

Cardiff Council: Admission Criteria



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Professor Chris Taylor

Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD)

Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences

taylorcm@cardiff.ac.uk

029 20876938

@profchristaylor

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1. Introduction

This research was commissioned following Cardiff Council’s Cabinet meeting on 16 March 2017 at which Cabinet authorised officers to consider further the Council’s school admission arrangements including wider research into alternative options and the impact of each, in advance of consultation on the Council’s School Admissions Policy 2019/20.

Cardiff Council is the admissions authority for all Community schools in Cardiff. For secondary schools, which is the main focus of this research, there are currently nine English-medium Community schools and three Welsh-medium Community schools. In addition to these there are a further six secondary schools – five

faith schools and one Foundation school. These latter six schools are responsible for their own admission arrangements. However, Cardiff Council are responsible for ensuring every pupil (except those excluded twice) must have an allocated school place and to publish the arrangements for admission to all schools. Furthermore, for the next admissions cycle (for Year 7 entry in 2018/19) the local authority is piloting coordinated admission arrangements with three of these schools (Corpus Christi RC High School, St Teilo's CW High School and Whitchurch High (Foundation) School).

This research focusses on the schools and admission arrangements for which Cardiff Council is the admissions authority. However, since the admission arrangements and catchment area for Whitchurch High School are congruent with those of the local authority this school is included in some of the subsequent analysis.

The report is structured in the following way. Section 2 outlines the context for admissions in Cardiff, including the various policies and strategies that underpin Cardiff school admissions. Section 3 then presents the current Cardiff school admission arrangements and oversubscription criteria before Section 4 goes on to analyse the distribution and segregation of pupils to school based on these criteria. Section 5 reviews the admissions criteria of a selected number of local authorities (from England and Wales). This leads to a summary of the key findings from recent studies relating to school admissions in Section 6. The final Section presents conclusions and associated recommendations. These include suggested amendments to existing admission arrangements and oversubscription criteria, consideration of new additional criteria, and recommendations that might require consideration by the Welsh Government.

2. Context for admissions in Cardiff

Admission arrangements in Cardiff must adhere to the Welsh Government School Admissions Code (2013). They are guided by several principles, including:

- Are clear in the sense of being free from doubt and easily understood. Arrangements that are vague lead to uncertainty and this may reduce the ability of parents to make an informed choice for their children.
- Are objective and based on demonstrable fact. Admission authorities and governing bodies must not make subjective decisions, or use criteria which are subjective or arbitrary in nature.
- Are procedurally fair and are also equitable for all groups of children (including those with special educational needs (SEN), disabilities, those in public care, or who may be a young carer).
- Provide parents or carers with easy access to helpful admissions information (Regulations require the LA to produce a composite prospectus that covers admission arrangements for all schools in their area. See paragraph 2.12).
- Comply with all relevant legislation and have been determined in accordance with the statutory requirements and the provisions of this Code. Failure to comply with a statutory requirement or any proposal to use unlawful arrangements can be referred to the Welsh Ministers who may use their intervention powers to make a direction to enforce the statutory requirement or prevent an unlawful act.

The Code includes statutory guidance on the content of admission arrangements (e.g. oversubscription criteria) and how to apply admission arrangements. The key guidance on this is provided in Paragraph 2.25 [their emphasis]:

All maintained schools in Wales (including schools with a designated religious character), that have enough places available (up to and including the admission number) **must** offer a place to every child who has applied (except where they are twice excluded, see paragraphs 3.58 to 3.60). However, some schools will have more

applicants than places. Admission authorities **must** therefore have in place, as part of their admissions arrangements, criteria to determine the allocation of places in the event of oversubscription. Authorities **must** ensure these criteria are reasonable, clear, objective, procedurally fair, and comply with current legislation. Admission authorities **must** ensure that their arrangements will not disadvantage unfairly, either directly or indirectly a child from a particular social or racial group, or a child with special educational needs. It **must** be clear in which order oversubscription criteria will be applied. Admission arrangements **must** include an effective, clear and fair tie-breaker for occasions when it is necessary to distinguish between applicants when the criteria are used. The criteria **must not** require any ‘interpretation’ and **must** be clear and unambiguous.

Welsh Government (2013: 11)

The statutory guidance also includes 18 examples of oversubscription criteria that *must not* be used by admissions authorities, some of which *are* permitted in the equivalent School Admissions Code in England (DfE 2014). These include: selection on the basis of ability or aptitude, giving priority to children whose parents are current or previous staff at the school, or the use of random allocation. In addition, this guidance states that “reference to straight line [...] should not be used as measures of distance” (p.15).

The Education Act 1996 (and the subsequent School Admissions Codes) state that admission authorities must consider parents’ preferences and that these preferences must be met unless it would not be deemed an efficient use of resources – primarily where the number of applications exceeds the Planned Admission Number for a school (i.e. the number of places available in a school). In addition, the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 places a statutory duty on local authorities to assess the demand for Welsh-medium education in their area through their Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs). In line with the Education Act 1996 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 parents therefore have the right to express a preference for Welsh medium education and that this preference must be met unless not deemed an efficient use of resources.

There are currently a total of eighteen Maintained secondary schools in Cardiff (i.e. funded by the Welsh Government). For the purpose of admissions these could be considered to fall into one of three types: faith schools (including Roman Catholic and Church in Wales schools), Welsh-medium Community Schools and English-medium Community Schools. The location of these schools are not evenly distributed across Cardiff and reflect decades of residential growth. In addition to these Maintained secondary schools there are a small number of independent schools (some co-educational and some single-sex schools). These independent schools typically cost between £9,000 and £12,000 per annum per pupil (depending on the school and age of the child). Whilst most independent schools have scholarships available these are predominantly only available to parents who can afford the fees.

Cardiff is the largest city in Wales and is currently the eleventh largest in the UK. As with most urban areas in the UK, Cardiff has a relatively high proportion of ethnic minority families (15.3% in 2011) and pupils eligible for free school meals (22.2% compared to 18.8% for all of Wales in 2014/15). Its population grew by over 18% between 2001 and 2011 and is forecast to grow by a further 26% in the next twenty-five years. Residential segregation in Cardiff by social class and ethnicity is relatively high, and segregation by age and family life-stage is amongst the highest in England and Wales, exacerbated by the numbers of university students in the city (Kingman 2016). This has important consequences on school rolls, the mix of school intakes, and, accordingly, levels of pupil attainment across the city. The city of Cardiff is also heavily constrained by its geography. It is a coastal city, has three major rivers running through it, and seven arterial train routes to the city centre. This has significant implications for journeys to school, and ultimately how much ‘choice’ of school places for parents there is.

Cardiff Council recently published its ‘vision’ for education in the authority – *Cardiff 2020: a renewed vision for education and learning in Cardiff*. This sets out a number of aims, outcomes and goals for the coming

years. Most notably it is guided by the stated values of: equality of opportunity; working openly and collaboratively; raising aspirations of, and expectations for learners; and embracing diversity.

Throughout the Cardiff 2020 vision there is a strong emphasis on ‘local schools for local children’;

Ensure a balance of Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision across the city so that where possible we have local schools for local children [...] continue to provide more Welsh medium school places in line with the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan for Cardiff [...] and] create a Community Focused Schools approach so that the curriculum can be enriched by local involvement and the use of school buildings can benefit the wider community in Cardiff.

(Cardiff 2020 p.14)

In relation to school admissions specifically, the local authority also aims to:

- Offer a co-ordinated Admissions process with the voluntary aided sector, which provides parents/carers with a clear picture of the school place choices available to them and the likelihood of securing first preferences.
- Increase the number of pupils securing a school place that meets individual needs, where appropriate in accordance with their first preference.

(Cardiff 2020 p.15)

This has implications for the way in which school admissions in Cardiff are organised and how admission arrangements can be changed. Clearly any changes must adhere to statutory guidelines, but they must also consider the geography of Cardiff and the institutional priorities set out by the local authority.

3. Cardiff school admissions

Cardiff Council publishes a School Admissions booklet for parents every year. This sets out admission arrangements for entry to all Maintained primary and secondary schools in Cardiff. The closing date for applications to secondary schools is typically at the beginning of December and the closing date for applications to primary schools is typically at the beginning of January in the academic year before pupils start Year 7 or Reception class respectively.

For admissions to Year 7 in 2018/19 parents can list up to five preferences. These are ranked preferences (i.e. first preference, second preference, etc) but the determination of places against preferences are treated equally (the Equal Preference Scheme). In other words, the rank order of the school is not used as a criterion if the preferred school is oversubscribed. Where there are places available the highest ranked preference must be met. Where there are more applications than places available the use of oversubscription criteria are used to rank order applications.

The published oversubscription criteria for Cardiff Community secondary schools are currently, in rank order:

1. Children who are looked after by the Local Authority (as defined by Section 22 of the Children Act 1989) or previously looked after children (as defined by the Welsh Government School Admissions Code document no. 005/2-13)
2. (a) Where an older sibling was directed by the Council to an alternative school because the alternative school was previously the catchment area school, if the parent desires, the Council will admit younger siblings to the alternative school. This applies only where the older sibling is in attendance at the alternative school during the academic year to which the application relates. In addition the younger sibling must be residing in the same address (or an address within the catchment area that was the subject of the change before it was implemented) that the older sibling was living at the time of the original application.

2. (b) Where an older sibling was directed by the Council to an alternative school because no places were available at the catchment area school, if the parent desires, the Council will admit younger siblings to the alternative school. This applies only where the older sibling is in attendance at the alternative school during the academic year to which the application relates.
3. Pupils who are permanently resident within the defined catchment area* of the school on the published closing date of 04 December 2017 for receipt of preference forms. Evidence of permanent residence of the pupil must be supplied if required. Where preferences exceed places available, priority will be given to multiple birth siblings resident within the defined catchment area. Criteria 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 will then be applied to decide which other pupils are admitted.
4. Pupils in respect of whom the Council judges that there are compelling medical grounds or compelling social grounds for their admission to a specified school. Written recommendations from a medical consultant or a social worker or similar professional will be required giving detailed reasons for the pupil's admission to a particular school. Where preferences exceed places available, Criteria 5, 6, 7 and 8 will then be applied to decide which other pupils are admitted.
5. Pupils who have a brother and/or sister who will be on register at the school, in Years 8 to 11, when they are admitted. In considering siblings first priority will be given to applications from multiple birth siblings. Any sibling connection must be clearly stated in the application. Where preferences exceed places available, Criteria 6, 7 and 8 will then be applied to decide which other pupils are admitted. For admission purposes a sibling is a child permanently resident at the same address as the pupil applying for a place who is the brother/sister, half brother/sister (children who share one common parent), step brother/step sister where two children are related by virtue of their parents being married, co-habiting or in a civil partnership. This definition also includes adopted or fostered children living at the same address.
6. In determining applications for admission in respect of other pupils the Council gives priority to children living nearest the school as measured by the shortest practicable walking route. The Council uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to calculate home to school distances in miles to the nearest 2 decimal places. The shortest walking route is calculated using Ordnance Survey (OS) customised route data from an applicant's home address to the nearest open school gate. The co-ordinates of an applicant's home address are determined using the Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG) AND OS Address Point Data. The starting point for a route assessment is determined as the nearest point on the walking route network to the main front entrance of a property. Private driveways and paths are not included in the distance measurement. All routes within the walking network must be publicly accessible and available 24 hours. Where preferences exceed places available, Criteria 7 will then be applied to decide which other pupils are admitted. Cardiff Council has developed a computerised walking route network based on the Welsh Learner Travel Measure Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance June 2014 and this is used to ensure that every pupil is assessed as consistently as possible. Where there is no safe walking route available, the Council will calculate the shortest driving distance from the home address to the nearest open school gate by use of the same Geographical Information System (GIS) used to measure the shortest practicable walking route.
7. In determining applications for admission in respect of other pupils the Council gives priority to children living furthest away from the alternative school offered by the Council as measured by the shortest practicable walking route as a tie break. The Council uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to calculate home to school distances in miles to the nearest 2 decimal places. The shortest walking route is calculated using Ordnance Survey (OS) customised route data from an applicant's home address to the nearest open school gate. The co-ordinates of an applicant's home address are determined using the Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG) AND OS Address Point Data. The starting point for a route assessment is determined as the nearest point on the walking route network to the main front entrance of a property. Private driveways and paths are not included in the distance measurement. All routes within the walking network must be publicly accessible and available 24 hours. Cardiff Council has developed a computerised walking route network based on the

Welsh Learner Travel Measure Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance June 2014 and this is used to ensure that every pupil is assessed as consistently as possible. Where there is no safe walking route available, the Council will calculate the shortest driving distance from the home address to the nearest open school gate by use of the same Geographical Information System (GIS) used to measure the shortest practicable walking route.

8. Pupils whose premature admission to the school has been approved by the Council.

The most important criteria for admissions in Cardiff are catchment areas. It is useful to note that all the English-medium Community schools (and Whitchurch High School) have congruent catchment areas that cover the entire local authority. Similarly, all three Welsh-medium Community schools have congruent catchment areas that also cover the entire local authority. Therefore, every family lives in two catchment areas – one English-medium school catchment and one Welsh-medium school catchment.

The remaining five faith schools have their own published admission arrangements and oversubscription criteria. These are published in the School Admissions booklet for parents. In the past applications to these schools are made directly to each school. For 2018/19 two of the faith schools are participating in a pilot scheme to coordinate admissions, which means applications to these schools will be incorporated into the main application process used for Community Schools. Although applications to these schools will be incorporated into the Cardiff Council application process these schools are still allowed to choose their own oversubscription criteria.

4. Analysis of Cardiff school admissions

Previous analysis of Cardiff school admissions suggested that open enrolment appeared to have had a detrimental impact on intakes (i.e. greater levels of segregation) in the most unpopular secondary schools (Taylor 2009). However, it did not appear to have had much impact on the more popular schools in the city. This reflects a degree of mobility ‘out of catchment’ for the least popular schools. It also reflects the inelastic supply of places in the more popular schools, preventing much change in the intake composition of these schools than if pupils just attended their nearest secondary school.

The overall levels of between-school segregation of pupils eligible for free schools between 1991 and 2002 are illustrated in Figure 1. This showed that segregation in Cardiff was higher than the average for Wales, typical for urban areas which are more residentially segregated to begin with. This also showed that segregation was lower between Community schools than it was between all schools (i.e. when including faith schools).

Levels of segregation were then compared against three other methods for allocating school places – by catchment area only, by proximity (i.e. nearest school), and by randomly allocating pupils to schools (Table 3). It is very clear from this how random allocation is the most effective way of ensuring balanced intakes. But the results in Table 1 also showed that there was very little difference in levels of segregation using catchments or proximity; admission to the nearest school would generate the lowest level of segregation, but it is important to note that this analysis does not take into account the Planned Admission Number of each school (i.e. it assumed that every pupil could attend their nearest school irrespective of intake size).

Figure 1. Segregation (S) of pupils eligible for free school meals, 1991–2002 (from Taylor 2009: 557)

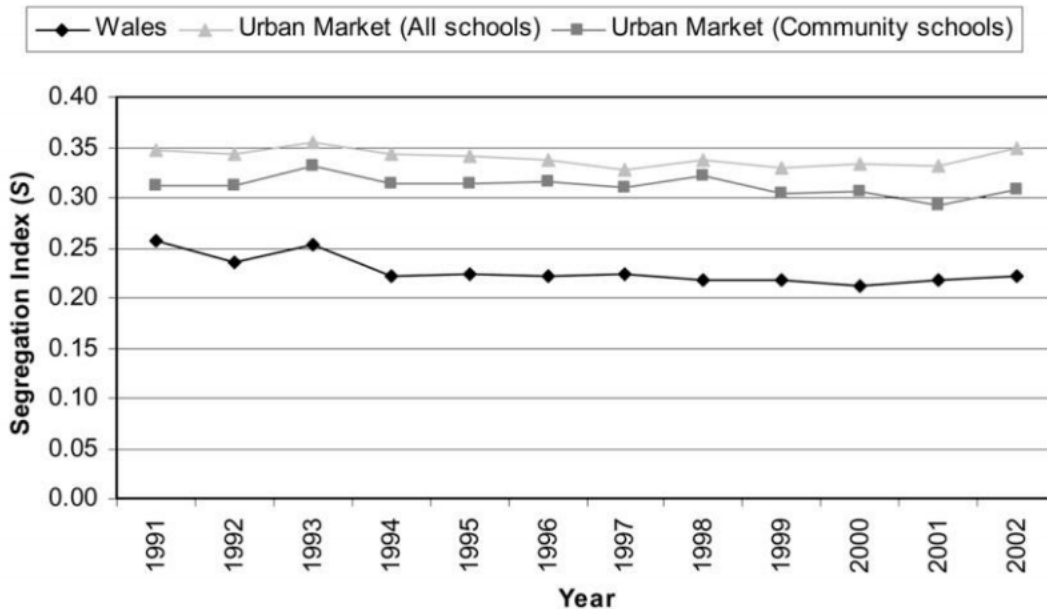


Table 1. Comparative measures of segregation (S) between community schools using individual student data (from Taylor 2009:559)

Intake	S
Actual Intake	.27
Catchment Intake	.26
Proximity Intake	.25
Random Intake	.02

This analysis was repeated using individual Year 7 pupil data between 2011 and 2017 (i.e. admissions to secondary schools for the 2010/11 and 2016/17 academic years respectively). Again, this compares levels of segregation based on actual enrolments with predicted levels of segregation based on alternative methods for allocating school places. In this analysis we are able to examine four sets of segregation:

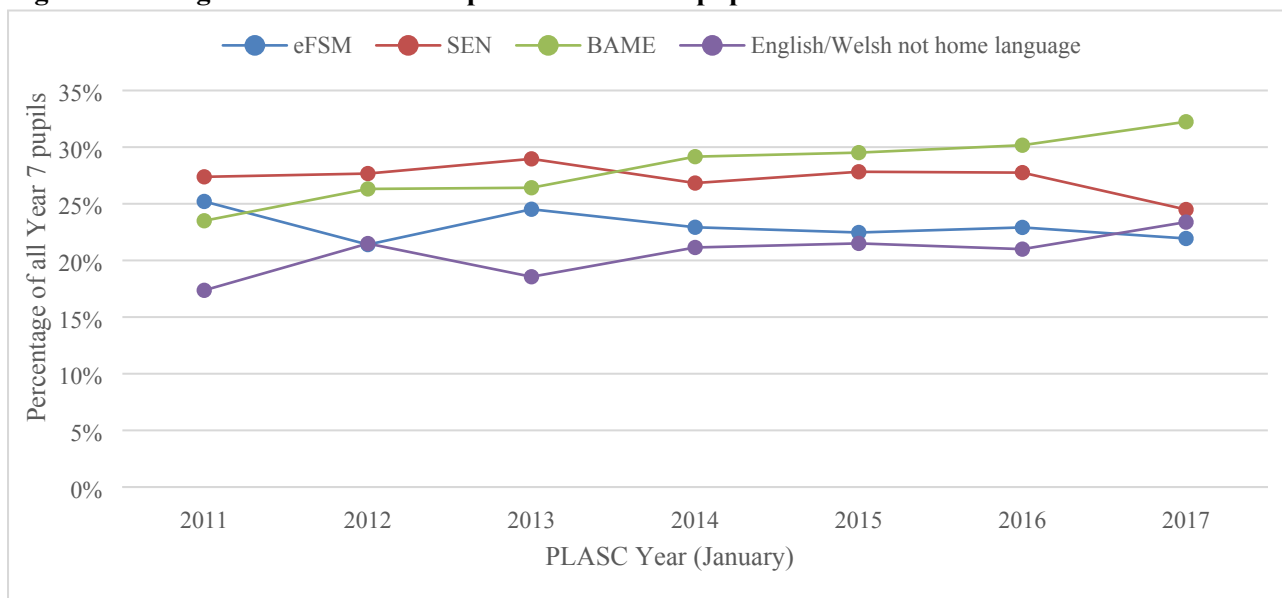
- i. Pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM)
- ii. Pupils with SEN (including those with and without Statements)
- iii. Pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds (BAME) (i.e. non-White British pupils)
- iv. Pupils whose main home language is not English or Welsh (EWAL)

As in Taylor (2009), segregation based on actual enrolment is compared against segregation based on pupils attending their designated catchment area and pupils attending their nearest school. Cardiff has three sets of choices in the maintained sector: English medium Community schools, Welsh medium Community schools and faith schools. Since this report is primarily concerned with admission arrangements to Community schools the hypothetical scenarios are only based on Community schools. Since the catchment areas for English-medium Community schools overlap the catchment areas of Welsh-medium Community schools the analysis treats pupils as two groups – those that would be allocated an English-medium Community school (by catchment or proximity) and those that would be allocated a Welsh-medium Community school (by catchment or proximity). Which group a pupil is in is based on their current enrolment preferences for English-medium or Welsh-medium schools. Pupils that attended a faith school are removed from these hypothetical models since it is not possible to predict whether they would have chosen a Community school

under different admission arrangements. This is a more sophisticated analysis than that conducted in Taylor (2009), and hence should be taken into account when comparing results.

First, we consider the overall composition of Year 7 intakes over time (Figure 2). This shows, for example, that the proportion of non-White pupils has risen steadily in recent years from 23.5% in 2011 to 32.2% in 2017. Correspondingly the proportion of pupils whose home language is not English or Welsh has also risen steadily. The overall proportion of Year 7 pupils with SEN has gradually fallen and the proportion of eFSM pupils has remained relatively constant, particularly over the last five years.

Figure 2. Changes in the overall composition of Year 7 pupils between 2011 and 2017



The composition of intakes by school for the most recent year (2016/17) is presented in Table 2. This clearly demonstrates the wide differences in the socio-economic composition of Community school intakes in Cardiff. For example, the percentage of eFSM pupils in Year 7-11 varies from 5.5% to 46.3%. The aggregated demographic data for English-medium Community schools and English-medium faith schools are comparable. Demographic data for Welsh-medium secondary schools differ significantly from the city-wide average on all four measures. Children with a BAME background, for whom English or Welsh is not their home language, and who are eligible for free school meals are far less likely to enrol in Welsh-medium secondary schools than other maintained schools in Cardiff. In the main, Welsh-medium secondary school intakes are heavily polarised, particularly in relation to the low number of BAME students on roll. They are also considerably less likely to admit pupils eligible for free school meals. However, it should be noted here that there is some variation between Welsh-medium secondary schools, and a small number of English-medium Community secondary schools have similar low levels of eFSM pupils. As we will see later, detailed comparison of English-medium and Welsh-medium secondary schools is difficult because they have overlapping catchment areas.

Table 2. Intake composition by school, 2016/17

Secondary Community School	Total Pupils		Percentage of total pupils (Yrs 7-11)			
	Yr 7	Yrs 7-11	eFSM	BAME	SEN	EWAL
Cantonian High School	142	472	41.5%	18.4%	38.8%	11.2%
Cardiff High School	242	1,193	7.9%	40.6%	14.1%	26.2%
Cathays High School	120	607	31.0%	76.4%	35.1%	70.5%
Corpus Christi RC High School	228	1,050	13.1%	34.6%	17.7%	25.7%
Eastern High School	139	700	44.7%	18.4%	31.9%	9.3%
Fitzalan High School	285	1,370	28.4%	83.5%	30.3%	77.2%
Llanishen High School	248	1,261	18.2%	21.3%	26.2%	14.1%
Mary Immaculate High School	163	739	29.0%	31.4%	26.1%	21.7%
Cardiff West Community High School	107	681	46.3%	15.3%	47.4%	9.1%
Radyr Comprehensive School	201	1,025	8.1%	14.0%	13.6%	5.9%
St Illtyd's Catholic High School	206	872	28.7%	27.1%	34.4%	17.7%
St Teilo's C.W. High School	245	1,181	24.6%	27.5%	18.8%	16.4%
Bishop of Llandaff C.W. High School	194	963	9.1%	22.5%	17.2%	10.5%
Whitchurch High School	390	1,815	11.6%	22.3%	17.1%	15.7%
Willows High School	149	554	42.4%	39.4%	41.2%	32.9%
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bro Edern	131	509	10.2%	10.0%	21.6%	0.2%
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf	194	849	10.4%	8.2%	20.1%	1.3%
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Plasmawr	176	880	5.5%	10.2%	15.2%	0.5%
English-medium community schools	2,023	9,678	23.3%	35.6%	26.2%	27.7%
Welsh-medium community schools	501	2,238	8.4%	9.4%	18.5%	0.7%
Faith secondary schools	1,036	4,805	20.4%	28.6%	22.2%	18.3%
All mainstream secondary schools	3,560	16,271	20.5%	30.1%	24.0%	21.4%

It is then possible to compare the intake size of each school with the predicted intake size based on pupils attending their catchment school or attending their nearest school (Table 3). The last column in Table 3 gives an indication of the number of net gains or losses of having open enrolment against catchment area size. Six schools have a larger intake than if they only admitted catchment area pupils and six schools have a smaller intake than their catchment area size. The other school, Cardiff High, has approximately the same intake size as it would based on its catchment area. This could be an indication that nearly every pupil in the Cardiff High catchment area attends the school and do not attend an alternative school (in keeping with findings from Taylor (2003) fifteen years ago).

Table 3. Predicted intake sizes based on catchment area and proximity, 2016/17

Schools	Total pupils			Enrolled v catchment net gains/losses
	Enrolled	Catchment	Nearest	
Cantonian High School	142	80	140	62
Cardiff High School	242	244	226	-2
Cathays High School	120	82	187	38
Eastern High School	139	158	196	-19
Fitzalan High School	285	344	291	-59
Llanishen High School	248	291	152	-43
Cardiff West Community High School	107	184	148	-77
Radyr Comprehensive School	201	172	185	29
Whitchurch High School	390	275	234	115
Willows High School	149	177	251	-28
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bro Edern	131	119	187	12
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf	194	226	215	-32
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Plasmawr	176	146	85	30

If admissions were based on proximity then some schools could see a significant change in their intake size. For example, Whitchurch and Llanishen could admit 30-40% fewer pupils. Of course, in practice this is unlikely to happen since other schools would not be able to admit all their nearest pupils because of their Planned Admission Number. Nevertheless, this does indicate which schools would have to admit pupils for whom it would not be their nearest school.

Table 3 does provide a good indication as to how ‘local’ the current catchment areas are. By comparing the intake size based on catchment area and proximity it is easy to note which schools appear to have a ‘constrained’ catchment area (e.g. Cantonian: 80 pupils in catchment compared to 140 pupils based on proximity; Cathays: 82 compared to 187; and Willows: 177 compared to 251) and those with a ‘generous’ catchment area (e.g. Llanishen: 291 pupils in catchment compared to just 152 based on proximity; and Plasmawr: 146 compared to just 85).

However, we are also interested in how these different admission arrangements affect the composition of school intakes. Table 4 outlines the differences in the proportion of eFSM pupils and ethnic minority pupils to illustrate the extent to which intake compositions can vary due to different admission arrangements. For example, eight Community schools have a higher proportion of eFSM pupils on roll than they would have if they only admitted pupils from their catchment areas. Similarly, there are eight Community schools (although not the same schools) that have a higher proportion of ethnic minority pupils on roll than they would if they only admitted pupils from their catchment areas.

But, in fact, the size of these differences is relatively small. Only Cantonian admits a significantly higher proportion of eFSM pupils than their catchment area would suggest. And only Cathays admits a significantly higher proportion of ethnic minority pupils than their catchment area would suggest. For all other schools there would appear to be only a small difference in the proportion of eFSM and ethnic minority pupils (although for schools with a relatively low proportion of eFSM and ethnic minority pupils the relative difference could be quite large – see, for example, the ethnic minority composition of Ysgol Plasmawr based on its catchment area compared to its actual enrolment).

Based on these figures it would suggest that controlling admissions based on geography (catchment area or proximity) would have very little difference on the overall levels of segregation in Cardiff. Indeed, this can be clearly seen in Figures 3 to 6. As each Figure illustrates, there would be very little difference in the levels of segregation between schools of the current intakes with intakes based on either catchment areas or proximity. This would suggest that open enrolment and the current oversubscription criteria are not worsening the underlying levels of residential segregation that exists across Cardiff. Equally, however, the current arrangements appear to have done very little to create more balanced intakes than we might expect based on where pupils live.

The results in Figures 3 to 6 also suggest that levels of segregation, certainly by eFSM, SEN and ethnic minority, have fallen over this period (and have fallen compared to levels of segregation in 2002 – see Figure 1). In terms of home language, overall levels of segregation remain at approximately the same level as they did at the beginning of the period (although they have gone up and down over time). Given that levels of segregation by catchment and proximity have also generally fallen over time this would suggest the decline probably relates to an associated fall in levels of residential segregation, rather than anything to do with admission arrangements.

The fall in segregation would suggest that the intake composition of Community schools across Cardiff is getting more ‘balanced’. However, Figure 7 illustrates how complex this has been. This shows the Segregation Ratio for each Community school between 2010/11 and 2016/17. The Segregation Ratio gives an indication as to the extent to which the intake of a school is like other schools in Cardiff – a Ratio below 1.0 indicates an under-representation of a particular group, and a ratio of above 1.0 indicates an over-representation of that group. Figure 7 presents the results of this for pupils eligible for free school meals. This clearly shows there are two groups of schools – one with a significant under-representation of eFSM pupils, and the other with an over-representation of eFSM pupils – and that schools are still heavily polarised in terms of their intake composition. It also shows that, on balance, there is an observable closing of the gap between these two sets of schools over time. But it also shows that much of this change has been driven by changes to the intake composition of one or two schools. For example, there has been a sizeable change in the intake composition of Fitzalan and Cathays (fewer eFSM pupils) and Llanishen (more eFSM pupils). It also shows how much variation there can be in each year.

Table 4. Predicted intake composition (pupils eligible for free school meals and non-White British) based on catchment area and proximity criteria

Schools	eFSM				BAME			
	Enrolled	Catchment	Nearest	Enrolled v catchment	Enrolled	Catchment	Nearest	Enrolled v catchment
Cantonian High School	43.7%	21.3%	30.7%	22.4%	17.6%	16.3%	17.6%	1.4%
Cardiff High School	7.0%	7.8%	12.8%	-0.8%	43.0%	44.3%	43.0%	-1.3%
Cathays High School	28.3%	23.2%	16.6%	5.2%	80.8%	69.5%	80.8%	11.3%
Eastern High School	41.7%	39.9%	43.9%	1.9%	23.7%	29.1%	23.7%	-5.4%
Fitzalan High School	23.9%	25.9%	24.4%	-2.0%	82.8%	79.4%	82.8%	3.4%
Llanishen High School	25.8%	24.7%	17.1%	1.1%	27.4%	26.5%	27.4%	1.0%
Cardiff West Community High School	49.5%	50.5%	50.0%	-1.0%	15.9%	17.4%	15.9%	-1.5%
Radyr Comprehensive School	10.0%	9.3%	10.3%	0.6%	12.9%	11.6%	12.9%	1.3%
Whitchurch High School	12.1%	8.7%	9.0%	3.3%	24.4%	17.8%	24.4%	6.5%
Willows High School	43.6%	41.8%	35.1%	1.8%	44.3%	51.4%	44.3%	-7.1%
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bro Ederm	14.5%	11.8%	13.4%	2.7%	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%	0.1%
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf	11.9%	11.9%	8.4%	-0.1%	8.8%	11.1%	8.8%	-2.3%
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Plasmawr	2.8%	3.4%	4.7%	-0.6%	10.2%	6.8%	10.2%	3.4%

Figure 3. Segregation between Community schools of pupils eligible for free school meals, 2010/11 to 2016/17

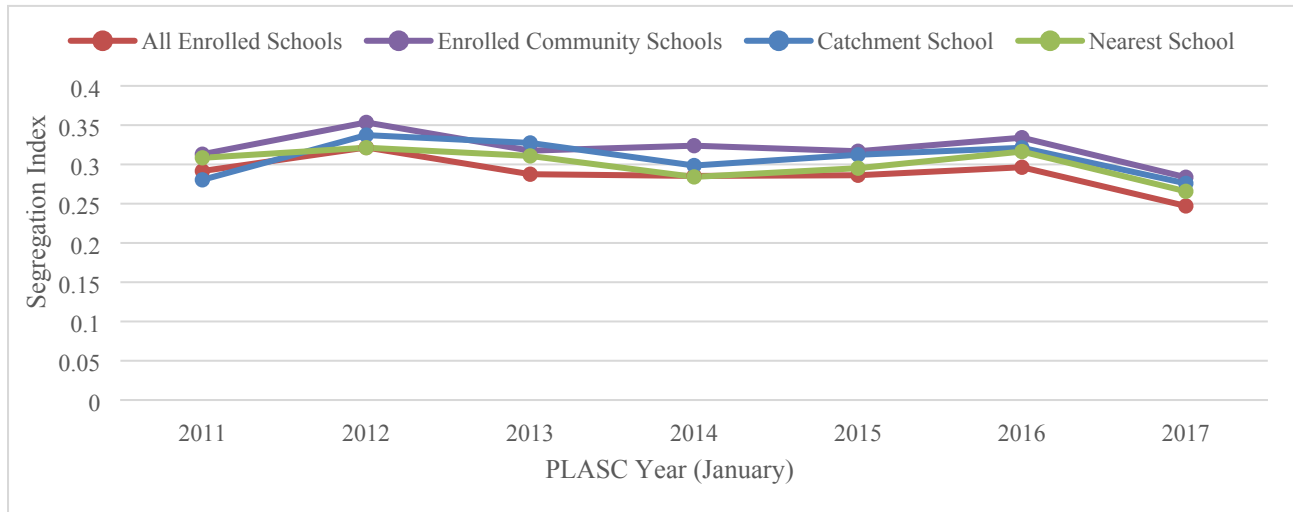


Figure 4. Segregation between Community schools of pupils with special educational needs, 2010/11 to 2016/17

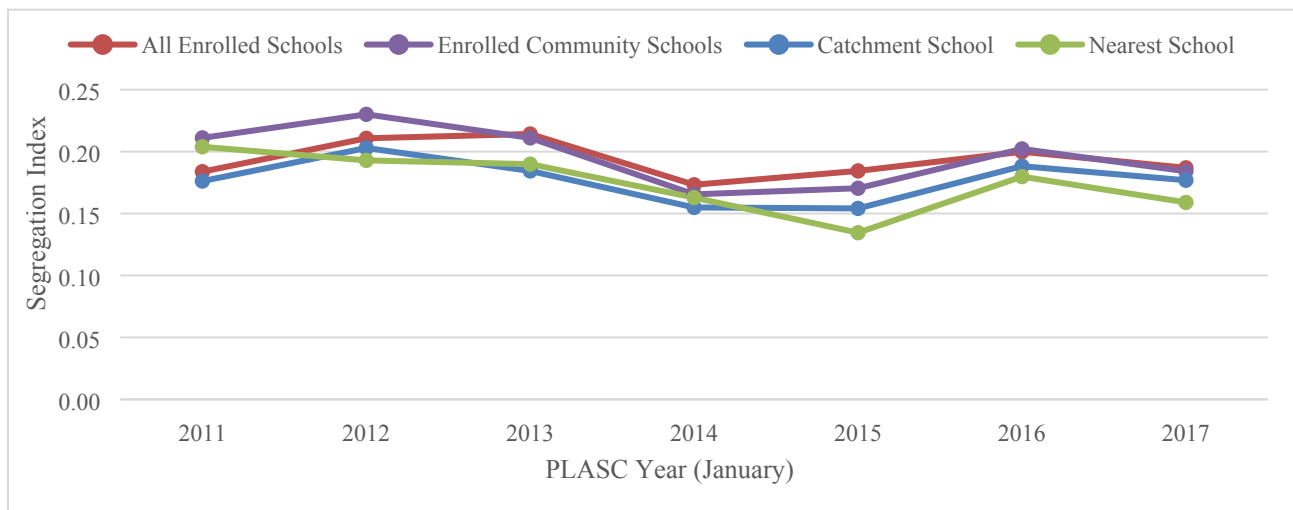


Figure 5. Segregation between Community schools of non-White British pupils, 2010/11 to 2016/17

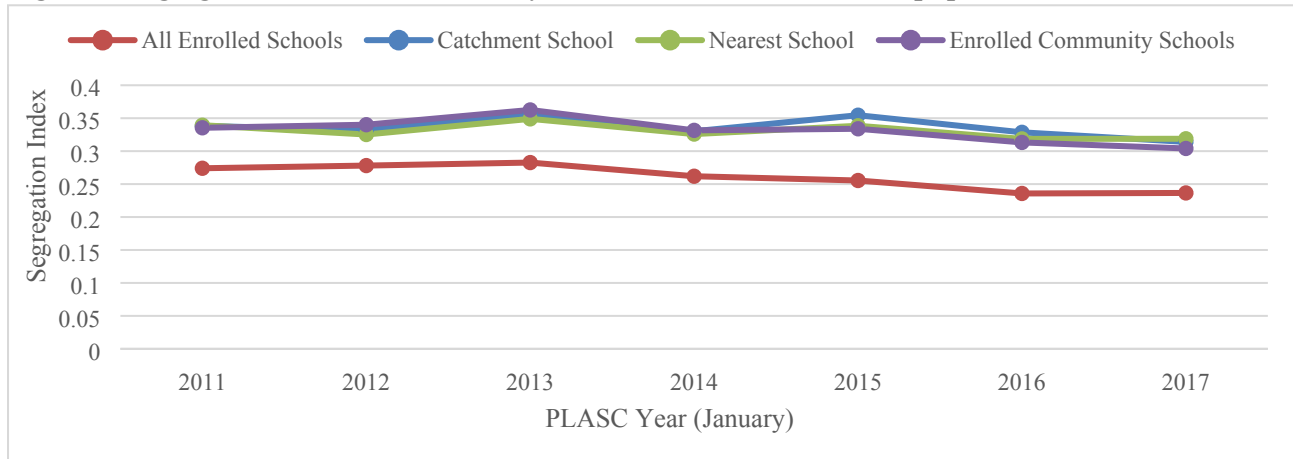


Figure 6. Segregation between Community schools of pupils whose home language is not English or Welsh, 2010/11 to 2016/17

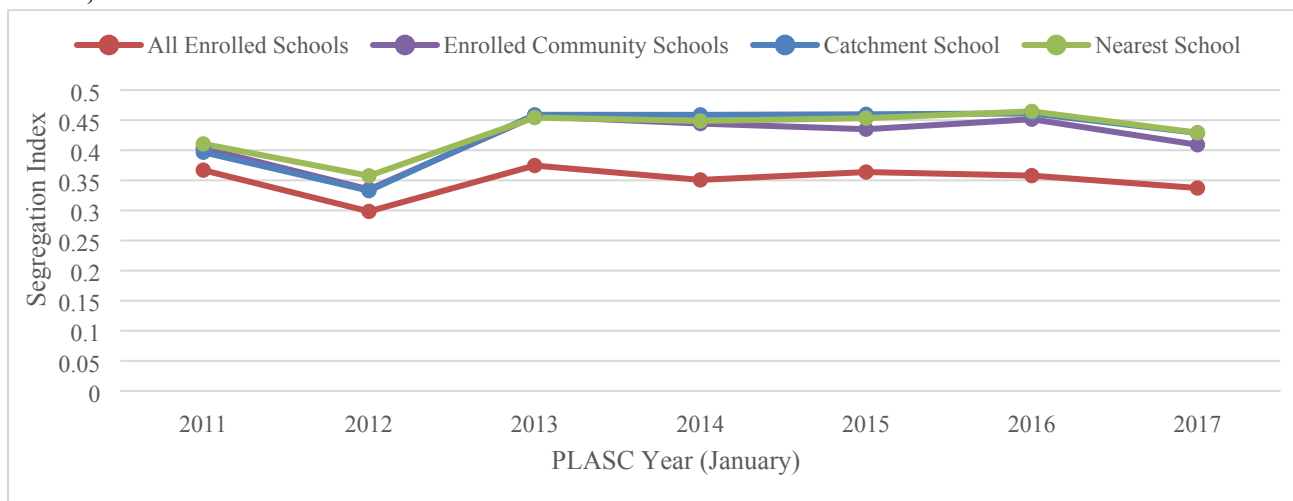
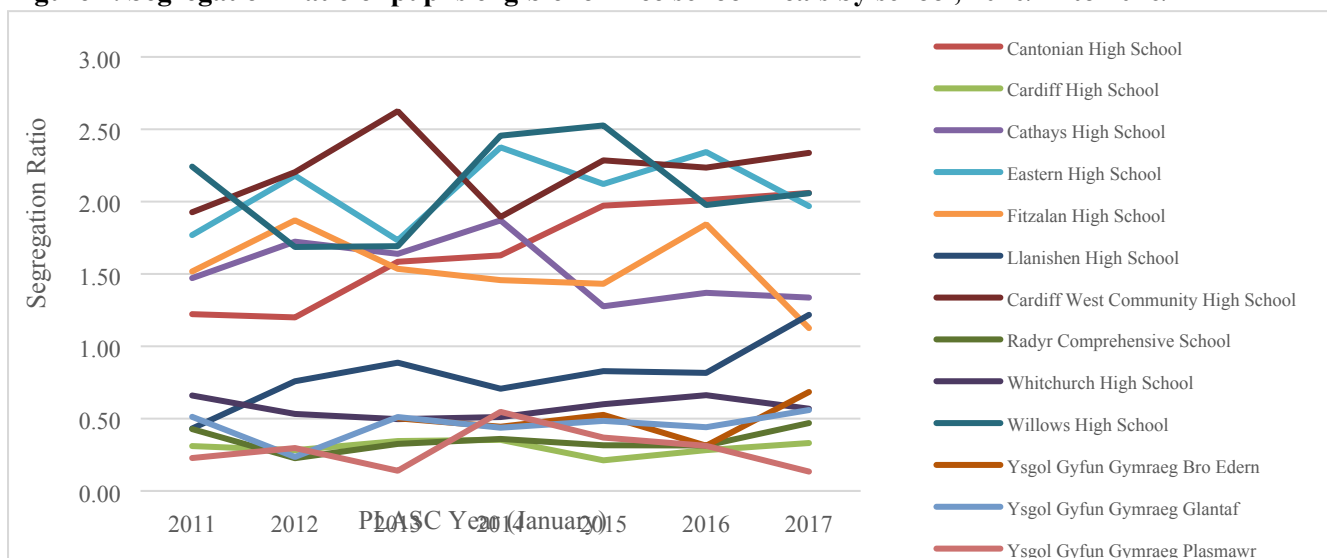


Figure 7. Segregation Ratio of pupils eligible for free school meals by school, 2010/11 to 2016/17



Finally, we consider what the impact of changes to the admission arrangements could be on the distribution of pupils by levels of attainment. Here we examine the proportion of pupils who did not achieve the Core Subject Indicator (CSI) in Key Stage 2 (i.e. at the end of Primary school).

The first thing to note is that levels of low attainment at KS2 have fallen considerably in Cardiff over the last seven years, and this decline appears to have been observed in the intakes of all Community schools (Figure 8).

Table 5 then compares the distribution of low attaining pupils if they had attended their catchment or nearest secondary school. Unlike the distribution of eFSM pupils, ethnic minority pupils, pupils with SEN and pupils whose home language is neither English or Welsh, this shows that levels of low attaining pupils could be considerably different. For example, Table 5 shows that Cantonian, Cathays, Llanishen, Willows and, to some extent, Ysgol Glantaf, all admit a significantly higher proportion of low attaining pupils than we might expect based on either their catchment area or proximity. What is perhaps most striking about this is that whilst there are some schools that admit much higher levels of low attaining pupils there are few schools that appear to take an equivalently lower proportion of low attaining pupils. This would suggest that some schools in Cardiff

are ‘losing’ potentially higher attaining pupils. If the admissions criteria were allowing schools to ‘select’ higher attaining pupils (either directly or indirectly) then we might expect to see significantly lower levels of low attaining pupils on roll compared to their catchment or nearest intakes in some schools. In other words, a small number of schools appear to be either ‘attracting’ low attaining pupils or, more likely, ‘losing’ more able pupils to a wide range of alternative schools (as opposed to just the most popular schools).

Figure 8. Percentage of enrolled Year 7 pupils who had not achieved the CSI at KS2, 2010/11 to 2016/17

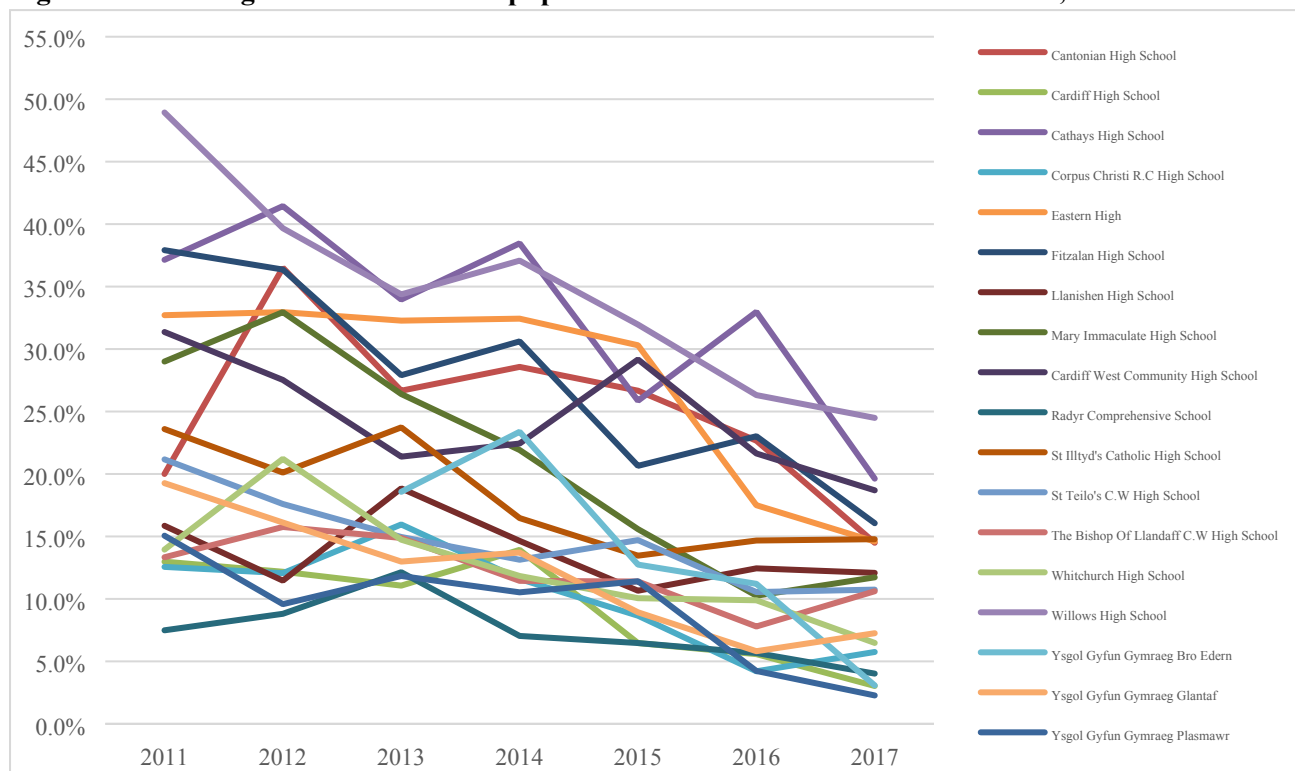


Table 5. Distribution of 2016/17 Year 7 pupils not achieving CSI at KS2

Schools	Percentage not achieving CSI at KS2		
	Enrolled	Catchment	Nearest
Cantonian High School	14.5%	7.6%	9.5%
Cardiff High School	3.0%	2.1%	6.9%
Cathays High School	19.6%	15.4%	9.0%
Eastern High School	14.6%	16.1%	14.7%
Fitzalan High School	16.1%	18.2%	17.5%
Llanishen High School	12.1%	9.2%	6.7%
Cardiff West Community High School	18.7%	18.6%	19.6%
Radyr Comprehensive School	4.0%	6.4%	6.5%
Whitchurch High School	6.5%	5.5%	5.6%
Willows High School	24.5%	20.8%	18.4%
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bro Edern	3.1%	3.4%	6.4%
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf	7.3%	5.8%	3.7%
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Plasmawr	2.3%	3.4%	2.4%

5. Review of other local authority admission arrangements

Fifteen local authorities were purposely selected to review their admission arrangements – thirteen from England and two from Wales. These are listed in Tables 6. Table 7 provides some further information on educational performance in the English local authorities. Generally the review has largely focussed on secondary school admissions, although any important deviation from primary school admissions was considered.

The extent to which there is overall control of admission arrangements by the local authority versus school autonomy in defining their own admission arrangements varies considerably. An attempt to summarise this is presented in the second column of Table 6, helping to differentiate between admission arrangements that are largely determined and presented at the school-level or at the authority-level. Much of this variation is due to the proliferation of Academies and Free Schools in England. In comparison, Cardiff would be considered to have authority-led admission arrangements, but primarily just for its Community (English-medium or Welsh-medium) schools. Even in Cardiff there is just as much autonomy for faith schools to choose their own admission arrangements as there is in many of the English local authorities selected. All of the local authorities in Table 6 operate a coordinated admissions system, whereby the deadlines and allocation of places is heavily coordinated across the authority, to ensure admissions are organised efficiently and fairly (e.g. that an applicant will not be allocated a place in more than one school).

The English local authorities in Table 6 are listed in order of their overall academic attainment (based on the proportion of end of KS4 pupils achieving grade C or above in English and Maths). The overall academic attainment of secondary schools is presented in Table 7. This shows, for example, that Buckinghamshire and Cheshire East have the highest levels of achievement based on this measure, and Nottingham City and Southampton with the lowest. It is also worth noting the overall Progress 8 measure for each authority – this is a combined measure of progress in eight subjects between Key Stage 2 (KS2) and Key Stage 4 (KS4). This is useful since the GCSE measure is not contextualised (i.e. based on the proportion of SEN or eFSM pupils in each authority). Here it is useful to note that, on average, pupils in Cheshire West and Chester make the greatest progress in attainment followed by pupils in Buckinghamshire. Pupils in Nottingham City continue to have the lowest levels of achievement based on this progress measure, followed by South Gloucestershire. The relative size of each authority is also indicated by the number of pupils there were at the end of KS4.

Table 6 then summarises the main oversubscription criteria in each of the 15 local authorities (for secondary school admissions).

All local authorities adhere to the statutory requirement that first priority must be given to looked after children or children previously looked after. Six of the 13 authorities use other exceptional grounds (e.g. medical need), reflecting a decision amongst many to remove this as a criterion. The main justification for this is that if a SEN statement names a school then that pupil must be admitted to that school, thereby by-passing the admissions procedures. For example, in Cheshire West and Chester, the ‘exceptional medical or social need’ has just been removed from its criteria (following consultation) on the grounds that (a) it affects very few pupils/applications, (b) it is not required by the School Admissions Code (the Code states that authorities *may* include exception medical or social needs as a criterion), and (c) schools are expected to make provisions for SEN irrespective of how the pupil is admitted.

Table 6. Summary representation of oversubscription criteria in selected local authorities (and priority order)

Local authority (3 prefs unless stated otherwise)	Local Authority (LA) or schools (S)	LAC	Other exceptional grounds	Catchment area & sibling	Catchment area	Sibling	Feeder school	Tie-break*	Other [†] (ranking in brackets)
Buckinghamshire	LA > S	1	2 (medical, social)		3	4		Distance (1), then random	PP (some schools, e.g. Beaconsfield High)
Cheshire East	LA > S	1			3	2	4	Distance (1)	
Gloucestershire (5 preferences)	S > LA	1		2	3	4		Distance (1)	ST, S6
Nottinghamshire	S > LA	1		2	3	5	4 (with sibling), 6 (w/out sibling)	Distance (1)	
Cheshire West and Chester	LA > S	1		2	4	3	5	Distance (1)	
Brighton and Hove	LA > S	1	2 (medical or other exceptional)	3	4 (dual catchment areas)			Random	
Tower Hamlets	LA > S	1	2 (medical, social)			3-4		Distance (2)	B (authority-level)
Coventry	S > LA	1		2	3	4		Distance (1)	
South Gloucestershire	LA > S	1		2	3			Distance (1), then random	
Staffordshire	LA > S	1	2 (medical)		4	3	5	Distance (1)	
Bristol	LA > S	1		2	3	4		Distance (1)	B (school-level e.g. Colston's Girls')
Southampton	S > LA	*			*	*	*	Distance (1) and (2)	
Nottingham City (4 preferences)	S > LA	1	2-7 (medical, mobility or social)	3	4	5		Distance (1)	ST(2), PP(6)
Newport	LA > S	1	2-5 (medical)	3	4	6		Distance (2)	
Swansea	LA > S	1			2	3	4	Distance (2)	

LAC – looked after children or previously looked after

* (1) – straight line; (2) – shortest walking route

† ST – children of salaried staff; S6 – sibling in sixth forms; B – Banding; PP – pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium

Almost all the local authorities reviewed use catchment areas as a key criterion for allocating oversubscribed places. In some authorities other terms are used, e.g. Areas of Prime Responsibility in South Gloucestershire, but in effect are exactly the same thing. In nine of these, priority was given to applicants living in catchment areas with siblings currently at the school, followed by any other applicants living in the catchment area. Catchment areas have always dominated admissions criteria but it is worth noting that even where authorities ‘dropped’ catchment areas as a criterion in the last twenty years many of them have now re-introduced them. In this selection of local authorities only Tower Hamlets does not have catchment areas – instead using a combination of banding and distance to determine most of their oversubscribed places.

The main ‘deviation’ from the standard use of catchment areas has been in a couple of local authorities that have merged several school catchment areas together to create ‘dual catchment areas’. In some parts of Brighton and Hove up to three secondary schools can share the same catchment area (for the determination of oversubscribed places). As will be discussed later, this has had the advantage of giving a wider ‘pool’ of applicants a greater opportunity of getting into a school of their choice, albeit still within a defined geographical area. Perhaps paradoxically, this has had the effect of reducing the chances of a pupils outside these ‘dual catchment areas’ from being admitted to some of Brighton and Hove’s most popular schools. Furthermore, it is worth noting that many secondary schools in Brighton and Hove still have a standard one-school catchment area. In other local authorities, individual schools might share catchment areas or have overlapping catchment areas. For example, in Bristol, a small number of schools have first, secondary and joint priority areas.

In only one authority, Southampton, did there appear to be any clear guidance that catchment areas can change over time,

Parents are reminded that living within a catchment area does not guarantee a place in any given school.

Catchment areas can also be changed over time. Any decision by parents about the purchase or rental of a home based on school catchment areas is taken entirely at their own risk.

The lack of any advice about catchment area boundaries in other local authorities could give the impression that these are unlikely to change, and that if they were changed the admission authority would be responsible for having to mitigate the impact of this on families.

Every local authority includes siblings as a criterion. As noted above, most give priority to applicants with siblings living in a catchment area. However, Cheshire East and Staffordshire appears to give priority to all siblings irrespective of whether the applicant lives in the catchment area or not. Conversely, South Gloucestershire appears to only give sibling priority to applicants from within the catchment areas (i.e. applicants living outside the catchment areas with siblings in the school do not appear to be given any priority).

Five of the thirteen local authorities give *additional* priority to pupils attending named feeder schools (or sometimes referred to as designated primary schools). *Additional* because in all examples there is greater priority for applicants with siblings and/or who live in the catchment area. This is not the same as the now historic ‘feeder school system’ that used to operate in many local authorities, that gave higher priority to pupils attending designated feeder primary schools. In almost all examples, siblings must be in years 7 to 11. However, Gloucestershire allow applicants with siblings in the school sixth form to be given priority. Four of these five local authorities give priority to pupils attending a feeder school from within the catchment area. Swansea is the exception to this. Its published admission arrangements state that the feeder school priority is given to those living outside the catchment area, implying that pupils in a catchment area are not given greater preference if they attend a feeder school. This is an important distinction if there are more applications from within the catchment area as there are places available.

Table 7. Overall performance at the end of key stage 4 in 2016 - all pupils

Local authority	No. of pupils at end of KS4	Progress 8 Score	Grade C or better in English and Maths GCSEs	Staying in education or entering employment (2014 leavers)
Buckinghamshire	5622	0.01	73.7%	97%
Cheshire East	3740	-0.15	67.5%	96%
Gloucestershire	6385	-0.05	66.4%	94%
Nottinghamshire	7883	-0.04	65.9%	93%
Cheshire West and Chester	3443	0.04	65.5%	94%
Brighton	2139	0.02	65.4%	93%
Tower Hamlets	2570	0.15	63.3%	93%
Coventry	3461	-0.05	60.8%	92%
South Gloucestershire	2770	-0.23	60.1%	95%
Staffordshire	8757	-0.10	59.7%	96%
Bristol	3138	-0.19	59.5%	91%
Southampton	1952	-0.12	57.1%	90%
Nottingham City	2534	-0.35	50.4%	87%

Progress 8: This score shows how much progress pupils made between the end of key stage 2 and the end of key stage 4, compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2. This is based on results in up to 8 qualifications, which include English, maths, 3 English Baccalaureate qualifications including sciences, computer science, history, geography and languages, and 3 other additional approved qualifications.

The only other key oversubscription criteria used in these local authorities were: the use of banding – authority-wide in Tower Hamlets and individual school-level in Bristol; pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium – across Nottingham City and some schools in Buckinghamshire; and children of salaried staff (in Nottingham City and Gloucestershire).

Banding is used as a way of attempting to get a balanced intake. For example, in Tower Hamlets applicants are assigned to one of four bands depending on their admissions tests scores. If there are more applications than places then other oversubscription criteria are applied in each band – in the case of Tower Hamlets this is largely based on siblings and then distance between the home and school. It is not clear how the bands are selected or how many places are allocated to each band.

The prioritisation of pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium – essentially pupils eligible for free school meals (see next Section) – is relatively new and appears to have been given encouragement in the (England) School Admissions Code following the introduction of the Pupil Premium in England. Whilst this would immediately give greater choice to pupils from some of the poorest households it is important to note that where this is used as a criterion, it is given quite low priority. This means, for example, that siblings and catchment area pupils still have greater priority than other Pupil Premium pupils.

One issue with this criterion is whether families are aware that their children are eligible for the Pupil Premium, since this is an internal administrative classification. In Buckinghamshire pupils' eligibility for free school meals is clearly defined as the criterion for admission to some schools, but in these cases this only applies to pupils from *within* a designated catchment area (i.e. it gives no priority to eFSM pupils outside the

catchment area). This ensures that low income pupils from within a catchment area are given high priority, but it does very little to open access to low income pupils from elsewhere in the authority.

The priority given to children of salaried staff is also more present than in the past. Some faith schools have historically been using this, but the growth in Academies and Free Schools appears to have led to more widespread use, presumably because this can be used to attract better quality staff to these 'new' schools. However, the Welsh Government School Admissions Code precludes the use of this as a criterion in Wales

All these oversubscription criteria are discussed in more depth in the next Section of the report.

All local authorities include a tie-break, either based on distance (for fourteen authorities) or lottery (for Brighton and Hove). In two local authorities, Buckinghamshire and South Gloucestershire, they also use random allocation as a second tie-break, i.e. where distance alone cannot be used as a tie-break – largely of importance where many applicants may be living in high-rise accommodation who would all be designated as living the same distance from the school.

What might be quite surprising is that the vast majority of local authorities (and their respective admission authorities) use straight-line distance as the tie-break. Only in Tower Hamlets and in some schools in Southampton is the shortest walking distance used as the tie-break. Despite the availability of accurate data and complex Geographical Information Systems to calculate shortest walking distances, many authorities seem content with just using a straight line distance. This may reflect the proliferation of schools as admission authorities – perhaps because schools are not capable of running their own admission allocations using the more sophisticated measuring of shortest walking distance. But it is also possible that the straight-line distance is easier to account for in an appeal. Despite the prevalence of this in England the Welsh Government School Admissions Code states that reference to the use of straight line distance is not permitted as a tie-break.

The admission arrangements for Glasgow were also reviewed. In Glasgow pupils are automatically registered at a local catchment area school. Only if families wish to be considered for an alternative school do they have to make an application. But what is quite unique about Glasgow's oversubscription criteria is that they can give priority to children from single adult households, inviting applicants to make a case for being granted a place because the location of the preferred school "would be advantageous for the care and well-being of the child or young person."

There are six other observations to make from this review of local authority admission arrangements:

- i. The easiest set of admission arrangements to understand are those that include a relatively small number of criteria.
- ii. The most difficult admission arrangements to understand are those where the oversubscription criteria are presented for each school separately. Whilst this may be a necessity in areas with a high number of Academies and Free Schools, each operating their own admission arrangements, the challenge of reading through multiple sets of oversubscription criteria could be (a) challenging, and (b) cause greater misunderstanding, particularly where most schools seem to have the same criteria (the argument being that potential applicants are less likely to identify deviations from the general rule unless these deviations are flagged or highlighted).
- iii. Some oversubscription criteria are more difficult to understand when they are presented as groups of priority rather than criteria for prioritisation. For example, both Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City rank order different groups of pupils who have greater priority than others. Whilst this may appear to be clearer to applicants (i.e. they can recognise which group and therefore order they fall in to) it is less clear what happens when there are more applicants in each group than there are places available. The tie-break in these authorities is based on distance, but it is not clear whether distance would apply

before some of the other characteristics that define high priority groups of pupils have been applied (e.g. attending a linked primary school).

- iv. A few admission authorities present some oversubscription criteria as having equal priority. In practice this may be entirely appropriate, but it could be considered confusing for applicants when trying to understand how criteria are ranked.
- v. Several authorities make explicit reference to the admission of children of Service Personnel (e.g. Newport). The (England) 2014 School Admissions Code requires admission authorities to allocate places in advance of the admissions process (i.e. before any oversubscription criteria have been applied) to substantiated applications from Service Personnel and other Crown Servants who are due to arrive in the area; in effect giving these pupils equal status to pupils with named schools in their SEN statements.
- vi. Coventry publish a list of the open evenings/days for all schools in its annual admissions guide. All schools have at least one open evening/day during September and October (before the 31st October deadline for applications). Whilst the vast majority of schools will organise open evenings, and many local authorities will encourage families to attend these, the publication of dates for all schools provides a much higher level of openness and transparency that could encourage fair access.

6. School admissions research

This section discusses findings from research on school admissions in the UK. In particular, it discusses the known advantages and disadvantages of key features of the admission arrangements outlined in the previous section, including the use of different oversubscription criteria.

6.1 Admission authorities

There is strong evidence that regulation of open enrolment, and admission arrangements generally, (e.g. through local authority control or through national School Admissions Codes) has made admissions more efficient and procedurally fair (Gorard *et al.* 2003, Coldron 2015). In addition, ‘the requirement to provide school places efficiently and to avoid unreasonable public expenditure’ is paramount in any legal challenge of admissions (Clement 2013).

In addition, the School Admissions Codes make it clear that admission authorities must not have admission arrangements that directly or indirectly disadvantage children from particular social or racial groups or children with disabilities or special educational needs (Roberts 2017).

Where schools have autonomy over their own admission arrangements there is widespread international evidence that this can be detrimental (in terms of admissions) to pupils from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, Lubienski *et al.* (2013) demonstrated that autonomous schools in New Zealand created ‘priority zones’ that precluded admission of the most disadvantaged families.

But as Coldron (2013) concludes, most policy attention has been given to ensuring equality of opportunity in relation to admission procedures. Very little has been achieved in ensuring more balanced school intakes or in redressing the indirect effect of residential segregation or the practical and social difficulties of accessing popular schools.

6.2 School preferences

In terms of preferences, there is strong evidence that parents and pupils tend to prioritise different criteria. Pupils prefer to attend the same school as their close friends (Robinson *et al.* 2016). Parents, however, will often say they prioritise academic achievement (Robinson *et al.* 2016, Coldron 2015) but detailed analysis by

Burgess *et al.* (2015) reveals that socio-economic composition of schools and proximity are also valued by parents.

There is very limited evidence that schools now actively discourage vulnerable groups from applying to particular schools. However, there is evidence that the extent to which schools encourage and promote an inclusive ethos can influence preferences and, ultimately, applications amongst the most vulnerable groups of families (e.g, SEN, ALN, ethnic minorities and low income) (Martin *et al.* 2014). Staff in primary schools generally argue that it is particularly important that vulnerable children remain within their friendship groups (Robinson *et al.* 2016). However, this highlights a tension in school admissions: low achieving vulnerable children have probably the most to gain in terms of attainment from utilising parental preference but the risks of (a) possibly disrupting friendship groups as a result and (b) ghettoising the low performing schools they leave behind, are considerable.

Similarly, the opportunity and ability to ‘choose’ a school is dependent to some extent on various socio-economic and cultural characteristics that privileges two key groups: high household income families and church-goers (Allen 2013). Higher household income gives greater freedom within the housing market – and since most oversubscription criteria are based on geographical proximity (whether it be through catchment areas, distance to school or even feeder primary schools) this means that affluent families have far greater choice of schools than less affluent families. Similarly, church-goers have access to many alternative schools that are not available to non-church-goers. This can also privilege those families with greater social and cultural capital who are more capable of navigating and meeting the complex ways in which religious attendance/participation is measured in faith schools.

6.3 School choice and attainment

There is only very limited evidence that there is a link between school choice and its intended outcome of increased school competition and school improvement (Coldron 2015). Furthermore, and as Tables 1 and 2 illustrate above, it is difficult to identify any discernible relationship between levels of attainment and different oversubscription criteria.

What appears to be of more importance is ensuring that all children have fair access to the best ‘performing’ schools. Detailed analysis of pupil attainment and admission arrangements have shown that it is the lowest achieving pupils who have the most to gain from having school choice (Allen 2013). There appears to be no benefit in terms of attainment to high achieving pupils in terms of whether they attend their nearest school, catchment school or if they use parental preference to obtain a place in an alternative school. This fits the large body of research that has shown that on average the choice of school makes very little difference on a pupil’s levels of attainment. However, what Allen (2013) is able to demonstrate is that it can actually make a difference for the lowest achieving pupils.

6.4 Catchment areas

Catchment areas have always been the most used oversubscription criteria by admission authorities. They have the advantage of allowing local authorities (and schools) to better plan provision. For example, it is more efficient to make decisions as to how to use capital grants for new school developments based on local, neighbourhood-level, forecasts rather than local authority-wide forecasts. It also helps schools identify their ‘local’ community when working with families and other stakeholders outside the school. Another advantage of catchment areas is that they are relatively stable and often remain unchanged, giving families and schools a high degree of predictability when it comes to admissions (although the relationship with the housing market can make this problematic). Cardiff also benefits from having ‘nested’ catchments, where catchment areas for primary schools are congruent to secondary school catchment areas. Whilst feeder schools are not an

oversubscription criteria these nested catchment areas in effect help maintain close relationships between local primary schools and their partner secondary schools.

The disadvantage of catchment areas is that they tend to represent residential segregation within an area. And since houses in the catchment areas of popular schools can attract on average a 13% premium to house prices then can also create or exacerbate residential segregation.

The ability to purchase a house in the catchment area of a desired school is not the only way catchment areas can advantage higher income families. As Robinson *et al.* (2016) reported in their qualitative study of families in Brighton and Hove, a number of families reported other ways they attempted to secure a place in their preferred schools by temporarily renting accommodation, moving in with their parents or giving their parents' address as their own. Whilst giving a false address is fraudulent it does not prevent this from occurring. For example, ITV News reported in 2016 that 582 applications were rejected over a five year period for giving false addresses, data obtained through Freedom of Information requests from just 30 local authorities.

6.5 Feeder schools

Very few local authorities use feeder schools (also referred to as designated primary schools, major contributory primary schools, and partner school designations) as a high priority oversubscription criteria anymore. However, its use amongst school admission authorities is still prevalent. The decision by schools to use this as a criterion has led to an increase in the number of objections to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (2016). Furthermore, these objections have tended to be upheld – primarily where the distance between the secondary school and the designated primary schools is so far that more 'local' children not attending these designated primary schools have faced a longer or more difficult journey to alternative secondary schools. This appears to have been an issue for Free Schools who have chosen their own designated primary schools for reasons other than being local. The problem is that there is no clear definition of a feeder school in the School Admissions Code. This just states that previous schools attended cannot be used as a criterion unless it is a named feeder school. It does not currently go as far as defining what a feeder school should be. However, the report by the Office of the Schools Adjudicator does give some steer to the notion that feeder schools are primarily to encourage admission to 'local' pupils, or certainly in ensuring that a feeder school criterion does not significantly disadvantage other 'local' pupils. They also go on to recommend that the Department for Education in England,

“may want to consider the case for guidance to admission authorities on how to maximise the benefits of feeder schools in terms of continuity of education and shared work across schools while ensuring that the selection of feeder schools does not cause unfairness to other local children.” (p.7)

6.6 Banding

In a review of school admissions in London between 2001 and 2015 West and Hind (2016) found that an increasing number of admission authorities have introduced banding as a mechanism to create greater academic and socially mixed intakes. Banding is where pupils are tested prior to admission, and schools allocate a proportion of their places to pupils by their test result. The exact proportion of pupils by band can vary considerably. Some schools use an equal proportion per band whilst others will use different proportions for each band. Some schools say they allocate places to be representative of the pupils who applied whilst others say they allocate places to be representative of the national distribution of ability (Morris 2014). Although the 2003 School Admissions Code stated that schools should take an equal proportion of pupils from each band there continues to be diverse practice of this. Furthermore, it should be noted there is no formal guidance as to how pupils should be tested (e.g. some schools use NFER reading and mathematics tests, others, such as in Bristol, use the GL Assessment Non-Verbal Reasoning assessment – all very different measures of 'ability'), or how the bands are to be determined.

Despite a lot of interest in the use of banding and an expectation that it would become widespread to encourage fair access to schools (see Coldron *et al.* 2008), Morris (2014) reports that only four authorities now organise banding on an authority-wide basis (all in London). Indeed, in Greenwich only three schools will continue with banding from 2018 onwards – all Academies – and each will administer their own tests after applications have been made. Interestingly, Morris also reports that one Free School opted out of banding (instead using catchment areas as a key admission priority) in order to benefit from the relatively high number of high ability pupils that were no longer able to get into schools that continued to use banding.

Given the low uptake in the use of banding as an admissions criterion there is very limited evidence of its impact. In three of the early ‘adopters’ of banding (all in London) Coldron *et al.* (2008) found that they went on to have fewer appeals and lower segregation than other authorities. However, there has been no robust analysis of their impact since then or over a larger scale.

In the last report by the Chief Schools Adjudicator (for England) a number of concerns about the use of banding in oversubscription criteria were highlighted. The first set of concerns related to unnecessary testing of particular groups of pupils. For example, if a school is not over-subscribed then there is no need for the applicants to have sat a test. Similarly, pupils with an SEN statement that named the school, or looked after children and previously looked after children, must be admitted whether they took the test or not. Their other concerns related to procedure – how the test is administered, who administers it and when it is administered.

These concerns are supported by the work of West and Hind (2016) who conclude,

“One practice that has become especially problematic is that of banding. The arrangements regarding the number of groups/bands and the type of banding implemented vary. Banding also requires pupils to be tested. In some local authorities testing is organised in school time and the results used across schools that use banding. However, a more common pattern is for children to have to take different tests for individual schools on several different days including weekends, making it difficult for parents who have atypical working patterns – e.g., shift work – and increasing stress levels for children and parents.” (p.4)

A good example of the complexity in using banding can be found in Colston Girls’ School in Bristol. For this school, there are five ability bands (as opposed to four in other schools/authorities). The cut-off for each band is based on ensuring an equal number of applicants in each band – thereby not necessarily being representative of ability range for the wider authority’s pupils. So, if only high ability pupils apply, only high ability pupils will be admitted, and so on.

6.7 Random allocation

In England the 2014 School Admissions Code permits the use of a lottery or random allocation in determining admissions but not as the main oversubscription criterion. In Wales the Welsh Government School Admissions Code 2013 does not allow random allocation to be used as an oversubscription criteria. Nevertheless, many analysts see random allocation to provide one of the most effective ways of ensuring balanced intakes. In practice, where random allocation is used by admission authorities in England it serves as a tie-break for where other criteria cannot be used to allocate over-subscribed places, just as distance is often used as a tie-break. This is now quite prevalent in England, but it is in Brighton and Hove where random allocation was first attempted and can play an important role in school admissions. However, the impact of this in Brighton and Hove is not entirely clear. Allen *et al.* (2013), previously proponents of random allocation as a criterion, found that random allocation was associated with greater segregation between schools (albeit a marginal increase). They did find, however, that it led to a reduction in the dependence of location on pupils’ attainment. As the authors conclude,

“it seems unlikely that the reforms are likely to substantially lower social segregation across schools even in the long-run in this city, where differences in the quality of housing stock across areas are deeply entrenched and

the boundaries of the new catchment areas mean that families living in the most deprived neighbourhoods have little chance of accessing the most popular schools in the centre of the city.” (p.164)

And as Allen *et al.* (2013) themselves note, much of the advantages of random allocation arose from the redrawing of catchment areas in the authority. Importantly, the creation of ‘dual-school catchments’ – where up to three schools may share the same catchment area – is where most of the random allocation will occur, since there are many times more pupils living in each catchment area than there are places in each of the secondary schools in that catchment area. But as Robinson *et al.* (2016) observed, this has not caused too much concern amongst parents in these dual-school catchments since they tend to contain the most sought after schools. The more ‘unpopular’ schools are located elsewhere and have their own catchment areas. Robinson *et al.* actually argue that the creation of dual-school catchments has reduced choice for families who live outside these areas, irrespective of the introduction of random allocation as a tie-break. Robinson *et al.* also highlighted other challenges resulting from the creation of dual-school catchments in Brighton and Hove, such as the transition from primary to secondary schools,

“Where children from one primary school transferred to several different secondary schools, this created difficulty in building close working relations with relevant staff in secondary schools.” (p.7)

6.8 Priority for pupils eligible for free school meals

The 2014 School Admissions Code (England) says that admission authorities may give priority to pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium. This allows priority to be given to pupils eligible for free school meals (and looked after children, but this group must be the first priority anyway). There are an increasing number of examples in England where priority is given to pupils eligible for free school meals. Not only are schools encouraged to prioritise such pupils in their admission arrangements, schools are expected to want to recruit Pupil Premium pupils because of the additional funding they would receive. However, Freeman (2015) has suggested that the uptake has not been as great as anticipated. Freeman also argues that with a greater focus on the Progress 8 measure for schools in England (educational progress from KS2 to KS4 in eight subjects) schools will focus on ‘attracting’ underperforming children from more advantaged backgrounds.

The Chief Schools Adjudicator for England also highlighted their concern about the mismatch between eligibility for free school meals and low income households. Indeed, Taylor (2017) has shown that 8% of pupils in Wales not eligible for free school meals live in poverty. Given that the proportion eligible for free school meals is approximately 15-17% in Wales this ‘missing’ group of low income pupils is very sizeable.

The equivalent for the Pupil Premium in Wales is the Pupil Development Grant and the Early Years Pupil Development Grant (previously known as the Pupil Deprivation Grant or PDG).

7. Conclusions and recommendations

In this final section, the report considers possible changes to the Council’s admission arrangements, including discussing the advantages and disadvantages of alternative oversubscription criteria. The discussion and subsequent recommendations are organised in the following way. First it discusses the admission arrangements and oversubscription criteria currently being used by Cardiff Council and proposes possible amendments to this. It then considers the advantages and disadvantages of alternative criteria that the Council may wish to consider including. Then it goes on to discuss other possible changes to admission arrangements that may require further direction or guidance from the Welsh Government.

7.1 Changes to current admission arrangements

The main oversubscription criteria used for admission to Cardiff’s Community schools is **catchment areas**. The review above has clearly demonstrated that this is also a favoured criterion amongst other local

authorities, including those that did not previously have catchment areas. The advantages and disadvantages of this as a criterion was discussed above. On that basis there does not appear to be a need to remove catchment areas as a criterion.

However, a key challenge the local authority has is that the number of pupils living in a catchment area is, in some areas of Cardiff, greater than the number of places available in the designated catchment area school. This causes significant unhappiness to families who do not get allocated a place in their preferred catchment area school. The temptation in such circumstances is to alter catchment area boundaries, not least to 'reallocate' an appropriate number of pupils living in each catchment area. However, there are a number of significant issues that arise from this. First, changes to catchment areas, even modest ones, can cause significant disruption to local communities, particularly as the location of catchment areas are often used in deciding where to live many years in advance of applying for a school place. Secondly, by changing catchment areas in order to redistribute pupil numbers the local authority would implicitly be suggesting that all catchment area pupils should be able to attend the designated catchment area – precisely the issue that the local authority is attempting to avoid. And third, the number of school-aged pupils in each cohort can change from one year to the next, and it is relatively difficult to predict housing growth and mobility on a small geographical scale. Therefore, in order to distribute pupil numbers appropriately catchment area boundaries are likely to need to be changed on a regular and ongoing basis, causing constant and prolonged discontent amongst local residents.

Another commonly cited reason for changing catchment areas is to increase more balanced intakes (ethnically, socio-economically, etc). Whilst this is a commendable aim, the redrawing of catchment area boundaries is likely to only have a limited short-term impact as the housing market adjusts to these new catchment areas. In order to encourage more balanced intakes there are other, more effective, criteria that could be considered (see later).

However, there will always be circumstances where the redrawing of catchment areas may be strongly justified, such as the construction of new schools and hence the establishment of new catchment areas. Therefore, it is in the interests of the local authority to encourage the perception that (a) living in a catchment area does not guarantee a place in the catchment area school and (b) that catchment areas can change and at any time.

Recommendation (short-term): consider including a statement that says catchment areas may change and that any decision by parents about the purchase or rental of a home based on school catchment areas is taken entirely at their own risk.

Increasingly fewer admissions authorities are using exceptional or **compelling grounds** as an oversubscription criterion. What constitutes 'compelling' is difficult to measure objectively. The current admissions system 'protects' SEN pupils with named schools on their statements and looked after children (including previously looked after children). The inclusion of this as an oversubscription criteria has the potential to give parents 'false hope' in what they may think are reasonable grounds for why their son/daughter should be given priority. The number of places allocated on the basis of this criterion in Cardiff is very small. Often this is dependent upon an applicant being able to provide 'expert' support, such as from a medical consultant. Whilst the application of this criterion by the local authority could be considered to be objective – that is priority is given to applications where such 'expert' support is provided, the objective basis of this 'expert' support is questionable. Furthermore, the most vulnerable children and families are probably the least likely to either request or obtain such support. It is also a valid argument that whatever the exceptional grounds, any school should be able to meet the needs of these pupils. There is no requirement in the School Admissions Code to include this as a criterion.

Recommendation (short-term): consider removing compelling medical or social grounds as a criterion. Removing this as a criterion would also help reduce the number of oversubscription criteria.

Currently between a quarter and a third of admissions to Cardiff schools are based on the **sibling** criterion. This is, therefore, an important criterion in allocating places. Indeed, it could be argued that the high priority given to siblings could be at the expense of giving priority to other pupils, such as based on proximity. However, the inclusion of a **sibling criterion** is common to oversubscription criteria in all the local authorities reviewed. There are also very compelling reasons for why siblings should attend the same school – for logistic reasons (e.g. travel to/from school, particularly for younger children), for financial reasons (e.g. recycling of school uniforms) and for educational reasons (e.g. familiarity with the organisation, curriculum and pedagogy of a school). And of course, applicants do not have to make their application on the basis of the sibling criterion if they so wish, e.g. where they want their children to attend different schools based on their individual needs.

However, there are some subtle differences in how the sibling rule could be used alongside other oversubscription criteria. For example, criteria could be adopted that gives priority to applicants with siblings who are resident within the designated catchment area but does not give priority to other applicants with siblings (e.g. South Gloucestershire). Alternatively, criteria could give priority to all siblings, irrespective of whether the applicant lives in a designated catchment area or not (e.g. Cheshire East and Staffordshire). The alternative to these two scenarios are where there are two sets of sibling priorities – one for applicants of siblings living in a designated catchment area and one for applicants of siblings living outside the designated catchment area. For example, both Buckinghamshire and Gloucestershire use the sibling rule in this way, yet their criteria are presented differently.

Whilst the decision to only give priority to applicants of siblings who are living in a designated catchment area can be made, there would seem to be a stronger justification (for educational and social purposes) to give priority to applicants with siblings inside and outside the designated catchment area. The decision as to whether to give greater priority to pupils living in a designated catchment area without siblings versus pupils living outside a designated catchment area with siblings is much less clear. It is useful to note that only three local authorities in Table 1 give greater priority to applicants of all siblings over applicants living in the designated catchment area. The majority of local authorities give greater priority to applicants living in designated catchment areas and then applicants living outside the designated catchment areas without siblings. Although complicated by criteria 2a and 2b this is in effect how the current Cardiff oversubscription criteria operate. However, the prioritisation of applicants living in the designated catchment areas with siblings could be made more explicit, as used in Gloucestershire, Coventry and Bristol.

Recommendation (short-term): consider adding the criterion explicitly giving high priority to applicants with siblings who are living in the designated catchment area.

The definition and presentation of each criterion appears to be excessive in length compared to the definitions of criteria in other local authorities. Also, the list includes ‘equal’ priority criteria (e.g. 2a and 2b). This can be confusing given criteria are meant to be listed in order of priority.

Recommendation (short-term): consider editing criteria to simple statements, keeping technical detail to a minimum in the main list of criteria; adding clear definitions elsewhere in the handbook (and avoiding duplicating definitions throughout the handbook); and avoid the use of ‘equal priority’ criteria.

Cardiff Council use eight criteria (nine if 2a and 2b are included separately). Most other local authorities use just five criteria (see Table 1). The number of criteria seems excessive and the fewer the criteria the easier it is

for parents to understand. The following recommendations, therefore, suggest which criterion could be removed.

Cardiff contains a number of relatively ‘unique’ admissions criteria. Most notably criteria 2a, 2b, 7 and 8. The first two of these appear to relate to historic decisions to change catchment areas and the Council’s attempt to try to ‘mitigate’ the impact of these changes. It is not clear how necessary this really is or what it achieves.

Criterion 7 uses the ‘furthest from the next appropriate alternative school’ measure. This is encouraged in the Welsh Government 2013 School Admissions Code. However, it would seem that this is particularly useful in more rural areas, where there could be considerable differences in journey times if priority is not given to more isolated families. The merit of this criterion within the urban area of Cardiff is not clear and perhaps more difficult to justify. It is also a very complex criterion, that is based on various distance measures that any prospective applicant would not be able to calculate for themselves. This would suggest that this criterion does not fulfil the aims of providing greater transparency and encourage fair access through the publication of oversubscription criteria.

The final criterion (number 8 above) is even less clear – this is presented as the least important criteria, coming *after* the *de facto* tie-break criterion (distance to school – criterion 6), so it is very difficult to envision a scenario where it can be used to differentiate between applicants presumably living the same distance from their preferred school.

Recommendation (short-term): consider removing criteria 2a, 2b, 7 and 8 from the current list of oversubscription criteria

With these proposals the Cardiff oversubscription criteria could be much more easily summarised as:

1. Looked after children and previously looked after children
 2. Children permanently resident in the designated catchment area
 3. Children with siblings currently registered in Years 7 to 10
- Tie-break: shortest walking distance between school and home

It has been somewhat surprising to see that so many admission authorities in England use a straight-line measure for the distance between pupils’ homes and schools. Cardiff is one of a seemingly small number of admission authorities to use the shortest walking distance between school and home. The Welsh Government School Admissions Code does not permit the reference to using straight line distance as a criterion, but does not give a justification for this. Given the geography of Cardiff – with its coastal location, rivers and rail lines – it may be more meaningful to use the shortest walking distance as the tie-break than a straight-line distance anyway. However, the prevalence of the latter in England may reflect that the use of the shortest walking distance is prone to more appeals, often because of what constitutes a ‘safe walking route’.

Recommendation (medium-term): consider encouraging the Welsh Government to update its School Admissions Code to provide a justification and rationale for its preferred use of shortest walking distance. This may be helpful for admissions authorities in clarifying their use of this as a tie-break and may limit the opportunity for appeals.

Other proposed amendments to the Cardiff school admissions handbook include the following:

Recommendation (short-term): consider publishing dates of open days/evenings for all schools in the admissions handbook.

Recommendation (short-term): consider including a more detailed statement about the admission of children of Service Personnel and other Crown Servants in the admissions handbook.

Recommendation (medium-term): consider having an earlier deadline for applications (e.g. 31st October of each year) instead of circa 28th November for secondary school applications and circa 9th January for primary school applications. This would give officers longer to process applications, assess the validity of applications and deal with appeals. The earlier application deadline might also have the additional benefit of discouraging short-term renting of properties nearer popular schools.

7.2 Additional oversubscription criteria

Based on the analysis presented in this report there are not strongly compelling reasons to include new additional oversubscription criteria. However, three potential additional oversubscription criteria are considered here that Cardiff Council may wish to consider introducing to address its current admission challenges: residential longevity, feeder schools and dual-school catchment areas.

Length of residence, or **longevity**, has been suggested within Cardiff as a solution to the particular problem of catchment area pupils not getting a place in their catchment area school. The only use of longevity as an admissions criterion, in any of its forms, is amongst a relatively small number of faith schools (e.g. Westminster voluntary-aided schools). This typically involves “the prioritisation of attendance at a named church over a long period of time” (Allen and Parameshwaran 2016:4). However, it is useful to note that this was found to be one of the three most common criteria in what appeared to be the most selective local authorities in Allen and Parameshwaran’s recent analysis of between school segregation in England. As the authors discuss, “this favours families who plan primary school choice many years in advance and do not move house” (p.4). As a criterion, it therefore disadvantages mobile families, including migrant families or asylum seekers, which would potentially be in breach of the School Admissions Code to ensure criteria do not disadvantage particular social or racial groups. The use of historical connections to a school was deemed inappropriate in the 2010 School Admissions Code.

Recommendation (short-term): consider alternative ways to longevity or length of residence for addressing the short-fall in the number of school places available to pupils living in catchment areas

The issue of longevity as a criterion is similar to that of the use of **feeder schools** as a criterion. Interestingly the Welsh Government School Admissions Code states: “the use of named feeder primary schools as an oversubscription criterion can allow better continuity for pupils but needs to be used with caution” (Welsh Government 2013:17). The main concern is that a feeder school criterion, just like residential longevity, could be detrimental to mobile pupils. Indeed, feeder schools are rarely used anywhere as a primary oversubscription criteria, except amongst faith schools and a few Academies or Free Schools. So, it is useful to consider the observations made above about feeder schools – particularly in relation to (a) ensuring it does not disadvantage other ‘local’ children or (b) making an educational case for its use. Whilst it is plausible to make an educational case for the use of feeder schools as a criterion (e.g. to minimise issues of transition, to encourage close cooperation between the primary and secondary school sectors) it is much less clear what educational case could be made for longevity as a criterion.

Instead, a possible compromise is to use catchment areas and feeder schools as oversubscription criteria – just as in Cheshire East and Staffordshire. The order of these two criteria is important, and in both local authority examples the catchment area criterion is ranked higher than the feeder school criterion. This has the effect of giving greater priority to catchment area pupils attending a designated feeder school than catchment area pupils attending a primary school that is associated with a different secondary school (e.g. where the medium of instruction is different or where they are a faith school). An educational case for this could be made. However, some attention would still need to be given to migrant families and the possible impact that this

would have on competition for places in primary schools. But this would be far less significant than adopting a longevity criterion since there would be multiple feeder schools once could attend within a given secondary school catchment area.

Recommendation (short-term): consider adding designated feeder schools as an oversubscription criteria (after sibling and catchment criteria).

Although random allocation is not permitted in Wales, the use of **dual-stream catchment areas**, often used alongside the random allocation tie-break, is worth considering. Despite identifying several limitations of dual-stream catchments in Brighton and Hove, Robinson *et al.* suggest that more choice would be given to families if all catchment areas were shared with at least two secondary schools. This would immediately increase the number of higher priority pupils for each school. However, consideration would need to be given to (a) travel arrangements – since it is more likely that catchment area pupils could be travelling further distances, and (b) what the tie-break would be in the incidence of places being oversubscribed based on the catchment criterion – distance is really the only viable tie-break mechanism in the absence of random allocation and so proximity to each school would still give some pupils greater priority over others. However, there could be three advantages of this approach. First, it could lessen the assumption amongst families that they should automatically get a place in their designated catchment school. Second, it provides an indirect way of encouraging more parents to consider their choice of school, particularly for those families who are the least likely to engage with the admissions process and parental preference. And third, it may also lead to greater collaboration and coordination between secondary schools and in encouraging schools to find ways of distinguishing themselves from one another (e.g. through curriculum, ethos, pedagogy, subject specialisms, etc) to offer a wider ‘choice’ that better meets the individual needs of learners.

Recommendation (medium-term): consider undertaking further analysis on the implications of creating dual-school catchment areas in Cardiff (i.e. by merging school catchment areas) to give higher priority to a wider ‘pool’ of prospective applicants.

7.3 Other recommendations

There are two potential benefits of allowing parents to state a preference over which school they wish their children to attend. The first is that it could help better meet the individual needs of pupils. And second, it can increase the opportunity for children to attend better performing schools, particularly those living in disadvantaged areas which can often also have the poorest performing schools. There has also been an indirect benefit of open enrolment, that is the ability of admission authorities to ‘manage’ the admissions system to achieve other desirable outcomes, such as more socially and ethnically balanced intakes.

The establishment of School Admissions Codes has generally encouraged more equitable access to schools (e.g. through the removal of interviews as a method to determine admissions). However, there is still evidence that stricter regulation of admissions is required, particularly where individual schools have the autonomy to choose their own oversubscription criteria (Allen 2013). A notable example of this in England has been the recent choice of academies and free schools to give priority to children of employed staff in the school. The Welsh Government School Admissions Code already precludes this from being used as a criterion, although current concerns about teacher recruitment in Wales may put pressure on this.

Of more concern in Wales is the continued higher levels of ethnic and socio-economic segregation in areas with faith schools. There are numerous examples of covert and overt selection in the criteria employed by some faith schools in England, and the School Admissions Codes have attempted to incrementally lessen that opportunity. However, there is still evidence that segregation is higher where there are faith schools. Allen (2013) makes the very useful observation that faith-based criteria should be based on a binary criterion of religious adherence (i.e. yes or no) rather than the current form of a ‘continuum’ approach to religious

adherence (e.g. baptised, regular attendance, attended a faith primary school) that so many faith schools tend to use.

Recommendation (short-term): encourage the Welsh Government to consider updating its guidance on how religious adherence could be objectively measured in a simple and binary form.

Whilst greater enforcement of the current admissions guidance may prevent the use of unfair admission arrangements it is nevertheless also the case that this guidance, and the most commonly used oversubscription criteria that this guidance encourages, have done very little to realise the potential benefits of open enrolment.

A major constraint in Wales is the limited opportunity for schools to be sufficiently distinctive from one another in order to meet the needs of a wider range of pupils. In England, there has been the introduction of city technology colleges, specialist schools, academies and free schools in the last twenty years. Although these schemes have had varying degrees of success, including some notable disadvantages, they nonetheless constitute an explicit attempt to try to widen the range of educational opportunities from which parents can choose from. The growth of Welsh medium and bilingual education in Wales is also an example of this. However, the Welsh Government has been reluctant to consider and encourage other forms of specialism or diversity in provision.

It could be the case that the development and introduction of the new curriculum in Wales could provide the opportunity for greater diversity in curriculum and pedagogy within and between schools. In urban areas such as Cardiff this might mean there is greater distinctiveness between schools.

Recommendation (long-term): consider encouraging the Welsh Government to consider how it might increase the diversity of schools (particularly in urban areas), but without it increasing segregation.

Recommendation (long-term): consider how the new curriculum in Wales might encourage greater diversification in provision between schools and how this could be embodied in future admission arrangements.

Another major constraint is the inelastic supply of school places. However, if open enrolment is to have any benefit in terms of educational experience then there must be the capacity to allow greater movement of pupils between neighbourhoods and schools. Allen (2013) suggests that the main way of offering more choice to parents, and thereby giving greater opportunities for the most disadvantaged families to access better performing schools, is to allow local authorities to increase their surplus capacity to 20% of the planned admission number. This would have significant cost implications, both in terms of capital expenditure (new schools or school expansion) and in recurrent expenditure (since it would explicitly require an inefficient use of resources). The current cost of an additional secondary school place in Cardiff is just under £18,000. Based on current pupil numbers a 20% increase in capacity is the equivalent of an additional 3,600 school places across Cardiff. For Cardiff secondary schools alone this would cost just under £65million over a five year period.

As long as there is limited surplus capacity in schools then families who can afford to pay higher house prices in order to live in popular catchment areas or as near as possible to popular schools will have greater choice than other families.

The only other realistic way of trying to increase equality of opportunity in admissions is to use or create new innovative oversubscription criteria. The most frequently cited examples of this include fair banding, random allocation (Coldron *et al.* 2008) and explicit priority to other vulnerable groups currently not mentioned in the Welsh Government School Admissions Code.

Banding appears to work well where this is applied across a local authority and where a local authority is responsible for administering the admissions test to all pupils (see West and Hind 2016). However, only a few secondary schools in Cardiff have to apply oversubscription criteria. Therefore, if the local authority were to administer an admissions test for the purposes of banding it would be an unnecessary procedure for the clear majority of children. But administering an admissions test for selected schools only would pose administrative issues that could lead to inequity in its application. For example, if only potential applicants to particular schools are required to sit an admissions test then it is not clear who would administer it. Primary schools would not necessarily administer it if they did not think some or all their pupils were likely to apply to those secondary schools using banding. Furthermore, the authority would have to ensure that all pupils, irrespective of where they live or which primary school they attend, have the opportunity to sit the admissions test. The most likely solution to this is to administer tests at selected locations and out of school time (e.g. weekends). Ensuring equal access to these tests would be very difficult to achieve. There would also be the additional problem of when to administer the test. We have seen examples of where the admissions tests are administered in Year 5 (i.e. the academic year before application) (e.g. Tower Hamlets) and after an admissions application has been made (e.g. Greenwich). If the admission test were only necessary for admission to some schools then a post-application test would be the most appropriate approach. The consequence of this would be that banding could only be based on those that applied to the school (i.e. not necessarily based on the distribution of ability across the authority), that there would be a relatively short time-frame in which to sit the test, and may discourage applicants who might be put off by sitting an admissions test.

In England the Chief Schools Adjudicator (2016) has argued that missing a test during the annual admissions process cannot be grounds for appeal – arguing that this would be detrimental to organising the admissions process efficiently. But this is only likely to increase the level of anxiety about attending or missing an admissions test for pupils and their families.

It is quite revealing, however, that the Chief Schools Adjudicator has argued that having not sat an admissions test should not discriminate against pupils attempting to access a school for in-year admissions. This might explain why in Tower Hamlets banding is not applied to its admission waiting lists between September and December (i.e. in the period leading up to the annual admissions cycle).

The Welsh Government School Admissions Code is not particularly clear about the use of banding in Wales. Whilst the Code provides a definition of banding and notes a few conditions if banding were to be introduced it does not explicitly encourage it. For example, the Code is very clear that selection by ability or aptitude is not permitted but only in a footnote does it say that this does not apply to banding. The Code certainly does not give any advice as to how best to administer a fair banding procedure for admissions.

Recommendation (long-term): continue to monitor the need to introduce banding into Cardiff school admissions, including how this would be administered and encourage the Welsh Government to develop detailed guidance on how banding could be used in Wales.

The Welsh Government 2013 Schools Admissions Code does not currently permit the use of **random allocation** as an oversubscription criteria. Therefore, distance is really the only available option for admission authorities in Wales to use as a tie-break. However, random allocation is amongst one of the most equitable ways of allocating school places. The most obvious use of random allocation would be as a tie-break alongside other criteria, such as catchment areas (e.g. Brighton and Hove). For example, the ability for admission authorities to randomly allocate places where there are more applications from families in catchment areas than there are places available would significantly reduce the inequalities associated with the

use of other criteria such as siblings and distance. Although there are obvious benefits of using random allocation the evidence to support these claims remains limited.

Recommendation (long-term): encourage the Welsh Government to consider the opportunity to include random allocation as an acceptable tie-break criteria in the School Admissions Code.

To provide greater equality of access to schools Allen and Parameshwaran (2016) recommend giving greater priority to children eligible for the Pupil Premium (in England) (i.e. **pupils eligible for free school meals**). It would be possible to give similar priority to pupils eligible for the PDG in Wales. The PDG is not quite seen as ‘belonging’ to the eligible pupils as much as the Pupil Premium is in England. The alternative would be to give priority to pupils eligible for free school meals (and since looked after children must be given first priority it is this group that would benefit the most). Consideration would need to be given to when an applicant is eligible for free schools – during the previous school year (if applicable), on a given date (e.g. the deadline for admissions applications, e.g. Buckinghamshire) or from a sustained period of time; pupils eligible for free school meals over two years are significantly more likely to have always lived in poverty than pupils who are eligible for free school meals for just one year (Taylor 2017). It should also be noted that this criterion has not been legally tested yet. For example, we know that for every two pupils eligible for free school meals there is one ineligible pupil who also lives in poverty. If this criterion is intended to give greater priority to pupils from low income families then the choice of using eligibility for free school meals will need to be strongly justified.

The use of this as an admissions criterion would not be straightforward for one other reason. If it was given a low priority (i.e. after other criteria have been employed) then it is unlikely to have a major impact on increasing opportunities for some of the poorest families in Cardiff and creating more balanced intakes. If, on the other hand, it was given high priority (e.g. with similar priority to looked after children) there is the real danger that this would allow all pupils eligible for free school meals to access the same schools – thereby increasing segregation between schools.

Recommendation (medium-term): encourage the Welsh Government to consider criteria that gives priority to socio-economically disadvantaged pupils. Such guidance would be useful particularly in relation to how socio-economic disadvantage could be determined (e.g. by stating that the use of eligibility for free school meals would be an acceptable method for this despite its known limitations as a measure of disadvantage).

Finally, every local authority in England operates a **coordinated admissions system**. That is, the local authority coordinates the applications for places in all schools, even if they are responsible for deciding their own oversubscription criteria. This has a number of important benefits. Not least it simplifies the application process for parents (e.g. with one application form and one deadline for applications). It also limits the opportunity for parents to make multiple applications and hence receive multiple offers for places. This is important when the local authority begins to allocate school places and notifies parents of the outcome. Cardiff Council recently invited schools who are their own admission authority to coordinate their admissions, but only three of the six agreed to take part in a pilot exercise. A similar issue applies to applications made to multiple local authorities.

Recommendation: encourage the Welsh Government to introduce statutory guidance for admission authorities to operate coordinated admissions systems. This could also consider the coordination of admissions across local authority boundaries.

8. References

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