CHAIN EFFECTS 2017

The impact of academy chains
on low-income students

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– June 2017

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Foreword

The academy programme was launched in 2000 to turn around failing schools that disproportionately served students from some of the nation's poorest communities. By helping these schools with the support of philanthropic, educational and business partners, the intention was to improve the lives of young people from the least privileged backgrounds. This often helped to ensure they gained better exam results and improved opportunities for higher education and work.

Since then, the size of the programme has increased dramatically. Seven years ago, there were about 200 academies. At the time of writing, this has now reached over 6,000, almost a third of all schools, covering both the primary and secondary sectors. Of these, less than a third are sponsored academies, while two thirds are more successful schools that have converted to gain academy funding and freedoms.

While converter academies can be high-performing schools, which have chosen the academy path for greater autonomy, sponsored academies conform more to the original purpose of the academy project: to improve the fortunes of the UK's most under-performing schools.

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

In 2014, the Sutton Trust examined this issue for the first time, and this is now our fourth edition of *Chain Effects*. Our three previous reports found that while some chains had seen significant improvement, there were also some that had not. This report returns to the same question (and many of the same academy chains) to analyse the current state-of-play, and compare results across years. For the first time, it also looks at how disadvantaged pupils are faring in converter academies, and at Key Stage 2 in primary chains.

The report suggests that, while there have been some outstanding performers, too many chain sponsors, despite several years in charge of their schools, continue to struggle to improve the outcomes of their most disadvantaged students. Sponsored academies still lag behind the national averages. While some, despite low attainment, are showing above average improvement over the last three years, demonstrating schools are being turned around, we also show that there are ten chains which are neither attaining nor improving above the average for all secondary schools (including academies). We also find that while sponsored academies do well for their disadvantaged pupils with low attainment from primary school, they perform poorly with their high attainers.

The success of chains in "turning around" schools is a particularly important issue at a time when the government is committed to further expansion of the academies programme. This raises real issues about the capacity of the system to meet such high expectations. It is vital therefore that far more is done to build the capacity of successful schools – of which Outwood Grange in Yorkshire is a good example – to support weaker schools in local multi-academy trusts.

Our Chain Effects reports have already created a new transparency around academy chains, and the Department for Education's publication of Multi Academy Trust performance tables has been a welcome development. We hope that this year's report will continue to contribute to the important debate around academy chains, and academies more broadly. I would like to thank Professors Merryn Hutchings and Becky Francis for all their work on this report.

Sir Peter Lampl – *Founder and Chairman, the Sutton Trust and Chairman, the Education Endowment Foundation*

Executive summary

1. Successive governments have promoted academy sponsorship as a way to improve the educational achievement of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. As the academies programme has developed, policymakers have increasingly seen academy chains, and especially multi-academy trusts (MATs) as the best way of working to improve the performance of previously struggling schools and the educational outcomes of their often disadvantaged pupils. While the DfE now reports annually on MAT performance, a welcome development, there has been less attention to outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, the focus of the initial establishment of the sponsored academies programme.

2. The *Chain Effects* annual reports address this gap, and remain the only analysis of the effectiveness of this policy strategy in impacting positively on the attainment of disadvantaged young people. This fourth report is based on 2016 exam results. As previously, the main focus is on sponsored secondary academies. However, this year for the first time we also consider outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in converter and primary academies.

3. We include chains in our analysis only if they had at least three academies in 2016, and at least two secondary (or three primary) sponsored academies for a three-year period from September 2013. Academies are only included if they have been with the same sponsor since September 2013, so that there has been time for the sponsor to have some impact on performance.

4. The report reviews outcomes for disadvantaged secondary pupils across a range of measures including Progress 8 and Attainment 8, reflecting the changes in accountability at GCSE. We have compared outcomes with previous years using both new and old measures. At Key Stage 2 only reading and mathematics attainment and progress are considered, in light of concerns about the reliability of the writing assessment outcomes.

5. The analysis reveals:

   - The secondary sponsored academies in this analysis have lower inspection grades than the national figures for all secondary schools and academies ('mainstream schools'). Four in ten of the academies in the analysis group (which have all been sponsored academies for at least three years) are not yet regarded as Good by Ofsted. The academies in our analysis group are more likely than mainstream schools to be below the floor standard, and one in five of them met the 'coasting school' definition in three successive years.

   - There continues to be very significant variation in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, both between and within chains. This year disadvantaged pupils in ten out of 48 chains had attainment above the national average for disadvantaged pupils in all mainstream schools (maintained and academies), including four chains which were substantially above that average. However, 29 of the 48 had attainment below the mainstream average. While attainment was often poor, improvement in attainment between 2014 and 2016 was better than the mainstream average in half the chains. Of particular concern are the ten chains in which both attainment and improvement were below the mainstream averages.

   - Those chains that were most successful with disadvantaged pupils also tended to be successful with their more affluent pupils, while less successful chains tended to have poor results for both groups.

   - Attainment outcomes at Key Stage 4 are strongly related to prior attainment; thus chains with a higher percentage of low-attaining pupils tend to show lower attainment and progress. However, there are also differences across chains not related to pupil characteristics, and

the chains with the highest attainment outcomes tend to do better than their prior attainment figures would suggest.

- Academy chains do better with low attainers than with high attainers on average. Key Stage 4 pupils with high prior attainment – those who were above Level 4 at Key Stage 2 –make less progress in sponsored academies than they do in other types of school. This is also the case among disadvantaged pupils; disadvantaged pupils with high prior attainment make less progress in sponsored academies, including those in the analysis group. In contrast, disadvantaged pupils with low prior attainment progressed better in analysis group chains than their counterparts in other types of schools.

- Chains have responded in different ways to the new accountability measures, with some prioritising entry in all English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects, while others have focused on achieving good Attainment 8 and Progress 8 results without filling all the EBacc slots. This can reflect not entering pupils for languages.

- Longitudinal analysis over four years shows that the proportion of chains in which disadvantaged pupils perform above the mainstream average has fallen between 2013 and 2016. There has been relatively little change in the ranking of chains; some have consistently done well and others have underperformed. However, a minority have steadily improved their performance, and it would seem vital for the Office of the National Schools Commissioner to explore how this has been achieved, and share effective practice.

- This year, for the first time, outcomes for secondary converter academies in the chains in our analysis group are included. Just over a fifth of the chains had two or more converters that had been in the chain for three years. These academies generally had higher percentages of disadvantaged and of low-attaining pupils than the average for all converter academies. In most chains, attainment for disadvantaged and low-attaining pupils was similar in converter and sponsored academies. However, in sponsored academies, disadvantaged pupils with low prior attainment made better progress in sponsored academies, while those with high prior attainment made better progress in converters.

- Where chains were included in both the Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 2 analysis groups, we are able to compare their success in the two age groups. Some chains were successful with disadvantaged pupils in both age groups. However, others appeared much more successful in one age group or the other.

Thus, a small number of chains continue to achieve impressive outcomes for their disadvantaged students against a range of measures, demonstrating the transformational impact on life chances that can be made. However, a larger group of low-performing chains are achieving results that are not improving and may be harming the prospects of their disadvantaged students. Longitudinal analysis shows that, in spite of some marginal movement, including improvement in a few poorly performing chains, and the falling back of a few chains previously performing at the national average, the main picture is one of a lack of transformative change over the period, including a very slow growth in number of those chains which are succeeding in the original aims of the sponsor academies programme.

Over the last year, the Government has been more willing to move underperforming academies from their chains and Regional Schools Commissioners have been actively re-brokering academies. However, there is much still to do to ensure that the promise of the policy programme is realised in improving the educational experiences and outcomes for disadvantaged children – and indeed to prevent the policy programme overall from falling into disrepute.

Recommendations

1. Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) must act more firmly with chains that do not deliver improvement over time, in order to ensure that pupils' life chances are being supported rather than harmed.

2. To this end, the government must recognise the challenge of limited capacity in the system and allow RSCs to draw on *all* providers with good track records of successful public education delivery, including, where appropriate, successful Local Authorities.

3. The Government, along with the National and Regional Schools Commissioners should do more to create mechanisms to ensure the spread of good practice from the best academy chains to the rest. Suggestions include:

   ➢ Creating a taskforce led by the National Schools Commissioner, and comprised of trustees and senior and middle leaders from chains demonstrating significant success, to act as mentors to those sponsors struggling to realise their potential.

   ➢ Commissioning robust research on governance, structural arrangements, leadership, and teaching practice in chains that are providing transformational outcomes to their disadvantaged students, to analyse what enables them to succeed.

4. For schools themselves, there is growing evidence on the most effective strategies for school improvement, including the Sutton Trust/Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Teaching and Learning Toolkit, which focuses on effective strategies to improve results for disadvantaged students. Sponsors and schools should make full use of this body of evidence to improve pupil outcomes.

5. The Government and Ofsted should reiterate the intention of the Pupil Premium to support the attainment of *all* disadvantaged young people, including those with middle and high attainment, and provide schools with examples of how to do so.

6. To encourage this, the Government should create a high attainment fund specifically to develop, trial and support successful initiatives and resources for high attaining pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

7. Government and RSCs must act urgently to highlight the need for support of pupils with high prior attainment within academy chains (including those from disadvantaged backgrounds).

8. The successes of many academy chains in effectively supporting pupils with low prior attainment should be celebrated and used as a resource for the rest of the system: Ofsted and the DfE should explore (or commission research to discover) how this effective support is being achieved, and promote these methods across the system.

1 Introduction

The sponsored academies programme is a long-standing means by which governments have sought to improve the quality of schooling in areas of social disadvantage, and thereby to promote the educational achievement of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.[1] Within this, the expansion of sponsored chains of academy schools has been seen by successive governments as key to the success of the sponsor academy programme.[2] (In recent years these sponsor chains have been referred to by government as 'MATs' – the acronym for Multi-Academy Trusts, the governance constitution of many, but not all, academy chains). Governments have perceived academy chains as the vehicle to best ensure value for money, capacity, and school-to-school collaboration; and thereby most effective in improving the performance of previously struggling schools, and the educational outcomes of their (often disadvantaged) pupils.

Academy chains began to emerge in 2004, and were actively promoted first by Gordon Brown's government in 2007, and then more radically and directly by the Coalition Government in 2010.[3] The active encouragement by Government of the growth of academy chains, and reliance on them as a means to bring about school (and thereby system) improvement has been maintained in policies ever since. Nevertheless, until our first *Chain Effects* report for the Sutton Trust in 2014, there had been very little evaluation of the impact or otherwise of this policy strategy on the attainment of disadvantaged young people.[4] *Chain Effects* (2014) set out to address this gap, investigating which academy chains have had most success in advancing the outcomes of low income students. The impact and interest was such that the Sutton Trust have promoted the analysis as an annual series: this is the fourth report.[5] The reports provide scrutiny of the extent to which academy chains are fulfilling their intended purpose in supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds, analysing which academy chains have raised attainment and progress for disadvantaged students, and which have not, and making recommendations to government accordingly.

Background

Given this is our fourth report, we shall not further rehearse the background to, and development of, the academies programme: for details, see our prior reports. Moreover, an encouraging trend that has developed over Government policymaking now for over a decade, and reflecting Governments of a range of political hues during this period, is the recognition of a need to raise attainment for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, to promote equality of opportunity and social mobility. Much credit for this can be attributed to organisations like the Sutton Trust and others, who have presented the evidence and maintained a sharp focus on the issue of educational inequality. To that end, the need to attend to this issue is well-established, and there is also acknowledgement that gaps to achievement in education according to social background remain unacceptably wide.[6]

Nevertheless, it is important to precede our analysis in this report with some information, updates and reminders. Since our last report, the Government has again published the relative attainment of academy chains, maintaining their new transparency, following calls for this publication by '*Chain Effects*' and by

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[1] The DfE maintains that, "The growth in sponsored academies has transformed the performance of the most disadvantaged pupils by turning around the worst performing schools in the country, helping to realise our vision for real social justice and a good education for all." (DfE, 2015a, p.20)

[2] For evidence over time, see: Education Select Committee, 2017a; DfE, 2016a, p. 16; and contemporary government documents referenced in our prior *Chain Effects* annual report series.

[3] See Academies Commission, 2013.

[4] The DfE define disadvantaged pupils as those who have been eligible for Free School Meals at any time in the last six years, and those recorded as having been looked after for at least one day and those recorded as having been adopted from care. This is the definition used for the Pupil Premium.

[5] Hutchings, Francis & De Vries, 2014; Hutchings, Francis & Kirby, 2015; Hutchings, Francis and Kirby, 2016.

[6] For statistics and other evidence here, see our prior *Chain Effects* reports, and/or other Sutton Trust reports.

the Education Select Committee.[7] The Regional Schools Commissioner system has developed and strengthened under the leadership of National Schools Commissioner Sir David Carter, albeit there has also been concerns at the level of 'churn' among RSCs, as several have moved to take leadership positions in academy chains. Sir David is rolling out a system of 'MAT growth checks' that should be met by chains prior to allowing their further growth, which elaborates recommendations formerly made in our '*Chain Effects*' reports, and which we warmly welcome as supporting quality in the system. MATs and their features have also come under scrutiny from the Education Select Committee, which recommends an evidence-based approach to growth and accountability, reiterating the need to prioritise performance.[8]

While the impetus of the original academies programme incepted by the then Labour Government in 2002 was to revitalise struggling schools in areas of social disadvantage, the focus of 'conversion' policy under the Coalition Government from 2010 was on school autonomy. Schools rated 'Outstanding' (or later 'Good' with features rated Outstanding) by Ofsted were incentivised to convert to 'converter academy' status, and a majority of these schools were in relatively affluent areas. Due to the scale of impact of this policy intervention, the majority of 'academies' in the English school system are now converter academies. However, the sponsored academy programme – whereby struggling schools are 'taken over' by academy sponsors – has also continued to grow. The following section sets out the present academies landscape.

1.1   Academies and chains: the current picture

Academies are publicly funded schools, independent from the local authority. In May 2010, there were 203 academies, with around 70 more scheduled to open later that year. The academy list published in March 2017 shows 6,087 (primary, secondary and special schools). The incentivising of maintained schools to convert to academy status through the offer of autonomy, specific freedoms and a generous funding allocation in the early years of the Coalition administration and the expansion of the programme to include primary schools led to an astonishingly rapid expansion of the programme.[9] In March 2017, 69% of maintained secondary schools in England were academies or free schools (the Coalition's new name for academies that were not created from existing schools), but a smaller percentage of primary schools (Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage of state-funded schools that are academies, free schools and
        LA maintained schools[10]

Type of establishment	Primary	Secondary	Total
Academies	22%	62%	29%
Free Schools (including studio schools and UTCs)	1%	7%	2%
LA Maintained	77%	31%	69%

Despite continued policy and media attention, focusing on sponsored academies and free schools, the vast majority of academies are now converter academies; of the 6,087 academies on the DfE list in March 2017, only 29% were sponsored.[11]

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[7] The government responded to recommendations by the Education Select Committee that it publish data on the attainment of different chains, and this has resulted in annual reports (DfE, 2015b, 2016b, 2017a).
[8] See Education Select Committee, 2017a: Becky Francis was Special Adviser to this Committee Inquiry.
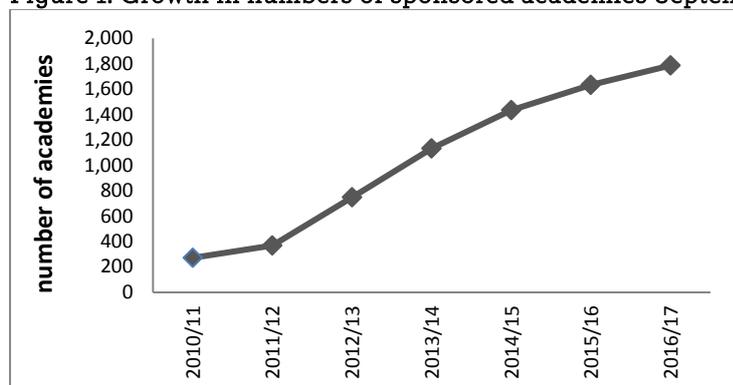[9] See Bassett et al., 2012; Academies Commission, 2013.
[10] DfE, 2017b.
[11] *Ibid.*

This report is concerned with sponsored academies. Their numbers continue to grow, though not as rapidly as they did between 2011 and 2014 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Growth in numbers of sponsored academies September 2010-March 2017[12]

The DfE academies list shows that almost a third of academies are in single academy trusts, and a similar number in trusts of two to five schools. The remainder (37%) are in trusts with six or more schools. Sponsored academies are more likely to be in larger trusts and converters to stand alone. There are in total 2,718 trusts (March 2017) but only 567 of these are made up of three or more schools.

In our previous reports, we have focused on academy chains, using the DfE definition of a chain as a group of three or more academies with a single sponsor.[13] We have continued to use this unit of analysis, despite the current policy focus on multi-academy trusts. This is because some chains are not set up as MATs, but rather as collections of single academy trusts (SATs) or a combination of SATs and MATs. Our focus is the sponsor rather than the structure.

A further source of complexity is that many academy sponsors have also set up free schools, studio schools and UTCs, which are essentially managed in the same way as academies. Harris, for example, had nine free schools in June 2016 and ARK had five.[14] This is the main form of growth for some trusts, Tauheedul had set up nine free schools by June 2016, but had only one converter and two sponsored academies at that date. We have not included free schools in our analysis because very few of them have been part of chains for three years, and even where they have, the majority do not yet have GCSE results.

This hints at the complexity involved in any discussion of academies, chains and other types of schools in the contemporary English system. As we have said in our previous reports (and the Education Select Committee has concurred), the level of complexity and fluidity has made it notoriously difficult to analyse the impact of academies (and academy chains) on educational outcomes for young people.[15] Analysing the attainment of schools that have only recently become academies, or of chains that have been in very rapid development and contain a mixture of school types, can lack validity. However, given the specific intention of the sponsored academies programme to improve the outcomes for disadvantaged young people, and the encouragement of academy chains as a means of best facilitating these outcomes, it is vital to attempt to assess their impact.

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[12] DfE, 2017b.
[13] See Hutchings, Francis & De Vries, 2014, for discussion.
[14] DfE, 2016a.
[15] Education Select Committee, 2015.

1.2 Research aims

What has been the impact of sponsored academies on the outcomes of the disadvantaged pupils they were initiated to help? Which academy chains have had most success in advancing the outcomes of low income students?

These are the questions that we again apply in our analysis for this updated report. In doing so, we provide information about the relative impact of different sponsor chains on various facets of pupil progress and attainment, especially for disadvantaged pupils.

Clearly a key question is what the successful chains have in common, and what they are doing to achieve their success. Chains' school improvement strategies are beyond the scope of this report, but we reiterate the recommendation that the DfE urgently commission robust research to address this vital question.[16]

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[16] Hutchings, Francis & De Vries, 2014; Hutchings, Francis & Kirby, 2015; Hutchings, Francis and Kirby, 2016. See also NAO, 2014.

2 Research design

2.1 The academies included in the analysis

This research is primarily concerned with outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in sponsored academies.[17] In previous years we have included only secondary and all-age sponsored academies with Key Stage 4 (KS4) results, and that remains our main focus. However, this year for the first time we also include some discussion of Key Stage 2 (KS2) results in primary and all-age academies. In addition, we review the outcomes for converter academies in the chains in our analysis groups.[18]

2.1.1 Key Stage 4 analysis group

As in last year's report, we have included as chains all instances where one sponsor is listed for three or more academies (sponsored or converter). However, we acknowledge that in some cases these are not organised as multi-academy trusts (MATs), and that in practice some schools have multiple sponsors; thus the organisations we include may not all consider themselves to be chains, and may not have primary responsibility for the schools listed against them.[19]

Our KS4 analysis group includes only chains that:

- had at least two sponsored academies that have consistently been part of the same chain since September 2013; and
- had pupils taking GCSE exams in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

While this inevitably limits the number of academies and chains included in the analysis, we have done this because the majority of pupils taking examinations in 2016 in these academies will have undertaken at least the most recent three years of their education within the chain, and so it seems reasonable to relate their outcomes and progress to the chain.[20] [21]

Within this analysis group, converter academies have been selected in a similar way; we include only those that have been part of the chain since December 2013 (the earliest date for which information about converter academies in chains is available), and where there are at least two converter academies in the chain.[22] It is worth noting that only ten of the 48 chains in the analysis group had converter academies that met these criteria; most secondary converter academies stand alone, and there are very few chains made up entirely of secondary converters.[23]

The chains included in the KS4 analysis group are listed in Table 2, which also shows the number of sponsored and converter academies for which we were able to analyse data for the period 2014-16, together with the total number of state-funded schools in each chain in June 2016 (including all types of academy, free schools, studio schools and UTCs).[24] Names of chains in which only two academies are included are italicised in the text of the report and on tables. On graphs, their names are in lower case.

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[17] All academies opened prior to September 2010 are classified as sponsored by the DfE; the majority of these were underperforming schools but a small number were City Technology Colleges, or were newly opened schools. Since September 2010, all the school that have become sponsored academies were identified as under-performing.

[18] We considered including the free schools in academy chains, but the majority are too new to have attainment data for 2014 and 2016.

[19] For further discussion, see Hutchings, Francis & De Vries (2014).

[20] This is the same approach as Cook used in his 2013 analysis of chains' effectiveness, and we applied this approach in our previous Chain Effects reports. The DfE have also used this approach in their statistical release analysing the performance of MATs in 2016 (DfE, 2017a)

[21] We excluded one chain which met the criteria above, but one of the two schools had fewer than six disadvantaged pupils and the data for that school was therefore suppressed in accordance with DfE rules; we excluded the chain because we would have been using only one school to represent it.

[22] DfE, 2013.

[23] East Midlands Education Trust is an exception, with six secondary converters.

[24] We have provided the 2016 figure to match the end date of the attainment analysis; many chains have grown further since then. Free schools information: DfE, 2016c.

Table 2 lists sponsors in the form given on the DfE list of academies. But in the remainder of this report we have shortened these by removing words such as 'Trust', 'Federation', 'Foundation', 'Group' etc.

Table 2: Chains and numbers of academies included in the KS4 analysis

	sponsored academies in analysis group	converter academies in analysis group	total academies (+ free schools, studio schools and UTCs) in chain, May 2016
Academies Enterprise Trust (AET)	26	2	66 +1
Academy Transformation Trust (ATT)	6	3	19
ARK Schools	9	2	29 +5
Aspirations Academies Trust (AAT)	2		9+3
Brooke Weston Trust	4		8+1
Cabot Learning Federation	6		12+1
Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust (CMAT)	2		6
CfBT Education Trust	3	4	15+4
City of London Corporation	3		4
Creative Education Academies Trust (CEAT)	5		12
CWA Academy Trust	2		6
David Meller	2		3
David Ross Education Trust (DRET)	4	3	33+1
Diocese of Exeter	2		12
Diocese of London	3		16
Diocese of Oxford	3		20
Diverse Academies Trust	2	3	6
Dixons Academy Trust	2		4+4
E-ACT	11		23
Emmanuel Schools Foundation	3		3
Grace Foundation	3		3
Greenwood Academies Trust	7		26
Harris Federation	13	2	28+9
Kemnal Academy Trust, The (TKAT)	3	11	41
Landau Forte Charitable Trust	3		6
Learning Schools Trust	2		3
Leigh Academies Trust	3		12+1
Mercers Company, The	2		3
Merchant Venturers, The Society of	2		6
Northern Education Trust	3		20+2
Oasis Community Learning	14		45+2
Ormiston Academies Trust	17		29
Outwood Grange Academies Trust	6	2	19
RSA Academies	2		5
School Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA)	8	6	43+3
Swale Academy Trust	2		8
The Aldridge Foundation	4		7+1
The Co-operative Group	3		8
The Education Fellowship Trust	4		12
The Haberdashers' Livery Company	3		5+1
The Midland Academies Trust	2		5+2
The Priory Federation of Academies Trust	4		4
The Skinners' Company	2		5
Trust in Learning (Academies)	2		3
UCAT	3		6+1
United Learning	21		41+1
University of Brighton	2		13
Woodard Academies Trust	4		5
TOTAL	**244**	**38**	

Notes: This list uses sponsors as recorded on the DfE list published in May 2016. Some academies have since changed sponsor. One sponsor (Learning Schools Trust) ceased to sponsor academies from September 2016.[25]

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[25] DfE, 2016d, DfE, 2016e.

2.1.2 Key Stage 2 analysis group

The process for selecting the KS2 analysis group was similar to that for KS4; however, because numbers of pupils in primary schools are generally lower, the analysis group consists of those chains where *three* sponsored academies met the criteria for inclusion, and converter academies are included only where the analysis group chain had at least three converters that met the criteria. As with the KS4 group, only a minority of chains (8 out of 30) had enough converter academies for inclusion. Of the 30 chains in the KS2 analysis group, just over half are also included in the KS4 group.

Table 3: Chains and numbers of academies included in the KS2 analysis

	sponsored academies in analysis group	converter academies in analysis group	total academies (+ free schools, studio schools and UTCs) in chain, May 2016
Academies Enterprise Trust (AET)	25	6	66+1
Academy Transformation Trust (ATT)	7		19
ARK Schools	9		29+5
Aurora Academies Trust	4		4
CfBT Education Trust	3		15+4
David Ross Education Trust (DRET)	5	3	33
Diocese of Bath and Wells Multi Academy Trust	5		13
Diocese of Birmingham Education Trust	7		10
Diocese of Coventry	3		12
Diocese of London	3	5	16
E-ACT	11		23
Education Central Multi Academy Trust	3	3	13
Enhance Academy Trust	5		6
Greenwood Academies Trust	10		26
Harris Federation	7		28+9
Kemnal Academy Trust, The (TKAT)	17	6	41
Northern Education Trust	6		20+2
Nottingham Roman Catholic Diocesan Education Service	3		11
Oasis Community Learning	13	5	45+2
REAch2 Academy Trust	11		51+1
School Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA)	11	10	43+3
The Central Learning Partnership Trust	3		7+1
The Collaborative Academies Trust	5		9
The Co-operative Group	3		8
The Education Fellowship Trust	7		12
The Elliot Foundation Academies Trust	9		22
The Griffin Schools Trust	5		12
The Haberdashers' Livery Company	3		5+1
Tudhoe Learning Trust	3		7
United Learning	8	3	41+3
TOTAL	214	41	

2.2   The data

The data used in this report are derived from the National Pupil Database (NPD) produced by Education Datalab for the Sutton Trust, and School Performance Tables.[26] Figures have been calculated for the chains in each analysis group. Where data for an academy has been suppressed because there are fewer than six pupils in a particular group that academy has been omitted from the chain results. In these cases, the outcome for the chain may underestimate achievement by a few percentage points. In cases where data for a school in a chain which has only two schools in the analysis group has been suppressed,

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[26] DfE, 2017c.

the chain is excluded from the analysis of that particular measure because it would represent only a single school. Where suppression has affected the figures shown, this is indicated.

2.2.1 National changes to attainment data

2016 saw a major change in the way in which secondary school performance is measured:

> A new secondary school accountability system has been implemented in 2016. The 2016 headline accountability measures for schools are: Attainment 8, Progress 8, attainment in English and maths (A* to C), English Baccalaureate (EBacc) entry and achievement, and destinations of pupils after key stage 4.[27]

This report focuses mainly on these new measures (with the exception of destinations). They involve a greater focus on pupil progress, and an emphasis on a more academic curriculum. They also ensure that the achievements of all pupils are included in the measures by which a school is judged (both Attainment 8 and Progress 8 are based on averages), and thus reduce the incentive to focus on borderline pupils which was a feature of previous measures.[28]

Three measures focus on attainment:

- average Attainment 8 score;
- achieving A*-C grades in both English and maths;
- achieving the English Baccalaureate (EBacc).

Of these measures, EBacc is the most demanding. To achieve the EBacc a pupil must gain a grade C or above for GCSE in five core academic subject areas: English, mathematics, history or geography, the sciences and a language.

Achieving A*-C grades in both English and mathematics is part of the EBacc, but is identified as a distinct attainment measure because of the critical importance of these subjects.[29]

Attainment 8 is based on pupils' average attainment (whether or not a C grade is achieved) across eight subjects. These include the five EBacc subjects, and three further subjects, which can be from those specified for EBacc or can be any other approved, high-value arts, academic, or vocational qualification.[30]

Progress 8 is the most important measure in terms of accountability, since it is used for the floor standard. It is based on the same subjects as Attainment 8, but measures pupil progress between KS2 and KS4, using a pupil's KS2 results in English and mathematics as a baseline. It is calculated by comparing the Attainment 8 score of each pupil with the average score of all pupils nationally who had the same attainment level at KS2. Thus, the greater the Progress 8 score, the greater progress made in comparison with pupils with similar KS2 attainment.

These changes to the headline measures have made it difficult to make comparisons over time. The 2016 DfE analysis of MATs' performance states that they have not been able to provide measures of improvement over time because the data is not comparable. However, we have shown improvement both using the new measures (calculated for previous years) and old measures (calculated for 2016), though we are aware that neither of these is satisfactory.

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[27] DfE, 2017c, Main text, p.1.
[28] Ball et al., 2012.
[29] There are slight differences between the English requirement for EBacc and for this measure: see DfE (2017c) for details.
[30] The DfE (2017c) report a strong correlation (correlation coefficient 0.90) at Local Authority level between average Attainment 8 scores and the previous key measure of attainment, percentage achieving 5 A*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent. Similarly, at chain level, we have found a strong correlation (0.91).

There were also substantial changes to the Key Stage 2 tests: these were the first tests to assess the new, more challenging national curriculum which was introduced in 2014.

2.3   Groups for comparison

Figures have also been calculated for the following groups of mainstream schools, and used for comparison:

- all mainstream secondary schools and academies;
- three main types of school: however, in this case we have only included those that have had that status since September 2013:

  - ° LA maintained schools (including community, foundation, VA, VC);
  - ° sponsored academies whether in a chain, a pair or solo (KS4 n = 451; KS2 n = 445);
  - ° converter academies (KS4 n = 1,222; KS2 n= 1133);

- three specific sub-groups of academies (again, including only those that have had that status since September 2013):

  - ° the entire analysis group of sponsored academies in chains which have been consistently in the same chain since September 2013 (KS4 n = 244; KS2 n=215);
  - ° the entire analysis group of converter academies which have been consistently in the same chain since September 2013 (KS4 n=38; KS2 n=43);
  - ° solo sponsored secondary academies: those not in a chain or pair which were under the same sponsor throughout the period from September 2013, and had attainment data for each year (KS4: n=61);

- London schools: attainment in London is higher than in other regions. Some academy chains are based entirely in London, and their attainment is perhaps more usefully compared to London schools' attainment rather than that of all mainstream schools.

Chain-level characteristics have also been derived from the NPD and other published data. These include the composition of the chain and the characteristics of pupils in the analysis group of academies in the chain (such as percentage of disadvantaged pupils).

The main indicator of disadvantage we have used is eligibility for free school meals at any time in the previous six years.[31] [32]

2.4   Limitations

The main limitation of this report is that only a minority of sponsored academies are included. Section 2.1.1 explained our rationale for including only those schools that have been in the same chain for three years. However, in two-thirds of the chains listed at KS4, all the secondary sponsored academies met our criteria for inclusion, and in most of the rest a substantial majority did so. Thus, our findings give a good picture of the performance of those chains. It is only in two rapidly growing chains that less than half the sponsored secondary academies are included: *Northern* and Outwood Grange, and in these cases, our findings give only a partial picture of their success with disadvantaged pupils.

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[31] In some cases, those recorded as having been looked after for at least one day and those recorded as having been adopted from care are also included.
[32] Crawford & Greaves (2013) examined a range of indicators of educational disadvantage, and concluded that the most effective was eligibility for Free School Meals at any time in the last *three* years; however, this is not available on the school performance tables.

Similarly, at KS2, the analysis group generally incudes all or a substantial majority of the primary sponsored academies in each chain. However, less than half the primary sponsored academies in *Diocese of Coventry*, David Ross and REAch2 are included, with REAch2 having the lowest proportion – just 30%, reflecting its rapid growth.

Another limitation is that in this report, the unit of analysis is the academy chain. However, it should not be assumed that schools within each chain are similar to each other. There is considerable variability within some chains in terms of their Ofsted outcomes and attainment. There is also wide variation in most chains in the characteristics of the intake of each academy and the attainment figures. These differences tend to reflect the different routes through which schools became sponsored academies; some of the original sponsored academies were private schools or former City Technology Colleges and some had been high-attaining state schools but had chosen to become academies before conversion was possible. In some, but not all cases, these schools still have much higher attainment than the former 'failing' schools. Another historical difference is between academies that were former failing schools and academies that were created as new schools: for example, ARK has created a number of new sponsored academies (similar schools created now would be termed Free Schools). Where chains are relatively small, this can skew the overall attainment figures we are using.

2.5   Structure of the report

The main focus of the report is disadvantaged pupils in sponsored academies at KS4. This is discussed in the next section, which reviews the characteristics of the analysis group chains; gives an overview of their performance against national benchmarks, and then focuses on attainment outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and those with low prior attainment. Following this are three shorter sections briefly reviewing the characteristics and performance of KS4 converter academies in the analysis group chains, KS2 sponsored academies and KS2 converter academies in the same chains. Finally, as in previous years, we have used the KS4 sponsored academy data relating to attainment (including pupil progress) and improvement over time to create indices of attainment and improvement. This is followed by a discussion of the main findings, leading to the recommendations outlined at the beginning of the report.

3 Key Stage 4 sponsored academies

Key Stage 4 (secondary) sponsored academies are the main focus of the report, and this section is the most substantial. It is followed by shorter sections focusing on Key Stage 4 converter academies and Key Stage 2 (primary) academies.

3.1 Chain characteristics that may impact on attainment

A wide range of pupil characteristics impact on attainment. These include gender and ethnicity, socio-economic and social class background (as indicated by wealth, level of parental education, and so on), and birth date within the school year.[33] When comparing the attainment of pupils in different schools, pupil characteristics have been identified as having a key impact on attainment. It is important to note, however, that while pupils with certain characteristics tend to attain less well, this is not inevitable. Some schools 'buck the trend'.

This report focuses on disadvantage, because a key aspect of the creation of sponsored academies was the assumption that they would 'break the cycle of disadvantage'.[34] The attainment of disadvantaged pupils has been consistently lower than that of their peers, and their progress less rapid. In 2016, this is evident in the key attainment figures for state-funded schools:[35]

	Attainment 8	Progress 8	Grade A*-C in both GCSE English and mathematics	Achieved EBacc
Disadvantaged pupils	41.1	-0.38	43.1%	11.7%
All other pupils	53.3	0.10	70.6%	29.7%

The proportion of disadvantaged pupils within the analysis group of chains varies considerably. Figure 2 illustrates this. Nationally, 27% of all KS4 pupils were defined as 'disadvantaged' in 2016; the figures for the analysis group of chains varied from 20% to over 60%.

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

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[33] For commentary on the impact of some of these factors on pupil attainment, see Lupton et al., 2009; Strand, 2014; Education Select Committee, 2014.
[34] See Blunkett, 2000.
[35] DfE 2017c, Main text, Tables 8 and 9.

Figure 2: Percentage of Year 11 students in sponsored academies in analysis group chains who were disadvantaged, 2016[36]
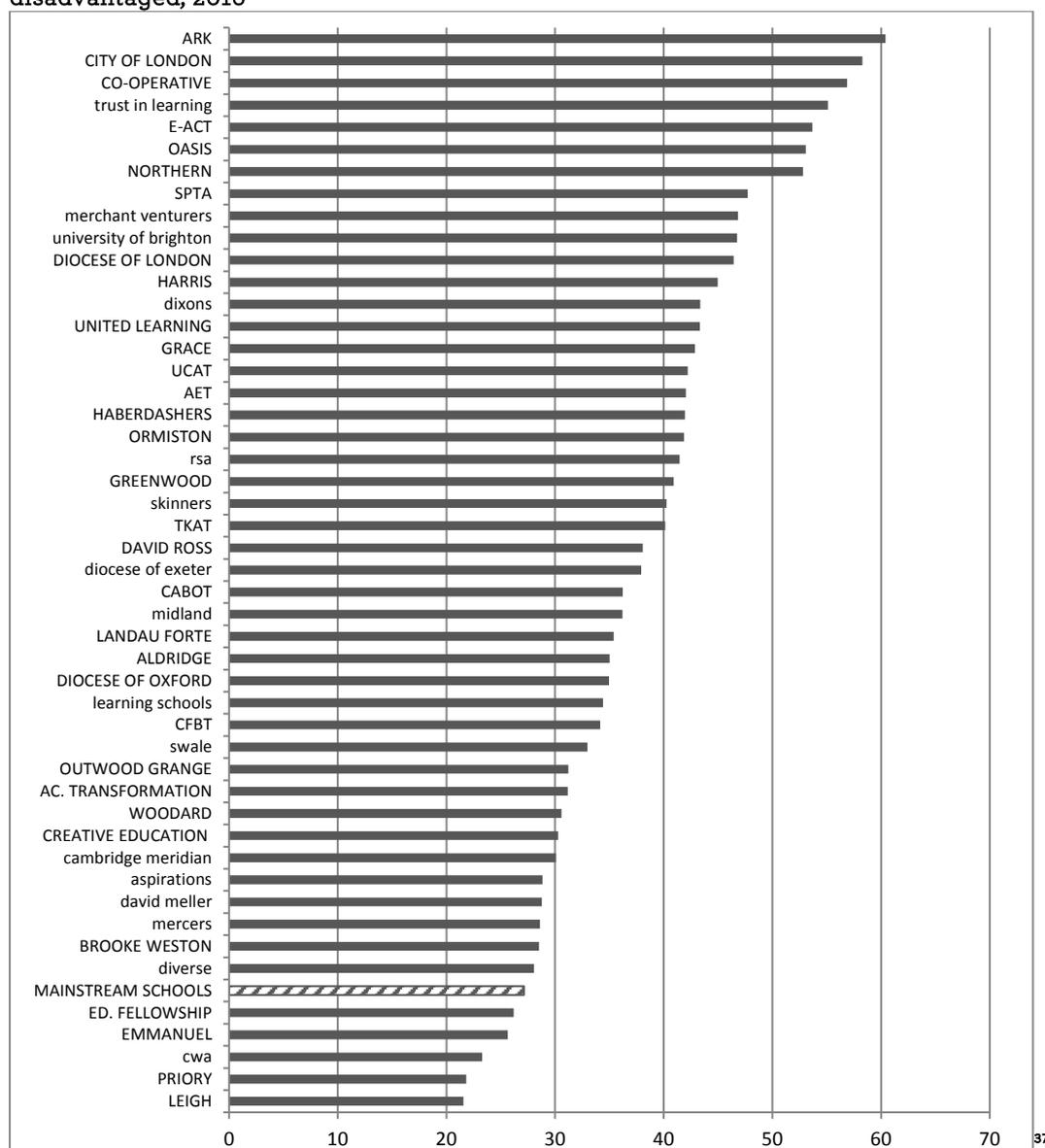
Chains shown in uppercase have three or more schools in the analysis group; those in lower case have only two.

While disadvantage has a substantial effect on attainment figures, the single most important factor in KS4 pupils' attainment is their prior attainment, measured by their performance in the Key Stage 2 (KS2) national tests. The DfE statistics distinguish three groups of pupils; those whose attainment was average (that is, they achieved Level 4 in National Curriculum tests); below average, or low (achieved below Level 4) and above average, or high (achieved Level 5 or above). In 2016, these three groups performed very differently at KS4:[28]

KS2 attainment	Attainment 8 score	Grade A*-C in both GCSE English and mathematics	achieved EBacc
Low	31.5	12.0%	0.9%
Average	49.3	63.2%	15.1%
High	64.5	95.9%	55.2%

[36] Data presented in all Figures in this report relating to pupil numbers or attainment are derived from the National Pupil Database and/or the School Performance Tables (DfE, 2017d).

[37] DfE, 2017c. Progress 8 is not shown here because it measures progress compared with those with similar KS2 attainment, and is therefore designed to be zero for each of these groups.

Figure 3 shows the proportions of KS4 pupils whose KS2 attainment was low, average and high in each chain in the analysis group:

Figure 3: Prior attainment of KS4 pupils in analysis group chains, 2016
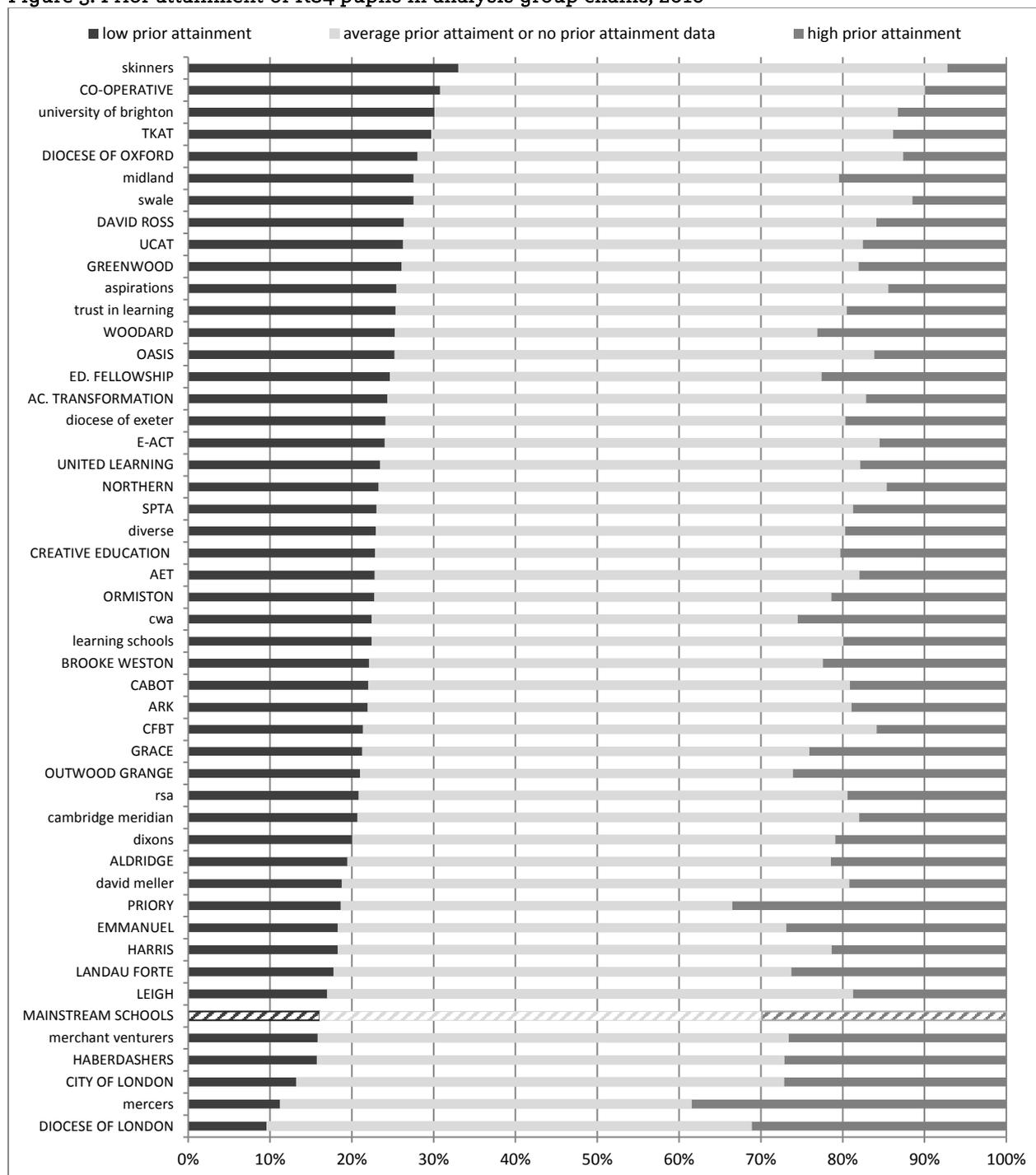
Note that prior attainment figures are not available for all pupils. Nationally, almost 5% of KS4 pupils in mainstream secondary schools do not have prior attainment data. On this graph, they have been combined with those of average prior attainment, since the groups we are interested in are those with low or high prior attainment

We can see from Figure 3 that most chains include higher than average numbers of pupils with low prior attainment; exceptions are Diocese of London, *Mercers* and City of London. Similarly, most chains have lower than average numbers of pupils with high prior attainment; exceptions are *Mercers*, Diocese of London and the Priory (though in this chain, only one of the four schools has a large number of pupils with high prior attainment).

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Nationally, the disadvantaged group includes a disproportionate number of pupils with low prior attainment (though this is still only a quarter of disadvantaged pupils nationally). The figures for the chains in the analysis group are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Proportions of disadvantaged KS4 pupils in analysis group chains whose prior attainment was low or high, 2016
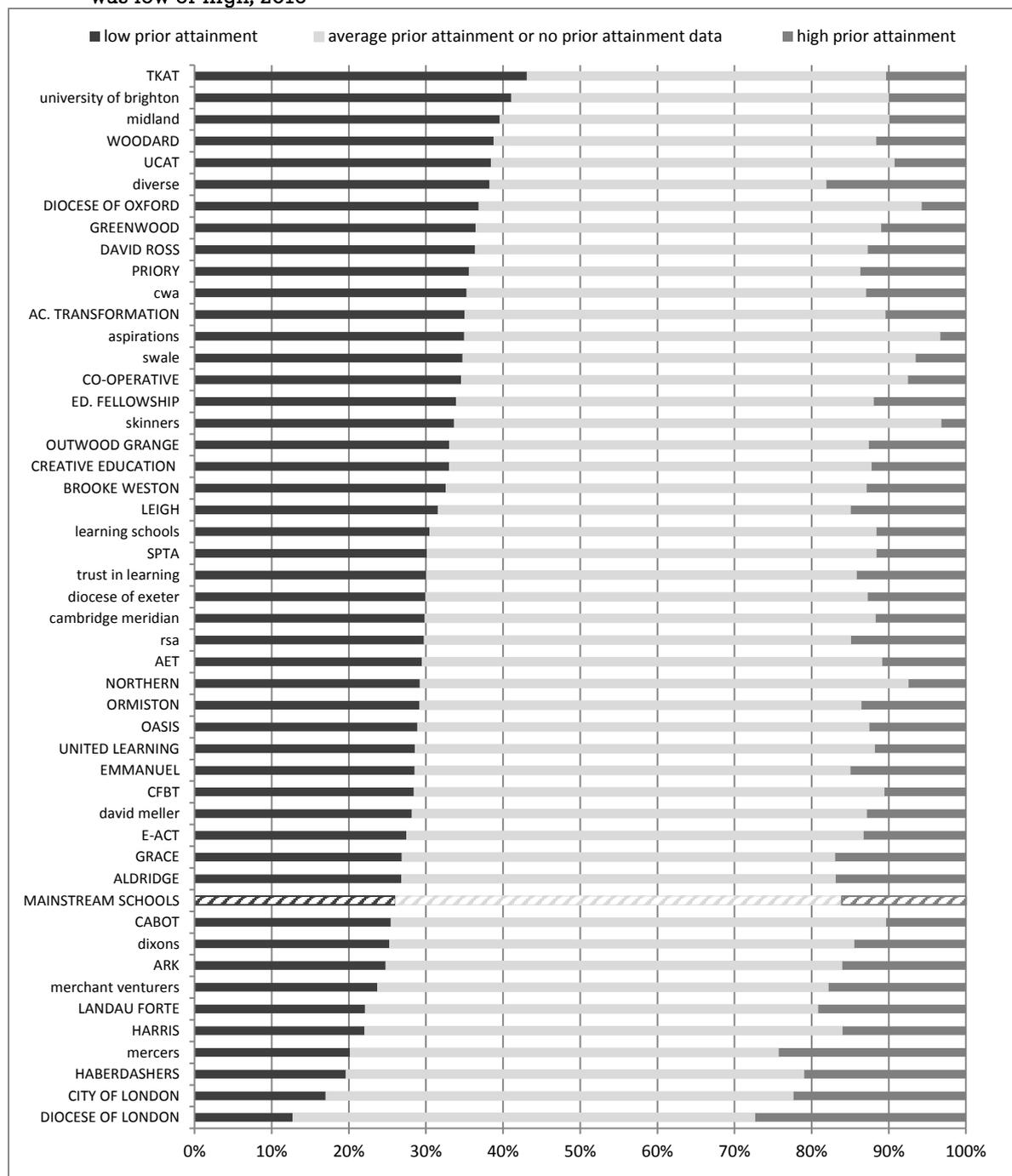
Figure 4 shows that the percentage of disadvantaged pupils who have low prior attainment in the analysis group chains is generally higher than the national figure. In some chains, it was very much higher – notably TKAT, *University of Brighton, Midland*, Woodard and UCAT. But at the opposite end of the scale, a small number of chains had fewer low attainers and more high attainers among their disadvantaged pupils than the national figures. This particularly affected chains based in London (Diocese of London

and City of London), but was also the case for *Mercers,* Haberdashers, Landau Forte and *Merchant Venturers*.

The pupil intake varied widely across the chains. We recognise that pupil characteristics are not easily summed up in metrics; there is undoubtedly a difference in outlook and prospects between disadvantaged pupils living in a depressed area where long-term unemployment is endemic and those living in a more affluent area where it is possible to get jobs. The challenges facing schools will differ in each case. We are not suggesting that all disadvantaged pupils, or all those with low prior attainment are the same. But we need to use definitions that enable us to distinguish between groups of pupils; recognising that this may over-simplify reality. These basic measures show that pupil characteristics pose very varied levels of challenge to the chains in the analysis group.

In our first report, we also reviewed characteristics of the chains themselves that might potentially impact on a chain's success. We found that chains that had grown very rapidly were less likely to do well, while those in London were more likely to have high attainment. Other research has suggested that chains focused in a limited geographical area are more successful.[38]

The DfE analysis of MAT performance in 2016 suggests that pupil numbers are not a key factor; large chains are spread throughout the performance distribution.[39] It is worth noting that while nationally the number of KS4 pupils fell slightly between 2014 and 2016, in our analysis group the fall was greater. We are considering the same schools in both years, but 19 of the 48 chains had over 10% fewer pupils in 2016 than they had in 2014, and the following chains had over 20% fewer pupils: *Aspirations*, CFBT, UCAT, Academy Transformation, *Swale* and *Midland.* This is likely to have had repercussions in terms of budgets and staffing, which could impact on attainment.

The chain characteristic that is perhaps the most important in relation to performance is their strategy for supporting school improvement. Our reports have emphasised the importance of sharing successful strategies rather than competing.

3.2 Overview of Key Stage 4 analysis group chains and schools

The main analysis in this report focuses on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. This short section gives an overview of how successful the chains in our analysis group have been in Ofsted inspections, as well as reviewing their attainment for all pupils, and their performance against the floor standard and the coasting schools definition.

3.2.1 Ofsted

First, we consider the most recent Ofsted overall judgement for the school (as at 31 August 2016).

Table 4: Ofsted: most recent overall effectiveness judgement as at 31 August 2016[40]

	Outstanding %	Good %	RI %	Inadequate %
Schools in our analysis group	15	47	30	7
All secondary schools	22	56	17	5

Table 4 shows that, compared with the national pattern, a higher proportion of schools in the analysis group were judged as Requires Improvement (RI) or Inadequate (37% v 22%). Sponsored academies

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[38] DfE, 20I4; Hill et al., 2012.

[39] DfE, 2017a.

[40] Ofsted 2016.

are, of course, schools facing particular challenges, often with a history of low attainment, including poor Ofsted grades. It is surprising that nearly four in ten of these academies are not yet regarded as Good by Ofsted, because sponsored academies are intended to receive particular support to enable them to improve, and these schools had all been academies for at least three years, most for much longer. However, Ofsted data always presents a historical view in that only one fifth of the schools in the analysis group had been inspected in the last year, and for 27%, the most recent full inspection was before the start of our analysis period (September 2013).

Table 5: Chains grouped by Ofsted's most recent judgement for overall effectiveness as at 31 August 2016 (academies in the analysis group only)

Average inspection grade at or above Good	Average inspection grade at or below Requires Improvement
ARK Schools	*CWA*
Aspirations	*Diocese of Exeter*
Cambridge Meridian	Grace
CfBT	*Learning Schools*
City of London	Midland
Diocese of London	SPTA
Haberdashers	UCAT
Harris	Woodard
Landau Forte	
Leigh	
Mercers	
Merchant Venturers	
Outwood Grange	
Priory	
RSA	
Skinners	
Swale	
Trust in Learning	

Table 5 shows that in 18 of the 48 chains, the average Ofsted grade was between 1 and 2 (at, or better than, Good). At the other extreme, there were eight chains in which the average Ofsted grade was between 3 and 4 (at, or worse than, Requires Improvement).

The Education and Adoption Act (2016) made it clear that in future every school failing to meet government benchmarks will be turned into an academy.[41] This was justified by the claim that:

> Hundreds of schools, often in disadvantaged areas, are already being turned around thanks to the help of strong academy sponsors - education experts who know exactly what they have to do to make a failing school outstanding.[42]

Following a House of Commons debate as the Bill progressed through Parliament, this stipulation was extended to academies. This implies that 'failing' sponsored academies will move to other 'stronger' sponsors. In 2015-16, 94 academies changed sponsor, 51 of these as a result of intervention, and 14 because the sponsor closed. Between September 1 and November 1 2016, a further 85 changed sponsor, 40 of these as a result of intervention.[43] It is yet to be seen whether re-brokering will bring about the desired improvement in these schools.

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[41] UK Parliament, 2016.
[42] DfE, 2015c.
[43] DfE, 2016e.

3.2.2 Attainment

As Section 2.2.1 explained, new measures of attainment and pupil progress have been introduced this year, and the main measure of attainment is now Attainment 8. Figure 5 shows that, using Attainment 8, the majority of the analysis group chains have lower average scores than the mainstream schools average.

Figure 5: Average attainment 8 score, 2016, for all pupils in analysis group chains
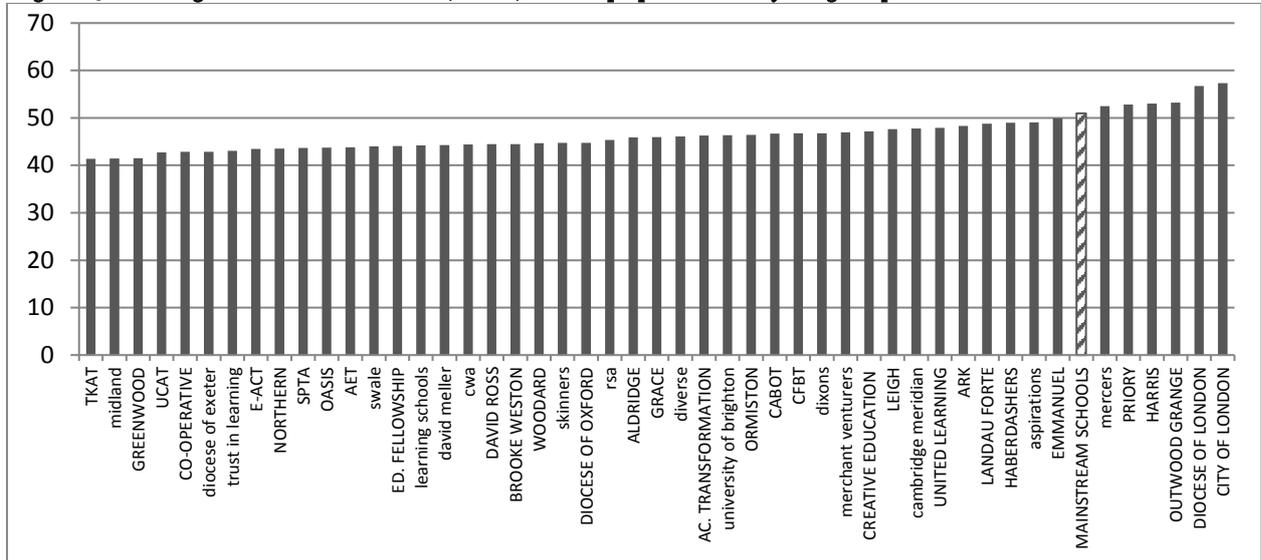

There is no statistical relationship between the percentage of disadvantaged pupils in a chain and its Attainment 8 score (r = -0.05). But there is a strong correlation between the Attainment 8 score and the percentage of pupils with low prior attainment (r = -0.74). However, some chains have achieved better attainment outcomes than would be expected from the prior attainment of their pupil intake (notably, Outwood Grange, City of London, Diocese of London, Harris, *Skinners, Cambridge Meridian, University of Brighton,* and *Aspirations*).

The new measure of pupil progress, Progress 8, uses each individual pupil's KS2 attainment as a baseline, and measures their progress in relation to that of other pupils with the same KS2 attainment. It is designed such that where progress matches the national average, the Progress 8 score is zero. Thus it controls for prior attainment, which is useful in relation to the point above. Figure 6 shows the Progress 8 score for each chain.

City of London had a below average proportion of pupils with low prior attainment, and so a high Attainment 8 score is predictable, but the high Progress 8 score shows that it did better than the prior attainment figures would predict. At the opposite end of the scale, *University of Brighton* had a high proportion of pupils with low prior attainment, and while its Attainment 8 score is below average, it is better than would have been predicted from prior attainment alone, and again this is demonstrated by its positive Progress 8 figure. Other chains have done less well than their prior attainment figures predicted and these are marked by their negative Progress 8 figure.

Figure 6: Progress 8 measure, 2016, for all pupils in analysis group chains
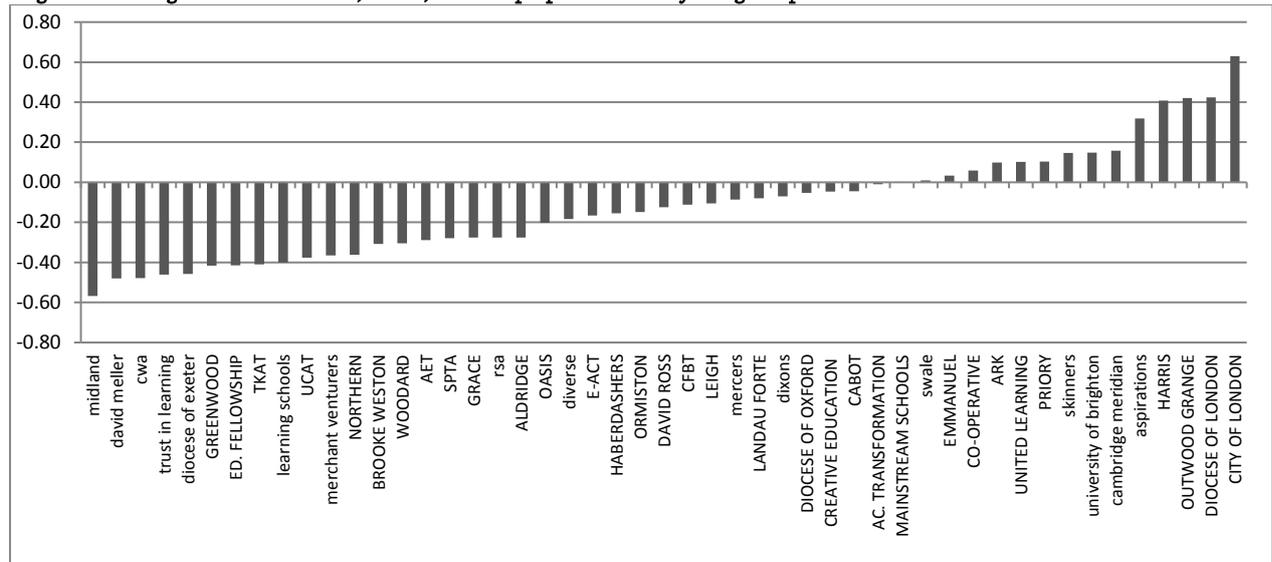
3.2.3 Floor standards

A second way of considering the overall standing of a chain is by the number of schools below the floor standard. In 2016, a school was deemed to be below floor if:

- its Progress 8 score was below -0.5; and
- the upper band of the 95% confidence interval was below zero.

Nationally 9% of secondary schools were below the floor standard in 2016. Of the 244 sponsored academies in the analysis group, 40 (16%) were below floor in 2016. The percentages nationally and in the analysis group are lower than in previous years (2015: 11% and 22% respectively); this reflects the change in the way the floor target is measured.[44]

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[44] DfE, 2017c, Main text, Section 8.

Table 6: Floor standard

Academies in analysis group below floor standard, by chain, 2016			Chains in which no academies in the analysis group were below the floor standard
	number	percentage (%)	
Northern	2	66.7	Academy Transformation
Brooke Weston	2	50.0	*Aspirations*
David Meller	1	50.0	*Cambridge Meridian*
Diocese of Exeter	1	50.0	CfBT
Learning Schools	1	50.0	City of London
Merchant Venturers	1	50.0	Co-operative
RSA	1	50.0	*CWA*
Midland	1	50.0	David Ross
Trust in Learning	1	50.0	Diocese of London
Greenwood	3	42.9	*Diverse*
Diocese of Oxford	1	33.3	*Dixons*
Grace	1	33.3	Emmanuel
TKAT	1	33.3	Haberdashers
UCAT	1	33.3	Harris
E-ACT	3	27.3	Landau Forte
AET	7	26.9	Leigh
SPTA	2	25.0	Mercers
Aldridge	1	25.0	Outwood Grange
Education Fellowship	1	25.0	Priory
Creative Education	1	20.0	Skinners
Ormiston	3	17.6	*Swale*
Cabot	1	16.7	*University of Brighton*
ARK	1	11.1	Woodard
Oasis	1	7.1	
United Learning	1	4.8	

Table 6 shows that 25 of the 48 chains in the KS4 analysis group had a least one school (that is, one school that had been consistently part of the chain for at least three years) below the floor standard. In small chains, one school below floor results in a high percentage, but it is noteworthy that AET and E-ACT both have over a quarter of their analysis group academies below floor despite the fact that each chain has had a number of low achieving academies re-brokered (and thus not included in our sample).

3.2.4 Coasting schools

In the Education and Adoption Bill (2016), the Conservative government referred to coasting schools, which, under the provision of the Bill, will be eligible for intervention.

A secondary school meets the coasting definition if:

- In 2014, fewer than 60% of pupils achieved 5+ A* to C grades including English and maths, and the school has less than the national median percentage of pupils who achieved expected progress in English and in mathematics; and
- In 2015, fewer than 60% of pupils achieved 5+ A* to C grades including English and maths, and the school has less than the national median percentage of pupils who achieved expected progress in English and in mathematics; and
- In 2016, the school has a Progress 8 score below -0.25 and the upper band of the 95% confidence interval is below zero.

Of the 244 academies in the analysis group, 48 (one in five) met the coasting definition in all three years, and almost half the chains included at least one coasting school (Table 7).[45] About 16% of all coasting KS4 schools are academies in our analysis group.

Table 7: Coasting schools[46]

Sponsored academies in chains in the analysis group which met the coasting definition in all three years			Chains in which no analysis group academies met the coasting definition in all three years
	number	percentage	
Greenwood	5	71	Academy Transformation
Cabot	3	50	*Aspirations*
Brooke Weston	2	50	*Cambridge Meridian*
Education Fellowship	2	50	CfBT
Woodard	2	50	City of London
CWA	1	50	Co-operative
Diocese of Exeter	1	50	*David Meller*
Trust in Learning	1	50	Diocese of London
SPTA	3	38	*Diverse*
E-ACT	4	36	*Dixons*
AET	9	35	Emmanuel
Diocese of Oxford	1	33	Haberdashers
Grace	1	33	Harris
TKAT	1	33	Landau Forte
Northern	1	33	*Learning Schools*
UCAT	1	33	Leigh
David Ross	1	25	*Mercers*
Aldridge	1	25	*Merchant Venturers*
Creative Education	1	20	*Midland*
United Learning	3	14	Outwood Grange
Ormiston	2	12	Priory
ARK	1	11	*RSA*
Oasis	1	7	*Skinners*
			Swale
			University of Brighton

Among the larger chains, Greenwood, Cabot, SPTA, E-Act and AET stand out as having over a third of their sponsored academies in the analysis group in the coasting category. By contrast, 25 of the 48 chains analysed had no schools in this category; these are listed on Table 7.

3.2.5 Overview: summary

This overview shows that many of the sponsored academies in the analysis group are still struggling to reach national benchmarks. The strong relationship between Attainment 8 score and the percentage of pupils with low prior attainment suggests that the attainment level of the pupils they take in may be a factor in this. However, Progress 8 is designed to assess progress regardless of prior attainment, so that taking on pupils with low prior attainment should not disadvantage a school. However, research has shown that schools with large numbers of pupils with low prior attainment were more likely to have low scores on Progress 8, and to fail to achieve the floor target.[47] Two explanations were put forward for this: schools in relatively affluent areas (where few pupils have low prior attainment) tend to have pupils with a supportive home environment – and schools in deprived communities tend to be less effective as a result of higher teacher turnover and recruitment problems. This suggests that the low Progress 8 scores

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[45] DfE, 2017e.
[46] *ibid.*
[47] Allen, 2016a.

which have resulted in some sponsored academies failing to meet the floor standard and being in the coasting group may also be a reflection of the nature of the pupil intake.

This section was concerned with the overall achievement of the academies in each chain; the next section reviews outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and for those with low prior attainment.

3.3 Key Stage 4: Outcomes for disadvantaged and under-attaining pupils

This section reviews the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in each academy chain, the attainment gap relating to disadvantage; pupil progress, and the extent to which attainment and progress have improved since 2014. In each section, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils with different levels of prior attainment are considered.

3.3.1 Attainment of disadvantaged pupils

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

- average Attainment 8 score;
- achieving A*-C grades in both English and maths;
- achieving the English Baccalaureate (EBacc).

These measures are described in Section 2.2.1.

Figure 7 compares the average attainment of our analysis group academies with attainment in other groups of schools. In each case, only schools that have had the same status for three academic years from September 2013 are included. For both Attainment 8 and EBacc, disadvantaged pupils in sponsored academies did less well than those in all mainstream schools and in mainstream schools other than academies. Disadvantaged pupils in our analysis group did better than the average figure for those in all sponsored academies. For Attainment 8, they also did slightly better than those in solo sponsored academies.

The pattern for 2016 is somewhat different from that found in previous years, because both the analysis group and the solo sponsored academies outperform the average for all sponsored academies. The reason for this difference becomes apparent when we examine the remaining sponsored academies which have been in existence for three years. In previous years, this group was made up of academies in groups of two, together with academies that had existed for more than three years but had joined a chain during the last three years. But in the current analysis, a new category has emerged: academies that have been re-brokered because of concerns about their performance; these academies typically have poor attainment figures (the average Attainment 8 score for this group is 37.7, compared with 41.1 for all sponsored academies that have existed for three years). The removal of re-brokered academies from the analysis group chains and from the solo academies group thus has the effect of boosting the attainment of these groups in comparison to the figure for all sponsored academies. In our analysis group, AET and E-ACT have had the most academies re-brokered. While some of our chains have taken on re-brokered academies, the majority of these do not feature in the analysis group because we include only those that have been with the same sponsor for three years.

Figure 7: Attainment, 2016, for disadvantaged pupils in sponsored academies and mainstream schools which have had the same status since September 2013

Average Attainment 8 score

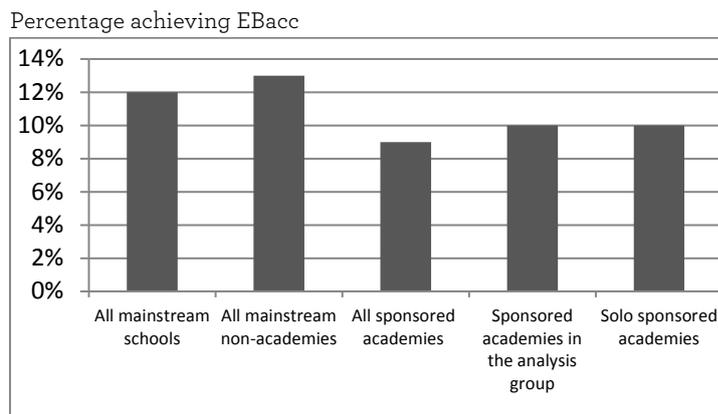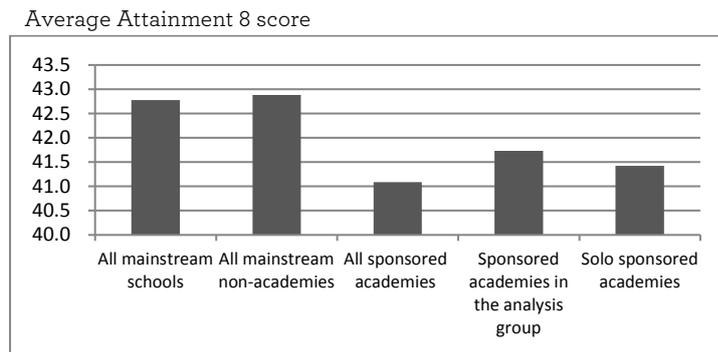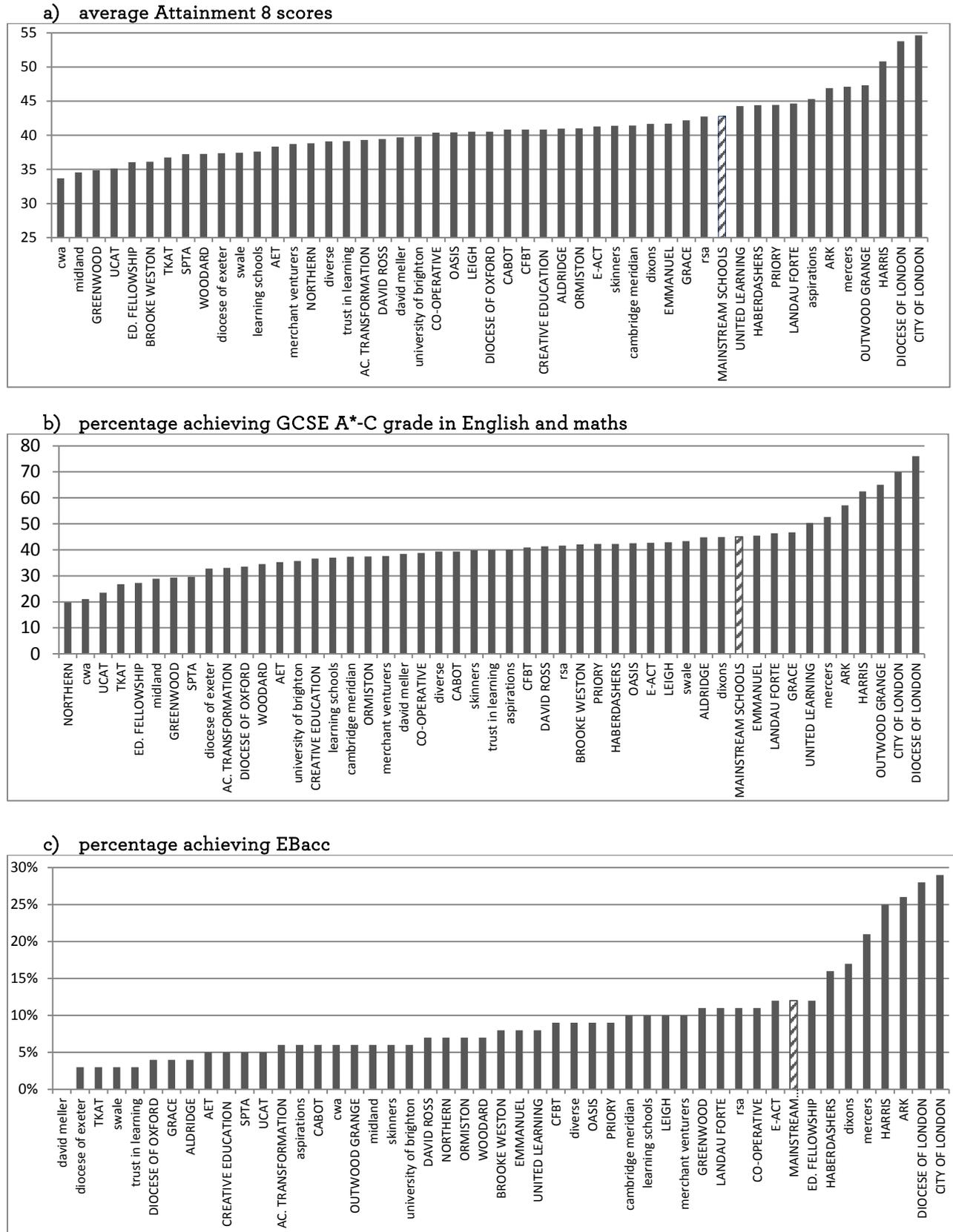
Percentage achieving EBacc

Figure 8 shows attainment figures for disadvantaged pupils in each chain using three measures of attainment. In each case, less than a quarter of the chains exceed the national figure for disadvantaged pupils, and the same chains tend to feature in this group for each measure. City of London, Diocese of London, ARK, Harris, and *Mercers* are consistently in this group.

There is greater variation across measures in the chains that perform poorly; TKAT is the only chain that appears in the bottom eight for all three measures.

The variation between measures suggests that not all chains are using the same strategies or prioritising the same measures. For example, both Grace and Outwood Grange scored at or above the mainstream average for Attainment 8 and percentage achieving English and maths, but were well below for EBacc. In both cases this relates to entering fewer pupils for languages than other chains – possibly as a strategic decision, or possibly due to teacher shortage in this area, or to knowing that high grades are more difficult to achieve in languages.[48] In contrast, Greenwood and Education Fellowship were around average for EBacc but much lower on the other measures, and in each case a much higher percentage of pupils were entered for languages than in Grace or Outwood Grange.

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[48] Allen (2016b) estimated that 3,400 additional language teachers would be required to ensure that every pupil studied a language for EBacc. Thomson (2016) argued that 'the more that schools offer MFL the more they are effectively being penalised' because high grades are more difficult to achieve.

Figure 8: Attainment of disadvantaged pupils in sponsored academies, 2016, by chain

a) average Attainment 8 scores

b) percentage achieving GCSE A*-C grade in English and maths

c) percentage achieving EBacc

Overall, the DfE has reported that numbers entered for EBacc have increased, particularly for science and humanities subjects. There was considerable variation across chains in entry rate, ranging from 10% to 53% (Figure 9). However, the aim of entering an EBacc subject is not only to achieve EBacc, but also

to achieve a score in each of the Attainment 8 subject slots; thus chains entering large numbers of pupils for EBacc subjects may have done this to try and boost their Attainment 8 score.

Figure 9: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils a) entering all EBacc subjects and b) achieving EBacc, 2016, by chain
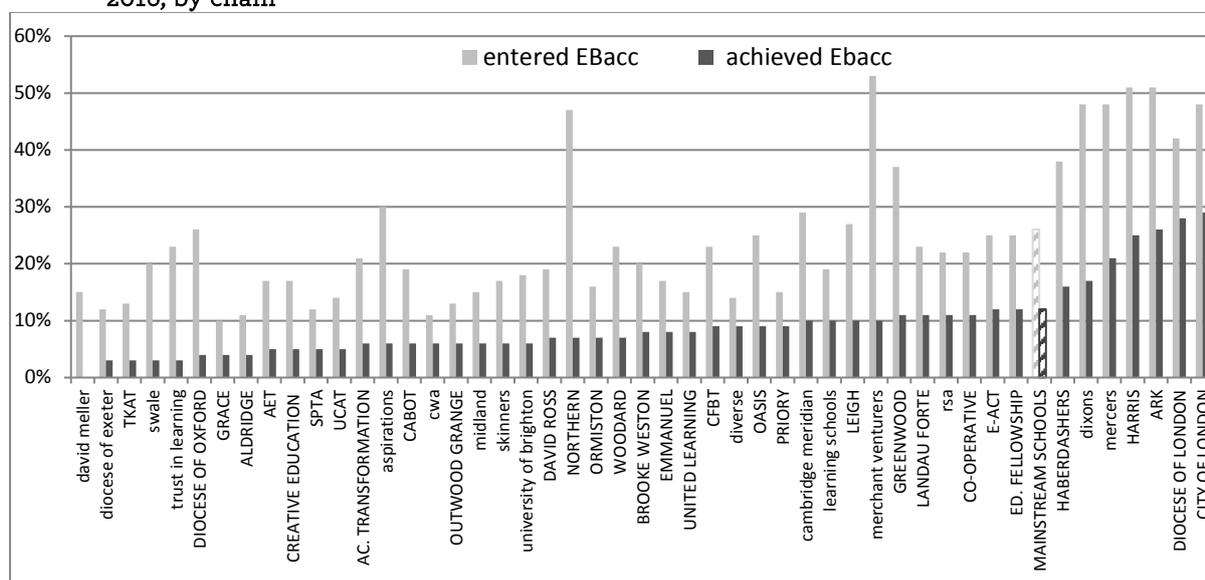
Section 3.2.2 pointed out that there is there is a strong correlation between the Attainment 8 score for all pupils and the percentage of pupils with low prior attainment. This suggests that a possible factor in the variation in attainment of disadvantaged pupils in the chains in the analysis group might relate to their prior attainment. The chains with the highest attainment for disadvantaged pupils all have relatively few disadvantaged pupils with low prior attainment (see Figure 4). For example, in Diocese of London, a chain in which disadvantaged pupils do well in secondary schools, only 13% of the disadvantaged pupils have low prior attainment. In contrast, TKAT has the highest proportion of disadvantaged pupils whose prior attainment was low, and Figure 8 shows that attainment for disadvantaged pupils in that chain is at the lower end of the range for all three measures.

The correlations between the percentage of disadvantaged pupils with low prior attainment and the various attainment measures for disadvantaged pupils are moderately strong (for average A8 score, r = -0.70; for gaining Grade C or above in both English and maths, r = -0.67).

However, in some chains, disadvantaged pupils do better than might be expected from their prior attainment figures (Diocese of London, City of London, Harris, ARK, Outwood Grange, the Priory, *University of Brighton*) while in others, they do less well than their prior attainment would suggest (*CWA, Merchant Venturers*, SPTA, Brooke Weston, Northern). Prior attainment figures are not the only factor impacting on attainment at GCSE level.

Figure 10 shows the Attainment 8 scores for each chain for disadvantaged pupils with low prior attainment. It is noticeable that scores for more than half the chains exceed the national average for this group, and the average score for the analysis group (29.1) is just above the mainstream school average (28.4). This suggests that, on average, sponsored academies in chains do well with this group of pupils, though the success is not universal.

However, there is considerable variation across chains, with scores ranging from 18.6 (*Merchant Venturers*) to 41.7 (City of London). While one cannot assume that all disadvantaged pupils with low prior attainment are the same, this level of variation suggests that the strategies used to support such pupils in some chains are very much more effective than those in other chains.

Figure 10: Average Attainment 8 scores for disadvantaged pupils with low prior attainment, by chain, 2016
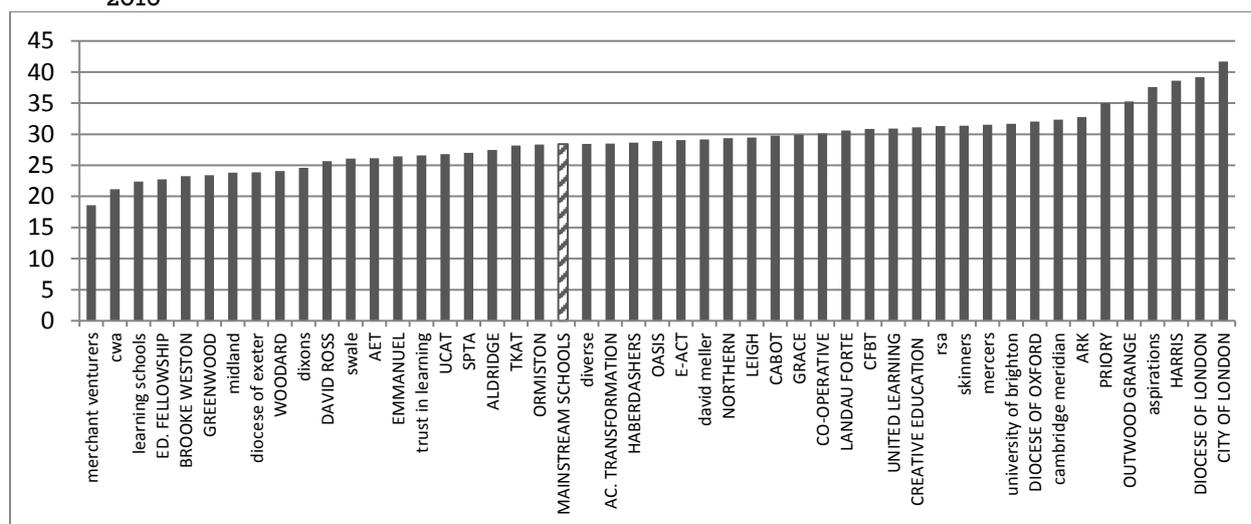
Disadvantaged pupils with high prior attainment are also of interest. In analysis group academies, this group attain slightly *less* well than the national average (their average Attainment 8 score was 58.6 compared to a national figure of 59.8). Figure 11 shows that there is less variation across chains in outcomes for this group, and that most chains do less well than the national figure.

Figure 11: Average Attainment 8 scores for disadvantaged pupils with high prior attainment, by chain, 2016
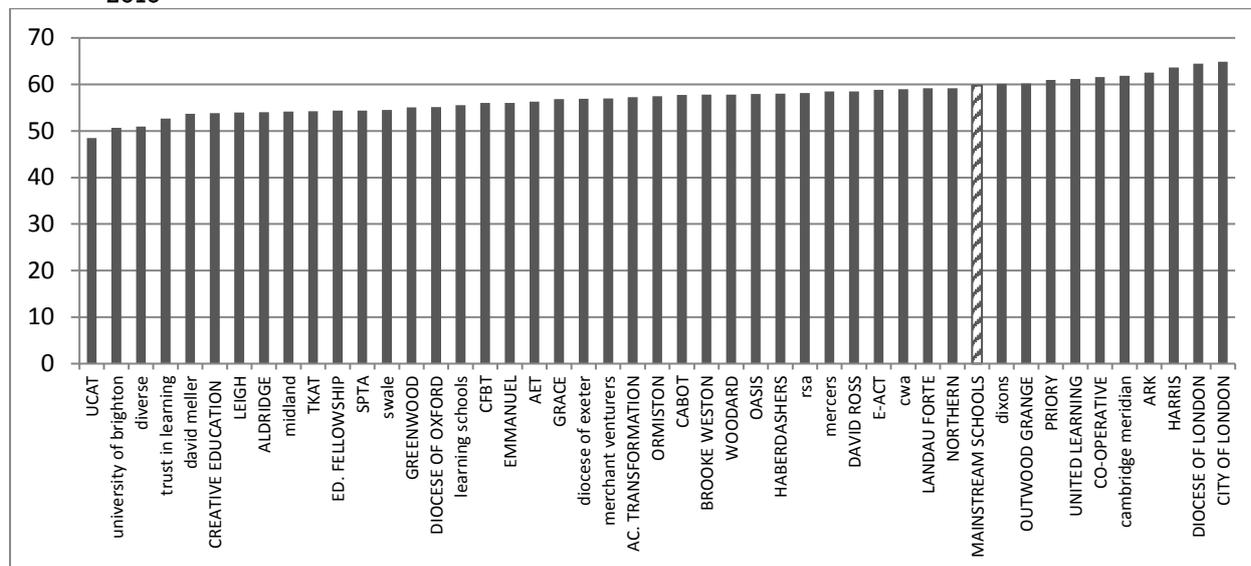
Note: scores for Skinners and Aspirations have been suppressed because of low pupil numbers in this category.

3.3.2 The attainment gap

In our previous reports, we have shown that the attainment gap between disadvantaged and other pupils is much smaller in sponsored academies than the national figure. This has reflected lower than average attainment for both disadvantaged pupils and those who are not disadvantaged. The data this year shows a very similar pattern.

Previously the DfE calculated the gap as the difference between the percentage of disadvantaged and of other pupils achieving 5A*-C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics. They now use the gap

index, which involves ranking all pupils by attainment in English and maths and calculating the average rank of the disadvantaged pupils. However, this measure is not published at school level.[49]

The DfE's performance website takes a different approach; it compares the performance of disadvantaged pupils in each school with the national figures for pupils who are not disadvantaged.[50] For example, a school's Attainment 8 figure for disadvantaged pupils is compared to the national Attainment 8 score of pupils who are not disadvantaged (53.3). If we take that approach, disadvantaged pupils in two chains (City of London and Diocese of London) have a higher average Attainment 8 score than 53.3, and all other chains have lower figures (Figure 8a).

While the DfE no longer calculate the attainment gap by directly comparing the outcomes for disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils within a single school or group of schools, it is still a useful way of showing overall performance. Figure 12 compares Attainment 8 and EBacc outcomes for disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils across different types of school.

Figure 12: Attainment gap between disadvantaged and other pupils, 2016

Attainment 8

EBacc
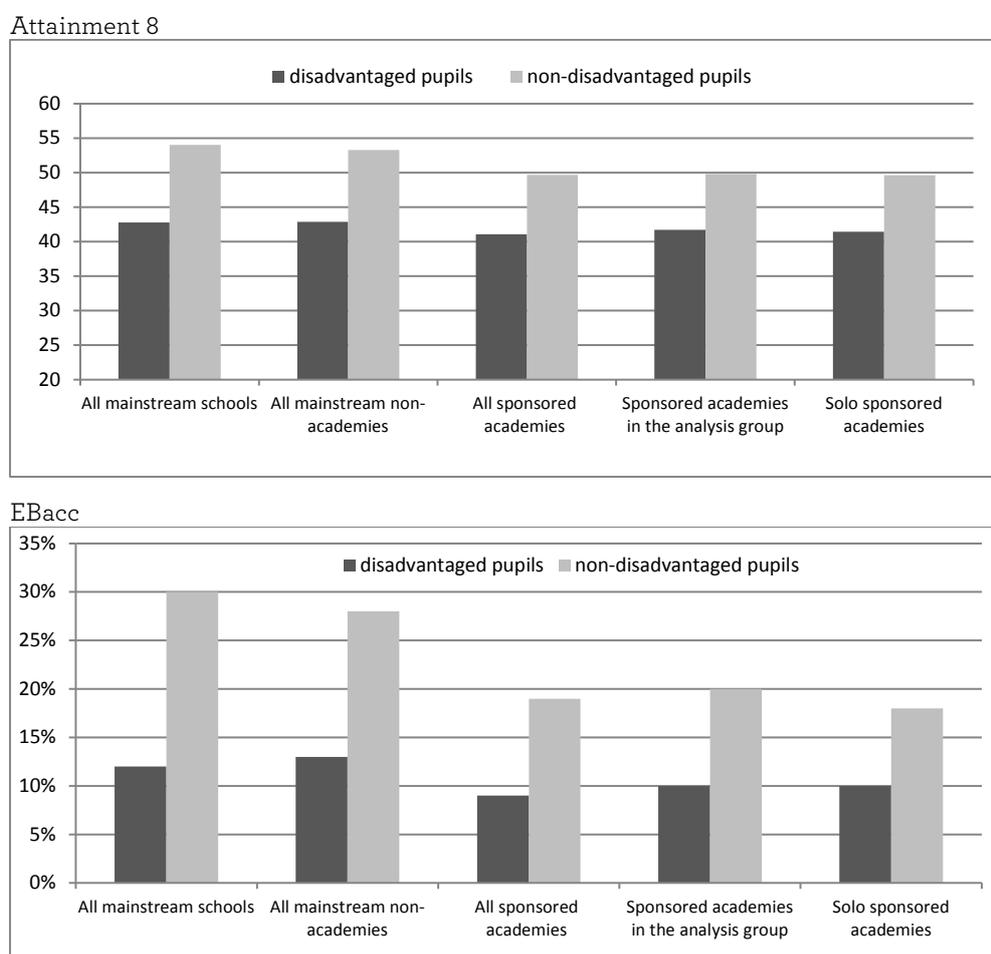
Figure 12 shows that the gap is smaller in sponsored academies (including those in the analysis group) than it is in all mainstream schools, and this is largely because those pupils who are not disadvantaged do less well in sponsored academies. It seems likely that this may relate to their specific social and economic circumstances. Sponsored academies are generally located in areas of deprivation, and where there are few affluent families. In other words, the wider population in many of these schools is likely to

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[49] DfE, 2017c.
[50] DfE, 2017d.

be predominantly working class, with smaller distinctions between those pupils classified 'disadvantaged' and those not.

Figure 13 compares the average Attainment 8 scores of each group in the analysis group chains. It shows that there is a strong correlation between the scores of the two groups (r = 0.81). Thus, chains that score above average for one group tend to do the same for the other (or, as is more often the case, to score below average for both groups).

Figure 13: Attainment 8 scores for of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils, relative to the mean performance of these groups in mainstream schools, 2016
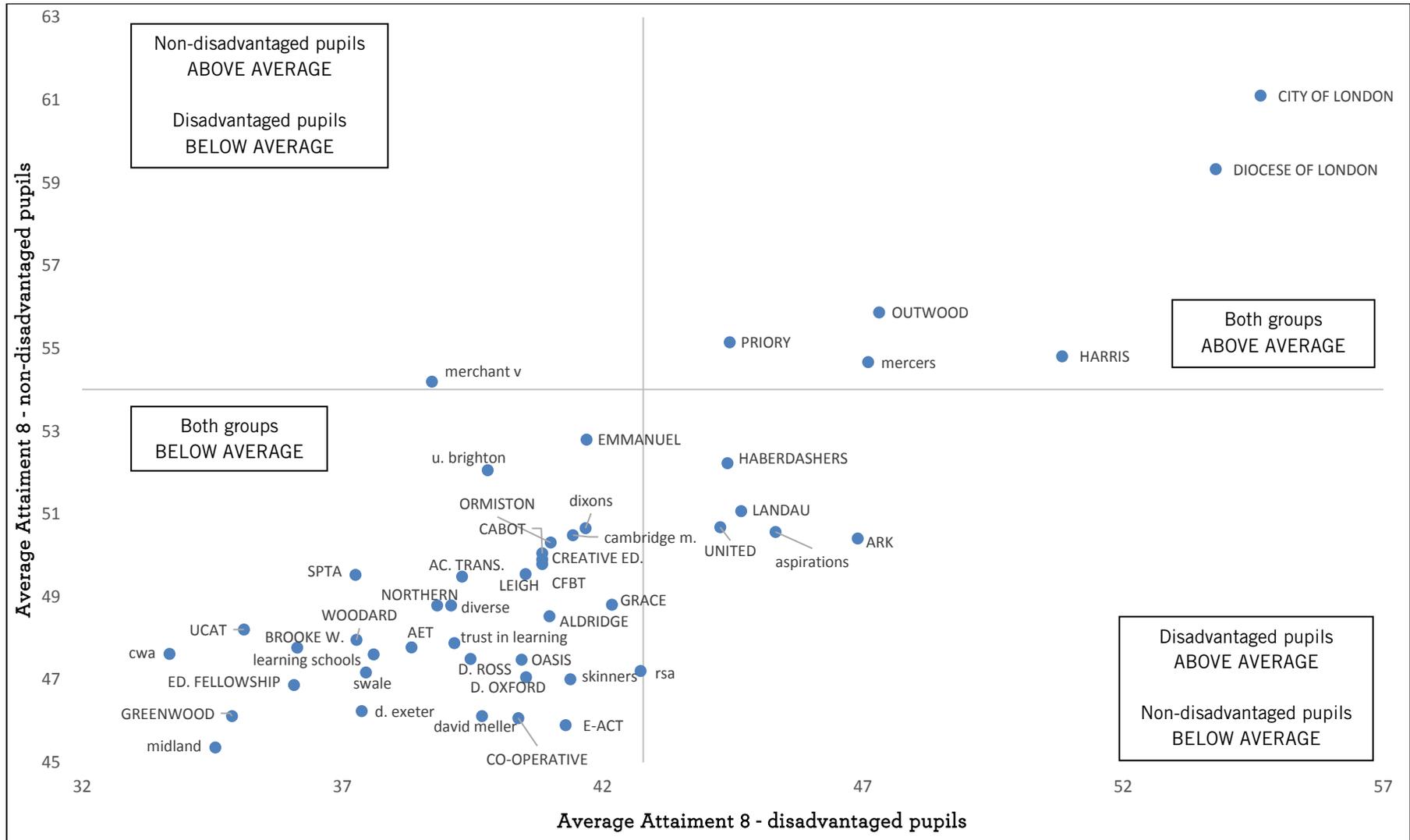
Note: the axes show mean performance for all mainstream schools on each measure

A handful of chains stand out: six have Attainment 8 scores above average for both groups: City of London, Diocese of London, Harris, Outwood Grange, *Mercers* and the Priory. Five others score above average for disadvantaged pupils but below for other pupils (the attainment gap is small in these schools): ARK, *Aspirations*, Landau Forte, Haberdashers and United Learning. Just one chain is above average for pupils who are not disadvantaged but below for disadvantaged pupils, and thus has a large attainment gap (*Merchant Venturers*). Similar patterns emerge from analysis of the gaps for percentage achieving Grade C or above in both English and maths, and for achieving EBacc.

3.3.3 Pupil progress in sponsored academies

In the revised accountability system, Progress 8 is the key measure used for accountability; pupil progress has become the most important measure of the effectiveness of a secondary school. The intention behind this change is 'to encourage schools to offer a broad and balanced curriculum with a focus on an academic core', and to 'reward schools for the teaching of all their pupils', rather than focusing on those at the grade C/D borderline (which had been a consequence of using threshold measures). 'Every increase in every grade a pupil achieves will attract additional points in the performance tables.'[51]

Progress 8 is calculated so that the average score for all pupils in state-funded mainstream schools nationally is 0.00. Since it is based on prior attainment, this measure eliminates differences related to the prior attainment of a school's intake, which, as we have shown, are a key factor in the attainment levels achieved. Nationally, the Progress 8 scores for those with low prior attainment, average prior attainment and high prior attainment are all set at 0.00. This makes it possible to compare whether pupils in different groups of schools make similar progress regardless of their prior attainment.

National figures published by the DfE show that while those with *low* prior attainment make similar progress in any type of school, those with *average* or *high* prior attainment make much less progress when they attend sponsored academies.

Table 8: Progress 8 2016 by prior attainment and type of school[52]

|	Progress 8 score for pupils whose prior attainment was:		
	Below Level 4	At Level 4	Above Level 4
All state-funded mainstream schools	0.00	0.00	0.00
Local authority maintained mainstream schools[9]	-0.03	-0.03	-0.05
Academies and free schools	0.03	0.02	0.03
Sponsored academies	**-0.04**	**-0.16**	**-0.23**
Converter academies	0.07	0.10	0.09

Our analysis, focusing only on schools that have had the same status for at least three years, shows the same pattern. Figure 14 shows that in sponsored academies, the low prior attainment group made almost as much progress as the national figure, but that high-attaining pupils made less progress than their

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51 DfE, 2017f, p5.
52 DfE 2017c, Main national tables, Table 4a.

peers in other types of school. In our analysis group, the Progress 8 score shows that all three groups had made more progress than the average made in all sponsored academies, which is encouraging. However, the same pattern is still evident; analysis group academies do better with pupils with low prior attainment than they do with high prior attainment. In contrast, in converter academies and in London schools, all three groups made above average progress.

Figure 14: Progress 8 2016 by prior attainment, comparator groups
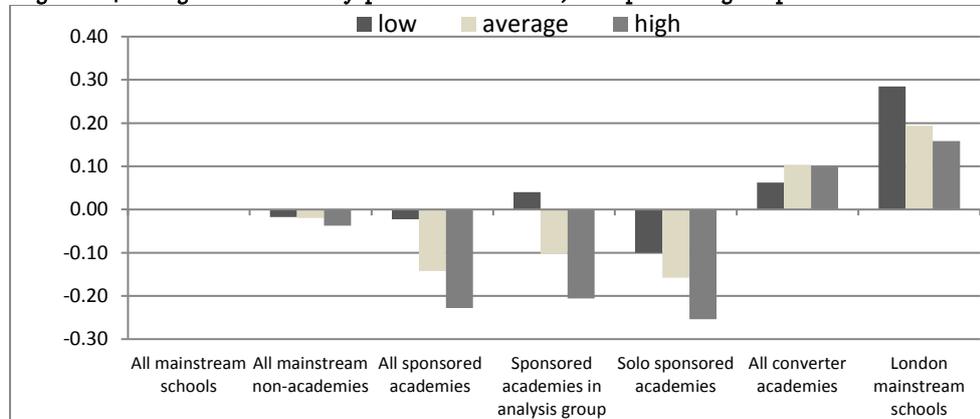
Turning, then, to the progress of disadvantaged pupils compared to those who are not disadvantaged, Figure 15 shows that disadvantaged pupils in mainstream schools progress significantly less than all other pupils. In all sponsored academies that have been open for three years, both groups made less progress than the national figures. However, in analysis group academies, progress was greater, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, whose average progress was above the national figure (though average progress for non-disadvantaged pupils was below the national figure).

Figure 15 Progress 8 for disadvantaged pupils, 2016, comparing different types of school
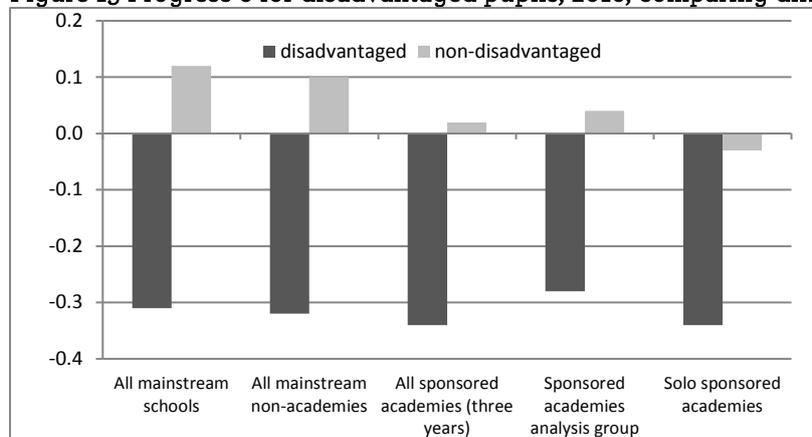
There is considerable variation across academy chains in the Progress 8 figure for disadvantaged pupils (Figure 16). Average progress made by disadvantaged pupils in more than half the chains was lower than the national figure. The rank order of the chains is very similar to the ranking for attainment.

Figure 16: Progress 8 disadvantaged pupils, 2016, by chain
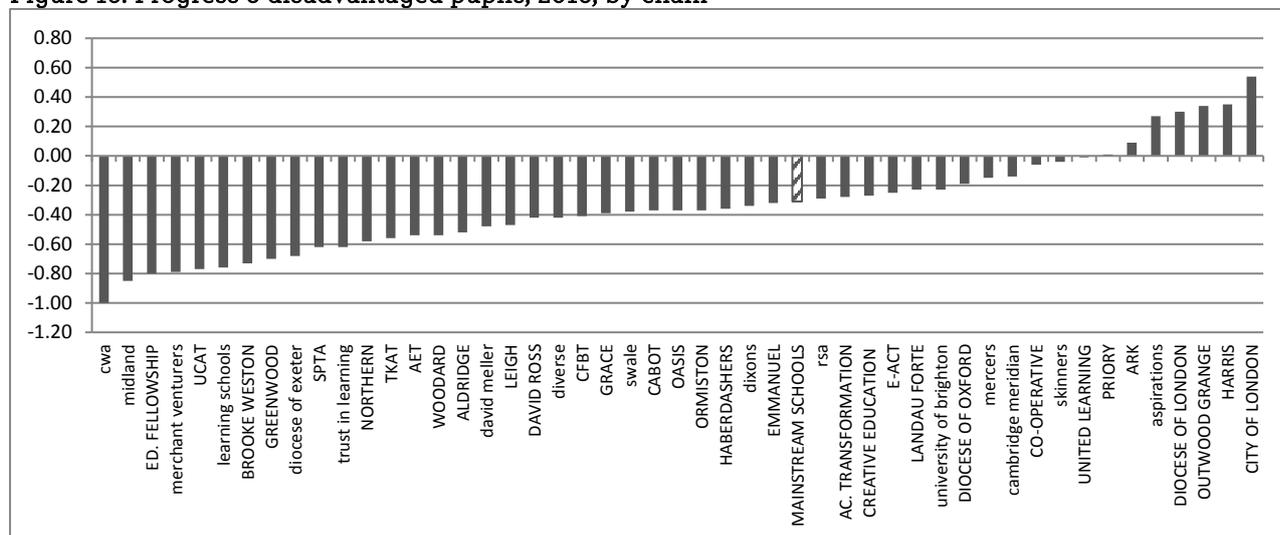
Figure 17 shows Attainment 8 and Progress 8 for each chain. Ten of the 48 chains were above the mainstream averages for both measures: City of London, Diocese of London, Harris, Outwood Grange, *Aspirations*, ARK, Priory, United Learning, Landau and *Mercers*.

A further nine were above average for pupil progress, though have not achieved national attainment levels: *Skinners*, Co-operative, *Cambridge Meridian*, Diocese of Oxford, *University of Brighton*, E-ACT Academy Transformation, Creative Education and *RSA*. This is precisely what one might hope a sponsored academy would achieve. Haberdashers was above average for attainment but below for progress. The remaining 28 chains were below on both measures; both attainment and pupils' progress were below the national average.

Figure 17: Disadvantaged pupils, Attainment 8 and Progress 8, 2016
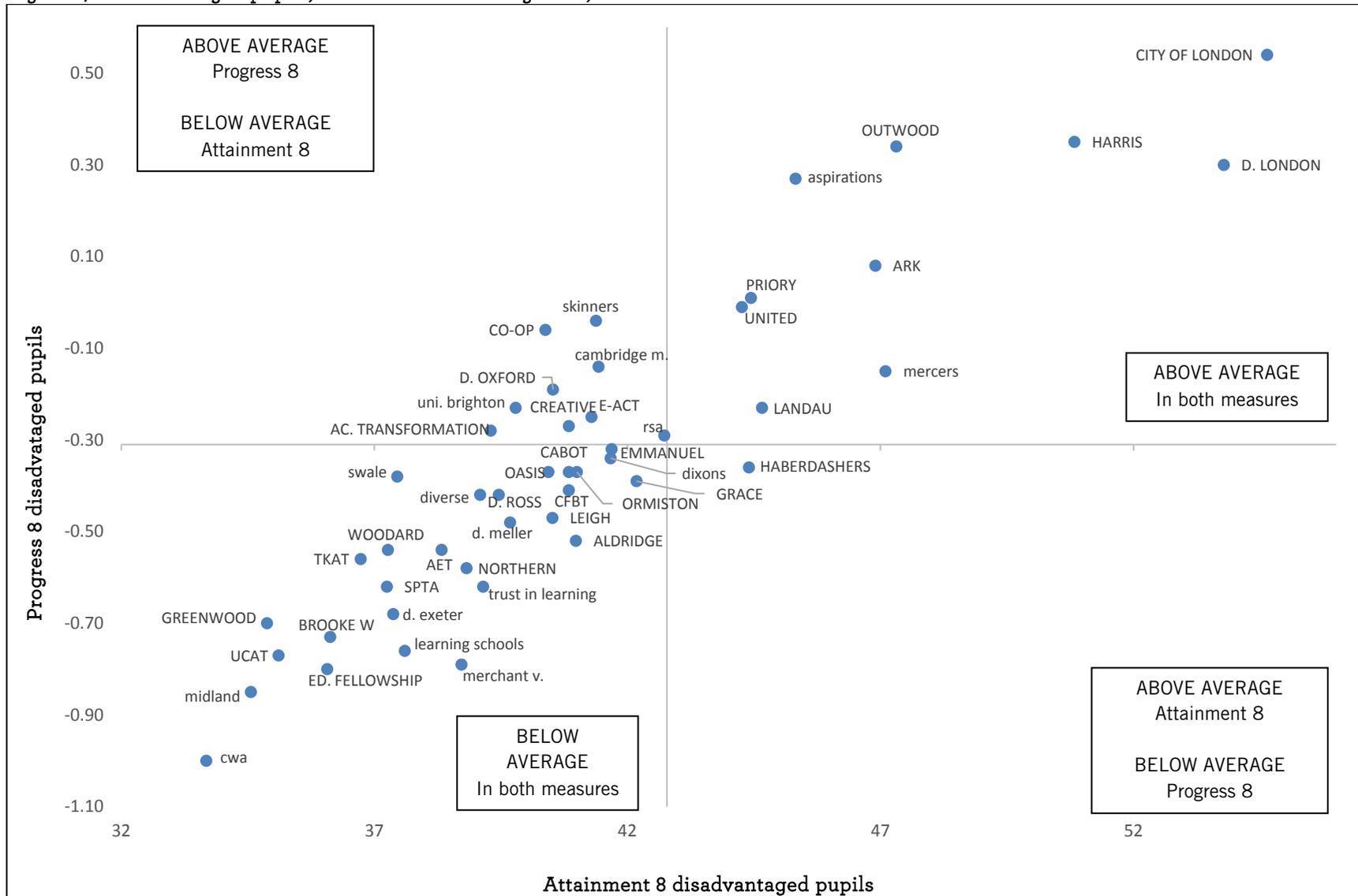
Note: the axes show mean performance for all mainstream schools on each measure

Next, we consider the progress made by disadvantaged pupils from the different prior attainment groups. Figure 18 shows that in analysis group sponsored academies, disadvantaged pupils with low prior attainment made more progress than was the case nationally, but those with high prior attainment made less progress. The London figures, included for comparison, show that it is possible for each group to make even more progress.

Figure 18: Progress 8 score, 2016, for disadvantaged pupils with low, average and high prior attainment
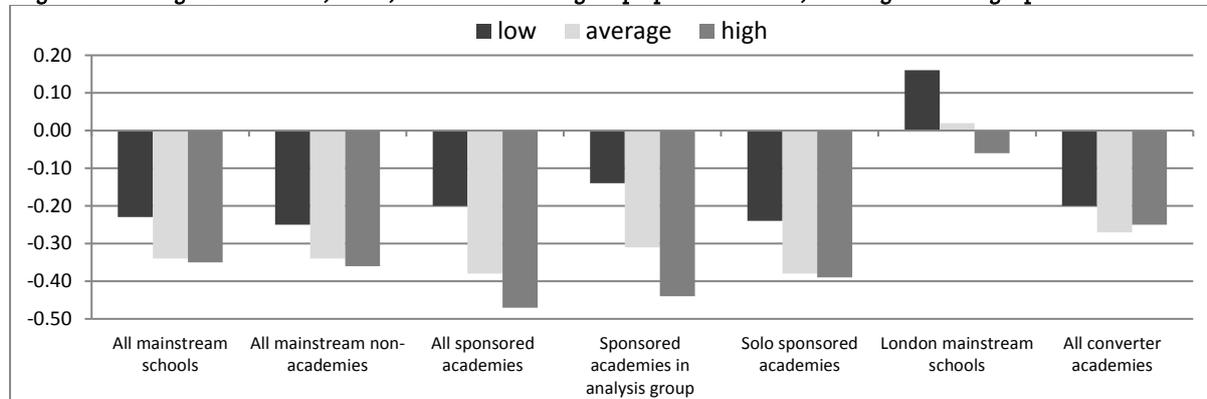
While the average Progress 8 figure for low-attaining disadvantaged pupils in analysis group academies is quite encouraging, there is, as always, considerable variation across chains, shown on Figure 19.

Figure 19: Progress 8, 2016, for disadvantaged pupils with low prior attainment, by chain
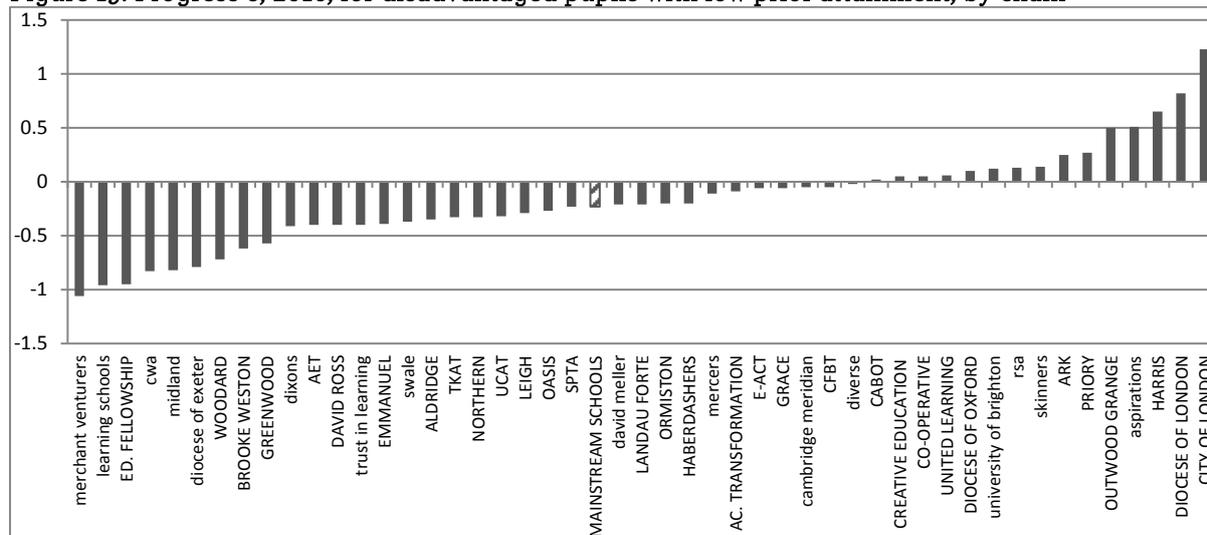
There is similar variation for disadvantaged pupils with high prior attainment, though in this case the vast majority of chains scored below the national average for this group.

Figure 20: Progress 8, 2016, for disadvantaged pupils with high prior attainment, by chain
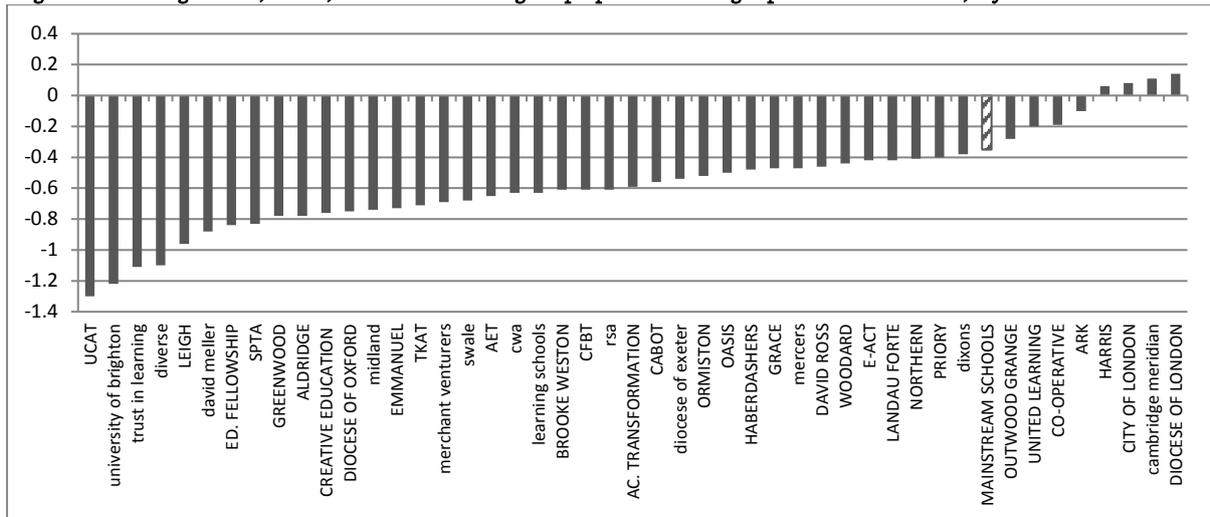
Note: scores for Skinners and Aspirations have been suppressed because of low pupil numbers in this category.

We have also reviewed progress in maths and English (Figures 21 and 22). This used to be calculated as the percentage of pupils who had made the 'expected' progress based on their KS2 test results. It is now calculated using the same methodology as Progress 8 – as an average of the progress made by each pupil since KS2 compared with pupils with similar KS2 attainment.

Figure 21: Progress 8 for maths, 2016, disadvantaged pupils
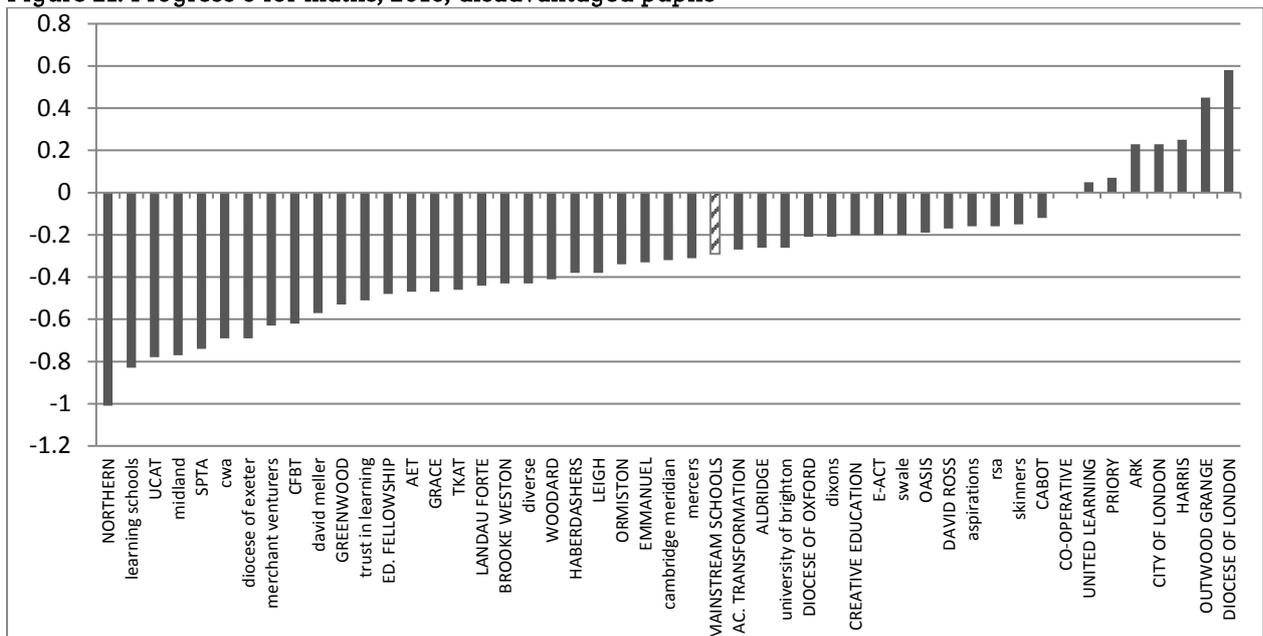
Figure 22: Progress 8 for English, 2016, disadvantaged pupils
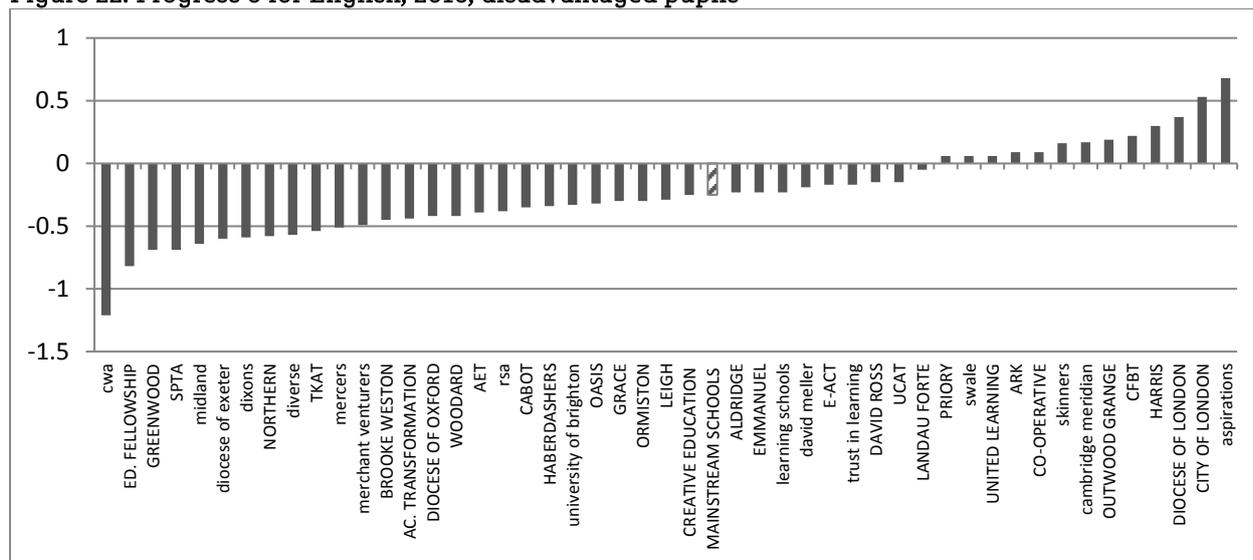
These figures show similar patterns to the overall Progress 8 scores. In general, the rank order of chains is similar, though some do better in one subject than the other (for example, Cabot is above average for maths progress but below for English).

3.3.4 Improvement over time: sponsored academies

In 2016, it is particularly difficult to review changes in attainment over time. This is partly because the measures used have changed – though it is possible to calculate the new measures for previous years and vice versa. But more importantly, school aims and behaviour have changed – which was of course part of the government's intention in introducing the new measures. It is clearly inappropriate to judge schools against measures which they are (or were) not aiming to achieve. However, it is also important to know whether improvement is taking place. In this report, we consider improvement using both new and old measures.

Attainment 8 has been calculated for 2014 – though that is not the measure schools were aiming to achieve at that time – and the change in average score between 2014 and 2016 for each chain is shown on Figure 23. These figures represent not simply improvement in attainment, but also the extent to which schools have changed their behaviour in response to the introduction of new measures.

**Figure 23: Attainment 8 score for disadvantaged pupils, 2014 and 2016**
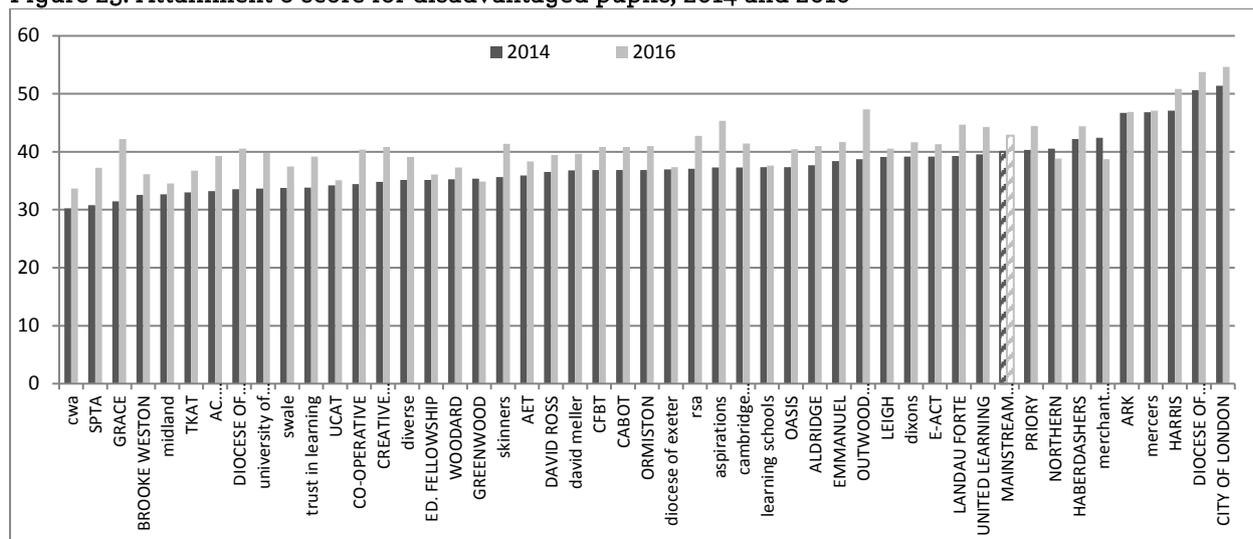
On average, schools with low attainment show more improvement over time than those with higher attainment, and that is broadly the pattern shown here. However, scores in some chains have improved more than this pattern would suggest (Grace, *Aspirations*, Outwood Grange), and in others scores have improved less or even fallen.

Over 70% of chains in the analysis group show a greater improvement in their Attainment 8 scores than the average for mainstream schools, which is encouraging.

It is also possible to calculate the old measures for 2016 – though they are no longer central to schools' aims (Figure 24).

Figure 24: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving five GCSE or equivalent A*-C grades including English and maths, 2014 and 2016
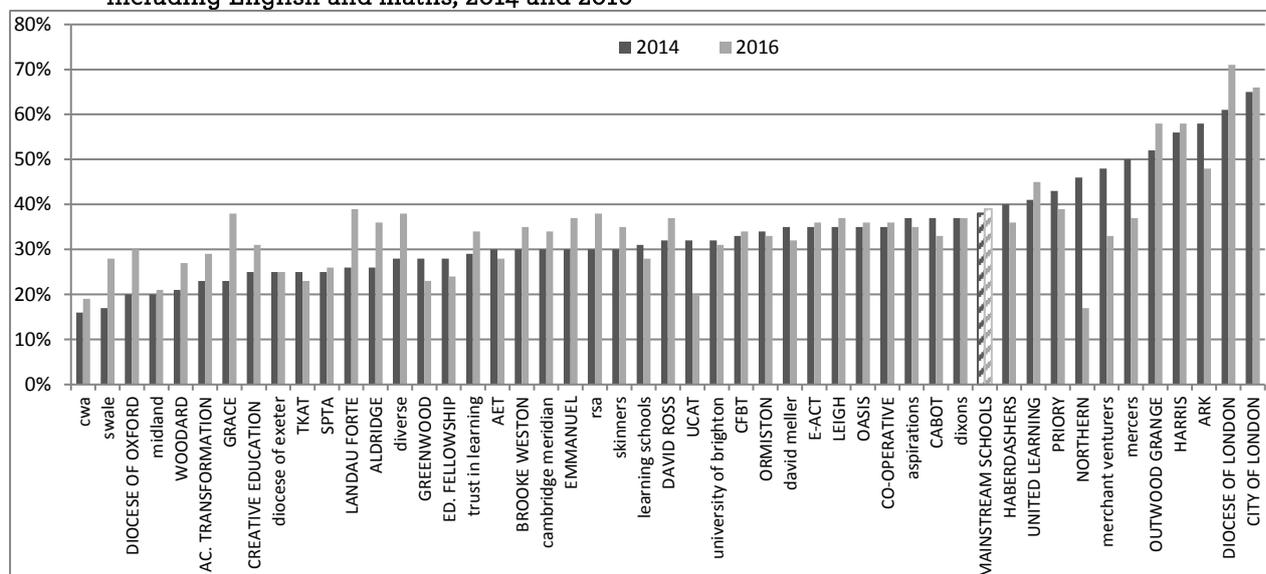
The changes in this measure are rather greater than those in Attainment 8, and the large decreases in some chains suggest that some chains are no longer aiming at this target. However, overall, the pattern of change across chains is similar for the two measures. Grace emerges as the most improved chain on both, followed by Diocese of Oxford. Other chains that showed substantial improvement on both measures were Landau Forte, Outwood Grange, Academy Transformation, Creative Education and *RSA*.

An attainment measure which has been fairly consistent over time is the EBacc. The limitation of using it for comparison is that it has never been the most important measure and therefore schools have not necessarily made great efforts to improve their EBacc outcomes. EBacc subjects now assume greater importance because they are central to Attainment 8 – but the EBacc requires pupils to gain at least a Grade C, whereas Attainment 8 does not. It is also the case that a student can do well on Attainment 8 without sitting all the EBacc components – they don't have to do languages, for example,

Nationally, the percentage of pupils achieving EBacc showed little change between 2014 and 2016, with the small increase accounted for largely by changes in methodology. The overall figures for analysis group sponsored academies reflected this pattern, but at chain level there is considerable variation (Figure 25).

Figure 25: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving EBacc in chains in the analysis group 2014 and 2016
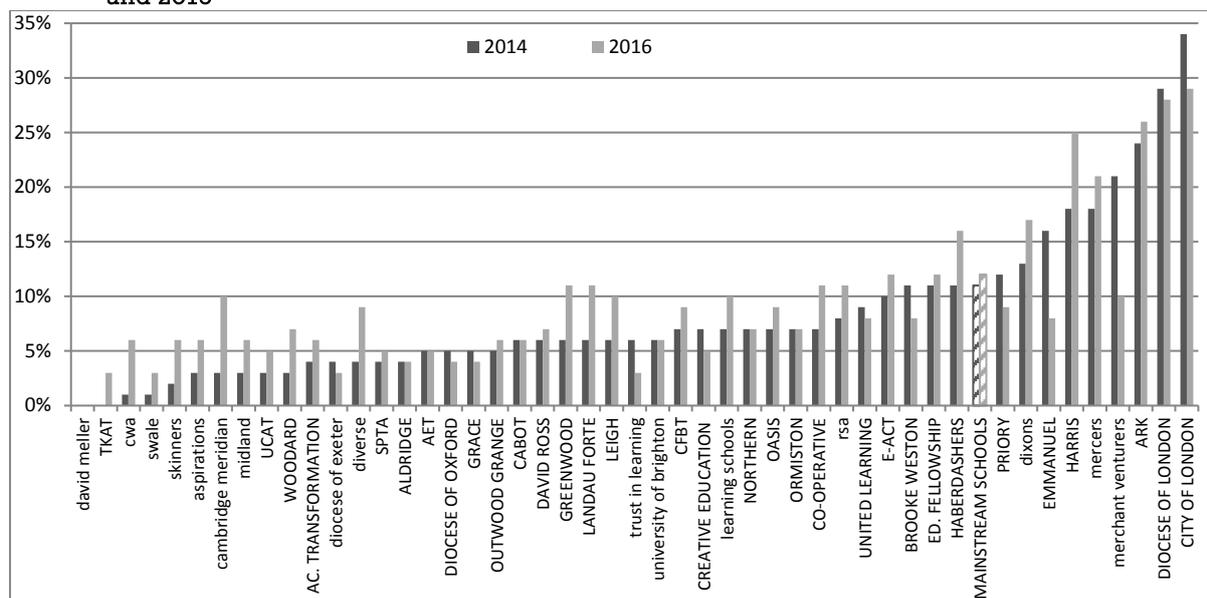
The pattern of change between 2014 and 2016 here is different from those for Attainment 8 improvement or for five A*-C GCSE grades including English and maths. On EBacc, Grace and Diocese of Oxford, which were high in the other two measures, did not improve. The greatest increases in percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving EBacc were in *Cambridge Meridian* and Harris, while the greatest decreases were *Merchant Venturers* and Emmanuel, both of which were above average in 2014. EBacc improvement is possibly related more to the importance each chain accords to EBacc than anything else.

3.4 Summary: which chains are the most effective for disadvantaged Key Stage 4 pupils?

In our previous reports, we created a single measure of attainment, which combined the various different measures of both attainment and progress. This year the components of our summary measure have changed reflecting the change in the key measures published and used for accountability. We have created a summary measure of the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in 2016 from the following:

- average Attainment 8 score;
- Progress 8 score;
- percentage achieving Grade C or above in English and mathematics.

These are all headline accountability measures in the new system implemented for the first time in 2016. We have not included the other headline measures: EBacc entry and achievement. Our concern is with attainment rather than exam entries, and for a pupil, achieving Grade C or above in mathematics and English is more important for future education and employment than achieving EBacc (which in any case includes these subjects).

Each chain's summary score has then been calculated using the difference between the chain and all mainstream schools for each of the above measures, with each of these measures given equal weight. Table 9 shows the chains performing above and below the average for mainstream schools in this weighted *attainment* measure. Within each band chains are listed in alphabetical order.

We have also created a second summary score based on the previous key measures of attainment. This can be found in the Appendix. As far as possible this replicates the strategy used in previous reports, using the same measures and weighting them in the same way. However, as some of these are no longer published there are slight differences. We have measured 2016 results in each of the following measures:

- percentage achieving 5A*CEM – 50%;
- average capped GCSE point score – 20%;
- Progress 8 English (replacing percentage achieving expected progress in English) – 10%;
- Progress 8 mathematics (replacing percentage achieving expected progress in maths)– 10%;
- percentage achieving EBacc – 10%.

The correlation between the scores produced by these two different approaches is very strong (r = 0.97) and three-quarters of the chains fall in the same bands using either approach. The remaining quarter (with one exception) appear a band higher when new measures are used.

Table 9 shows that just ten of the 48 chains exceeded the mainstream average in the overall ranking. Nine of the ten have had above average performance in previous years in which we have conducted this analysis, and of these, five have been in the above average group every year (City of London, Harris, ARK. Mercers, and Diocese of London).[53] The remaining chain, *Aspirations*, is in the analysis group for the first time this year.

More than half the chains (29 out of 44) are below the mainstream average in the overall attainment ranking. There has been more movement among this group but 15 of them have been in the below average group for at least three consecutive years.

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[53] Diocese of London has only been part of the analysis group for two years, but has had very high attainment each year.

Table 9: Chains performing above and below the mainstream average on key measures of 2016 attainment for disadvantaged pupils

	Progress 8	Attainment 8	Grade C or above in both English and maths %	Overall rank
Well above average	*Aspirations* City of London Diocese of London *Harris* Outwood Grange	City of London Diocese of London ARK *Aspirations* Haberdashers	City of London Diocese of London Outwood Grange ARK Harris	City of London Diocese of London Harris Outwood Grange
Above Average	ARK *Cambridge Meridian* Co-operative Diocese of Oxford E-ACT Landau Forte *Mercers* Priory Skinners United Learning *University of Brighton*	Harris Landau Forte *Mercers* Outwood Grange Priory United Learning Grace *RSA*	*Mercers* United Learning Aldridge *Dixons* Emmanuel Grace Landau Forte *Swale*	ARK *Aspirations* Landau Forte *Mercers* Priory United Learning *Cambridge Meridian* Co-operative *Dixons* E-ACT Emmanuel Grace Haberdashers *RSA* Skinners
Average	Ac. Transformation Creative Education *Dixons* Emmanuel Haberdashers *RSA*	Ac. Transformation AET Aldridge Brooke Weston Cabot *Cambridge Meridian* CfBT Co-operative Creative Education	Ac. Transformation AET *Aspirations* Brooke Weston Cabot *Cambridge Meridian* CfBT Co-operative Creative Education	Ac. Transformation AET Aldridge Brooke Weston Cabot CfBT Creative Education *David Meller* David Ross *Diocese of Exeter* Diocese of Oxford *Diverse* Education Fellowship Greenwood *Learning Schools* Leigh *Merchant Venturers* *Midland* Northern Oasis Ormiston SPTA *Swale* TKAT *Trust in Learning* *University of Brighton* Woodard
Below Average	AET Aldridge Brooke Weston Cabot CfBT *David Meller* David Ross *Diocese of Exeter* *Diverse* Education Fellowship Grace Greenwood *Learning Schools* Leigh *Merchant Venturers* Northern Oasis Ormiston SPTA *Swale* TKAT *Trust in Learning* UCAT Woodard	*David Meller* David Ross *Diocese of Exeter* Diocese of Oxford *Diverse* Dixons E-ACT Education Fellowship Emmanuel *Learning Schools* Leigh *Merchant Venturers* Northern Oasis Ormiston Skinners SPTA *Swale* TKAT *Trust in Learning* UCAT *University of Brighton* Woodard *CWA*	*David Meller* David Ross *Diocese of Exeter* Diocese of Oxford *Diverse* E-ACT Greenwood Haberdashers *Learning Schools* Leigh *Merchant Venturers* *Midland* Oasis Ormiston Priory *RSA* Skinners SPTA *Trust in Learning* *University of Brighton* Woodard CWA Education Fellowship Northern	CWA AET Aldridge Brooke Weston Cabot CfBT Creative Education *David Meller* David Ross *Diocese of Exeter* Diocese of Oxford *Diverse* Education Fellowship Greenwood *Learning Schools* Leigh *Merchant Venturers* *Midland* Northern Oasis Ormiston SPTA *Swale* TKAT *Trust in Learning* *University of Brighton* Woodard
Well below average	*CWA* *Midland*	Greenwood *Midland*	TKAT UCAT	*CWA* UCAT

Top tier: Well above average (greater than 1.0 Standard Deviations better attainment than mainstream), second tier: above average (0.1 to 1.0 SDs better); third tier: average (within 0.10 SDs of mainstream); fourth tier: below average (-0.10 & -1.0 SDs worse); bottom tier: well below average (less than -1.0 SDs worse improvement than mainstream). Within categories chains are in alphabetical order.

In previous reports, we have also created a measure of improvement over a two-year period. It is particularly important to assess the extent to which sponsored academies improve because the rationale for their creation is that the predecessor school was under-performing, and that turning the school into a sponsored academy will bring about rapid improvement.

This year, the change of attainment measures makes any attempt to assess improvement problematic. In view of this, the DfE analysis of the 2016 performance of multi-academy trusts does not include a measure of improvement between 2015 and 2016, but instead re-publishes the improvement data from 2014-15.[54] However, since improvement is so central to the sponsored academy agenda, we have analysed improvement between 2014 and 2016 in two ways. First, we have calculated what each chain would have scored in 2014, using the 2016 performance measures. Table 10 shows the chains that improved above or below the mainstream average using this measure.

However, we recognise that in 2014 schools were not focusing on Progress 8 and Attainment 8, but on the old measures. We therefore created a second improvement measure based on previous measures (or close substitutes, as described above). This can be found in the Appendix. There is a very strong correlation between these two different summary scores for improvement (r = 0.88), and comparison of the two tables shows that two-thirds of the chains fall into the same band on each.

Table 10 shows that more than half the chains have improved by more than the mainstream average figure. This has been an encouraging feature in each of our reports. Of course, on average, schools with low initial attainment show greater improvement than those with higher initial attainment, and many of the chains are improving from a low attainment base – but Table 10 also shows that many of the high-attaining chains have made more than average improvement (Diocese of London, Harris, Outwood Grange).

Grace emerges as having made very much the greatest improvement in the performance of disadvantaged pupils between 2014 and 2016. This is very welcome; in our first report, using 2013 performance data, Grace fell in the lowest band for every attainment measure. Other chains which have previously been noted for low attainment have also made above average improvement since 2014 (Woodard, Diocese of Oxford). However, it is worrying that disadvantaged pupils' attainment in almost a third of the analysis group chains has not improved in line with the national figures; *Merchant Venturers* and Northern stand out as the least improved chains.

As in previous years, we have compared summary scores for attainment with those for improvement (Figure 26. This shows that more chains showed above average improvement in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils than above average attainment. This, of course, is exactly what one would expect of a sponsored academy in the early stages of its life – below average attainment but above average improvement. And while some of the high-performing chains show lower improvement, as might be expected given their existing high performance (examples are Mercers and ARK), eight of the 48 chains are above average for both attainment and improvement – four of these for the second year running (Outwood Grange, Diocese of London, Landau Forte and United Learning). But 16 fall below the mainstream average on both measures. While some of these are close to average on one or other of the scores (falling into the average band on Table 9 or Table 10), there are ten chains which are clearly below average on both scores. Three (Northern, Greenwood and Leigh) are in this position for the second or third successive year. Since all the academies in the analysis group had been consistently part of the same chain for three years, it might have been expected that they would be improving substantially.

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

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[54] DfE, 2017a.

Table 10: Chains performing above and below the mainstream average on key measures of 2016 improvement for disadvantaged pupils

	Progress 8	Attainment 8	Grade C or above in both English and maths %	Overall rank
Well above average	Grace; Outwood Grange; *Aspirations*; Ac. Transformation	Grace; Ac. Transformation; *Aspirations*; Brooke Weston	Grace; *Swale*; Ac. Transformation; Aldridge	Grace; Ac. Transformation; Aldridge; *Aspirations*
Above average	Co-operative; *Cambridge Meridian*; Creative Education; *University of Brighton*; *Skinners*; SPTA; Priory; *RSA*; Diocese of Oxford; *CWA*; Brooke Weston; *Diverse*; *Swale*; Harris; Emmanuel; Woodard; Ormiston; United Learning; CfBT; UCAT	Cabot; *Cambridge Meridian*; CfBT; Co-operative; Creative Education; Diocese of Oxford; *Diverse*; Harris; Landau Forte; Ormiston; Outwood Grange; Priory; *RSA*; *Skinners*; SPTA; *Swale*; TKAT; *Trust in Learning*; United Learning; *University of Brighton*	Brooke Weston; Creative Education; David Ross; Diocese of London; Diocese of Oxford; *Diverse*; Dixons; Emmanuel; Landau Forte; *Learning Schools*; Leigh; *Midland*; Outwood Grange; *Trust in Learning*; United Learning; Woodard; CfBT; City of London; *Diocese of Exeter*; E-ACT	Brooke Weston; *Cambridge Meridian*; CfBT; Co-operative; Creative Education; Diocese of London; Diocese of Oxford; *Diverse*; Emmanuel; Harris; Landau Forte; Outwood Grange; Priory; *RSA*; Skinners; SPTA; *Swale*; United Learning; *University of Brighton*; Woodard
Average	*David Meller*; David Ross; Oasis; Cabot; TKAT; Landau Forte; Diocese of London	AET; Aldridge; City of London; *CWA*; *David Meller*; David Ross; Diocese of London	Harris; *Mercers*; Oasis; *Skinners*	Cabot; City of London; *CWA*; *David Meller*; David Ross; *Midland*; Oasis; Ormiston; *Trust in Learning*
Below average	AET; *Diocese of Exeter*; Haberdashers; Aldridge; City of London; *Midland*; E-ACT; *Mercers*; *Dixons*; *Trust in Learning*; Education Fellowship; Northern; Leigh; ARK; *Learning Schools*; Greenwood	*Dixons*; Emmanuel; Haberdashers; Oasis; ARK; *Diocese of Exeter*; E-ACT; Education Fellowship; Greenwood; *Learning Schools*; Leigh; *Mercers*; *Midland*; Northern; UCAT; Woodard	AET; ARK; *Aspirations*; Cabot; *Cambridge Meridian*; Co-operative; *CWA*; *David Meller*; Education Fellowship; Greenwood; Haberdashers; Ormiston; Priory; *RSA*; SPTA; TKAT; *University of Brighton*; *Merchant Venturers*; Northern	AET; ARK; *Diocese of Exeter*; *Dixons*; E-ACT; Education Fellowship; Greenwood; Haberdashers; *Learning Schools*; Leigh; *Mercers*; TKAT; UCAT; *Merchant Venturers*
Well below average	*Merchant Venturers*	*Merchant Venturers*	UCAT	Northern

Top tier: Well above average (greater than 1.0 Standard Deviations better improvement than mainstream), second tier: above average (0.1 to 1.0 SDs better); third tier: average (within 0.10 SDs of mainstream); fourth tier: below average (-0.10 & -1.0 SDs worse); bottom tier: well below average (less than -1.0 SDs worse improvement than mainstream).

Figure 26: Attainment for disadvantaged pupils (as in Table 9) compared with improvement (as in Table 10)
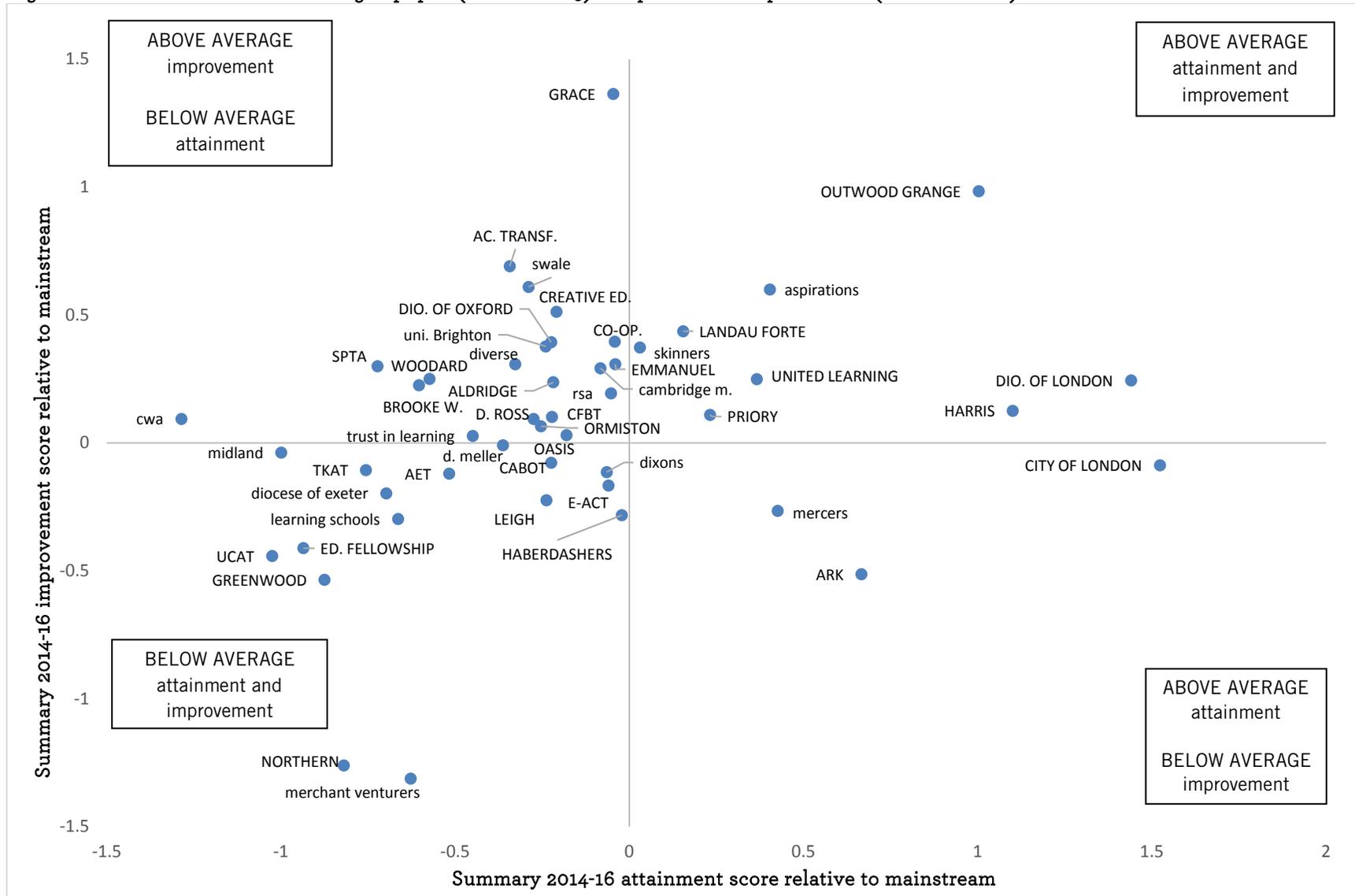
Note: the axes show mean performance for all mainstream schools on each measure

3.5 How chain characteristics relate to performance

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

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

In addition, three of the most successful chains were based in London, where, as we have shown, average attainment on all measures is significantly higher than in the rest of the country. We argued that the 'London factor' may have contributed to their success. Last year's report again addressed this issue, showing that there is no simple relationship between pupil outcomes and being in London. We found that the London schools in some chains performed above the London average and in other chains, did much less well. We have not analysed location this year.

However, throughout the report we have drawn attention to prior attainment (and particularly, the prior attainment of disadvantaged pupils). The analysis shows that while prior attainment is a key factor in educational outcomes, some chains do very much better than prior performance figures would suggest and others do worse.

Another factor that may affect chain performance is the new schools they take on. While many chains have featured in all our reports, it should be remembered that in most cases, there are now more schools in the chain. Taking on schools with major problems may result in less efforts going into maintaining improvement in other schools in the chain, and may still impact negatively on chain performance after three years. An examination of the data relating to individual schools within some chains that have increased in size shows that, in many cases, taking on more schools has lowered overall performance.

This is likely to become a particular issue with the increase in re-brokering academies that are under-performing. The Education Select Committee report on MATs this year draws attention to the reported unwillingness of some trusts to take on academies that have fallen into difficulties. While very few re-brokered academies are now in the analysis group, this is clearly an important issue to follow.
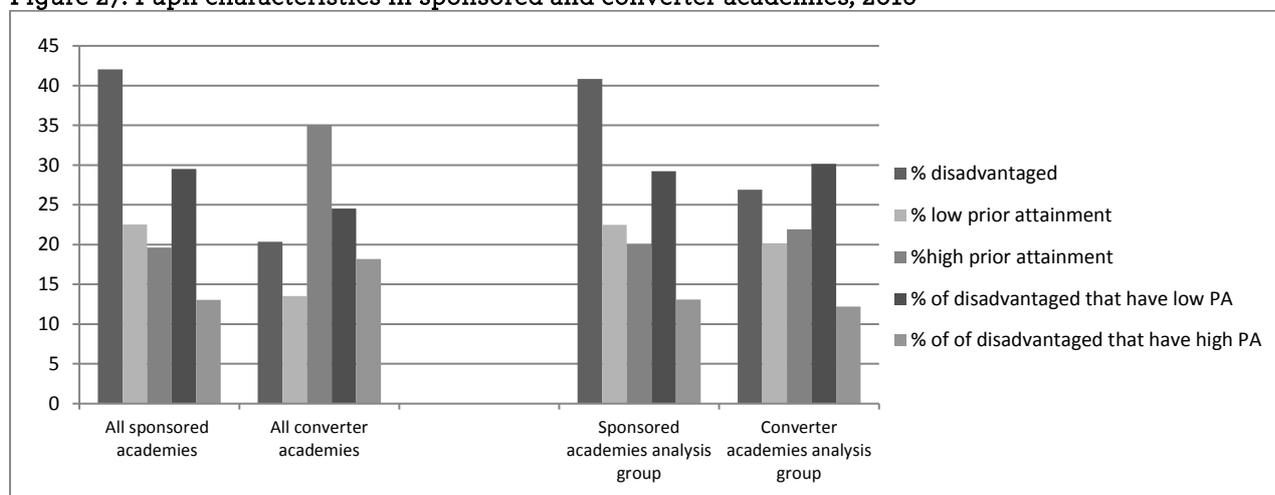
4 Key Stage 4 converter academies

Here we consider outcomes for pupils in converter academies which had been part of the chains in our KS4 analysis group for almost three years by summer 2016. Only ten of our 48 chains included two or more converters that met these criteria – a total of 39 academies.

It is worth noting that almost all the chains in the analysis group had 50% or more sponsored academies, and that in 26 of the 48 chains, sponsored academies made up 80% or more of the number in the chain (ten of these chains had *only* sponsored academies). This makes the converter academies considered here atypical in that they have joined chains mainly consisting of sponsored academies.

The converter academies analysis group is also not typical of all converter academies in terms of pupil characteristics.

Figure 27: Pupil characteristics in sponsored and converter academies, 2016

Note: PA= prior attainment

Figure 27 compares pupil characteristics in sponsored and converter academies that have had the same status for three years. It shows that in comparison to converters, sponsored academies have a higher percentage of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with low prior attainment, and that the disadvantaged pupils are more likely to have low prior attainment. Figure 27 then compares the characteristics of our analysis groups. While the characteristics of the sponsored academies are very similar to those of all sponsored academies, the analysis group converter academies have a higher percentage of disadvantaged pupils than all converter academies, and their prior attainment profile is more like that of sponsored academies than of converters. This could be because these chains only take on converters in the deprived areas in which their sponsored academies are based, or because these converters have chosen sponsored academy chains in which they feel better supported.

So far, we have considered the average profile; inevitably there are differences across chains, and the converter academies in David Ross stand out as being more like the overall pattern for converters in their pupil characteristics; they have particularly low percentages of both disadvantaged pupils and those with low prior attainment.

Converter academies are included in this report for the first time to examine three main questions:

- Do disadvantaged pupils have higher attainment in converter or sponsored academies?
- Do disadvantaged pupils make more progress in converter or sponsored academies?

- Has the performance of disadvantaged pupils improved more in converter or sponsored academies?

If we consider only sponsored and converter academies that have had that status for three years, the attainment of all pupils and of both disadvantaged and other pupils is higher in converter academies. This is unsurprising; the early converter academies were all schools judged to be Outstanding by Ofsted. However, for disadvantaged pupils with low prior attainment there is very little difference between sponsored and converter academies (Figure 28).

Figure 28: Attainment 8 2016: comparison of average scores for various pupil groups in all converter and sponsored academies that have had that status for three years
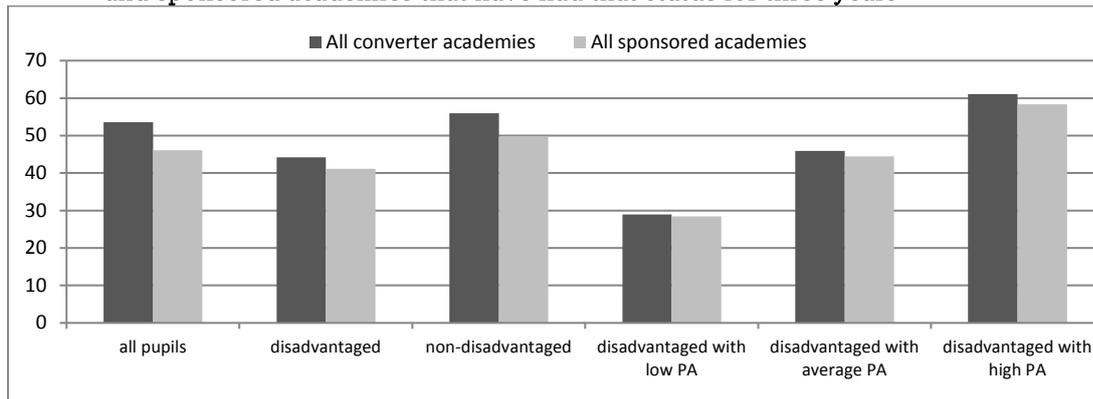

The picture is rather different when we consider only the converters and sponsored academies within the analysis group of chains (Figure 29). There is very little difference between Attainment 8 average scores in the two groups. This report has already noted that sponsored academies in chains in the analysis group have on average higher attainment than all sponsored academies. Figure 29 shows that the converters in analysis group chains do less well on average than all converter academies; this may reflect their higher numbers of pupils with low prior attainment, discussed above.

Figure 29: Attainment 8 2016: comparison of average scores for various pupil groups in analysis group converter and sponsored academies
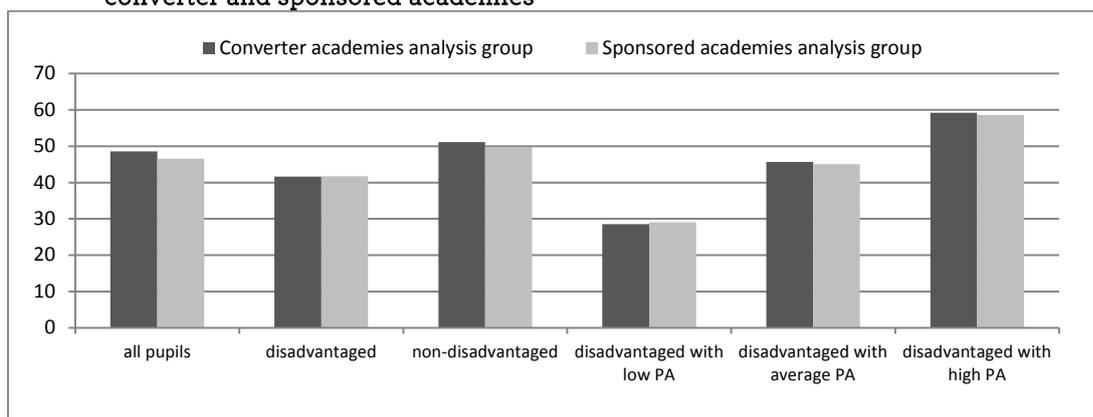

There are also differences across chains; Figure 30 shows average Attainment 8 for converter and sponsored academies in each chain. The only chain where there is a substantial difference is David Ross, which, as noted above, has fewer pupils than other chains in its converter academies from the more challenging groups.

51

Figure 30: Average Attainment 8 score 2016 for disadvantaged pupils in converter and sponsored academies in each chain[55]
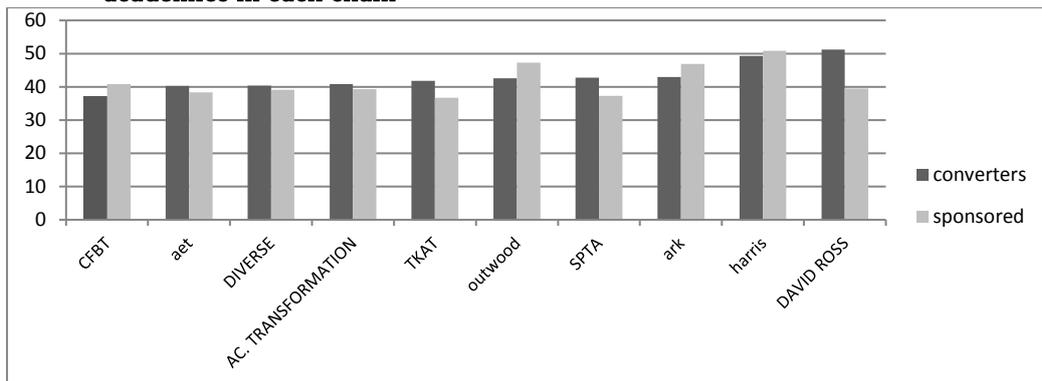

Turning to pupil progress, Figure 31 shows that disadvantaged pupils in all converter academies have made more progress than those in sponsored academies. However, when disadvantaged pupils are grouped by prior attainment, it becomes clear that the disadvantaged pupils with low prior attainment do equally well in either type of school, while those with high prior attainment do very much worse in sponsored academies (reflecting findings reported earlier).

Figure 31: Progress 8 2016: comparison of average scores for various pupil groups in all converter and sponsored academies that have had that status for three years
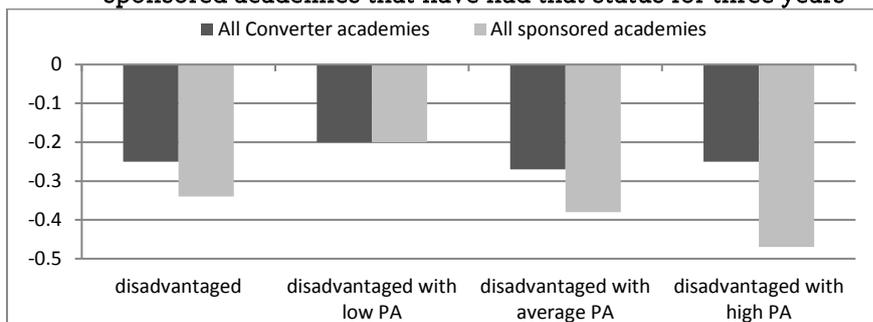
If only academies in the analysis group are considered (Figure 32), disadvantaged pupils with low prior attainment make more progress in sponsored academies than converters, but those with high prior attainment do less well in sponsored academies than in converters. So, converter academies may do a better job for disadvantaged highly able students.

Figure 32: Progress 8 2016: comparison of average scores for various pupil groups in analysis group converter and sponsored academies

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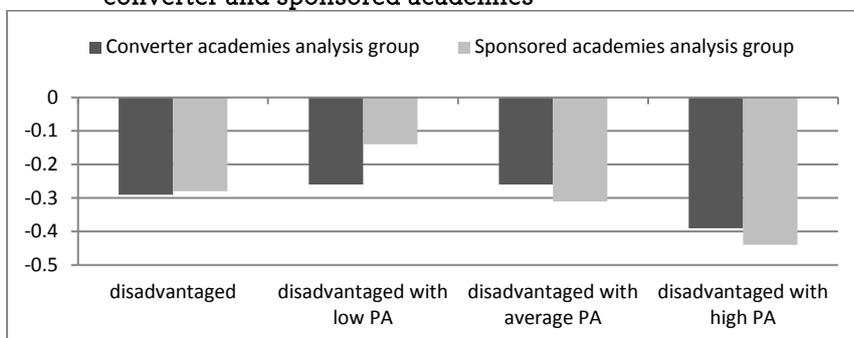
[55] In this section, chains labelled in lower case have only two converter academies in the analysis.

There are again differences across chains. In some chains, disadvantaged pupils in sponsored academies made more progress than those in converters (CfBT, *ARK, Outwood Grange, Harris*).

Figure 33: Progress 8 2016 score for disadvantaged pupils, comparing converter and sponsored academies in each chain
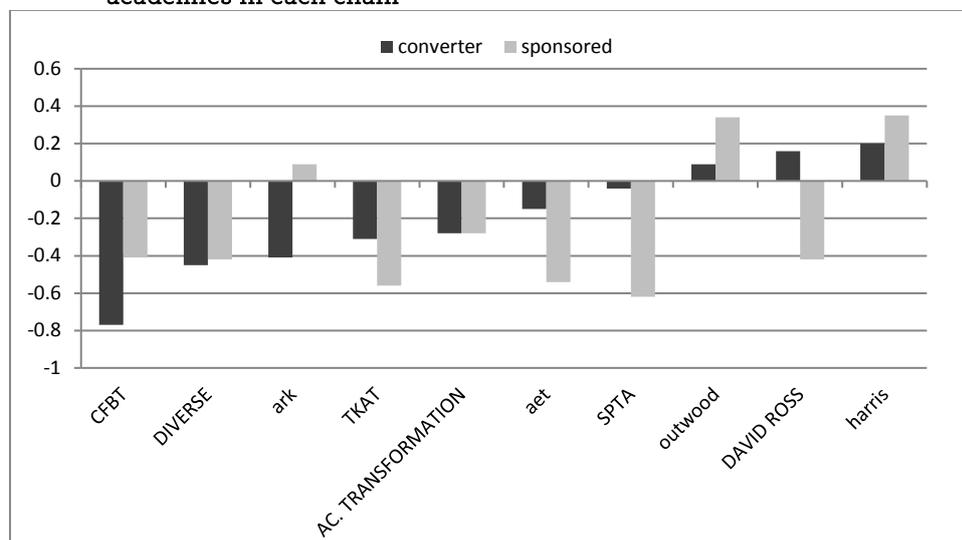
Finally, we consider improvement between 2014 and 2016. Again there is a difference between all academies and those in the analysis group. When we focus on all academies (that have had the same status for at least three years), sponsored academies show greater improvement, reflecting the fact that schools with low initial attaiment always show more average improvement over time). However, in the analysis group, 2014 Attainment 8 scores for sponsored and converter academies are similar, as is the amount they have improved this score.

Figure 34: Improvement in Attainment 8 score for disadvantaged pupils between 2014 and 2016 for different groups of schools
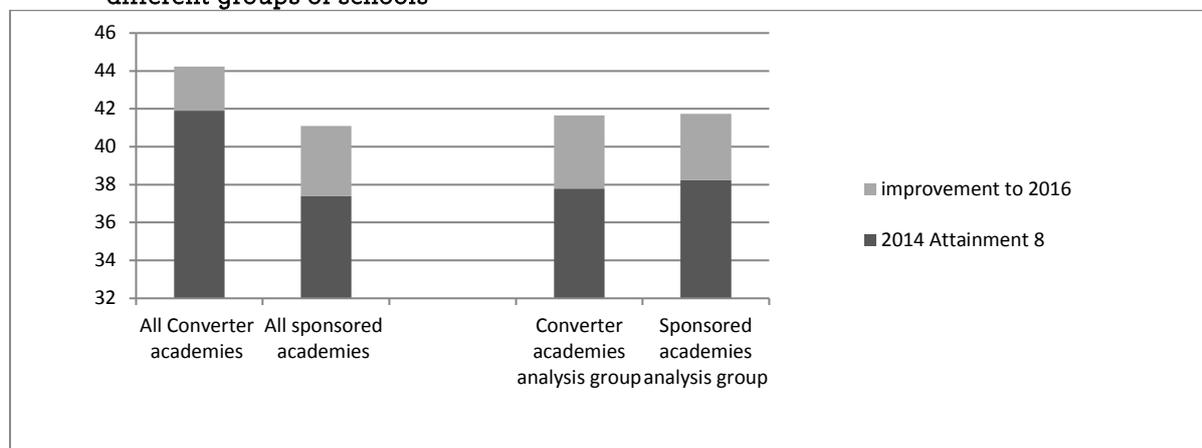
The change between 2014 and 2016 in Attainment 8 scores for disadvantaged pupils varied across chains. Outwood Grange showed the greatest improvement in both converters and sponsored academies.

This brief comparison of converter and sponsored academies is limited by the relatively small number of converters which have been part of analysis group chains. Nonetheless, it shows that the pupil characteristics are closer to those of sponsored academies than converters, which may account for their attainment being lower than the converter academy average. The review also reinforces the point that sponsored academies are quite successful with disadvantaged pupils with low prior attainment, but less successful with those with high prior attainment.

5 Key Stage 2 sponsored academies

It is clearly of interest to know which academy chains are the most effective for disadvantaged primary pupils, just as we have reviewed their effectiveness for secondary pupils. In previous years, we have been unable to do this because the numbers of primary academies were so low. This year, for the first time, the numbers are adequate to allow such analysis. As Section 2.1.2 showed, a total of 214 schools in 30 chains have been identified as an analysis group.

However, we are aware of the many concerns that have been expressed about national assessment in primary schools, not least about the design and implementation of the 2016 tests.[56] In the light of concerns about the nature of the writing assessment and its marking and moderation, we have not used writing results here. Nor have we attempted to create any overall ranking of chains.

5.1 Pupil characteristics

All the chains included in the KS2 analysis group had more disadvantaged pupils than the national average (Figure 35). Across the whole analysis group, 54% of the pupils were disadvantaged (compared with 41% of those in the secondary analysis group).

Figure 35: Percentage of Year 6 students in sponsored academies in analysis group chains who were disadvantaged, 2016

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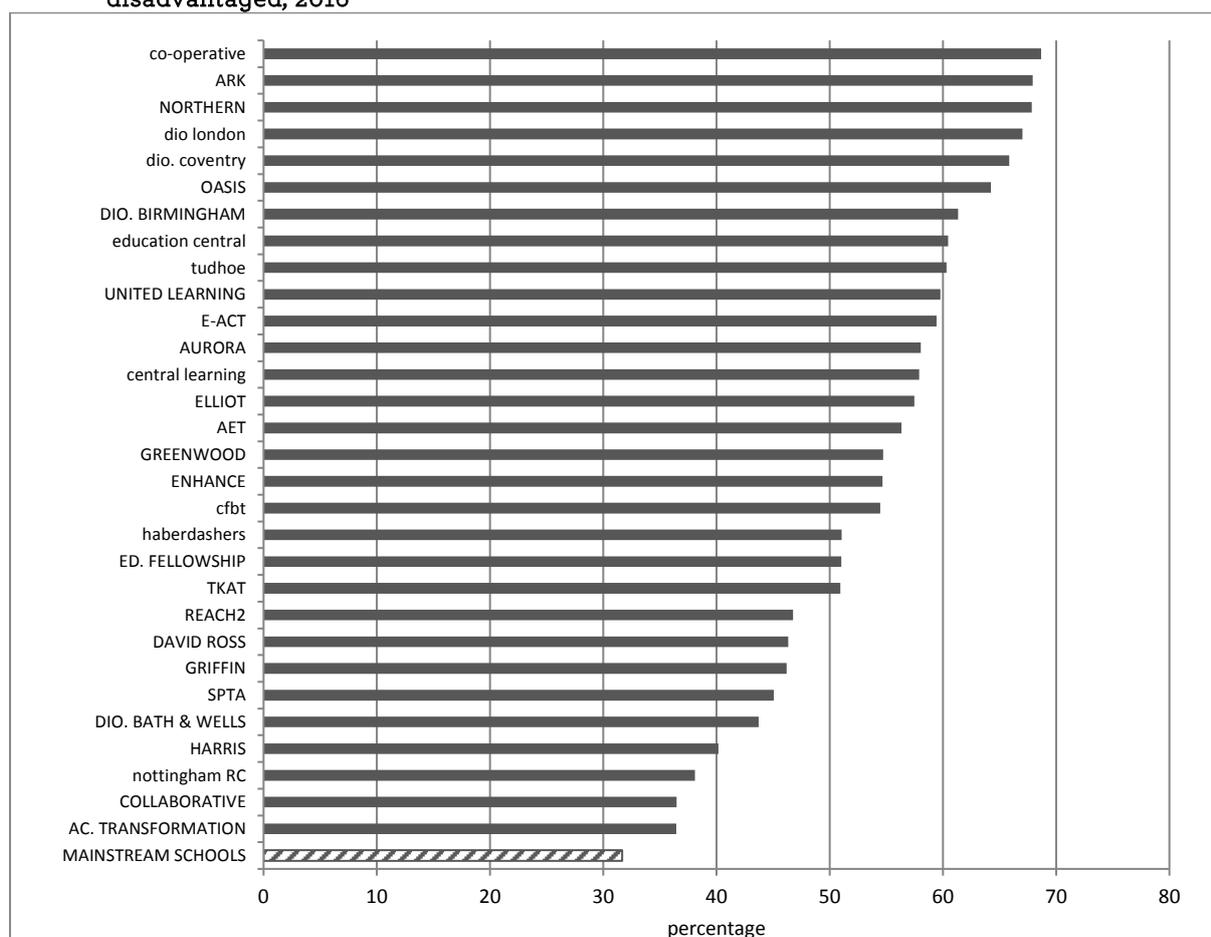
[56] See, for example, Education Select Committee 2017b.

This means that the academies and chains in our analysis group are fulfilling their originally envisaged policy mandate of providing for socially disadvantaged areas and pupils.

Disadvantaged pupils consistently have lower scores than their peers in KS2 National Curriculum assessments. Table 11 shows the percentages reaching the expected standard in the 2016 assessments.

Table 11: Percentage of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected level in KS2 national assessments, 2016[57]

	Reading. writing and maths %	Reading %	Writing %	Maths %	Grammar punctuation and spelling %
disadvantaged	39	53	64	58	61
all other pupils	60	72	79	76	78

Similarly, their progress scores show that they make less progress during KS2 (from age seven to age 11) than those who are not disadvantaged.

The chains in the analysis group also tend to have more pupils whose attainment at KS1 was low, and fewer whose prior attainment was high, compared to national figures (Figure 36).

Figure 36: Prior attainment of KS2 pupils 2016

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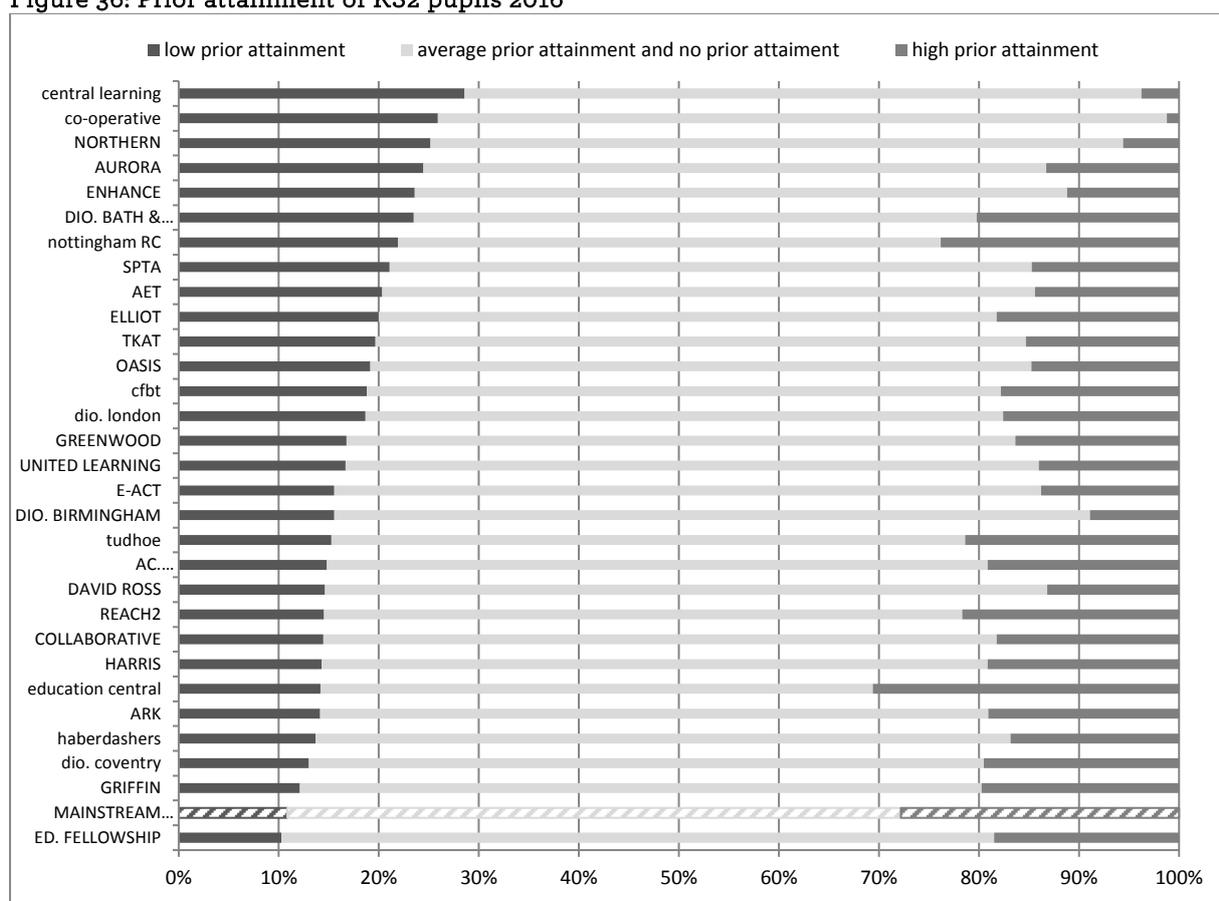
[57] DfE 2017g.

Primary pupils whose KS1 attainment was low do very much worse than others in KS2 assessments, and those whose prior attainment was high do very much better (Table 12).

Table 12: Percentage of pupils with different level of prior attainment reaching the expected level in KS2 national assessments[58]

	Reading, writing and maths %	Reading %	Writing %	Maths %	Grammar, punctuation and spelling %
low prior attainment	6	17	20	19	17
medium prior attainment	47	64	76	68	73
high prior attainment	91	95	97	97	98

Among their disadvantaged pupils, the analysis group chains also have more with low prior attainment than the national figure (Figure 37).

Figure 37: Proportions of disadvantaged KS2 pupils 2016 whose prior attainment was low or high
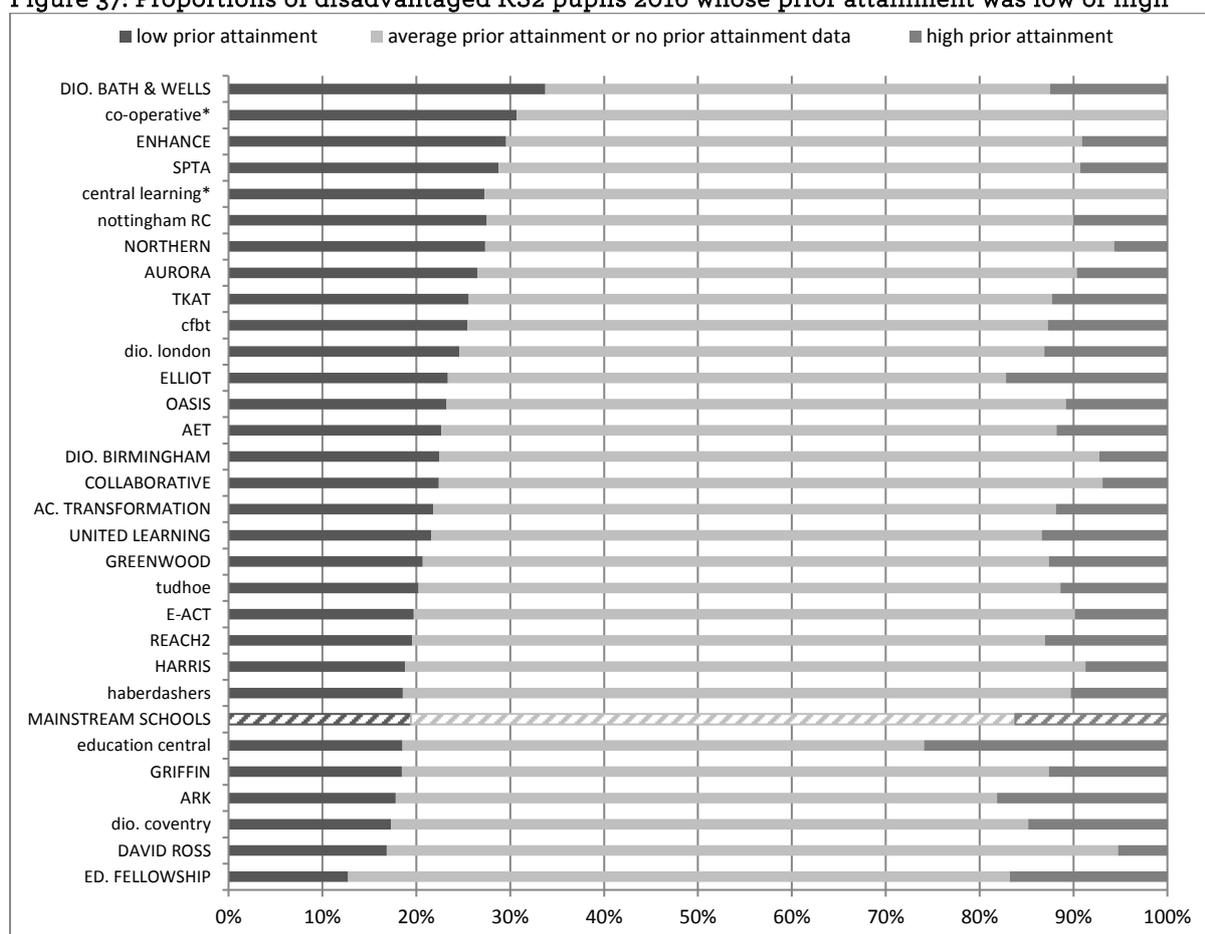
Co-operative and *Central Learning* had very low numbers of disadvantaged pupils with high prior attainment which have been suppressed.

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[58] DfE, 2017g.

Just as with secondary, these figures suggest that some chains are facing greater challenges than others in terms of their pupil intakes. For example, *Co-operative* and Northern have particularly high proportions of both disadvantaged pupils and of pupils with low prior attainment.

5.2   National benchmarks

5.2.1   Floor standard

Schools are above the floor standard if:

- at least 65% of pupils meet the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics; or
- the school achieves sufficient progress scores in all three subjects. (At least -5 in English reading, -5 in mathematics and -7 in English writing).[59]

Nationally, 5% of primary schools were below the floor standard in 2016. In the analysis group, 8.4% of the sponsored academies were below floor. This included academies from 12 of the 30 chains.

5.2.2   Coasting schools

The KS2 coasting definition states that a school will be coasting if:

- In 2014, fewer than 85% of pupils achieved level 4 in English reading, English writing and mathematics, **and** the school has less than the national median percentage of pupils who achieved expected progress in English reading *and* English writing *and* mathematics; **and**
- In 2015, fewer than 85% of pupils achieved level 4 in English reading, English writing and mathematics, **and** the school has less than the national median percentage of pupils who achieved expected progress in English reading *and* English writing *and* mathematics; **and**
- In 2016, fewer than 85% of pupils meet the expected standard in English reading, English writing and mathematics, **and** the school achieves a progress score below -2.5 in English reading *or* below -3.5 in English writing *or* below -2.5 in mathematics.

Nationally 3.5% of eligible schools met this definition. In our analysis group, the proportion was higher (19 schools or 8.9%). Thirteen of the 30 chains had at least one which met the coasting definition.[60]

5.3   Key Stage 2 attainment

This section is concerned with attainment in the national tests in reading and mathematics.

The comparator groups used are similar to those for KS4; only schools that have had the same status for three academic years are included.
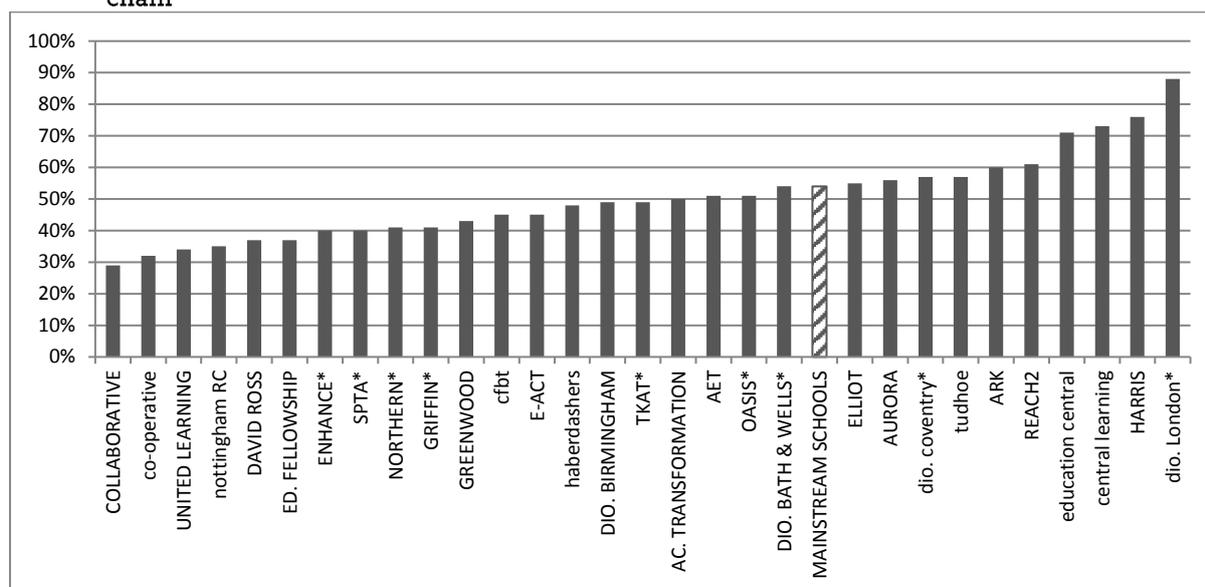
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[59] DFE 2017g.
[60] DfE 2017e.

Figure 38: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, 2016, by type of school
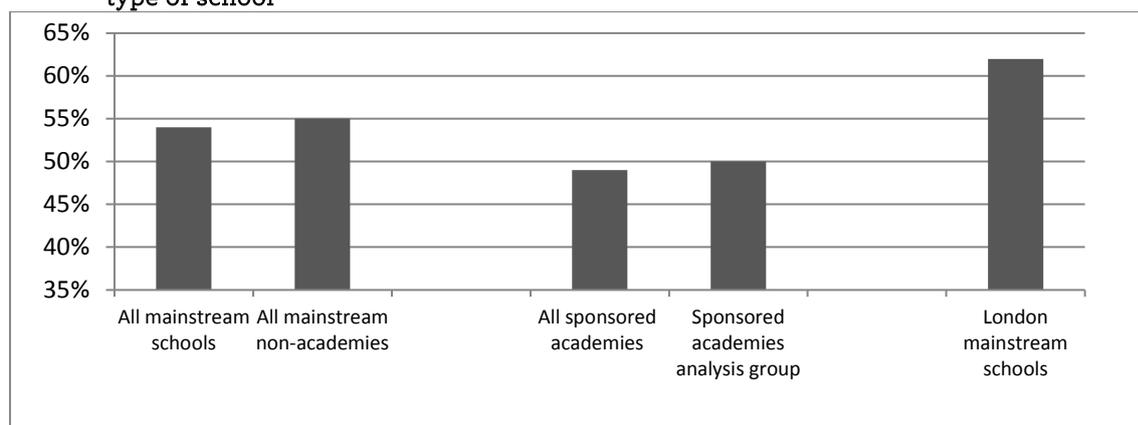
The percentage achieving the expected standard in sponsored academies is lower than in mainstream schools, but the analysis group chains do slightly better than all sponsored academies. Figure 39 shows the considerable variation across chains, ranging from 29% of pupils achieving the expected standard in Collaborative to 88% in *Diocese of London*.

Figure 39: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, 2016, by chain

Chains marked with an asterisk are based on figures for one school less than the total in the analysis group as a result of suppression.

There is no relationship between the percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving the expected standard and the percentage of these pupils whose prior attainment was low (r = 0.09).

In maths, there is very little difference between the percentage of disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mainstream schools (59%) and in sponsored academies in the analysis group (58%), with all sponsored academies a further two percentage points behind.

However, there is again a substantial difference between the highest achieving and lowest achieving chains. In Education Fellowship, just 33% of disadvantaged pupils achieved the expected standard, compared to 83% in *Central Learning* (Figure 40).

Figure 40: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving the expected standard in maths, 2016, by chain

Chains marked with an asterisk are based on figures for one school less than the total in the analysis group as a result of suppression.

As with reading, maths scores are not related to the percentage of disadvantaged pupils with low prior attainment. However, there is a strong relationship (r = 0.79) between attainment in maths and reading.

Figure 41: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving expected level in maths and reading by chain, 2016
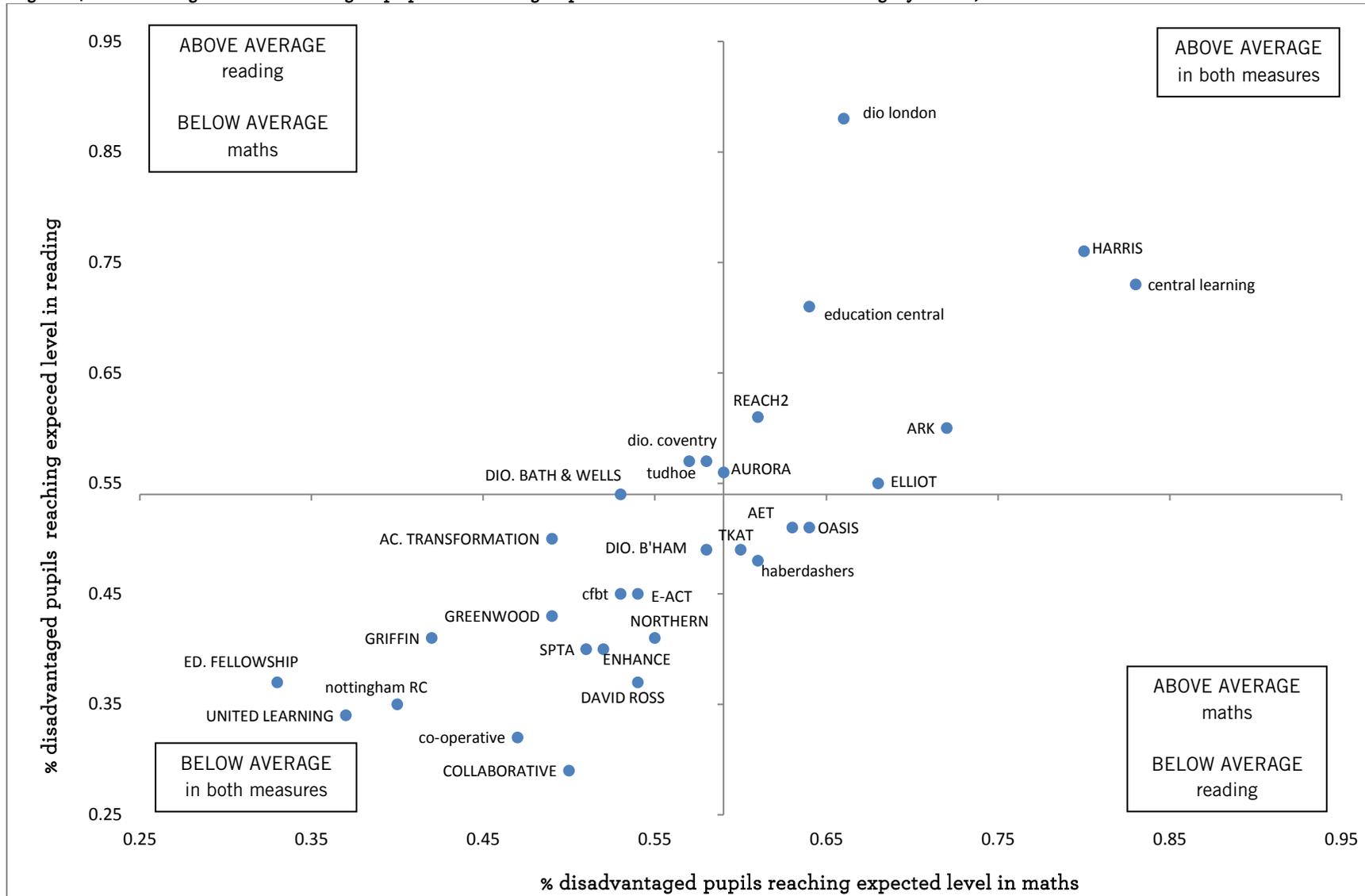
Note: the axes show mean performance for all mainstream schools on each measure

Some chains perform above the mainstream average in both subjects: *Diocese of London*, Harris, *Central Learning*, Education Central, Elliot, ARK and REAach2. In contrast, some are well below mainstream average in both: Education Fellowship, United Learning, *Nottingham RC, Co-operative,* and Collaborative.

5.4 Key Stage 2 pupil progress

From 2016, new measures of pupil progress have been used. These are calculated on a similar basis to Progress 8; pupils' results are compared to the actual achievements of other pupils nationally with similar prior attainment at KS1.

> A positive score means that they made more progress than those with similar prior attainment; a negative score means they made less progress than pupils with similar starting points nationally. A progress score of -4 in reading would mean that, on average, pupils in a school achieved the equivalent of 4 scaled score points lower in reading than all pupils with similar prior attainment nationally. A negative progress score does not mean pupils made no progress.[61]

The published tables show that disadvantaged pupils have an average reading progress score of -0.7, compared with other pupils (0.3). Our analysis shows that in sponsored academies that had had that status for at least three years, disadvantaged pupils had made less progress (-1.1) but in our analysis group, the score was slightly better (-0.9) – though still lower than the mainstream score.

Figure 42 shows the reading progress scores for chains in the analysis group.

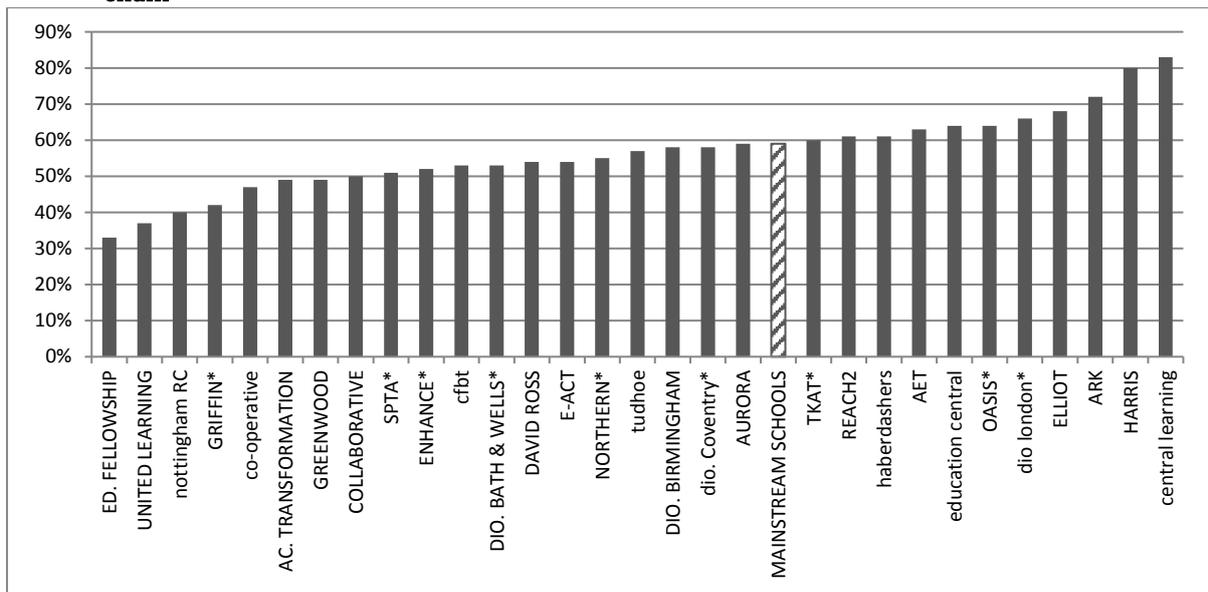**Figure 42: Reading progress for disadvantaged pupils, 2016, by chain**
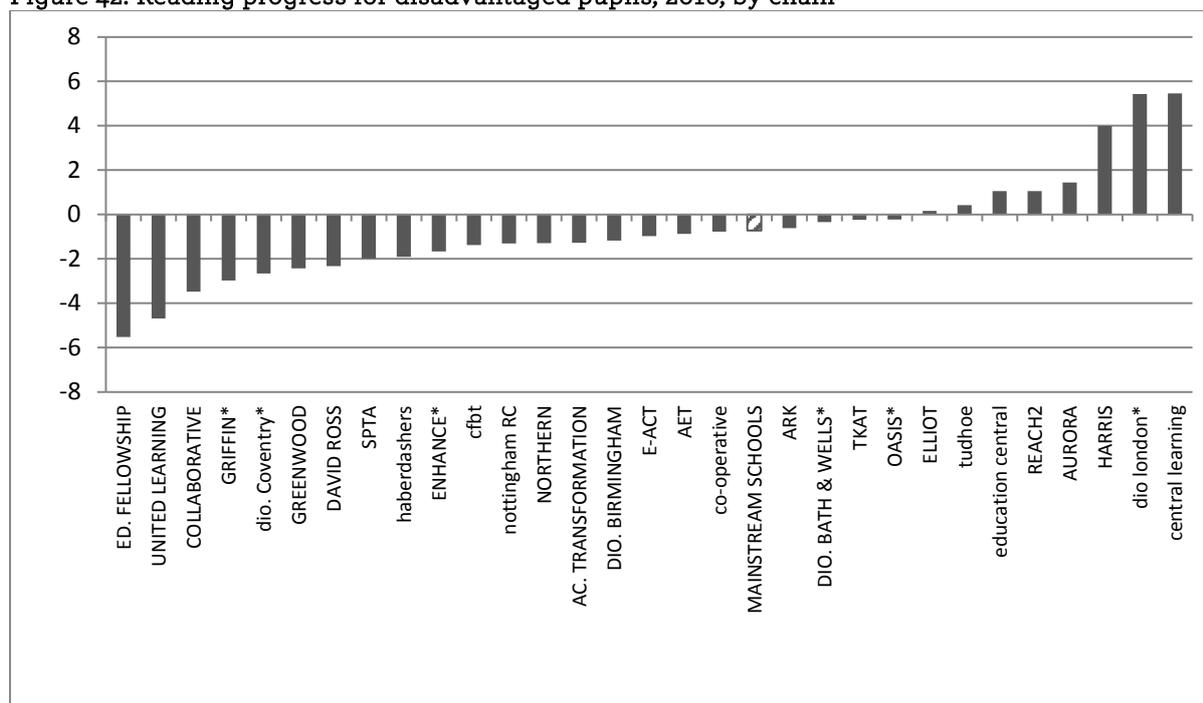
Chains marked with an asterisk are based on figures for one school less than the total in the analysis group as a result of suppression.

Similarly, in maths, disadvantaged pupils make less progress than their peers, though the gap is not as large as for reading (disadvantaged, - 0.5, other 0.2). While sponsored academies do slightly less well, disadvantaged pupils in the sponsored academies in the analysis group made more progress than the

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[61] DfE, 2017g.

mainstream school average (-0.32). This is reflected by more chains scoring above the mainstream average (Figure 43).

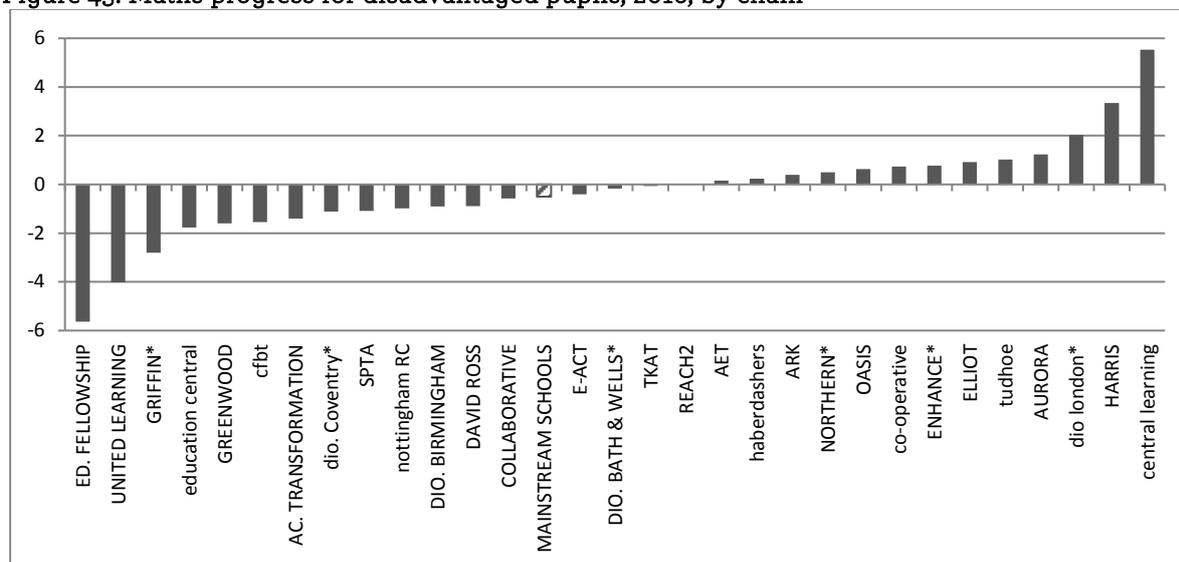**Figure 43: Maths progress for disadvantaged pupils, 2016, by chain**

Chains marked with an asterisk are based on figures for one school less than the total in the analysis group as a result of suppression.

The same chains do well in both maths and reading progress: *Central Learning, Diocese of London* and Harris.

5.5   Key Stage 2: comparison over time

The changes to the primary curriculum and tests mean that results from 2016 are not comparable with results from earlier years. The new curriculum is more challenging and the expected level is now higher than previously. Therefore, changes over time cannot be interpreted as improving or worsening. Nevertheless, they are of interest in showing the extent to which the different chains have adapted to the demands of the new curriculum and the new test expectations. Figures for both Central Learning and Harris suggest that they have been very effective in adapting to the new demands in both subjects.

5.6   Key Stage 2 sponsored academies: summary

The KS2 academies in our analysis group are, like those at KS4, catering for above average proportions of disadvantaged pupils. It is interesting to note that prior attainment (at KS1) is not closely related to attainment outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in the analysis group chains.

Where chains were in both the KS4 and KS2 analysis groups, we can compare their success in the two age groups. Harris, Diocese of London and ARK were successful with disadvantaged pupils in both age groups. However, United Learning achieved *poorer* results in primary than secondary, and Northern did better in primary. *Central Learning*, which features only in the KS2 analysis group, was also very successful.

5.7   Key Stage 2 converter academies

As with secondary, this report only considers those primary converter academies:

- that are in chains in the KS2 analysis group
- that have been part of that chain since December 2013
- where there are at least three converters in the chain that meet these criteria.

In addition, two small schools that met the criteria above were omitted because the pupil numbers were so small that attainment data was suppressed. The converter analysis group therefore consists of just eight chains and 41 academies. The total pupil numbers involved are thus too low to allow any clear conclusions to be drawn.

Earlier we showed that the converter academies in our KS4 analysis group were not typical of all converter academies in terms of pupil characteristics. The same is true at KS2; the converter academies in the analysis group have higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils and those with low prior attainment than the average converter academy, and are thus more like sponsored academies in terms of intake (Figure 44).

Figure 44: Pupil characteristics in different groups of KS2 schools, 2016
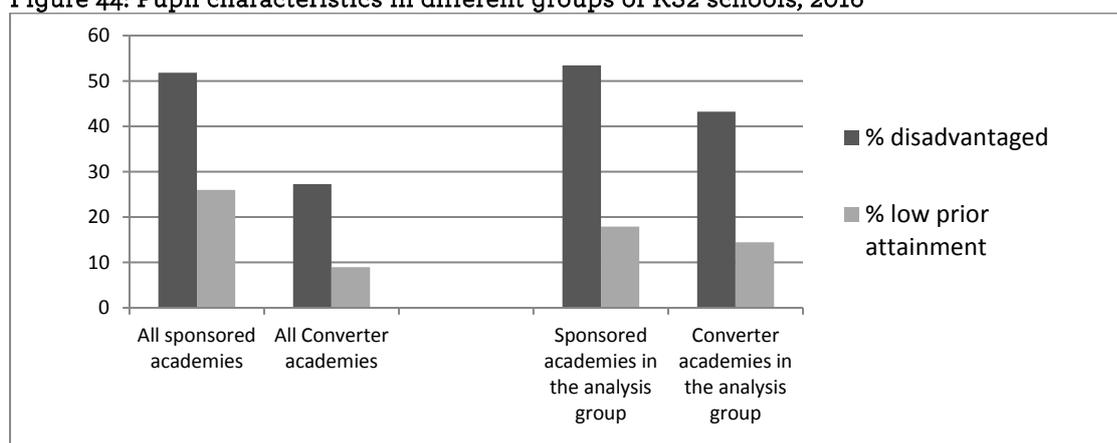
Inevitably there are differences across chains, and the converter academies in David Ross and AET stand out as being more like the overall pattern for converters in their pupil characteristics; in comparison with the other chains, they have much lower percentages of both disadvantaged pupils and those with low prior attainment.

This section focuses on three main questions:

- Do KS2 disadvantaged pupils have higher attainment in converter or sponsored academies?
- Do KS2 disadvantaged pupils make more progress in converter or sponsored academies?
- Has the performance of KS2 disadvantaged pupils improved more in converter or sponsored academies?

If we consider only sponsored and converter academies that have had that status for three years, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils is higher in converter academies. This is unsurprising; the early converter academies were all schools judged to be Outstanding by Ofsted. The pattern is very much the same in the analysis group chains, though the gap between converters and sponsored is less. In both reading and maths, there was less variation in attainment between chains in their converter academies

than their sponsored academies. Attainment in the converter academies of Oasis and *United Learning* was slightly higher than in other the chains.

Figure 45 shows that disadvantaged pupils in all converter academies have made more progress than those in sponsored academies in both reading and maths. However, in our analysis groups pupils in the converter academies made, on average, less progress in reading than those in sponsored academies.

Figure 45: Disadvantaged pupils' progress in reading and maths in sponsored and converter academies, 2016
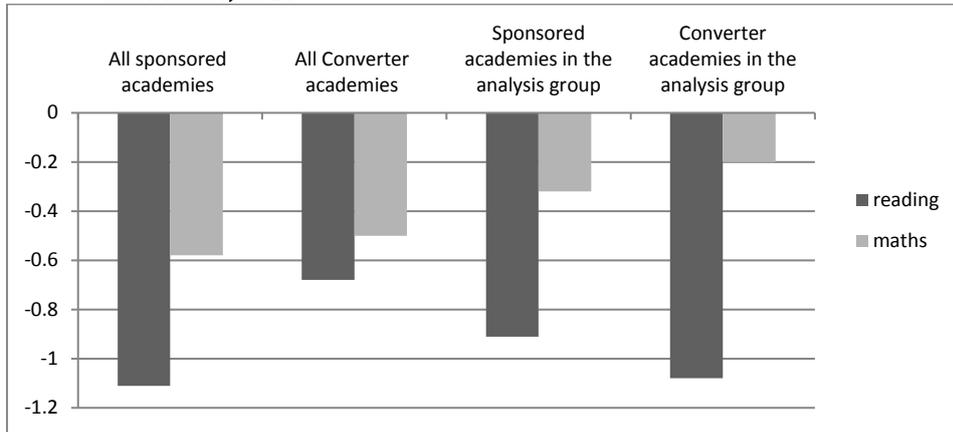
In both reading and maths, the pupils in the converter academies in TKAT, Oasis and *David Ross* progressed better than those in converter academies in other chains, and better than the sponsored academies in the same chain.

Finally, we consider change over time, which reflects the extent to which chains have adapted to the new curriculum and tests. For both reading and maths, converters in the analysis group show greater improvement (or adaptation to the new curriculum) than all converters that have had that status for three years. But the picture across the chains is a confused one. The chains in which the converters appear to have made the most improvement in both reading and maths for disadvantaged pupils are United Learning, TKAT, Oasis and Education Central.

6 Discussion

This section summarises findings and discusses their implications. It leads to the recommendations which are at the start of the report.

6.1 Summary of findings

The chains in which disadvantaged pupils had the highest attainment and made the most progress in 2016 are those that we have reported as successful in previous reports (particularly Diocese of London, City of London, Harris and Outwood Grange).

Some of the chains that were least successful with disadvantaged pupils are those that have been found to be least successful in previous reports (for example, Midland, Greenwood, SPTA, Northern), though the lowest attainment was in a chain new to this analysis, *CWA*. But other chains that have been previously identified as less successful are now achieving much better results (for example, Grace and Diocese of Oxford). However, in some cases, chains now appear higher up the rankings because their weakest schools have been re-brokered (for example, E-ACT).

DfE figures show that in sponsored academies, those KS4 pupils with high prior attainment make less progress than they do in other types of school; this was the case in our KS4 analysis group. The same pattern occurred among disadvantaged pupils; those with high prior attainment have much lower Progress 8 scores in sponsored academies than in other types of school. This is an important challenge for sponsored academies, including those in the analysis group. However, sponsored academies (and particularly those in the analysis group, achieved better progress than other types of school for disadvantaged pupils with low prior attainment). The implications of this are discussed below.

Attainment outcomes at KS4 are strongly related to prior attainment: chains with a higher percentage of low-attaining pupils tend to show lower attainment and progress. However, there are also differences across chains not related to pupil characteristics, and the chains with the highest attainment outcomes tend to do better than their prior attainment figures would suggest. There is a wide range of chain level Attainment 8 scores for disadvantaged pupils with low prior attainment – from 18.6 (Merchant Venturers) to 41.7 (City of London).

Attainment 8 and Progress 8 figures show that chains have responded in different ways to the new measures. For example, Outwood Grange appears not to have targeted EBacc. While their disadvantaged pupils' results in Attainment 8 and English and maths GCSEs were good, their EBacc performance was well below mainstream average. They had a relatively low EBacc entry rate, particularly for languages. In contrast, Greenwood had much higher entries in all EBacc subjects (and higher EBacc achievement) but did poorly on Attainment 8 and Progress 8.

The introduction of new measures makes it impossible to gain a clear picture of which chains have improved over time. While we have calculated improvement using both old and new attainment and progress measures, what these show partly reflects the extent to which they have changed their curriculum and strategies to meet the new requirements. The chain that appears to have made the greatest improvement is Grace. This is particularly encouraging, as in 2014 report they were well below average for attainment and below average for improvement. Four chains stand out in that for the second year running, their attainment *and* improvement summary scores are above average: Diocese of London, Outwood Grange, Landau Forte and United Learning.

This year for the first time we have analysed outcomes for secondary converter academies in the chains in our analysis group. Just over a fifth of the chains had two or more converters that had been in the

chain for three years. These academies on average had higher percentages of disadvantaged and of low-attaining pupils than the average for all converter academies. On average their attainment for disadvantaged and low-attaining pupils was similar to that of the sponsored academies. However, disadvantaged pupils with low prior attainment made better progress in sponsored academies than in converters, while those with high prior attainment made better progress in converters.

This year for the first time we also investigated KS2 academies. Because of the widespread concerns about national tests at KS2, we have not used the writing test results (for which it has been argued that moderation was inconsistent across the country). Nor have we created an overall index.

Whereas in secondary, there were strong relationships between prior attainment and KS4 outcomes, this was less evident at KS2. At chain level, there was no relationship between percentage of low attaining disadvantaged pupils and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

Where chains were included in both the KS4 and KS2 analysis groups, we are able to compare their success in the two age groups. Harris, Diocese of London and ARK were successful with disadvantaged pupils in both age groups. However, United Learning achieved weaker results in primary than secondary, and Northern did better in primary. *Central Learning*, which features only in the KS2 analysis group, was also very successful.

At KS2, as at KS4, only about a quarter of the chains had enough converter academies to include in the analysis group. These converter academies had higher percentages of disadvantaged and low-attaining pupils than was average in converter academies. On average, attainment for disadvantaged pupils was slightly higher in the converters, but the picture across chains was much more varied.

6.2   Discussion

It is now 15 years since the opening of the first sponsored academy, and the fourth year of our *Chain Effects* analysis of the impact of academy chains on the educational outcomes of disadvantaged young people, which they were envisaged to transform. It is timely to take stock, and our more extensive analysis this year – which includes pupil prior attainment - is intended to aid such appraisal.

One of the intentions of the sponsored academies programme was to revitalise education in areas of deprivation, with the implication that sponsored academies would serve largely disadvantaged demographics. Our analysis shows that the academy chains analysed are retaining their intended purpose of serving disproportionately disadvantaged demographics (including a few with more than double the national percentage of disadvantaged students). This was true for both sponsored secondary and primary academies.

Pupil intake varied widely across chains. However, most chains include higher than average numbers of pupils with low prior attainment, and this impacts on their KS4 results.

And what of quality of provision? As usual in our results, a handful of outstanding academy chains are shown to be continuing to achieve strikingly good results for their pupils of *all* backgrounds and levels of achievement, across a range of measures. While this group has not expanded much, a number of chains have improved very notably from their positions in our early analyses. Every year we argue that more should be done to learn what is working in these chains, and to cascade these messages across the system.

It is urgent that this happens because, again as in prior years, there are twice as many chains in the lowest quadrant of Figure 26, showing below average attainment and improvement in outcomes of disadvantaged pupils, as there are in the quadrant in which chains have above average attainment and

improvement. A few chains have been in the lowest quadrant for two or three successive years. This includes both AET and E-ACT, which have had some of their worst-performing academies re-brokered.

We have argued in previous reports that failing chains should be closed, and their schools re-brokered. The process of re-brokering has developed in the last year: this has not meant forced closure of the chains concerned; albeit a few have closed voluntarily. As we reported above, from 2015-16 there was a substantial increase in the number of schools that changed sponsor, and more than half of these did so as a result of intervention. But nevertheless, there are still some chains – including large ones – that continue to have significant portions of their schools below the floor standard, and performing poorly across the board against many of our measures. We reiterate our call for robust action by RSCs to act with those chains that continue to struggle, supporting reported RSC efforts to mandate improvement support, and re-brokerage where necessary. We also repeat the call from our 2016 report, supported by the Education Committee (2016), for the DfE to recognise the challenge of capacity within the system (especially in particular geographic areas), and thus to support RSCs to draw down capacity for sponsorship *wherever it may be found*. In other words, where local authorities are providing outstanding provision for their local schools this ought to be recognised and fostered, providing opportunities for such local authorities to join the pool of outstanding charitable sponsors ready to support struggling schools. This recommendation was also taken up by the Education Committee in their inquiry into MATs,[62] observing that this pragmatic inclusivity may also aid in avoiding the growth of 'SNOWs' ('Schools No-one Wants') which are becoming a feature of discussion in the education press, as schools needing re-brokerage become deemed too risky to take on by some sponsors.[63] To this end, it is also important that re-brokered schools are tracked, to monitor progress and ensure that their outcomes are improved.

In terms of achievement, overall our findings make gloomy reading for Government. Mainstream non-academy schools are performing significantly better than sponsored academies in terms of disadvantaged pupils achieving Attainment 8, and for disadvantaged pupils attaining EBacc. Our analysis shows that pupil performance at Attainment 8 correlates strongly with prior attainment, and as we have seen, sponsored academies mainly contain higher than average percentages of pupils with low prior attainment, somewhat explaining this trend (albeit some chains buck this trend, showing the potential of genuinely transformative provision). These findings highlight the need for struggling chains to benefit from support, as well as accountability. Support and resource for improvement seems especially vital in a period of challenge for teacher supply: teacher quality has the biggest impact on pupil attainment, yet struggling schools are likely to find it especially hard to attract and retain them, if left to cope on their own. The recent 'loan' of its CEO by Diverse Academies Learning Partnership to the 'struggling' WCAT chain shows what can be achieved via school-to-school vocational impetus, and this is to be applauded.[64] Yet for such support to be cascaded at a systemic level requires strategic management and resource.

What many sponsored academy chains are doing really well is supporting the progress of pupils with low prior attainment, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is no mean feat, addressing an issue that has particularly challenged the English education system, and providing support and good progress for a section of our most vulnerable pupils.[65] This finding is a cause for celebration. Some of the chains in our analysis group are achieving outstanding records in this area, which should stand as an exemplar and resource for other schools in tackling this notoriously challenging issue. Yet, with just a handful of exceptions, these chains are not achieving the same progress for their middle and (especially) high attainers, including – notably – their high attaining disadvantaged pupils. This is undermining their results for progress and attainment for disadvantaged pupils overall. Clearly, this poor progress damages the life chances of disadvantaged pupils with high prior attainment – ironically those in theory with the most potential to realise Government social mobility targets by achieving access to

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[62] Education Select Committee, 2017.

[63] *Ibid.*

[64] Schools Week, 2017.

[65] Marshall, 2013.

higher education, the professions and so on. And it also risks sponsored academies becoming seen as specialising in supporting low attainers; threatening their comprehensive identity and intake. Should this manifest, with 'flight' of higher attainers from these schools, there are long-term threats to the quality of provision as well as the social mixing shown by the OECD to be beneficial for attainment overall.[66]

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

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[66] OECD, 2010.

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Appendix

Table A: Chains performing above and below the mainstream average on key measures of 2016 <u>attainment</u> for disadvantaged pupils: old measures

Table B: Chains performing above and below the mainstream average on key measures of 2016 <u>improvement</u> for disadvantaged pupils: old measures

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Table A: Chains performing above and below the mainstream average on key measures of 2016 <u>attainment</u> for disadvantaged pupils: old measures

	5A*CEM	Progress 8 English	Progress 8 maths	EBacc	GCSE capped points score	Overall rank
Well above average	Diocese of London City of London	*Aspirations* City of London	ARK City of London	City of London Diocese of London	City of London Diocese of London	City of London Diocese of London
Above average	ARK Harris Outwood Grange United Learning	Diocese of London Harris ARK *Cambridge Meridian*	Diocese of London Harris Outwood Grange *Aspirations*	ARK *Dixons* Haberdashers Harris	ARK Harris Landau Forte *Mercers*	ARK Harris Outwood Grange United Learning
Average	David Ross *Diverse* *Dixons* Emmanuel Grace Landau Forte Leigh *Mercers* Priory *RSA*	CfBT Co-operative *David Meller* David Ross E-ACT Landau Forte Outwood Grange Priory *Skinners* *Swale*	Cabot Co-operative Creative Education David Ross Diocese of Oxford *Dixons* E-ACT Oasis Priory *RSA*	*Mercers* Co-operative E-ACT Education Fellowship Greenwood Landau Forte *RSA* Ac. Transformation AET Aldridge	Aldridge Emmanuel Haberdashers Outwood Grange United Learning Ac. Transformation AET *Aspirations* Brooke Weston Cabot	*Aspirations* Co-operative E-ACT Haberdashers Landau Forte *Mercers* Priory Ac. Transformation AET Aldridge
Below Average	Ac. Transformation AET Aldridge *Aspirations* Brooke Weston Cabot *Cambridge Meridian* CfBT Co-operative Creative Education *David Meller* *Diocese of Exeter* Diocese of Oxford E-ACT Education Fellowship Greenwood	*Trust in Learning* UCAT United Learning Aldridge Creative Education Emmanuel Grace *Learning Schools* Leigh Ormiston Ac. Transformation AET Brooke Weston Cabot *Diocese of Exeter* Diocese of Oxford	*Skinners* *Swale* United Learning Ac. Transformation Aldridge *Cambridge Meridian* Emmanuel *Mercers* Ormiston *University of Brighton* AET Brooke Weston CfBT *CWA* *David Meller* *Diocese of Exeter*	*Aspirations* Brooke Weston Cabot *Cambridge Meridian* CfBT Creative Education *CWA* *David Meller* David Ross *Diocese of Exeter* Diocese of Oxford *Diverse* Emmanuel Grace *Learning Schools* Leigh	*Cambridge Meridian* CfBT Co-operative Creative Education *David Meller* David Ross *Diocese of Exeter* Diocese of Oxford *Diverse* *Dixons* E-ACT Education Fellowship Grace Greenwood *Learning Schools* Leigh	Brooke Weston Cabot *Cambridge Meridian* CfBT Creative Education *David Meller* David Ross *Diocese of Exeter* Diocese of Oxford *Diverse* *Dixons* Education Fellowship Emmanuel Grace Greenwood *Learning Schools*

	Haberdashers *Learning Schools* *Merchant Venturers* *Midland* Oasis Ormiston *Skinners* SPTA *Swale* TKAT *Trust in Learning* UCAT *University of Brighton* Woodard	*Diverse* *Dixons* Greenwood Haberdashers *Mercers* *Merchant Venturers* *Midland* Northern Oasis *RSA* SPTA TKAT *University of Brighton* Woodard	*Diverse* Education Fellowship Grace Greenwood Haberdashers Landau Forte Leigh *Merchant Venturers* Midland SPTA TKAT *Trust in Learning* UCAT Woodard	*Merchant Venturers* *Midland* Northern Oasis Ormiston Outwood Grange Priory *Skinners* SPTA *Swale* TKAT *Trust in Learning* UCAT United Learning	*Merchant Venturers* Oasis Ormiston Priory *RSA* *Skinners* SPTA *Trust in Learning* *University of Brighton* Woodard	Leigh *Merchant Venturers* *Midland* Oasis Ormiston *RSA* *Skinners* SPTA *Swale* TKAT *Trust in Learning* UCAT *University of Brighton* Woodard
Well below average	*CWA* Northern	*CWA* Education Fellowship	*Learning Schools* Northern	*University of Brighton* Woodard	*CWA* *Midland* Northern *Swale* TKAT UCAT	*CWA* Northern

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Table B: Chains performing above and below the mainstream average on key measures of 2016 improvement for disadvantaged pupils: old measures

	5A*CEM	Progress 8 English	Progress 8 maths	EBacc	GCSE capped point score	Overall rank
Well above average	Grace	*Aspirations* Brooke Weston *Cambridge Meridian* Co-operative *Diocese of Exeter* *Swale*	Grace Outwood Grange	Ac. Transformation	*Cambridge Meridian*	Ac. Transformation
Above Average	Ac. Transformation Aldridge Brooke Weston *Cambridge Meridian* Creative Education *CWA* David Ross Diocese of London Diocese of Oxford *Diverse* Emmanuel Harris Landau Forte Leigh Outwood Grange *RSA* *Skinners* *Swale* *Trust in Learning* United Learning Woodard	Ac. Transformation CfBT Creative Education David Ross Diocese of London Grace Harris Landau Forte Leigh Northern Outwood Grange Priory *Skinners* SPTA UCAT United Learning Woodard	Ac. Transformation Aldridge Brooke Weston *Cambridge Meridian* Co-operative Creative Education *CWA* David Ross Diocese of London *Dixons* Emmanuel Landau Forte *Midland* Oasis Priory *RSA* Swale *University of Brighton* Woodard	ARK *Aspirations* *Cambridge Meridian* CfBT Co-operative *CWA* *Diverse* *Dixons* E-ACT Greenwood Haberdashers Harris Landau Forte *Learning Schools* Leigh *Mercers* *Midland* Oasis *RSA* *Skinners* Swale TKAT UCAT Woodard	Aldridge CfBT City of London Co-operative Creative Education *CWA* Diocese of London Diocese of Oxford Grace Harris Landau Forte Oasis *Skinners* SPTA *Swale* TKAT *Trust in Learning*	Aldridge Brooke Weston *Cambridge Meridian* CfBT Co-operative Creative Education *CWA* David Ross Diocese of London Diocese of Oxford *Diverse* Emmanuel Grace Harris Landau Forte Oasis Outwood Grange *RSA* *Skinners* *Swale* *Trust in Learning* United Learning Woodard
Average	CfBT City of London Co-operative *Diocese of Exeter* *Dixons* E-ACT *Midland* Oasis Ormiston SPTA	City of London Emmanuel Oasis Ormiston AET Aldridge ARK Cabot *CWA*	Cabot *Diverse* Education Fellowship Ormiston *Skinners* TKAT United Learning AET ARK *Aspirations* CfBT	AET Aldridge Cabot *David Meller* David Ross Education Fellowship Northern	Ac. Transformation ARK Brooke Weston David Ross *Diocese of Exeter* *Diverse* *Dixons* E-ACT Haberdashers *Midland* Ormiston Outwood Grange Priory *RSA*	TKAT *Aspirations* City of London *Diocese of Exeter* *Dixons* E-ACT Leigh *Midland*

	University of Brighton	*David Meller*	City of London	Ormiston	United Learning	Ormiston
Below Average	AET	Diocese of Oxford	*David Meller*	Outwood Grange	*University of Brighton*	Priory
	ARK	*Diverse*	*Diocese of Exeter*	SPTA	Woodard	SPTA
	Aspirations	Dixons	Diocese of Oxford	*University of Brighton*	AET	*University of Brighton*
	Cabot	E-ACT	E-ACT	Brooke Weston	*Aspirations*	AET
	David Meller	Education Fellowship	Greenwood	City of London	Cabot	ARK
	Education Fellowship	Greenwood	Haberdashers	Creative Education	*David Meller*	Cabot
	Greenwood	Haberdashers	Harris	*Diocese of Exeter*	Education Fellowship	*David Meller*
	Haberdashers	*Learning Schools*	*Learning Schools*	Diocese of London	Emmanuel	Education Fellowship
	Learning Schools	*Mercers*	Leigh	Diocese of Oxford	Greenwood	Greenwood
	Mercers	*Merchant Venturers*	*Mercers*	Emmanuel	*Learning Schools*	Haberdashers
	Priory	Midland	*Merchant Venturers*	Grace	Leigh	*Learning Schools*
	TKAT	*RSA*	SPTA	Priory	*Mercers*	*Mercers*
	UCAT	TKAT	*Trust in Learning*	*Trust in Learning*	*Merchant Venturers*	UCAT
Well below average	*Merchant Venturers*	*Trust in Learning*	UCAT	United Learning	Northern	*Merchant Venturers*
	Northern	*University of Brighton*	Northern	*Merchant Venturers*	UCAT	Northern

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

Professor Becky Francis is Director of the UCL Institute of Education (IOE). She joined the IOE from King's College London, where she was Professor of Education and Social Justice. Her previous roles include Director of Education at the RSA.

Becky has combined academic research and policy work in education throughout her career. She regularly serves as a consultant to the UK government and international agencies, and previously served as advisor to the UK Parliamentary committee responsible for scrutinising government policy on education. She is a frequent media commentator on education issues. Becky's academic expertise centres on social identities and inequalities in educational contexts. Her policy research focuses on school quality and social class. She has spearheaded longstanding research programmes on the impact of major reforms in the English schools system – in particular, the policy of academisation. She is currently directing the Education Endowment Foundation-funded project 'Best Practice in Grouping Students'.

Becky served as a panel member for the 2014 national Research Excellence Framework exercise. She has also acted as a judge for various national practitioner awards, including the *TES* Teacher of the Year awards. She is a trustee of Impetus-PEF, which supports charities working with disadvantaged young people.