

# Banding and Ballots

Secondary school admissions in England: Admissions in 2012/13 and the impact of growth of Academies

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## Foreword by Conor Ryan

School admissions are a minefield at the best of times. With a growing number of academies, more and more schools have responsibility for their own admissions policies, within the constraints of the statutory admissions code. For this report, we were keen to see whether these powers were changing the nature of school admissions policies.

This research by the education team at the LSE has looked at the admissions policies of 3,000 secondary schools and academies in England, and provides the most comprehensive picture available of the impact of the Government's changes to schools on admissions.

For the most part, there has been little apparent change in policies. Most schools, including most academies, still use distance from school and the presence of siblings at the school already as their main criteria. Although one in ten academies uses partial selection by aptitude or ability, its growth has not been significant. However, there is evidence of a small but more significant growth in the use of banding and random allocation – or ballots – to achieve a more comprehensive intake. This is something that is particularly used by sponsored academies.

The Sutton Trust has long argued that more schools and academies should use banding and ballots as a way to get a more balanced intake, particularly in urban areas. Access to the most popular comprehensives should not be limited to those who can afford to pay a premium on their mortgages or rents. We believe that more urban schools should use such methods, but for them to be most effective, they should develop them in partnership with other schools and local authorities.

Of course, it is not enough to have fair admissions. Where schools use criteria other than distance or sibling, parents should be made more aware of their choices and particularly of their rights to free transport to a choice of schools if their children are eligible for free school meals.

Equally, it is important that where possible, schools work together to develop such approaches. The example of Hackney, which has a number of successful academies and maintained schools, is a good one. Ideally such arrangements should be brokered by a local authority. Where co-operation takes place, admissions are fairer and it is easier for parents.

Where schools do use ballots or banding, it is important that such methods are understood by parents and regarded as fair by local communities. That's why it can make practical sense to use these methods for perhaps half a school's places, while allocating the rest by distance or sibling. Ballots are more straightforward, but where schools use banding, a common test should be used to avoid children facing several tests.

This report complements a number of other recent Sutton Trust reports, including *Parent Power?*, which showed how a third of professional parents moved home to be near a good school, and *Selective Comprehensives*, which revealed how most of the top 500 comprehensives, based on their GCSE results, are socially selective. Using ballots and banding can be an important way to help level the playing field.

I am very grateful to Prof Anne West, Dr Philip Noden and Audrey Hind at the LSE for this very comprehensive research.

**Conor Ryan,**  
**Director, Research and Communications**  
**The Sutton Trust**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides key findings from a two part research project funded by the Sutton Trust and the LSE focusing on secondary school admissions in England. The research analyses secondary schools' admissions criteria and practices in England in 2012/13 and illustrative examples of how some local authorities and schools use pupil banding as part of the Year 7 admissions process.

The report provides a brief overview of the historical and policy context relating to secondary school admissions, identifying in particular the latent concerns regarding academic selection persisting from the transition from a selective to a comprehensive system and during the period of the educational quasi-market since 1988.

Previous research has suggested that a significant minority of secondary schools, and in particular those responsible for their own admissions, used a variety of oversubscription criteria that could be socially selective.

We examined oversubscription criteria used by 3,001 publicly-funded secondary schools in England. Our findings relating to secondary school admissions for 2012/13 show that there have been some changes since 2008. Virtually all schools now give top priority to children in local authority care, in accordance with legislation. Most of the changes from 2008 to 2012 reflect an increase in the objectivity and transparency of oversubscription criteria.

## Key findings

- The growth in the number of sponsored academies has not led to a corresponding increase in the use of selective oversubscription criteria. While 15 per cent of sponsored academies used partial selection by aptitude in 2008, this had fallen to 10 per cent in 2012. It is however too early to draw conclusions about the effect of converter academy status on oversubscription criteria.
- Distance and sibling criteria remain the predominant oversubscription criteria for non-selective state schools. However, the number of schools using banding increased from 95 in 2008 to 121 in 2012. Random ballots were used as a main ranking criterion by 42 schools in 2012.<sup>1</sup> These oversubscription criteria are often seen as means of creating balanced school intakes and were used by 5 per cent of comprehensive schools. These criteria were popular among academies (8%) and particularly sponsored academies or free schools (17%).
- There has been a slight increase in the number of schools that use partial selection by aptitude (from 133 schools (5%) to 155 schools (6%) between 2008 and 2012).
- A minority of schools with a religious character do not use religious oversubscription criteria although most do use measures of religious adherence for admission.
- Grammar schools use a similar range of oversubscription criteria to non-selective schools although of course applicants must meet their initial entrance requirements (including tests of ability).

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<sup>1</sup> This was not separately counted in 2008.

## **Banding in practice**

Some schools have entry criteria involving random ballots for school places or the use of banding applicants by ability which are sometimes viewed as means of admitting pupils covering the whole ability range. In the second part of the project, we looked specifically at three areas where several schools used banding as part of their admission arrangements.

In each of the three areas, not all schools used pupil banding as part of their school admissions. Schools with a religious character were less likely to use banding.

The effectiveness of banding is constrained by the popularity of schools and the supply of school places. Banding would therefore be expected to have the greatest effect on creating balanced intakes in areas in which schools are popular and school rolls are rising.

In none of the areas did all schools using banding use the same banding arrangements. In each area a banding test was carried out within local primary schools. Nevertheless, in two of the three areas some schools required applicants to sit an additional banding test. The use of multiple banding tests was criticised on the grounds that it did not assist pupil access, was inconvenient for parents, demanding for children and wasteful of public resources.

Banding and random allocation may be thought of as providing a 'belt and braces' approach to ensuring a comprehensive intake but it may be less effective than using either of these methods in isolation.

The use of banding conveys a school's commitment to providing comprehensive education and so may provide a yardstick against which the school's admissions may be assessed and reviewed. However, in striving to achieve balanced intakes, banding for the purposes of admission is not a panacea. It can however contribute to creating more balanced intakes than would otherwise be the case.

Different admission authorities reflect different priorities in their admissions arrangements, and it is clear that different balances are struck between objectives.

## SUTTON TRUST RECOMMENDATIONS

1. More schools, particularly in urban areas, should take the opportunity where they are responsible for their own admissions to introduce random allocation (ballots) or banding to ensure that a wider mix of pupils has access to the most academically successful comprehensives. Ballots can ensure that a wide mix of pupils have the possibility of attending a school, and banding can help to secure school intakes reflecting a wide range of ability.
2. The most effective use of banding is when cooperative agreement can be reached between schools in an area. Local co-ordination could be achieved through a local admissions forum or brokered through the local authority. Groups of schools should be encouraged to develop a shared approach to admissions across an area.
3. Schools that wish to achieve a comprehensive intake should use banding, or random allocation, in conjunction with a catchment area, as these admissions policies can help schools to achieve an intake reflecting a wide ability range. One way of using random allocation, while making sure that those who live very close to schools are not unduly disadvantaged, could be to introduce both 'inner' and 'outer' catchment areas. Using either method in isolation may, however, be more effective than using both random allocation and banding in combination.
4. Where banding is used, a common test should be developed for all schools in an area so that pupils don't have to sit multiple tests.
5. The Government should find ways – working with community groups, consumer agencies and businesses that are successful in working class communities - to make it easier for all parents to access as rich a range of information to facilitate informed choice-making over their children's education.
6. It is particularly important that parents are aware not just of the school choices available, but of their rights to free transport to a choice of three schools within six miles of their home (or up to 15 miles for faith schools) if their child is eligible for free school meals.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1. Introduction

This report provides key findings from a two part research project funded by the Sutton Trust and the LSE focusing on secondary school admissions in England. The aims of the research are twofold:

- to provide an up-to-date analysis of secondary schools' admissions criteria and practices in England for admissions in 2012/13 in light of the new legislative context, including the significant increase in the number of academies following the 2010 Academies Act; and
- to provide illustrative examples of how a small sample of local authorities and schools use pupil banding as part of the Year 7 admissions process

The first part of the report focuses on secondary school admissions criteria and practices in England for admissions in September 2012. The research is timely in light of the increase in the number of academies that are responsible for their own admissions.<sup>2</sup> Previous research has found that schools with responsibility for admissions tend to adopt admissions criteria that differ from those of schools with admissions policies under control of local authorities (i.e. community and voluntary controlled schools). Since the 2010 Academies Act, schools have been able to apply to convert to academy status and in so doing they become responsible for admissions (if they did not previously have this responsibility).

In addition to focusing on overall changes to admissions criteria and practices over time and variation between schools of different types, the study also explores the ways in which schools may seek to ensure a mix of pupils from across the ability range, in particular via banding and random allocation.

Before presenting substantive findings, we provide a brief overview of the historical and policy context relating to secondary school admissions, and this is followed by a short review of recent, relevant research. In section 2 the methods adopted for the analysis of admissions arrangements are then presented before the findings in relation to school admissions criteria and practices, both over time and for schools of different types. Section 3 of the report then examines how pupil banding operates in areas where several schools use such arrangements for admissions and section 4 concludes.

### 1.1 Historical and policy context

A brief overview of the development of the secondary school system in England is necessary in order to understand the significance of secondary school admissions and also to understand how admissions relate to latent concerns regarding academic selection.

The 1944 Education Act established a system of primary and secondary education, with provision being made by local education authorities and by voluntary bodies, normally the churches. Admissions to local education authority schools were determined by the local authority and to most voluntary schools by the school's governing body. The 1944 Education Act allowed for (although did not prescribe) a 'tripartite' system of secondary education, with grammar schools for the most academically able, technical schools for those deemed to have technical aptitude and secondary modern for the remainder. Admission was based, in the main, on the results of the 'eleven plus' a test of ability taken in the final year of primary school. This comprised the selection system under which grammar schools selected their pupils on the basis of ability.

However, concerns were raised about the system, with research demonstrating that the main beneficiaries of grammar schools were the middle classes.<sup>3</sup> Following the election of a Labour

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<sup>2</sup> Academies Commission(2013)

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Floud (1956)

Government, local education authorities were, in 1965, requested to submit plans for the introduction of comprehensive education. Although this request was withdrawn following the election of a Conservative government in 1970,<sup>4</sup> proposals for comprehensive reorganisation continued to be submitted and by the early 1980s comprehensive education was almost universal,<sup>5</sup> although grammar schools were retained by some local authorities.

Significant changes to school-based education policy took place under successive Conservative administrations between 1979 and 1997. The 1980 Education Act gave an increased emphasis to parental 'choice' of school. Following the 1988 Education Reform Act school funding was determined predominantly on the basis of pupil numbers and schools were required to admit pupils up to the school's physical capacity. Public examination results were also published via 'league tables' in the media. A quasi-market was thus created, with schools being incentivised to increase the number of pupils admitted and maximise their 'league table' position.<sup>6</sup> Schools could also opt out of local authority control and become grant maintained, so gaining control over admissions from the local authority and joining those schools that had long had this responsibility, in the main voluntary aided schools (most of which were under the control of the churches).

Concerns about secondary school admissions were expressed following the introduction of these reforms, often relating to a return to selection or at least to an increase in social segregation. These related to the admissions process,<sup>7</sup> the use of interviews, overt selection on the basis of ability or aptitude, social or covert selection and complex application procedures.<sup>8</sup> In short, given the incentives for schools to maximise their league table position, it was feared that they would seek to admit pupils more likely to achieve good examination results.

However, it would be wrong to assume that there were no concerns on these matters prior to the 1988 Education Reform Act. For example, a report commissioned by the former Inner London Education Authority expressed concern that a process of 'banding' which sought to achieve an academically balanced intake across secondary schools (see below), was being used by some voluntary aided secondary schools (responsible for their own admissions), to obtain a disproportionate number of higher ability pupils.<sup>9</sup> The report noted that suspicions about the actions of such schools 'could only be allayed' (p. 58) if all voluntary schools used the same procedures as schools under the control of the local authority and stopped the practice of interviewing pupils prior to a place being allocated.

Following the election of the Labour Government in 1997, the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act (SSFA) established a new legal framework for admissions; two key mechanisms were introduced, the Schools Adjudicator (whose responsibilities include ruling on objections to schools' or local authorities' admission arrangements), and the School Admissions Code.

The first Code, which applied to arrangements leading to admissions from September 2000, noted that admission authorities had 'a fairly wide discretion to determine their own oversubscription criteria provided these criteria are objective, fair, compatible with admissions and equal opportunities legislation'.<sup>10</sup> Significant regulatory changes followed the 2006 Education and Inspections Act. This strengthened the force of the Code from one which admission authorities should 'have regard to' (the standard legal status of most official 'guidance') to one with which they must 'act in accordance'.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the third School Admissions Code included 'mandatory' provisions, identified in the text by the emboldened words 'must' or 'must not', whilst other provisions preserved the lower standard of compliance

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<sup>4</sup> Simon (1991)

<sup>5</sup> Gordon et al. (1991)

<sup>6</sup> Le Grand and Bartlett (1993)

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Audit Commission (1996)

<sup>8</sup> See Gewirtz et al. (1995) and West et al. (1998)

<sup>9</sup> ILEA (1985)

<sup>10</sup> DfEE (1999) para 5.2

<sup>11</sup> The decision to strengthen the Code arose from parliamentary (and other) criticism (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2004).



(designated 'should' or 'should not' in the text).<sup>12</sup> The 2006 Act also provided a new right to parents whose children were eligible for free school meals to free transport to three schools rather than just the nearest school deemed suitable by the local authority. The Government also experimented with 'choice advisers' to help lower income parents navigate the admissions system.

In addition, parents were given a new right to object to 'mandatory' breaches of the code.<sup>13</sup> The 2006 Education and Inspections Act also prohibited interviews 'where the interview is to be taken into account...in determining whether the applicant is to be admitted to the school' (part 3, s44); and the Education (Admission of Looked After Children) (England) Regulations, introduced in 2006, required admission authorities to give 'first priority in its oversubscription criteria to all relevant looked after children' (s3).

The 2008 Education and Skills Act further strengthened the statutory admissions framework. The various sections of the 1998 SSFA were completely recast, rather than simply amended. The result was to widen the scope of objections and to give the Schools Adjudicator more effective powers to remedy any unsatisfactory arrangements that came to his attention.<sup>14</sup> A revised (fourth) Code was published in 2009 noting that the application and allocation process was to be made easier, with, from 2010, parents only needing to apply to the local authority in which they lived and national closing dates for applications being specified (local authorities having already been given responsibility for coordinated admissions in 2002).<sup>15</sup> In 2010, the Code was amended slightly and reissued.<sup>16</sup> This was in force at the time our study was carried out. (Although a new Code was introduced in 2012,<sup>17</sup> this was not in force for admissions in 2012/13.)

In secondary school admissions, parents or carers must be allowed to express a minimum of three 'choices', or more accurately 'preferences' for publicly-funded secondary schools for their child, generally at the age of 11 years when they move from primary to secondary school.<sup>18</sup> They are required to complete a 'common application form' which is provided by and returned to their local authority. In some cases schools are permitted to seek additional information about prospective pupils, by asking parents or carers to complete supplementary information forms. If there are fewer applicants than places available at a particular school, all those expressing a preference must be offered a place for their child;<sup>19</sup> if there are more applicants than places available, the school's published oversubscription criteria are used to determine which children are offered a place.

A particular focus of this study is on the ways in which schools seek to ensure a mix of pupils from across the ability range. This is important given research relating to the effects of academic selection on later educational outcomes and the evidence indicating higher aggregate outcomes in school systems that are academically (and socially) mixed. Thus analyses using data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) examining pupils' educational achievement at the age of 15 in reading, science and mathematics have revealed that inequalities between pupils from different social groups are accentuated by separating pupils into different secondary schools on the basis of their ability.<sup>20</sup>

Two key mechanisms for seeking to ensure a mix of pupils are banding and random allocation of pupils. The second part of this report specifically examines areas in which several schools use banding as part of their admissions process. Banding was first introduced by the former Inner London Education Authority on an authority-wide basis with a view to ensuring that comprehensive schools had an intake that was academically balanced, and was

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<sup>12</sup> DfES (2007)

<sup>13</sup> Parker (2013)

<sup>14</sup> Parker (2013)

<sup>15</sup> DfES (2009)

<sup>16</sup> DCSF (2010)

<sup>17</sup> DfE (2012a)

<sup>18</sup> See DCSF (2010), DfE (2012a)

<sup>19</sup> Except in the case of grammar schools

<sup>20</sup> E.g. Pfeffer (2008), van de Werfhorst and Mijs (2010)

an integral part of the transfer arrangements that replaced selection testing for grammar schools.<sup>21</sup>

Another mechanism that may be used to try and ensure a wider mix of pupils than might otherwise be the case is random allocation. The 2007 Code noted:<sup>22</sup>

Random allocation of school places can be good practice particularly for urban areas and secondary schools... It may be used as the sole means of allocating places or alongside other oversubscription criteria. Random allocation can widen access to schools for those unable to afford to buy houses near to favoured schools and create greater social equity.<sup>23</sup>

## 1.2 Previous research

A number of research studies have examined secondary school admissions criteria and practices in England. Admissions criteria and practices used (in 2001) by virtually all publicly-funded secondary schools in England were explored in one study, which found that a significant minority of secondary schools, in the main those responsible for their own admissions (voluntary aided and foundation), used a variety of criteria that appeared to be designed to select in to schools certain groups of pupils: these included giving priority to the children of former pupils; those with a family connection to the school; the children of teachers; selecting a proportion of children on the basis of aptitude/ability in a subject area(s); and the use of interviews.<sup>24</sup>

Subsequent research relating to admissions in 2006, found that some schools responsible for admissions, in particular voluntary aided schools, were less compliant than others with the Code and were more likely to select covertly than community schools.<sup>25</sup> It was also found that there had been an increase in the proportion of schools selecting 10 per cent of their intake on the basis of aptitude, with voluntary aided and foundation schools being more likely to select in this way than community or voluntary-controlled schools (where admissions are the responsibility of the LA). In 2008, the Schools Adjudicator was asked to review the compliance of admission arrangements with the School Admissions Code. Around 3,000 of the 5,300 foundation and voluntary aided primary and secondary schools in England were selected and their arrangements checked by lawyers. Problems were found with a high proportion, major contraventions being identified in over 800 schools. These included failing to give top priority to children in care; giving priority to siblings of former pupils; and using unclear oversubscription criteria.<sup>26</sup>

A further independent large scale research study focusing on secondary school admissions in 2008 was also carried out.<sup>27</sup> This followed the Education and Inspections Act 2006 which prohibited interviews, and the introduction of regulations requiring top priority to be given to children in care. The research compared the criteria used for 2008 with those that had been in use in 2001 and found that, virtually all schools gave priority (and in the main top priority) to children in care. More schools mentioned in their admissions criteria children with statements of special educational needs (a higher proportion were community/voluntary-controlled schools/academies than voluntary aided/foundation schools). Very few schools used interviews, which were prohibited by the Education and Inspections Act 2006. Fewer schools used criteria that could be used for social/covert selection (e.g., giving priority to the children of former pupils/staff). However, more schools selected pupils overtly on the basis of aptitude/ability in a subject area. The highest proportion of schools that selected in this way (allowed by legislation and guidance) were academies and foundation schools. A larger proportion of schools used random allocation (of varying types) in the event of oversubscription in 2008 than in 2001.

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<sup>21</sup> West (2005)

<sup>22</sup> DfES (2007)

<sup>23</sup> DfES (2007) para 2.28, see also DCSF (2010) para 2.33

<sup>24</sup> West and Hind (2003); West et al. (2004)

<sup>25</sup> Coldron et al. (2008)

<sup>26</sup> Office of the Schools Adjudicator (2008) para 5

<sup>27</sup> West et al. (2009; 2011)

Some research has looked specifically at the use of random allocation as part of the admissions process. Evidence from Brighton and Hove suggests that random allocation, when used in conjunction with catchment areas, can lead to less divergent school intakes.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly in another study, when asked about the fairness of allocation methods, and presented with a specific, plausible scenario, support for random allocation was almost as strong as for allocating school places on the basis of home to school distance.<sup>29</sup> Public approval for the more abstract *principle* of allocating school places according to random ballots was however much more limited, suggesting that the details and particular circumstances of each case may be crucial.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Allen et al. (2013)

<sup>29</sup> Sutton Trust (2007)

<sup>30</sup> 1928 respondents were provided with the following scenario. 'A community comprehensive school has 100 places on offer, but 200 families have applied for these places. All of the families live within 2 miles of the school. The school first gives places to children with special educational needs and those with a brother or sister already at the school. In your opinion, which is the fairer way of deciding which children get places at the school?' 35 per cent favoured choosing families according to home to school distance while 32 per cent favoured a random ballot. 32 per cent did not favour either option. When asked a similar question regarding a Christian school 36 per cent favoured a random ballot over a measure of religious commitment (favoured by 20 per cent) with 43 per cent not favouring either option.

## 2. SECONDARY SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

### 2. Secondary school admissions

In this section we focus on secondary school admissions criteria and practices for admission in September 2012.

#### 2.1 Methods

Secondary school composite prospectuses (admission brochures) for all English local authorities (excluding the Isles of Scilly) (N=151) were downloaded from local authority websites, or in the event of these not being available, requested from local authorities. Admissions criteria and policies for all schools were not always available even though local authorities are required to publish a composite prospectus which must include 'detailed admission arrangements of all maintained schools in the area (including admission numbers and catchment areas)'.<sup>31</sup>

Where insufficient information was provided, local authorities or schools were contacted and asked to provide individual schools' secondary schools' transfer information. Overall, this method was relatively successful and enabled us to obtain information relating to the vast majority of secondary schools in England. Some schools responsible for their own admissions did not provide information to the research team or to local authorities. A total of 3,001 publicly-funded secondary schools were included in the sample, virtually all those in England.<sup>32</sup> Of these, 164 were grammar schools and 2,837 non-grammar secondary schools. The information relating to school type was as provided in the composite school prospectus for admission in 2012/13.

The admissions criteria and practices used by individual schools were recorded in an SPSS data file. The database was set up to allow for comparisons on aggregate to be made between 2008 and 2012 (using criteria such as giving priority to children in care, those with special educational needs, medical/social needs). However some new criteria were included in the database, in particular, to ascertain whether supplementary information forms were in use and the type of random allocation used.

#### 2.2 Admissions criteria and practices

In this section we highlight key features to emerge from our analysis of admissions criteria and other policies and practices. In the first part we focus on admissions to comprehensive secondary schools in England.<sup>33</sup> This includes academies and free schools. The second part focuses on grammar schools, the majority of which (124) had converted to academies. We then consider the use of banding and random allocation, mechanisms that may be intended to produce intakes reflecting the full ability range.

Before we go on to report on the particular oversubscription criteria used by schools, it is however important to note that, from the point of view of parents, the clarity of the admissions system is in part determined by the particular combination of approaches taken to admissions within an area. For example, in one town with seven schools, five different methods were used for taking feeder schools and distance into account in the admissions process. Indeed, we have previously suggested that admission authorities should be required not only to coordinate the administration of admissions but also the local oversubscription criteria.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, in another local authority, all 22 schools used the same admissions criteria, despite two being their own admission authority (one foundation and one academy).

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<sup>31</sup> DCSF (2010) p83

<sup>32</sup> In January 2012, there were 3,268 secondary schools in England (DfE, 2012d); this includes middle deemed secondary schools which we excluded.

<sup>33</sup> We use the term comprehensive school to refer to any non-grammar school (although, for example, this group would include some secondary modern schools).

<sup>34</sup> Noden and West (2009)

Ease of understanding was not assisted by some local authority prospectuses. For example some did not provide admissions criteria for all schools with responsibility for their own admissions. In other local authorities, detailed admissions criteria for schools responsible for their own admissions were not provided in their prospectuses, as exemplified below:

The information provided in this booklet serves as a *guide* to the various admissions criteria for academies and foundation, trust and voluntary aided schools. *It should not be regarded as definitive*. Please contact the individual schools for detailed information about their admissions criteria.

Composite prospectuses also varied in terms of their clarity. Some provided information on each school with admissions criteria presented clearly alongside on the same page. Others required parents to devote considerable attention to matching admissions criteria to schools or finding relevant information.

## 2.3 Comprehensive schools

### 2.3.1 Changes between 2008 and 2012

We wanted to establish the extent to which changes had taken place between 2008 and 2012 across comprehensive schools in England. As shown in Table 1 there were broad similarities across years.

**Table 1 Admissions criteria in publicly-funded comprehensive secondary schools in England (2008 and 2012) (percentage table)**

Criterion	2012 N= 2837	2008 N=2970
In care	100	99
Siblings	97	97
Distance	93	93
Medical/social need	55	59
Catchment area	64	61
Statement of special educational needs	68	53
Random tie break	50	-
'Feeder' primary school	38	38
Religion	16	17
Supplementary information form	13	-
Priest's reference	8	-
Compassionate/exceptional factors	3	10
Random allocation (zone/area)	2	-
Partial selection by ability/aptitude in subject	6	5
Ethos	4	4
No alternative school/difficult journey	4	4
Banding	4	3
Special educational needs without statement	4	2
Partial selection by ability	1	1
Interview with parent	0	<1
Interview with pupil	0	<1

Note: not recorded in 2008.

In 2012 all comprehensive secondary schools mentioned giving priority to children in care and almost all also gave priority to siblings. More than 90 per cent of comprehensive schools used distance in their oversubscription criteria. When determining which pupils should be offered places it is necessary for pupil applications to be ranked. Consequently while some *groups* of pupils may be prioritised over others (such as on the basis of living in a catchment area, attending a feeder school or being a sibling of a current pupil) it is also necessary to include a continuous criterion to rank applications *individually*, such as home to school distance or a

rank order determined by a random ballot. In a very small number of religious schools, a measure of devoutness may be used for this purpose.

Somewhat fewer schools in 2012 than in 2008 reported giving priority to children with medical or social needs (55% versus 59%). A higher proportion of schools made reference to children with statements of special educational needs (68% versus 53%). It is important to stress that this is not an 'oversubscription' criterion because if the school in question is named on the child's statement of SEN, the child must be admitted. The increase in the number of schools mentioning this may indicate that admission authorities are taking account of the need for parents of children with statements of SEN to be provided with such information. No schools were using pre-admission interviews, although in some cases assessments for aptitude involved meetings with staff alongside another form of more objective assessment. These changes all reflect a move towards greater transparency and objectivity within the school admissions process.

There was an increase from 5 per cent to 6 per cent in the proportion of schools using partial selection by aptitude in their admission arrangements (this represents an increase from 133 schools in 2008 to 155 schools in 2012).

In 2012, some new criteria/practices were recorded. Thus, it was found that a supplementary information form was needed for 13 per cent of schools. Random allocation within a zone or area was in place in 2 per cent of schools. In addition, banding, another means of seeking to secure a mixed ability intake, was used by a slightly higher proportion of schools in 2012 than 2008 (4% versus 3%).

### *2.3.2 School admissions and school type*

In the light of previous research revealing that schools of different types have different admissions criteria, Table 2 compares admissions arrangements in five different types of comprehensive school: community and voluntary controlled schools, whose admissions are the responsibility of the local authority; voluntary aided schools and foundation schools whose admissions are the responsibility of the school governing body; and academies whose admissions are the responsibility of the academy trust. As shown in Table 2, there were some differences between schools of different types in terms of the criteria used.



**Table 2 Admissions criteria in publicly-funded comprehensive secondary schools in England (2012) by school type (percentage table)<sup>35</sup>**

Criterion	C/VC N=984	VA N=360	F N=396	Ac N=1097	All N= 2837
In care	100	100	100	100	100
Siblings	99	93	98	97	97
Distance	95	84	96	94	93
Medical/social need	66	32	62	50	55
Catchment area	72	47	61	63	64
Statement of special educational needs	79	49	61	67	68
Random tie break	61	41	47	44	50
'Feeder' primary school	38	61	30	33	38
Religion	1	93	1	10	16
Supplementary information form	<1	59	4	12	13
Priest's reference	<1	46	<1	4	8
Compassionate/exceptional factors	5	2	3	3	3
Random allocation (zone/area)	<1	2	1	3	2
Partial selection by ability/aptitude in subject	<1	6	6	9	6
Ethos	1	18	<1	2	4
No alternative school/difficult journey	4	3	4	4	4
Banding	3	5	2	6	4
Special educational needs without statement	4	1	4	4	4
Partial selection by ability	<1	1	3	2	1

Amongst the most commonly used criteria, voluntary aided schools were less likely to prioritise distance and medical/social need than were other schools; fewer mentioned the admission of children with a statement of special educational need (49 per cent compared with between 61 per cent and 79 per cent for other school types); more mentioned having 'feeder' primary schools (generally primary schools with a religious character); around six out of ten required the completion of a supplementary information form and nearly half the completion of a priest's reference (see also section below on academies with a religious character). A higher proportion of academies than other types of school used random allocation, banding, and partial selection by ability or aptitude in a subject area(s).

### 2.3.3 Admissions to academies

Academies are of different types. Sponsored academies were established by the previous Labour government, in the main, to replace schools that were deemed to be failing. Converter academies were introduced by the Coalition Government following the 2010 Academies Act. Schools that are maintained by local authorities (community schools, voluntary aided, voluntary-controlled and foundation schools) and deemed to be 'performing well' can apply to become academies.<sup>36</sup> Academies – and free schools, a type of academy – have admissions policies and criteria agreed with the DfE as part of their funding agreement.

Normally, the converter academy will retain its pre-existing admission arrangements for the first year; however, different criteria for subsequent years can be agreed before signing the funding agreement.<sup>37</sup> Admissions criteria can thus be the same as those for local authority schools. One academy explicitly noted: 'The school has now converted to become an Academy but has retained the Council's admissions policy.'<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> School status as at April 2012.

<sup>36</sup> DfE (2012b, p.1)

<sup>37</sup> DfE (2012c)

<sup>38</sup> Only 100 of the 789 converter academies operating in April 2012 when data collection was carried out) could have changed their admissions policies as a result of achieving academy status. This is because only the earliest converter academies (achieving academy status before 4<sup>th</sup> January 2011) could have consulted on changing their admission policy for pupils entering year 7 in September 2012.

The admissions criteria for sponsored and converter academies were, overall, rather similar. However, more converter academies than sponsored academies used catchment areas; and more sponsored academies made reference to children with statements of special educational needs, random allocation within an area, and banding as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3 Admissions criteria in comprehensive academies (2012) by type (percentage table)**

Criterion	Sponsored academies & free schools N=308	Converter academies N=789
In care	99	100
Siblings	94	99
Distance	91	95
Medical/social need	52	49
Catchment	52	67
Statement of special educational needs	77	62
Random tie break	38	46
'Feeder' primary school	23	37
Religion	8	10
Supplementary information form	12	11
Priest's reference	2	4
Compassionate/exceptional factors	<1	3
Random allocation (zone/area)	6	1
Partial selection by ability/aptitude in subject	10	9
Ethos	<1	2
No alternative school/difficult journey	2	4
Banding	15	3
Special educational needs without statement	4	4
Partial selection by ability	<1	2

Note: sponsored academies N=304; free schools N=4

Some academies have a religious character. So, in light of previous research indicating that voluntary aided schools (in the main with a religious character) are more likely to use religious admissions criteria, and also adopt admissions criteria that differ from those of non-religious schools, we compared *converter* academies with and without a religious character (see Annex, Table A1). As might be expected, fewer of the converter academies with a religious character made reference to siblings, distance, children with statements of special educational needs, medical/social need and catchment area. A high proportion made reference to religious criteria. Over half required the completion of a supplementary form (often used to confirm religion or religious denomination) and over a third referred to the need for a priest's reference. These differences are similar to those between community/voluntary-controlled schools and voluntary aided schools (see Table 1). Random allocation within an area was more common for academies with a religious character than those without.

We also looked at admissions criteria used by *sponsored* academies with and without a religious character (see Annex, Table A2). Unsurprisingly, more sponsored with a religious character than without used religious criteria in the event of the school being oversubscribed, more used supplementary information forms and a small proportion required a priest's reference. Banding and random allocation within an area were more common in schools with no religious character.

## 2.4 Religion

We were also interested in the number of religious criteria used by schools of different types. As shown in Table 4, voluntary aided schools and academies with a religious character sometimes used a large number of religious criteria, which indicated a preference within some



schools for offering places to more devout applicants. Interestingly 39 per cent of academies with a religious character did not use any religious oversubscription criteria.

**Table 4 Percentage of secondary schools with different numbers of religious criteria (2012) (percentage table)**

Type of school	No religious criteria	Number of religious criteria					
		1	2	3	4-6	7-16	N
Voluntary aided	9	2	3	9	45	32	360
Academy religious character	39	7	9	6	27	12	161

## 2.5 Grammar schools

Grammar schools, by definition, are schools that select pupils on the basis of academic ability. Whilst testing is the norm for such schools, other oversubscription criteria are also used, as shown in Table 5, indicating that test scores were most often used to determine a threshold rather than to rank applicants.

**Table 5 Main admissions criteria in addition to ability for grammar schools (N=164) (percentage table)**

Criteria	2012 N=164	2008 N=164
In care	95	93
Distance	88	79
Siblings	50	57
Catchment area	47	43
Medical/social need	30	31
Special educational needs	34	29
Supplementary information form	27	-
'Feeder' primary schools	4	8
Religious criteria	4	6
Ability/aptitude in subject area	4	2
Ethos	3	2
Priest's reference	2	-
Compassionate factors	<1	2

There were very few differences between 2008 and 2012 in terms of the admissions criteria reported for grammar schools.

## 2.6 Practices/criteria to aid an academically balanced intake

In this section we look at two particular mechanisms permitted by the Code that can be used with a view to obtaining an academically balanced intake. Grammar schools clearly operate on the basis of separating pupils on the basis of ability. While there may be academic benefits to those going on to grammar schools, there are corresponding losses for those going on to secondary modern schools.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, some admission mechanisms are intended to achieve a balanced intake and these include random allocation and banding, which we address in part 3.

### 2.6.1 Random allocation

Random allocation was most often used as a 'tie break' if, for example, two applicants lived the same distance from a school. This practice was used by half of all secondary schools.

<sup>39</sup> Atkinson et al. (2007), Levacic and Marsh (2007)

Random allocation can also be used however as the main ranking criterion (rather than using, for example, home to school distance). Random allocation is used as a ranking criterion because it can, depending on parental preferences, prevent a school's intake being monopolised by those living nearby. One reason for wishing to break the geographical link with the local area is to prevent a particularly popular school from being exclusively available to families able to afford property close to the school.

Random ballots have been used to allocate school places in parts of the USA, New Zealand and Sweden. Research on the effects of ballots tends to focus on comparing the attainment of pupils successful in ballots with the attainment of unsuccessful applicants.<sup>40</sup> There is however evidence from Chicago indicating that higher attaining pupils are more likely to enter random ballots for school places than are lower attaining children.<sup>41</sup> Evidence on the use of ballots in the England has however suggested that their short-run impact suggests they can result in more academically balanced intakes across schools.<sup>42</sup>

Random allocation is used as the main ranking criterion by a small but growing number of schools in England. In 2012, 42 schools used random allocation as the main ranking criterion, 28 of which were academies. Thus while 2 per cent of comprehensive schools used random allocation, 3 per cent of academies did so. The practice is more popular among sponsored academies and free schools in which 6 per cent use random ballots. Schools vary as to whether they use random allocation in conjunction with a catchment area. Figure 1 gives an example of the use of random allocation.

#### **Figure 1 Academy (Church of England) using random allocation**

Where the number of applications for admission is greater than the published admission number, applications will be considered against the criteria set out below. After the admission of pupils with statements of special educational needs where the Academy is named on the statement, the criteria will be applied in the order in which they are set out below:

- 1 Children in public care (as defined in Section 22 of the Children Act 1989) at the time of their entry to the Academy.
- 2 Pupils who, at the time of application, will have an older sibling on the roll of the Academy who will continue to attend at the time of admission. The term 'sibling' means a full, half, step or adopted brother or sister, but not cousin, who will be living together as part of one household at the date of their entry to the Academy. The Academy may require proof of relationship and/or residency.
- 3 The remaining places will be allocated by Random Allocation as specified below:
  - a) 80% will be offered to pupils resident within the catchment area. A map can be viewed by contacting the school.
  - b) 20% will be offered to pupils resident outside the catchment area. A map can be viewed by contacting the school.

In some cases random allocation was used in conjunction with banding. For example one school, after prioritising looked after children and 10 per cent on the basis of aptitude in technology, used banding combined with random allocation and catchment areas. In this case, applicants were placed in five ability bands and, within those ability bands, 80 per cent of the remaining places were allocated to applicants living within four miles of the school and 20 per cent to those living outside this radius.

Other examples of the use of both banding and random allocation are shown in Figures 2 and 3.

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<sup>40</sup> See Stasz and Stolk (2007)

<sup>41</sup> Berry Cullen et al. (2006)

<sup>42</sup> Allen et al. (2013)

### Figure 2 Academy (non-religious) using random allocation

After the admission of students with a statement of special educational needs, where the Academy is named on the statement, criteria will be applied in the following order.

- 1 Looked After Children
- 2 Admission of students whose siblings attend the Academy in Year 7–10 and who will continue to do so on the date of admission.
- 3 Remaining places in each ability band will be allocated by drawing lots in geographical zones. Zone A will be a zone up to a 2 mile radius from the fixed point shown on the on display at the Academy and on the website (the website allows you to calculate your distance using postcode); Zone B will be a zone over 2 miles' radius from the point on the map. (90% of places will be allocated to Zone A and 10% to Zone B).

### Figure 3 Academy (non-religious) using banding and random allocation

- 1 Children in public care, who apply to the school, will be offered a place.
- 2 Children with a statement of special educational needs, who apply to the school, will be considered for a place without reference to the following over-subscription criteria. In addition to this, governors may grant a place to a child with a very exceptional medical or social need on the recommendation of an independent professional.
- 3 Children whose siblings at the time of application will be within key stages 3 or 4 at the Academy. The term sibling includes legally adopted children, and step- and half brothers or sisters living at the same address.
- 4 65% of the remaining places will then be offered to:
  - (i) an inner catchment area which will include all addresses in post code zone [postcode x]. If there is oversubscription, the Academy will offer places using fair banding and random selection to ensure all abilities are represented. If undersubscribed, the places will be offered to the postcodes listed in 4(ii).
  - (ii) The remaining 35% of places will be offered to an outer catchment area which will include all addresses in the post code zones [postcodes y, z]. If there is oversubscription, the Academy will offer places using fair banding and random selection to ensure all abilities are represented. If under-subscribed, the places will be offered to postcode [postcode x].

#### 2.6.2 Banding

Banding arrangements were used by four per cent of schools. While 83 of the 121 schools using banding were located in London, 37 local authority areas include at least one secondary school using banding (and these included 18 authorities outside London). The history, implementation and implications of banding are discussed in section 3.

### 3. BANDING AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

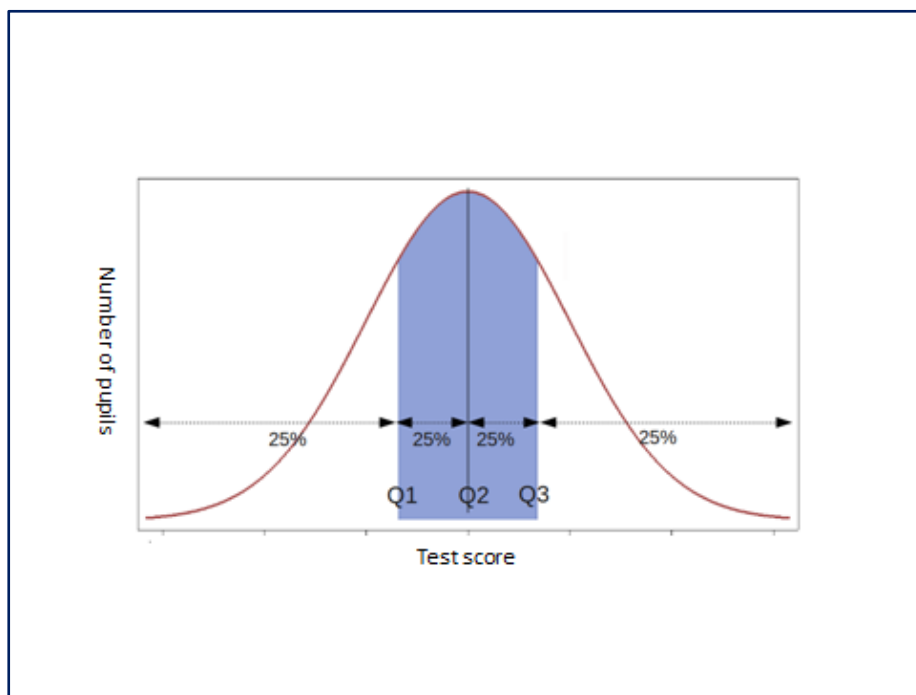
#### 3. Banding and its implementation

##### 3.1 Banding and the balanced intake

Banding can contribute to creating comprehensive school intakes which reflect the full ability range of potential entrants to the school. Under a banding arrangement, potential entrants are placed in ability bands and then places are offered to pupils from each of the ability bands – that is, oversubscription criteria are applied *within* each of those bands.

Thus, for example, the highest performing 25 per cent of potential entrants could be placed in the higher ability band and the lowest performing 25 per cent of potential entrants in the lowest ability band, as illustrated in Figure 4. An oversubscribed school offering places on the basis of the distance from home to school would then offer 25 per cent of places to those from the highest band of applicants (scoring above the mark shown by Q3 in Figure 4). Pupils within that band would be offered places according to the distance they lived from the school. Similarly, 25 per cent of places would be offered to those in the lowest ability band (scoring below Q1), again based on their proximity to the school.

Figure 4 Banding pupils according to their test score



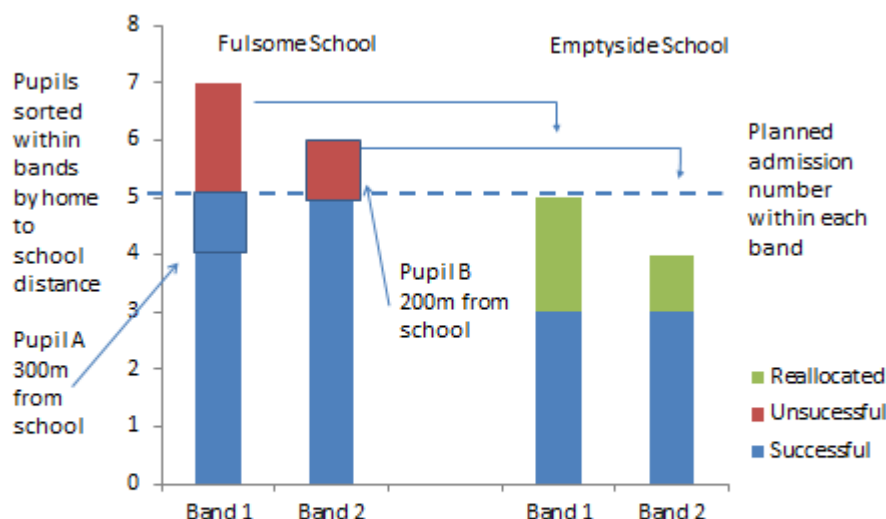
A simple, hypothetical example of the effect of this allocation process is shown in Figure 5. In this example two bands are used with each school planning to admit five pupils in each band. Fulsome School is oversubscribed and applies its oversubscription criterion – home to school distance - within each band. Pupil A lives 300m from the school and is the most distant pupil to be offered a place from band 1. Pupil B lives 200m from the school and is not offered a place because five applicants in band 2 live closer to Fulsome School than pupil B. Thus pupil B is not offered a place despite living closer to the school than pupil A (from band 1). Unsuccessful applicants to Fulsome School are also considered for their lower preference school (Emptyside School).

At Emptyside School there are fewer applicants than the Planned Admission Number and so oversubscription criteria for the school are not applied. Thus Emptyside's banding arrangement has no effect on its intake although the use of banding at Fulsome has

determined which of its applicants were offered places and which were passed on to Emptyside.

Thus, in this example, the effect of the banding arrangement is that Fulsome School admits the same number of pupils from each ability band, that the two schools have similar intakes (in terms of their prior attainment) and that about half of their pupils are drawn from each ability band.

**Figure 5 Hypothetical example of the effect of banding at two schools**



### 3.2 The evolution of banding

In this part of the report, we briefly describe how the use of banding has evolved, summarised in Table 6, and present some important variations in its operation. We then discuss how banding is operated with reference to local authority areas in which banding is used by several schools. In particular we consider how different banding arrangements, and combinations of arrangements, balance admission priorities in different ways.

When the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) first introduced banding, it sought to balance parental preference with providing each school with a comprehensive intake. Benn and Chitty (1996) suggest the policy aimed to prevent a single social class dominating a school and to ensure a range of attainment at each school. In this report we refer to banding as a means of admitting an intake reflecting the full ability range although, owing to the association between attainment and socio-economic status it is sometimes presented as a mechanism that may contribute to the admission of more socially mixed intakes.

Importantly, when banding was operated by ILEA, not all schools were able to attract sufficient applications to ensure a balanced intake was achieved<sup>43</sup> and this remains an important issue. Banding was discontinued in most areas of London in the early 1990s when the London boroughs inherited responsibility for education.<sup>44</sup> Only three boroughs (Greenwich, Lewisham and Tower Hamlets) have used banding continuously since it was first introduced.

Under the ILEA arrangements, from 1972 onwards *all* pupils within maintained primary schools were placed into ability bands. Until 1988 the banding arrangements were based on

<sup>43</sup> E.g. ILEA (1988)

<sup>44</sup> West (2005)

headteachers' professional assessment of ability and a verbal reasoning test taken by pupils in the final year of primary school, and from 1989 solely on the basis of a test of reading ability.<sup>45</sup> The planned admission number for each secondary school was then distributed across the ability bands in proportion to the size of those bands. This procedure is referred to in this report as 'local' banding (although it is also sometimes referred to as 'area-wide' banding.)

A second form of admission banding arose with the founding of 15 City Technology Colleges (CTCs) from 1989. These new independent state maintained schools were *required* by law to admit pupils of different abilities drawn mostly from the local population.<sup>46</sup> Consequently this led to banding for admission purposes being carried out by individual CTCs. All applicants were required to take a test which was used to band applicants. Thus while local banding allocated places to pupil bands in proportion to their incidence in the local population, banding by CTCs was carried out only among the *applicants* to the school. Applicants to the school were tested and placed in ability bands and then places were offered to those applicants in proportion to the size of those ability bands. As the applicants to the school may or may not reflect the ability profile of a defined local area, this method is referred to in this report as 'proportionate banding' (although it is also sometimes referred to as 'fair banding').

**Table 6 Notable developments relating to banding**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Change</b>
<b>1972</b>	All primary pupils in the ILEA assessed for banding on the basis of the headteacher's professional judgement and a verbal reasoning test
<b>1988</b>	London Reading Test used for banding
<b>1988</b>	New CTCs statutorily required to admit pupils of all abilities
<b>1988</b>	Education Reform Act introduces more open enrolment
<b>1994</b>	Only Tower Hamlets, Greenwich, Lewisham & Hackney continue to use banding
<b>1998</b>	School Standards and Framework Act allows proportionate banding but does not allow new local banding
<b>2003</b>	School Admissions Code allows 'fair banding' which it defines as proportionate banding, but disallows local banding or banding based on the national ability profile
<b>2004</b>	Hackney stops using local banding
<b>2006</b>	Education and Inspections Act allows proportionate banding, local banding and banding based on national ability profile
<b>2007</b>	School Admissions Code endorses banding as good practice
<b>2010</b>	School Admissions Code continues to allow banding although no longer endorses it as good practice

We might see banding as performing both practical and symbolic functions. Its practical function is to contribute to the creation of balanced intakes to schools. A symbolic function may be to publicly manifest an admission authority's commitment to comprehensive education and to signal to parents that schools admit pupils of all abilities.

<sup>45</sup> West (2005)

<sup>46</sup> Although pupil admission was to be on an all-ability basis, pupils were to be selected on the basis of their general aptitude and readiness 'to take advantage of the type of education offered in CTCs; and on their parents' commitment to full-time education or training up to the age of 18. (Thus, the notion that schools were 'all ability' was it has been argued compromised by selection by aptitude along with a process of selection of pupils and parents of a particular type (West and Bailey, 2013).

### 3.3 Methods

In order to gain a picture of how banding operated we examined three areas in which several schools used banding as part of the secondary school admissions process, using documentary evidence, interviews with local authority officers in the three areas and supplemented by questionnaire and interview data from eleven headteachers from areas using banding.<sup>47</sup> The numbers of schools using banding or not using banding in each area are shown in Table 7.

**Table 7 Summary of the three areas using banding**

Area	Schools using banding				Schools not using banding		
	Number	Type	Full	Type of banding	Number	Type	Full
A	9	Cm – 2	7	Mixed – Proportionate & National	5	VA – 5	3
		Ac – 6					
		VA – 1					
B	6	Cm – 1	2	Mixed - Local & Proportionate	3	Ac – 2	0
		Ac – 5				VA – 1	
C	12	Cm – 6	8	Mixed - Local & Proportionate	2	Ac – 1	1
		Ac – 2				VA – 1	
		Fn – 1					
		VA - 3					

Note: [Cm=Community, Ac=Academy, Fn=Foundation, VA=Voluntary Aided. 'Full' schools were full on National Offer Day in the previous year, as reported in the 2013-14 composite admissions brochure]

In none of the three areas did all schools use banding in their admission arrangements. Notably nine of the ten schools not operating banding were faith schools – reflecting their greater interest in the religious affiliation of applicants than in creating balanced intakes.

Interestingly also within all three areas there were variations in how pupils were tested, placed in bands or in how the size of bands was determined across schools. Below we summarise the arrangements operating in the three areas and then discuss some of the implications of the different arrangements.

#### Area A

Banding was initially introduced by sponsored academies and this arrangement was then also introduced by other schools in the area. The local admission forum had been keen to ensure that parents were not required to enter their children for numerous tests and so a single banding test was shared by several schools. Subsequently this test was implemented within primary schools in the area so that all local pupils were included in the testing process. A local authority officer also suggested that, as it was the new sponsored academies which had begun testing pupils, the banding test was itself seen as a signal of school quality. Including community and some voluntary aided schools in the banding process was therefore seen as creating a more level playing field among the local schools.

Although all local pupils took the banding test, pupils were banded proportionately by eight out of nine of the schools using banding. That is, the *applicants* to each school were placed in bands. Consequently the same applicant could be in different bands for different secondary schools because each school would create bands from their applicants (thus the mark ranges for different bands differed across the schools). One school placed its applicants in bands determined by the national ability distribution. In addition, six of the secondary schools split their applicants into four bands while three used five bands.

The local admission forum monitored the intakes of the secondary schools each year and the key stage 2 levels of their intakes in 2012 are shown in Figure 6. Interestingly, while much local concern had focused on the mixed academies, a girls' voluntary aided school had the

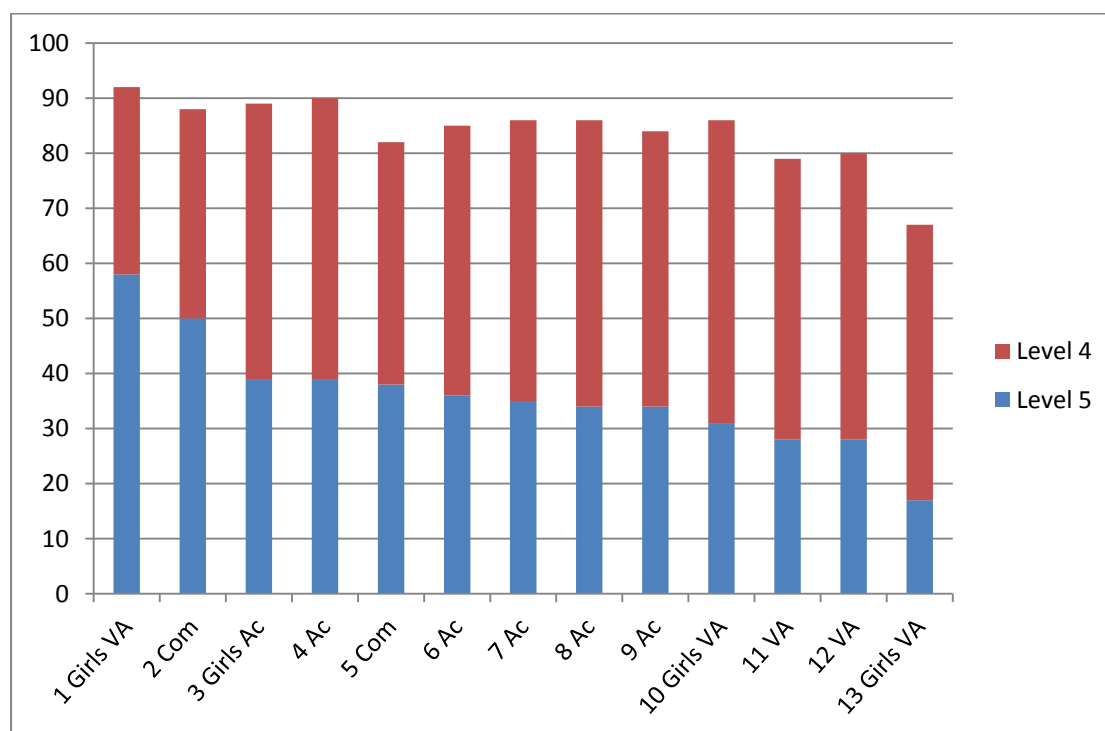
<sup>47</sup> The schools of eight of the eleven headteachers were located either in Area A, B or C. Three were from other local authority areas in which banding was used by several schools.



highest prior attainment profile and a mixed community comprehensive school located in an affluent area also consistently secured a high attaining intake compared with the mixed academies.

The number of schools using banding each year was not static. A new free school academy had joined the banding arrangement the previous year and an established voluntary aided school had decided to cease using banding as part of its admissions process.

**Figure 6 Proportion of the September 2012 Year 7 intake that achieved level 5 or level 4 in key stage 2 tests**



### Area B

In Area B banding was introduced about ten years ago across a town when the local school system switched from a three tier system, including middle schools, to a two tier system under which pupils transferred from primary schools to secondary schools at age 11. Banding was initially introduced by the local authority for the mixed community schools.

The two single sex schools in the town were heavily oversubscribed and banding was seen as a means of enabling the mixed schools to secure a more balanced intake. The two single sex schools had later also introduced banding although unlike the mixed schools, they used a random ballot to rank applicants within the ability bands.

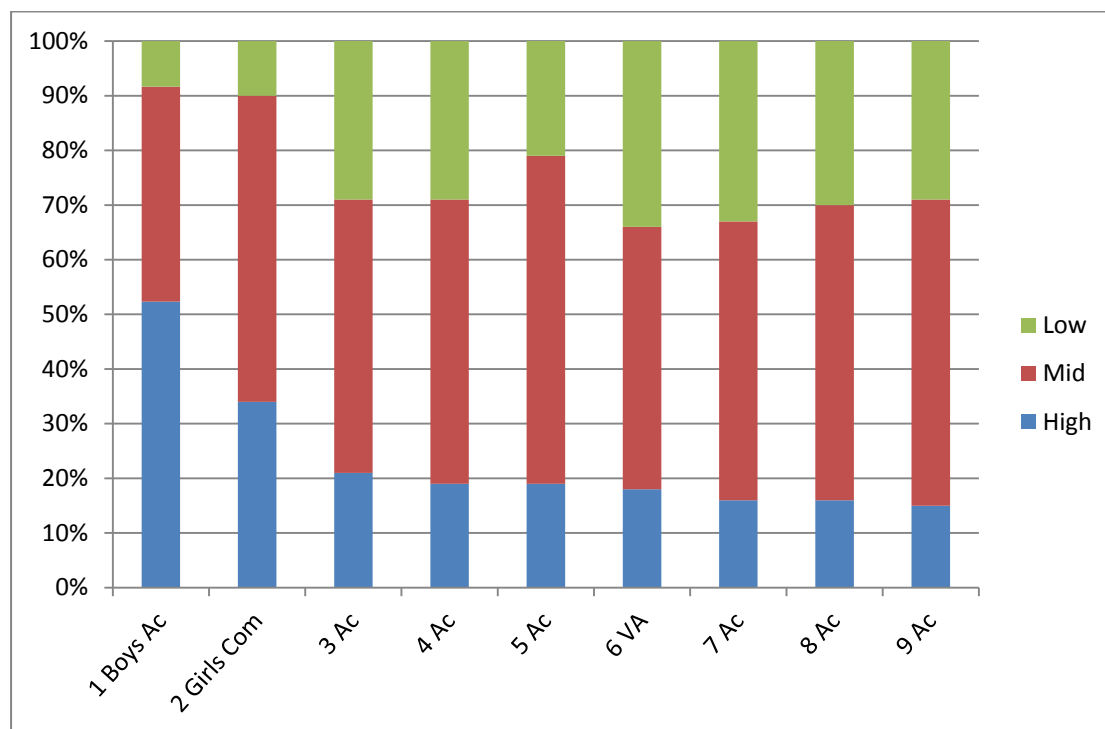
In 2013 only the two single sex schools were oversubscribed and consequently only a limited number of pupils could have been redistributed between schools as a result of banding. All primary school pupils within the town were tested for the purposes of banding and these bands were used by five of the six banding schools. The school that did not use the town wide banding test was one of the oversubscribed single sex schools. It had become a grant maintained school in the early 1990s and so had been responsible for its own admissions for twenty years. Since 2008 it had used its own banding test, taking place on a Saturday morning.

Data relating to the prior attainment profiles of the school intakes was not collected by the local authority admissions team. The key stage 2 prior attainment profile of pupils taking their GCSEs in 2012 shown in Figure 7 however gives some indication of the prior attainment



profile of pupils who would have entered school in 2008 (although importantly it does not take account of pupil mobility since entering secondary school). Most of the schools had become academies since banding was introduced and two schools no longer included banding in their admission arrangements.

**Figure 7 Proportion of 2012 GCSE cohort with high, middle or low prior attainment at key stage 2 (2007)**



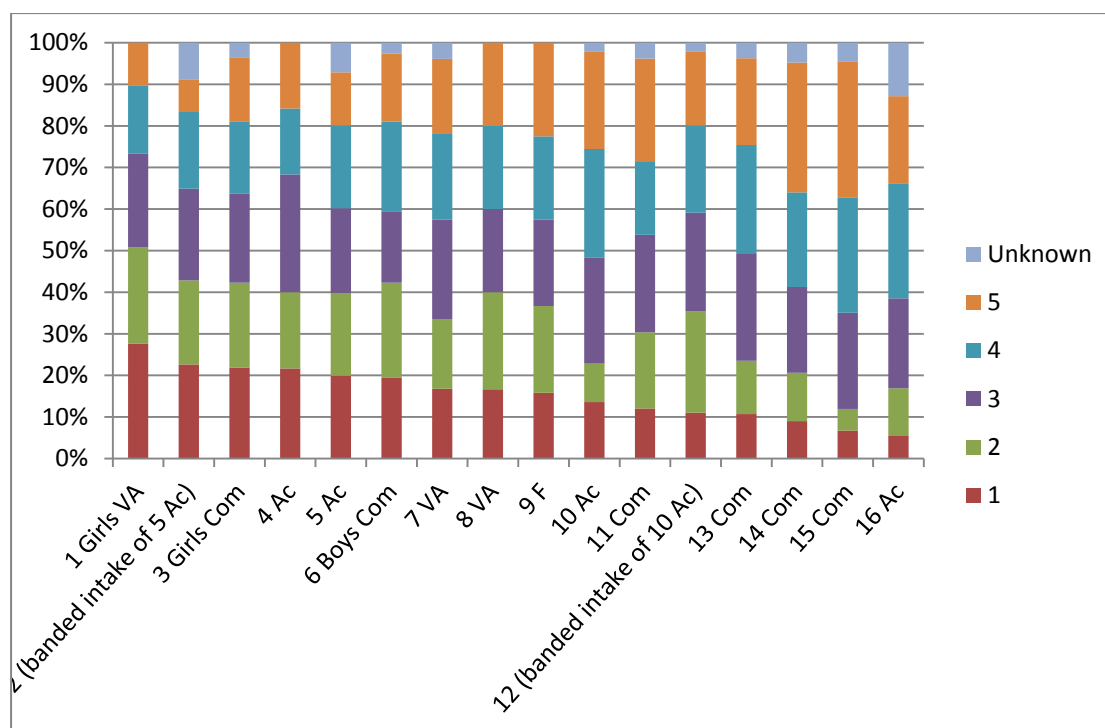
### Area C

In Area C local banding had operated continuously for more than 40 years, first as part of ILEA and then as a London borough. The distribution of school intakes across ability bands is shown in Figure 8.

Twelve out of fourteen local schools used banding, of which nine operated in the same manner. Their planned admission number was divided by five to determine the size of intake bands. Correspondingly, pupils in all local primary schools were tested when in Year 5 and divided into quintile bands. Thus an applicant's band was the same across all nine schools. One voluntary aided school (C1) operated slightly differently in that the number of pupils recruited from each band was determined in proportion to the number of *applicants* in each band rather than simply by dividing the Planned Admission Number into five groups of equal size.

Another school had been responsible for its own admissions for more than 20 years (C5), during which time it had required applicants to sit its own banding test and then split offers into nine bands. The school had then federated with another school (C10) with the schools operating a shared banding test with each school then applying proportionate banding to their applicants. In 2008 the federation incorporated a primary phase, the pupils from which were guaranteed a place in the secondary schools. The remaining places at each secondary school however continued to be allocated according to the federation's banding test.

**Figure 8 Proportion of Year 7 intake drawn from bands 1 (highest attainment band) to band 5 in Area C**



Comparisons within and between the three areas described above raise numerous issues which are discussed below.

### 3.4 Banding and oversubscription

It is important to understand the most basic relationship between parental choice, surplus places and banding. That is, schools are compelled to admit all applicants if they are not full to their Planned Admission Number (except in the case of grammar schools). Thus for undersubscribed schools banding has no effect on their admission decisions. In Area B only two schools (B1 and B2), out of the six which included banding in their admission arrangements (and only two schools out of nine in the town overall), were oversubscribed on offer day in 2013. Thus the local redistributive effect of banding would be limited to the number of pupils who were reallocated by those two oversubscribed schools as a result of banding. (It should however be noted that a third school had been oversubscribed in the previous two years and that, with an increase in pupil numbers, more schools are likely to be oversubscribed in the coming years.)

In Area A and Area C however there were more visible signs of banding having the intended effect of generating more balanced intakes than would otherwise be the case. At most of the schools in these areas distance was the oversubscription criterion which applied to most applicants.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, differences in the proximity of the last pupil offered a place in each of the pupil bands gives an indication of the impact of the policy. For example, for three of the oversubscribed schools in Area A, the proximity of the most distant pupils offered a place within different ability bands are shown in Table 8. In the table we see that at school A2 more distant pupils from the lower ability bands were offered places while the reverse is true for school A9, at which more distant pupils from the higher ability bands received offers. As both of these schools were oversubscribed it is reasonable to assume that if banding had not been used then school A2 would recruit a higher achieving intake while school A9 would have recruited a lower achieving intake. In the case of school A6 it is more difficult to interpret the

<sup>48</sup> That is, most applicants were not looked after children, did not have a statement of special educational needs or already have a sibling at the school and consequently they did not qualify for a place at the school under these higher ranked oversubscription criteria.

effect of banding on the ability profile of the school and for most schools in both Area A and Area C this was the case.<sup>49</sup>

**Table 8 Home to school distance of the last pupil to be offered a place in each band (figures relate to September 2013, taken from the secondary school admissions brochure for 2014-15 entry)**

School	Bands (1 is the highest band)				
	1	2	3	4	5
A2	824	831	1307	1676	N/A
A9	4059	1045	1168	839	N/A
A6	844	1924	1574	914	588

Notably however even in Area A, where seven out of nine schools using banding were full, the local authority admissions staff in Area A were cautious in drawing conclusions about the local effect of banding, as this exchange indicates:

- Officer 1** our admission forum has always monitored the key stage 2 results of the Year 7 cohort and I think... [banding] does make some difference..., but are we convinced that it makes a massive amount of difference?
- Officer 2** I think it makes a difference if all of the bands were over-subscribed for all of the schools.
- Officer 1** Yes.
- Officer 2** So if they are all over-subscribed then you can say well at least every school is getting their proportion of children across the ability range.
- Officer 1** But whether... if we didn't use banding you would end up with more or less the same cohort anyway, it's hard to say.

While the local authority officers were cautious as to the effects of banding some headteachers whose schools used banding spoke positively about the arrangement either in relation to its practical effect or its symbolic role:

The area-wide banding ensures a fair distribution of students for a comprehensive intake. (HT)

I would find it difficult to identify how to produce a fairer system. (HT)

The banding system does at least ensure that the most popular schools don't become selective schools by default. (DHT)

What we want is a comprehensive intake... Hopefully the parents see it as showing we [local schools] can cooperate. (HT)

### **3.5 Implementation and implications**

Having identified the central importance of oversubscription or school popularity to the functioning of a banding system, we will now further consider how different banding arrangements operate, noting in particular how different admission authorities implicitly or explicitly balance different admission objectives and the sometimes unexpected effects which can follow from these different approaches and their interaction.

In particular we discuss different approaches to testing, the tendency of proportionate banding to reward an ability group for which the school has become popular (or what we refer to as 'herd rewards'), some relationships between banding and the use of random allocation,

<sup>49</sup> Note that both of the oversubscribed schools in Area B operated random allocation to rank applicants rather than the home to school distance. One of the oversubscribed schools used proportionate banding and random allocation within those bands. Consequently in principle removing the use of banding would be to have no systematic effect on the school's intake. At the other oversubscribed school applicants were placed in local bands and the headteacher believed that the removal of those bands, or the use of proportionate banding, would be likely to result in an intake with a higher ability profile.

transfers in and out of areas using banding, banding within areas with large numbers of lower attaining children and finally, the need to consider how the objectives of banding are balanced with other objectives for admission authorities.

### *3.5.1 Pupil testing*

Clearly, banding pupils requires a process through which pupils may be allocated to attainment bands. For all schools using banding in the three areas a test was used to band pupils rather than using teacher assessment (although this was sometimes used if, for example, a pupil was unable to attend a test session). A single test would be practical in any area operating local banding whereas multiple tests may be used where schools use proportionate banding (this means there may be a different test for each school). However, in all three areas banding pupils was primarily achieved through an area-wide test.

In all three areas a local banding test was carried out in state maintained primary schools. In Area A this was initiated by the local Admissions Forum to prevent pupils having to sit numerous banding tests. However, despite the area-wide primary school testing, one school in Area B and a federation in Area C (which included two secondary schools) ran their own test which was then used as the basis for their proportionate banding. In each case the schools in question had been responsible for their own admissions for more than 20 years (initially as a grant maintained school and a City Technology College).

The use of multiple banding tests within the same area was criticised by some interviewees for several reasons. First, it was suggested that separate banding tests could limit access to schools for some pupils. Thus, a headteacher of an oversubscribed school explained that the school would 'definitely not' use its own banding test:

By using a common test across all of the primary schools it means that we have the fairest way possible to ensure that every child has the opportunity to access schools of their choice... and by having a standard admission procedure across all schools it means that actually I'm doing my part to ensure that that's the case. [Headteacher, oversubscribed school]

This headteacher believed that a separate banding test could present an obstacle for some potential applicants. This view was also taken by the Admission Forum in Area A which had then worked hard to ensure a single banding test could be used by all schools and subsequently that all pupils should take that test within primary schools. So, some respondents took the view that separate banding tests could discourage some potential applicants from applying to a school and that it could be the most disadvantaged pupils who would be the least likely to take multiple tests.

Multiple banding tests were also criticised because they placed unnecessary and excessive demands on pupils and their parents – for example, often taking place on a Saturday or at after school sessions. Indeed, one headteacher of a voluntary aided school which did not use banding stated that ideally, she would prefer all local schools to cease using banding because of the multiple tests which children were required to sit.

Interestingly, one headteacher was interviewed whose school now acts as a hub, coordinating banding tests for ten local secondary schools to ensure that pupils are not required to sit multiple tests. Owing to the large number of schools in a neighbouring authority using their own banding tests, tests took place on nine consecutive Saturdays during the autumn term. Thus it was possible for a pupil to sit banding tests for each of six schools named on the common application form, and to sometimes take the same test more than once. Consequently, the local authority had invited the secondary school, which had operated its own banding tests since the early 1990s, to approach other schools to invite them to use the same banding test and to share pupils' test scores. This scheme had worked efficiently and thus expanded to now include ten schools.

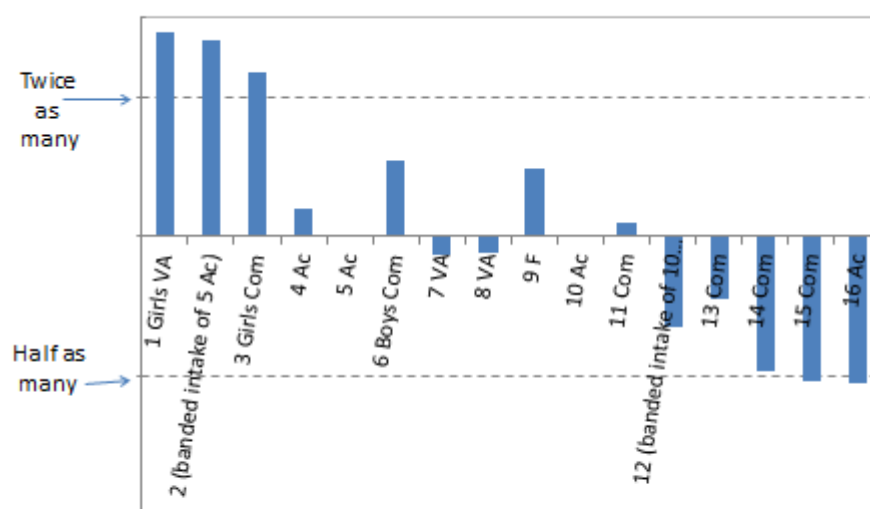
Finally, multiple banding tests were also criticised by a local authority officer who was concerned about the wasted resources (for invigilation and marking).

### 3.5.2 Herd rewards

The pattern of parental preferences exerts a greater influence over admission outcomes under proportionate banding than under local banding. That is, the proportion of places at a school is determined in proportion to the attainment levels of those who expressed a preference to attend the school - rather than purely in proportion to the local area. Thus if a particular segment of the attainment profile is more likely to apply to a particular school then this will be reflected in the intake of that school. This effect was evident at the three schools operating their own banding test. In the case of B1 and C2, the pupils admitted through each school's banding test had higher levels of attainment than the intakes of other schools in the area.

The ratio, for schools in Area C, of applications from pupils in the highest attainment band to those from the lowest attainment band are shown in Figure 9 (schools are shown in the same order as in Figure 8). In Figure 9, the horizontal axis cuts the vertical axis where a school receives the same number of applications from the highest band of applicants as from the lowest band. Schools C1, C2 and C3 each attract more than twice as many applications from the highest attaining students as from the lowest attaining students. Conversely, schools C14, C15 and C16 attract half as many applications from the highest band than the lowest. Four schools (C4, C7, C8 and C11) attracted very similar numbers of applications from the highest and lowest bands. Schools C1, C2 and C10 all used proportionate banding.<sup>50</sup>

**Figure 9 Area C ratio of applications from the highest band of pupils to applications from the lowest band of pupils**



School C10, which shared a banding test with C2, was more popular among lower attaining pupils and again this was reflected in its intake.

At schools C1 and C2, as with school B1, the school's GCSE performance was higher than that of other local schools. The schools' tendency to attract larger numbers of higher attaining

<sup>50</sup> It is important to note that, for the schools operating proportionate banding the ratio of applications did not translate exactly into the ratio of pupils admitted from different bands. This is because which applicants were offered places would also depend on whether applicants received an offer from one of their higher preference schools.

applicants is perhaps not surprising as such pupils' parents are more likely to apply to schools further from their home and also to be more responsive to schools' examination performance.<sup>51</sup>

The manner in which proportionate banding rewards herd behaviour (in this case rewarding the group of families of higher attaining pupils) was perhaps illustrated most clearly at school C1 which did not operate its own banding *test* or use its own mark thresholds for different bands but rather adjusted the number of offers it made to each band of pupils in proportion to the number of applications received from pupils in each band. The main oversubscription criterion for ranking applications within bands was then home to school distance. This school's GCSE performance was higher than at nearby schools operating local banding in proportion to the *local* pupil profile and concomitantly the school attracted a larger proportion of applications from the parents of higher attaining pupils.

The mechanism may be illustrated if we consider a hypothetical scenario. If we begin by assuming that pupils of different abilities were evenly spread in the local area and a school was equally popular among pupils of all abilities then we would expect the home to school distance of the last pupil to be offered a place in each band to be equal across the five bands. It is then interesting to consider the effect of an increase in the school's popularity among more distant, higher attaining applicants. The effect would be to increase the proportion of offers made to pupils from higher attainment bands and thus some higher attaining pupils living further from the school would be offered places. Correspondingly, the effect would be to reduce the proportion of lower attaining pupils offered places and thus reduce the size of the effective catchment for lower attaining pupils. Thus distant, high achieving applicants who were *not* offered a place at the school would have the effect of reducing the proportion of places offered to lower achieving pupils on the edge of the effective catchment.

This effect we have described as a herd reward because the applications of parents of high attaining pupils with little or no chance of achieving a place at the school was to increase the likelihood of other high attaining children attending the school while reducing the chances of lower attaining pupils.

For all of the other schools operating proportionate banding (C2, C10, B1 and all except one of the schools operating banding in Area A), proportions were determined by moving the mark threshold in the banding test rather than by altering the number of pupils offered places across bands with fixed mark thresholds. However, the effect of these adjustments would be comparable to the herd effect described above.

The effect would of course also follow for a school operating proportionate banding that attracted a larger number of applications from lower attaining pupils (as in the case of school C10).

A headteacher of one of the schools using proportionate banding remarked that:

*“when we had [local] banding parents of oversubscribed groups felt very hard done by”*

The oversubscribed groups referred to in the quotation above were the parents of higher attaining children among whom the school was particularly popular.

### 3.5.3 *Commuter pupils*

In our hypothetical situation, we initially assumed an even spread of pupils of different abilities and that the school was equally popular among all attainment bands. Of course in reality neither of these assumptions would be true and this begs the important question as to what should be considered to be the pool of potential entrants for a particular school.

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<sup>51</sup> Hastings et al. (2005). While the Hastings et al findings relate to the US, Noden et al. (1998) reports the same findings for middle class families compared with working class families in London, a story also reflected in Gewirtz et al (1996).



One of the headteachers of an oversubscribed school operating proportional banding based on its own test explained that the school had been its own admission authority since long before local banding was introduced in the area. Although primary schools across the area participated in the local banding process, perhaps more than half of the Year 7 intake came from outside that area. It was reported that some pupils travelled more than twenty miles to attend and so the school persisted in organising its own banding test for its applicants. In short, it was suggested that the school drew its intake from a different pool of entrants from other schools in the town.

Further emphasising the view that schools should not be assumed to be serving the same potential applicants (or perhaps even the same profile of applicants), the headteacher went on to express frustration about the limitations imposed by the School Admissions Code on the school's admissions policy. The rationale was as follows. The school had, over an extended period, provided single sex education and an exceptional range of extra-curricular opportunities. While some pupils were admitted on the basis of their special educational needs or being looked after children, or what we have referred to elsewhere as 'desert-based' criteria<sup>52</sup> the school was unable to offer places to other exceptional applicants. For example, as the only school in the area with a cricket square, the headteacher argued that the school should have the right to admit a small number of applicants on the basis of their cricket skills.

Interestingly, it was argued that, as long as such places were allocated within the school's banding arrangements this would not create a serious distortion in school intakes. That is, while wishing to maintain the school's commitment to banding, the headteacher wished to give greater priority to school *diversity* in admissions arrangements – and thus for example a particularly skilled musician should be facilitated in attending a school with a strength in music. While such provisions are of course possible through admission by aptitude (of which the school made use) they have less freedom than would have been welcomed.<sup>53</sup>

In contrast to this account, when asked what changes headteachers would like to make to local admissions arrangements, one headteacher stated:

- a) I would cease any admissions based on specialisms as I would imagine this skews the banding
- b) I would require all schools to use the same banding arrangements rather than running different systems – including academies
- c) If out of [area] children wish to come to a [local] school they should take the same tests (HT)

So, while some schools and headteachers view themselves as serving their local community, some do not. This contrast is exemplified not only by the cases shown above but also by religious schools admitting pupils on the basis of religious adherence.

#### 3.5.4 Random allocation and banding

We have suggested that random allocation is often seen as another mechanism through which to achieve balanced intakes across schools. It is particularly interesting therefore to consider the cases of schools B1 and B2 operating proportionate banding but with random allocation as the main ranking criterion (schools A8 and A9 also introduced random allocation for pupils starting in September 2014). The headteacher of the school with pupils travelling more than 20 miles to school explained that the school had introduced random allocation after unsatisfactory experiences using distance as the main criterion. Home to school distance was not felt to be a good basis on which to offer places to pupils because the school placed a higher value on delivering a specific style of education to families attracted by the ethos of the school. The headteacher argued that home to school distance was not a good indicator of commitment to that ethos. (While this may be the case, it is not obvious see why random

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<sup>52</sup> Noden et al. (2009)

<sup>53</sup> It might be argued that the 'herd rewards' identified earlier are special case of admission accommodating school diversity. However the case for making offers to a balanced profile of a very skewed pool of potential entrants may be difficult to sustain as one objective – achieving a balanced intake – would be undermined by another objective relating to the admission of a particular segment of the ability range.

allocation should be any better in this respect.) More compellingly, owing to its popularity the school had, when using distance as the main ranking criterion, received numerous fraudulent applications and had to withdraw offers of places each year as a result of parents providing false addresses. In addition, it was argued that the effect of school popularity on property prices is now well established and therefore operating a distance criterion would lead to greater social exclusivity.

Given the evidence referred to earlier that the parents of higher attaining children are more willing to travel further to school and are also more responsive to higher achieving schools, for a school with impressive GCSE results, we could reasonably expect a random allocation criterion to attract even more applications from the parents of higher attaining children.

Indeed, this is well illustrated by school C5. In 2005 and 2006 when using its own banding test and a random ballot, 60 per cent of the school's intake was drawn from the top two local bands (which would have been expected to contribute up to 40 per cent of the intake under the local banding arrangements). Only when the school replaced random allocation with a distance criterion and also federated with a local primary school with a disadvantaged intake did the school's intake approximate to that of other local schools. Our interpretation of the effect of random allocation, in this instance, is that it attracted additional applications from pupils living further from the school and these pupils were more likely to be higher attaining pupils. The effect of these applications would then be to move the band thresholds higher up the mark range (in effect moving the Q1, Q2 and Q3 marks, as shown in Figure 4, to the right).

School admissions staff in Area A were well aware of the potential for schools using random allocation to attract more distant applicants (and were also concerned about the shortage of school places within the authority). Two local schools planned to use random allocation for admission in September 2014. When consulting on this change, one school had proposed to use random allocation within defined catchment zones. The other had proposed to move from using home to school distance to random allocation but without specifying a catchment area. Consequently the admissions managers had persuaded that school to modify its plans. The school had then, as a result, specified a catchment area within which random allocation would be operated.

We have seen that operating proportionate banding in conjunction with random allocation (and especially in the absence of a defined catchment area) may contribute to generating school intakes that diverge from those of other local schools. It is however important to also realise that this may not necessarily have deleterious consequences for the intakes of other local schools. That is, as we saw earlier, different schools may draw pupils from different pools of potential entrants. In short, while some pupils may be willing to travel more than twenty miles to school B2, they may not be willing to do so to attend any alternative school in Area B.

### *3.5.5 Banding in schools serving disadvantaged communities*

In Area C some of the oversubscribed schools were situated within relatively disadvantaged locations. These schools were more popular with the families of lower attaining pupils than with those of higher attaining pupils (C8, C10 and C13). One of the schools (C10) used proportionate banding, and so its greater popularity among the parents of lower attaining pupils would be expected to contribute to its enrolling a relatively lower attaining pupil intake.

By contrast, schools C8 and C13 used local banding. Consequently, at these schools, children from higher attaining bands could be offered places at the school while the applications of lower achieving children who lived closer to the school were unsuccessful. Indeed, these lower attaining applicants may well then have been offered places at less popular, undersubscribed schools elsewhere in Area C. Local banding at school C8 therefore gave a slightly greater priority to achieving a comprehensive intake (reflecting the local authority's ability profile), than to responding to patterns of parental preferences or indeed than purely serving those living closest to the school. If it is the case that schools are easier to manage if they include a proportion of relatively high attaining children then local banding



could be construed as a conferring a reward on successful, popular schools in disadvantaged locations.

### *3.5.6 Balancing objectives*

The headteacher of an oversubscribed school commented that few are sympathetic to the difficulties arising from being oversubscribed (e.g. time-consuming appeals with unsatisfactory outcomes favouring articulate appellants, complaints to the ombudsman, fraudulent applications, inflated house prices creating socially exclusive intakes).

Chiming with this absence of sympathy, admission managers expressed the view that schools were very keen to recruit high achieving pupils. Indeed, one interviewee expressed doubts that the random allocation mechanism (when used to re-sort waiting lists as places subsequently became available between March and September) was operated impartially at an oversubscribed school. However, in contrast to this picture of institutionally self-interested behaviour, another headteacher expressed an intention to retain the school's use of local banding because a shift to proportionate banding would result in a higher achieving intake and the school becoming less accessible to less advantaged children. That is, there was evidence that not all motivations were institutionally self-interested.

Different versions of banding balance objectives for school admissions in different ways. As we have seen, proportionate banding gives greater influence to patterns of parental preference than does local banding. Local banding on the other hand relies on an administrative definition of the 'local' pupil population when for geographical reasons and due to differences in parental tastes, different schools may have different de facto catchments.

Indeed, different balances are even struck with other common oversubscription criteria, such as the admission of siblings or the admission of applicants with an aptitude for a specialist subject.

In relation to admitting pupils with a sibling already attending the school, in schools with small numbers of pupils admitted in each ability band (for instance in a school using nine ability bands rather than four), an individual ability group could be dominated by siblings if they are given priority in the admission process. Thus, for example, in Area C a school using proportionate banding had on one occasion admitted no pupils on the basis of proximity within one of their banding groups. Other admission authorities using banding had however circumvented this problem by reserving a proportion of places within each band for nearby children or by giving higher priority, for a proportion of places, to pupils without any older sibling. In these ways, schools were able to ensure pupils living very close to the school would be admitted.

Thus, even at the most prosaic level, there are balances to be struck between different admissions objectives and it is not self-evident which objective should be given greater weight.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Our findings relating to secondary school admissions for 2012/13 reveal that there have been some changes since 2008 in terms of the proportion of schools using different criteria. Virtually all schools were found to give top priority to children in local authority care, in accordance with legislation. There were no instances of interviews taking place prior to a place being offered. While it may seem unremarkable to find almost all schools complying with mandatory elements of the Code, this has not always been the case and it is therefore worthy of remark.<sup>54</sup>

Overt selection of a proportion of pupils on the basis of aptitude in a subject area(s) is permitted by legislation: we found an overall increase in the number of schools that used this form of selection (from 5 per cent to 6 per cent between 2008 and 2012). A higher proportion of academies than other school types selected a proportion of pupils in this way. It has been argued that there are 'strong arguments to suggest that selection by aptitude is likely to be socially selective by default even without active covert selection by schools'.<sup>55</sup>

Some schools with a religious character do not admit pupils on the basis of religious adherence although these represent a minority of denominational schools. Concerns remain because schools with a religious character are, in general, more likely to admit pupils who have higher levels of attainment and are less likely to be eligible for free school meals.<sup>56</sup>

Grammar schools deploy a similar array of oversubscription criteria to non-selective schools although of course applicants must meet the entrance requirements (including tests of ability).

In contrast, other schools may have entry criteria involving random ballots for school places or the use of banding applicants by ability – mechanisms which are sometimes viewed as means of producing intakes covering the whole ability range. In the second part of the project we looked specifically at three areas in which several schools used banding as part of their admission arrangements.

In all three areas, not all schools used pupil banding as part of their school admissions. In particular, schools with a religious character were less likely to use banding, reflecting the diversity of mission across different schools.

Diversity of mission was also reflected across some of the other schools. Different admission authorities could reflect different priorities in their admissions arrangements, and it is clear that different balances are struck between objectives such as recruiting a balanced intake, serving a local community or maintaining institutional traditions (from curricular specialisation to serving particular geographical areas).

While banding arrangements can take different forms, they can only have an effect on school intakes if at least some schools are oversubscribed (that is, if schools have to reject some applicants). The effectiveness of banding is therefore constrained by the popularity of schools and the supply of school places.

In none of the three areas did all schools using banding use the same banding arrangements. Different forms of banding balance admissions priorities in different ways. For example, proportionate banding gives the pattern of parental preferences greater influence than local banding.

In all three areas a single banding test was carried out within local primary schools. However, in two of the three areas some schools required applicants to sit an additional banding test. This was criticised by some respondents on the grounds that it could limit pupil access to potential secondary schools, and also because of the demand it placed on pupils, the inconvenience to parents and the cost to the public purse. There is a very strong case for

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<sup>54</sup> Office of the Schools Adjudicator (2008)

<sup>55</sup> Coldron et al. (2009, p. 260)

<sup>56</sup> Allen and West (2009; 2011)

pupils to be only required to sit one banding test and for that to be valid for any school using banding to which they apply.

While the use of banding in conjunction with random allocation may be thought of as providing a 'belt and braces' approach to ensuring a comprehensive intake, it may be less effective than using either of these methods in isolation.

Our findings suggest that, in striving to achieve balanced intakes, banding for the purposes of admission is not a panacea. It can however contribute to creating more balanced intakes than would otherwise be the case.

While particular approaches to school admissions, such as local banding, proportionate banding or selection by aptitude, may sometimes play a symbolic role in wider political debates about education – and in particular in relation to residual debates about selection - their effects on the allocation of school places may be subtle and even at times paradoxical.

However, even the symbolic role of banding may have substantive effects. The use of banding explicitly identifies a school's commitment to providing comprehensive education. Such a commitment may also then provide a yardstick against which the school's admissions may be assessed and reviewed.

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Table A1 Admissions criteria in converter academies (2012) by religious character (percentage table)

Criterion	No religious character N=693	Religious character N=96
In care	100	100
Siblings	99	95
Distance	96	90
Medical/social need	52	27
Catchment area	69	51
Statement of special educational needs	64	47
Random tie break	46	46
'Feeder' primary school	36	42
Religion	0	84
Supplementary information form	5	55
Priest's reference	0	35
Compassionate/exceptional factors	4	0
Random allocation within area	1	4
Partial selection by ability/aptitude in subject	9	8
Ethos	1	8
No alternative school/difficult journey	5	1
Banding	3	3
Special educational needs without statement	4	5
Partial selection by ability	2	4

Table A2 Admissions criteria in sponsored academies (2012) by religious character (percentage table)

Criterion	No religious character N=243	Religious character N=65
In care	99	100
Siblings	93	99
Distance	91	88
Medical/social need	51	57
Catchment area	51	54
Statement of special educational needs	76	83
Random tie break	38	39
'Feeder' primary school	22	29
Religion	<1	35
Supplementary information form	9	25
Priest's reference	0	9
Compassionate/exceptional factors	<1	0
Random allocation within area	7	3
Partial selection by ability/aptitude in subject	12	5
Ethos	<1	0
No alternative school/difficult journey	3	2
Banding	18	6
Special educational needs without statement	4	3
Partial selection by ability	<1	0