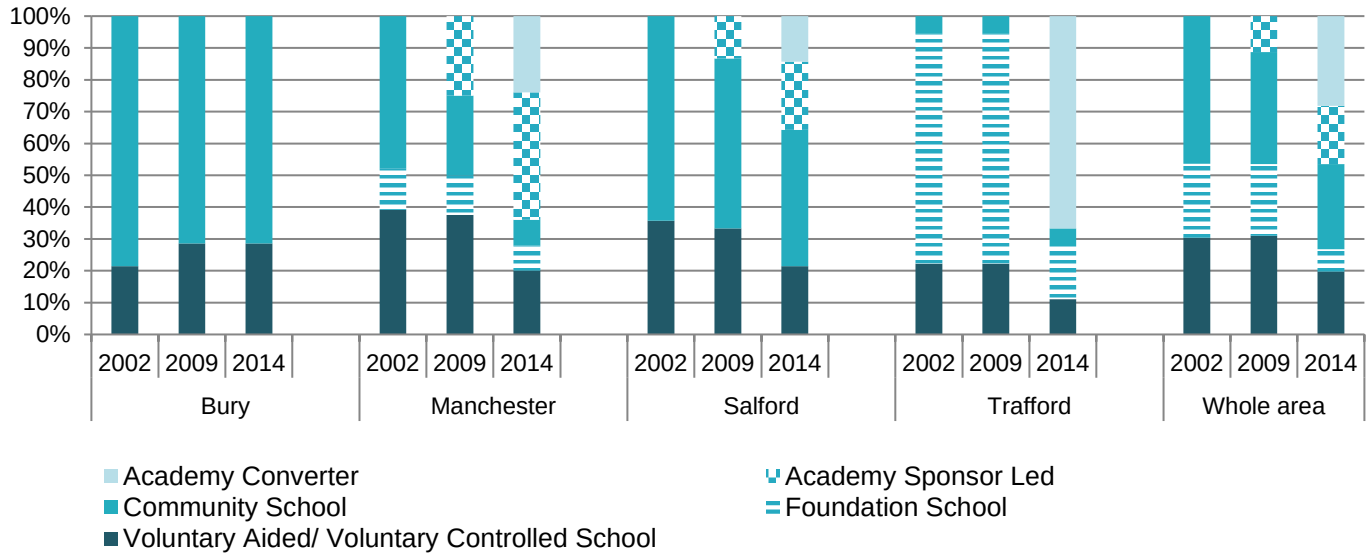
This piece of work focussed on four areas of Greater Manchester in an attempt to assess whether the introduction of Academies has led to greater social sorting in secondary schools and/or whether poorer students are now attending better schools as a result of the Academies policy. We look at these four areas because they have different patterns of Academisation, and also different socio-economic composition, so they illustrate some of the different local arrangements that will be encountered around the country. We examine the period from 2002 (no Academies) to 2009 (when Labour's 'Sponsored Academies' were in place) and then 2014, when the Coalition's 'Converter Academies were also present.

The Extent of Academisation by 2014

Nationwide, around 61% of secondary schools were academies of some kind by 2014. This includes schools which were forced to become Sponsored Academies under the Labour and Coalition governments because of poor prior performance, schools which chose to become Converter Academies after 2010 and various new school types such as Free Schools, created by the 2010 Academies Act.

In our four areas, there were very different school systems and they experienced very different patterns of school change since 2002. Trafford for example, is one of very few authorities in the country to retain selective grammar schools, and also had 70% of its secondary schools as converter Academies in 2014, while Bury had no Academies. Figure 1 shows the percentage of schools of each type in the 4 LAs and the whole area in 2002, 2009 and 2014.

Figure 1: Summary of changes to school type



Changes to Segregation as Measured by Segregation Indices

A standard approach to understanding pupil distributions among schools is to use segregation indices. We calculated two variants – the Dissimilarity Index (D) and Gorard's Segregation Index (GS) to examine whether segregation by socio-economic status (as measured by FSM status) had increased or decreased

over time in each of our four local authorities. We found that Trafford was the most segregated at all time points and Manchester was the least segregated. In addition, Bury, Salford and Trafford had different patterns of change over time from those in Manchester. Intakes to secondary schools in Salford and Trafford became **more** segregated while in Bury they became **less** segregated. Manchester saw a decrease in segregation initially then an increase to previous levels. The changes in these indicators cannot be attributed to academisation per se as and some of the changes are very small. Our longer paper points to some of the difficulties in using segregation indices to tackle these types of questions.

Table 1: Segregation indices

	Bury		**Manchester**		**Salford**		**Trafford**	
	GS	D	GS	D	GS	D	GS	D
2002	0.250	0.289	0.127	0.221	0.227	0.309	0.283	0.336
2009	0.256	0.303	0.112	0.198	0.263	0.341	0.375	0.423
2014	0.222	0.257	0.128	0.218	0.243	0.323	0.340	0.385

Other Changes in Patterns of School Attendance

In addition to looking at overall segregation indices, we used the National Pupil Database (NPD) to track the Year 6 cohort to their secondary schools in Bury, Manchester, Salford and Trafford in each of the three years: 2002, 2009 and 2014. We examined their characteristics in year 6 (FSM status, IDACI ranking of their area and prior attainment) and explored whether the Year 7 intakes of schools in our four local authorities had changed over time.

This analysis highlighted local factors that affected the intake of schools, none of which could particularly be laid at the door of changes to Academy status. Over time, many schools experienced variability in their 'reach' – the numbers of neighbourhoods they drew from – and in the actual neighbourhoods children came from. Even though schools remain physically in the same place, the communities around them change with time and parent preferences are not necessarily stable. Some schools experienced large drops in their reach, often connected with poor exam results and low Ofsted ratings. Three schools saw very significant decreases in the average deprivation rank of the neighbourhoods from which their pupils were drawn, partly because of changes to the socio-economic composition of the neighbourhoods and partly due to changing patterns of intakes for neighbouring schools. We also saw schools being affected by new schools opening close by or by schools closing. It was these local urban and school system dynamics that affected changes in the extent of the separation of pupils on Free School Meals or not, rather than whether the schools were Academies. Clearly it is possible that a change to Academy status might make a school more or less popular, and that Academies might apply overt or covert means to change their intakes or to market themselves in particular ways to different constituencies. However, these practices will be a) a very locally variable b) have highly localised effects and c) take place on top of all the other changes we have described. An 'Academy effect' is hard to isolate.

Has Academisation meant that poorer children get to go to better schools?

Rightly or wrongly, Academisation has been a policy that its proponents have claimed would drive up the quality of schools, particularly in the least advantaged areas. Increases in social segregation might

therefore be eclipsed by greater access to 'good' schools. School quality is notoriously hard to measure. We classified all schools in our four local authorities according to a combination of their exam results and Ofsted gradings (on the basis that these are the visible signs available to parents). Over the period 2002 to 2014, we found that school quality had 'polarised', with more good schools but also more bad schools, but it is hard to know if this reflects a real change or simply the change in Ofsted's inspection framework. Consequently, we found that over time, children on FSM were more likely to be in the most highly rated schools in 2009 and 2014 than in 2002, but also more likely to be in the least highly rated schools.

While we focused on change, the 'elephant in the room' was the persistent difference between richer and poorer pupils in the quality of schools attended. Overall and in all years, children on FSM were less likely to be in the most highly rated schools even when prior attainment was accounted for. Children on FSM were also more likely to be in the worst schools locally – so that even in areas such as Trafford, which has high school quality overall, they were clustered together in particular schools. These patterns were not changed by Academisation.

Conclusion

Increases in social segregation were observed in three of the four authorities we looked at as Academisation increased. However, the changes observed do not exactly map on to the changes in the school system. We found that the changes in the distribution of pupils reflected a complex set of localised changes in local school markets such as schools opening or closing or changing their intakes, and different degrees of cross-border movement. This suggests to us that there are other factors that could usefully be more fully explored to explain processes of social sorting in schools. As we saw no universal effects in this area that could be attributed to 'academisation', we argue that any effects need to be examined at the local level and we need to better understand patterns of access locally.

The more striking finding of the paper is that FSM pupils are, and remain, less likely to be in the best schools and more likely to be in the worst schools than their non FSM counterparts even when prior attainment is taken into account. In addition, there were substantial differences in the odds of FSM and non FSM children attending the best schools locally and avoiding the worst. We cannot attribute these changes over time clearly (or solely) to Academisation.

Overall, therefore, we cannot say definitively that Academies, either Labour's version or the Coalition's, have increased or reduced social sorting and segregation or levelled the playing field of school quality in these four authorities. What remains the case is the very different opportunities offered by the school system to children from richer and poorer homes. Given that these opportunities are largely structured by residential segregation, transport and school admissions policies, it seems unlikely that Academies on their own could be an answer, nor the primary cause of the problem.

Further Information

The full version of this paper *The Effects of English Secondary School System Reforms (2002-2014) on Pupil Sorting and Social Segregation: A Greater Manchester Case Study,* is available at http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/spcc/WP24.pdf This is one of a series of papers produced as part of CASE's research programme *Social Policy in a Cold Climate* (SPCC). The research examines the effects of the major economic and political changes in the UK since 2007, focusing on the distribution of wealth, poverty, inequality and social mobility.

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