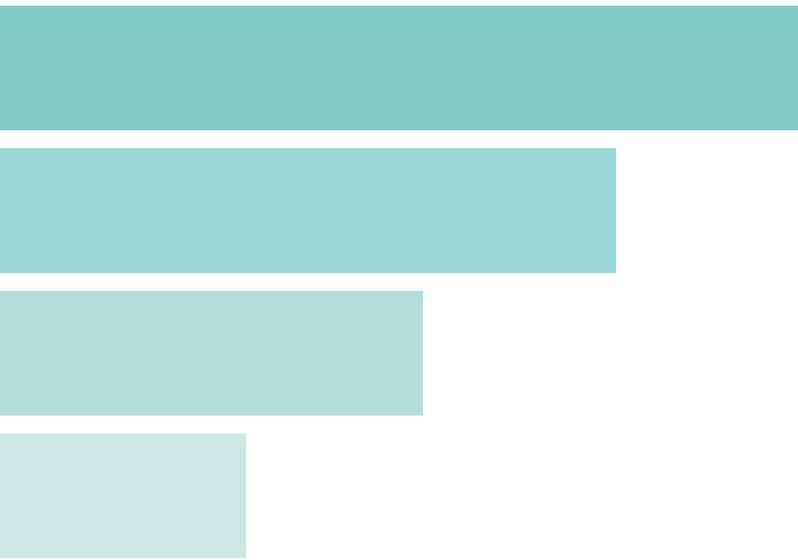


CHAIN EFFECTS 2015

The impact of academy chains on low-income students

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July 2015



Improving social mobility
through education



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FOREWORD

Academies were started in 2000 to alter the fortunes of 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 by ensuring they gained better exam results and improved opportunities for higher education and work.

Since then, the size of the programme has increased dramatically. Five years ago, there were about 200 academies. At the time of writing, there are well over 4,000; covering both the primary and secondary sectors. Of these, about one 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. Sponsors are many – from business leaders, to charities, to independent schools, to religious organisations – but all share this same goal.

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

Last year, the Sutton Trust examined this issue for the first time, in its widely-read report, *Chain effects*. It found that, while some chains had seen significant improvement (as compared to the average for all mainstream schools – maintained and academies), there were also those where improvement was possible. 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.

The report suggests that, while there have been some outstanding performers, many chain sponsors, despite several years in charge of their schools, continue to struggle to improve the outcomes of their most disadvantaged students. While converter academies, as you might expect, perform significantly better than other mainstream secondary schools, sponsored academies still lag behind.

The distance left to travel has been thrown into starker relief by the government's recently released definition of 'coasting schools': schools that have failed to improve significantly across three years. If we were to apply that definition to the chains analysed in this report for 2014, some 44% of the schools within these chains would be below the requisite level, with 26 out of 34 chains having at least one school in this group.

At the same time, we are pleased to see that some recommendations of last year's report have been acted upon. Last year, we called for greater empowerment of Ofsted to undertake formal inspections of academy chains, supported by DfE statistics dedicated to chain performance. Over the last year, we have seen some welcome moves towards these objectives. 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, and Dr Philip Kirby, the Sutton Trust Research Fellow.

Sir Peter Lampl
Chairman of the Sutton Trust and of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)



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 as the best method for fostering professionalism, value for money and school-to-school collaboration – and hence the best way of working to improve the performance of previously struggling schools and the educational outcomes of their often disadvantaged pupils. However, there has been very little analysis of the success or otherwise of this policy strategy in impacting positively on the attainment of disadvantaged young people.¹
2. Last year's *Chain Effects* study set out to address this gap, analysing school performance data to review how well disadvantaged pupils achieve in academy chains. This report re-runs our analysis from that report, this time based on 2014 exam results. As previously, we included chains in our analysis only if they had at least three academies in 2014, and at least two sponsored secondary academies for a three year period from September 2011. This means that academies are included in our analysis only when there has been sufficient time for the sponsor chain to have some impact on performance.
3. We reviewed outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in sponsored secondary school academies across a range of measures, including progress in English and mathematics, and the English Baccalaureate, in addition to the main measure of five good GCSEs or equivalents including English and mathematics. This is intended to reflect the stronger focus on academic subjects taken by the last and previous governments, and the change in emphasis in the league tables from 2016.
4. Our analysis reveals six key points:
 - Overall, in comparison with the national figures for all secondary schools and academies ('mainstream schools'), the sponsored academies in this analysis have lower inspection grades and are twice as likely to be below the floor standard. In 2014, 44% of the academies in the analysis group were below the government's new 'coasting level' and 26 of the 34 chains that we have analysed had one or more schools in this group.
 - There is very significant variation in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, both between and within chains. Some 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.
 - Our longitudinal analysis suggests an exacerbation of this trend. The contrast between the best and worst chains has increased in 2014. Some chains with high attainment for disadvantaged pupils have improved faster than the average for schools with similar 2012 attainment. In contrast, the lowest performing chains did significantly less well over the period 2012-14 than schools with similarly low 2012 attainment. In other words, chains at either end of the spectrum have further 'pulled away' from the majority in relation to the attainment of their disadvantaged pupils.
 - Although results for young people with low prior attainment have generally fallen across all school types, on average the fall was less dramatic for chains than for other types of school, and a few chains succeeded in significantly improving the attainment of this group, an important demonstration of value. However, half the chains did less well than the mainstream school average (the average of all state-funded schools and academies).
 - Since 2012, the academy chains in this study have reduced their use of equivalent qualifications, but their use in sponsored academies remained above the national average in 2014. On average, they still underperformed on the EBacc measure; nevertheless a few chains strongly outperformed other school types on the EBacc, and several more had dramatically improved results against this measure. More than half the chains exceeded the national average figure for pupils making progress in English.
 - When analysed against a range of Government indicators on attainment, a majority of the chains analysed still underperform the mainstream average on attainment for their disadvantaged pupils. As in 2012, while some of those below the average are continuing to improve, others are not.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For policy makers:

1. The Department for Education (DfE) should expand its pool of school improvement providers beyond academy sponsors, including developing new school-led trusts and federations, particularly if it is to address the growing focus on coasting schools.
2. In approving and commissioning sponsorship, the DfE and regional schools commissioners (RSCs) should specify and operate clear, rigorous criteria for all sponsors and other school improvement providers based on quality, capacity, strategic model and track record.
3. New chains should not be allowed to expand until they have a track record of success in bringing about improvement in their existing academies.
4. Since our last report, Ofsted has had its ability to inspect chains extended but this falls short of the formal powers they enjoy over academies individually and other education providers. Ofsted should be empowered to undertake formal inspections of academy chains, and to make judgements on their provision, based on clear criteria.
5. The DfE should also continue to sharpen and make more transparent its accountability process for sponsors, and regional commissioners must act to remove academies from failing chains. As more academies are moved between chains, the DfE must ensure transparency to ensure that the fates of these schools can be tracked, and improvement ensured.
6. Funding agreements for new sponsors should be shortened to five years from seven. And the government should not renew funding agreements where improvement has not been demonstrated.
7. The DfE should include a measure of progress for disadvantaged pupils in their definition of coasting schools, to be applied to all school types.
8. Where free schools form part of academy chains this should be made clear on the DfE's list of free schools, in order that any analysis can include all the schools in each chain.
9. The government should learn and spread the lessons from successful chains. It should commission robust research on the practices of those chains that are providing transformational improvement for their disadvantaged pupils, so that lessons of success may be spread throughout the system.
10. The government should create a taskforce comprised of senior and middle leaders from chains demonstrating significant success to act as mentors to those sponsors struggling to realise their potential.

For sponsors and schools:

11. Sponsor chains – but especially those needing to improve – should seek out successful practice and reflect on what their own chain could learn from it, and encourage this outward-facing approach among practitioners at all levels within their academies. In particular, multi-academy trust directors should ensure there are clear lines of responsibility and accountability for school improvement and performance within the chain.
12. There is growing evidence on the most effective strategies for school improvement, including the Sutton Trust/ Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Toolkit, which focuses on effective strategies to improve results for disadvantaged students. Sponsors and schools should make full use of this growing body of evidence to improve pupil outcomes.

Both our reports show that the best academy chains are succeeding in transforming the educational outcomes of their disadvantaged students. Indeed this latest report shows that several have built further on already exceptional results. However, worryingly, some academy chains previously identified as failing to improve the lives of their disadvantaged pupils have fallen back further since our last report. The analysis shows the imperative to learn from effective practice and to act firmly with those chains that urgently need to improve their results. It also provides further evidence that sponsorship is not a panacea for improvement: the Government must take a more open-minded approach to school improvement, to ensure that struggling schools and academies are best supported to improve, thereby improving the life chances of the young people they serve.

INTRODUCTION

Successive governments have promoted academy sponsorship as a way to promote the educational achievement of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The new government is pledged to continue encouraging schools to join sponsor chains by maintaining existing policy to require schools identified as 'failing' to become sponsored academies; and most recently through the Education and Adoption Bill's intention to extend this requirement to maintained schools identified as 'coasting'. The DfE claims 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."²

The sponsored academies programme was announced by the Labour government in 2000, growing in pace during the latter part of the decade, and further accelerated by the Coalition government since 2010. As the academies programme has developed, policymakers have promoted academy chains (usually Multi Academy Trusts, where a school or other organisation sponsors a group of schools). This arrangement has been seen as best fostering professionalism, value for money and school-to-school collaboration; and hence best working to improve the performance of previously struggling schools, and the educational outcomes of their (often disadvantaged) pupils. Until 2014, there has been very little analysis of the success or otherwise of this policy strategy in positively impacting the attainment of disadvantaged young people.³ In last year's report, we set out to address this gap, investigating which academy chains have had most success in advancing the outcomes of low income students. The report analysed which academy chains had raised attainment and progress for disadvantaged students, and which had not, and made recommendations to government accordingly.⁴

This report represents the Sutton Trust's aim to continue this analysis on an annual basis, providing scrutiny of the extent to which academy chains are fulfilling their intended purpose in supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

BACKGROUND

Education is key to the government's social mobility agenda. The education system is expected to prepare young people with the knowledge and skills they need to secure successful futures as workers and citizens, and to delineate merit through success in exams. Yet the evidence shows that in England, schooling at best replicates and at worst exacerbates existing inequality.⁵

As we observed in our first report, children from low socio-economic groups are already behind their more advantaged counterparts when they begin school.⁶ But far from narrowing this gap, the gap widens through school.⁷ Educational outcomes remain closely correlated with social class.⁸ Despite the policy attention to this issue, the gap has remained largely consistent in recent years: there is evidence of some narrowing for primary school outcomes, but the gap at secondary level remains stubbornly stable, having narrowed by one percentage point since 2007, from 28% to 27%.⁹

These differentiated outcomes cannot be solely attributed to the education system: family income, job prospects, health, housing, social capital and social culture are all important. Analysis suggests that schools contribute only between 7% and 20% of the variability in pupil outcomes.¹⁰ But system-level factors are also well documented, including the high levels of social segregation in the UK system,¹¹ with the result that disadvantaged pupils are often concentrated in schools judged to be poorer quality.¹² Hence those most in need tend to be those least likely to access good educational provision, facing 'double-disadvantage'.

These problems demand that we:

- Ensure that access to the best schools is equally available to all;
- Improve poor schools to ensure all provision is of a high standard.

Previous and current governments have sought to address the second point via the establishment of sponsored academies.

2.1 WHAT THE GOVERNMENT IS TRYING TO ACHIEVE THROUGH THE ACADEMIES PROGRAMME

The academies programme was instigated by the Labour government in 2000, with the opening of the first 'City Academies' in 2002. These academies replaced schools with a history of underperformance, located in areas of social deprivation, and represented an effort to resource and revitalise these schools for the benefit of their (disadvantaged) students.¹³ This focus on revitalising England's lowest performing schools was diluted with the Coalition government's drive to turn many of the most successful schools into academies¹⁴ through its 'conversion' programme.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the Coalition simultaneously enacted its pledge to maintain and significantly develop the sponsored academy programme; continuing to encourage struggling schools to voluntarily join a sponsor; and forcing underperforming schools to become academies. As noted above, the new Conservative government is maintaining and extending this approach, seeking to broaden the category of local authority schools eligible for mandatory academy sponsorship, through the identification of 'coasting' schools.

Outcomes for the sponsored academy programme have been mixed,¹⁶ and the impact on pupil achievement remains a topic of controversy and debate;¹⁷ although there have been emerging positive findings for the early wave of 'City Academies'.¹⁸ There have also been differing findings on the success of sponsored academies in narrowing

ATTAINMENT GAPS 2014

- There was a 27 percentage point gap for Free School Meals in the key indicator of 5 A*-C including Maths and English at GCSE.
- Only 9.7% of those eligible for Free School Meals achieved the English Baccalaureate, compared to 26.6% of all other pupils.
- Only 6% of those pupils not achieving Level 4 for Key Stage 2 achieved 5 A*-C including Maths and English at GCSE.

socio-economic gaps for attainment. The National Audit Office¹⁹ found that, although early sponsored academies tended to raise attainment overall, the gap between more disadvantaged pupils and others had grown wider on average in academies than in comparable maintained schools. Machin and Silva (2013) found no beneficial effects of sponsored academies on 'the tail' of low attainers (among whom disadvantaged students are over-represented). However, analysis by the DfE²⁰ shows more positive outcomes and a slight narrowing of the gap for pupils on free school meals (FSM), especially in sponsored academies open the longest. Hutchings et al (2014) showed that on average, academies in chains achieve higher attainment than 'standalone' academies.

What the government is trying to achieve via encouragement of the development of academy chains

Chains and groups of schools have been encouraged by successive governments, to mitigate risks associated with 'standalone' academies, and to facilitate the school-to-school support integral to the notion of a self-improving system. (For a full account of the rationale and history of the development of academy chains, see Academies Commission, 2013). According to the DfE (2015), just over half of all academies are now in a chain (53%). And, representing a very recent trend, converter academies comprise over half of the DfE's pool of approved sponsors.

Hill²¹ asserts the potential benefits of academy chains, but also notes some risks, including lack of a clear mission, introversion and overstretch of capacity.²² Such concerns have been aired further in relation to the problems experienced by some larger chains: expert commentators have suggested that academy chains were allowed to – and even encouraged by the DfE to – expand too rapidly, and/or across too wide a geographical area.²³ Likewise, there are debates about the role and impact of academy chains on the notion of autonomy at the heart of the academies programme. Nevertheless, sponsor chains have been a lynch-pin of Coalition academies policy; first the scale-up of the philanthropic sponsor model facilitated by the DfE's academy brokers in the early years of the Coalition administration; and later through its encouragement of school-led sponsorship.²⁴

The impact of chains remains relatively uncharted. Notable contributions include Chris Cook's early analysis for the *Financial Times* in 2013, our own *Chain Effects* report for the Sutton Trust (2014), and – importantly – analysis of the performance of chains against the performance of local authorities, by the DfE (2015b). This latter appeared as a response to recommendations from the Education Select Committee (2015) for the DfE to publish its data on chains; a recommendation repeating our own call in last year's *Chain Effects* report. While many were actively encouraged to expand rapidly in the early years of the Coalition government, as a result of the enormous increase in numbers of academies, capacity challenges rapidly became evident, with 25 academy chains 'paused' and prevented from further expansion in 2014.²⁵ This DfE list was subsequently reduced to 14 chains,²⁶ but there have also been well-publicised cases this year of schools being 'removed' from chains, due to lack of improvement.²⁷ In spite of the overt intention of the sponsored academies programme to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged young people, there has been little attention to the effectiveness of different chains in raising attainment for disadvantaged pupils: the Sutton Trust *Chain Effects* report of last year remains the only investigation specifically focused on this topic.

2.2 ACADEMIES AND CHAINS: THE CURRENT PICTURE

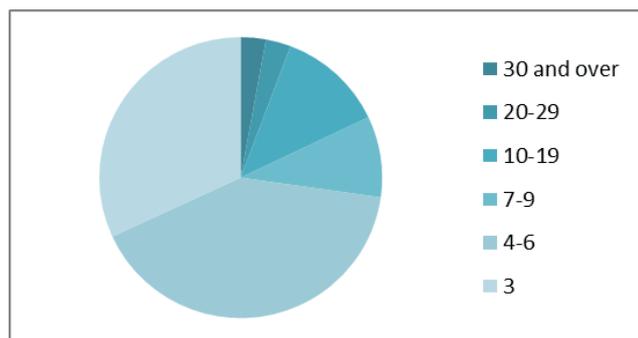
Academies are publicly funded schools, independent from the local authority. In May 2010, there were 203 academies. The academy list published in June 2015 shows 4,276 (primary, secondary and special schools). The incentivising of maintained schools to convert to academy status through the offer of autonomy, specific freedoms and a generous funding calculation in the early years of the Coalition administration²⁸ led to an astonishingly rapid expansion of the programme: 61% of maintained secondary schools in England are now academies or free schools.²⁹ Despite continued policy and media attention focusing on sponsored academies and free schools, the vast majority of academies are now converter academies. In June 2014, the DfE list included almost 4676 academies, of which only 30% (1404 academies) were sponsored. This growth in the number of academies had less impact on the primary sector, although numbers are increasing: 14.5% of all primary schools were academies in January 2015.³⁰

In June 2014 we identified 192 chains that fit the revised DfE definition³¹ of a group of three or more academies

with a single sponsor; in June 2015 there are 279. Academies within these groups may be formally linked as multi-academy trusts, but this is not the case for all of these 'chains'. They are extremely varied; the largest has 67 schools (June 2015) but the majority are very much smaller, with half consisting of only three or four schools (Figure 1). A further 158 sponsors have two academies each (of which at least one is a sponsored academy), and 91 sponsor just a single academy.

In comparison with the picture in June 2014, almost twice as many academies are now in chains of ten or more schools.

Figure 1: Number of chains by size of chain, 2015 (279 chains)



Source: DfE (2015)

A further source of complexity is that many academy sponsors have also set up free schools, which essentially are managed in the same way as academies. However, the list of free schools that the DfE provides³² does not routinely identify the sponsors, though these are sometimes evident in the school names.³³ This means it is not possible to bring together for analysis all the academies and free schools in each chain.

This hints at the complexity involved in any discussion of academies, chains, and other types of schools in the contemporary English system. As we recounted in our previous report, and as the Education Select Committee has concurred,³⁴ 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. Applying measures to schools that have often adopted academy status only very recently, or to chains that have been in very rapid development and contain a mixture of school-types, can lack validity. Nevertheless, it is this terrain that this report attempts to chart. 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.

2.3 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

So 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 (as indicated primarily by eligibility for free school meals).

Our previous report sought also to explore what the successful sponsor chains have in common, and what they are doing to achieve their success. This issue is beyond the scope of this report; however, in the absence of alternative sources, we reiterate the recommendation that the DfE urgently commission robust research to address this vital question.³⁵

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 THE ACADEMIES INCLUDED IN THE ANALYSIS

This research is concerned with outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in secondary sponsored academies. 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, following the DfE usage). However, we acknowledge that in some cases these are not organised as chains, and that 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.³⁶ And as previously, we have analysed the results only of academies that have consistently been part of the chain for three years prior to results (now shifting our sample to include those that have been part of a chain since September 2011). While this inevitably limits the number of academies and chains included in the analysis, we have done this because the majority of pupils taking GCSEs in 2014 in these academies will have undertaken at least the most recent three years of their secondary education within the chain, and so it seems reasonable to relate their outcomes and progress to the chain.³⁷ However, we have not included chains where only one secondary sponsored academy was part of the chain for the whole period since September 2011, because this would result in taking the performance of a single school as representing the chain as a whole. Similarly, we excluded chains where only one academy had pupils taking GCSEs during the period from September 2011.

The chains included in the analysis group are listed in Table 1,³⁸ which also shows the number of schools for which we were able to analyse data for the whole period, together with the total number of academies in the chain in June 2014 (including converters, and primary and special schools).³⁹

Table 1: Chains and numbers of academies included in the analysis

Chain	No of academies in analysis	Total academies June 2014	Chain	No of academies in analysis	Total academies June 2014
Academies Enterprise Trust (AET)	13	76	Grace Foundation	3	3
The Aldridge	3	4	Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust	3	22
Archdiocese of Southwark	2	9	Haberdashers' Aske's Federation	3	5
ARK Schools	5	23	Harris Federation	10	25
Barnfield Education Partnership Trust	2	3	Landau Forte Charitable Trust	3	5
Brooke Weston Trust	3	8	Learning Schools Trust	3	4
Cabot Learning Federation	5	11	Leigh Academies Trust	3	6
CFBT Education Trust	2	16	The Mercers Company	2	3
City of London Corporation	2	3	The Midland Academies Trust	2	3
The Co-operative Group	2	6	Oasis Community Learning	12	39
Creative Education Academies Trust	2	8	Ormiston Academies Trust	14	29
David Meller	2	3	Outwood Grange Academies Trust	2	11
David Ross Education Trust	2	25	School Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA)	5	44
Diocese of Oxford	3	8	The Priory Federation of Academies Trust	4	4
Diocese of Salisbury Academies	2	19	UCAT	2	8
Dixons Academy Trust	2	3	United Learning	17	36
E-ACT	12	31	Woodard Academies Trust	4	5

Notes on Table 1

1. Archdiocese of Southwark has been included because the June 2014 DfE list shows it as including all the schools which in 2013 were listed as Kent Catholic; however, on some DfE lists Archdiocese of Southwark has just two schools and the remainder are identified as Kent Catholic so it is unclear whether this should be considered as a single chain or not.
2. Both E-Act and AET lost schools following DfE decisions in February 2014. However, most of these schools were not allocated to new sponsors until after the GCSE exams. We have included schools that were part of the chain until the end of May 2014 when GCSEs were taken. One of these subsequently left the chain on June 1, and others in September 2014.
3. The Society of Merchant Venturers has been omitted because three of its schools (one secondary and two primary) are run by CGS Trust, with Merchant Venturers as a 'supra-sponsor' while the other secondary school appears to be directly sponsored by Merchant Venturers.

3.2 THE DATA

The data used in this report are mainly derived from the DfE school performance database for schools in England.⁴⁰ There have been a number of changes to performance data which mean that the figures for 2014 cannot be directly compared with those for previous years. These include changes in the list of qualifications that can be counted as GCSE equivalents, a move to linear exams, and changes to the English GCSE.⁴¹ The effect of these changes is that nationally the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A*-C GCSEs or equivalent including English and mathematics (5A*CEM) was lower in 2014 than it was in 2012.

In this report, we are concerned with attainment in 2014 and change between 2012 and 2014, as compared with the change nationally. Thus we are reviewing whether each chain has improved more (or worsened less) than the national figures, rather than the actual percentage point change. These comparisons are with the performance of all state-funded mainstream secondary schools, including both maintained schools and academies.

The figures for chain level performance have been calculated from the relevant attainment measure, such as percentage of students attaining 5A*CEM for each sponsored secondary or all-through academy consistently present in the chain for the three academic years (2011-12, 2012-13, and 2013-14). We have used the average for each academy, weighted by the absolute number of pupils of the relevant type (all pupils, disadvantaged pupils, or non-disadvantaged pupils).

We have also calculated the averages for the following groups, and used them for comparison:

1. all mainstream secondary schools;
2. the entire analysis group: sponsored secondary or all-through academies in chains which have been consistently in the same chain since September 2011 (N = 156);
3. solo sponsored secondary academies: those not in a chain or pair which were under the same sponsor throughout the period from September 2011, and had attainment data for each year (N=65);
4. all sponsored academies: whether in a chain, a pair or solo, which have existed since September 2011 (N = 303);
5. converter academies: those secondary schools that have consistently been converter academies since September 2011 (N = 679);
6. all London secondary schools (N = 421): 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 been collected from 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). These are again the weighted average of the figures for each school in the chain.

The main indicator of disadvantage we have used is the DfE definition (pupils who have been eligible for free school meals at any time from Year 6 to Year 11).⁴²

3.3 LIMITATIONS

Research focusing on academy chains is inevitably limited by the ongoing and rapid growth in the number of academies and chains. An analysis of past attainment has to focus on the chains and schools that existed a few years ago. This is necessary so that pupils will have experienced a sufficient part of their education within the chain, and attainment can fairly be attributed to the work of the academy and the chain (rather than to the predecessor school). While in June 2014 there were 106 chains with at least three schools including a secondary sponsored academy, only 34 of these met the criteria to be part of our analysis group.

Moreover, of the 34 chains included in our analysis, 14 had only two secondary academies open throughout the period we are analysing. This is obviously a limitation. One school having particular difficulties could change the chain's data substantially. On the other hand if researchers do not analyse chain performance until a chain has had at least three schools for at least three academic years, very large numbers of pupils would have benefited or been

disadvantaged before anyone drew attention to this. Some of the newer chains have already grown substantially yet only two schools have existed long enough to be included in this analysis. We have italicised the names of these 14 chains throughout the text of the report and on tables so that readers are clear which they are. On graphs we have the names of the larger chains in capitals to show the distinction.

This research focuses entirely on secondary sponsored academies. Sponsored academies are deliberately the focus because part of the rationale for creating them was that they would improve the attainment of pupils in deprived areas. We have not included primary sponsored academies simply because few have been in existence long enough. The first primary sponsored academies opened in September 2011, but numbers were very small in the first year, and it is only since 2012 that numbers have increased rapidly. It will be some time before it is possible to identify the long term effect of the chains on primary level attainment.

3.4 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

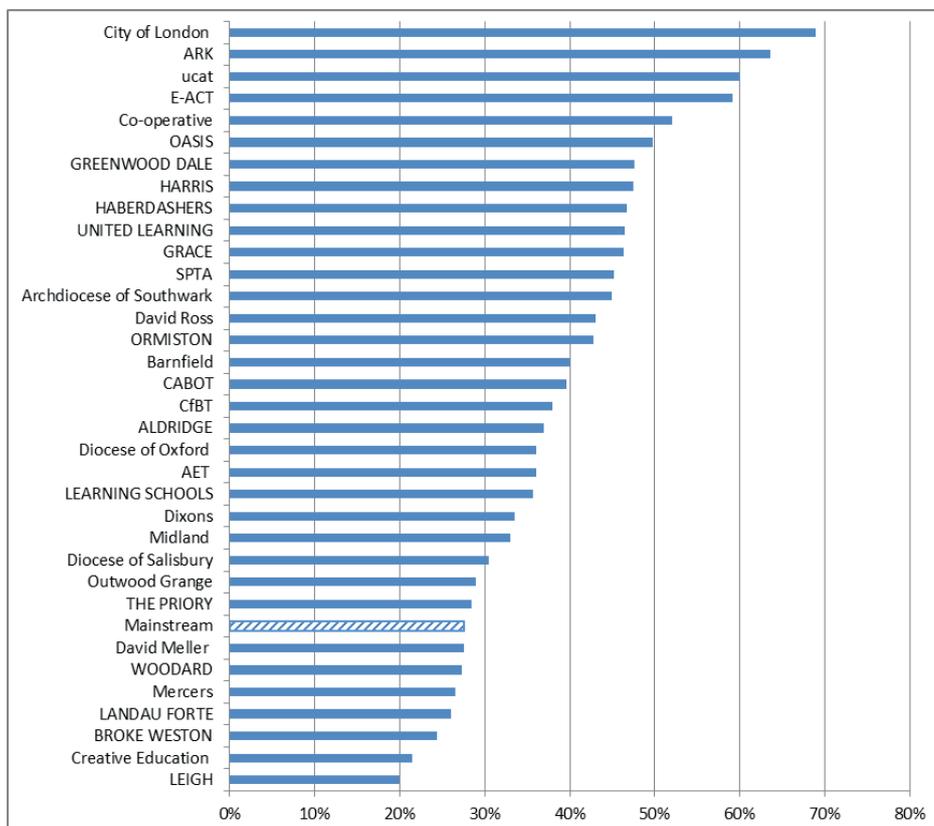
In the next section, we review various characteristics of chains that may impact on their performance. After that, we analyse the attainment of disadvantaged pupils within the analysis group, identifying the chains that over the period from September 2011 to June 2014 have been most effective in relation to improving disadvantaged pupils' attainment. We then review the characteristics of the most and least successful chains. The final section discusses the findings and sets out recommendations.

4. CHAIN CHARACTERISTICS THAT MAY IMPACT ON ATTAINMENT

This section identifies a range of chain characteristics that may impact on attainment. When comparing the attainment of pupils in different schools, pupil characteristics have been identified as having a key 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 also birth date within the school year, as well as prior attainment.⁴³ 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'. A key aspect of the creation of sponsored academies was the assumption that they would 'break the cycle of disadvantage'.⁴⁴

The **pupil intakes of schools** within the analysis group of chains vary considerably. Figure 2 illustrates this for the proportion of disadvantaged pupils, the specific focus of this report. Nationally, 27% of all pupils are defined as 'disadvantaged'; the figures for the analysis group of chains vary from 20% to almost 70%.

Figure 2: Mean percentage of Year 11 pupils in schools in analysis group who are disadvantaged (2014)



Source: Authors' analysis based on School Performance Tables⁴⁶

Note: on this and subsequent graphs, those chains shown in capital letters have three or more schools included in the analysis, while those in lower case have only two.

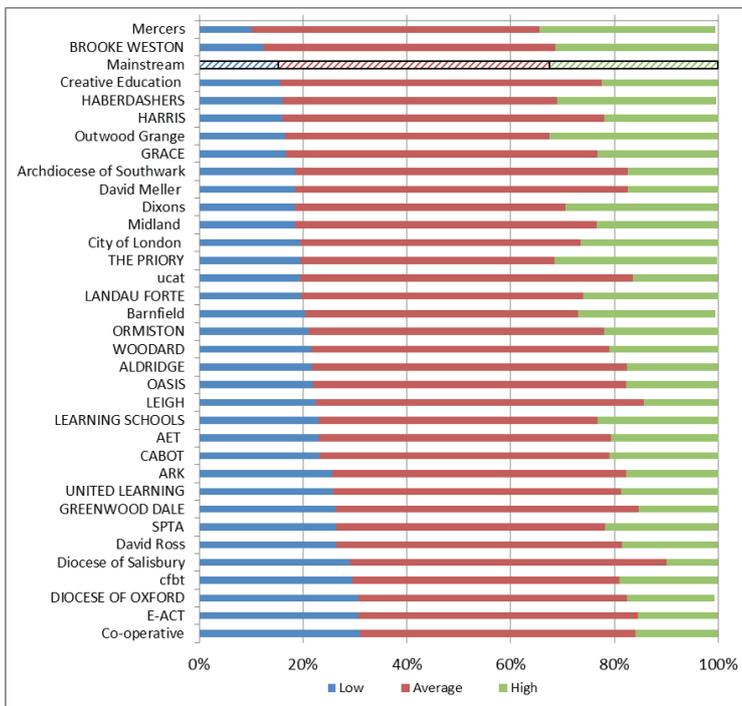
This shows that, by and large, sponsor chains are retaining their intended purpose of serving disproportionately disadvantaged demographics (including a few with double or more the average number of disadvantaged students).

Another important pupil characteristic is prior attainment. The DfE statistics distinguish three groups of pupils; those whose attainment at Key Stage 2 (KS2, normally the end of primary schooling) was average (i.e. they achieved Level 4 in National Curriculum tests); below average (achieved below Level 4) and above average (achieved Level 5 or above). In 2014, the percentages of pupils in each of these groups achieving 5A*CEM at age 16 varied widely:⁴⁷

Primary attainment	% nationally who achieved 5A*CEM
low	6.0
average	51.1
high	92.8

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

Figure 3: Proportions of pupils in each academy chain whose prior attainment was low, average and high taking GCSE in 2014



Source: Authors' analysis based on School Performance Tables

Again, we can see from Figure 3 that chains continue to include higher than average numbers of pupils with low prior attainment, and, generally, lower numbers of pupils with high prior attainment.

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. Thus 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.

In our previous report, we reviewed many other chain characteristics that might potentially impact on a chain's success. These included:

- the history and growth of the chain;
- the total number of schools;
- the form the chain takes (multi-academy trust, umbrella trust or looser configuration);
- the nature of the sponsor (e.g. successful school, business, diocese, faith or non-faith based charitable organisation, corporate sponsor, further or higher education institution, philanthropic individual);
- the geographical distribution of the schools (nationally dispersed or within a specific area);
- whether the chain is concentrated in London, where average attainment across all types of school is consistently higher than it is outside London;
- the characteristics of the schools prior to becoming academies (while the majority were 'failing' schools, some were city technology colleges or independent schools and others are new schools);
- the mix of schools within the chain (many chains include converter academies as well as sponsored; and primary as well as secondary);
- the leadership of the chain including the degree of central direction and the arrangements for school improvement;
- the extent to which individual schools have additional sponsors not listed on the DfE list.

A more detailed discussion of all these factors can be found in our previous report (Hutchings et al, 2014).

5. OVERVIEW OF ANALYSIS GROUP CHAINS AND SCHOOLS AT THE END OF 2013-14

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 against a range of accountability measures.

5.1 OFSTED

First we consider the most recent Ofsted overall judgement for the school (as at 31 August 2014).

Table 2: Ofsted: in most recent overall effectiveness judgement 31 August 2014

	Outstanding %	Good %	RI %	Inadequate %
Schools in our analysis group	17	42	27	15
All secondary schools ⁴⁸	21	49	23	6

Table 2 shows that, in comparison to the national pattern, a higher proportion of schools in the analysis group were judged as Requires Improvement (RI) or Inadequate, the two weakest Ofsted judgements; 15% of them were rated Inadequate compared to 6% of all secondary schools. Sponsored academies are, of course, schools facing particular challenges, often with a history of low attainment and/or poor Ofsted grades. However, in that all the academies in our analysis group had been academies for at least three years, and some very much longer, and sponsored academies are intended to receive particular support in improving, these outcomes seem quite disappointing.

Thirteen of the 34 chains in the analysis group included academies judged Inadequate, and 14 included academies rated Outstanding. However, in ten of the 34 chains, all the academies in the analysis group were rated Good or Outstanding. At the other extreme, there were five chains in which all the academies in the analysis group were rated RI or Inadequate (Table 3).

Table 3: Chains grouped by Ofsted's most recent judgement for overall effectiveness as at 31 August 2014 (academies in the analysis group only)

All Good or Outstanding	All RI or Inadequate
ARK Archdiocese of Southwark Cabot CfBT City of London Greenwood Dale Harris Landau Forte Leigh Mercers	Diocese of Salisbury Grace Learning Schools UCAT Woodard

The Education and Adoption Bill currently going through Parliament makes it clear that in future every school rated Inadequate will be turned into an academy. This is 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.⁴⁹

Presumably those academies that are rated Inadequate may be moved to other 'stronger' sponsors.

5.2 FLOOR STANDARDS

A second way of considering the overall standing of a chain is by the number of schools below the floor standard in 2014. A school was deemed to be below floor if:

1. Less than 40 per cent of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 achieved five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grade A* to C, including English and mathematics GCSEs (5A*CEM) and
2. The proportion of pupils making expected progress in English and mathematics was below the median percentage for all state-funded mainstream school. The median school score for pupils making expected progress in English was 74% and in mathematics was 67% in 2013/14.⁵⁰

Nationally 11% of secondary schools were below the floor standard. Of the 156 sponsored academies in the analysis group, 32 (21%) were below floor in 2014.⁵¹ Fourteen of the 34 chains had a least one school in the analysis group (that is, one school that had been consistently part of the chain for at least three years) below the floor standard.

5.3 COASTING SCHOOLS

In the Education and Adoption Bill the Conservative government refer to coasting schools, which, under the provision of the Bill, will be eligible for intervention. A coasting school has been defined as one which falls below a new 'coasting' level for three years. 'In 2014 and 2015 that level will be set at 60% of pupils achieving 5 good GCSEs or an above-average proportion of pupils making acceptable progress. From 2016, the level will be set based on Progress 8.'⁵²

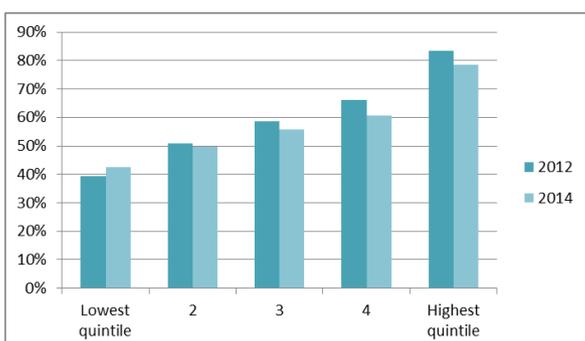
We have reviewed the number of schools in the analysis group which would fall into the coasting category in 2014 (though recognise that the intention is to judge over the results from three years). Of the 156 academies in the analysis group, 68 (44%) were below the 'coasting level' in 2014 and 26 of the 34 chains had one or more schools in this group.

5.4 IMPROVEMENT 2012-14

Thus far the focus has been on 2014 attainment. It is also useful to consider changes over time. Most sponsored academies were created from 'failing' schools with low attainment, so their focus must be on improving attainment in each successive year.

The change in the proportion of pupils achieving 5A*CEM in a particular school partly reflects the school's initial attainment. Those with low initial attainment tend to show greater improvement over time, whereas those with high initial attainment tend to worsen. This is represented on Figure 4a which divides all schools nationally into five groups and shows the average change for each group between 2012 and 2014. As a result of the changes to examinations and performance tables, the graph shows that only those with the lowest attainment in 2012 had, on average, higher attainment in 2014.

Figure 4a: Percentage of all pupils in all mainstream schools achieving 5A*CEM, 2012 and 2014, by 2012 quintile



We have used this notion to review how much each chain's overall performance changed between 2012 and 2014. In 2012, most of the chains in our analysis were in the lowest two quintiles – which reflects the origin of sponsored academies as low-attaining schools

Table 4: Change 2012-14 in the performance of chains in the analysis group on 5A*CEM in comparison to change for all mainstream schools, by quintile (within bands, chains are ranked alphabetically)

Change 2012-14, compared to quintile average	Quintile 1 (lowest attaining quintile in 2012)	Quintile 2	Quintile 3	Quintile 4	Quintile 5 (highest attaining quintile in 2012)
Significantly better		<i>City of London</i>	ARK The Priory	<i>Barnfield</i> Harris	
In line with average for that quintile	<i>Co-operative</i> Dio. of Oxford Learning Schools SPTA UCAT	AET <i>Arch. Southwark</i> Brooke Weston Cabot <i>Creative Education</i> <i>David Meller</i> <i>Dixons</i> Landau Forte <i>David Ross</i> Oasis Ormiston United Learning Woodard	CfBT Haberdashers Leigh		<i>Mercers</i> <i>Outwood Grange</i>
Significantly worse	Aldridge <i>Dio of Salisbury</i> E-ACT Grace	Greenwood Dale <i>Midland</i>			

The purpose of changing a low-attaining school into a sponsored academy is to ensure that it has strong support from school improvement experts and therefore improves rapidly. Table 4 shows that in comparison to all the schools in the lowest attaining quintile nationally, four of the academy chains in our analysis group showed significantly less improvement. However, five chains across quintiles 2-4 improved significantly more than the average for mainstream schools.

5.5 VARIABILITY WITHIN CHAINS

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. This section has already shown that there is considerable variability within some chains in terms of their Ofsted outcomes and attainment. Consider first the 14 chains that include only two sponsored academies that fit our criteria. In two of these chains the two academies were within one percentage point of each other in the percentage of pupils achieving 5A*CEM. But in four of these chains, the difference was more than 20 percentage point. Differences were even greater in the larger chains; in chains with more than ten sponsored academies in the analysis the difference in attainment between the lowest and the highest school in each chain always exceeded 25 percentage points, and in one chain was as much as 50 percentage points.

These differences tend to reflect the different routes through which schools became sponsored academies; one chain included a former private school, five included former City Technology Colleges which became sponsored academies before the converter route was available, and three other chains included academies which had similarly been high-attaining state schools but had chosen to become academies before conversion was possible. In most, but not all cases, these schools still have much higher attainment than the former 'failing' schools. Where chains are relatively small, this does skew the overall attainment figures we are using; The Priory is a key example of this. Another historical difference is between academies that were former failing schools and academies that were created as new schools (today the latter would probably be Free Schools rather than academies).

5.6 OVERVIEW: SUMMARY

This overview highlights considerable variation within and across the chains in our analysis group. Some appear to be flourishing, with good Ofsted grades, schools above the floor target and coasting level, and improving more than others with similar initial attainment. But others are failing to improve, even moving backward relative to the mainstream average. The next section considers how this variation impacts on disadvantaged pupils.

6. OUTCOMES FOR DISADVANTAGED AND UNDER-ATTAINING PUPILS

Disadvantaged pupils include all those known to be eligible for free school meals in the previous six years or are children looked after by the local authority for more than 6 months.⁵³ This is a substantially larger group than the alternative measure (current eligibility for free school meals). It is also the group that is eligible for the government's pupil premium. Whereas some 14% of those taking GCSEs in 2014 were eligible for free school meals (FSM), 27% were disadvantaged. However, the attainment gaps relating to each of these groups are similar in size (Table 5).

Table 5: Attainment at GCSE for FSM and disadvantaged pupils, 2014

	No of eligible pupils	5A*CEM %
Free School Meals (FSM)		
FSM	80,629	33.5
all other pupils	477,815	60.5
Attainment gap		27.0
Disadvantaged Pupils		
disadvantaged pupils	150,466	36.5
all other pupils	407,998	64.0
Attainment gap		27.4

Source: DfE (2015)

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

- five or more A*-C grades in GCSE or equivalent qualifications including English and mathematics GCSE (5A*CEM);
- pupil progress during their secondary school career in mathematics and English;
- average (capped) point score (with and without equivalents); and
- the English Baccalaureate (EBacc).

Further details of these measures can be found in the Appendix, together with information about Progress 8 which will become the main measure to be used in school performance tables from 2016.

As explained in Section 1.2, changes to qualification and to performance tables mean that overall, the percentage achieving 5A*CEM was lower in 2014 than it had been in 2012.

In this section, we also analyse data relating to pupils whose attainment at primary schools was below the expected level (Level 4). Such pupils are disproportionately from disadvantaged groups. Nationally, only 6% of this group achieved 5A*CEM in 2014. We review how successful the analysis group of academy chains have been in producing better outcomes for these pupils.

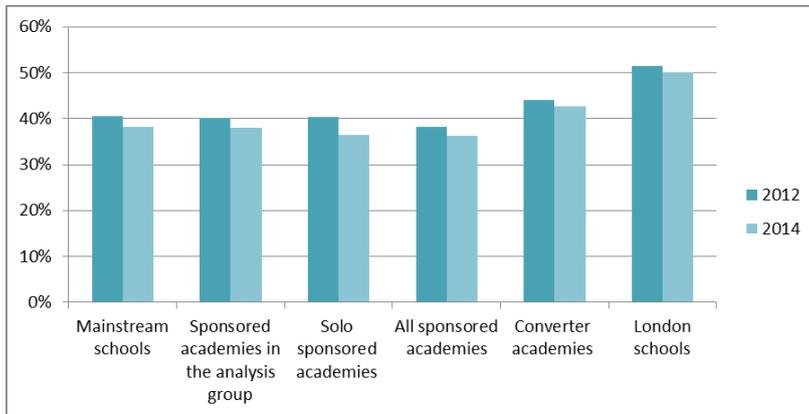
6.1 FIVE A*-C GRADES AT GCSE OR EQUIVALENT

6.1.1 Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected level

Figure 4b shows the mean school percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving 5 A*CEM in 2012 and 2014 in all mainstream schools and in the group of sponsored academies in chains included in this research (the analysis group). There is very little difference between these two groups. Solo academies on average had slightly lower attainment for disadvantaged pupils in 2014, and converter academies higher attainment in each year. This is unsurprising given the criteria for becoming a converter academy.

Figure 4b also includes the equivalent figures for all London schools, where a much higher percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieved 5A*CEM in each year. This indicates the potential for other schools and academies to improve.

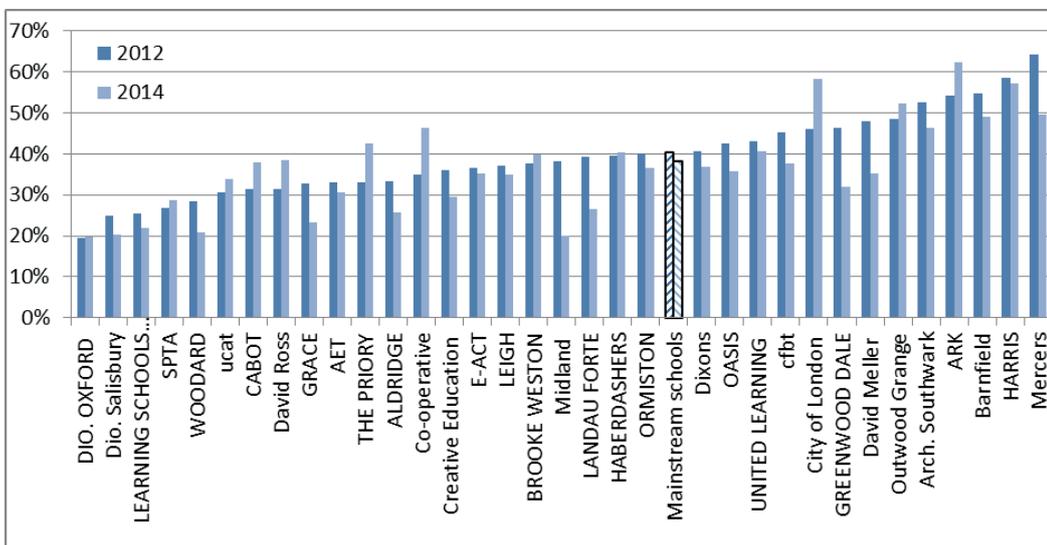
Figure 4b: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving 5A*CEM, 2012 and 2014



Source: Authors' analysis based on School Performance Tables.⁵⁴ Note that in this and subsequent graphs of this type, the four academy groups include only schools that have had that status continually for three years.

Figure 5 shows the mean percentage of disadvantaged pupils in sponsored academies reaching the expected level in each of the chains in the analysis group in 2012 and 2014. In 2012, there was considerable variation across chains. This may relate to the previous history of the schools in the chain, how long they had been academies, attainment in their predecessor schools, or other factors. But the extent to which this figure had increased or decreased by 2014 clearly reflects the effectiveness of the strategies of the chain and the schools that make up the chain in bringing about improvement in the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

Figure 5: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving 5A*CEM, 2012 and 2014

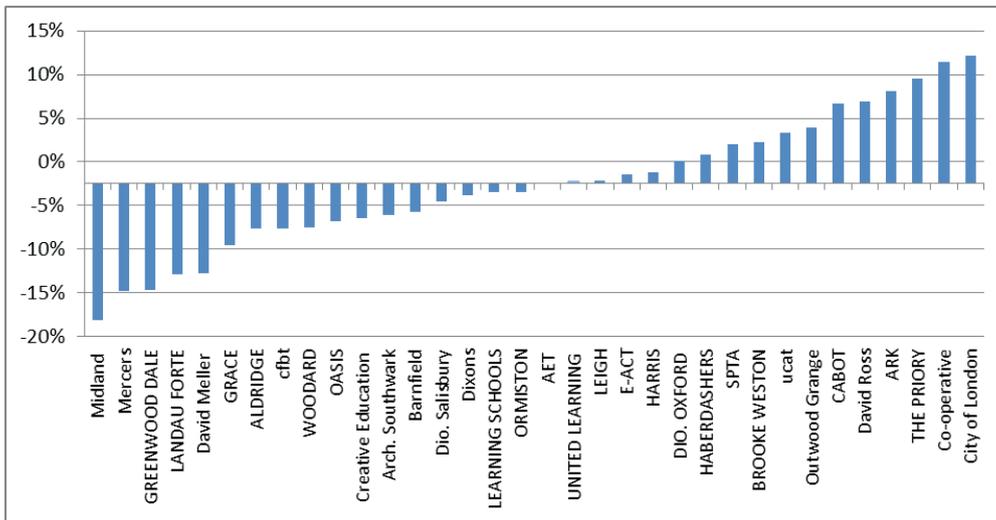


The chains with the highest proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieving 5A*CEM in 2014 were the same six chains as in 2013 (see Hutchings et al 2014):

- ARK;
- Harris;
- City of London;
- Outwood Grange;
- Mercers;
- Barnfield.

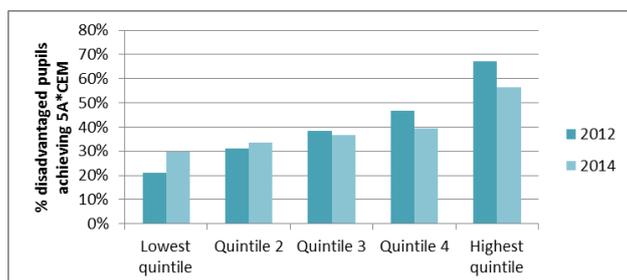
Our main focus is on the change between 2012 and 2014 in comparison with the change nationally. Figure 6 shows that in 2014, 12 of the 34 chains had results for these pupils that exceeded the mainstream average. It also shows that, between 2012 and 2014, in about half the chains in our analysis group, disadvantaged pupils showed either greater improvement (or less fall) in attainment than all mainstream schools (for example, Co-operative, City of London, The Priory), while the other half showed a relative decline in results for their disadvantaged students (e.g. Midland, Mercers, Greenwood Dale).

Figure 6: Change in percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving 5A*CEM between 2012 and 2014 compared with change for all mainstream schools nationally



It would be expected that those with the lowest initial attainment would show the greatest improvement, because it is clearly easier to improve from a low baseline, and this is the pattern normally found: on average, low attaining schools always show greater improvement than high attaining schools. This was illustrated in the quintile analysis for all pupils in Section 3.4. Here we repeat the same analysis, but using only attainment of disadvantaged pupils. This is illustrated in Figure 7. All mainstream schools have been divided into five groups (quintiles) on the basis of the 2012 percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving 5A*CEM. Figure 7 shows the mean 2012 and 2014 attainment for the schools in each quintile, together with the mean improvement made. While the average percentage achieving 5A*CEM increased by 9% in the lowest quintile the three highest achieving quintiles of schools had a lower percentage of pupils achieving 5A*CEM in 2014 than was the case in 2012.

Figure 7: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils in all mainstream schools achieving 5A*CEM, 2012 and 2014, by 2012 quintile



If we then review the performance of the analysis group of chains in this light, it is possible to identify those that improved outcomes for disadvantaged pupils significantly less or more than schools with comparable 2012 attainment (Table 6).

Table 6: Change 2012-14 in the performance of chains in the analysis group on 5A*CEM for disadvantaged pupils in comparison to change for all mainstream schools, by quintile (within bands, chains are ranked alphabetically)

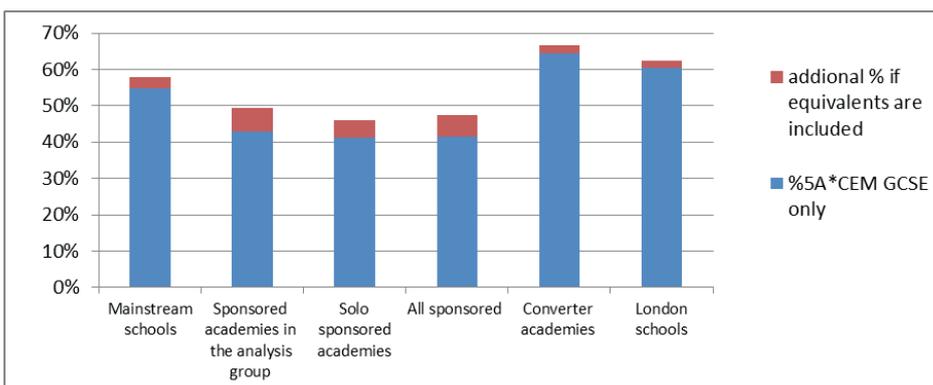
Change 2012-14, compared to quintile average	2012-14, to (lowest attaining quintile in 2012)	Quintile 1	Quintile 2	Quintile 3	Quintile 4	Quintile 5 (highest attaining, quintile in 2012)
Significantly better			<i>Co-operative</i>		<i>City of London</i> <i>Outwood Grange</i>	ARK Harris
In line with average for that quintile			AET Cabot <i>David Ross</i> The Priory UCAT	Brooke Weston <i>Creative Education</i> <i>Dixons</i> E-ACT Haberdashers Leigh Ormiston	<i>CfBT</i> <i>David Meller</i> Greenwood Dale Oasis United Learning	<i>Arch. Southwark</i> <i>Barnfield</i> <i>Mercers</i>
Significantly worse		Dio. of Oxford <i>Dio. of Salisbury</i> Learning Schools SPTA	Aldridge Grace Woodard	Landau Forte <i>Midland</i>		

All the academy chains that fell in the lowest quintile showed less improvement for disadvantaged pupils than the average for all mainstream schools in that quintile. Four of the five chains that improved significantly more than all mainstream schools in their quintile were in the highest two quintiles. Thus rather than a typical pattern of reversion to the mean, the split between low performing and high performing academy chains, in relation to the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, has grown over the period 2012-14.

Previous research on sponsored academies has drawn attention to the extent to which some have relied on alternative 'equivalent' qualifications, rather than GCSEs, to boost attainment figures.⁵⁵ It is clearly important that some high quality vocationally oriented courses are included in the curriculum, and that these may serve to engage less academic pupils. However, it is a concern if pupils are encouraged to take such subjects to enhance their school's position on the league tables, rather than to benefit the pupils themselves.⁵⁶ Concerned about the extent to which equivalent qualifications were taken, the Coalition government vastly reduced the number of equivalent qualifications that would count for the 2014 league tables, leaving only those that demonstrate rigour and have a track record of taking young people into good jobs and higher education.⁵⁷ The recently introduced indicators the EBacc and Progress 8 encourage a focus on GCSEs rather than equivalent qualifications, with the EBacc focused exclusively on specific GCSEs, and Progress 8 requiring the five EBacc GCSEs and three other accepted academic or vocational qualifications.

While the school performance tables give the overall percentage of 5A*CEM GCSEs only (without equivalents), this is not provided for disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils. But it is worth noting that the use of equivalents in sponsored academies in 2014 remained higher than in all mainstream schools, converter academies or London schools (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Mean percentage of 5A*CEM with and without equivalents, all pupils, 2014



However, there was considerable variation between chains in this. Clearly national policy is encouraging schools to focus on GCSEs; some chains which had previously made considerable use of equivalents had made a significant increase in 5A*CEM GCSE only between 2012 and 2014, (for example, ARK, Outwood Grange) resulting in an overall improvement in 5A*CEM. Others showed no change in their GCSE only attainment, but suffered an overall lowering of attainment because so many equivalents no longer count (for example, Diocese of Salisbury, Midland, Grace). A third group had made little use of equivalents in 2012 and so were less affected by the changes (for example, Archdiocese of Southwark, The Priory).

We suggested in our previous report that those with a lower reliance on equivalents might find themselves better positioned to do well in the future, as the focus on GCSEs increases (each year fewer equivalent qualifications will 'count' in the performance tables, and as explained above, Progress 8 prioritises GCSEs). We will return to this issue in relation to the average point score, for which figures for disadvantaged pupils are available.

6.1.2 PUPILS WHO ARE NOT DISADVANTAGED REACHING THE EXPECTED LEVEL

In this section we turn to the other students in academies: those pupils who are not categorised as disadvantaged, a group we call the 'non-disadvantaged'. They are not the main focus of this report, but it is of interest to see whether the chains that have the highest attainment for disadvantaged pupils are equally successful with other pupils.

Figure 9: Mean percentage achieving 5A*CEM in 2012 and 2014: pupils who are NOT disadvantaged

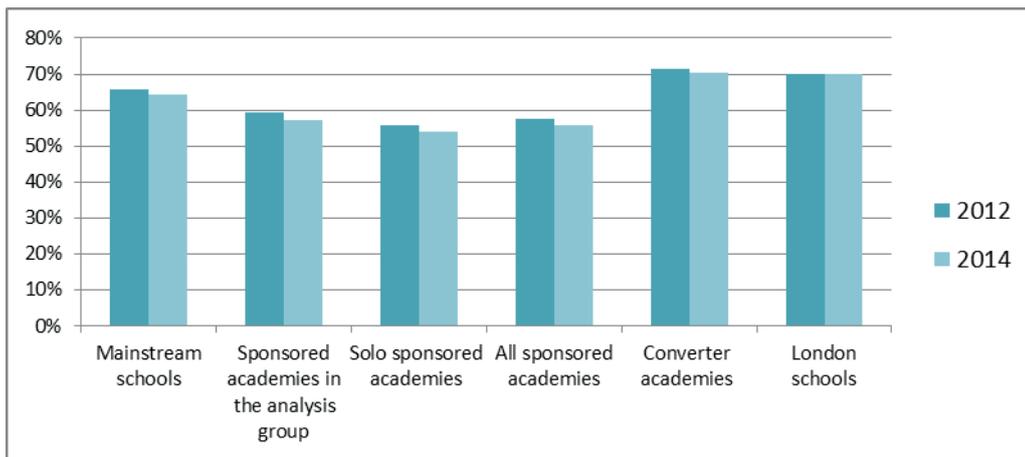


Figure 9 shows that in 2014 the attainment of pupils who were not disadvantaged was lower in sponsored academies than in mainstream schools. A key reason for this lower attainment may be that there is much greater economic diversity among those who are 'not disadvantaged' than there is among the disadvantaged group; sponsored academies are generally located in deprived areas where the families of 'non-disadvantaged' pupils may be only marginally better off than those classed as disadvantaged, and this may impact negatively on attainment. However, it is also possible that some sponsored academies are focusing most of their attention on disadvantaged pupils and neglecting those from more affluent backgrounds; this possibility will be examined by comparing the performance of disadvantaged and other pupils within each chain (the attainment gap).

Figure 10 shows the percentages of non-disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected level in 2012 and 2014 and Figure 11 shows how this has changed, in comparison to the national change.

Figure 10: Percentage of non-disadvantaged pupils achieving the expected level (5A*CEM), 2012 and 2014

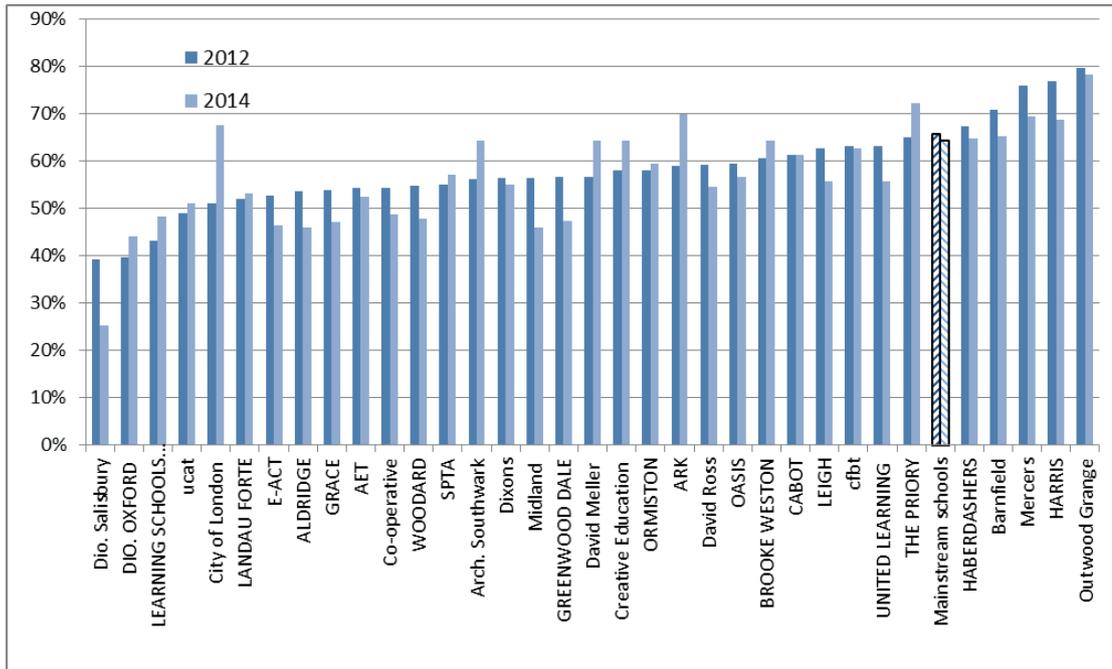
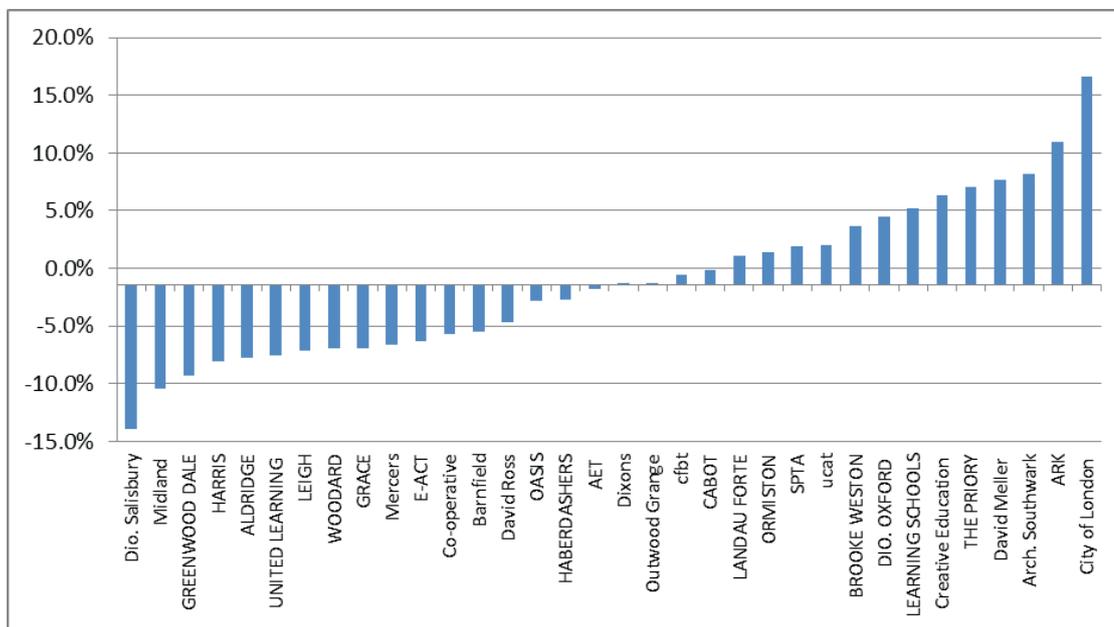


Figure 11: Change in percentage of non-disadvantaged pupils achieving 5A*CEM between 2012 and 2014 compared with change for all mainstream schools nationally



As with the disadvantaged pupils, some of the lower-achieving chains have made substantial improvements between 2012 and 2014, but others show relatively little or no improvement. City of London was below average for pupils who were not disadvantaged in 2012 and 2013, but is now above average, matching its generally high performance across all measures.

Some have also fallen back without having reached the attainment level for all mainstream schools.

Figure 11 shows that most of the chains that achieved the best for disadvantaged pupils in 2014 were also the most

effective for those who are not disadvantaged:

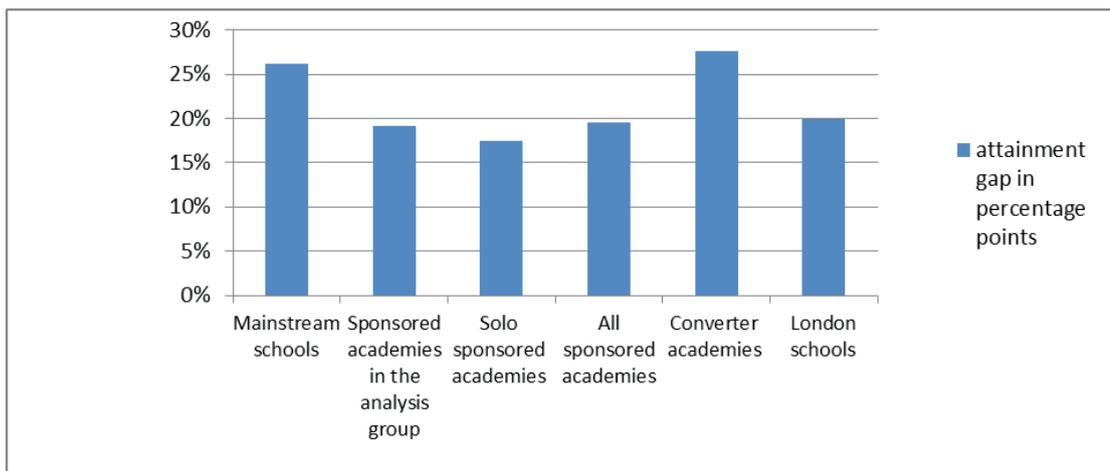
- Outwood Grange;
- The Priory;
- ARK;
- Mercers;
- Harris;
- City of London.

These differences are generally expressed as the attainment gap, to which we now turn.

6.2 THE ATTAINMENT GAP BETWEEN DISADVANTAGED AND NON-DISADVANTAGED PUPILS

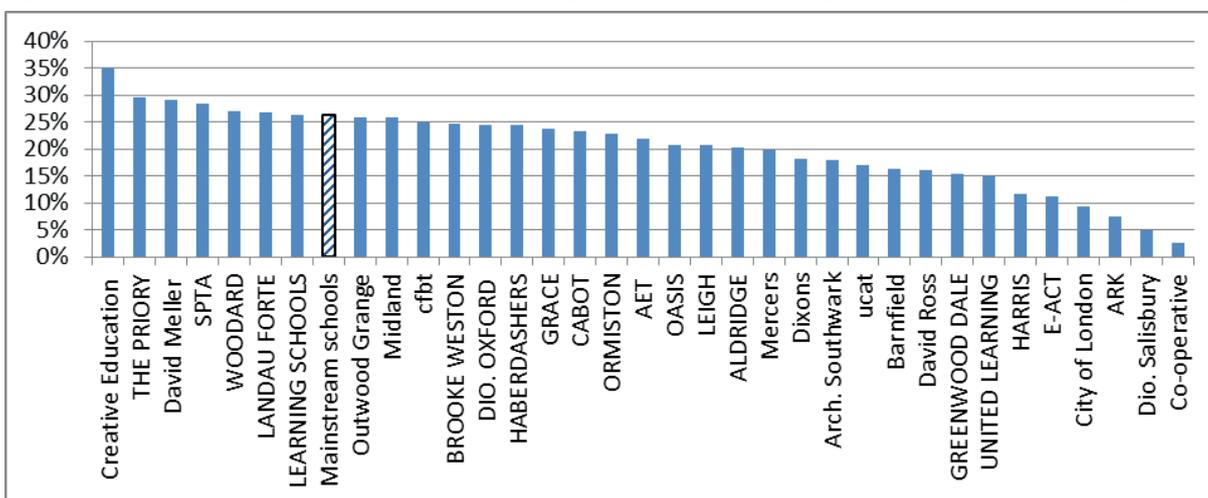
The attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers is a government impact indicator, and reducing the gap is a policy priority. The mean attainment gap in the academies in the analysis group was substantially smaller than the gap for all mainstream schools (18.8% v 25.7%).⁵⁸ This is perhaps not unexpected because the gap is generally much smaller in urban areas, and most sponsored academies are urban. However, the gap in solo sponsored academies was smaller than that of the analysis group (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Mean attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils, 2014



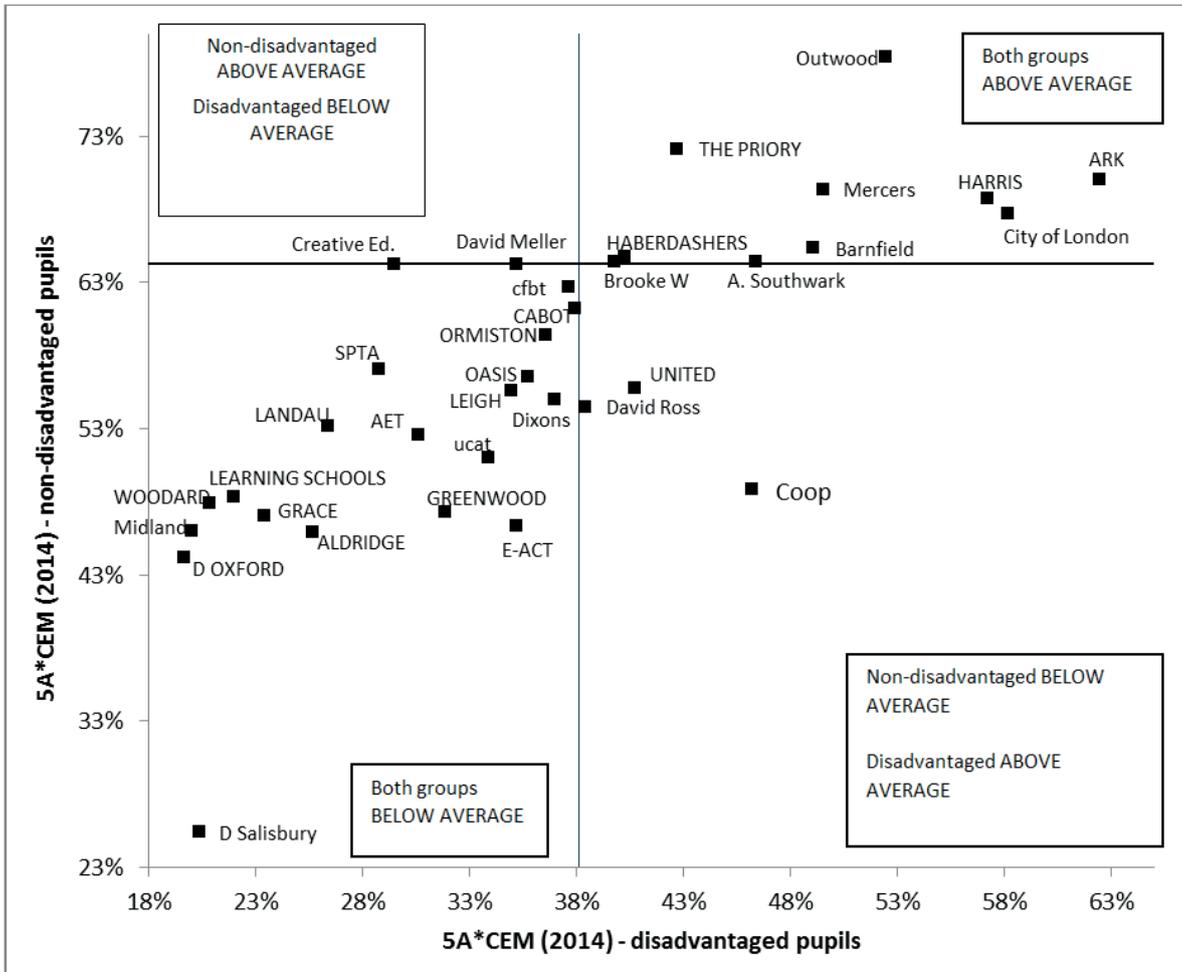
Of more interest is the variation in the gap across academy chains; this ranged from over 30% for one chain down to just 3% for another.

Figure 13: Mean attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils 2014 in analysis group chains



While the size of the gap clearly matters, this figure is of little use without knowing the level of attainment of each group. There is little merit in having a small attainment gap if the non-disadvantaged pupils are underachieving. On Figure 14, therefore, we have mapped the percentages of disadvantaged and other pupils achieving 5A*CEM in each chain, and also showed how they compare with the figures for all mainstream schools.

Figure 14: Percentage achieving 5A*CEM: disadvantaged pupils compared to other pupils



Note: the plotted lines show mean performance for all mainstream schools on each measure

It is important to keep in mind that the economic status of the 'non disadvantaged' group varies significantly between localities and schools. However, as suggested earlier, it is also possible that some chains may be prioritising their efforts to raise the attainment on those who are disadvantaged.

When we consider only those chains that were above the national mean for both disadvantaged and other pupils, the chains with the narrowest attainment gaps were ARK, City of London and Harris (7.6, 9.4 and 11.5 percentage points respectively).

6.3 PROGRESS IN ENGLISH AND MATHEMATICS

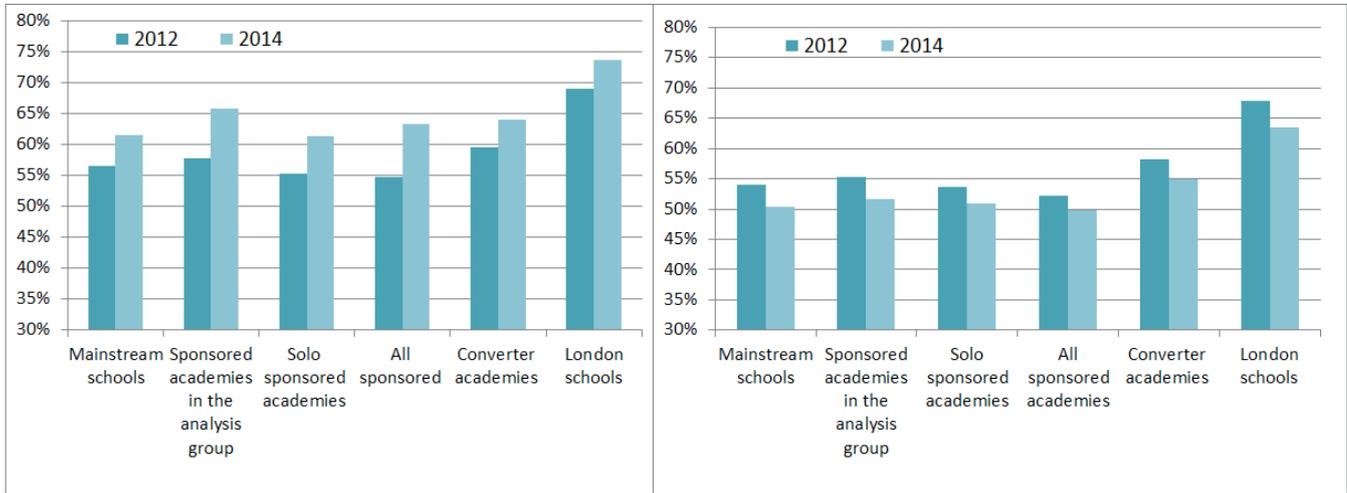
Figure 15 shows that disadvantaged pupils in our analysis group made, on average, slightly better progress in English than did all mainstream schools. In 2012, a higher percentage of pupils made the expected progress in English than in mathematics, and Figure 15 shows that the percentage achieving the expected progress had improved further by 2014 in English, but not in maths.



Figure 15: Mean percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving expected progress, 2012 and 2014

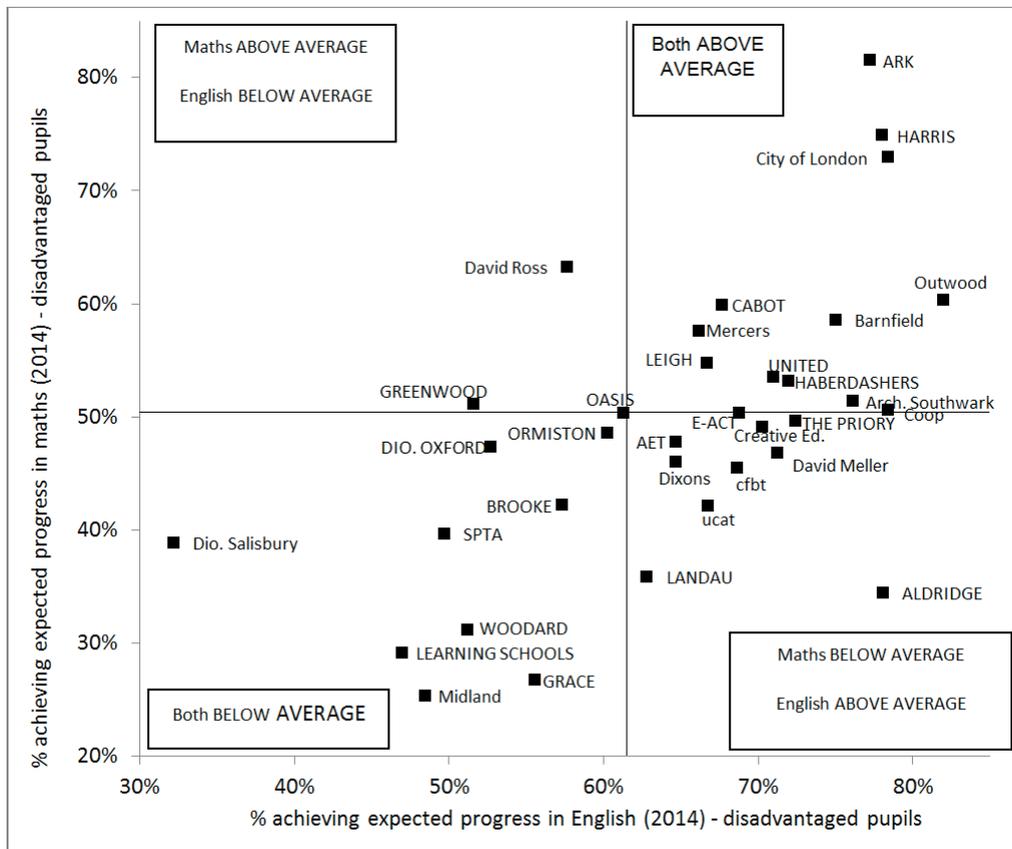
ENGLISH

MATHEMATICS



Since our analysis group is of schools that have been sponsored academies since September 2011, and have remained in the same chain throughout that period, it would be expected that the chain has had an impact on the progress of the pupils taking their GCSEs in 2014, as the majority of them will have spent three years in that chain. Yet Figure 16 shows a considerable difference between the highest and lowest proportions of disadvantaged pupils making expected progress in English and mathematics in the chains in the analysis group.

Figure 16: Mean percentage of disadvantaged pupils making expected progress in English compared to mathematics 2014



The chains in which the proportions of disadvantaged pupils making progress in English and mathematics are above average are generally those very much the same as those with high proportions of disadvantaged pupils achieving 5 A*CEM: Harris, ARK and City of London are the best. Other chains where pupils make above average progress in both subjects are Outwood Grange, Cabot, Barnfield, Mercers, Leigh, United Learning, Haberdashers and Archdiocese of Southwark.

The pattern shown here is very similar to that in our previous report; however, disadvantaged students in the Cabot Learning Federation made much greater progress in 2014 than had been the case in 2013, moving it from the below average quadrant to the above average quadrant.

6.4 AVERAGE CAPPED POINT SCORE

6.4.1 Disadvantaged pupils' average capped point score

Capped point score, like 5A*CEM, fell between 2012 and 2014 as a result of changes to the school performance tables. Figure 17 shows that in 2012, the average capped point score for disadvantaged sponsored academies in the analysis group was slightly higher than that for all mainstream schools, but by 2014, this was reversed, with sponsored academies doing slightly less well than all maintained schools.

Figure 17: Average capped point score for disadvantaged pupils 2012 and 2014

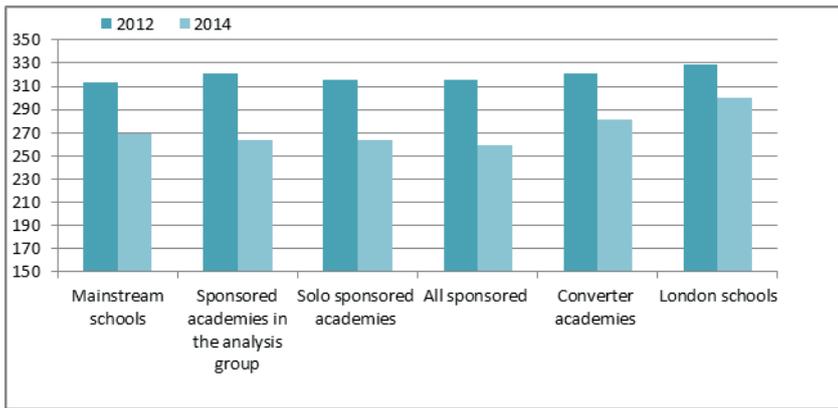
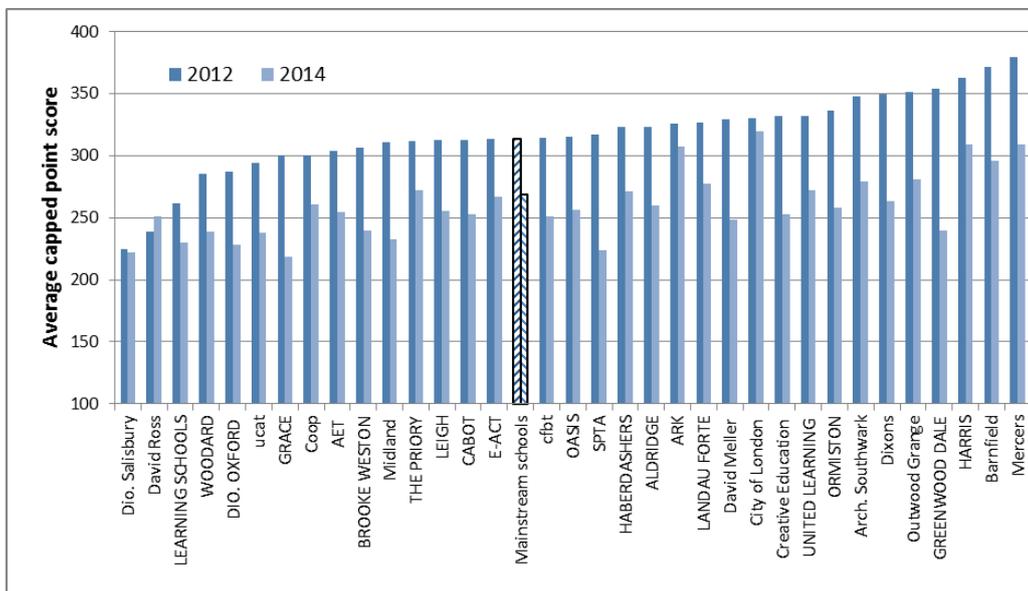


Figure 18 shows the 2012 and 2014 point scores for the analysis group chains.

Figure 18: Average capped point score achieved by disadvantaged pupils, 2012 and 2014: chains in the analysis group



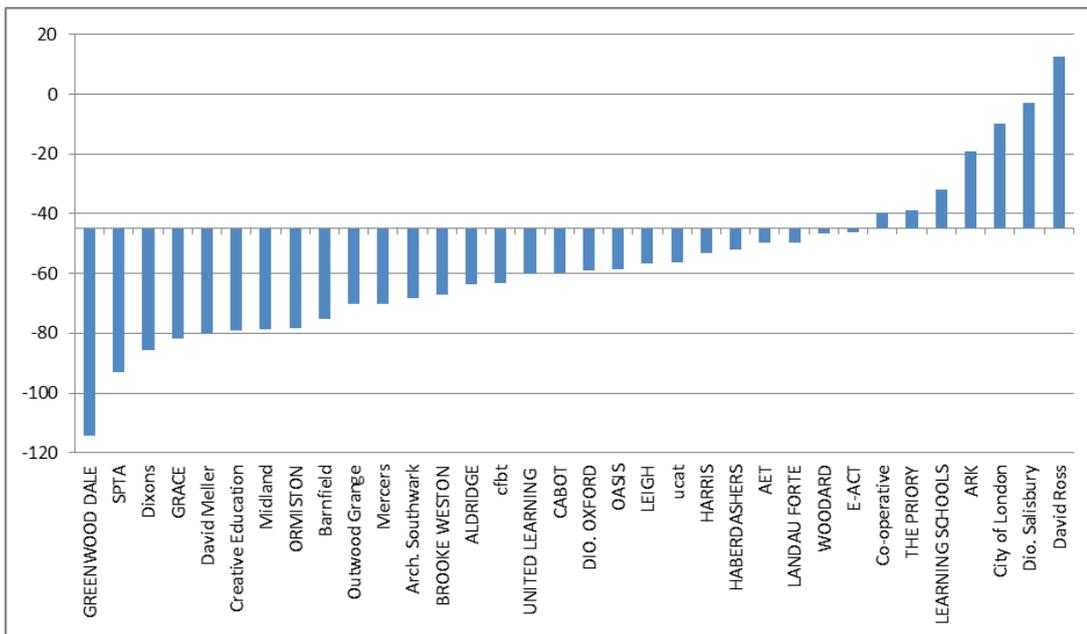
While almost every chain had very much lower point scores in 2014 than in 2012, the highest average capped point scores in 2014 were achieved by

- City of London
- Harris
- Mercers
- ARK
- Barnfield

Three of these chains also had the leading point scores in 2012.

Figure 19 shows the change in point scores for disadvantaged pupils between 2012 and 2014. While only one chain actually increased its point scores (David Ross, which had been one of the lowest in 2012), and just seven chains 'improved' more than all mainstream schools.

Figure 19: Change in point scores for disadvantaged pupils between 2012 and 2014 in comparison to mainstream schools



Overall, the capped point scores for chains in the analysis group chains are low in comparison to national figures, and have fallen by more than is the case nationally. When we compare the mean percentage of pupils achieving 5A*CEM and the mean average (capped) in score for each chain in the analysis group, there is a strong correlation. However, for a few chains there are greater differences: Some did rather better on average (capped) point score (Landau, Barnfield, City of London, Aldridge). This may reflect a policy in the latter chains of encouraging pupils to take a broader curriculum (point score is calculated on the best eight GCSE or equivalent grades), rather than concentrate only on achieving 5 A*-C grades. This strategy should have a positive impact on league table outcomes when the new Progress 8 measure is introduced from 2016.

A few chains are ranked very much higher on percentage of pupils achieving 5A*CEM than on capped point score (Mercers, Brooke Weston, SPTA). This could suggest a strategy focused on enabling pupils to achieve the necessary grades in five subjects, rather than on a broader curriculum (taking eight subjects).

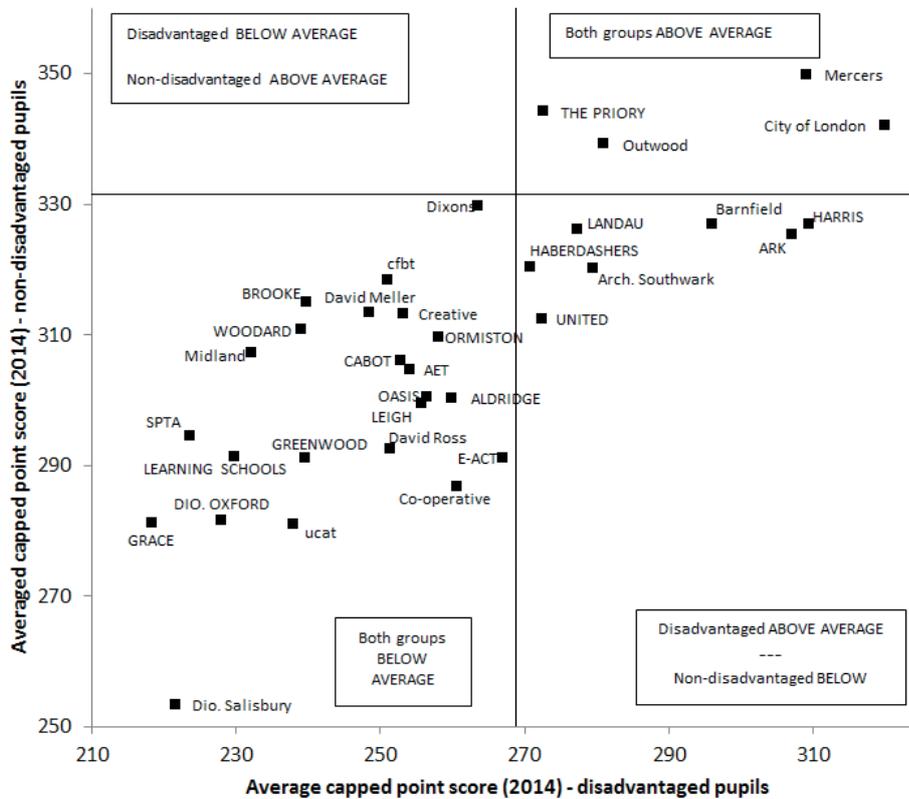
6.4.2 Non-disadvantaged pupils and the attainment gap using average capped point score

The average capped point score for those students who are not disadvantaged was also low in comparison to mainstream schools; just four chains exceeded the average mainstream capped point score.

Figure 20 compares the attainment of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils using average capped point score. It is thus comparable to Figure 14 which looked at the percentage reaching the expected level.



Figure 20: Average (capped point score) - disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils, relative to the mean performance of these groups in mainstream schools



Note: the plotted lines show mean performance for all mainstream schools on each measure

6.5 AVERAGE GCSE CAPPED POINT SCORE

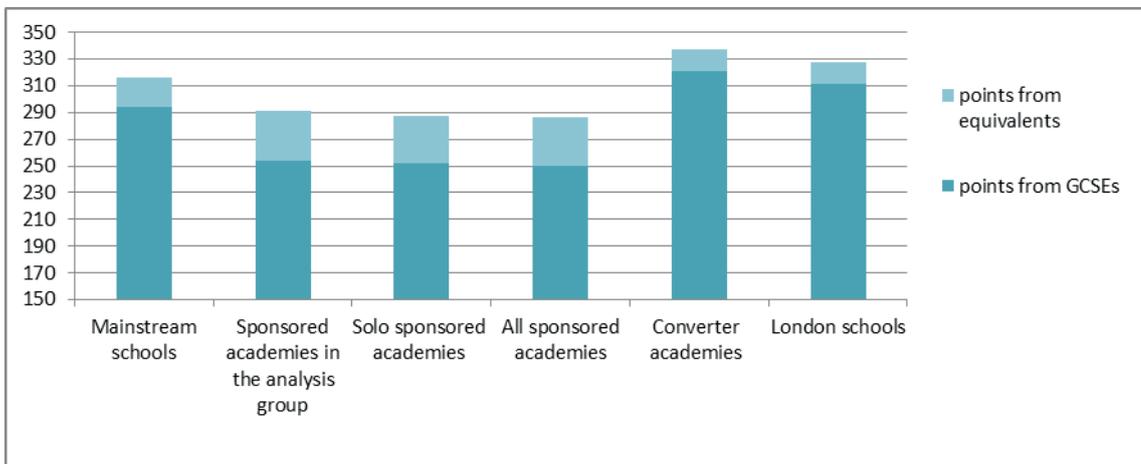
As discussed earlier, sponsored academies in general made much greater use of 'equivalent' qualifications, which are not as rigorous as GCSEs,⁵⁹ but boosted their position on league tables. In 2014, the least rigorous vocational qualifications could no longer be counted in the league tables, so overall, the proportion of points from equivalent qualifications dropped substantially. The decision to enter a student for vocational qualification may be in their best interest; however, as more equivalent qualifications will be dropped from the school performance tables over the next two years, use of equivalents may reduce school scores.

The performance tables provide capped point score data with and without equivalents and break this down for disadvantaged and other pupils. This enables us to investigate:

- whether sponsored academies make above average use of equivalent qualifications;
- whether disadvantaged students are taking more equivalent qualifications than other students;
- whether some academy chains are using more equivalent qualifications – and whether this is disproportionately for disadvantaged students.

Figure 21 shows that on average, sponsored academies still offer more equivalent qualifications than mainstream schools, converter academies or London schools.

Figure 21: Average capped point score 2014 with and without equivalents: all pupils



The figures shown on Figure 21 represent a considerable reduction in the use of equivalent qualifications. In 2013, 33% of the points recorded by academies in the analysis group were from equivalents, compared with 17% for all mainstream schools; in 2014 the equivalent figures were 13% and 7%. Thus the use of equivalents has dramatically reduced as a result of the various policy changes outlined in Section 3.2.

Using the capped point score data, we are able to investigate whether equivalents are disproportionately taken by disadvantaged pupils. Nationally a higher proportion of the total point score of disadvantaged students came from equivalents in 2014 (12% for disadvantaged v. 6% for other students). In the analysis group of academies, a higher proportion of the points come from equivalents, but this is the case for both disadvantaged and other pupils (16% v. 11%).

Figure 22 shows the average point score with and without equivalents for disadvantaged pupils.

Figure 22: Average capped point score 2014 with and without equivalents: disadvantaged pupils

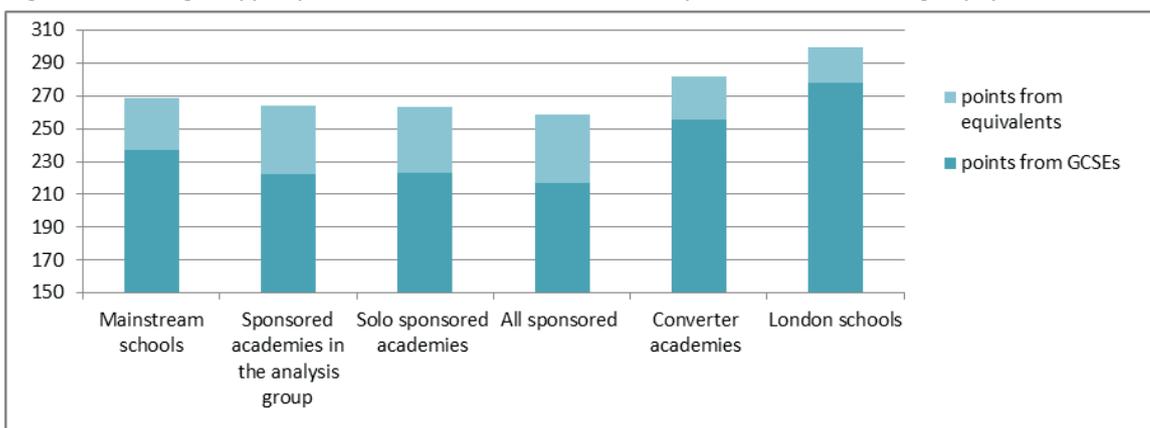
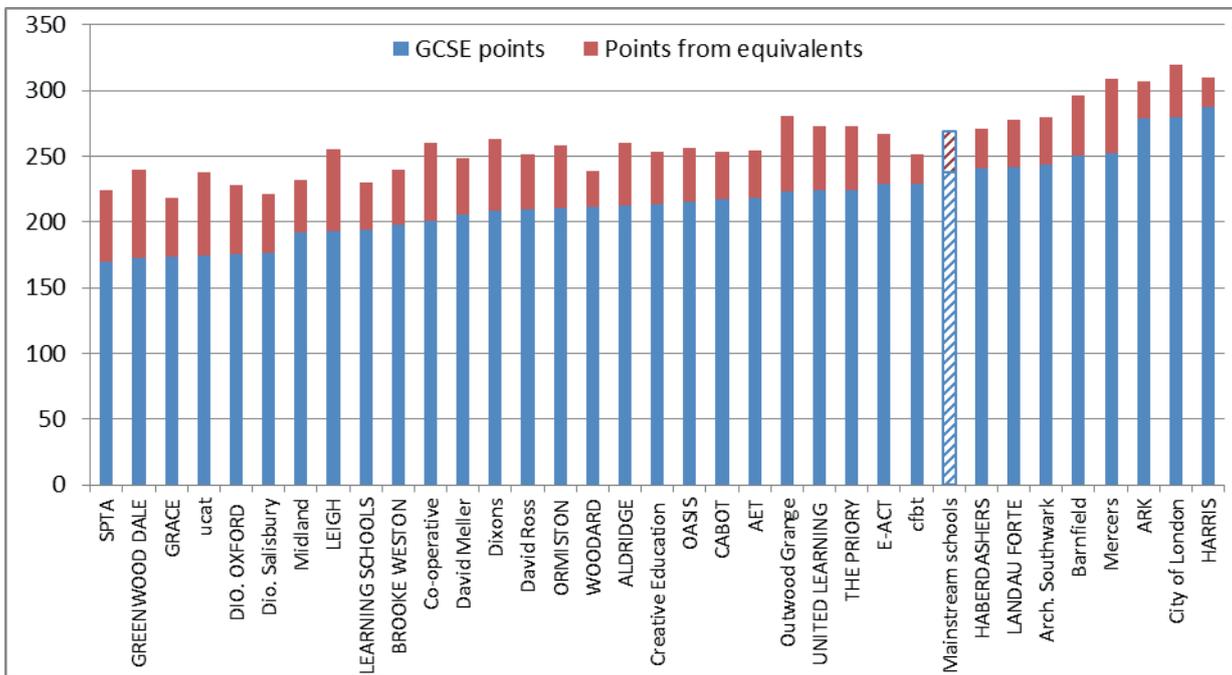


Figure 23 then shows the 2014 average capped point score for disadvantaged pupils in sponsored academies in each chain, with and without equivalents.

Figure 23: Average capped point score for disadvantaged pupils with and without equivalents: chains in the analysis group



It shows that there is some variation across chains in the extent to which equivalent qualifications are taken by disadvantaged pupils. Across all mainstream schools the average percentage of points from equivalents was 12% for disadvantaged students. In London schools, this figure was just 7%. Only five chains had less than 12% of total points from equivalents (ARK, CfbT, Haberdashers, Harris and Woodard). However, in ten other chains more than 20% of points came from equivalents.

In general, the chains that had the highest proportion of the total points from equivalents in 2013 are still well above average, and those that had the lowest proportions have maintained that position.

Most of the chains with a high percentage of points from equivalents for disadvantaged pupils also had a higher than average percentage for other pupils; very few chains seemed to use equivalents disproportionately for disadvantaged pupils.

High use of equivalents for both disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils
Greenwood Dale
UCAT
Leigh
Co-operative
Diocese of Salisbury
Diocese of Oxford
SPTA
Dixons
Grace

When we consider the points achieved from GCSEs alone, the most successful chains are those that come out as most successful throughout the report: Harris, City of London, and ARK.

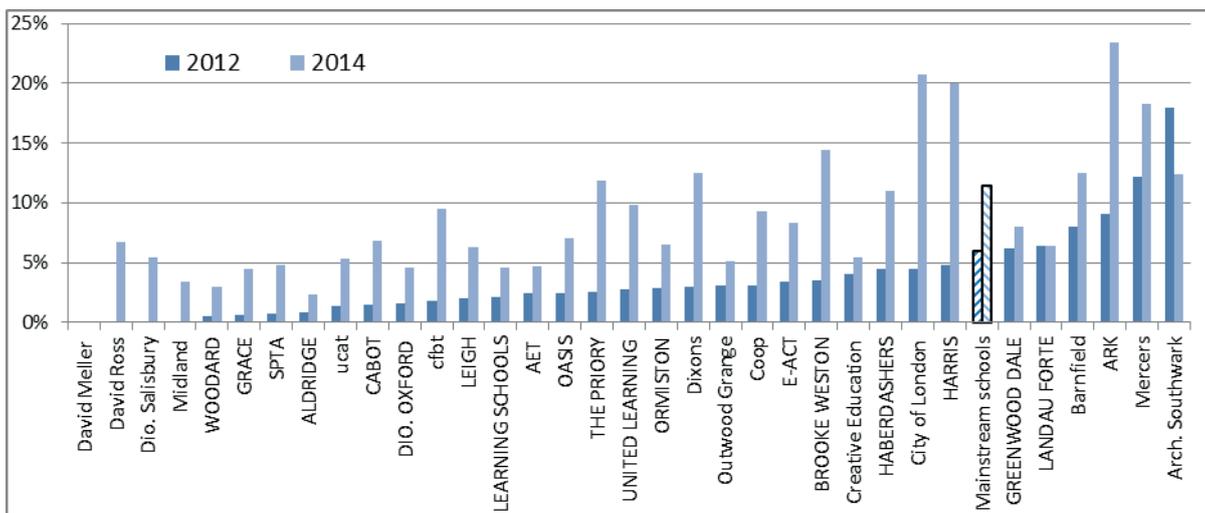


6.6 EBACC

6.6.1 Disadvantaged pupils achieving EBacc

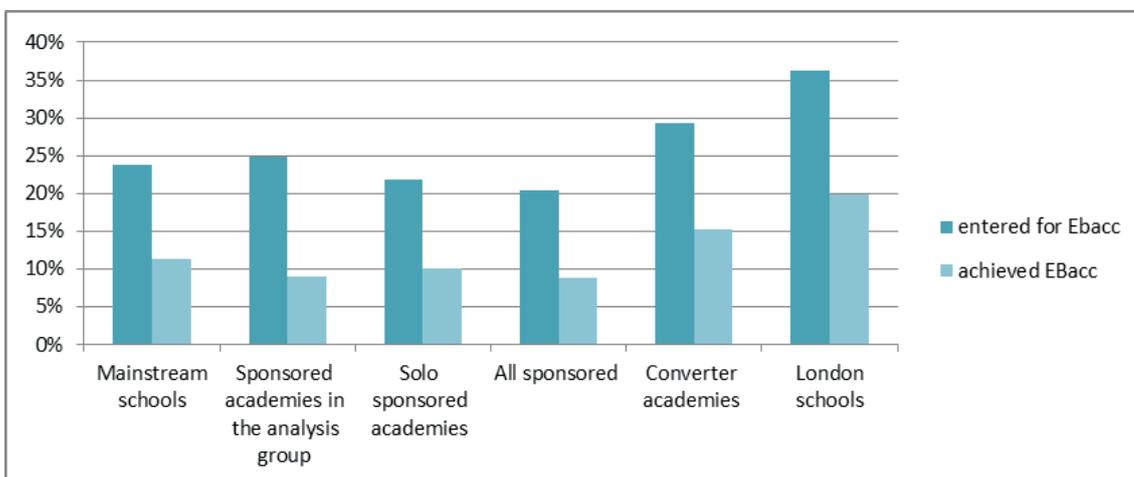
We have also reviewed the data relating to percentage of pupils achieving the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). The EBacc is a measure of success in academic subjects – including English, Maths, Science, languages and history or geography – that the government is now planning to require all students to study. The 2014 data (Figure 24) shows that in some (but not all) chains, there was a considerable increase in the percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving EBacc between 2012 and 2014. There is also considerable variation between chains, ranging from almost a quarter of disadvantaged pupils in ARK achieving the EBacc, to none at all in David Meller.

Figure 24: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving EBacc in chains in the analysis group 2012 and 2014, compared with all mainstream schools



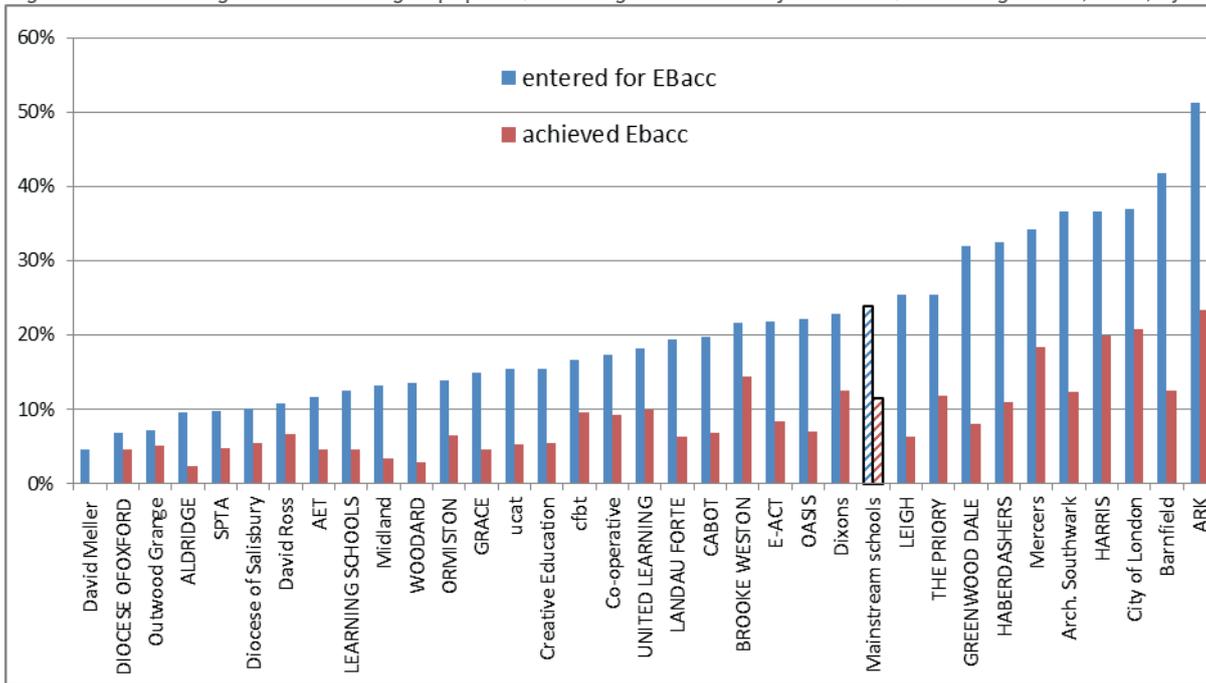
A better indicator of how chains are addressing the policy changes through which EBacc subjects are becoming much more important⁶⁰ is the percentage of pupils entered for all EBacc subjects. Nationally, about twice as many pupils are entered for all EBacc subjects as achieve EBacc. Figure 25 shows that sponsored academies in the analysis group entered a higher percentage of pupils for EBacc than all mainstream schools, though a lower percentage achieved EBacc. Interestingly, those sponsored academies in chains on average enter a higher percentage of pupils than other sponsored academies.

Figure 25: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils a) entering all EBacc subjects and b) achieving EBacc, 2014



However, there is considerable variation across chains, ranging from ARK which entered more than half its disadvantaged pupils for all EBacc subjects to David Meller which entered less than 5% (Figure 26).

Figure 26: Percentage of disadvantaged pupils a) entering all EBacc subjects and b) achieving EBacc, 2014, by chain

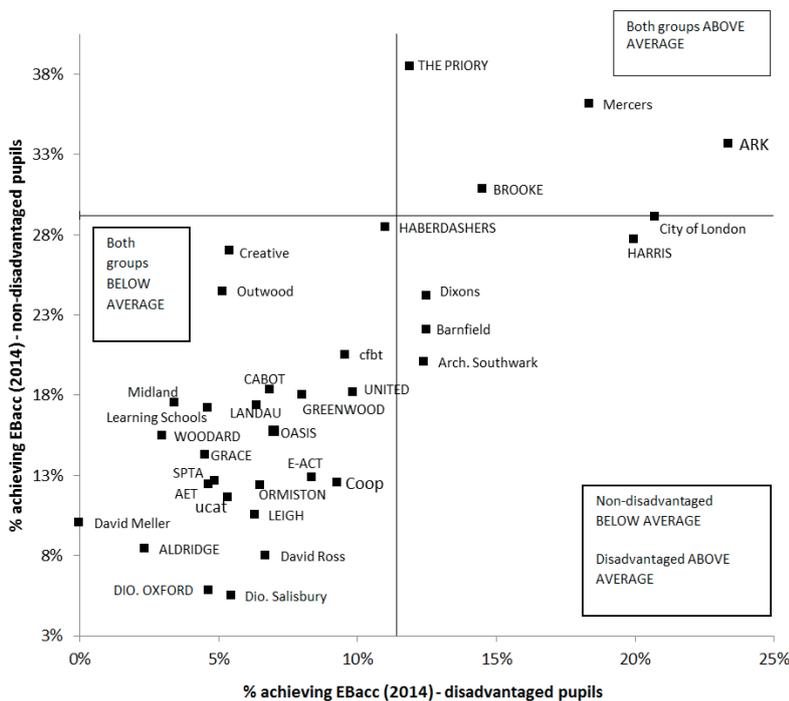


6.6.2 Non-disadvantaged pupils and the attainment gap using EBacc

The percentages of non-disadvantaged pupils achieving EBacc for chains in our analysis group were generally below the national average in 2013.

Figure 27 compares the EBacc outcomes of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils and so is comparable to Figures 14 and 20 which presented equivalent data for 5A*CEM, and for average point score. Since the analysis group were generally below the national average on EBacc, particularly for non-disadvantaged pupils, only four chains performed above average for both groups.

Figure 27: Percentage of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils achieving EBacc, relative to the mean performance of these groups in mainstream schools



Note: the plotted lines show mean performance for all mainstream schools on each measure



While there has been an increase in the percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving EBacc in the analysis group of academy chains, and there are some notable high performers, most chains are well below the average for all mainstream schools on this measure. Given the policy premise of the EBacc – a focus on facilitating social mobility by securing access to those ‘high status’ subjects that best secure access to elite universities and professions – it is encouraging to see that many chains appear to be focusing on this measure. That a few are not may be a cause for concern.

6.7 PUPILS WITH LOW ATTAINMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

In this section we review the secondary school attainment of those pupils who did not achieve the expected level (Level 4) at age 11. In 2014, nationally only 6% of this group achieved 5A*CEM at secondary school, compared to 51% of those who achieved Level 4 and 93% of those who achieved level 5 or 6.

Clearly improving outcomes for the lowest achieving pupils, who are often also disadvantaged, is important for promoting life chances.

Figure 28: Percentage of pupils whose prior attainment was below Level 4 achieving 5A*CEM, 2014

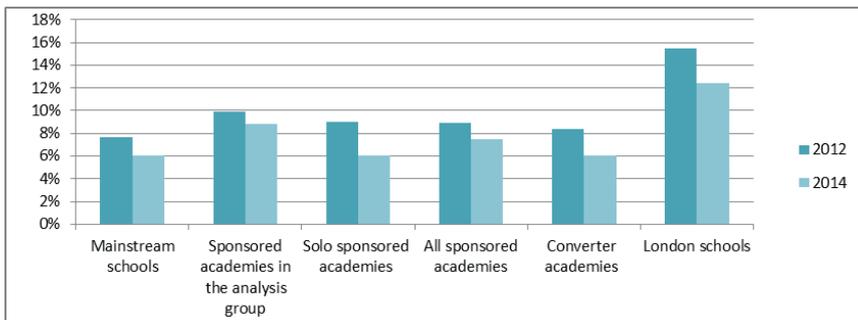
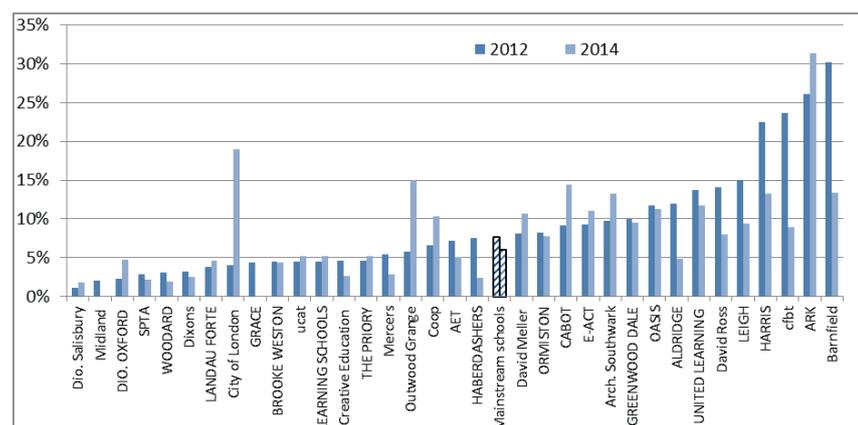


Figure 28 shows that, on average, these pupils fared better in the sponsored academies in the analysis group than in mainstream schools, solo academies or converter academies – a pattern consistent with that identified in our previous report, despite the falls across the board.

Figure 29 then shows that some chains have been very much more effective than others with this group of pupils. Whereas in all mainstream schools 6% of this group go on to achieve 5A*CEM, five of the chains in the analysis group achieved more than double this figure in 2014: ARK, City of London, Outwood Grange, Cabot, Barnfield, Harris and Archdiocese of Southwark. Several others also compared favourably to mainstream. ARK scored well above all the other chains, with 31% of this group achieving 5A*CEM and City of London showed greater improvement on this measure than the other chains. In contrast, some chains performed very poorly, including some that have fallen back from already poor results for their low-attaining pupils. In two chains none of the pupils with low attainment at primary school achieved 5A*CEM.

Figure 29: Percentage of pupils whose prior attainment was below Level 4 achieving the expected level (5A*CEM) 2012 and 2014



Clearly, although very important, it is not sufficient for a chain to produce above average results for those entering with low attainment. We have also reviewed the achievements of those with average and high prior attainment. This showed Barnfield, Outwood Grange and Archdiocese of Southwark, and of the larger chains ARK, as the most successful chains with all three groups of learners.

6.8 SUMMARY: WHICH CHAINS ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE FOR DISADVANTAGED PUPILS?

This analysis suggests that some chains have different targets from others – some, for example, are prioritising the EBacc subjects, while others have focused on a more vocational curriculum involving equivalent qualifications (which raises the 5A*CEM score).

To achieve this we looked at the chains in relation to the following measures of attainment of disadvantaged pupils in 2014:

- percentage achieving 5A*CEM;
- percentage making expected progress in English;
- percentage making expected progress in mathematics;
- average capped GCSE point score;
- percentage achieving EBacc.

The outcomes for pupils whose attainment was low in primary school are not included here as they are not the same group as disadvantaged pupils, but may overlap. Nor have we included improvement made between 2012 and 2014; this is clearly important, and is analysed in the next table. However, at this point our focus is on the 2014 results. Note again, the analysis group includes only those schools that have been sponsored academies in the same chain since at least September 2011. The chain has therefore had three school years in which to bring about improvement before the 2014 results.

We then sought to identify those chains that did best on a summary score combining all of the measures. This is weighted as follows:

- percentage achieving 5A*CEM – 50%;
- average capped GCSE point score – 20%;
- percentage making expected progress in English – 10%;
- percentage making expected progress in mathematics – 10%;
- percentage achieving EBacc – 10%.

The rationale for the high weighting given to 5A*CEM is that it is still currently the key measure on which schools are assessed, in conjunction with pupil progress in English and maths, which together receive a further 20% of the weighting. GCSE capped point score is of interest because it excludes equivalents, and both that measure and EBacc give some indication of how the chain is responding to the government drive for more academic qualifications which will be increasingly reflected in future league tables.

Each chain's score has been calculated using the difference between the chain and all mainstream schools for each of the above measures, weighted in the proportions given. Table 7 gives the chains performing above and below the average for mainstream schools in this weighted attainment measure.

We then followed the same strategy to present data related to improvement on each measure between 2012 and 2014, yielding a score for improvement weighted in the same way as the overall score for attainment. Table 8 gives the chains performing above and below the average for mainstream schools in this weighted improvement measure.

Table 7: Chains performing above and below the mainstream average on the key measures of 2014 attainment for disadvantaged pupils

	5A*CEM	Expected Progress English	Expected Progress Maths	EBacc	GCSE Capped Pt. Score	Overall Rank (Weighted)
Sig. above ave.	Archdiocese of Southwark	Aldridge	ARK	ARK	ARK	ARK
	ARK	Archdiocese of Southwark	Barnfield	Brooke Weston	City of London	Barnfield
	Barnfield	ARK	Cabot	City of London	Harris	City of London
	City of London	Barnfield	City of London	Harris	Archdiocese of Southwark	Harris
	Co-operative	City of London	David Ross	Mercers	Barnfield	Mercers
	Harris	Co-operative	Harris	Archdiocese of Southwark	Haberdashers	Outwood Grange
	Mercers	David Meller	Outwood Grange	Barnfield	Landau Forte	Archdiocese of Southwark
	Outwood Grange	Haberdashers	Archdiocese of Southwark	Dixons	Mercers	Co-operative
Above ave.	Brooke Weston	HARRIS	Greenwood Dale	The Priory	AET	Haberdashers
	Haberdashers	Outwood Grange	Haberdashers	Haberdashers	Aldridge	The Priory
	The Priory	The Priory	Leigh	United Learning	Cabot	United Learning
	United Learning	United Learning	Mercers	AET	CfBT	Brooke Weston
Ave.	Cabot	AET	United Learning	Aldridge	Creative Education	CfBT
	David Ross	CfBT	Co-operative	Cabot	David Meller	Cabot
Below ave.	CfBT	Cabot	E-Act	CfBT	David Ross	David Ross
	David Meller	Creative Education	Oasis	Co-operative	Dixons	Dixons
	Dixons	Dixons	AET	Creative Education	E-Act	E-Act
	E-Act	E-Act	CfBT	David Meller	Oasis	Leigh
	Leigh	Landau Forte	Creative Education	David Ross	Ormiston	Oasis
	Oasis	Leigh	David Meller	Dio. Oxford	Outwood Grange	Ormiston
	Ormiston	Mercers	Diocese of Oxford	Diocese of Salisbury	The Priory	AET
	UCAT	UCAT	Dixons	E-Act	United Learning	Aldridge
Sig. below ave.	AET	Oasis	Ormiston	Grace	Woodard	Creative Education
	Aldridge	Brooke Weston	The Priory	Greenwood Dale	Brooke Weston	David Meller
	Creative Education	David Ross	Aldridge	Landau Forte	Co-operative	Diocese of Oxford
	Diocese of Oxford	Diocese of Oxford	Brooke Weston	Learning Schools	Diocese of Oxford	Diocese of Salisbury
	Diocese of Salisbury	Grace	Diocese of Salisbury	Leigh	Diocese of Salisbury	Grace
	Grace	Ormiston	Grace	Midland	Grace	Greenwood Dale
	Greenwood Dale	Diocese of Salisbury	Landau Forte	OASIS	Greenwood Dale	Landau Forte
	Landau Forte	Greenwood Dale	Learning Schools	Ormiston	Learning Schools	Learning Schools
	Learning Schools	Learning Schools	Midland	Outwood Grange	Leigh	Midland
	Midland	Midland	SPTA	SPTA	Midland	SPTA
	SPTA	SPTA	UCAT	UCAT	SPTA	UCAT
	Woodard	Woodard	Woodard	Woodard	UCAT	Woodard

Top tier: Significantly above average (15+% better performance than mainstream), second tier: above average (>1% & <15% better); third tier: average (within 1% of mainstream); fourth tier: below average (>1% & <15% worse); bottom tier: significantly below average (15+% worse). Within categories chains are in alphabetical order. Average attainment for disadvantaged students in all mainstream schools: 5A*CEM= 38.1%, Expected progress in English=61.5%, Expected progress in maths=50.4%, GCSE capped point score=237.3, Ebacc=11.4%.

Table 8: Chains performing above and below the mainstream average on the key measures of 2012-14 improvement for disadvantaged pupils

	5A*CEM	Expected Progress English	Expected Progress Maths	EBacc	GCSE Capped Pt. Score	Overall Rank (Weighted)
Sig. above ave.	ARK Cabot City of London Co-operative David Ross The Priory	AET Cabot City of London Co-operative Diocese of Oxford Haberdashers Outwood Grange	Cabot David Ross SPTA The Priory	ARK Brooke Weston City of London Harris	Aldridge ARK Barnfield Co-operative Creative Education	ARK City of London Co-operative Outwood Grange The Priory
	Brooke Weston Diocese of Oxford E-ACT Haberdashers Harris Outwood Grange SPTA UCAT	The Priory UCAT Aldridge Archdiocese of Southwark ARK Barnfield Brooke Weston Creative Education David Meller E-ACT	ARK City of London Co-operative Creative Education David Meller Diocese of Oxford Diocese of Salisbury Leigh Outwood Grange UCAT	CfBT Co-operative David Ross Dixons Haberdashers Mercers The Priory United Learning Cabot Diocese of Salisbury	Harris Ormiston Outwood Grange	AET Brooke Weston Cabot Diocese of Oxford E-ACT Haberdashers Harris Ormiston SPTA UCAT
Ave.	AET Leigh United Learning	David Meller E-ACT	AET Brooke Weston E-ACT Harris Ormiston United Learning	AET Aldridge Barnfield Creative Education Diocese of Oxford E-ACT	City of London David Ross Diocese of Salisbury Dixons	United Learning
Below ave.	Aldridge Archdiocese of Southwark Barnfield CfBT Creative Education Diocese of Salisbury Dixons Grace Learning Schools Oasis Ormiston Woodard	Grace Landau Forte Learning Schools Leigh SPTA United Learning Woodard	Aldridge Grace Greenwood Dale Haberdashers Learning Schools Mercers Oasis Woodard	Grace Greenwood Dale Learning Schools Leigh Midland Oasis Ormiston Outwood Grange	E-ACT Grace Greenwood Dale Haberdashers Landau Forte Learning Schools Midland Oasis United Learning Woodard	Aldridge Barnfield Creative Education Diocese of Salisbury Dixons Leigh Archdiocese of Southwark CfBT Grace Greenwood Dale Landau Forte Learning Schools Oasis Woodard
	David Meller Greenwood Dale Landau Forte Mercers Midland	Mercers OASIS Ormiston Greenwood Dale Midland	Archdiocese of Southwark Barnfield CfBT Dixons Landau Forte Midland	SPTA UCAT Woodard Archdiocese of Southwark David Meller Landau Forte	Diocese of Oxford Leigh UCAT Archdiocese of Southwark David Meller Mercers	David Meller Mercers Midland

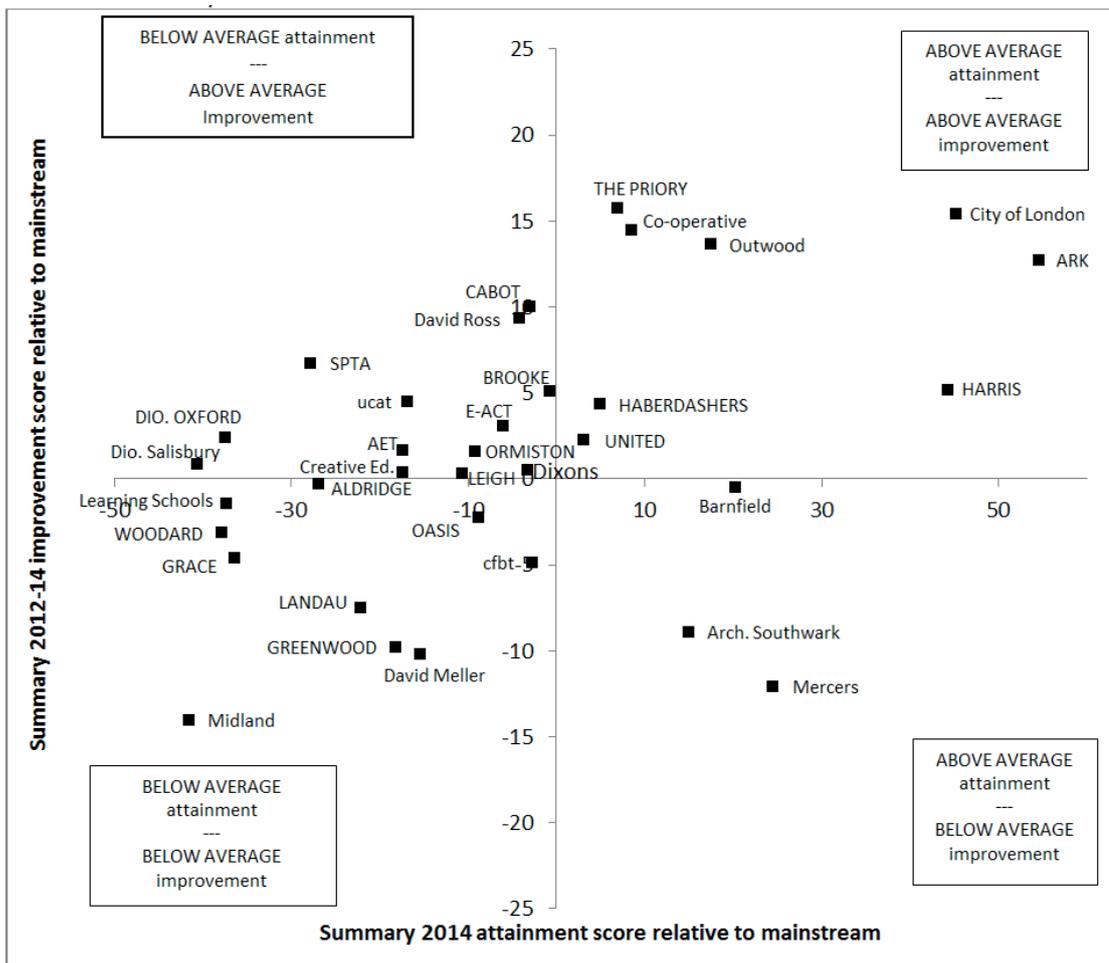
Top tier: Significantly above average (greater than 1.0 Standard Deviations better improvement than mainstream), second tier: above average (0.1 to 1.0 SDs better); third tier: average (within 0.10 SDs of mainstream); fourth tier: below average (-0.10 & -1.0 SDs worse); bottom tier: significantly below average (less than -1.0 SDs worse improvement than mainstream). Within categories chains are in alphabetical order. Average improvement for disadvantaged students in all mainstream schools: 5A*CEM=-2.4%, Expected Progress in English=5.0%, Expected progress in maths=-3.6%, GCSE capped point score=+18.4, Ebacc=5.4%.

Table 7 shows that three chains achieved significantly above average against all five measures of attainment for disadvantaged pupils: ARK, City of London and Harris (also ranked top three overall). A further three chains were ranked above or significantly above average against all five measures: Barnfield, Mercers, and Archdiocese of Southwark. These, together with Outwood Grange, were the highest scoring in our overall composite measure for the attainment of disadvantaged young people.

Meanwhile, four chains performed significantly below average against all five attainment measures: Midland, Diocese of Salisbury, Learning Schools and SPTA. A further four chains were ranked below or significantly below average against all five measures: Woodard, Diocese of Oxford, Grace, and Ormiston.

Figure 30 compares the overall score for the combined measures of attainment for disadvantaged pupils with that for improvement since 2012.

Figure 30: Attainment for disadvantaged pupils (as in Table 7) compared with improvement (as in Table 8)



Note: the axes show mean performance for all mainstream schools' on each measure

It is noticeable 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. However, what is evident on Figure 30 is that ten chains were below average both for improvement and attainment. Since all the academies in the analysis had been consistently part of the same chain for three years, it might have been expected that they would be improving rapidly.

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 as a basis for future discussion on how academies chains can best help to improve the prospects of their disadvantaged students.



6.9 HOW DO CHAIN CHARACTERISTICS RELATE TO PERFORMANCE

In our previous 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 showed that the chains showing the greatest success for disadvantaged pupils varied in terms of size management style and centralised policies; 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 are based in London, where, as we have shown, average attainment on all measures is significantly higher than in the rest of the country. It is impossible to tell how much the 'London factor' has contributed to their success.

The least effective chains are also very varied, though on average they have been established for a shorter period and so may not yet have developed effective practices for school improvement. However, they are currently affecting young people's life chances, and their inexperience should not be allowed to damage these.

6.10 CHANGE SINCE 2013

The overall ratings shown on Tables 7 and 8 are compiled in exactly the same way as those in our previous report, and thus we can compare 2014 outcomes with those from the previous year.

6.10.1 *Attainment table*

There has been little change since our last report in the combined index for attainment of disadvantaged pupils. All five of the chains that were significantly above average last year remain in that band (ARK, Barnfield, City of London, Harris, Mercers), and similarly seven of those in the significantly below average band in 2013 remain there in 2014 (Diocese of Oxford, Diocese of Salisbury, Grace, Landau Forte, Learning Schools, SPTA and Woodard).

A few chains are placed very much higher in 2014 than they were in 2013: The Priory, Co-operative, Brooke Weston and Cabot. Two chains are very much lower ranked than they were in 2013: Dixons and Ormiston.

6.10.2 *Improvement table*

This shows more change between the 2013 and 2014 results. Ten chains made above average improvement in both tables (i.e. placed in the top two bands) and just three made below average improvement in both tables.

7. DISCUSSION

This report builds on our previous research, updating analysis of the impact of different academy sponsors on the attainment of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, their peers, and on school improvement. It has illustrated the complexities that any rigorous analysis of the impact of academy chains on pupil outcomes must take into account, and the consequent challenge to effectively and meaningfully monitor developments. Nevertheless, we reiterate that, given the scale of activity, the impact of schooling on young peoples' lives and outcomes, and the financial and strategic policy investment in sponsors and chains for educational improvement, it is imperative that such analysis is conducted and built upon.

A key distinctive shift which has taken place in this time period, and which our findings illuminate, is the Government's removal of many equivalent qualifications from the league table data and incentivisation of schools to pursue more 'academic' GCSE subjects which are included in English Baccalaureate (EBacc), and will also count in the new measure from 2016, Progress 8. Our report findings reflect these changes, suggesting that there is variation in the way that chains are responding to performance indicator changes, and to the government agendas underpinning them. In all types of school there has been a substantial reduction in use of equivalent qualifications, However, academies still made more use of them than mainstream schools⁶¹ and converter academies in 2014, and the chains with the lowest attainment for disadvantaged pupils were using more equivalent qualifications than other chains. On average, chains entered many more pupils for EBacc than they had previously done, though their success rate was lower than for all mainstream schools – with some notable exceptions (again, there was considerable variation across the chains).

The number of chains exceeding average mainstream school outcomes for their disadvantaged pupils at 5 A*CEM have remained similar to last year's index, with 11 exceeding and 22 below the mainstream average; albeit there have been changes between those chains falling above and below the average since 2012. We discussed how half of chains have made progress here, while half have fallen back. This confirms analyses of chain performance as 'mixed' and highly diverse.

On closing the gap, sponsor academies are doing better than all mainstream schools and converter academies (with standalone academies having the narrowest gaps), but this may reflect a) relative low attainment across the board in the academies concerned (this is shown to be the case for the majority of chains in our sample), and/or b) the demographic of sponsor academies which tend to contain more young people that are working class, if not on free school meals.

The report investigates the differences between the performance of sponsored academies in chains and those that stand alone, in each case considering only those that have existed since September 2011.⁶² For most measures the sponsored academies in chains performed marginally better than standalone academies; however, these differences were smaller than in our previous report. At the same time, the percentage of pupils achieving EBacc was higher in standalone academies (though those in chains entered more pupils for EBacc subjects.) However, the measure on which sponsored academies in chains stood out was the performance of pupils whose primary school attainment had been low. Here the chain academies on average outperformed solo academies, converter academies and the average for mainstream schools. Another area of success for chains is in the percentage of pupils making the expected progress in English (and to a lesser extent, maths). Here, on average, the chains in our analysis group did better than the mainstream school average. Progress for disadvantaged pupils, and effective support for those with low prior attainment, are both important elements in furthering social equality. However, further analysis showed that more than a quarter of the chains were below the mainstream figure for progress on both maths and English. Thus, our analysis shows that there is enormous variation between chains in outcomes and progress for disadvantaged pupils across the range of our measures, and the changes to these between 2012 and 2014.

Comparing across 2012 and 2014, our analysis appears to show a three-fold trend for sponsor academy chains in our sample, as follows:

- i) Some chains which were above or significantly above average for attainment for disadvantaged pupils in 2012 and 2013, and which have further improved their position on both counts in 2014, demonstrating outstanding capacity and impact;
- ii) A large number of chains which are concentrated around the mainstream average for improvement and/or attainment (often doing slightly worse for attainment, and slightly better for improvement, as we would expect);

iii) A small number of chains - but notably a larger group than the high achieving chains - that were below or significantly below average for attainment in 2012 and 2013, which have fallen further back by 2014, demonstrating potential harmful impact.

While our focus has been on the impact on disadvantaged students, it is interesting to see that this trend is also largely reflective of attainment and improvement for non-disadvantaged students in those academies analysed.

What our analysis shows, then, is progress of a majority of chains around the mean for performance of their disadvantaged pupils (confirmed by our quintile analysis), but also a gradual 'pulling away' and concentration of outlier chains at the opposite ends of the spectrum.

So academy sponsorship is not a panacea. The very striking and significant success of some chains shows the strong effectiveness of this intervention in a small number of cases: despite the small numbers of chains achieving these levels of success, their achievements across a whole range of measures are dramatic, demonstrating the holistic quality of their provision, and suggesting depth and strength of the structures and teaching and learning underpinning it. These chains show the genuine potential of sponsorship to make transformative improvement. It is important that the extent of these successes, and the extent of their achievements over the mainstream average, be acknowledged, celebrated, and learnt from.

Nevertheless, the Government must not ignore the negative impact that a number of chains at the other end of the spectrum are having on school quality and (consequently) the life chances of the young people they serve. To be clear, our findings show the DfE claim about the value of the growth of sponsored academies is not yet evidenced. They asserted 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"⁶³

The DfE and its regional commissioners need to do more to ensure that the vision is translated to results. Our previous conclusion, that "Far from providing a solution to disadvantage, a few chains may be exacerbating it", is further supported by even clearer evidence in the intervening period.

This conclusion highlights the import of effectiveness in processes of sponsor commissioning and accountability. Our findings suggest that the Government stores up trouble for the future by optimistically assuming that all sponsors have the capacity to improve schools. Figures reported to the Education Select Committee by the DfE show that nearly all applications for sponsorship have been approved: of 705 applications only 25 (3.5%) have been declined, with a further 35 'undecided'.⁶⁴ Perhaps, then, it is less than surprising to see that some of those sponsors appointed are struggling. This in turn emphasises the import that the rigorous measures being applied to maintained schools which fail to improve - including those regards as coasting - are applied equally to academy chains. A few of those chains in our sample identified as performing poorly have received dreadful Ofsted results as well as failing on data indicators; yet the DfE (who have now passed this responsibility to RSCs) has not acted consistently to replace the sponsors - this is true of some schools sponsored by dioceses as well as traditional academy chains.

Our analysis illustrates the potentially damaging effects of such lack of action on those young people most vulnerable and in need of support. Where academies are moved from one sponsor to another it is vital that the new sponsor should have a strong track record of school improvement and that such schools should be monitored to ensure that we do not end up with a situation where the worst performing schools are simply passed from one sponsor to another. The progress of a majority of these (reasonably long-established) chains in line with their quintile average for attainment, does challenge the Government's prioritisation of multi-academy trusts over other school improvement models (including federations and maintained school trusts), which may be provided by local authority schools (and/or councils themselves). We would advocate an open-minded approach which builds on success and draws down improvement expertise for schools whether provided by and/or for maintained or academy schools and chains. The dramatically different outcomes being achieved by disadvantaged young people in academy chains at either end of the performance spectrum highlights both the potential and urgency here.

Hence we suggest that improvement service for struggling schools and academies should be identified on the

basis of quality, capacity and track record, rather than type. The expansion of potential improvement agencies might help regional schools commissioners to expand the potential pool of providers: this is important, because particular geographical areas are clearly having especial challenges in supporting and achieving improvement for their disadvantaged young people.⁶⁵ This expansion of the pool of providers is also crucial given that our evidence suggests the need to raise the bar in commissioning sponsors, and begin removing academies from sponsors more systematically and transparently. Criteria should be:

- Quality (including attainment record and offer to students);
- Capacity;
- Vision and strategic model (including school improvement strategy, approach to expansion and regional coherence, governance model, sponsor vision and ethos, etc.);
- Track record (against transparent criteria).

Clearly for new sponsors with no prior record, strength against the other criteria will need to be especially convincing. We also reiterate our previous call, now made by several different bodies, for the current length of funding agreements (sponsorship contracts) to be re-examined.⁶⁶ As evidence to the Education Select Committee suggested, the shorter length of 'charter' contracts in the US, coupled with active evaluation and non-renewal in cases of underperformance, has been a key feature of more successful charter regions.⁶⁷

Crucially, we also need to learn from the best chains, and to spread these lessons. We reiterate this point from our previous report, as our evidence suggests that the need has by no means receded. The National Audit Office (2014) concluded that the DfE does not yet know why some chains are more successful than others. Moreover, the promised 'sponsor forum' – an expert service for novice sponsors – has not yet materialised. We suggest that the DfE invest resources into such services and to research, in order to address these challenges, and to help realise the potential of other chains. It might also consider resourcing a taskforce, comprised of senior and middle leaders and Governors from the most successful chains, to share expertise and constructive review of those chains which are not actually failing but which have not yet met expectations on improvement. Finally, we also reiterate our call for Ofsted to be allowed to inspect chains themselves (including MATs), rather than just the schools within them. Ofsted inspection of school improvement in chains would help inform others about good practice (through Ofsted reports), as well as leveraging improvement in poorly performing chains.

We hope that the information in this report again makes a contribution in its publication and analysis of data on longer-established academy chains. As we update annually, the number of schools in each chain that meet the criteria for this analysis will inevitably increase, and so the analysis will become more robust. It will be important for transparency that, as we move towards greater numbers of free schools within chains, the DfE include these within its academies list.

Our findings also suggest there needs to be further clarification of sponsor responsibility. As with our previous phase of research, for some of the chains in our sample it was not clear from school websites who the sponsor was, and sometimes multiple organisations were listed. It continues to be difficult in a few cases to identify organisations/individuals who take responsibility for school performance within a chain. Accountability through Ofsted would help here. But there is also an onus on the DfE to ensure clarity of criteria and adequate vetting in sponsor approval.

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

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APPENDIX: PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The measure of pupil progress in English and mathematics was published for the first time in 2009. From Key Stage 2 (age 11) to Key Stage 4 (age 16) pupils are expected to make three levels of progress. Thus a pupil who achieved Level 4 (the expected Level) at age 11 would be expected to gain a C grade in GCSE. But a pupil who achieved Level 5 at age 11 would be expected to achieve a B at GCSE, while one who was below Level 4 would have made the expected amount of progress if they achieved a GCSE grade below a C. This measure clearly helps school with low-attaining intakes to demonstrate that they are adding value for their pupils. Thus it may be of particular importance for some sponsored academies.

Attainment based on the other measures (average point score and EBacc) has also been reported, but has had less significance. Average (capped) point score is calculated from the best 8 GCSE or equivalent results a pupil achieves, and therefore encourages schools to ensure that all pupils take eight subjects. Average capped point score is also reported for GCSs only, excluding equivalent qualifications.

The EBacc, introduced in 2010, involves achieving A*-C passes in English, maths, two science subjects, a modern or ancient language and history or geography. Its aim was to create an incentive for schools to offer these subjects, in order to give students 'a properly rounded academic education'. Part of the concern was that too many pupils – especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds – were taking 'non-academic' or non-traditional subjects, which would not facilitate access to the most prestigious higher education institutions and/or professions. Hence one of the aims of the EBacc measure is to incentivise practices that support social mobility. It was unclear when this measure was introduced how much importance was to be accorded to it, and the extent to which schools have changed their curriculum in response has varied.

However, the government has announced that from 2016, a new performance indicator, Progress 8, will be used.

The Progress 8 measure is designed to encourage schools to offer a broad and balanced curriculum at KS4, and reward schools for the teaching of all their pupils. The new measure will be based on students' progress measured across eight subjects: English; mathematics; three other English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects (sciences, computer science, geography, history and languages); and three further subjects, which can be from the range of EBacc subjects, or can be any other approved, high-value arts, academic, or vocational qualification. From 2016, the floor standard will be based on schools' results on the Progress 8 measure. (DfE, 2014f)

This measure will replace 5A*CEM. Along with performance in English and Maths, it will become the main attainment measure used to assess schools' performance.⁶⁹ This new measure was announced in October 2013, and so will have had no impact on the curriculum offered to the pupils who took their GCSEs in that year. However, those schools that changed their curriculum in line with EBacc will already be moving in that direction.

APPENDIX: AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

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 Professor of Education and Social Justice at King's College London. She has followed a research career focusing on education and social justice, but has also incorporated education policy work, including her Advisory role to the Education Select Committee Inquiry on Academies and Free Schools. She is one of the judges for the DfE/TES Pupil Premium Awards. Becky is best known for her work on gender and achievement. Her academic expertise and extensive publications centre on social identities (gender, 'race' and social class) in educational contexts, social in/equality, and social identity and educational achievement. She has written many books on these topics, including the most recent *Identities and Practices of High Achieving Pupils* (2012, Continuum, with Christine Skelton and Barbara Read).

Dr Philip Kirby is the Sutton Trust Research Fellow. He holds a PhD in political geography from Royal Holloway, University of London, and was formerly Associate Research Fellow at the University of Exeter.

ENDNOTES

1. Throughout the report we use disadvantaged to mean those pupils who have been eligible for Free School Meals at any time in the last six years. This is the definition used for the Pupil Premium.
2. DfE (2015a), p.20.
3. Throughout the report we use disadvantaged to mean those pupils who have been eligible for Free School Meals at any time in the last six years. This is the definition used for the Pupil Premium.
4. The DfE (2015b) has responded to recommendations by the Education Select Committee (which drew on last year's Chain Effects report and recommendations), that it publish data on the attainment of different chains, by publishing data and analysis on chains and comparison with Local Authorities; a significant move towards transparency which we strongly welcome.
5. DfE (2015c, 2015d).
6. Cabinet Office (2011); Jerrim & Macmillan (2014).
7. DfE (2014, 2015c).
8. Lupton et al (2009); Clifton & Cook (2012).
9. Lupton & Thomson (2015).
10. Wiliam ([2010], Rasbash et al (2010).
11. OECD (2010).
12. This is illustrated by work such as that of Lupton (Lupton et al 2009; Lupton 2010) and Francis (2011), which demonstrate the over-representation of working class children in poorer quality schools.
13. Mahony & Hextall (2012); Academies Commission (2013).
14. Those schools graded by Ofsted as 'Outstanding', and later 'Good' with Outstanding features.
15. As it was now many of the best schools – where more advantaged children tend to be concentrated – that gained as a result of generous funding arrangements and autonomy (Francis, 2010; Academies Commission, 2013).
16. NAO (2012), NFER (2014), Education Select Committee (2015).
17. Machin & Vernoit (2010); Machin (2012); Academies Commission (2013); Wrigley & Kalambuka (2012); Machin & Silva (2013); Education Select Committee (2015).
18. DfE (2012a); Eyles & Machin (2014).
19. NAO (2012).
20. DfE (2012a).
21. Hill (2010); Hill et al, (2012).
22. See also Ofsted (2014a).
23. See Education Select Committee (2015).
24. E.g. DfE (2010).
25. Education Select Committee (2015).
26. Paton (2014).
27. BBC (2014). The DfE (2015a) report that between August 2013 and July 2014 they issues 38 'pre-warning notices' to academies, and three 'warning notices'; and that during this time period 5 academies (all secondary, sponsored academies) were transferred to new sponsors.
28. See Bassett et al (2012); Academies Commission (2013).
29. DfE (2015e).
30. DfE (2015e).
31. See Hutchings, Francis & De Vries (2014) for discussion.
32. DfE (2015f).
33. For example, Harris is listed as having five open free schools and a further eight opening in 2015 (DfE 2015g).
34. Education Select Committee (2015).
35. Hutchings, Francis & De Vries (2014); see also NAO (2014).
36. For further discussion, see Hutchings et al (2014).
37. 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 report.
38. Table 1 uses the chain titles given on the DfE list of academies (2014b); throughout the remainder of this report we have shortened these titles by removing words such as 'Trust', 'Federation', 'Foundation', 'Group' etc.
39. We have provided the 2014 figure because this matches the end date of the attainment analysis; many chains have grown further since that time. This figure given may still under-represent the total size of some chains, as some include Free Schools, and others, independent schools.
40. DfE (2015h).
41. For full details see DfE, 2015c, Section 10.

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42. 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.
 43. For commentary on the impact of some of these factors on pupil attainment, see Lupton et al (2009); Strand (2014); Education Select Committee (2014b).
 44. See Blunkett (2000).
 45. The pupil characteristics of chains given in Figure 2 and 3 are calculated as the weighted average of the school level proportions given in the DfE School Performance Tables.
 46. DfE (2015h).
 47. DfE (2015c).
 48. Ofsted (2014b).
 49. DfE (2015i).
 50. DfE(2015c).
 51. Using data from DfE (2015h).
 52. DfE (2015j).
 53. DfE (2015d). The DfE has more recently changed its definition of disadvantaged pupils to include those in local authority care or looked after for more than one day, but the older measure is the one used for the 2014 performance data.
 54. The analysis of attainment is entirely based on data from the School Performance Tables; thus we have not repeated the source under each figure.
 55. National Audit Office (2010); Wrigley & Kalambuka (2012).
 56. Wolf (2012).
 57. DfE (2012b) Press release, 30 January 2012.
 58. The figures here refer to mainstream state-funded schools only (i.e. they exclude special schools). Thus they differ from those shown in Table 2. Throughout the analysis special schools are excluded because the inclusion of one special school in a chain's results could, depending on the nature of the special school, have a significant impact.
 59. Wolf (2012).
 60. From 2016 the main accountability measure for schools will be Progress 8, which measures pupils' progress through secondary school in eight subjects, five of which must be EBacc subjects.
 61. Again, for clarity, mainstream schools comprise all maintained schools and academies.
 62. These two groups do not make up the total number of sponsored academies. Some are the only secondary sponsored academy in a chain made up of primary academies and /or converter academies. Others are in chains which include other secondary sponsored academies but these are too new to be part of this analysis. Some are in groups of two (which do not meet the DfE's definition of a chain. We have not discussed attainment of these academies in the report.
 63. DfE (2015a), p.20.
 64. Education Select Committee (2015).
 65. Of course, the majority of new sponsors are actually academy schools: their impact will begin to be traceable in coming years.
 66. As called for by the Academies Commission (2013); our prior report (Hutchings et al, 2014); and the Education Select Committee (2015).
 67. Education Select Committee (2015).
 68. See, for example, Michael Gove (2013).
 69. Other measures published will be the percentage of pupils achieving a C grade or better in both English and mathematics, and EBacc (DfE 2014f).